NASCAR SITE/UX DESIGN

Editorial Guidelines

Version 1.0 Date 16 February 2011

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

REVISION LOG

VERSION	REVISION DESCRIPTION	AUTHOR(S)	DATE
1.0	Initial Release of Document	Timothy Truxell	16 February 2012

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
Overview & Purpose	4
Voice & Tone	6
Voice & the Digital Experience	7
Voice Characteristics	8
NASCAR.com Voice & Tone	13
Voice Scale	14
Editorial Guidelines	15
User-Centered Writing	16
Writing for Digital	16
Naming & Nomenclature	19
Usage Guidelines	20
Further Information	26
Primary References	27
Other References	27

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

01 Overview & Purpose

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

01 Overview

The purpose of this document is:

- To capture NASCAR's voice and tone for the fans' digital experience
- To provide rules on how to craft messaging and other content that remains faithful to NASCAR's voice and tone
- To provide guidance on how to craft copy that is suited for the digital experience regardless of channel or device

Anyone writing, editing or producing digital content other than straight news or video features should follow the guidelines in this document to ensure a consistent voice and content presentation throughout the site.

This document explicitly **does not** document a style for the following types of content:

- Editorial news articles that should follow AP Style
- Video recaps that should follow a news-like format
- Opinion pieces and feature articles which should follow AP Style
- Video shows, podcasts and other features that rely on the personality of their hosts or guests

Note: This editorial guide is intended for writing and editing content for sites using U.S. English. A variation of this guide may need to be created for any original Spanish content.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

02 Voice & Tone

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Voice & Tone in the Digital Experience

Voice and tone is the editorial execution of our brand. It ensures that communication is consistent across a website and aligns with other important communications. Voice is how the NASCAR digital experience sounds. Tone is how it feels. These together determine the words, nomenclature, and style that should be used. In short, it's how we talk to our fans.

Think of this voice and tone as NASCAR's digital personality and style. The extent of personality and style that is conveyed depends on the occasion, circumstance, or environment. The same concept is true for digital content—how to speak depends on the context.

There are many different kinds of writing, and each type may have a specific voice. A race recap sounds and reads differently than a technical explanation. Users have expectations concerning the voice of each type of writing.

This section provides insight into NASCAR's digital brand and outlines the attributes that create the brand personality, that, in turn, determine the tone of voice that should be used.

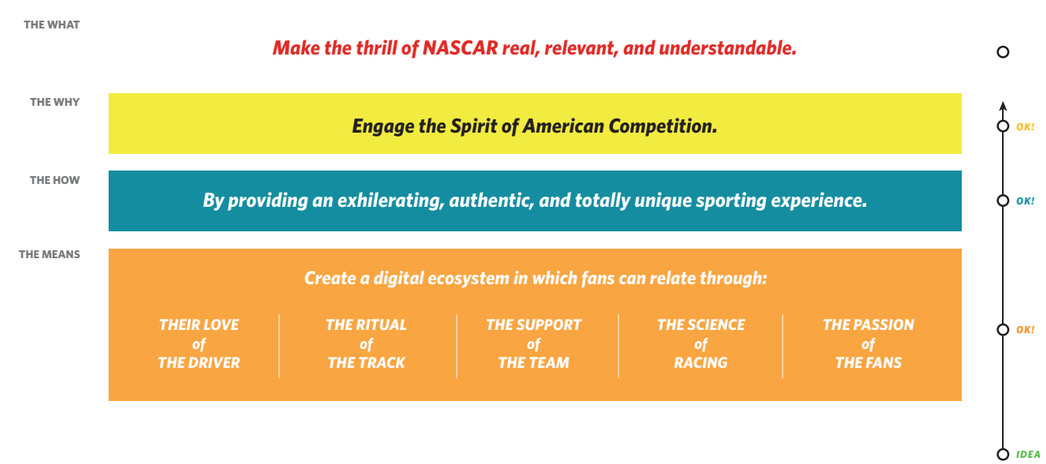
Before getting into the specifics of the voice and tone, we should first think about the digital medium, and how this medium may affect the voice and tone. Use a consistent voice actoss all areas of the digital experience. The more consistent a voice you support—and the better it speaks to the intended audience in particular—the quicker the fans will recognize it and become familiar with it. And the more familiar it is to them, the more effective it will be.

To further explore how the tone of voice is established, we follow the following method:

1. Start with the digital experience filter
2. Determine the factors and experiences that contribute to or create each pillar of the experience
3. Take those experiences and list associated attributes
4. Select a set of attributes across the entire digital experience that best captures NASCAR's digital voice and tone
5. Place these attributes into a voice scale to further refine voice and tone

The main pillars for the digital experience from the fans' perspectives are: their Love of the Driver, the Ritual of the Track, the Support of the Team, the Science of Racing and the Passion of the Fans.

We will take each of these pillars in turn to establish the characteristics and attributes for NASCAR's digital voice and tone.



SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Voice Characteristics

THEIR LOVE OF THE DRIVER

Contributing Experiences

They are seen as **accessible**, **authentic**, and as **real people**.

With their accessibility, drivers are seen as **down to earth** and **approachable**.

Despite their authenticity, they are not just nice guys. They are **spirited competitors**, superb **athletes** who have compelling and ongoing **rivalries** that are just as spirited as any other spot.

Potential Attributes

- Approachable
- Authentic
- Competitive
- Confident
- Genuine
- Independent
- Individualistic
- Real
- Rebellious

Their love of the driver is...

Approachable

The cars may have numbers, but the drivers have names. And with each one comes a rich backstory of motivation and personality. This is integral to the fan experience. Because the more they care about the drivers off the track, the more they will care about them on it.

Competitive

Our drivers are athletes, not billboards. And they'll do anything to get their car across that line. Whether it's using their opponent's airflow against them or pushing four tires that should have blown miles ago, they strap themselves into that machine to feed their desire to compete.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Voice Characteristics

THE RITUAL OF THE TRACK

Contributing Experiences

Race day has its own familiar rythms, from the **flyover** and **national anthem** to the phrase: **"Drivers, start your engines."**

But it extends beyond the race itself, from playing **corn hole** and **camping** with your friends—it's a **spirited reunion** of a social tribe.

Potential Attributes

- Dramatic
- Energetic
- Exciting
- Exhilarating
- Friendly
- Fun
- Sociable
- Spirited
- Thrilling
- Traditional

The ritual of the track is...

Traditional

There's a reason fans arrive days before the race. From starting grills to starting engines, the ceremony is often as much of an event as the race itself.

Fun

Simple to describe. Impossible to recreate. Attending a NASCAR race is fun. Be it reuniting with your second family, playing corn hole or just taking off your hat during the anthem, there's something magical about having everyone gathered in one place.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Voice Characteristics

THE SUPPORT OF THE TEAM

Contributing Experiences

The team members are the **unsung heroes** of NASCAR. They are **real** people, whose **dedication** goes beyond the tools they are holding.

We know this because in addition to being **accessible**, they possess a level of **commitment, camaraderie** and **collaboration** that allows them to treat each other **like a family**.

Their intense **training** allows them to be **tough**. While the driver gets the glory, their contribution is **celebrated**.

Potential Attributes

- Cooperative
- Confident
- Celebrated
- Committed
- Dedicated
- Energetic
- Powerful
- Practical
- Reliable
- Rigorous

The support of the team is...

Rigorous

The team is like mission control for the Apollo program; it's an assembly of specialists working tirelessly to maintain absolute precision. And although many may never leave the atmosphere, they're affecting the mission just as much as those that do.

Powerful

The team goes beyond the pit. And maintains a level of strength that would make some professional athletes quiver. Make no mistake. Even if they're not sitting behind the wheel, they're racing the car.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Voice Characteristics

THE SCIENCE OF RACING

Contributing Experiences

For many people, **data** is what makes the **thrill** of NASCAR come alive.

The **speeds** and **technical specifications of the car** allow the sport to be relatable, the **scoring** helps keep each driver relevant.

The **turns** and **track banking** bring out the distinct **character of each track** and the **strategies** required to compete.

Potential Attributes

- Adventurous
- Agile
- Cutting-Edge
- Detailed
- Exhilarating
- Immersive
- Ingenious
- Powerful
- Precise
- Technical

The science of racing is...

Immersive
Everything that encapsulates the science of racing—from the angle of the track to the power of the engine—gets the fan closer to the action.

Ingenious
Drafting behind your opponent. Brakes that make you go faster. The meticulous dispersion of weight to create "a car that can win." These kinds of insights aren't just counterintuitive, they're downright cunning.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Voice Characteristics

THE PASSION OF THE FANS

Contributing Experiences

Many fans' **memories** of NASCAR revolve around the **togetherness** and **camaraderie** of the **social** gatherings.

Amid the **cheering** and **support of the sponsor**s, here you'll find a **family-like commitment** to not only the sport and its heritage, but each other.

Potential Attributes

- Authentic
- Companionable
- Emotional
- Energetic
- Exciting
- Hospitable
- Memorable
- Passionate
- Sociable
- Supportive

The passion of the fans is...

Authentic

Fans are a reflection of who they follow. And NASCAR's athletes carry a weight of authenticity you won't find anywhere else. That's because this overly-transparent sport is accompanied by a loyalty that's handed down through generations.

Sociable

Keep your eyes on the track, and you'll miss half the action. Because at a NASCAR race, who you're cheering with is just as important as who you're cheering for. It's what brings people of all walks of life together to root for the same driver and keeps tailgates going for days.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

The NASCAR Digital Voice and Tone

When all this comes together, the digital voice and tone for NASCAR emerges, as represented by the following diagram.

THE WHAT

Make the thrill of NASCAR real, relevant, and understandable.

THE WHY

Engage the Spirit of American Competition.

THE HOW

By providing an exhilarating, authentic, and totally unique sporting experience.

THE MEANS

Create a digital ecosystem in which fans can relate through:

THEIR LOVE of THE DRIVER	THE RITUAL of THE TRACK	THE SUPPORT of THE TEAM	THE SCIENCE of RACING	THE PASSION of THE FANS

VOICE & TONE

Approachable	Traditional	Rigorous	Ingenious	Authentic
Competitive	Fun	Powerful	Immersive	Sociable

OK!

OK!

OK!

IDEA

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

The NASCAR Voice Scale

Even with this background to inform your writing, voice is still a balancing act that simultaneously positions NASCAR within a larger spectrum that our fans will experience digitally. The accompanying voice scale is a way of thinking about the process by positioning brand personality attributes between opposing, but valid, options. The elements of the brand personality that best describe the voice and tone for NASCAR are represented in boldface.

	Not	**Here**	Not
THEIR LOVE of THE DRIVER	Chummy	**Approachable**	Introspective
	Cutthroat	**Competitive**	Cooperative
THE RITUAL of THE TRACK	Loose	**Traditional**	Routine
	Mischievous	**Fun**	Gentlemanly
THE SCIENCE of RACING	Relaxed	**Rigorous**	Exacting
	Brawny	**Powerful**	Subtle
THE SUPPORT of THE TEAM	Tricky	**Ingenious**	Straightforward
	Infatuated	**Immersive**	Observant
THE PASSION of THE FANS	Showy	**Authentic**	Homogeneous
	Cultish	**Sociable**	Polite

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

03 Editorial Guidelines

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

User-Centered Writing

The goal of NASCAR's digitial properties should be to facilitate a dialogue between NASCAR and its fans. Always use writing that is friendly, uses personal pronouns and lets users know that they are capable participants, regardless of their level of expertise. Develop content with the goal of encouraging users to build a one-on-one relationship with NASCAR.

This section of the document builds on the voice and tone outlined above to provide explicit guidance on creating content for NASCAR's digital experience. For specific guidance on a point of grammatical style, please see the AP Style Guide.

WRITING FOR DIGITAL

Good writing is good writing, but the medium that an audience uses to read that writing should always be considered. Since reading on a computer screen, tablet or mobile device is fundamentally different than reading on paper, certain things that work in a magazine or a catalog do not translate well.

Reading from computer screens is about 25% slower than reading from paper (www.useit.com/alertbox/9703b.html). And a mobile devices exacerbates this even further. Thus, writing for digital places a much greater import upon the brevity and scannability of information on the screen. Users expect to be able to get the information they need quickly; if they cannot find what they are looking for, they are apt to go elsewhere to look for it.

Also, digital as a medium is more about interactivity than traditional print pieces. Users expect to find interactivity and actionable content—that is, content that leads them to other places within a website or to another site altogether.

To fully take advantage of this medium with its constraints and opportunities, use the following guidelines when crafting content for NASCAR.

Be brief
On the Web, the vast majority of users scan the page instead of reading the text word-for-word. Also, reading from computer screens is significantly slower than from paper due to onscreen resolution. By making your copy as brief as possible, it will make it powerful.

Present scannable content
Since most users scan digital content, picking out individual words and sentences, the copy should give them cues as they scan the page, indicating what is important. Subheadings, numbered lists and bulleted lists help users pick out important information and lessen the chances of them giving up before they find what they want. This makes the information approachable and engaging.

Use brief, descriptive headings and subheadings
Using brief, distinct headlines increase the scannability of content. For headings and subheadings, ensure that the word or character count does not cause the heading to wrap lines. Wrapped headlines decrease the scannability of headings and reduce their clarity, as the user may confuse it with the actual content.

Headings and subheadings should always be followed by body copy that more fully explicates the information in the heading or a call-to-

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

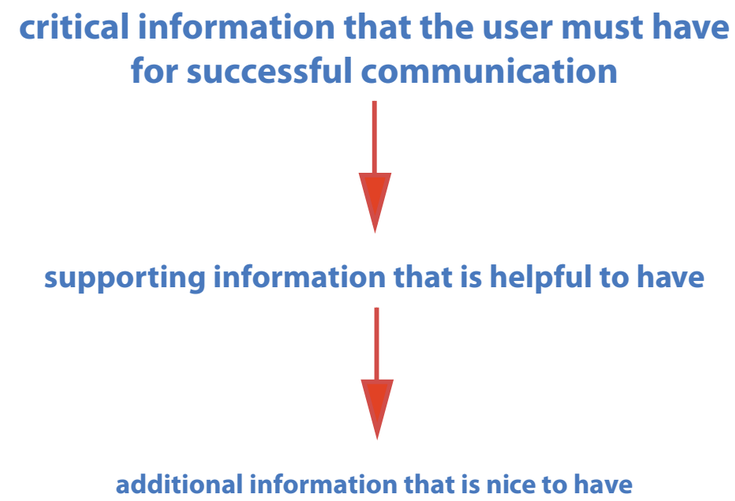
User-Centered Writing

action that clearly leads the user to the information referenced in the heading. Clear headings and subheadings, much like bulleted lists, make the content of the site engaging and easy for the user to digest.

Write using inverted pyramid style
The inverted pyramid is a metaphor that illustrates how information should be arranged or presented within copy; it can be thought of as a triangle. The triangle's broad base at the top of the figure represents the most general or important information the writer means to convey. The top part of the triangle illustrates that this kind of material should head the content, while the tapered lower portion illustrates that other material should follow in order of diminishing importance or increased detail.

Use the inverted-pyramid style to get the important information to the reader immediately, even if it is on succeeding pages. Such a style makes the content easy as the user doesn't have to view information that is not important for his or her needs.

Use hyperlinks
Hyperlinks are what make the Web such a useful tool for finding information. Use them to guide users toward more information, bringing them deeper into the site for more detail. Hyperlinks engage the user in the content and make it easy for him or her to interact directly with the content. All hyperlinks should clearly indicate the destination.



The Inverted Pyramid

Use personal language
Use polite and personal language. This indicates that they are engaged in a dialogue with you. Personal language makes the content conversational and engaging.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

User-Centered Writing

Use clear language
Most people seek specific information online, and they want to find that information quickly. Choose words that clearly and easily instruct, guide or inform. Break up complex sentences containing multiple clauses into two or more simple sentences. Clear language is language that the user can quickly comprehend.

Deal with one idea at a time. Don't try to address multiple ideas in a single module or paragraph, as it will reduce the clarity of the content.

Provide clear calls to action
For every piece of content, users should be presented with a clear next step or call to action. Not only will a clear call to action lead users down their desired paths, it will make the content more clear to users and will may it easy for them to take action. Such easily ascertained next steps are emblematic of content that is helpful and simple in its purpose. Here are some examples of clear calls to action that may be useful for NASCAR.

Examples:

Do

- Find out how Stewart's team went from tatters to title
- View Complete Standings

Don't

- View All
- Learn More

Avoid using "Click Here" or "Read More" unless there is no other way to convey the link. The use of this label confuses action with information. While the user is instructed to "Click", he or she will have no idea what lies on the other side of that link. This type of construction takes away from the engaging element of the content.

Reflect energy
Use action verbs, active voice, compact sentences and short paragraphs. In English, shorter words with fewer syllables generally convey more energy than longer words with more syllables. Avoid passive constructions. Energetic copy is powerful copy.

A frequent clue that you have lapsed into passive voice is that the person or thing performing the action is preceded by the word by.

Using active voice will provide users with the direction they seek. Use the content to differentiate and instill confidence in users.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

User-Centered Writing

NAMING AND NOMENCLATURE

Nomenclature is about naming. It is about creating appropriate, meaningful labels for sections, pages, navigation, and other elements of NASCAR's digital experience to accurately reflect the information and functionality. Clarity and consistency are the two guideposts for effective nomenclature.

The Taxonomy provides guidance for creating specific labels and titles for the major areas and pages for NASCAR.com.

Use Familiar and Simple Terms
Labels should use common terms that are familiar to users. While metaphors and clever expressions may be fun to write, if their meaning is not clear, users could have difficulty finding the information they are looking for.

Describe the Destination or Action
Labels should give the user a clear idea of the information that will appear or the action that will result from clicking the element. The title of a page that a navigation option links to should prominently display the same words as the navigation to assure users that they have arrived at the correct page.

Test in Multiple Languages
If you anticipate that the label will appear in multiple languages (e.g., Spanish), translate your options before making a decision. This will help you estimate the space required for the name.

Make It Useful
Nomenclature should be driven by user needs and goals. The labels should communicate a clear message so users can find what they need easily and quickly. Good nomenclature should direct users toward their goals, not divert them from those goals.

Make It Understandable
"Say what you mean, mean what you say." For users to be able to identify and access information easily:

Example:

Do:

- Write clear, concise labels for navigation tools and web pages.
- Use icons as an enhancement for clear labels. Make sure icon images have clear ALT text.

Don't

- Use undefined categories such as Click Here, More, Miscellaneous or Other. They will confuse users because they may set incorrect expectations and waste the users' time as they try to find the appropriate content.

Be Restrained
As in good writing, good nomenclature is direct and understated.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

User-Centered Writing

Example:

Do:

- Provide clear labels that suggest substance: View Driver Statistics

Don't

- Try to grab users' attention with hyperbolic labels. It erodes credibility and the brand, and sets unrealistic user expectations: Most Exciting Race.

Make It Consistent
Make sure labels are consistent throughout the site to aid learning and enhance user experience. For instance, if the label is News & Media in one area of the site, it should be the same everywhere else in the site.

Make It Predictable
The labels should have enough consistency that users can predict what will happen when they click on it. Predictability promotes user confidence and leads to repeat visits.

- Match label names with target section/page names. Labels can be shorter if needed than page names but they should mirror the page name in intent by using the same key word.
- Use short, descriptive titles and headings that inform users about page contents.
- Don't use labels that inaccurately represent the contents of the target page. For example, if users select View Track Details, they should land on an appropriate Track page, not on a page promoting a special offer or promotion.
- Avoid using nomenclature that makes users feel as though they are in charge of creating an experience for themselves on the website—such as "Enhance Your NASCAR Experience." Creating a positive user experience is our responsibility. Avoid making users feel like they have to do anymore work than necessary.
- "NASCAR" should only be included in nomenclature when its exclusion may cause confusion.
- Field label nomenclature should be nouns or verbs.
- Use gerunds to indicate process (e.g., Signing In).
- Button nomenclature should be verbs. There should be no more than 11 characters on a button.

Exceptions can be made but should have a compelling rationale behind them. For instance, "Add to My Drivers" can be used even though it breaks the 11-character rule because a shorter alternative may be less clear.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Usage Guidelines

In general, editorial content on the site, such as race reports and opinion pieces, should adhere to The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (AP 2012).

The following pages outline style tips and and guidance for style points that are not covered by AP. This includes site messaging and other areas that are specific to the digital medium.

Adherence to these style guidelines will help ensure a consistent user experience for NASCAR. The style guide is a living document, and it should expand over time to include new issues of concern to the site's content creators.

Action verbs

Action verbs express actions; compare them with verbs of being. Think of the difference between I write (action verb) and I am a writer (verb of being).

Try to cut down on verbs of being and replace them (whenever possible) with action verbs to make your writing more dynamic. Don't confuse action verbs with the active voice, which is the opposite of the passive voice. Sentences with verbs of being (such as am, is, are, were) are not necessarily passive sentences, but they are often weak ones.

Active voice, passive voice

Try to use the active voice whenever you can. The active voice takes the form of X does Y; the passive takes the form of X is done [by Y].

The passive voice has two problems. First, sentences often become dense and clumsy when they're filled with passive constructions. Using it waters down the strength and impact of the text. Second, the passive voice lets the writer avoid the responsibility of providing a subject for the verb.

If you're going to apologize, apologize: "I'm sorry we do not have that item." The active voice forces one to be specific and strong, not indecisive and weak.

Examples:

Do: We will give you a list of local attractions.

Don't: You will be given a list of local attractions.

The real issue is whether the subject of the sentence is doing something, or having something done to it. Be careful and thoughtful, though. Some passives are necessary and useful, and so not all passives should be avoided.

Don't confuse am, is, are, and to be with the passive voice, and don't confuse action verbs with the active voice.

Ampersand, and

Avoid using ampersands (&) in body text. However, use them in headings and navigation where space is an issue and the word and may compromise brevity.

Asterisk

Use an asterisk to indicate required fields. Avoid using asterisks in other contexts. In content areas, symbols such as † may be used.

Boldface

Reserve the use of boldface font for section headings, keywords and defined terms. While boldface increases scannability, overusing it decreases its impact. Use it sparingly.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Usage Guidelines

Browser titles

Browser titles should be formatted in the following way: [page title]: NASCAR – [browser]. Always use title case for browser titles.

Examples:

Behind Stewart's Amazing Run: NASCAR.com – Mozilla Firefox

Also see *Page Titles*.

Bullets

When writing content for the web, bullet lists are very important for a number of reasons. First, they chunk information, which allows users to quickly find the information they seek. Also, bullets make pages more easily scannable. Use bullets in the following instances:

- You have distinct points to make that would be lost in a paragraph of text.
- You want to draw attention to key messages.
- You are listing things.

When bulleted phrases complete a sentence, make sure they are parallel in construction. Each line should start with the same part of speech—that is, a noun, a verb or a verb phrase.

Buttons and links

Buttons

Buttons are used when moving users forward and backward in a process. Use buttons for user initiated data exchanges, submissions and transactions.

Button nomenclature should always be title case (all first letters of words are capitalized except conjunctions, articles and prepositions).

Buttons should always signal an action. That is, they are almost always verbs.

Examples:

Enter, Next, View List, Update, Submit, Cancel

Exceptions include "Yes" and "No" buttons.

Also, use buttons with specific actions in a single-step process.

Examples:

Save, Order, Sign Up

For multiple-step processes, use "Next" or "Continue" for steps one through the penultimate step (usually the step before validation) on forms in a multiple-step process. Use "Enter", "Submit" or a specific action button on the validation page of a multiple-step process. The button nomenclature will depend on the context of use.

When referring to a button in instructional copy, always treat the text on the button as a title. Do not use quotation marks around the button's label. Unless there are multiple references to buttons in the instructional text, avoid using the word button. This is one instance where boldface text may be useful.

Links

Text links are part and parcel of the content of the page. That is, they are related directly to the topic of the page. Use text links only when displaying information; use buttons when exchanging information, such as submitting a form.

Stand-alone text links should always be in title case. If links are part of the body copy on a page, they should be in sentence case and follow the same grammatical and usage rules as the rest of copy.

Never use "Click Here [to do this]" as a link. Use the links to provide users with context about where the link leads them.

Examples:

Do: Learn more about our tandem racing.

Don't: Click here to learn more about hotel deals in Daytona.

If a reader is scanning the page for additional information and all the links are click here, the user will have to read the surrounding text to understand where the resulting page link goes. With the first example, users can scan all the contextual links and go quickly to their destination.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Usage Guidelines

Not all text links are calls to action—for instance, links can also direct users to more information—but if the link is a call to action, it should be a verb.

Example:

Order Now

Never use "More" as a link by itself. Always use a descriptor before or after "More".

Example:

Do: Learn more about pit-stop adjustments.

Do: More Drivers

Don't: Learn More

Don't: More

When referring to a link in instructional copy, always treat it as a title. Do not use quotation marks around it. Unless there are multiple references to links or buttons in the instructional text, avoid using the word link.

Example:

Select Edit Profile to change your newsletter preferences.

Also see *Nomenclature*.

Cancel, close

Always use "Cancel" and "Close" by themselves. They should not be followed by descriptors.

Example:

Do: Cancel

Don't: Cancel Change Password

When a Cancel button aligns with another button in a form, always place Cancel on the left.

Multiple step forms must have a Cancel button, beginning on the second step of the process. Subprocess pages have Close buttons instead of Cancel buttons. Cancel buttons are required on single-step processes if there is ambiguity about whether data the user has saved has been changed.

Examples:

Create/Edit address

Change Password

Case

Use title case (all first letters of words are capitalized except conjunctions, articles and prepositions) for:

- Page titles
- Sub-navigation
- Headings
- Stand-alone text links
- Field labels
- Table column headings
- Labels ending in a colon
- Drop-down menu items

To form title case for both titles and subtitles, capitalize the first words, the last words and all principal words in the title, including those that follow hyphens in compound adjectives. Do not capitalize articles (a, an, the), prepositions (e.g., in, to, for, by, between), conjunctions (e.g., and, or, but), or the to in infinitives when it occurs in the middle of the title.

Example:

Do: The History of NASCAR

Don't: The History Of NASCAR

Use sentence case for the following:

- Subheadings
- Radio buttons
- Check boxes
- Progress panel entries
- In-line links

Concise language

Good writing is concise writing. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, and a paragraph should have no unnecessary sentences. Using unnecessary words and phrases introduces more opportunities for you to make mistakes and for the reader to become confused. Watch your use of adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases. All writing requires these devices, but using too many of them tends to clutter up copy. Use only modifiers that are absolutely necessary. The more concise writing is, the more powerful and effective it is.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Usage Guidelines

Concrete language

Use specific, concrete words instead of vague, general ones wherever possible. Be precise.

Drop-down menu

Always refer to it in copy as a drop-down menu, not pull-down menu or drop-down box.

Order items in drop-down menus alphabetically.

Economy of style

A mark of clear and forceful writing is economy of style—using no more words than necessary.

Don't pad your sentences with "It should continuously be remembered that's" and "Moreover, it has been previously indicated's," like bureaucratic and academic writing you may have read. It only slows down communication and comprehension.

After you write a sentence, look it over and ask if judicious editing would damage the sense. If not, start cutting, because the shorter version is usually better.

Error messages

Error messages indicate to users that an error has occurred in the system. These errors may have been caused by the user or by the system. There are two types of error messages:

1. Formatting errors.
2. System errors.

Formatting errors

Errors occur when users have not submitted information that the system requires or when users submit information that the system cannot accept. For example, a message might appear when a date is entered in the wrong format. These usually occur in forms or other text fields, such as log in.

The error message should appear on the top of the module where the user entered information and specify what the user needs to do to correct the problem.

The corresponding field labels should be highlighted.

All errors on the page should display at one time, if possible. The user should not see multiple error pages.

Use the word sorry in the message when the error occurs because of a business or technological restriction. It indicates that you want to make the process as smooth as possible for the user.

Example:

> We're sorry. The User ID or Password was not valid. Please enter your ID and password again. Your password is case sensitive.

System errors

These are errors the user did not cause, or that the user cannot control or fix. The error message should describe the situation and provide appropriate next steps. Avoid using browser-generic error pages.

Make the message brief and clear, and explain the cause of the error.

Example:

> We're sorry. The application does not appear to be responding at this time. Please try again later or contact us.

Also, provide options for recovering from the error.

Example:

> Please enter required information in the fields that are highlighted.

Do not fault the user.

Example:

> **Do:** The password was invalid, please try again.
>
> **Don't:** You did not enter a valid password.

This is an instance when passive voice is preferred.

Do not use emotionally charged language or exclamation marks.

Example:

> **Do:** Your password was invalid. Please check your password and enter it again.
>
> **Don't:** Fatal error! Your password was invalid.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Usage Guidelines

Field labels

Field labels are generally above or next to a text field. Field labels are always AP-style title case.

If the field label is to the left of a field, use a colon between the label and the text field.

Example:

Username: _____

Field labels can be nouns or verbs.

Internet, intranet, extranet

Internet should always be capitalized because it is a proper noun. Intranet and extranet, however, do not require capitalization since they are not proper nouns.

Italics

Avoid the use of italics on the Web since they are very difficult to read on a computer screen. If they must be used for emphasis, use them sparingly (for one word or phrase only—never for an entire sentence).

Module headings

Modules refer to sections on the screen or page. Headings for modules should be AP-style title case. The sole exception to this rule is FAQ questions, which are written in sentence case.

Module headings should not mirror the page title. Whenever possible, content module headings need to be action-oriented.

Example:

Why Join Fan Center?

Anchor link modules do not have module headings since they fall directly below the page title, which acts as the heading.

Numbered lists

Numbered lists are a good way to organize information on the Web. They chunk information, making it easier for the user to find. Numbered lists are also helpful in describing processes.

See also *bulleted lists*.

Page titles

The page title should reflect what is presented in the navigation. In a single-step or multiple-step process, the page heading should refer to the overall name of the process, because steps of the process are not included in the sub-navigation. Titles should not be overly lengthy or extend to more than one line. Be brief and descriptive with titles. Save the details for the body of the page.

Page titles should be written in title case.

Password

Password should be expressed in title case only if it is a field label and when it is referring to the field label.

Example:

Enter your Password and User ID. Your password should be six to ten characters long and include both alphabetical characters and numbers.

Precise language

When making word choices, let your guide be precision—the best way to clarity and communication. Sometimes this means choosing words a little out of the ordinary: catastrophic might come closer to the mark than tragic.

But, while a large vocabulary can help you here, don't resort to impressive-sounding words or you risk confusing the reader. Remember, know how complicated it is and state it simply.

Precision more frequently means choosing the right familiar word: paying attention to easily confused pairs like affect and effect, and making sure the words you choose have exactly the right meaning.

Always read your writing as closely as possible, paying attention to every word, and ask yourself whether every word says exactly what you want.

Progress panel

A progress panel is a heading that shows a user's progress through a series of pages or steps that a

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

Usage Guidelines

user must navigate. Entries in the progress panel should be in title case.

If there is a one to one relationship between the steps in a process and the options on the progress panels, the names should match.

Required fields

Required fields should always have an asterisk or be presented in boldface consistentely

Always place the required fields sentence at the end of the instructional text on a form.

Indicate optional fields in a form only:

- If they are grouped with required fields, it would be better to separate optional fields from required fields on the page.
- If the data point is unclear to the user and may cause the user to be unsuccessful in completing the task.

Subheadings

Subheadings are used to break up text or communicate a new idea. They are an indispensable aid for scannability.

Use descriptive subheadings to provide an at-a-glance understanding of the content by surfacing key points. This is especially useful in narrative text.

Try to avoid writing a subheading longer than 10 words.

Subheadings should be in sentence case.

Sub-navigation

Avoid using this term when producing copy for the site. Instead refer to the specific link and the direction.

Text links

See *buttons and links*.

Underlining

Avoid the use underlined fonts on the Web since users expect hyperlinks to be underlined. Using underline for emphasis should be avoided.

World Wide Web, Web, Web site

As with Internet, the term World Wide Web is a proper noun and should be capitalized in all uses that refer to it. The word website, however, is not a proper noun. Therefore, it is not capitalized.

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

04 Further Information

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation

04 Further Information

PRIMARY REFERENCES

- The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (AP 2012). This is the primary reference for questions of usage and style for NASCAR.

OTHER REFERENCES

Books

- Anderson, Daniel, Bret Benjamin, and Bill Paredes-Holt. Connections: A Guide to Online Writing. Allyn & Bacon. 1997.
- Bonime, Andre and Ken C. Pohlmann. Writing for New Media: The Essential Guide to Writing for Interactive Media, CD-ROMs, and the Web. Wiley. 1997.
- The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2003
- Economist Publications. The Economist Style Guide: The Best-Selling Guide to English Usage. Economist Publications.
- Hale, Constance Ed. Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age. San Francisco: Hardwired. 1996.
- Kilian, Crawford. Writing for the Web. Self-Counsel Press. 2000
- Roget's II: The New Thesaurus, 3rd Ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 2003.
- Shertzer, Margaret. The Elements of Grammar. New York: Longman. 1996
- Strunk, William, Jr., E.B. White, and Roger Angell. The Elements of Style. 4th Ed. New York: Longman. 2000.

Websites

- Fowler, H. W. 1908. The King's English, 2nd ed.: http://www.bartleby.com/116/
- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: http://www.merriam-webster.com
- Jakob Nielsen's Usability Research on Web Writing: http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/
- Roget's Thesaurus: http://www.bartleby.com/110
- Visual Thesaurus: http://www.visualthesaurus.com
- Yahoo! Style Guide: http://styleguide.yahoo.com/writing

SapientNitro ©2012 SapientNitro Corporation