Basic Principles

Building blocks of UX copywriting
Be Concise

As few words as possible without losing meaning

Delineate what is necessary for the user to know (see: progressive disclosure)

Avoid long blocks of text, make it parsable

Only use punctuation when necessary (helps with parsability)

Write in the present tense, e.g. “video has been downloaded” vs. “video downloaded”
## Concise examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Save changes?</th>
<th>Would you like to save your changes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong></td>
<td><strong>Do</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep UI text short.</td>
<td>Don't write instructions that are longer than necessary to communicate an action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Register to vote</th>
<th>You must register before you can vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong></td>
<td><strong>Don't</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write UI text focused on the current task.</td>
<td>Tell the user how to take action, not that they should or must do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Signing in...

- **Your phone is contacting us. This can take up to 5 minutes.**
  - **Do** Communicate the details that are essential to understanding a current state or action.
  - **Don't** Avoid providing details that aren't essential for the user to know, such as how an action or process is performed.

- **Your phone needs to communicate with our servers to sign in to your account. This may take up to 5 minutes.**
  - **Do** Communicate the details that are essential to understanding a current state or action.
  - **Don't** Avoid providing details that aren't essential for the user to know, such as how an action or process is performed.
Be Clear

Avoid double negatives, kind of an evil design pattern, e.g. “I do not want to unsubscribe”

Avoid jargon (match between system and real world heuristic), use terms that your audience is likely familiar with

Make it obvious what an interactive element does, e.g. buttons should be labeled with exactly what will happen upon click/tap
Clarity Example

**System error**
There was an error while booking your tickets!

**System error**
The seats you chose are no longer available!

**Seats 142B and 143B are no longer available!**

- Cancel reservation
- Choose other seats
Make It Useful

Lead with the objective; users are trying to figure out how to achieve a goal (task), put the task at the forefront of the text that’s helping them, e.g. “Tap on an item to see its properties” (bad) vs. “To see an item’s properties, tap on it” (good)

Show don’t tell; use visuals when appropriate
Be Consistent

Same tone, style, voice, and terminology throughout the product.

Avoid using synonyms

Maintain same perspective throughout (first person vs. second person)

When possible, opt for words used universally in UX.

Use numbers, e.g. “2” instead of “two” (in most cases)

Use language consistent with the device, e.g. “tap” on mobile vs. “click” on web
Additional Principles

Extra improvements and techniques
Inverted Pyramid Technique

How to Write in the Inverted Pyramid Style

1. **Identify your key points.** What piece of information is the key fact you want your readers to know, even if they only read a single paragraph or sentence on the page? What effectively summarizes all the information that will follow?

2. **Rank secondary information.** Outline the story details and supporting information, prioritizing the information that is most likely to be of interest to the broadest audience, and moving down the list to the smaller and more nuanced details.

3. **Write well and concisely.** The structure only helps readers if the content is strong. Cut unnecessary information. Get to the point quickly. Use straightforward language. Use short paragraphs and bulleted lists.

4. **Frontload all elements of content with important information.** The main headline should be descriptive. The story should start with the main point. Each heading or subheading should be descriptive. The first sentence of every paragraph should be the most important. The first words in each sentence should be information-carrying and indicate what content will follow.

5. **Consider adding a summary or list of highlights.** Some sites go a step beyond and add a summary (like this article does) or a bulleted list of key points to further emphasize the main takeaways of the content.
Progressive Disclosure

Especially useful for mobile UI (less screen real estate); upfront information is just enough for baseline understanding with ability for users to explore and learn more.

Key: delineate which information is central and which is peripheral.
Brand/Product Tone

- Funny
- Neutral
- Serious
- Casual
- Neutral
- Formal
- Irreverent
- Neutral
- Respectful
- Enthusiastic
- Neutral
- Matter-of-fact
F Pattern

Most users scan a screen in an F-pattern. Use this to help prioritize text and create scannable hierarchy.
## The Microcopy Canvas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target user</th>
<th>Purpose of copy</th>
<th>Copy experiments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add a few details about them</td>
<td>Define the user need, use-case or value</td>
<td>Create 1-3 versions of the copy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User concerns and emotions</th>
<th>Action or expected outcome</th>
<th>Style and tone notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List 2-4 emotions they might be feeling (e.g., anxiety, anticipation, frustration)</td>
<td>What does the user need to do as a result of this message?</td>
<td>This should align with user emotions and concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User context</th>
<th>Channel and platform</th>
<th>Success criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What else might they be doing right now? Do you have their full attention?</td>
<td>Where and how the user will receive this</td>
<td>How you'll know this copy is working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key UX Questions

Does this copy help reduce user anxiety?

Does this copy make sense to my users? (A/B test)

Does this copy reflect the tone of my brand?

Is this copy manipulative and/or unethical? Does it mistreat my user?
Glossary

Good:

“Use”

Specific actions verbs

Bad:

“Utilize”

“Enable”

Very (and other adverbs)

“Blah blah” text

“End user” → who is this for you?
Sources

16 Rules of Effective UX Writing. by Nick Babich
UX Writing: Handy Tips on Text Improving User Experience
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Inverted Pyramid: Writing for Comprehension