UX Writing

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

Save changes?

──────────────────────

Do

Keep UI text short.

Would you like to save your changes?

──────────────────────

Don't

Don't write instructions that are longer than necessary to communicate an action.

Register to vote

──────────────────────

Do

Write UI text focused on the current task.

You must register before you can vote

──────────────────────

Don't

Tell the user how to take action, not that they should or must do so.

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.

Signing in...
Your phone needs to communicate with our servers to sign in to your account. This may take up to 5 minutes.

──────────────────────

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!

Close

System error

The seats you chose are
no longer available!

Close

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

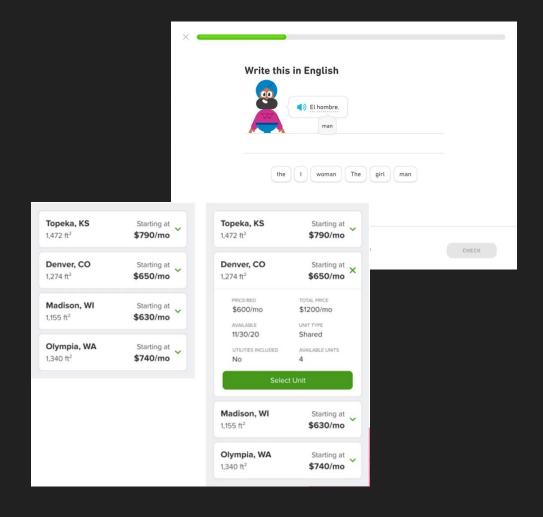Extra improvements and techniques

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.
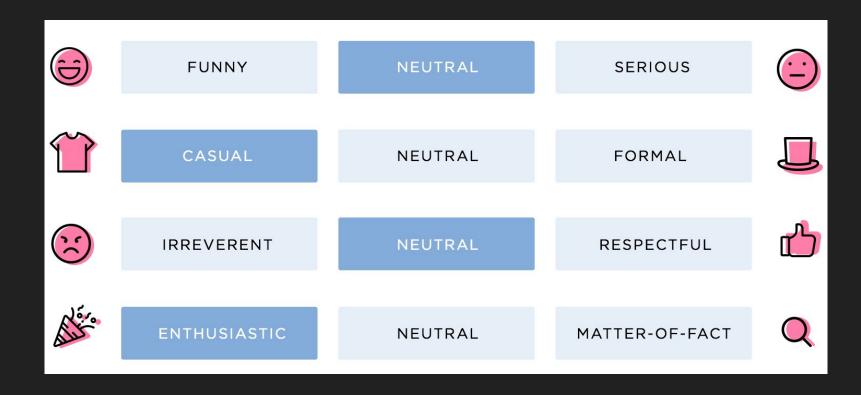
Progressive Disclosure

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.

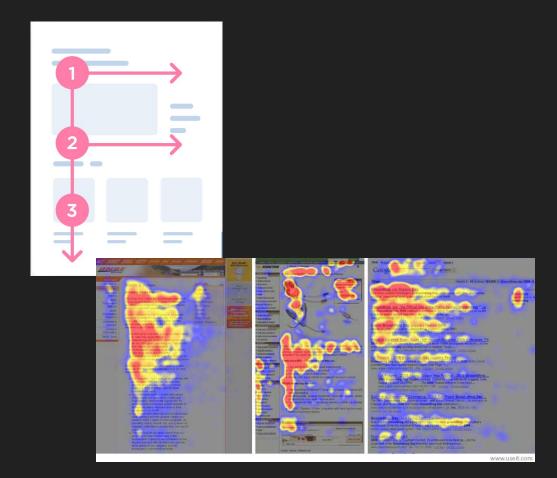Key: delineate which information is central and which is peripheral.

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

Target user	**Purpose of copy**	**Copy experiments**
Add a few details about them	Define the user need, use-case or value	Create 1-3 versions of the copy

User concerns and emotions	**Action or expected outcome**	
List 2-4 emotions they might be feeling *(e.g., anxiety, anticipation, frustration)*	What does the user need to do as a result of this message?	

Style and tone notes
This should align with user emotions and concerns

User context	**Channel and platform**	**Success criteria**
What else might they be doing right now? Do you have their full attention?	Where and how the user will receive this	How you'll know this copy is working

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](#)

[What Are UX Writers? UX Copywriting | Adobe XD Ideas](#)

[All you need to know about Progressive Disclosure](#)

[UX copywriting: What's powering the web's best digital experiences | GatherContent](#)

[The complete guide to UX writing - Justinmind](#)

[Writing - Material Design](#)

[Cringeworthy Words to Cut from Online Copy](#)

[Inverted Pyramid: Writing for Comprehension](#)