

# The Guide to Building and Automating Content Style Guides



How to Enforce Quality and Compliance at Scale



A MARKUP AI GUIDE



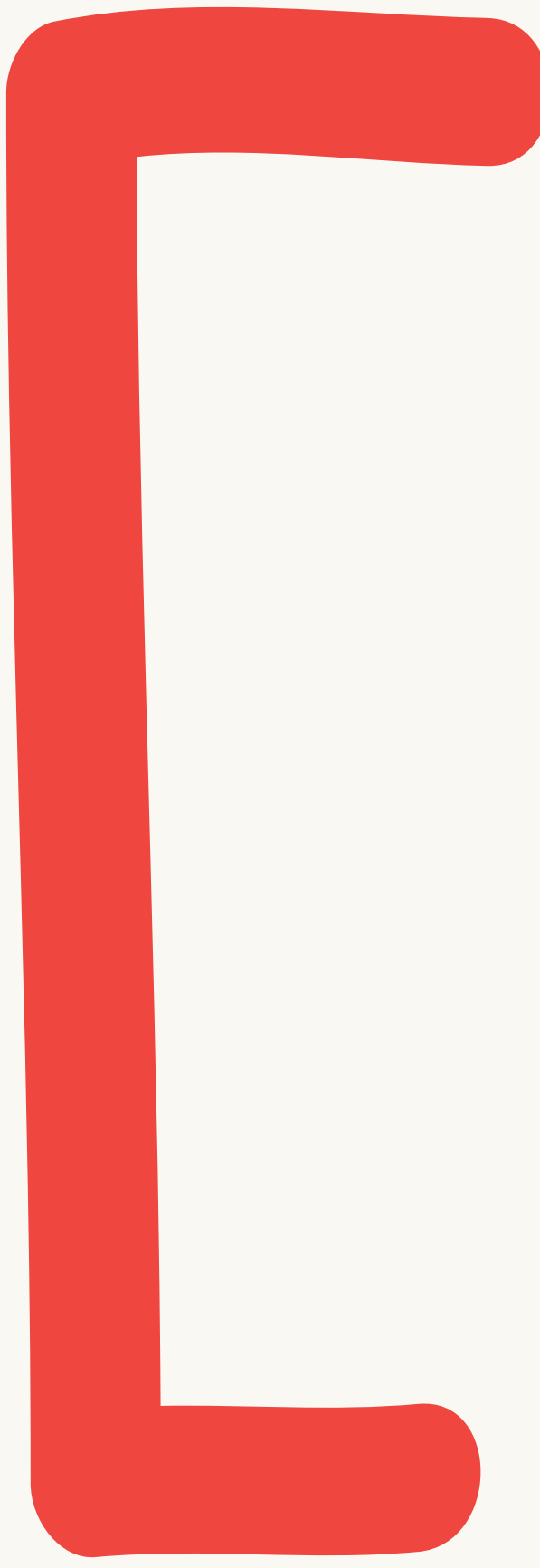
## The Guide to Building and Automating Content Style Guides

What comes to mind when you think of style guides?


Perhaps the [Associated Press' Stylebook](#), often considered the ultimate companion for any journalist. Or maybe you're thinking of an academic style guide like the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) or the [Modern Language Association's \(MLA\) Style Manual](#). Either way, when it comes to your company, these established forms of editorial style guides are just a starting point. To build trust and move fast, you need a dynamic corporate content style guide.



## What's a content style guide?



A content style guide is the strategic framework that protects your brand integrity. In a high-velocity environment, it unites all your content contributors — no matter where they work — and empowers them to standardize their writing style and tone. It ensures they stay on message and speak with one unified voice.



Simply put, a content style guide is your best guardrail to ensure all of your company's content maintains a consistent voice and personality — regardless of department, location, or whether it was written by a human or an AI. A content style guide contains a set of company-specific writing guidelines that shape your content and keep everyone aligned. Successful corporate content style guides accelerate your workflow by achieving several things simultaneously:

- ✓ Define your tone of voice and harmonize all your enterprise content.
- ✓ Integrate guardrails seamlessly into your content creation environments.
- ✓ Scale as your brand identity evolves.

But how do you put that into practice? And what should your content style guide include?

## Our content style guide checklist

### Laying the foundation

Every corporate content style guide should harness the basic formatting rules of one of the major editorial style manuals. There's no single set of rules when it comes to writing content. So, an established style guide provides the foundation for standardizing spelling, grammar, formatting, word usage, and other variations of the English language.

Here are four style guides that every writer should know about:

#### **1. The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook**

As mentioned before, the AP Stylebook is a set of writing standards for news media, and one of the most comprehensive and ubiquitous style guides. This style guide contains commonly accepted journalistic standards for usage, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. It's characterized by its commitment to keeping writing style easy, concise, and free from bias. At Markup AI, we adhere to AP style to ensure clarity and precision.

#### **2. The Chicago Manual of Style**

This set of writing standards is used in commercial and academic publishing — so it's one of the most widely used style guides and beloved by writers, academics, editors, and publishers. Chicago has extensive instruction on the publishing process. Things like preparing manuscripts, proofreading, formatting, and two variations of source citation, as well as style and usage.



### **3. The Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Manual**

The MLA Style Manual is mostly used in the academic world and is primarily a set of guidelines for formatting and citation, in scholarly writing and manuscripts. It's often used in teaching and lays out the principles behind citing and documenting sources. Favored by scholars, journal publishers, and academic writers, it's also adopted by some B2B writers for content creation.

### **4. The Elements of Style**

Written in 1918 and revised decades later by EB White, *The Elements of Style* is short and to the point. With an emphasis on clarity and simplicity, the rules are hard and fast — but set out simply. Authors, journalists, and copywriters love this “Little Book.” If you're looking to improve your writing in general, or need to focus on brevity and conciseness, this might be the right one for you.

Of course there are other style guides you could also consider, like the [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#) or the [Diversity Style Guide](#). It matters less which one you choose, and more that you consistently uphold those standards across all enterprise content.

Once your company has settled on a foundational style guide, the real work begins. Now you have to consider how to transform those base guidelines into specific guardrails unique to your organization.



## Make it personal

A corporate content style guide has to be specific to your company since it's your chance to showcase your brand voice and connect with your customers. Your guidelines should lay out the rules for things like:

### Tone of voice

Tone of voice is how you sound when you talk. When used in a business context, tone of voice helps customers understand and connect with your brand. Tone of voice isn't the same as good writing or strong messaging. It's the next level up from those things. It's about using language to give your brand its own distinct and recognizable voice, that's consistent across all your content touchpoints. And your tone manifests itself through a variety of writing elements. Such as word and sentence length, tempo, and using (or not using) contractions, among other things.

When it comes to your corporate content style guide, you'll want clear directives for how you want writers to apply tone in their content. And for how it varies depending on content type. Your guidelines should include:

- **Positioning statement:** A clear statement outlining your tone.
- **Brand values:** A summary of your identified brand values and how they impact tone.
- **Types of tone:** Describe your tone values and how they potentially vary.
- **Key phrases:** Provide core brand messaging that embodies your tone.
- **Examples:** Sample texts showing how your tone works in different contexts.
- **Hints and tips:** Ways for writers to remember guidelines, like mnemonics.

### Product or service-related words and phrases

When it comes to company-specific [terminology](#), you need to enforce consistency. The last thing you want is for your customers to be confused about a product or service because its description uses inconsistent terminology.

Think about a company like Ikea. With so many product names, instruction manuals, and support articles, maintaining consistent terminology across all departments is a priority. Building your own furniture is difficult enough without getting bogged down in conflicting descriptions of assembly parts or being unable to find a knowledge base article because the product is spelled differently. For large companies, enterprise-wide terminology management is a must if you want to provide trusted customer experiences — the kind where your customer finds what they need on the first try.

Your content style guide is the perfect place to standardize any company-specific words and phrases. It guarantees consistent terminology will be used, no matter which department, writer, or LLM produces it. And that helps your customers easily understand and learn about your product or service.

### **Grammar guidelines**

Some grammar rules can be bent or broken. For example, starting a sentence with “and” or “but,” or ending one with a preposition like “on,” may not be strictly correct, but more people do it when they talk. So you might do the same if your company has a more casual and conversational tone. In essence, you can use grammar guidelines (or a lack of them) as a way to manifest elements of your tone of voice.

A content style guide allows you to formalize which grammar rules you’re willing to break or enforce, ultimately leading to unified content across the enterprise.

### **Accessibility standards**

Set standards about clarity and conciseness when outlining your content guidelines. Maybe some departments consider readability (like reading level ease) and scannability when they create content, but others don’t. This creates disjointed customer experiences that lead to negative business outcomes.

You want your content to be accessible to the widest audience possible. So this is an opportunity to incorporate [Plain Language principles](#) into your content guardrails.

Plain language doesn't assume all people have the same literacy levels, or any prior knowledge on the topic they're reading about. Content written in plain language uses shorter sentences and common words, covers the most important topics first before going into detail, and is structured clearly with headings, lists, and tables. It also uses an active voice and keeps paragraphs focused on one topic. Because content is then so clear and easy to understand, it leads to accurate localization and reduced translation costs.

### **Inclusive language**

Inclusive language demonstrates awareness of the vast diversity of people in the world. Using inclusive language offers respect, safety, and belonging to all people, regardless of their personal characteristics. Inclusive language includes many different aspects, such as:

- Proper acknowledgment of people and cultures
- Intentional language
- Respectful language
- History-conscious language
- Accessible language
- Diverse and accurate representation



Global companies (especially those that speak to an international audience) have to consider how that content translates into other languages and whether it's inclusive of and accessible to diverse audience types. To understand your audience through an inclusive lens means understanding the myriad identities and community groups that your target audience may belong to.

Simply identifying the number of different cultures you work with, their level of English proficiency, and whether you're ignoring certain underrepresented communities, helps you build more inclusive content. If you're using elements of tone such as colloquialisms, figures of speech, puns, or metaphors, be aware that not everyone is familiar with them. Some figures of speech may have historically been used in a discriminatory way, or won't resonate with non-native speakers. It takes empathy and awareness, but deliberate communication starts with thinking how your intentions could impact your audience.

## The link between style guides and positive business outcomes

Why do content style guides matter? Why do they play such a vital role in creating engaging and effective customer experiences?

Now, more than ever, customers and prospects are meeting and primarily engaging with your company digitally. As customer experiences increasingly take place online, regardless of industry or sector, you need to realize the value of your content asset.

Though you might not have thought of content as an asset before, it's actually one of your business's biggest assets. It speaks on behalf of your brand when people can't, and it guides people through every stage of the customer journey. Although it might not end up on your balance sheet, content is the fuel that keeps your organization moving.

So that's why it's critical to have a well-defined content style guide that's operationalized at scale across your enterprise. Through a unique and consistent voice, your content creates parallel positive experiences for your prospects and customers, and builds relationships with them as they get to know your brand.

### **The top 5 reasons your company needs a content style guide**

1. Keep everyone up to date with the latest content guardrails.
2. Create consistent, better quality content.
3. Help your company establish and maintain uniform messaging and communications.
4. Keep your company branding consistent when it comes to your name, abbreviations for your name, and your tagline or slogan — so you don't confuse your customers.
5. Guide all content creators, no matter what department they work in.

When you think about it, everyone creates content for your organization. From support articles, and documentation, to marketing materials and website microcopy, content is produced in all departments and needs to be governed by a content style guide. However, storing a PDF in a central location is no longer enough.



# How to scale your content style guide

Defining and creating a content style guide isn't nearly as challenging as getting all content creators across the enterprise adhere to those guidelines.

Many organizations spend lots of time creating their content style guide, only to bury it as a PDF in a drive full of folders, and have no way to check if writers are using it. In essence, if you can't enforce and maintain your style guide, you risk inconsistent and confusing content reaching your customers — and nobody wants that!

And from time to time, companies undergo a rebrand. This affects some aspects of your content style guide, but there'll be other guidelines you'll want to keep. Only having your style guide available in PDF form limits your ability to update and enforce your new guidelines, while writers are still getting used to them.

## Struggling to enforce and maintain?

There are lots of limitations when it comes to traditional forms of governance for content style guides. Mainly, they just aren't built to support the generative AI content creation explosion. So, creating a content style guide document and sharing it in an email to all employees just isn't going to cut it. Besides, who's got time to consult the guidelines for every piece of content anyway?

Businesses have all kinds of writers. Traditional content writers, subject matter experts who aren't trained writers, agencies, freelancers, and now, generative AI models. It's no surprise that it's challenging to produce clear, consistent, on-brand content.

Even if the PDF style guide is used regularly, editors spend the majority of their time correcting grammar mistakes instead of adding high-value guidance. This usually leads to editorial bottlenecks that slow down your content creation process.

On top of that, the chaos of content production creates legal risks if content isn't carefully governed — a nightmare for any company. This is especially damaging for companies in regulated industries, where mistakes are dangerous, reputationally damaging, and expensive. For example, lives depend on clear communication in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries. Content covers lots of important topics, from simple packaging, to information about dosage and side effects, and instructions about how to use medical devices.

## Automate your guardrails with Markup AI

A better approach to enforcing and maintaining your content style guide is to capture and digitize your content strategy and deploy it where your content lives.

To scale confidently, you need more than a document — you need **automated guardrails**. This keeps your style guide dynamic, ensuring every content creator (human or machine) has access to the very latest standards.

Markup AI's Content Guardian Agents<sup>SM</sup> add velocity to your content creation process by automatically scanning, scoring, and rewriting content to meet your standards. When all your content creators build content that reflects your brand, you make your strategy a reality and help your organization to speak with one clear voice.

In an increasingly digital era, it's time to embrace automated content governance to make sure your style guide has the impact it deserves.



## Bring your content style guide to life with **Markup AI**

Realizing the potential of your content style guide is critical to providing engaging and consistent customer experiences. Markup AI empowers you to do exactly that.

Markup AI is the first and only AI content guardrail that empowers organizations to boldly scale content excellence through integrative AI Agents that measure and enhance content compliance across comprehensive criteria.

### **Markup AI helps you enforce and maintain your content guidelines by:**

- Capturing and digitizing your corporate style preferences for content.
- Aligning all writers (regardless of department or location) to your content guidelines.
- Guiding writers to create inclusive and accessible content.
- Maintaining a consistent voice, which makes your company easy to identify and recognize.
- Increasing efficiency through seamlessly integrating into your content ecosystem.
- Maximizing budget by making it easier to translate and localize your content.
- Adding velocity to your content creation process with AI and automation.
- Protecting your company against the repercussions of poorly crafted or non-compliant content.

AI creates content, but Content Guardian Agents<sup>SM</sup> perfect it. Our API-first and Model Context Protocol (MCP) compatible solution delivers content guardrails directly where your content lives. Markup AI instantly scans, scores, and rewrites any content to enforce your standards for brand voice, terminology, and compliance. We give you the confidence you need to scale your use of AI.

**To find out more about how Markup AI  
brings your content style guide to life.**

**Let's talk**



**markup ai**

**Content Guardian Agents<sup>SM</sup>**