

# OIT Style Guide for Technical Documentation

This document contains guidelines for technical writers/content coordinators responsible for creating print and online documentation for OIT services.

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## HOW to USE

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- This is a working document. Feel free to make suggestions, add new entries, etc. Contact us at [wwwdev@oit.umass.edu](mailto:wwwdev@oit.umass.edu)
- This document covers only stylistic issues, such as word choices, and spelling and punctuation conventions, that are specific to OIT documentation. For other issues, including grammar, please see the table below.

**What**

OIT Proper Names (conventions)

Writing documentation

Style, grammar, naming in technical documentation

Grammar

**Where**

Talking About OIT

Writing OIT Technical Documentation

Microsoft Manual of Style

Chicago Manual of Style

Strunk and White's Elements of Style

- All documents associated with this style guide are also available online at <http://www.oit.umass.edu/about/site/index.html>

# A

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## acronyms & abbreviations

Acronyms and abbreviations must always be defined. Use an acronym/abbreviation first, then spell out the name in brackets. Define an acronym when it is first used, then use it liberally later.

*Correct:* Acronym + (name) SSH (Secure Shell)

*Incorrect:* name + (acronym) Secure Shell (SSH)

See also: **a, an** and **acronyms**

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## account

Capitalized when preceded by OIT; otherwise lowercase.

*Example:* OIT Account

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## a, an and acronyms

- Use **a** before acronyms whose pronunciation begins with a consonant sound regardless of their actual spelling.  
*Example:* a PDF, a URL
  - Use **an** before acronyms whose pronunciation begins with a vowel sound regardless of spelling.  
*Example:* an HTML file, an .iso file
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## ampersand (&)

Do not use **&** in text to mean **and** unless you are specifically referencing the symbol on an interface. The ampersand is also a special symbol in HTML that precedes a code name or number of a special character that a browser may not correctly display otherwise.

See also: **special characters**

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## Apple Menu

Capitalize both words. Refers to the menu identified by the Apple Computer logo. Use it with **the**.

*Example:* The Apple Menu

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## application

Use it as a synonym for **program**.

*Example:* Kazaa is a peer-to-peer application.

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## B

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<b>back up</b> (v) <b>backup</b> (n, adj)	Note the difference in spelling depending on use. Use <b>backup</b> (1 word) as a noun or adjective, and <b>back up</b> (2 words) as a transitive verb.  <i>Example:</i> Backup file Make sure you back up your data before starting the scan.
<b>bold</b> (adj)	Do <i>not</i> use as a verb or <b>bolded, boldface, boldfaced</b> .
<b>button</b>	Avoid using button in procedures, unless the button is a nameless icon (such as the <b>Lookup button</b> in SPIRE). Do not use the words <b>the</b> and <b>button</b> with a button name.  <i>Correct:</i> Click Cancel. <i>Incorrect:</i> Click the Cancel button.

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## C

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<b>Call Waiting</b>	Capitalize both words.
<b>check</b> (v, n, adj)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do not use as a verb when referring to a check box or radio button; use <b>select</b> or <b>clear</b> instead.</li><li>Do not use as a noun to mean <b>check mark</b>.</li><li>Okay to use as an adjective, as in <b>checked commands</b>. (We prefer, however, <b>selected commands</b>).</li></ul> <p>See also: <b>check box, select</b></p>
<b>check box</b> (n)	Two words.  <i>Correct:</i> Select/clear the Include check box. <i>Incorrect:</i> Turn on/turn off/ mark/unmark/check/uncheck the Include check box.  See also: <b>check, select</b>
<b>choose</b>	Use <b>click</b> and <b>double-click</b> instead of <b>choose</b> for buttons that carry out commands.  <i>Correct:</i> Click Continue. <i>Incorrect:</i> Choose the Continue button.  See also: <b>select</b>

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<b>click</b> (v)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use <b>click</b>, rather than <b>choose</b> or <b>select</b>, to refer to a choosing or selecting a command or option (with the exception of check boxes).</li> <li>If a user can set an option to use either a single click or a double-click, use the default mode when documenting a feature.</li> <li>Do not use <b>click on</b> or <b>click at</b>; <b>click in the window</b> is acceptable, however.</li> <li>It's okay to omit <b>click OK</b> at the end of a procedure if the interface makes it clear that clicking the button is necessary to complete the procedure.</li> </ul> <p>See also: <b>check, check box, select</b></p>
<b>client</b>	<p>Use <b>client</b> to refer to a computer or program, not a person. To refer to a member of the UMass community, use the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address the user(s) directly. <i>Example:</i> You'll need an OIT Account (your NetID and UMass password) to log in to computers in our classrooms.</li> <li>Identify the specific audience. <i>Example:</i> We anticipate that this service will make it much easier for students, faculty and staff to print from our classrooms.</li> <li>Use: <b>campus community, UMass community</b>. <i>Example:</i> Members of the UMass community will be able to use their UCards to pay for black-and-white printing on a per page basis.</li> </ul>
<b>close</b> (v)	Use <b>close</b> for windows, documents and dialog boxes. Use <b>quit</b> for programs.
<b>computer</b>	<p>Not <b>PC</b>. We occasionally use <b>machine</b> to avoid repetition.</p> <p><i>Correct:</i> Download the installer to your Windows computer.</p> <p><i>Incorrect:</i> Download the installer to your PC.</p>

## D

<b>database</b> (n, adj)	One word.
<b>delete</b> (v)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use <b>delete</b> to refer to the Delete command, and as an imperative in procedures.</li> <li>Do not use <b>cut</b> or <b>erase</b> as synonyms for delete.</li> </ul>
<b>deselect</b>	<p>Do not use; instead, use <b>cancel the selection</b> or, in the case of check boxes, use <b>clear</b>.</p> <p>See also: <b>check box</b></p>
<b>desktop</b>	One word.

<b>dial-up</b> (adj) <b>dial up</b> (v)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use <b>dial-up</b> as an adjective only, not as a verb or a noun. Always hyphenate.</li> <li>As an adjective, it refers to a service or a line, modem, or networking connection. Do not use as a noun (<b>a dial up</b>); it's ambiguous. <i>Correct:</i> Use our dial-up service if you are off-campus. <i>Incorrect:</i> Use our dial up service if you are off-campus. OIT offers multiple ways to connect to the campus network, including a dial up.</li> <li>Use <b>dial</b> as a verb to refer to placing a call or using a modem.</li> </ul>
<b>double-click</b> (v)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always hyphenate.</li> <li>Use instead of <b>select</b> and <b>choose</b> when referring to a mouse action.</li> <li>Do not use <b>double-click on</b>.</li> </ul> <p>See also: <b>click</b></p>
<b>drop-down</b> (adj)	Use to describe the type of item, as in <b>drop-down menu</b> , <b>drop-down list</b> . Always hyphenate.

## E

<b>email</b>	Do not hyphenate. Note the capitalization.
<b>end user</b> (n) <b>end-user</b> (adj)	Avoid. Use <b>user</b> or <b>you</b> (address the user directly) instead. See also: <b>client</b>
<b>enter</b> vs. <b>type</b> (v)	When prompting users to fill out a field, use <b>enter</b> instead of <b>type</b> . <i>Correct:</i> In the User Name field, enter your NetID (OIT Account user name). <i>Incorrect:</i> In the User Name field, type your NetID (OIT Account user name).
<b>Ethernet</b>	Always capitalize.
<b>Explorer</b>	Always use <b>Internet Explorer</b> ; do not shorten to <b>Explorer</b> . See also: <b>Software Names</b>

## G

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### graphic, graphics, graphical

- Use **graphic** (n.) to refer to pictures, images, or displays or to indicate “vivid” or “realistic” *Example:* graphic content.
  - Use **graphics** (adj.) to refer to software *Example:* graphics software such as Adobe Photoshop.
  - Use **graphical** (adj.) to indicate an environment *Example:* graphical interface.
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## H

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### highlight

Avoid using **highlight** in documentation. Use **select** instead.

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### hit

- Each file requested by a visitor on a Web site registers as a hit. There can be several hits on each page. While the volume of hits reflects the amount of server traffic, it is not an accurate reflection of the number of pages viewed.
- Do not use to refer to keystrokes. Use **press** instead.  
*Example:* Press ENTER

See also: **press**

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### home page

Two words.

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### host name

Two words.

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## I

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### Internet

Always capitalized.

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# L

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## links

- Spell out the URLs for all links to pages outside <http://www.oit.umass.edu>.  
*Correct:* Windows Update Web site  
<<http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com>>  
*Incorrect:* Windows Update
- Links to other pages on the OIT Web site do not need the URLs attached.
- When linking to **Supported Software & Downloads**, keep the names consistent:  
*Correct:* Supported Software & Downloads page for Windows  
Supported Software & Downloads page for Macintosh

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## login (n)

## log in (v)

## log on (v)

## logon (n)

- Two words as a verb, one word as a noun. No hyphenation in either case.
- Use **log in** when referring to access to all OIT services.  
*Example:* log in to UMail
- Exception: SPIRE  
*Example:* log on to SPIRE
- When in doubt, check the name of the login button. Remember to maintain the opposites, regardless of word choice: **log in – out; log on - off**  
*Correct:*  
Many users log in as 'Administrators' for every computer session.  
Use your current login (name) to access the system.  
You need a password to log on to SPIRE.  
The SPIRE logon fields are too narrow.

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## lower left (n)

## lower right (n)

Use instead of **bottom left** and **bottom right**. Hyphenate as adjectives: **lower-left** and **lower-right**.

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## lowercase

One word. No hyphenation.

Do not use **lowercased** or **lowercase** as a verb.

*Correct:*

You can quickly change the capitalization of all uppercase and lowercase letters.

Change all the uppercase letters to lowercase.

*Incorrect:*

You can quickly change the capitalization of all upper- and lowercase letters.

Lowercase all the capital letters.

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## M

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<b>Mailbox Menu</b>	Capitalize both words in the UMail for the Web documentation.
<b>markup</b>	One word <i>Example:</i> HTML markup
<b>more...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Used at the end of a news item; links to the complete content of the announcement.</li><li>▪ Note the capitalization and ellipsis.</li></ul>

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## N

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<b>naming conventions</b>	The guidelines below apply to document names and paths on the OIT Web site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>OS directory names:</b> mac9, macx, winxp, win2000, winme, win98</li><li>▪ <b>Application names:</b> operating system_applicationname (win_winscp, mac_jellyfish)</li><li>▪ <b>Paths:</b> service/function/directory (dialup/configuring/winxp, Ethernet/troubleshooting/win2000)</li></ul>
<b>NetID</b>	Replaces OIT Account user name. Use it with <b>OIT Account user name</b> in parentheses. <i>Correct:</i> Log in with your NetID (OIT Account user name)
<b>newsgroup</b>	One word.
<b>Note:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ We use <b>Note:</b> to highlight a particular aspect in a procedure.</li><li>▪ Always capitalized and bold, followed by colon. Same font as the text.</li></ul> <p><i>Correct:</i> Follow the prompts of McAfee setup. <b>Note:</b> If Setup detects a previous version of VirusScan, click Yes to uninstall it.</p>

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## O

<b>off-campus on campus</b>	Hyphenate <b>off-campus</b> , but not <b>on campus</b> .
<b>OIT Account</b>	Capitalize <b>Account</b> when preceded by OIT. See also: <b>NetID, account</b>
<b>online</b>	One word in all instances.
<b>on-screen</b> (adj)	Hyphenate as an adjective in all instances. Avoid using as an adverb; use <b>on the screen</b> instead.  <i>Correct:</i> Follow the on-screen instructions (adj). Follow the instructions that appear on the screen (adv.).
<b>opt-in</b> (v, adj)	Hyphenate even as a verb.

## P

<b>Pay-for-Print</b>	Capitalize both <b>Pay</b> and <b>Print</b> . Hyphenate.
<b>peer-to-peer p2p</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Refers to peer-to-peer applications such as LimeWire or Kazaa.</li><li>▪ Always hyphenate.</li><li>▪ Use the abbreviations <b>p2p</b>, if defined at the beginning of the document.</li></ul> See also: <b>acronyms &amp; abbreviations</b>
<b>prepositions (at, in on)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Use primarily <b>in</b>, and <b>at</b> or <b>on</b> to avoid repetition.</li><li>▪ Use <b>on</b> for screens and menus. Use <b>in</b> for windows, tables, fields. Use <b>at</b> to avoid repetition only.</li></ul> <i>Correct:</i> At the File > Open window, in the Files of Type field... In the VPN Client/Create New VPN Connection Entry window: on the Connection Entry: field...  In the window vs. on the screen
<b>press</b> (v)	Differentiate among the terms <b>press</b> , <b>type</b> , <b>enter</b> , and <b>use</b> . Use the following guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Use <b>press</b>, not <b>depress</b> or <b>type</b>, when pressing a key initiates an action within the program or moves the user's position within a document or worksheet <i>Example:</i> press ENTER or press N</li><li>▪ Use <b>use</b> in situations when <b>press</b> might be confusing, such as when referring to a type of key such as the arrow keys or function keys. In such cases, <i>press</i> might make users think they need to press all the keys simultaneously</li></ul>

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*Example* :use the arrow keys to move around the document

- Use **enter** to direct a user to type information that will appear on the screen

*Example:* enter your name

- Do not use **strike** or **hit**.
- Do not use **press** as a synonym for **click**.

*Correct:*

Type your name, and then press ENTER.

Press CTRL+F, and then type the text you want to search for.

To save your file, press Y.

To move the insertion point, use the arrow keys.

*Incorrect:*

To save your file, use CTRL+S.

Hit ENTER to begin a new paragraph.

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**print** (v)  
**printout** (adj)

Use **print** not **print out** as a verb. Use **printout** as a noun

*Example:* The printout was dirty

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## Q

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**quotation marks**

- Do not use quotation marks for commands and screen names. Use our font code instead.

*Correct:* In the File Download window, click **save**

*Incorrect:* In the “File Download” window, click “Save”

- Use quotation marks only to highlight a name, or action that would otherwise get ‘lost’ in the text.

*Correct:* “Pay-for-Print” is coming to OIT Computer Classrooms in mid-November.

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## R

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**right-click** (v)

- Acceptable to use, but define it first, if necessary.  
*Example:* Using the right mouse button (right-click)

- Always hyphenate.

See also: **click**, **double-click**

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## S

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<b>screen vs. window vs. tab</b>	We differentiate between screens, windows and tabs as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Use <b>window</b> when referring to a software application installed on a workstation (e.g., VirusScan, Virex, etc). <b>Example:</b> In window X</li><li>▪ Use <b>screen</b> when referring to an online application (e.g., SPIRE, WebCT). <b>Example:</b> On screen X</li><li>▪ Use <b>tab</b> to refer to the different portions of a window.</li></ul>															
<b>screenshot</b>	One word.															
<b>search box</b>	Two words.															
<b>select</b> (v)	Two uses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Highlighting a text (CTRL + A)</li><li>▪ Choosing a radio button, check box, etc.</li></ul>															
<b>setup</b> (n) <b>set up</b> (v)	Two words as a verb. <b>Example:</b> Set up the time in the Time window.  One word as a noun. <b>Example:</b> The setup was not completed correctly.															
<b>special characters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ HTML contains a set of special characters that precede the code name or number of a special character. For example, to show less-than (&lt;) and greater-than (&gt;) signs on a Web page you would use this HTML code: <code>&amp;#60;</code>; <code>&amp;#62;</code>;</li><li>▪ In XML, using various symbols such as &amp; will invalidate the file; use the following codes:<table><tr><td>And</td><td>&amp;</td><td>&amp;amp;</td></tr><tr><td>Apostrophe</td><td>'</td><td>&amp;apos;</td></tr><tr><td>Greater Than</td><td>&gt;</td><td>&amp;gt;</td></tr><tr><td>Less Than</td><td>&lt;</td><td>&amp;lt;</td></tr><tr><td>Quotation Mark</td><td>"</td><td>&amp;quot;</td></tr></table></li><li>▪ XMLSPY lists these codes under its Entities panel (right-hand side of the screen). If the panel does not automatically appear, go to Window &gt; Entry Helpers to open it.</li></ul>	And	&	&amp;	Apostrophe	'	&apos;	Greater Than	>	&gt;	Less Than	<	&lt;	Quotation Mark	"	&quot;
And	&	&amp;														
Apostrophe	'	&apos;														
Greater Than	>	&gt;														
Less Than	<	&lt;														
Quotation Mark	"	&quot;														
<b>SPIRE ID</b>	Not <b>Peoplesoft ID</b> , <b>SIS ID</b> , etc.															
<b>software names</b>	Three rules of thumb: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Use the full name (Manufacturer + Name + Version Number, e.g., Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004) in the beginning of any document. In subsequent instances, use the name only (e.g., Dreamweaver)</li><li>▪ Remember to use the version number if OIT supports multiple versions of the same program.</li><li>▪ For common Microsoft products, you can drop the manufacturer name (e.g., Internet Explorer rather than Microsoft Internet</li></ul>															

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	Explorer).
<b>style sheet</b>	Two words.

## T

<b>text box</b>	Two words.
<b>troubleshoot</b> (v)	One word in both cases.
<b>troubleshooting</b> (n)	

## U

<b>UMass Amherst</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Per university guidelines, UMass (without Amherst) cannot be used to refer to the Amherst campus. The two acceptable names are: <b>UMass Amherst</b> and <b>University of Massachusetts Amherst</b>.</li> <li>▪ <b>Campus</b> can be used to refer to UMass Amherst. <b>University</b> refers to the UMass university system.</li> <li>▪ We have used, however, <i>members of the University community</i> to refer to the students, faculty and staff at UMass Amherst.</li> </ul> <p>See also <a href="http://www.umass.edu/umhome/identity/talking.html">www.umass.edu/umhome/identity/talking.html</a></p>
<b>user name</b>	Two words.

## V

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<b>video-conference</b>	Hyphenate.
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## W

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<b>Web, Web site</b>	Always capitalize <b>Web</b> . Two words for Web site.
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<b>window</b>	See also: screen vs. window vs. tab
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<b>Windows Me</b>	Note the abbreviation and capitalization.
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