



Building Your Brand's Voice: A Practical Handbook for Creating a Content Style Guide

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About This Handbook





This ebook is designed for marketers, editors, content strategists, and business communicators who want to establish editorial consistency across their organization. Whether you're building a brand from scratch or scaling content production, a house style guide can anchor your voice, improve efficiency, and ensure high-quality communication across all channels.

Flatpage specializes in helping teams craft content that's clear, cohesive, and human. We created this handbook to share best practices—and provide you with a customizable template to get started.





Contents

About This Handbook	1
Why Every Business Needs a Content Style Guide	4
1 The Role of a House Style Guide	7
2 Defining Your Brand Voice	11
3 Grammar, Usage, and Style Preferences	15
4 Formatting and Structure Guidelines	20
5 Documenting Content Types	27
6 Governance and Maintenance	33
Tools, Templates, and Resources	38
Ready to Build Yours?	41



Introduction

Why Every Business Needs a Content Style Guide





Creating a cohesive and consistent brand voice isn't just about what you say—it's about how you say it. In a world where businesses regularly create content across multiple channels, for different audiences, and with contributions from a variety of team members, consistency is key to clarity and credibility.

A house style guide is your editorial backbone. It documents the rules, standards, and preferences that shape your content—from tone and grammar to formatting and structure. A well-crafted style guide empowers your team to write with confidence, reinforces your brand identity, and builds trust with your audience.





Where Should Your Style Guide Live?

Choosing the right format and location for your style guide is essential to its usability. The best home for your guide is where your team already works. Options include:

- **Google Docs:** Ideal for collaborative editing and easy sharing
- **Notion:** Great for structured documentation and version control
- **Internal Wiki or Website:** Useful if you want to make the guide accessible across departments
- **PDF:** Good for static, polished versions, but harder to update regularly

Whatever format you choose, make sure it supports easy access, regular updates, and version tracking. The more user-friendly your guide, the more likely your team is to actually consult and employ it.

In this handbook, we'll walk you through how to create a house style guide that reflects your brand's voice, supports your team, and scales with your content needs.

This handbook also includes a customizable style guide template in the appendix. As you read through each chapter, you can reference the template to see how your decisions about voice, grammar, formatting, and structure can be documented clearly and applied consistently.

1

The Role of a House Style Guide





A house style guide isn't a luxury or "nice-to-have." It's an essential tool for every organization that produces content—whether you're a solo marketer, a team of editors, or a fast-growing business managing multiple channels of communication.

Without a shared set of writing standards, teams waste time reinventing the wheel. Writers guess at tone, editors rewrite without consistency, and content loses its polish. A style guide eliminates ambiguity, streamlines collaboration, and reinforces brand credibility.

More importantly, it supports scalable editorial operations. As your content team grows—or as more people in your company contribute to messaging—a style guide functions as your editorial source of truth. It helps cross-functional teams communicate clearly and keeps your voice consistent across every platform and project.

Whether you're publishing web pages, launching campaigns, onboarding freelancers, or writing investor reports, a unified style guide makes execution smoother and faster.



Benefits of a Style Guide

- **Saves time:** No need to relitigate grammar and tone with every new draft.
- **Improves consistency:** Content sounds like it came from one voice—even if written by many.
- **Enables scaling:** New hires, freelancers, and contractors can hit the ground running.
- **Reduces revisions:** Spend fewer cycles debating stylistic choices.
- **Builds trust:** Professional, consistent writing reflects well on your brand.
- **Supports editorial workflows:** Easily reference rules while editing or building content briefs.

Your style guide doesn't need to cover every nuance. Start with what matters most—tone, grammar, common usage—and expand as needed.





How a Content Style Guide Differs from Branding Guidelines

It's important to distinguish a content style guide from branding guidelines. While they complement each other, they serve different functions and should exist as separate documents.

■ **Content style guides, or house style guides, focus on voice, grammar, formatting, and editorial choices:** they help writers, editors, and marketers produce consistent, high-quality written content.

■ **Branding guidelines, sometimes called brand books, govern visual identity:** logos, color palettes, typography, image styles, and other design elements.

Where a brand guide tells a designer how to use a logo, a content style guide tells a writer how to address an audience. While both work together to reinforce brand identity, keeping them separate ensures clarity and ease of use for their respective teams.

2

Defining Your Brand Voice





Your brand's voice is how you sound to your audience: it shapes how people perceive you and remember you. This chapter will help you define that voice in a way that's clear, actionable, and repeatable.

What Is Brand Voice?

Brand voice is the consistent expression of your brand's personality through words. It's not what you say (your message), but how you say it.

Identifying Voice Traits

Choose 3–5 adjectives to describe your voice. For example:

- Friendly, helpful, direct
- Authoritative, clear, thoughtful
- Energetic, curious, confident



Then define each one in context:

Friendly: We write like we speak—with warmth, empathy, and a touch of personality. We welcome the reader in.

Helpful: We anticipate questions and explain things clearly. We avoid jargon and always aim to be useful.

Direct: We get to the point quickly and clearly, without fluff or filler. Our tone is respectful but never wordy.

Use a “Do/Don’t” Table

Create examples that illustrate what your voice looks like in action.

Trait	Do	Don’t
Friendly	“We’re here to help.”	“Submit your request.”
Clear	“Download your copy now.”	“The following downloadable content is available.”
Curious	“Have you ever wondered how to streamline this?”	“Users may consider exploring various possibilities.”



Case Studies: Voice in Action

Let's look at two contrasting company voices and explore how each expresses tone across different content types.

Company A – Voice: Friendly, helpful, casual

Content Type	Example
Social Post	"We just dropped a new guide—get it here before it's gone!"
Email Intro	"Hey there, we noticed you liked our last post. Here's more."
Web Copy	"Let's dive in and show you how it works."

Company B – Voice: Formal, authoritative, informative

Content Type	Example
Social Post	"Our latest research guide is now available. Read it here."
Email Intro	"Following up on your recent interest in our report series."
Web Copy	"This section provides an in-depth overview of the platform's features."

These case studies highlight how tone varies with audience, platform, and personality. A good style guide helps writers navigate these shifts while maintaining a cohesive voice.

3

Grammar, Usage,
and Style Preferences





Once your brand's voice is defined, it's time to make decisions about the mechanics of writing. This chapter helps codify rules for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage so your content feels professional and consistent no matter who writes it.

Choose a Base Style

Start by selecting a widely accepted editorial style guide as your foundation:

AP Style: Ideal for marketing, journalism, blogs, emails, and social media.

Chicago Manual of Style: Best for long-form, academic, or research-driven content.

You don't have to follow an established style guide in full—just use it as your baseline and document any intentional departures.

Your house style guide doesn't need to be exhaustive. Focus on the most common or contentious decisions. Everything else can refer back to your base style.



Common Rules to Define

Your guide should clearly state preferences for frequently debated usage topics. Every rule should include an example.

Element	Sample Rule	Example
Serial Comma	Use the serial comma.	"We bought apples, oranges, and bananas."
Spelling	Use American English.	"Color" not "colour"
Capitalization	Sentence case for headlines.	"How to write a style guide"
Hyphenation	Hyphenate only when necessary to avoid confusion.	"Email" not "e-mail"
Acronyms	Spell out first use.	"Search engine optimization (SEO)"
Numbers	Spell out 0–9; numerals for 10+.	"Five tips" vs. "12 insights"

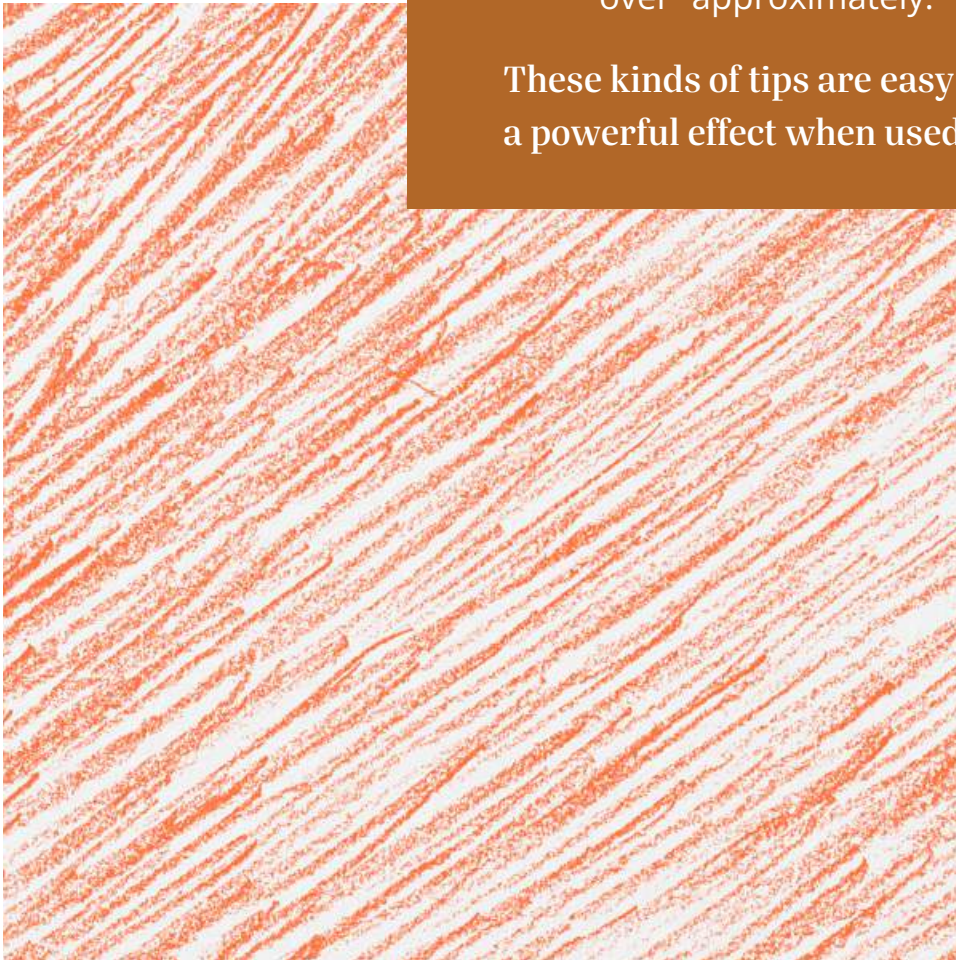


Quick Tips

Your style guide can also include quick, specific tips to assist content creation decisions. These pointers are especially useful for reinforcing habits that improve clarity and consistency.

- **Vary sentence openings:** Avoid starting consecutive sentences with the same word.
- **Note exceptions:** Document the reason behind any editorial exceptions to help maintain consistency.
- **Simplify wherever possible:** Prefer “use” over “utilize,” “help” over “assist,” and “about” over “approximately.”

These kinds of tips are easy to overlook but can have a powerful effect when used regularly.





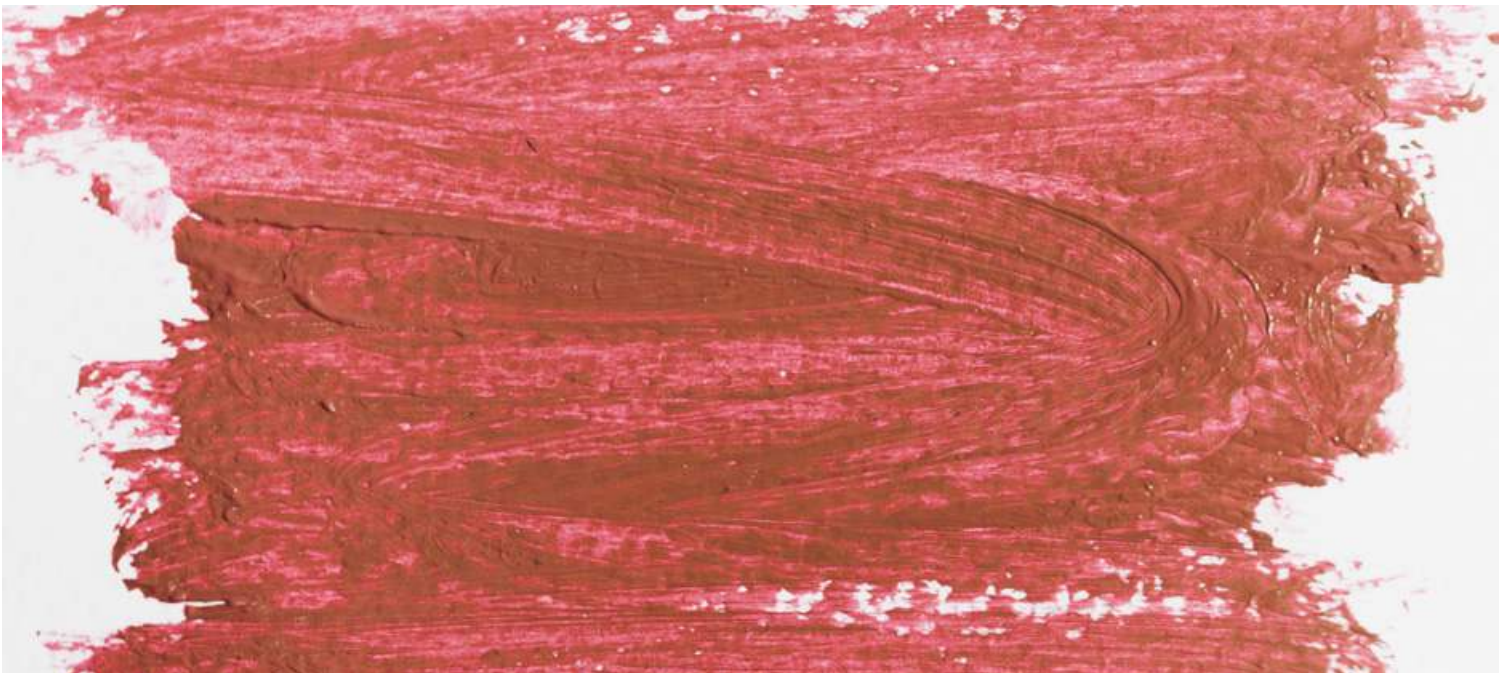
Applying Style in Practice

Consider using callout examples for edge cases or frequently asked questions. For instance:

Hyphenation: Use “cost-effective” as a compound adjective before a noun (“a cost-effective strategy”) but not when it’s used as a predicate (“the strategy is cost effective”).

Capitalization: We write “internet” in lowercase, consistent with AP Style.

Your grammar and usage section is not only a reference for editing—it shapes how your team thinks about writing. Grounding these rules clearly in examples makes it easier to maintain quality at scale.



4

Formatting and Structure Guidelines





Consistent formatting helps your content feel organized and polished. It also makes it easier for your audience to skim, scan, and absorb information. This chapter provides structural standards to improve the readability and visual flow of your writing.

Headings and Subheadings

Use heading hierarchy to organize ideas and guide readers through your content. Consistent structure also improves accessibility and SEO.

- **H1:** For the title of the page or article.
- **H2:** For main section headings.
- **H3:** For subsections within H2 blocks.

Avoid skipping levels (e.g., don't jump from H1 to H3).



Example:

- **H1: How to Create a Style Guide**
(Bold, title-case capitalization)
 - **H2: *Choosing a Base Style***
(Italics, title-case capitalization)
 - **H3: Benefits of Chicago versus AP**
(Roman, sentence-case capitalization)
-

Paragraphs

- **Keep paragraphs short**—3 to 5 sentences max. Long paragraphs can feel overwhelming online, and breaking them into smaller chunks helps readers stay engaged.
- **Use breaks** between paragraphs to improve readability on screens.

Here's a two-paragraph example to illustrate the effect of paragraph breaks:

Content quality matters just as much as frequency. Publishing consistently doesn't help if the writing is confusing, bloated, or off-brand.

To make your writing easier to digest, break it into shorter paragraphs. Give each idea room to breathe and allow your reader a natural pause between thoughts.



Typography and Emphasis

How you treat text (bold, italics, capitalization) affects how content is received and interpreted.

- **Bold:** For emphasis and user interface (UI) elements (e.g., Click **Submit**).
- *Italics:* For internal thoughts, book titles, or occasional emphasis.
- ALL CAPS: Best avoided. They are harder to read and feel aggressive.

Example:

Correct:

- Please click **Save**
Draft before exiting.

Avoid:

- PLEASE CLICK SAVE
DRAFT.
-



Lists and Bullets

Use lists to break up information and improve scannability.

- **Bulleted lists:** For unordered content.
- **Numbered lists:** For steps or sequences.

Always keep list items grammatically parallel (start each item with the same part of speech).

Example:

Correct:

- Scalable platform
- Fast performance
- Reduced cost

Avoid:

- The platform is scalable
 - Fast performance
 - It saves money
-



Links and Calls to Action (CTAs)

- Use descriptive link text (avoid “click here”).
- Follow sentence-case capitalization: “Learn more,” not “Learn More.”
- Avoid punctuation at the end of buttons or linked phrases.

Example:

Correct:

- Download the full guide

Avoid:

- Click here.
-

Tables, Charts, and Visual Elements

- Always provide descriptive captions.
- Use consistent formatting (colors, fonts, alignment).
- Avoid cramming too much information into one table or image.



Good formatting isn't just aesthetic—it's functional. It helps people absorb information more effectively and increases content retention. Take this example:

Document Type	Purpose
Style Guide	Company-wide editorial consistency
Style Sheet	Project-specific editorial decisions

Alignment and Spacing

- Left-align body copy for ease of reading.
- Use adequate white space between sections and images.

Example:

Correct:

- Our product is intuitive, powerful, and scalable.
- It's designed for businesses of all sizes.

Avoid:

- Our product is intuitive, powerful, and scalable. It's designed for businesses of all sizes.
-

5

Documenting Content Types



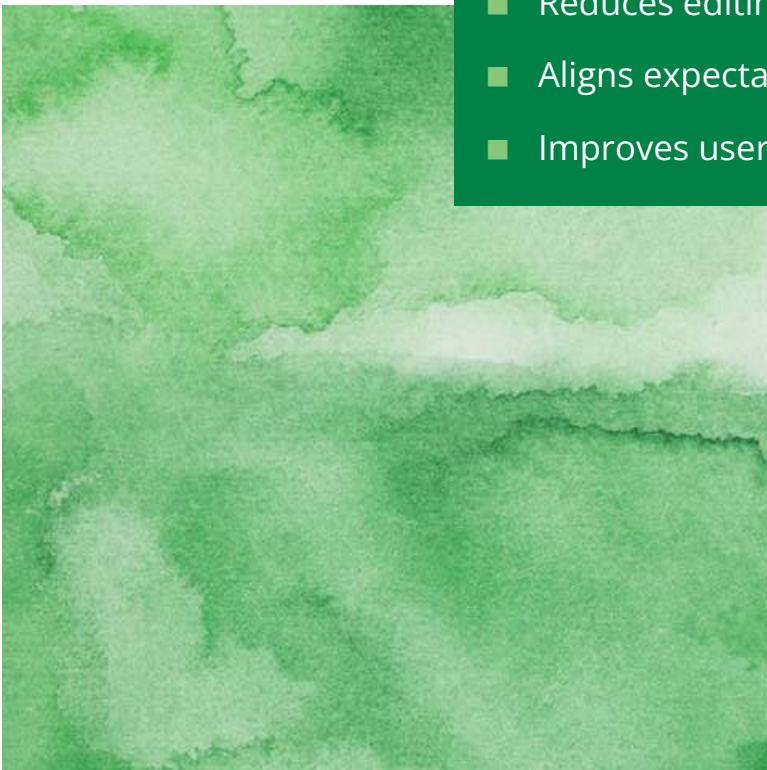


A robust content style guide doesn't just address grammar and formatting—it also gives guidance for different types of content your organization produces. This helps writers match tone, structure, and expectations to the medium they're working in. In this chapter we explore how to document content-specific rules that support clarity and consistency.

Why Document Content Types?

Each content type serves a distinct purpose and is aimed at different stages of the audience journey. Establishing conventions for each specific content format:

- Reduces editing time
- Aligns expectations across teams
- Improves user experience





Key Content Types to Define

1. Blog Posts

- **Purpose:** Educate, inspire, or inform; support SEO
- **Typical** Length: 800–1,200 words
- **Tone:** Conversational, informative, engaging
- **Structure:**
 - Title (H1)
 - Intro (hook and thesis)
 - 2–4 H2 sections with short paragraphs and bullet lists
 - Conclusion with CTA

Example CTA:

**Want more insights like this?
Subscribe to our newsletter.**

Name

Email

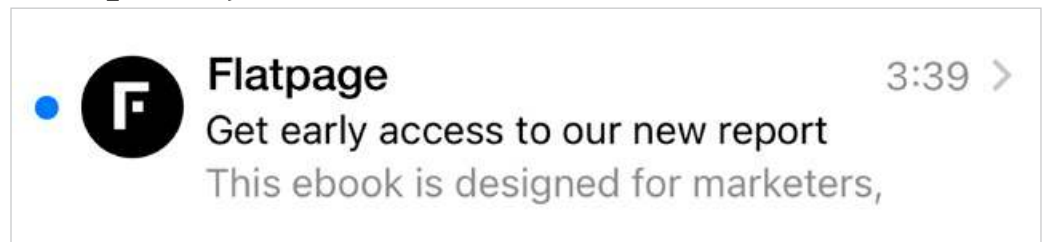
Subscribe



2. Email Campaigns

- **Purpose:** Engage, inform, convert
- **Tone:** Direct, benefit-driven, human
- **Structure:**
 - Subject line: 5–8 words, clear benefit
 - Hook in first line of body
 - Key message in 1–2 short paragraphs
 - Single CTA (e.g., button or link)

Example Subject Line:



3. Social Media Posts

- **Purpose:** Drive awareness, engagement, or traffic
- **Tone:** Playful, concise, on-brand
- **Guidelines:**
 - Vary tone by platform (LinkedIn = professional; Twitter = witty/informal)
 - Use visuals or emojis sparingly and intentionally
 - Include hashtags or tags when relevant



Example Tweet:



4. White Papers and Reports

- **Purpose:** Establish authority, share research, support sales
- **Tone:** Authoritative, detailed, formal but readable
- **Structure:**
 - Executive summary
 - Problem overview
 - Research or solution
 - Charts/graphs with captions
 - Conclusion with recommendations
 - Citations:** Use formal citation styles when referencing data, studies, or sources. Choose a style (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA) and include guidance in your house style guide.

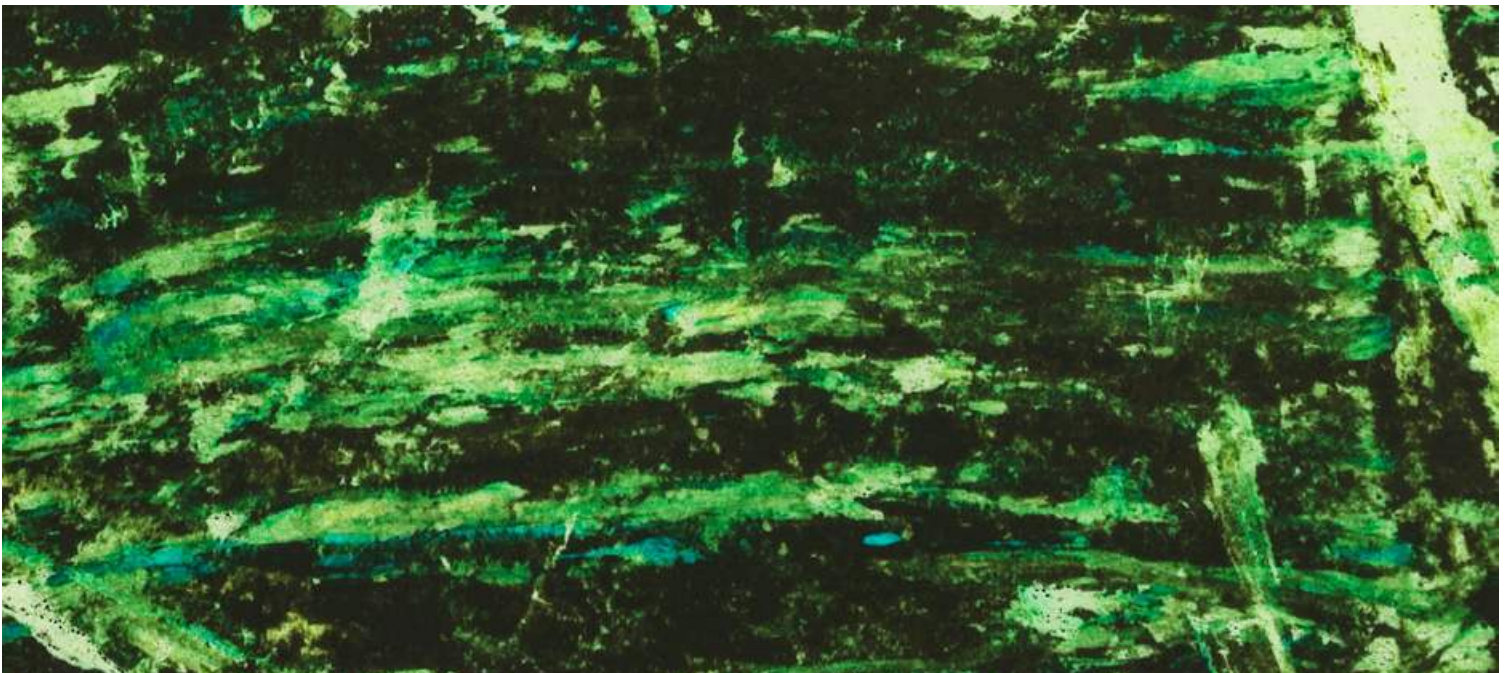


Customizing for Your Organization

Depending on your content mix, you might also include standards for internal documents, customer support emails, ads, or video scripts. Use your style guide template (see appendix) to document:

- Purpose
- Ideal tone
- Format and structure
- Visual/brand elements (if relevant)

This type-specific guidance will help content producers create with confidence and reduce ambiguity in the editorial process.



6

Governance and Maintenance





Creating a style guide is only the beginning. To remain useful, it must evolve with your organization's voice, goals, and team. Governance and maintenance practices ensure your style guide remains a living document, not a one-off exercise.

Assign Ownership

Designate a primary owner or small editorial team responsible for maintaining the guide. This person or group should:

- Review updates regularly
- Field suggestions and feedback
- Communicate changes to relevant stakeholders



Establish a Review Cadence

Schedule periodic reviews—at least once or twice per year—to revisit tone, rules, and examples. Add new sections as content formats evolve (e.g., a new platform or internal communication need).

Gather Insights from Key Staff

If you've already involved team members in shaping the guide, circle back to them once the guide is in use to evaluate its effectiveness. Ask which sections they've found helpful, what questions remain, and what additions could improve clarity. This feedback will inform future iterations.

Consolidate the review process by designating a feedback channel—whether it's a shared doc, a form, or a recurring meeting—and ensure representation across departments (e.g., marketing, design, product).



Build It Into Onboarding and Workflow

A great style guide is only useful if people know it exists and how to use it. Integrate it into:

- New hire onboarding
- Freelancer and agency onboarding
- Editorial workflows and checklists
- Briefs or templates (use links)

Version Control

Track and date each update or new version using a changelog. This documentation helps your team know what's changed and why particular decisions were made. Choose a system that allows for easy updates, visibility, and historical recordkeeping—whether it's a document history in Google Docs, page updates in Notion, or a manual changelog in a shared folder.

Example Changelog Entry:

- *March 2025: Added email subject line guidance, clarified use of em dashes vs. en dashes.*
-

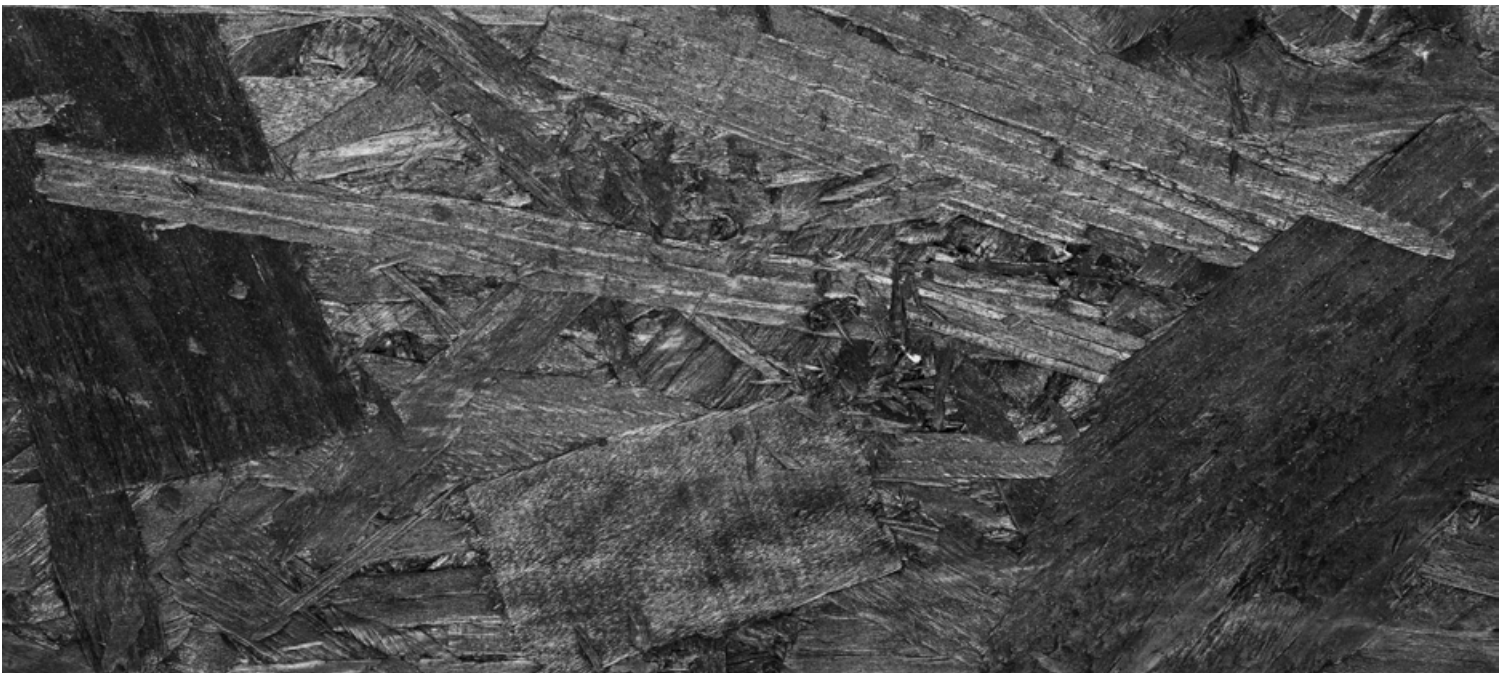


Communicate Updates

When there are major updates, share them in team meetings or newsletters. Highlight what's changed and why.

Pro Tip: Include a “What’s New” section at the top of your guide so frequent users can see changes at a glance.

By assigning ownership, embedding feedback loops, and integrating your style guide into daily operations, you ensure it grows with your team and continues to support quality content at scale.



Appendix

Tools, Templates, and Resources





Quick Recap: Why a Style Guide Matters

A house style guide ensures consistency, clarity, and confidence in your content. It helps:

- Align tone and grammar across content types
- Streamline workflows and reduce editing friction
- Onboard freelancers and new team members efficiently
- Maintain a strong, recognizable brand voice

Getting Started with Your Own Guide

1. **Start small:** Focus on the 5–10 most common editorial decisions your team encounters.
2. **Use our template:** Customize the downloadable Flatpage House Style Guide Template (linked below) to get a head start.
3. **Gather team input:** Ask what's confusing, what's missing, and what guidance they wish they had.
4. **Build it into workflows:** Include the guide in content briefs, onboarding docs, and internal wikis.
5. **Review and revise:** Treat your guide as a living document—update it as your brand, audience, and content evolve.



Downloadable Template

Use the Flatpage House Style Guide Template as a customizable foundation for your organization:
[Download the Flatpage House Style Guide Template](#)

Tools That Help

- **Google Docs:** Ideal for collaborative editing and easy sharing
- **Notion:** For structured documentation and version control
- **PDF:** Good for static, polished versions used in external communications
- **Content Snippet Libraries:** For shared phrasing or repeated content (e.g., Grammarly, Writer, Contentful)

Additional Reading

- Why Businesses Need a Style Guide for Content Writing
- How Content Marketers Can Build a Scalable Editorial Process
- The Difference Between a Style Guide and a Style Sheet

Final Page

Ready to
Build Yours?





You've got the guidance, tools, and examples—now it's time to put them into action.

- Use our [customizable template](#) to start your own house style guide.
- Share this handbook with your team to kick off the conversation.
- Need expert help? Reach out to Flatpage for editorial audits, style guide development, or team training.

Your content is your voice. Make sure it's clear, consistent, and unmistakably yours. Use this handbook and template to create a resource that empowers your entire team to write with clarity and confidence.

AI-Assisted Content Creation

Parts of this handbook were developed using AI tools and were thoroughly reviewed and refined by Flatpage's editorial team to ensure clarity, quality, and accuracy.

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