UX Writing Style Guide

This UX Writing Style Guide is intended to provide guidance on UX copy and establish consistency across all Edmentum products. This guide contains common usage and is not exhaustive. It will continue to be updated as new questions and issues arise.

Some topics will not be covered in this guide, such as basic grammar rules. For those topics, we will defer to the **AP Stylebook**. However, we will sometimes deviate from the AP's direction for the sake of clearer UX copy or for our own stylistic purposes. Therefore, the direction in this UX Writing Style Guide will always take precedence.

There will also be times where this guide will link to the marketing team's **Edmentum Style Guide** for more direction. In these instances, be sure to refer ONLY to the specific sections mentioned in the marketing guide as some marketing guidelines may differ from our UX guidelines.

Consult a UX Writer for any questions or clarifications.

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Writing Principles

Every piece of our UX copy should be written with the user in mind. Edmentum products cover all ages from kindergarten to 12th grade and beyond. Our users include teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Therefore, we must tailor our copy depending on the target audience. However, there are a few general writing principles we can use no matter who we are talking to.

In every piece of content we publish, we aim to be:

- **#EducatorFirst** – We believe educators are heroes who help students achieve amazing things. We do our best to empathize with their experiences, never assuming we can do their job better than they can.
- **A friendly guide** – Technology cannot replace the role of educators; Edmentum products are just part of the solution. We strive to share best practices and meaningful information to be a voice they can trust.
- **Authentic** – It's easy to get caught up in education jargon. Instead, we focus on research and real outcomes to guide our UX writing.

We do this by being:

- **Helpful** – Ask yourself: What does the reader want to know? Do they want to know every single product feature, or how those features improve their daily lives? We function as a helping hand.
- **Respectful** – Do not patronize users by spending too much time on what they already know, nor do we lecture them on what we think is best. Whether talking to teachers or administrators, customers or non-customers, we focus on understanding their needs.
- **Concise** – Time is precious, especially in a learning environment. Say what you need to say in as few words as possible. Provide all the necessary information, but get to the point ASAP.

Voice and Tone

Voice is what we say. Tone is how we say it. It's important that we speak consistently across Edmentum products to achieve cohesion and avoid confusion.

In every written interaction we are:

- **Human** – Our UX copy should be conversational but not casual. We must present ourselves as experts but do not want to sound robotic. This means addressing users directly and using first-person pronouns (you, your, etc.). Doing so conveys a personal tone and strengthens our ability to be seen as actual humans and build authentic relationships with our users.
- **Empathetic** – We are passionate about education and understand the challenges involved. We're not afraid to recognize that this work is hard, and it is our goal to understand the problems our users face and address them with real solutions that have impact.
- **Offering value** – Everything we write should be informative and bring value to our users. We strive to offer best practices with clear, concise, and accessible copy.

Role of UX Copy in Edmentum Products

UX copy includes only a portion of the content in Edmentum Products. This copy includes UI elements that users employ while interacting with our products, such as labels for menu items, navigation, commands, buttons, error messages, and the like.

UX copy **does not** include instructional material for students, such as lessons, tests, worksheets, etc. That copy is created by Learning and Content Design.

Think of a page in our product like a box. Instructional material is owned by the Learning and Content Design team. The content around the edges of the box that navigates to the instructional material is UX copy.
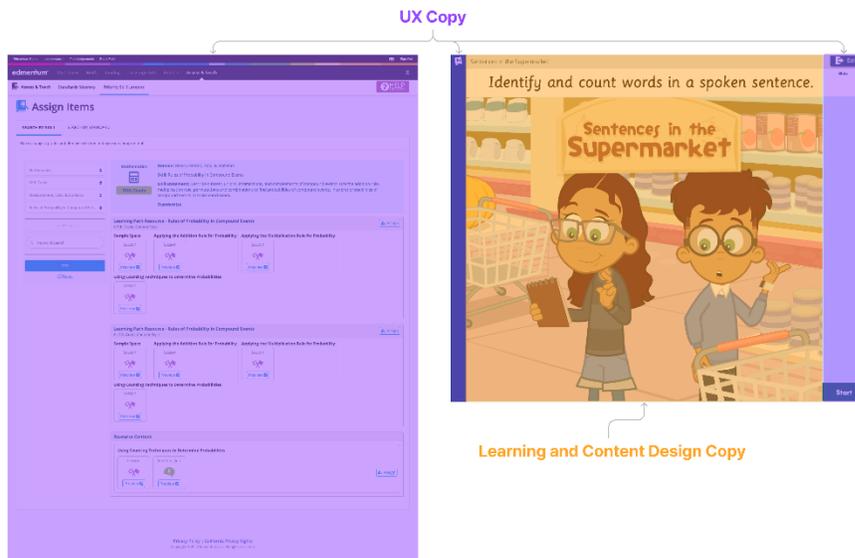
Writing Style and Tips

Active vs. Passive Voice

Write in **active voice** as much as possible. Active voice is more clear and generally shorter. Passive voice can be awkward, wordy, and vague.

Do	Do Not
Select "Reports" to review class data.	The "Reports" button should be selected to review class data.

Empty and Zero Results States

If a query or action is unable to produce results, it's important that we don't create a dead end for the user. We should always try to provide contextual help so the user can find what they're looking for.

Copy for empty and zero results states should:

- **Be brief yet explicit.**
  - Quickly explain how or why the user got to this point.
  - Clearly tell the user how to accomplish the task or where to go next.
- **Link directly to the steps necessary to complete the task, if possible.**
- **Be tailored for age appropriateness based on the audience.**

Error Messages

Copy should be as clear and concise as possible, state what went wrong, and provide a solution for the user to fix the error. Also, consider the audience receiving the error message and tailor the copy based on age appropriateness (i.e., it's OK to be a bit more descriptive and fun for younger students, while we should be more direct for older students, teachers, administrators, and parents).

Use the following guidelines for writing error messages:

- Red copy
- Sentence case
- Complete sentences if possible (use terminal punctuation)
- Sentence fragments are OK with limited space (no terminal punctuation)

Warning and Informational Messages

COMING SOON!

Gender-Neutral and Gender-Inclusive Language

Our UX copy should be as inclusive to all people as possible. That said, most UX copy speaks directly to the user and should address them as "you, your, etc." On the rare occasion our UX copy contains gendered language, we want to make sure our text is genderless whenever possible.

Follow these general rules to ensure gender-neutral and gender-inclusive copy:

- **Replace masculine constructions with gender-neutral terms.**
    - Example: "firefighter" instead of "fireman"
- **Use plural pronouns for gender inclusivity.**
    - Example: they, them, their
    - Exception: when contextually speaking about a specific gender
- **Avoid a combination of genders spliced together.**
    - Do not: he/she, s/he, his/her, and similar constructions

Present Tense

Use present tense to describe product behavior. Present tense describes actions occurring right now, and it creates a sense of immediacy and action. Additionally, present tense is generally shorter and explains things more clearly.

Do	Do Not
Your file is saved.	Your file has been saved.

Reading Level

Edmentum product users span from kindergarteners to teachers and school district administrators. With such a wide spectrum of education levels, it may be difficult to decipher the reading level for each user group. Our UX copy will take some readability recommendations from the **Nielsen Norman Group**, an established UI and UX consulting firm. We will also follow the **Flesch-Kincaid** readability formula when possible. (There are free readability calculators online for help.)

For reference, **readability** measures the complexity of words and sentence structure. Follow these guidelines to ensure readability in our UX copy:

- Use familiar and plainspoken words, the shorter the better. (If necessary, consult with a UX writer for grade-level-specific vocabulary.)
- Use short and direct sentences vs. complex and convoluted sentence structures.
- Aim to write at an 8th grade reading level for 9th grade and above, including teachers and administrators. This is the most common reading level for broad audiences.
- Aim to write at the corresponding grade level (or 1–2 levels below) for 3rd to 8th grade.
- Consult with a UX writer for kindergarten to 2nd grade. These user groups are tricky to write for as they are still learning to read. Many may not be able to read at all, therefore design will do the heavy lifting in navigating these young users through our products.

Grammar and Mechanics

Ampersands (&)

Use sparingly. There are cases where an ampersand is necessary such as company names, logos, proper nouns, or titles. Additionally, ampersands are appropriate when space is tight or to make the message more direct and easier to read. However, do not use an ampersand to replace "and" in full sentences and body copy.

Ampersands are OK to use in:

- Navigation
- Menu items
- Headings
- Button labels / CTAs
- Tab labels

Bulleted Lists

Bullets can make large chunks of copy easier to read, scan, and digest. Use these rules to help simplify our UX copy:

- Use a lead-in sentence whenever possible. (Like the one before this list.)
- Bulleted copy should always make sense continuing from the lead-in sentence.
- Use periods if the bulleted copy contains complete sentences.
- Do not use periods if the bulleted copy contains sentence fragments.
- Do not use a mix of full sentences and sentence fragments; each bullet should have the same structure.
- Always capitalize the first letter of the first word in each bullet, including sentence fragments.
- Do not use numbered lists unless the order of the bulleted items is important (e.g., top 10 list, specific steps in a process, etc.)

Example (complete sentences)
Please follow these rules for the best theater experience: - Silence all electronic devices before the show. - Do not use flash photography at any time. - Remain seated so other patrons can see. - Place trash in bins on your way out.

Example (sentence fragments)

> Our vacation to Costa Rica included:
>
> - Hiking in the rainforest
> - Visiting black sand beaches
> - Eating at a treetop restaurant
> - Swimming in hot springs

Capitalization

Edmentum products use a mix of **Title Case** and **sentence case** in UX copy. Refer to the **UI Elements** section for more specifics.

ALL CAPS

Avoid using all uppercase letters in most instances. Text in all caps can be difficult to read and scan. Minor exceptions are acceptable, such as using all caps for emphasis, acronyms, or brand names.

Example for emphasis
Edmentum products are designed with YOU in mind!

Contractions

Contractions can make copy sound more conversational. However, there are many studies (and opinions) related to how contractions should be used in UX writing. For our purposes, let's follow these simple rules:

- **Use simple positive contractions.**
    - you'll, we'll, we're, they're, it's, I'll, etc.
- **Avoid negative contractions.**
    - shouldn't, can't, don't, etc.
- **Avoid conditional contractions.**
    - should've, would've, could've, might've, etc.
- **When in doubt, spell it out!**

Dates

Use the following rules when writing dates in UX copy:

- **Do not use ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.).**
    - Her birthday is August 8.
- **When using a month, day, and year, set off the year with commas.**

- o   I believe it was April 9, 2021, when the accident occurred.
- **When using only a month and a year, do not separate with commas.**
  - o   I remember July 2019 being a very hot month.
- **Use an en dash (–) for date ranges.**
  - o   I will be on vacation November 14–18.

Italics

Avoid using italics at length as they can be difficult to read. Like all caps, it's OK to use italics to emphasize a word or two but should never be used to highlight full sentences or blocks of copy.

Numbers

Though the AP Stylebook's general guidance is to spell out numbers one through nine, our UX copy will deviate from this direction. Follow these rules when using numbers in UX copy:

- **Use numerals in most cases.**
  - o   1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.
- **Spell out a number at the beginning of a sentence, or recast the sentence if possible.**
  - o   Three cars were parked in the driveway.
  - o   There were 3 cars parked in the driveway.
- **Spell out some numbers if a sentence mixes different uses of numbers next to each other.**
  - o   She had two 95 test scores this week.
- **Use numerals for ordinal numbers in most copy (do not use ordinals for dates).**
  - o   1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc.
- **Use a figure-word combination for millions and above (no hyphen between number and word).**
  - o   The U.S. population was nearly 332 million in 2021.

Pronouns

See the following sections of this style guide:

- **Gender-Neutral and Gender-Inclusive Language**
- **Voice and Tone / Human**

Punctuation

Commas

Use the final comma before the last item in a series of three or more terms. (This is known as the Oxford comma or serial comma.)

Example
I need to pick up bread, eggs, and milk at the grocery store.

Dashes and Hyphens

- **Hyphen (-)**

Use of hyphens is far from standardized and can be a matter of taste, judgment, and style. For our UX copy, hyphens should be used to provide clarity or connect things that are closely related (e.g., compound modifiers). Do not use spaces on either side of a hyphen.

Examples
My daughter is in pre-K this year.
This is a beautiful, state-of-the-art school building.

- **En dash (–)**

The en dash is longer than a hyphen but shorter than an em dash. (AP style does not use en dashes, but we will in our UX copy.) Use an en dash to indicate ranges in dates and times. Do not use spaces on either side of an en dash, with a couple exceptions.

Examples
I will be on vacation November 14–18.
My doctor appointment is 2–3 p.m. on Friday.
Exceptions (when to use a space on each side)
2/11/24 – 3/8/24
8 – 3 = 5
(use an en dash in place of hyphen, as it's easier to read)

- **Em dash (—)**

The use of em dashes in UX copy should be rare. However, it can be used to show a strong break in a sentence, set off a series within a phrase, or separate a quotation from the attributed speaker. The em dash can take the place of commas, parentheses, or colons. While AP style calls for a space on either side of an em dash, we will not use spaces in UX copy unless the typesetting would make it look awkward or visually disruptive (e.g., line breaks).

Examples

I talked to Mrs. Taylor—my daughter's English teacher—at the game on Friday.
"A dash is a mark of separation stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than a parenthesis."—Strunk & White

Periods

Headings do not get periods; subheadings and body copy do. Refer to the **UI Elements** section for full direction on where to use terminal punctuation.

Slashes

Do not add a space around slashes in most cases. Users are especially familiar with slashes in dates and mathematical expressions. However, if using a slash between words makes it more difficult to read, consult a UX Writer for advice.

Examples
There is usually no need to add a space before/after a slash within copy.
I will be on vacation starting 11/20/2024.

Text Links

Text links are formatted differently than buttons (i.e., there is no design treatment). Some text links appear by themselves while others are embedded within copy.

- **Standalone**
    - Title Case
    - Underlined
    - Blue text

Examples
My Profile
Learn More
Go Back

- **In a sentence**

  Text links within copy should be written thoughtfully so the purpose of the link is clear to users. The words chosen for the hyperlink should be direct and meaningful. In other words, avoid only linking generic words like "here" or "this."

- Follow these basic rules as well:
  - Sentence case (unless using a proper noun)
  - Underlined
  - Blue text

Do	Do Not
Fill out the <u>research consent form</u> to opt in.	Fill out <u>this form</u> to opt in.
<u>Create a ticket</u> with the Help Desk for assistance.	Request assistance from the Help Desk <u>here</u>.
Read the <u>UX Writing Style Guide</u> for guidance.	Follow <u>these guidelines</u> for UX copy.

Time

Use the following rules when writing time in UX copy:

- **Lowercase a.m. and p.m., using periods and a space after the numbers.**
  - The show starts at 6:30 p.m. sharp!
- **Abbreviate standard time zones with all caps, do not separate with a comma.**
  - The meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. EST on Zoom.
- **Use an en dash (–) for time ranges.**
  - My doctor appointment is 2–3 p.m. on Friday.

UI Elements

The following rules detail UX copy guidelines for specific UI components in Edmentum products.

Button Labels / CTAs

- Title Case
- No more than 2–3 words (consult with UX Writer for exceptions)
- Copy should be actionable (start with a verb)
- Avoid wrapping if possible
- No terminal punctuation
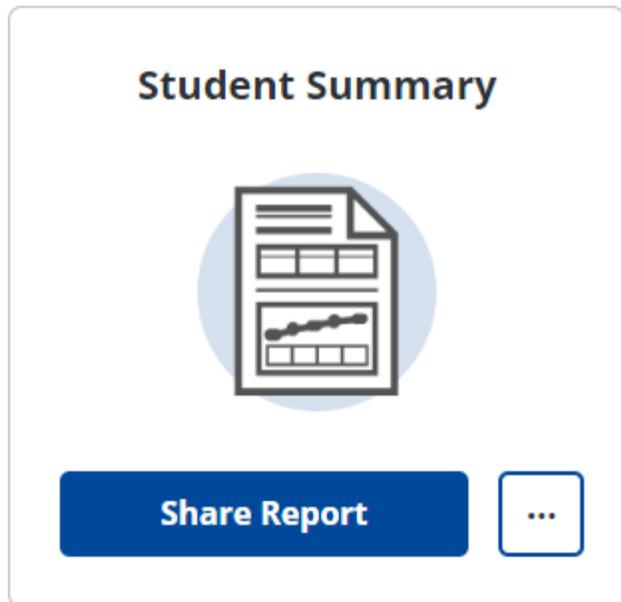
Form Fields

Placeholder text in form fields is OK but should always be accompanied by label text outside the form field. This is because placeholder text is generally low contrast and harder to read, is usually skipped by screen readers, and normally disappears when a user clicks into the field.

- **Placeholder text** (inside the box)
  - Sentence case
  - Copy should be short and clearly state what the user should be typing
  - No terminal punctuation
- **Label text** (outside the box)
  - Title Case
  - No more than 2–3 words
  - No terminal punctuation

Headings

- Title Case
- Copy should be short and punchy
- Sentence fragments are OK
- Wrapping is OK
- No terminal punctuation (unless using question mark or explanation point)
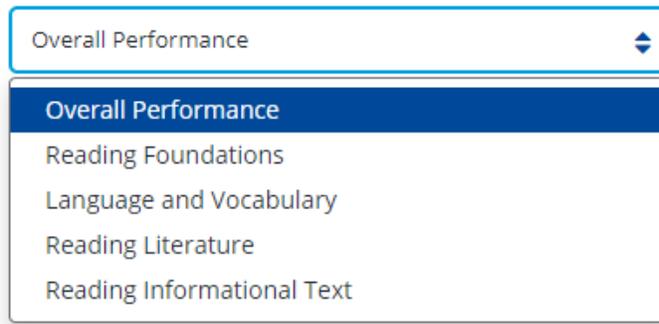
Menu Items

- Title Case
- No more than 2–3 words
- Avoid wrapping if possible
- No terminal punctuation

Navigation

- Title Case
- No more than 2–3 words
- Avoid wrapping if possible
- No terminal punctuation

Subheadings / Body Copy

- Sentence case
- Complete sentences
- Terminal punctuation
- Wrapping is OK

National Percentile Rank Trends

How are schools performing on diagnostics throughout the academic year?

National percentile rank (NPR) compares a student's score on the diagnostic to other students in the same grade nationally who tested in the spring.
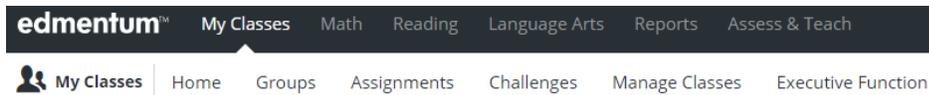
Tab Labels

- Title Case
- No more than 2–3 words
- Avoid wrapping if possible

- No terminal punctuation

Common Words and Expressions

Select vs. Click

Edmentum products can be used on various devices. Therefore, we should avoid using "click" as a call to action. (You do not "click" on a touch screen.) Use **select** instead.

Example:
Select "Create Report" to generate a new report.

Above, Below, Left, Right

Avoid using directional language when asking users to take an action. Users with screen readers will not have a reference for such. Also, UI elements may appear in different locations based on the screen size or device being used.

Do	Do Not
Select an option from the drop-down menu.	Select an option below from the drop-down menu.
Select "Class Settings" in the main navigation.	Select "Class Settings" in the upper-right corner.

Race

Capitalize Black and White when referring to race and only when relevant. However, do not use either as a singular or plural noun. Instead, use phrasing such as **Black people**, **White people**, etc.

Do	Do Not
Busing was stopped for White neighborhoods in parts of Louisville in 1985 but continued for Black students.	Busing was stopped for Whites in parts of Louisville in 1985 but continued for Blacks.

At Risk

Avoid using "at risk" to describe a student's status. Use **at promise** or another similar phrase. We want to keep our copy positive wherever possible. We do not want to predetermine a student's outcome or bias a teacher's thinking by using negative language.

Versus

It's OK to abbreviate versus for space. For clarity, use a period in the abbreviation: vs.

Edmentum Preferred Spellings

Some Edmentum product features are treated as proper nouns while others are not. For a list of commonly used words in our products and how they should be presented, consult marketing's [Edmentum Style Guide](#) for the latest guidelines.

Edmentum Product Names

It is very important to be consistent when using our product names. Additionally, internal company shorthand designations should never be used in customer-facing material. Consult marketing's [Edmentum Style Guide](#) for the latest guidelines.

Trademark Guidelines

Company trademarks, disclaimers, and practices may be updated from time to time. Consult marketing's [Edmentum Style Guide](#) for the latest guidelines.