



# HOW TO CREATE A STYLE GUIDE





# WHAT IS A STYLE GUIDE?

A style guide is an organized collection of grammatical, word, and style choices for your document, brand, series, or organization. Its purpose is to ensure consistency in communication.

Each style guide is unique because it reflects choice. Yes, you can have choice in the words and styles you use! Some style guides are simple one-page documents, while others are multi-page booklets, divided by category.

However you format your style guide, its purpose is as a reference document for you and your staff to use so that all communication is consistent. If you decide that you'll use "OK," for example, you don't want some "okay"s slipping in.



# WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR STYLE GUIDE

## SPELLING

- What spelling style will you use—Canadian? American? UK?
- Within some styles, you have options. In Canadian spelling, for example, you can choose "program" or "programme," "realize" or "realise."
- Some words have multiple spellings (e.g., "OK," "Okay," "okay")—you can note your preference here.
- You can note any made-up words here (this is especially helpful for fiction writers).
- Any industry-specific words can be noted here, including acronyms.

- Will you use the Oxford comma?
- Will you follow all comma rules to the letter or allow for a minimal style?
- How often will you use exclamation marks?
- Will you use em dashes?

## PUNCTUATION

- Do you prefer parenthesis or comma pairs for adding in extra bits of info?
- For academic writers, are you following any style guides for punctuation (e.g., APA, Chicago, AP)?

## CAPITALIZATION

- Do you wish to use traditional capitalization rules or minimal style?
- Will you capitalize titles (e.g., Vice President)?
- Are there industry-specific words that are always capitalized? (e.g., Veterans Affairs Canada capitalizes "Veterans")
- For fiction writers, note any words you've chosen to capitalize.
- Do you wish to capitalize the first word after a semi-colon?

- Will you use numerals or spell out numbers? Will this rule apply across the board or for select numbers (e.g., over 10, currency)
- How do you wish to format addresses? dates?
- "Percent" or "%"? "Dollars" or "\$"?

## NUMERALS

## FORMATTING

- While style guides focus on word and grammar style choices, you can also note formatting choices.
- How often will you use italics? For what purpose?
- How will you emphasize a word/phrase—bold, italics, capitals?
- Do you have a brand font?
- You can note heading level choices for font and font size.



- For organizations/brands, you can note guidelines for your tone/voice.

- What emotion are you trying to convey?

- Will your voice be warm and friendly? informative and straight forward? confidential? blunt?

## BRAND TONE

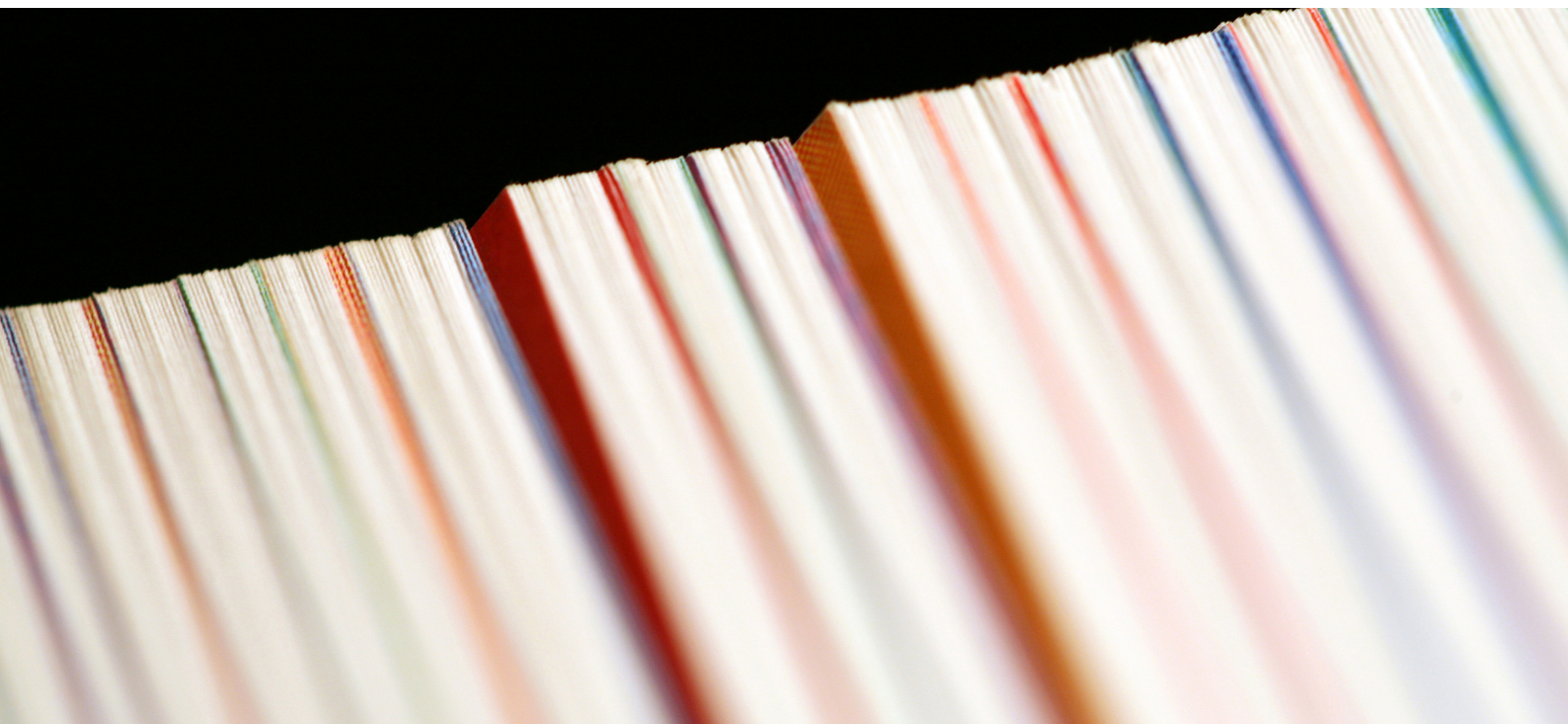
- Will you allow the use of slang and casual language? emojis?

- Are there specific words you should avoid?

- If you have taglines or you-specific phrases, you can note here how to use them

## OTHER

- You can include social media guidelines here (some companies opt to include these in a separate document)—will you use a different voice for Instagram than you will for LinkedIn?
- Approved list of reputable resources to pull information from.
- SEO words/phrases
- File naming conventions and internal storage/saving processes



# STYLE GUIDE FORMAT

Style guides are individual to your purpose, which makes creating a template nearly impossible. Some people/organizations have simple one-page word docs, while others opt for a booklet, broken down by category, and an alphabetical listing of all possible word choices.

How you choose to format your style guide is up to you. Two essential things to keep in mind as you create yours:

1

It has to be functional—ensure that your style guide can be used by anyone who needs to use it. If what started out as a simple one-pager is now 25 pages with no categories or order, you will want to rethink your format.

2

It is a living document—this means, you need to be able to add to it on a regular basis, as various word choices and usages arise. Language evolves, meanings of words change, and you'll want to keep up-to-date on your choices. Don't think that you'll be able to update a style guide once a year...chances are, you'll forget words and choices, and your style guide will no longer reflect what you are actually doing in your communications. Instead, keep a version of your style guide in a place where it can be easily updated (think: shared drive), and update it every time a new choice is made.

# STYLE GUIDE EXAMPLE



## ROSEMOUNT STYLE GUIDE

### SPELLING

- Canadian spelling (colour, travelling, centre, etc.)
- program
- realize, centralize, prioritize, organize
- okay
- copy edit (2 words)
- non-profits (over not-for-profits or nonprofits)
- cozy
- proofread
- email
- wellbeing

### PUNCTUATION

- Oxford comma
- em dash allowed
- ellipsis: ...(space after the last dot)
- follow comma rules
- minimal use of exclamation mark

### CAPITALIZATION

- minimal style
- general job titles use lowercase (president)
- specific job titles are capitalized (President Anil)
- Internet

### NUMERALS

- use numbers for currency, dates, addresses, model references, etc
- use numerals for all other numbers

### FORMATTING

- use bold for emphasis
- minimize use of italics (can use it for short notes/add-ons)
- heading font: Mourich
- text font: Nunito
- never use ALL CAPS

### BRAND VOICE

- kind, but knowledgable
- authentic (acknowledge real things)
- warm, inviting
- casual language allowed (contractions, some slang), but avoid words that could be misread as offensive
- words to use to help voice: guide, coach, journey, process





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