UX Writing Guidelines

All microcopy ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ should:
- Follow Google's three UX writing principles: Clear, Concise, Useful
- Follow [Google's Material Design](#) best practices for writing
- Follow [Apple's Human Interface Guidelines](#) for core iOS behaviors
- Follow Nielsen Norman Usability Heuristics
- Use ▮▮▮▮ brand voice
- Use the appropriate tone for the designated flow
- Use American English spellings

General Guidelines

UX Writing Principles - A Breakdown

According to research conducted at Google, effective microcopy should always be clear, concise and useful. Follow these three principles when creating microcopy ▮▮▮▮▮▮

1. ## Clear - The copy is understandable and appropriate for the target audience

Do:

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- Try to use common words
- Try to use language that is easily translatable across cultures
- Use specific call to actions (CTAs); users should feel confident and knowledgeable about where they're going

- ○ Instead of "Submit" or "Enter" use something specific to the task, like "Preview"
- Use ████ concepts and terminology consistently
- When relevant, use language that is already familiar to smartphone users, especially in error messages ███████████████

Don't:

- Oversimplify for the sake of simplifying
- Use words, phrases, or expressions that are specific to one culture or language

2. Concise - The copy is economical → it isn't lengthy or wordy

Do:

- Front load text with most important words or concepts
- Be direct; use CTAs when relevant (especially for button copy)
- Use numerals (ex. 2, 87)
  - ○ Exception: ████████████████████████████████████ ████████████ ██████████████████████████ █████████████████████
- Use microinteractions in place of text, when relevant ██████ █████████████████████████████████████

Don't:

- Overwhelm the user with multiple concepts
- Use too many stop words (this, in, at, with, from)
- Write out numbers

3. Useful - The copy has a clear purpose → it assists users in their journey and accounts for different behaviors and errors
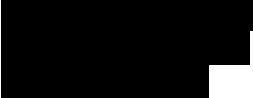
Do:
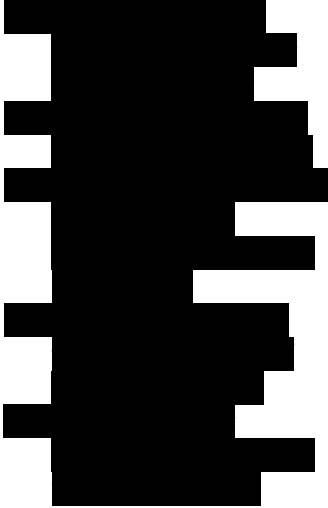
- Let the user know that they're in control
  - ○ Ex. Google's "Got it" button on educational pop ups gives the user reign over how they absorb tutorials or popups and allows the user to "acknowledge" text so they don't feel like they are being instructed
  - ○ Ex. Google offers the ability to "Undo" the action of sending an email, giving the user technical control over their experience
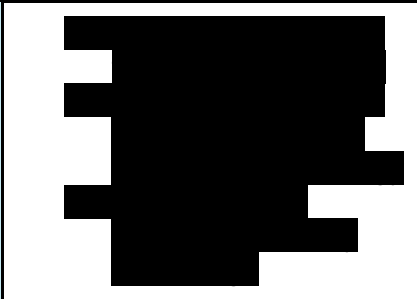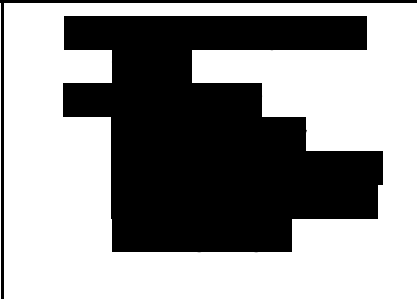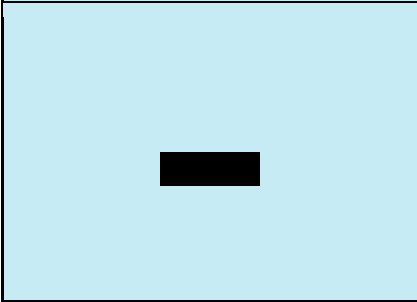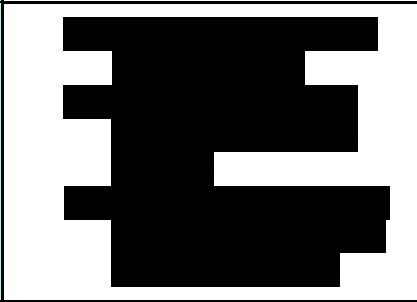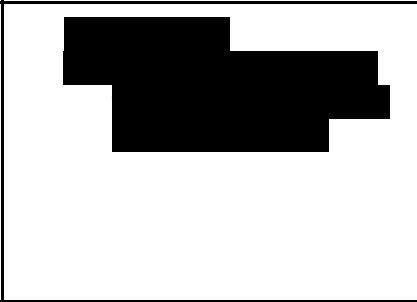
Don't:

- Use links that take the user outside of the app

- Make the user feel like they're stuck in one spot, especially if an error occurs
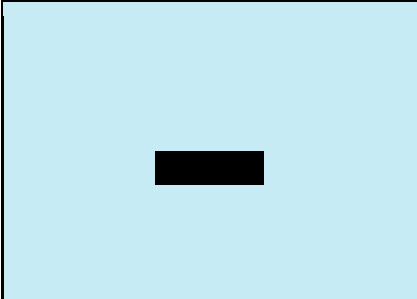 - Ex. Using both "Try Again" and "Recover Password" when a user inputs the incorrect password, instead of just "Recover Password"

Tense

General Rules

- Always try to use the present tense unless there is no possible way the copy can be written in present tense
- Address your audience in second person (you) or first person (I or me) when relevant
  - Never combine "you" and "I" in the same component
  - Never (ever) use "we," always keep the focus on the user

Brand-Related Guidelines for Mobile

Brand Voice

The following chart provides insight into how the principles behind ▆▆▆▆ brand voice impact mobile content. The concept for this chart comes from Torrey Podmajersky's book titled, "Strategic Writing for UX," a recommended read for anyone interested in UX writing.

	▆▆▆	▆▆▆	▆▆▆
Concepts	▆▆▆▆▆	▆▆▆▆▆	▆▆▆▆▆
Vocabulary	▆▆▆▆▆	▆▆▆▆▆	▆▆▆▆▆

Verbosity	███████	███████	███████
Grammar	███████	███████	███████
Punctuation	███████	███████	███████
Capitalization	███████	███████	███████

Additional Dos and Don'ts for UX Writers		
	Do:	**Don't:**
▬	███████	███████

▬	███	███
▬	███	███

Tone Spectrum

	███	███	███
Concept	███	███	███
Use Cases	███	███	███
Desired Effect	███	███	███

Tone Spectrum Dos and Don'ts for UX Writers

Tone	Do:	Don't:
▬	███████	███████
▬	███████	███████
▬	███████	███████

How to Handle Tone Transitions

Transitions in tone will occur at multiple points in the user's journey. It is the writer's duty to make these transitions feel natural. Writers can stay on top of tone transitions by making sure that they have proper context into the flow's general tone as well as additional awareness about error messages and next steps. ████████████████████████████████████ ████████████████████

Mobile-Specific Guidelines

The general rules written below are for both iOS and Android. ██████████████████
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Terms and Phrases

We say:

- *On* the home screen (not "in the home screen")
- *In* [insert specific page/screen] (ex. ██████████████)
- *In* the app
- *In* █████

General Punctuation Rules

- Use punctuation minimally
- Don't use colons or other punctuation that is difficult to quickly scan
- Use contractions when needed
- Always use the oxford comma

Component-Specific Rules

Navigation Bar Headers:

- **Casing:** Title Case
- **Punctuation:** None
- **Length:** 1-3 words

Headers (Below Navigation Bar):

- **Casing:** Title Case
  - Exception: ██
    ████████████████████
- **Punctuation:** None
- **Length:** Varies
  - 1-3 words for screen headers, form headers, etc.
  - 3+ words for screen headers that are ██████████████████████████
    ████████████████████████

Titles (████████ Alert Titles, etc.):

- **Casing:** Title Case
- **Punctuation:** None
- **Length:** 1-3 words

Body Text:

- **Casing:** Sentence case
- **Punctuation:** Varies
  - Do not punctuate single sentences
  - Exception: Punctuate a single sentence if it is followed by a CTA button (like Learn more)
  - Punctuate body text that is longer than a single sentence

Standard Buttons:

- **Casing:** Title Case
  - Exception: ALL CAPS for Android standard buttons
- **Punctuation:** None
  - Exception: When relevant, use a colon to specify a navigation workflow ████████ ████████
- **Length:** 1-3 words
- **Tone:** Direct

Text Buttons:

- **Casing:** Varies

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- **Punctuation:** None
- **Length:** 1-3 words
- **Tone:** Direct

Alerts and Dialogues:

- **Casing:** Mixed
  - Title Case titles (even if the title is a question)
  - Sentence case body text
- **Punctuation:** Varies
  - Use a question mark for titles that require it (ex. Are You Sure?)

- ○ Always include a period after the body text

Notifications

[Redacted]

Error Messages

Error messages should communicate the error to the user as fast as possible and provide a solution when necessary. Avoid unnecessary stop words and make sure to front load the message with the most important information (usually the issue or action item). Numbers should be written as numerals (ex. 8, instead of "eight") and common language should be used to communicate the message.

Length:

- Errors should be concise enough to fit into a single sentence but may be longer under special circumstances

Casing:

- Sentence case

Punctuation:

- No punctuation after single sentences
- Avoid unnecessary punctuation that may be hard to scan: colons, semicolons, dashes, bullets, etc.

Tone:

- Direct

Additional Tips:

- Don't overuse the support email at the end of error messages; when possible, always help users help themselves and use the support email as a last resort

Legal Guidelines

[Redacted]

General Spelling and Grammar

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███████████ Below are examples of American and British spellings. Please stick to American spellings. The reference source for the terms below can be found in the References list at the end of this document.

American English	British English
abridgment	abridgement
acknowledgment	acknowledgement
advertise (less common: advertize)	advertise
analyze	analyse
authorize	authorise
behavior	behaviour
cancelation/canceled/canceling	cancellation/cancelled/cancelling
capitalize	capitalise
categorize/categorization	categorise/categorisation
center	centre
check	cheque
color	colour
customize	customise
defense	defence
digitise	digitize

dependant (n)	dependent (n)
earned	earned (less common: earnt)
economize	economise
enroll/enrollment	enrol/enrolment
finalize	finalise
fulfill/fulfillment	fulfil/fulfilment
funneled/funneling	funnelled/funnelling
labeling/labeled (past tense of label)	labelling/labelled (past tense of label)
learned	learned (less common: learnt)
legalize	legalise
license	licence
maximize	maximise
modeled/modeling	modelled/modelling
net	net (less common: nett)
optimize/optimization	optimise/optimisation (less common: optimization)
organize, organization	organise/organisation
personalize	personalise
practice	practise (verb only)
prioritize	prioritise (less common: prioritize)
privatize	privatise (less common: privatize)
queuing	queueing (less common: queuing)
reeducate	re-educate
reenter	re-enter
sizable	sizeable
skillful	skilful
specialize/specialization	specialise/specialisation

stabilize	stabilise
standardize/standardization	standardise/standardisation
summarize	summarise
totaled/totaling	totalled/totalling
toward	towards
traveler/traveled/traveling	traveller/travelled/travelling
utilize	utilise (less common: utilize)
visualize/visualization	visualise/visualisation

Hyphenated Compound Words

- Only use a hyphen when the compound word precedes the noun it modifies
  - Ex. You created an up-to-date calendar
- Drop the hyphen when it comes after the noun
  - Ex. Your calendar is up to date

For general knowledge about how to use hyphens visit the Grammarly Blog.

References

Read the Material Design guidelines and Apple Human Interface Guidelines for additional information about sentence structure, capitalization, and how to write copy for different UI components.

References:

Strategic Writing for UX by Torrey Podmajersky
https://www.amazon.com/Strategic-Writing-Engagement-Conversion-Retention/dp/1492049395

Luke Mastin - Canadian, British, and American Spelling
http://www.lukemastin.com/testing/spelling/cgi-bin/database.cgi?action=view_category&database=spelling&category=A

The Canadian Style - Spelling
https://www.btb.termiumplus.gc.ca/tcdnstyl-chap?lang=eng&lettr=chapsect3&info0=3

Material Design - Writing
https://material.io/design/communication/writing.html

HIG
https://developer.apple.com/design/human-interface-guidelines/

Nielsen Norman Usability Heuristics
https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/

Google I/O - How Words Can Make Your Product Stand Out
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIGfwUt53nI

Grammarly:
https://www.grammarly.com/blog/hyphen/