

Writing Style Guide | Slance

Welcome to the Slance Writing Style Guide!

This writing style guide has been created for Slance employees, freelancers and third party contributors, but we hope it can positively impact content and communication teams at other organizations too. Our guide helps Slance maintain a clear and consistent brand voice based off our founding principles:

1. Values create value
2. Learning leads to growth
3. Responsibility allows freedom
4. Transparency invites trust
5. Simplicity: less is more
6. Engagement: embrace the moment
7. Diversity of ideas, unity of purpose

The Slance writing style guide is a living document – one that is continuously updated based on ideas and insights from our community. We encourage comments and feedback to help create a leading style guide example that can be used by all.



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Tone of Voice

Our mission is to expand the career opportunities for U.S. students. This underlying goal empowers us to do what we do: simply put, connecting student freelancers with clients. These two distinct groups are the lifeblood of our community, so understanding the personas of our member groups is key.

Students

Innovation permeates through the U.S. student body. Mark Zuckerberg and Matt Mullenweg epitomize the entrepreneurial spirit of college students by their revolutionary companies, Facebook and WordPress respectively. Students bring a different perspective only youth can bring. They challenge the status quo. They question why. Our tone of voice must reciprocate this culture and thirst for knowledge, so here are all but a few characteristics that represent of our tone of voice with students:

- Informal, *not unprofessional*
- Helpful, *not condescending*
- Concise, *not blunt*
- Expert, *not dictatorial*
- Confident, *not cocky*
- Edgy, *not brash*
- Transparent, *not vague*

Clients

'Clients' encapsulates a broad range of people: businesses large or small, sole traders, charities, individuals and Fortune 500 companies.

Clients refers to anyone looking to utilize the underutilized student free-lance community. Aside our mission, the main reason clients turn to free-lancers is efficiency. Cost efficiency. Value efficiency. Recruitment efficiency. Hence, our tone of voice for clients:

- Professional, *not colloquial*
- Helpful, *not condescending*
- Concise, *not blunt*
- Expert, *not dictatorial*
- Credible, *not overbearing*
- Human, *not impersonal*
- Transparent, *not vague*



Writing About People

From day one we've preached all ideas are good ideas. We wouldn't be where we are today if weren't for the 10 good ideas for every 100 bad. The same goes for our commitment to being considerate of others - we wouldn't have met some of the people who have profoundly influenced Slance. We therefore advocate inclusive and respectful communication always:

Age

- Only reference a person's age if it's relevant to what you're writing.
 - ✓ Sam, 21, graduated early to start his own business.
 - ✗ *Sam graduated early at 21 to start his own business.*
- Be sure to not use disparaging words like old or elderly.

Gender and Sexuality

- Use gender neutral terms like bartender. Avoid gendered terms like 'barman' and 'barmaid'.
- Use a person's preferred pronoun. If you're uncertain, use their name instead.
- Avoid colloquial terms like 'guys' and 'girls'.
- Avoid referencing a person's sexuality.



Disability and Medical Conditions

- Only reference a person's disability or medical condition if it's relevant to what you're writing.
 - Be specific if it is necessary to mention the disability or medical condition.
 - Avoid using words that connote pity like 'victim' and 'suffering'.
 - Avoid using words that could be construed as offensive like 'handicapped' and 'mentally ill'.
- √ Jessica became the first person with muscular dystrophy to ever complete the University marathon.
- x *Jessica became the first disabled person to ever complete the University marathon.*
- x *Jessica suffers from muscular dystrophy but still completed the University marathon.*

Titles of People

- Titles of people in text should only be capitalized before the person's name.
- √ CEO and Co-Founder of Slance, Billy Howard Jr., founded Howard Lighting in 1994.
- x *Billy Howard Jr., CEO and Co-founder of Slance, also founded Howard Lighting in 1994.*
- When writing about people, never use discriminatory words. Always write on the side of caution when discussing sensitive issues.

Style Manual

Slance uses the [AP Stylebook](#) on all matters pertaining to punctuation, grammar and usage. Exceptions to the AP Stylebook include:

Punctuation

- Use exclamation points sparingly! When in doubt, avoid using them.
 - √ *Warning! Offshore outsourcing destroys competitive advantage.*
 - x *Warning! Offshore outsourcing destroys competitive advantage!*
- Use semicolons sparingly; they are used for long, complicated sentences which contradicts our concise tone of voice. Instead, simply start a new sentence or use a dash '-'.
- Avoid using ampersands unless they are part of a company or brand name like 'Barnes & Noble'.

Acronyms

- Only use acronyms the reader will recognize like 'WWW', 'SEO', 'API' etc.
- If you are unsure if the reader will recognize the acronym, spell it out in full the first time you use it and add the acronym after in parentheses. You can then use the acronym thereafter.
 - √ *The Slance pilot test was held at Mississippi State University (MSU). Success at MSU laid the foundation to launch nationally.*
 - x *The Slance pilot test was held at MSU. Success at MSU laid the foundation to launch nationally.*

Locations

- On first reference, write out the country name in full. Common abbreviations can then be used thereafter.
 - √ Slance solely focuses on students from the U.S. Similarly, clients within our platform are also U.S. based.
 - x *Slance solely focuses on students from the U.S. Similarly, clients within our platform are also U.S. based.*
- Spell out all city and state names in full.
- Use the accompanying postal code state abbreviation when first referring to a city.
 - √ The Slance head office is located in Santa Monica, CA.
 - x *The Slance head office is located in Santa Monica.*

Numbers

- Spell out numbers one through nine.
- Spell out all numbers if used to start a sentence. Use figures for numbers 10 and above in all other scenarios.
- Spell out fractions. Use decimal points when a number can't be easily written as a fraction.
- Use hyphens to indicate a range of numbers. Use figures for all numbers in a range.
- Include commas for numbers over three digits.
- Express numbers in millions and billions where appropriate. Decimal-points are discretionary based on the detail required.
 - √ There are 1.46 million service jobs worldwide.
 - x *There are 1,460,000 service jobs worldwide.*
- Spell out 'percent' instead of using the symbol '%'.
 - √ Eleven percent of service jobs worldwide could in theory be carried out remotely.
 - x *11% of service jobs worldwide could in theory be carried out remotely.*

Currency

- Use the currency sign before the numerical amount. Include a decimal only if the amount is centesimal.
 - √ John earned \$1,250 last month through freelancing on Slance.
 - x *John earned \$1250.00 last month through freelancing on Slance.*

Times and Dates

- Use numerals then am or pm without spaces or periods to reference time. For all scheduled events, webinars, etc. use Pacific Time abbreviated to PT.
 - √ Slance officially launched at 12am PT.
 - x *Slance officially launched at 12 a.m..*
- Months of the year should not be abbreviated.
- When referring to decades within the past 100 years, abbreviate decades like 'the 80s' and 'the 90s'. When referring to decades more than 100 years ago, be more specific like 'the 1880s' and 'the 1890s'.
- Seasons should not be capitalized.

Dictionary

Spelling is often ambiguous when deciding whether or not to hyphenate a compound word (a word formed by combining two separate words), or whether the two words should be left separate altogether. Use the first spelling listed in the online [Merriam-Webster dictionary](#) as your reference point on all such issues, and note dictionary spellings supersede the AP Stylebook.

New Words

Exceptions to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary include:

- "slancer"
noun | slan-cer | \slan(t)-sər\
Definition: A student freelancer that belongs to the Slance community
Context: She began searching for slancers to create her writing style guide.
- "slancing"
verb | slan-cing | \slan(t)s\
Definition: To complete work in the on demand economy that usually requires training or skill.
Context: What time are you slancing until this evening?
- "A/B testing"
noun | A-B test-ing | \ab tes-tɪŋ\
Definition: To compare two versions of a web page to see which performs better.
Context: Slance implemented A/B testing to see which feature the community preferred.

- “alt text”
noun | alt text | \ˈalt tɛkst\
Definition: Text that tells the nature or contents of an image.
Context: The slancer updated all blog images with relevant alt text.
- “app”
noun | app | \ˈap\
Definition: A software program designed for a particular purpose that can be downloaded onto a device.
Context: The Slance iOS and Android apps are set to launch in 2017.
- “emoji”
noun | e-mo-ji | \ēməjē\
Definition: A small digital icon used to express an emotion or idea.
Context: Slance does not allow the use of emojis in any of its published content.
- “geolocation”
noun | ge-o-lo-ca-tion | \ˈjēōlōkāSHən\
Definition: The process of identifying a person's geographic location using a remote device.
Context: Geolocation has been mooted as an idea to help alumnus find and access current students on Slance.
- “human cloud”
noun | hu-man cloud | \ˈhyü-mən klaud\
Definition: The online remote workforce that completes short term tasks or projects in the on demand economy.
Context: As part of the human cloud, students are able to supplement their education with relevant work experience.

- “news feed”
noun | news feed | \ˈn(y)oozfēd\
Definition: A continuous transmission of data (often a collection of news or updates) specific to a user's activity on a website.
Context: She enjoys reading Slance updates in her LinkedIn newsfeed.
- “on demand economy”
noun | on de-mand e-con-o-my | \ˈon di-mand i-kä-nə-mē\
Definition: The ecosystem by which organizations contract freelance service providers for short term tasks or projects.
Context: Slance joins the likes of Uber, GrubHub and Airbnb as part of the on demand economy.
- “plugin”
noun | plug-in | \ˈpləɡɪn\
Definition: A software add-on that adds functionality to a program.
Context: We want to hear from our community which plugins they would want to see integrated on Slance.

Amended Words

Technology continues to evolve at an unrelenting pace; and with this comes change to the English language. New words are needed to describe new phenomenon, and such words come with ambiguity in their use. Understandably, dictionaries take time to iterate to keep up with the trend, so we have addressed some commonly troublesome words:

- back end, *not back-end*
- best seller, *not best-seller*
- click-through, *not clickthrough*
- ebook, *not Ebook or e-book*
- ecommerce, *not e-commerce*
- email, *not e-mail*
- double click, *not double-click*
- drop-down, *not drop down*
- Facebook Like, *not Facebook like*
- front end, *not front-end*
- home page, *not homepage*
- how-to guide, *not how to guide*

- internet, *not Internet*
- log in, *not log-in or login*
- opt in, *not opt-in*
- opt out, *not opt-out*
- real time, *not real-time*
- Retweet, *not re-tweet or ReTweet*
- sign in, *not sign-in*
- sign out, *not sign-out*
- sign up, *not sign-up*
- startup, *not start-up*
- voicemail, *not voice mail*
- website, *not web site or web-site*

Content Types

Content writing at Slance takes many forms. Here's an overview of the types of content we produce, their goals, and guidelines for each.

Writing a Blog Post

Slance blog posts are primarily written by and for our community. Scheduling and editing is conducted in-house, but most content is created collaboratively with clients and student freelancers alike. The blog is updated on a biweekly basis and mainly publishes how-to's, tips and tricks, reviews, case studies, tutorials and new feature announcements.

When writing for our blog, refer to this writing style guide for all things tone of voice, punctuation, grammar and usage. Here are some more specific points for writing a blog post:

- Titles should outline exactly what the post entails. They need to engage the reader but should be within 40 – 70 characters.
- Organize the post with clear, descriptive subheadings throughout - the gist of the post should be understood by reading the subheadings only.
- Link to previous blog posts or external sources if it helps explain a point.
- Use relevant tags to ensure ease of discovery. Tags act like an index in a book, but should be limited to a maximum of 10.
- Include images and/or videos to provide a visual summary of the post.

Writing a White Paper

A white paper is a detailed report, often analyzing a specific problem and offering a viable solution. Contributors vary from industry specialists and Slance management to clients and student freelancers. We publish white papers to help our community overcome problems such as offshore outsourcing, remote workforce management and getting a foot on the career ladder.

When writing a Slance white paper, refer to this writing style guide for all things tone of voice, punctuation, grammar and usage. Here are some of the differences between writing for our blog and writing a white paper:

- Titles should outline exactly what the post entails. They need to engage the reader but should be within 40 – 70 characters.
- Organize the post with clear, descriptive subheadings throughout - the gist of the post should be understood by reading subheadings only.
- Link to previous blog posts or external sources if it helps explain a point. Industry reports, analyst research and case studies are particularly useful for adding credibility.
- Include images, diagrams, charts and tables to support a point or argument when necessary.
- Keep the length of the white paper between 4 – 25 pages.

Writing Email Newsletters

Email newsletters at Slance are not the stereotypical coupon or self-endorsing advertisement. Rather, they are filled with FAQs, blog recaps, industry news round-ups, case studies, new feature announcements and surveys. Where possible, Slance will outsource production to student freelancers. Our monthly newsletter aims to be a valuable resource for our community and encourage feedback as to how to improve our platform.

When writing email newsletters, refer to this writing style guide for all things tone of voice, punctuation, grammar and usage. Here are some more specific points for writing an email newsletter:

- Subject lines should be creative and varied.
- Our readers are busy people, so include the most important information at the top of the email.
- Keep design, copy and links to a minimum. Our concise tone of voice applies here more than ever!
- Only include images if they are critical to clarifying a message. When in doubt, avoid using them.
- Transparency invites trust – apply one of our core values by making it easy to unsubscribe.

Writing on Social Media

We primarily use social media to collaborate with our community. One on one interactions are important for providing customer service, offering helpful resources and receiving constructive feedback. But, misuse of these channels can damage our brand. We take extra care on social media to adhere to this writing style guide to keep communication respectful at all times. Here are some more specifics for writing on social media:

- Try to apply Twitter's 140 character limit across all social channels. Exceptions to this are discretionary – the character limit should be exceeded if the message can't be clearly and fully communicated. Never sacrifice spelling or punctuation to meet this limit, although shortening words like 'information' to 'info' is acceptable.
- Tag the subject of a message where appropriate. When in doubt, avoid doing so.
- Only ever use 1 – 2 relevant hashtags per post. When in doubt, avoid using hashtags.
- Don't use social media to comment on trending topics that are unrelated to Slance.

Writing Ad Copy

When writing ad copy, refer to this writing style guide for all things tone of voice, punctuation, grammar and usage. Here are some more specific points for writing ad copy:

- All copy (with the exception of voiceovers and scripts) should be written with a clear CTA in mind. If context is needed, the wrong audience is being targeted.
- CTAs should be short and powerful.
- Ad copy for voiceovers and scripts depend upon the audience in question and the purpose of the ad. Please refer to Adam Thornhill when writing for these formats on a case by case basis.

Sourcing and Attribution

All sources used must be properly cited as per this guide:

Link Attribution

- Avoid spelling out URLs. Instead, hyperlink using relevant anchor text.
 - ✓ [Join](#) the Slance community today.
 - x *Join the Slance community today at slance.com.*

Image Attribution

- When attributing an image from Bigstock, please refer to Bigstock's policy: "You shall provide a link back to www.Bigstock.com (where applicable) -OR- provide a credit to the Bigstock contributor and to Bigstock in connection with the use of any Content in an editorial context. Such credit shall be in the following form: "Name of Artist/Bigstock.com".



Quotes

- All quotes should be attributed to the author of the quote.
- If the quote is in the body of the text, use 'says' or 'said' when referencing the author.
 - √ "Adopting a writing style guide has made internal and external communication more consistent," said Adam Thornhill.
 - × "*Adopting a writing style guide has made internal and external communication more consistent,*" explained Adam Thornhill.
- If the quote is a headline, italicize the authors name after the quote and do not use 'says' or 'said'.
 - √ "Adopting a writing style guide has made internal and external communication more consistent." *Adam Thornhill.*
 - × "Adopting a writing style guide has made internal and external communication more consistent." said Adam Thornhill.

Graphics and Formatting

Below are some of the key graphics and formatting requirements we adhere to. See our Brand Style Guide for more information on branding, typography and microcopy.

Titles and Headings

- All words should be capitalized in titles and headings except articles, coordinate conjunctions and prepositions (four or less letters). Here is a list of words we do not capitalize:
a, an, and, as, at, but, by, for, from, in, into, like, near, of, off, on, onto, or, over, past, per, plus, save, so, than, the, to, up, upon, via, with, yet
- The exception to the above list is to always capitalize the first and last words of the title.



Italics

- Use italics sparingly to emphasize a word. When in doubt, avoid doing so.
- Use italics to show what not to do in a guide or how-to.
- Use italics when referencing navigation instructions to be taken on Slance.
 - √ Now you've completed the simple sign up process, click *complete*.
 - x Now you've completed the simple sign up process, click complete.
- Avoid using a combination of multiple formatting options.
 - √ Now you've completed the simple sign up process, click *complete*.
 - x *Now you've completed the simple sign up process, click **complete**.*
- Avoid using underline, bold or caps. Use italics as the main formatting tool for emphasis.



Alignment

- Always left-align text.
- Leave only one space after each paragraph.

Lists

- Use rounded bullet points for lists without numerical significance. Do not indent.
- Use numbered points for lists with numerical significance. Do not indent.
 - √ 1. Style Guides Should Be Constantly Updated
 - x 1.) Style Guides Should Be Constantly Updated
 - x 1 Style Guides Should Be Constantly Updated



Q&As

- Add a space between each question and response.
- Do not include the interviewer's name in the questions. Italicize the interviewer questions.
- Include and italicize the full name of the interviewee. Use a colon, a space, then write the answer to the question in standard text. After first use, use the interviewee's initials.

√ *Why did you seek out a style guide example?*

Sarah Smith: I wanted to use this as a style guide template for my own business.

Would you hire a student to produce this?

SS: Of course! As a small business owner I do not have the budget to hire a copywriter full time, but outsourcing this kind of project to a student would be ideal.



Create Your Own Writing Style Guide

Feel free to use this writing style guide example as a template for creating your own compelling content. All we ask is that you credit Slance where possible. Or better yet, access our talented pool of U.S. student freelancers for all your writing and editing needs. Post your project in under 5 minutes!

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