



ZUI Writing Style Guide

Principles: Mailchimp calls it “Principles,” so we just aped that.

This a living document, meaning that is always growing and changing, just like the ZUI, just like language itself.

Writing in Zywave products should be:

- Clear and Concise
- Easily understandable
- Useful/helpful
- Actionable, whenever possible
- Motivating or persuasive, when necessary

Voice & Tone

Tone is simply voice applied to a specific context. That context includes both the circumstances of the communication, as well as the audience. The core personality of your voice should still shine through in any communication, but it should do so in a way that makes sense given the exact situation. Voice is the persona who's "speaking" when you write. You can think of the Zywave product voice as the core personality of the speaker who is talking to the user. Zywave's voice can be described as:

- Approachable
- Genuine
- Empathetic
- Clear
- Conversational
- Knowledgeable

[Check out our page on Voice & Tone for more detail](#)

Audience

It is important to note we have a different audience than the marketing or content teams because this is a style guide specific to writing in our products

- Our audience are product users
- Our audience will vary from product to product, and potentially will vary inside products depending on who is using it (HRc potentially has 3-4 different audiences using it: broker, broker admins, clients, etc.)
- Our audience could be viewed as a combination of both marketing and content's audiences, but a little more relaxed

Grammar and Mechanics

This is the meat and potatoes of the style guide. It covers the usual topics and how they impact both copy and microcopy/web elements. If you're unsure about any on-screen-text, especially if it isn't address in this style guide, ask a UX Writer. We're nice and don't mind answering questions.

Capitalization

- Use sentence case (capitalize the first letter of the first word and none of the others) for everything. Sentence case is the preferred capitalization style.
- Always capitalize the following words: Partners, Zywave positions such as Partner Support (Zywave Consultant, Project Manager, etc), Help (when referring to the Help section), and the first word after a colon

Punctuation

- Periods: Skip periods and unnecessary punctuation on single sentences to help readers scan text at a glance. Avoid using periods in solitary sentences in these elements: Labels, Hover text, Bulleted lists, dialog body text. Periods should be used on: Multiple sentences, any sentence followed by a link
- Oxford/serial comma: Use to the oxford comma to avoid any potential confusion
- Exclamation points: Use them sparingly, don't use more than 1, even if you're really, really excited about something
- Ampersands: Only use ampersands when conserving space is important, ideally only on buttons, or if it is part of a company or brand name
- Don't use punctuation in a page title/heading unless the title/heading is a question
- Semicolons: They usually support long, complicated sentences that could be simplified, shortened, or split in to 2 sentences

Lists

- Use lists to clearly and simply present steps, groups, or sets of information
- When writing a list, use the serial comma (also known as the Oxford comma)
- Use numbers when the order of the list is important, otherwise avoid them
- Avoid punctuation at the end of each list item, unless there are multiple sentences

Numbers

- Spell out a number when it begins a sentence, otherwise, use the numeral. This includes ordinals (-st, -nd, etc), too. Using the numeral saves a bit of space, which is usually important. If it feels weird to use "1" instead of "one," just go with your gut.

Bolding and Italicizing

- Using bolding to emphasize an action or specific link or button you are referencing
- Avoid italicizing, italic fonts don't always appear as clearly as bold fonts. The exception being things that are normally italicized, like titles of books or movies.

Active/passive voice

- Use active voice
- Avoid passive voice
- Writing positively whenever possible, avoid 'not' when possible

Contractions

- Use them, especially to save space in web elements, like buttons. However, sometimes "do not" can give more emphasis than "don't" when needed.

New vs. Old

Always try to use what is defined in this style guide. If what is in the style guide doesn't match what is live in product, consider the following:

- How noticeable is the difference? Use what is laid out in the style guide, unless it will be distracting or obviously different from what is in product.

-Can the text in product be updated or changed to match the style guide? If it cannot be changed at the same time as the text you are adding or updating, when can it be updated or changed?

-How often will the product be updated? Will it be a long time before the text in that product is updated again? You may want to use this opportunity to get the text up to speed, even if it doesn't perfectly match the rest of the product.

-Is there a middle ground between what is in the style guide and what is in the product that makes sense to use?

Additional resources

[MailChimp style guide](#)

[Material Design style guide](#)

[18f Content Guide](#)

[Atlassian writing style](#)

[Plainlanguage.gov](#)