

Creating a Custom Style Guide

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Why use a style guide?

- Consistency in all documentation
- Keep up with industry standards
- Everyone has their own vision of what looks and sounds good
- One form of reference for all writers

Reasons to create your own style guide

- You may not agree with everything in a commercial style guide
- You have your own policy for phrasing certain things
- New writers have company-specific guidelines to follow
- Create a reputation for publishing professional and consistent documentation

What should your style guide include?

- Proper usage of approved copyright and proprietary statements for your company
- Rules for word use when your style differs from the commercial guide
- Formatting specific text such as buttons, menu selections, check boxes

What should your style guide include?

- Departmental processes/procedures
- Location of templates and finished project files
- Acronyms and abbreviations
- Links to industry and internal Web sites

What your style guide should *not* include

- Grammar rules
- Template information

Develop a Strategy

- Gain support from management
- Form a style committee
- Set your boundaries. Determine what the style guide is *not*.

Develop a Strategy

- Determine the format of your style guide
- Select a centralized location for the guide

Get Started

- Set up weekly meetings for the committee to discuss style issues
- Ask the committee to review the style guide of choice, making notes of areas to change
- Set up weekly meetings to review the style decisions with the writing team

Get Started

- Inform the writing team of the feedback policy
- Interview your audience for feedback
- Assign a keeper of the style decisions
- Distribute minutes of style review meetings
- Be flexible

Document the style guide

- Enter the style decisions weekly
- Make frequent backups of your work
- Keep the group informed of your progress
- Consider creating a quick reference card

Publish the style guide

- Have a kick-off party at publication
- Reward people for teamwork
- Distribute the quick reference card

Going forward

- Make a commitment to keep the guide current
- Keep the style committee in place
- Distribute notification if an area of the guide changes
- Continue weekly review meetings or make time at staff meetings to discuss updates

Wrap up

- Involve the team
- Be flexible
- Have patience
- Have fun