

Online Style Guide

**This document defines standards for
use of language online for in “Acme Ltd.”**

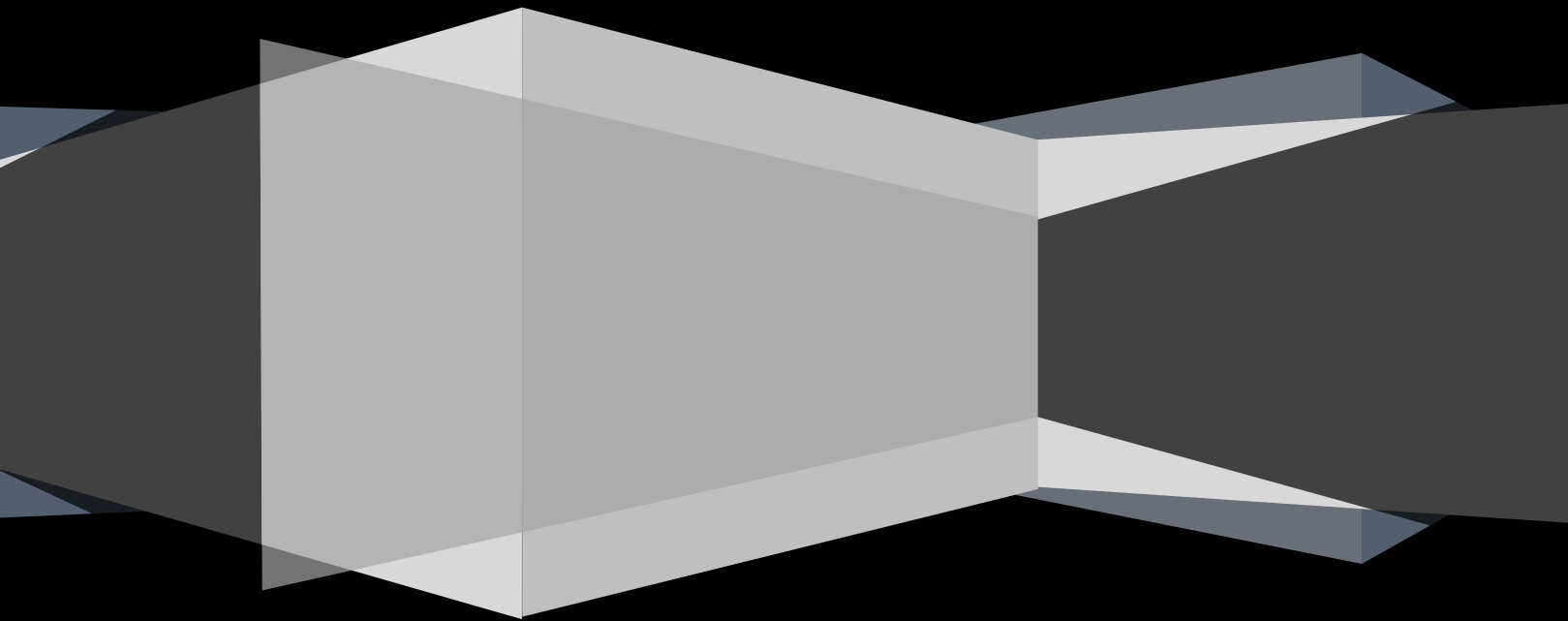


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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Acme Web Style Guide represents the means by which a unified approach to the use of language on Acme websites and intranet can be assured. This document sets out the style guidelines that regulate the writing of content for the Acme websites and intranet.

The Acme Web Style Guide is a practical document. It is intended that this document will be used by experienced web writers.

1.2 Additional Style References

While many examples are covered in this guide, a prescriptive rule has not been created for every circumstance. In the event of uncertainty, clarification can be obtained from the following sources:

- Oxford Guide to Style, first edition by Oxford University Press.
- Web Content Style Guide, first edition by Gerry McGovern.

(These are available from the Head of Web)

In the event of uncertainty, the correct style to use shall be determined in the following manner:

- Acme Web Style Guide is the governing style guide.
- Any style issues not covered by the Acme Web Style Guide shall be determined by the Oxford Guide to Style. There are two exceptions to this. These are :
- Internet terminology. These shall be determined by Web Content Style Guide.

Direct all queries regarding style for Acme websites to the Head of Web.

2 Acme Web Writing Style

2.1 7 Golden Rules of Web Writing

Follow these seven rules when writing content and visitors to your site will thank you.

1. **Know your reader** (Who are you writing for? See 2.2 below)
2. **Use the reader's mental model** (Think like readers, not like your department)
3. **Keep your content short and simple** (The intranet is NOT for 'creative writing')
4. **Write active content** (Too much verbiage muddies meaning)
5. **Use headlines and subheadlines** (Many headlines make reading much easier)
6. **Link to other content** (It is easy and very helpful to link to other relevant pages)
7. **Edit your content. Then edit again** (Aim to remove 50% of what you started with)

2.2 Personas

Acme Staff Persona

A Persona is a description of an idealised website visitor that matches the attributes of the audience being targeted.

Personas can be of great assistance when developing content, because they provide a focal point for discussing requirements. For example, a Persona can be talked about as if he/she were a living, breathing individual and the website was being designed to address her needs.

The following Personas are representative of Acme staff and may be used when developing content for the intranet.

- **David:** David is a 42 year old engineer in Acme. He accesses the intranet via a Desktop. He has very good web skills.

“I need content that helps me do something, not empty marketing spiel. It must also be clearly written, short and uptodate”

- **Patrick:** Patrick is a 33 year old consultant with Acme. He access the intranet via MyOffice@Acme. He has excellent web skills.

“I want to get to the information I need as quickly as possible. Navigation labels and search should be as clear as possible.”

- **Brenda:** Brenda is a 47 year old clerical offer in Acme. She accesses the intranet via a Desktop. She has good web skills.

“I need content on the intranet to be signposted to me, as I am often too busy to go exploring”

In summary, Acme staff:

- Are very impatient - they will not read something unless they have to.
- Want to do something & get out of Acmenet as quickly as possible.
- Do not understand your business function or terminology.

Accordingly, your should:

- Only produce highly-targeted information.
- Put important information at the top of the page.
- Be very concise & include lots of linking.
- Exclude any waffle, welcome messages or business ego (staff won't read it).
- To support Work activity by using applications and acquiring information.

This may be used to guide the development of new content.

2.3 Text Font, Size & Format

Fonts for the Acme Public Website in order are: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Sans-serif, default.

Fonts for the Acme Corporate Website in order are: Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, Sans-serif, default.

Standard text sizes and formats are defined in Acme Web Standard.

2.4 Text Length

Keep content as short as possible.

Limit content to a maximum of 500-700 words per page.

Headlines should be limited to 4-8 words.

Headlines should have a subject and a verb. Place the subject first, e.g. Acme opens new office, NOT A new office is opened by Acme. Punctuation should not be used in headlines, except where necessary to maintain accuracy.

Subheadlines should be used to assist understanding.

Sentences should be limited to 15-20 words.

Paragraphs should be limited to 40-70 words.

Summaries where used, e.g. for PDFs, should be limited to 30-50 words.

Use bulleted points to break up lists.

2.5 Text Accuracy

All content must be free of spelling and grammar mistakes.

Financial information must be approved by appropriate parties before publishing.

Do not use obscure references or obscure quotations in content.

Explain all abbreviations in brackets immediately after their first use, e.g. kWh (Kilowatt hours).

2.6 Hyperlink Text

Two means of writing hyperlinks are possible:

1. Bullet or standalone hyperlinks
2. In-text hyperlinks

Bullet Hyperlinks

A bullet or standalone hyperlink occurs where links are separated from text. For example:

- [Change your SAP access settings](#)
- [Book a meeting room](#)
- [Read the latest ITS News](#)

In-text Hyperlinks

In-text hyperlinks occur where text is linked within a paragraph of text. For example,

“Your payslip includes the details of your total pension, i.e. your total pension before any deductions are made and the itemised deductions. This includes mandatory payments such as tax and voluntary payments such as insurance premiums. [The attached sample pension payslip \(PDF 56Kb\)](#) includes an explanation of the various headings. If you require any further clarification of your payslip [please visit the website of the Payroll Office.](#)”

The rule of thumb is that hyperlinks must always form a complete sentence, e.g. [Click here to read more about staff social events](#)

Hyperlinks must not be labelled "Click here " or "More", but labelled within the context in which they appear.

2.7 Hyperlink Text for Downloads

Download hyperlinks must always indicate the format and size of the document they point to. This is to allow readers to know what they are opening. For example:

- [Acme Pension Scheme Annual Report 2005 \(PDF 277Kb\)](#)
- [Acme Pension Scheme Annual Report 2004 \(PDF 185Kb\)](#)
- [Acme Pension Scheme Annual Report 2003 \(PDF 855Kb\)](#)

A download in a paragraph of text could read:

“This includes mandatory payments such as tax and voluntary payments such as insurance premiums. [The attached sample pension payslip](#) (PDF 56Kb) includes an explanation of the various headings.”

Where possible, an abstract should also be provided. For example:

“[Mobile Asset Management](#) (PDF 83Kb)

This document explains the benefits of Mobile Asset Management including health, safety, security and preventative maintenance.”

2.8 Hyperlink Titles

Hyperlink titles must be used where clicking on a link results in a change in the user's on-screen environment. This includes:

- Link to a website or web page that opens a new window. Link title must state, "This link will open in a new window".
- Link to an Adobe Acrobat PDF. Link title must state, "This links to a PDF document which can be downloaded and viewed".
- Link to a Rich Text Format RTF. Link title must state, "This link will open in a new window".
- Link to a Plain text format TXT. Link title must state, "This link will open in a new window".
- Link to an image file that opens a new window. Link title must state, "This link will open in a new window".
- Link to an audio file. Link title must state, "This link will open a sound file in a new window".
- Link to a video file. Link title must state, "This link will open a video file in a new window".
- Image link to any of the above.
- Any other content linked from within a page.

2.9 Hyperlinks for Divided Pages

Documents should be limited to 2-3 on-screen lengths of the preferred browser configuration. Beyond this, documents should be divided.

The following convention must be used for linking documents that have been divided:

- 'Previous Page 1 of 3 Next'

This must be shown at the head and foot of content

2.10 Hyperlink Addressing

Hyperlinks to external websites should link to a stable URL e.g.

www.website.com/news/ not www.website.com/news/010203.html

Hyperlinks must be canonical in form, that is, the final forward-slash '/' must be included, e.g. <http://www.acmei.ie/>

Hyperlinks within the website must be in relative form e.g. [../images/image.gif](#)

Hyperlinks text should be between seven and twelve words in length.

2.11 Labelling of Fixed Navigation

Link text must be as short as possible, while remaining self-explanatory.

The meaning of individual link texts must be clear when juxtaposed with others.

Link texts may need to be user-tested to assess the degree of acceptance.

The maximum length of navigation link text on the Acme Corporate Intranet is 28 characters, including spaces.

The maximum length of navigation link text on the Acme Corporate Intranet that appears as a child to another link is 23 characters, including spaces.

The text of each link must be unique.

Use words that visitors to your site will understand NOT words that your business uses.

Make hyperlinks action-oriented where possible.

Start each word in a link with an upper case letter.

Do not capitalise conjunctions or prepositions, e.g. 'and' not 'And', 'of' not 'Of', etc.

Special characters may be used. For example, 'Health and Safety' may be rendered as 'Health & Safety'.

Check the spelling of hyperlinks before inserting them.

Do not use all upper case characters.

2.12 Browser Title Text

Make titles as descriptive as possible.

Make titles as short as possible (while not compromising the description). The longest recommended length is 80 characters or 6 to 8 words (including spaces).

Use an effective mix of upper and lower cases. Follow the standard rules of English grammar when creating page titles.

Do not capitalise conjunctions or prepositions, e.g. 'and' not 'And', 'of' not 'Of', etc.

Special characters may be used. For example, 'Health and Safety' may be rendered as 'Health & Safety'.

Check the spelling of page titles before inserting them.

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This is the end of this short sample of a **Corporate Online Style Guide** created by Shane Diffily.

The purpose of such a guide is to document the rules and conventions by which online content must be created.

To find out how to create your own Online Style Guide, visit **www.diffily.com/services**

