GatherContent

Content Style Guides

Checklists to help you plan, create, use and maintain a content style guide

A content style guide is an important part of any organisation's content operations, or [ContentOps](#). Whilst they can't alleviate every content-related challenge, or guarantee content will be delivered in the right style and format, they do provide a shared understanding of language, voice, tone and rules for writing across an organisation.

There's no one-size-fits-all for content style guides. It'll vary from organisation to organisation as to best format, what to include, what to exclude, and how to disseminate them effectively.

This checklist will help you facilitate and navigate conversations to help you plan, produce, get people to use and maintain a content style guide.

There will be lots that needs to happen beyond what this list covers ([defining voice and tone](#) etc), and no content style guide turns non-writers into outstanding writers, but it will ensure the content style guide you end up with has been informed and created collaboratively with the user in mind.

Get your stakeholders into a room, pass the biscuits around and work through this list in order or as needed. Be sure to capture all ideas and responses then share with participants afterwards.

Planning a content style guide

These questions will help you figure out where you're starting from - maybe there are some quick wins, maybe you'll be starting from scratch, either way you'll be asking the right questions upfront before investing any time into your content style guide.

❏ Do we have a content style guide already?

If yes:

❏ Who owns any existing content style guide?

❏ When was it last created?

❏ What format(s) is it in?

Always ask:

❏ What formats do we need?

❏ Who will own the process for getting this delivered?

❏ Do we need a Minimum Viable Product or full bells and whistles version to start? (It's ok to start with fundamental dos and don'ts and then add to it)

❏ Who will be using the style guide? (List all user types and both internal and external audiences)

❏ What will the style guide need to include? (voice, tone, grammar, spelling etc)

❏ Are we going to include all content types such as videos and images? (It's not always about the words only)

❏ How will the content style guide fit with the organisation's brand style guide and design system?

Creating a content style guide

When it comes to creating the content style guide, the decisions you make when answering the following questions will depend on resources, timescales and what was decided in the previous section about how many and what formats you need.

- ❏ What examples can we include? (It's important to show and tell with contextual examples)

- ❏ How prescriptive will we get with spelling, grammar and punctuation?

- ❏ Do we have an existing vocabulary/A-Z that should be included?

- ❏ Shall we include our content goals and principles?

- ❏ What do we need to include for people not to use? (For example: Does your organisation have a list of words that should never be used?)

- ❏ What will we use to create version one?

- ❏ What workflow and processes will we use to gather, manage and action feedback?

- ❏ Are there are universal rules or styles we want to adhere to? (Such as [Readability Guidelines](#), [Associated Press](#), or [Chicago Manual of Style](#))

- ❏ Can we test the content style guide with users during the creation process? (Gathering feedback early on can be invaluable)

- ❏ When will we review the draft to identify any gaps and make decisions on the structure? (Lead with the content, not the structure)

- ❏ How will we get users to the part they need? (Smaller versions, search function, contents etc)

Disseminating a content style guide

Creating a style guide is a big achievement in itself, but doesn't guarantee people will use it. You may have to find creative and different ways of disseminating the content style guide across your organisation. The following set of questions will help you decide what is needed, and what is feasible.

❏ Who do we need to use the content style guide? (list all user types/audiences, e.g. copywriter, subject matter expert, external agency)

❏ Do we need more than one format to suit different users of the guide? (E.g. PDF, online, one-sheet)

❏ What resources will we need to allocate to dissemination? (E.g. Training workshops, one-on-one training)

❏ What follow-up materials will we need after training?

❏ Do we need to include style guide training as part of our on-boarding? (Who will handle that?)

❏ Will we build our style guide into our authoring system? (GatherContent is perfect for this!)

❏ Can we create practical exercises to help people understand our style?

❏ What activities can we do to disseminate the style guide? (Internal roadshows, workshops, organisation-wide presentations)

Maintaining a content style guide

A content style guide should be a working document that is maintained and updated regularly. It should always be a useful and usable tool that accurately represents the organisation's style and format. These questions are a big step towards being proactive in maintaining the content style guide.

- ❏ Who will be responsible for maintaining the style guide? (There may be several but one person should oversee maintenance)

- ❏ How often will we seek to review and update the style guide?

- ❏ What activities can we do to be proactive with maintenance, rather than reactive (read about Mailchimp's content style guide round table)

- ❏ How will we communicate any changes, deletions and additions to the content style guide?

Content style guide inspiration

There are plenty of great examples of content style guides to draw inspiration from. Here are some good examples to get you and your team inspired.

The Government Digital Service (GDS) style guide covers style points for content.
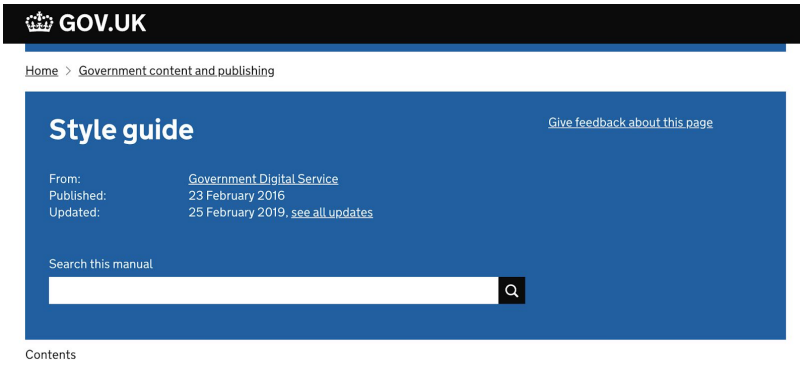
GOV.UK

A style guide from GOV.UK who have invested heavily in content design and content operations. A great reference guide to inspire your own content style guide.
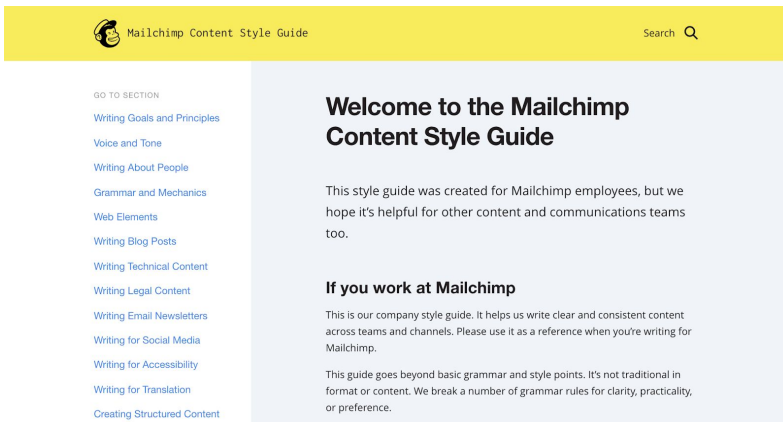
Mailchimp

One of the most referenced content style guides, and rightly so. Mailchimp have even made theirs available via Creative Commons for others to use as a starting point for their own. Check out our analysis of the guide.
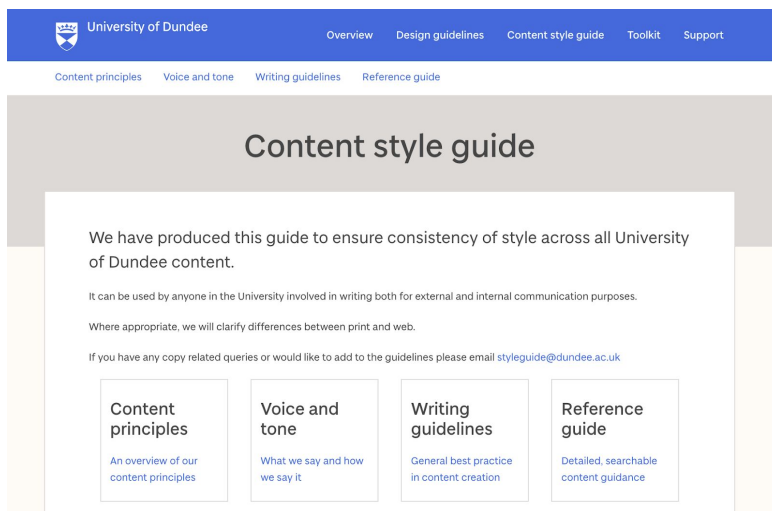
University of Dundee

A fantastic example that can be inspiring and useful for all sectors, not just higher education. Content principles, voice and tone, this guide has it all and is available to view in full online. Here's our detailed breakdown of this content style guide.

GatherContent
by Bynder

Standardize, structure, and scale your content operations with GatherContent

Overcome content chaos, and bring clarity to everyone in your content workflow.

Check out **the platform overview**, and then explore our **no-obligation free trial**. It's packed with content and examples to try out.

Alternatively, **book a demonstration** to have a content operations expert talk through how the platform can support your requirements.

Start a Trial