

Proofed.

Style Guide Template

Built from the style guides that Proofed creates and maintains for every partner.

Company:	Your company name
Version:	1.0
Last Updated:	Date
Owner:	Marketing / Content Lead

How To Use This Template

This template is based on the working style guide used by Proofed's marketing team.

It has been developed and refined by our Service Delivery Managers through our editorial operations across multiple content types.

To adapt it for your team:

- Review the template guidance notes throughout this style guide
- Replace all placeholder fields with your own brand guidelines, credentials, and tools
- Update or add sections for any content types or platforms not covered
- Remove the template guidance notes where required
- Set up your update log and maintain it going forward

Need Help Creating Your Style Guide?

Proofed delivers scalable editorial support for brands at every stage.

We combine tailored style guide development with ongoing editorial QA to help teams and organizations to maintain clarity and consistency across all content volumes.

Create Your Style Guide With Proofed

Updates

February 16, 2026 – Added guidance on internal vs. external phrasing

October 25, 2025 – Expanded guidance for marketing collateral content

October 13, 2025 – Added capitalization guidance and AI content structure checks

September 25, 2025 – Added guidance on bolded highlights in blog posts

September 24, 2025 – Updated anchor text and approach to links

September 2, 2025 – Clarified blog title formatting

August 22, 2025 – Added guidance on adding hyperlinks to blog posts

August 8, 2025 – Updated PDF editing guidance; revised bullet point punctuation rule

August 2, 2025 – Added instruction to avoid gerunds and guidance on AI triads

July 23, 2025 – Clarified capitalization of FAQs



Pro Tip

Date every update and describe the change in one line. Updates sit first so stakeholders always know what has changed and when.

With Proofed, your style guide is continuously refined based on your feedback.

1. Key Marketing Resources

Below is a list of key resources you'll need for this project:

- Marketing collateral
 - [Tone of voice document – link]
 - [Examples – link]
- Blog posts
 - [Blog style sheet – link]
 - [Examples – link]
- Platform
 - [Platform walkthrough video – link]

1.1. Relevant Company Resources

Link to any internal resources that apply to your company's content:

- [House Style Guide – link]
- [Training modules – link]

For any style points not covered in this guide, refer to the [House Style Guide – link].



Pro Tip

List every resource your team will need, grouped by platform or context.

Where rules conflict between different documents, state which style guide takes precedence.

2. Overview

2.1. Introduction

This style guide is for Proofed's public-facing marketing and informational material.

External communications either strengthen or weaken brand integrity.

Every word, punctuation mark, graphic, and image accumulates into an articulation of who we are and what we do.

- Dialect: American English
- Reference dictionary: Merriam-Webster



Pro Tip

Define the scope and purpose of this guide in two to three sentences.

State what content types it covers and who it is for, as well as the dialect and reference dictionary for continuity.

2.2. Google Docs

Review in "Editing mode" and make direct changes to spelling, punctuation, and grammar corrections, as well as for any minor edits needed for clarity or concision.



Pro Tip

Add a section for each platform in your stack.

The goal is one reference point per tool so that every reviewer knows exactly where and how to work.

Leave comments for the original writer if:

- Something is unclear and cannot be reworded without additional input
- The content is under the required word count (if specified in the brief)
- You are changing headings or subheadings, as this can affect character counts and design



Pro Tip

Define when reviewers should leave a comment and when a direct correction is enough.

Comments give your team visibility into what changed and why.

2.3. PDFs

To review PDF-based content, such as templates and one-pagers:

- Use annotation tools such as strikethrough, insert, replace, and highlight
- For flat PDFs (where you cannot interact with the text), use the sticky note tool to leave comments
- Comments are not required on every suggestion, unless a change needs further explanation



Pro Tip

Flat files need different instructions than editable files.

Call out the distinction so reviewers always know the right action to take.

2.4. Markup.io

To review live landing pages or website content. There are two modes:

- Comment mode: add and edit comments
- Browse mode: interact with page elements (close pop-ups, check hyperlinks, expand dropdowns)

Confirm you are in the correct mode for the task.



Pro Tip

Use a web annotation platform that takes a static copy of the live page and allows reviewers to add comments with suggested edits.

3. Internal vs. External Phrasing

Watch for internal terminology being used externally in ways that may not align with how the brand presents itself publicly.

A team may use one term internally, while marketing uses a different term externally for SEO or brand positioning reasons.

Use the external term in all public-facing content, regardless of what your team calls it internally.

If you spot a term that seems inconsistent, flag it.



Pro Tip

Maintain a running list of known terminology divergences and the reason for each one.

Documented terminology decisions keep every piece of content aligned across every channel.

4. Fact-Checking

Aim to validate all factual statements in the document:

- Use any hyperlinks in the document to confirm claims (e.g., pricing, service descriptions)
- Do not spend more than a couple of minutes validating each individual fact. If you cannot quickly confirm accuracy, leave a comment for the second reviewer
- Check the ratio of internal vs. external links as part of the fact-checking process



Pro Tip

Specify what gets fact-checked, the time limit per claim, and how to handle unverifiable claims.

A tight scope is what makes fact-checking sustainable at scale.

5. AI-Generated Content

AI-generated content creates volume, but it also creates its own category of style issues: flattened formatting, vague phrasing, predictable patterns, and a lack of brand voice.

Your style guide needs a dedicated section that defines the human-in-the-loop review process that catches every AI intricacy.

Evaluate AI output against the original intent. If the content has drifted from the brief, flag or restructure before editing for style.

- [AI prompt instructions – link]



Pro Tip

Link to the original brief or prompt to measure the output against what was asked for.

Next, define your standards for AI content to form a repeatable human-in-the-loop review process. Start with structure, then move to style.

These principles were developed from a working set of standards identified across thousands of AI-generated documents reviewed by Proofed, and can transfer directly to any team creating AI-generated content.

5.1. Structure and Tone

AI-generated content tends to jumble the flow of ideas within sections.

Within each section, content should flow through a beginning–middle–end structure: introduce the idea, then add detail, then pull it together.

AI drafts often arrive in the same generic voice. As a result, the copy sounds less precise and loses your distinct brand voice.

Your brand voice only gets into the content when the review process puts it there.

Remove or rewrite the following patterns:

- Contrasting constructions: “It’s not about volume. It’s about quality.”
- Triadic structures: “Plan, create, distribute.”
- Em dash overuse: “Your content – and your brand – depends on it.”
- Mirror-image sentences: “Great content starts with great editing.”
- False questions: “Sound familiar?”
- Escalation closers: “And that’s just the beginning.”
- Sloganeering: “Quality at scale. Every time.”
- Confident pivots: “Here’s the thing:”
- Filler authority “In today’s content landscape...”
- Symmetrical headings “More content. Same quality.”



Pro Tip

Create an AI pattern list specific to your brand.

AI patterns are predictable, but the conflicts depend on your voice and tone for your target audience.

5.2. Useful Context

AI-generated content prioritizes brevity over depth.

New drafts often arrive structurally complete but missing the context that makes content genuinely useful to the reader.

In particular, watch for:

- Examples that demonstrate a rule but do not illustrate why it matters
- Explanations that state the what without the why
- Transitions that jump between ideas without connecting them
- Similar concepts presented without enough distinction between them
- Claims made without supporting detail or specifics
- Vague generalizations where specific data, names, or references would strengthen the point



Pro Tip

Build this list from the context gaps you encounter most frequently.

AI generates differently depending on the content type and the prompt. Your list should reflect what your content needs, not what AI produces by default.

6. Tone of Voice

For full tone of voice requirements, refer to the tone of voice document:

[Tone of Voice – link]

6.1. Expert and Approachable

Speak with authority and humility. Do not hedge what you know, and do not embellish it.

Be conversational. Be professional. Humor and personality are welcome, sparingly, and only in service of relatability.

Value clarity and simplicity. Use strong verbs and refrain from excessive adverbs.

Nine times out of ten, it is about the client or prospect, not you. Never be pushy, pedantic, high-handed, or self-centric.

6.2. 100% Human and Tech-Powered

100% human. This is a choice based on evidence. Human beings still make the best editors. That spirit filters through all we do.

Communicate like a human being, never like a computer. Use human words and avoid industry jargon.

Be warm and sincere. Listen actively and with empathy. Never sound automated, obsolete, or too technical.

6.3. Solution-Focused Listening

Lead with curiosity and a sincere desire to understand your prospects and clients. Never push. Ask questions, listen, and embrace collaboration.

6.4. Consistent and Flexible

Consistently flexible. Flexibly consistent.

Your clients represent multiple industries, sizes, and stages of growth. Adjust tone, voice, and register for the audience.

Address flexibility explicitly while working it into your syntax. Avoid rigid sentence structures that assume too much about who your reader is.

Use active voice across all marketing content.

Exception: see the Marketing Collateral section below.



Pro Tip

Summarize your tone pillars and link to your full ToV document.

Note where different content types follow different rules.

7. Blog Posts

Make sure to check that the brief has been followed before starting your edit.

For full blog post requirements, refer to the blog style sheet: [Blog Style Sheet – link]

7.1. General Style and Voice

Aim for a semi-formal style. Lightheartedness and contractions are fine, but avoid mechanical errors and use standard English. Posts should be informative, memorable, and where appropriate, entertaining.

Language should be clear and simple. Industry jargon is fine where your audience expects it. Avoid unnecessarily complex jargon where possible.

Emphasize the agency of the reader. Refer to the company by name, and use the business-specific brand name where relevant (e.g., "Proofed"). Use the organizational "we" over "I."



Pro Tip

Define your blog voice separately from your brand voice.

The register, formality level, and audience assumptions may differ from your marketing collateral and website copy.

7.2. Formatting

Blog posts are typically drafted in a document editor (i.e., Google Docs) before being transferred to a CMS (i.e., WordPress). The formatting requirements below are intended for use in Google Docs.

If the formatting of a document is incorrect, make the necessary changes as part of the edit:

- For main text, use a clear, simple font (e.g., Arial or Calibri) at 12 pt
- Use Heading 2 and Heading 3 for all subheadings
- If a heading is followed by a colon and the heading is bold, bold the colon
- For numbered headings (e.g., in a step-by-step guide), write the numbers manually rather than using the document editor's numbered list formatting. Numbered lists and heading formatting do not work together in most CMS platforms
- Use standard list formatting for numbered lists and bullet points elsewhere in the text. It is only numbered headings that need to be written manually
- Format example sentences in italics and centered on the page. This makes them easier to detect when transferring to the CMS
- Use align and indent options to position text such as block quotes. Do not use tab, as this only affects a single line
- Use standard formatting for links: blue, underlined text
- For correct and incorrect examples, use ✖ and ✔



Pro Tip

Specify formatting for your drafting environment and your CMS separately.

Most formatting issues happen during transfer between the two.

7.3. Emphasis

Ultimately, consistency is the most important thing with formatting.

Use italics to distinguish example sentences. To emphasize a term within an italicized sentence, use underlining.

Use bold and/or italics for emphasis to support readability and SEO:

- Use your judgement to decide what is a key statement worth bolding
- Do not use this excessively, as overuse is counterproductive
- When the content that appears to be key is also anchor text for a hyperlink, bold the full anchor text
- For navigation instructions, commands, or tab names, use italics rather than bold



Pro Tip

Define how emphasis is used in your content, and be specific about which formatting serves which purpose for consistency.

7.4. Links

Every post should contain internal and external links at a rough ratio of 2:3.

- Aim for approximately 3–5 links total per 1,000 words
- Only your own domain links are considered internal. All other links are considered external
- Distribute links throughout the post, and alternate between internal and external where possible

If a post contains too many links, remove the least relevant links to reduce the overall count while maintaining the correct ratio and link distribution.

If a blog post has no links, or the ratio of internal and external links is incorrect, source appropriate links:

- Do not spend more than 15–30 minutes searching for appropriate links
- Do not cite competitor websites
- Cite credible, authoritative sites over small, personal blogs
- Target a ratio of approximately 2:3 internal to external links

Anchor text contributes to SEO, so the phrasing matters:

- Capture the intent of the linked content (i.e., “outsourced editing for content teams”)
- If a hyperlink is followed by punctuation (a full stop, comma, colon, etc.), that punctuation should not be included as part of the clickable link text
- All internal URLs should include a trailing slash (e.g., [proofed.com/prices/](#) not [proofed.com/prices](#))



Pro Tip

Define your link ratio, anchor text rules, and link sourcing in one place.

These links directly affect SEO performance and reader experience, so these rules should be as specific as your formatting standards.

8. Marketing Collateral

Marketing collateral (newsletters, one-page infographics, LinkedIn content, expert guides) requires different style preferences than blog posts.

Collateral is written for a specific audience and is shaped by its design:

- Opening statements can be treated as standalone sentences, rather than requiring a colon to introduce a bullet list
- Parenthetical information can be presented using commas for brevity (e.g., “frequent, short” rather than “frequent and short”)
- Acronyms widely understood by the target audience (e.g., ROI, B2C, B2B) do not need to be written out in full at first use
- Sentences can be presented as fragments where this aids readability and design
- The serial comma can be excluded between two short dependent clauses where it aids readability

Active voice is preferred, but not mandatory. Passive constructions are acceptable in collateral where they improve flow or design friendliness.



Pro Tip

Give collateral the same level of detail as every other content type.

Collateral is often the most shared asset you produce, and it cannot be edited once it reaches your audience.

9. Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar

- Omit the hyphen from words starting with the “e-” prefix: ebook, email
- Use gender-neutral language where possible
- Use the serial comma
- Do not capitalize the first letter of the word after a colon

Headers and subheaders are in AP title case.

- Use a tool such as titlecaseconverter.com to confirm correct capitalization
- Use “and” instead of an ampersand (&) in headings and subheadings
- Always capitalize “To” in headings when used as an infinitive verb

Consistency is key: do not mix numbers and numerals in the same sentence:

- Spell out numbers one to nine; use numerals for 10 and above
- Spell out century numbers unless there is a reason not to
- Do not use superscript for ordinal numbers



Pro Tip

Give collateral the same level of detail as every other content type.

Collateral is often the most shared asset you produce, and it cannot be edited once it reaches your audience.

10. Lists

Only use punctuation in bullet lists if the bullet contains more than one sentence. Do not punctuate lists of single words, sentence fragments, or single full sentences.

This rule takes precedence over the blog style sheet, which requires punctuation for all full sentences. Where rules conflict between documents, this marketing style guide always takes precedence.

- Use a colon to introduce vertical or bulleted lists
- Do not use commas or semicolons at the end of list items

Consistency within a list is more important than any individual punctuation decision.

11. Phrasing Preferences

Avoid participial phrases and gerunds (the “-ing” form of verbs).

- ✗ Avoid: Our service covers style guide creation, ensuring your content meets brand guidelines.
- ✓ Preferred: We can create your style guide, to make sure your content meets brand guidelines.

Limit triadic constructions (sentences with three-item lists in an “X, Y, and Z” format).

- ✗ Avoid: Our software simplifies onboarding, training, and editing processes.
- ✓ Preferred: Our editing software simplifies onboarding and training.

When removing an item, remove the least specific or least impactful.

Proofed.

Ready To Create a Strong Style Guide?

Effective content at scale starts with a clear, consistent foundation.

A well-crafted style guide defines your brand voice and standardizes your messaging, and ensures every piece of content aligns – no matter who creates it or where it's published.

Without that foundation, consistency becomes difficult to maintain.

Style guide creation is the critical step that underpins everything that follows. It brings clarity to tone, structure, and usage, and enables teams to produce content that is cohesive and recognizable.

Building a style guide that truly reflects your brand requires expert judgement and careful attention to how content performs in practice.

Proofed provides tailored style guide creation designed for in-house teams, global enterprises, fast-growing start-ups, elearning providers, nonprofits, and professional services firms.

We help you define clear, usable standards that support consistency at scale, so every piece of content works harder for your brand.

Schedule a call to see how Proofed can help you build a style guide that strengthens your content from the ground up.

Create Your Style Guide With Proofed