

This style guide fosters consistency, clarity, and effectiveness when creating course content for Shopify Academy. It details the stylistic and philosophical principles underlying our approach to education to ensure that learning materials align with our educational values.

Writing for Academy

Written content for Shopify Academy comes in many forms, including outlines, courses, exams, and website or marketing copy. Following these style guidelines will help solidify our brand and provide our audience with a consistent experience as they interact with Academy and Shopify.

Voice and tone

What is voice and tone exactly?

Our **voice** is our personality, which stays consistent throughout the work we produce. Our **tone** is our attitude, which may change depending on the situation.

Our voice doesn't stray too far from Shopify's (which you can read about [here](#)), but let's get into the specifics for Academy.

How to apply our voice and tone to your writing

Shopify Academy courses should empower merchants and partners to learn new technical and soft skills and to build on existing knowledge. Our voice and tone help us deliver on this in an effective and predictable way.

Here are a few keywords that describe the overall vibe of Shopify Academy content:

<p>Informational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Professional● Empowering● Authoritative● Experts in our field	<p>Relatable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Relevant● Community-driven● Current● Friendly
<p>Playful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Positive● Engaging	<p>Practical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Concise● Accessible (in all ways)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clever • Quirky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear • Plainspoken
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Voice

Our voice as an educational resource is straightforward and conversational; professional, but not overly formal.

Our voice:

- Is smart and confident in our expertise, but never pretentious or braggy. We never talk down to our learners.
- Explains information clearly and concisely. We don't use more words than we need.
- Speaks in plain language. We want to easily connect with our learners.
- Is sometimes a little playful, but never at the expense of our learners' understanding of the material.
- Is positive and encouraging. We believe in our learners' ability to succeed.



Tone

Just like in real life, our tone may shift depending on the situation and what we're writing.

When writing for **Academy courses**, our tone is knowledgeable, positive, and encouraging, but never salesy or overconfident. We never want to "sell" to our learners.

When writing **Academy website content**, we're still encouraging, knowledgeable, and confident, but here is where we might incorporate marketing language. Even in this situation, though, our marketing tone is empowering, not aggressive, boastful, or disparaging.

Voice/Tone Example

<p>Write like this</p> <p></p>	<p>Not, like this</p> <p></p>
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When we say “make commerce better for everyone”, we mean the entire planet: Shopify builds with our commitment to sustainable commerce in mind.	When we say “make commerce better for everyone”, we mean the entire planet, sun, moon, and stars. With our commitment to sustainable commerce, we’re basically the Justice League when it comes to fighting climate change.
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Voice and tone in practice

- **Write for both partners and merchants.** Be sure to word your content so it addresses both groups.
- **Write in plain language.** Write so your audience will understand it the first time they read it. Aim for a grade 7 reading level; this ensures that your content is accessible to the widest possible audience.
- **Default to the second-person POV.** We want to speak directly to our learners, so for the most part, you’ll use “you.”
Like this: “In this course, you will learn how to market your business”
Not like this: “In this course, learners will explore ways to market their business.”
- **Use the active voice, for the most part.** Active voice reinforces that the learner is meant to do or learn something.
Like this: Good brand guidelines help you create good brand materials
Not like this: Good brand guidelines help with the creation of good brand materials
- **Begin with your main point.** Present the most important information at the beginning of your paragraph. A short lead-in is ok if needed, but don’t spend too much time there before you get to your main point.
- **Be concise.** Say only what’s needed. Be careful not to restate the same thought or use redundant words.
- **Keep sentences and paragraphs short.** Aim for paragraphs of no more than three sentences. This makes your content easier to scan, which is especially important for online writing.

- **Avoid run-on sentences.** Break long sentences into two, or use a semicolon or a comma and conjunction between clauses. This makes it easier for learners to take in information.

A few other important things to remember:

- Avoid jargon and acronyms, unless absolutely necessary.
- Avoid colloquialisms, slang, or anything that might not be understood by an international audience.
- Use contractions where appropriate.
- Use the serial comma. For example, "Snap, Crackle, and Pop."
- Use "that" for essential clauses and "which" for nonessential clauses.
- Spell out numbers one-nine, use numerals for 10 and above
- Certifications is capitalized when it's part of a title, like Shopify Foundations Certification. It should be lowercase when it appears on its own.
- The term "merchant" should be lowercase. The term "partner" should also be lowercase, unless you're referring to "Shopify Partners", which should be capitalized.
- Avoid using the same word too many times. Use a synonym where you can, try rewriting the sentence, or stop and evaluate whether the word is really necessary.
- In "Shopify admin", "admin" is lowercase
- Don't use ampersands; use "and" instead
- "Backend" and "Frontend" are not hyphenated
- When using initialisms, the words should be lowercase and the initials uppercase. Ex.: average order value (AOV)

And a reminder to have a little fun

We may be producing educational content, but that doesn't mean we're writing the same kind of material you had to slog through in your high school textbooks. We always want to present important information in a clear and accessible way, but we are Shopify after all, so that means we get to have some fun while we do it - because Harley said so:



Harley Finkelstein

March 31 at 5:24 AM · 🌐



"Nothing should ever be averaged out or neutral".

Important reminder that as we grow in size there's going to be a natural pull away from things that are quirky and weird, towards average, safe and consistent. Please resist that. That creativity and delightfulness is the lifeblood of Shopify ❤️

Writing course content

General writing guidelines

In general, our writing follows the [Shopify Content guidelines](#). You can also refer to the specific guidance on [grammar and mechanics](#), but here are some basic rules to follow for Academy:

A few structural things to keep in mind:

Accessibility and inclusivity: Make sure your content is inclusive and free from bias. Refer to [Shopify's guidelines for inclusive language](#).

Accuracy and attribution: Always fact-check your content and cite your sources where necessary. If you want to include a quote from a partner or merchant, please be sure to obtain their consent before using it in your content.

Links: Feel free to link out to Shopify resources, especially ones that are likely to change. This ensures our content stays relevant long term. Example: Linking to the Shopify subscription pricing page.

Storytelling: Use storytelling to make your content engaging and memorable. Stories can help your audience connect with your content on an emotional level.

Visuals: If you have an idea for a visual element (image, graph, etc.), be sure to note it in the doc where you think it should appear, along with any information the designers might need to create it.

Videos: Videos can be embedded in the course content or they can be linked. Just note your preference and a link to the video.