



Team Guide to Clear Documentation Structure and Style

Tags

Internal Documentation

Knowledge Base Article

User Education



Case Study

How I Created a Style Guide That Made Documentation Easier to Write, Read, and Maintain

Summary

Documentation tends to fall apart when expectations aren't shared. I created a guide that clarified structure, tone, and formatting rules across a team with different writing styles and comfort levels. The result: more consistent docs, faster onboarding, and fewer questions about "where that thing is."

Context

I was working on a team where documentation lived across multiple platforms, written by different people with different habits. Everyone agreed documentation mattered, but no one had time to reinvent the wheel every time they wrote a page. The docs worked until someone new tried to use them. We needed something that clarified how to write things once and write them well.

The Work

I created a living document that explained:

- How to structure a doc (headings, intros, action steps)
- How to write in plain language with clear audience focus
- What to include (and what to skip)
- Where to store things so they didn't get lost
- Naming conventions for faster search and easier reuse

I used real examples, cross-linked common reference docs, and organized the guide like the docs it was meant to support. I also tested it by walking a new team member through it and using their feedback to simplify anything that didn't land.

Impact

The style guide helped team members write faster and with less second-guessing. It became the go-to reference whenever someone wasn't sure how to start. Internal documentation became more consistent, easier to scan, and much easier to update or hand off.

1. Purpose of This Guide

- Provide baseline writing and formatting standards
- Reduce rewriting, reformatting, and version confusion
- Help new contributors match tone and structure without needing a separate walkthrough
- Keep things simple, readable, and consistent across documents

2. Voice and Tone

- Use plain language
- Be direct and respectful
- Skip filler, softeners, and jargon where possible
- Write like a teammate, not like a manual

Example:

Instead of: "It is recommended that you consider reviewing..."

Use: "Review this before submitting your update."

3. Formatting Conventions

Headings

- Use H2 for major sections, H3 for steps or sub-points
- Title case for headings, sentence case for everything else

Lists and Steps

- Use bullet points for lists
- Use numbered steps for processes or task instructions
- Avoid long paragraphs inside list items

Text Styles

- Use **bold** for buttons or labels
 - Use *italics* for examples or notes
 - Avoid underlining, ALL CAPS, or color coding unless required by platform or accessibility standards
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4. Standard Structure for Docs

Where possible, use the following layout:

1. **Title**
 2. **Context** (what this is, who it's for)
 3. **What You'll Need** (optional)
 4. **Steps or Instructions**
 5. **Troubleshooting or Notes**
 6. **Contact or Ownership Info**
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5. Version Control and Ownership

- Add a "Last updated" date at the top or bottom of the page
- If you revise a document someone else wrote, leave a short note about what you changed
- Assign an owner for major recurring documents (e.g., audit prep checklist, onboarding steps) so it's clear who's responsible for updates