Style Guide

1. Purpose of this style guide

This style guide is intended to facilitate the most uniform linguistic presentation of German texts and to serve as an aid for basic questions regarding grammar, punctuation, number formats, etc. It does not replace a tone-of-voice document or corporate identity guidelines. Project-specific instructions always take precedence over the definitions in the style guide.

If you have questions or suggestions, please e-mail me at guido@amanuensis.de or call me at +49 5721 99 53 447.

2. General style guidelines

Each text (whether native or translation) should present a harmonious overall picture. The target audience should feel at home when reading or listening to the text and in no way feel overwhelmed. This also means that a text aimed at a specialist audience is sometimes very different from a text aimed at the general public.

Inclusive Language

Modern language is not exclusionary. However, excessive gendering in the form of double salutations, asterisks or by other means is not very conducive to reading flow. Depending on the type of text and the client, it is advisable to alternate between the German genders and, for example, to mention the female colleague (Kollegin) one time and the male colleague (Kollege) another time. If there is a gender-neutral term that does not appear artificial in the context, this term should be preferred. Examples include *Belegschaft, Team, Führungskraft* instead of *Mitarbeiter, Mannschaft* or *Manager.*

In Germany, as of 2020/2021, if we describe certain groups of people of a different skin color, the consensus is to no longer use skin color as an adjective, but as part of the noun: *die Schwarzen Sportler.* Consideration should always be given to whether it is necessary for the text to mention origin or skin color.

Idiomatic expression

A text should not sound like a translation, but should ideally read as if a person who grew up speaking the native language wrote it. Language is subject to continuous change. Even Goethe would not write like Goethe today.

The stiff and formal style of the so-called *Beamtendeutsch* (civil servant German) no longer has a place in the written language today.

Consistency

Identical concepts, technologies, etc. should also have consistent designations. However, the target audience must not be bored by constantly repeating the same term in several consecutive sentences. This rule is not intended to prohibit synonyms. As with any good rule, it is a guideline and there are often good reasons to break it.

Conciseness

Hardly anyone likes nested sentences. Therefore, it is important to write short and crisp. But also no staccato, no machine-gun salvos, because variety creates attention and ensures a pleasant reading flow.

Form of address

It must be appropriate for the target group. Whether *Sie, Du* or *du*—everything is possible, as long as it is agreed with the client. Without further instructions, the formal "Sie" is used.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations are only good if they make reading easier. While practically everyone probably knows what the abbreviations *usw.* (etc.) and *bzw.* (or) mean, GNSS, GOB, GIS and many more are not necessarily self-explanatory. So if the target audience is not only professionals, readers will be happy to have an explanation. Optimally in this form:

> Ohne GNSS (*Global Navigation Satellite Systems,* globale Navigationssatellitensysteme) käme die moderne Welt aus dem Tritt. Satellitensignale sorgen dafür, dass wir uns von Navigationssystemen ans Ziel führen lassen können, dass Geldautomaten Abhebungen korrekt buchen, dass auf Baustellen alles rund läuft und dass Flugzeuge die Position aller anderen Flugzeuge in einer Region kennen.

By the way: When an acronym or abbreviation is pronounced as a word, it is also spelled like a proper noun in German (with uppercase and lowercase letters). Continuous capitalization is used when each letter is pronounced separately. *Radar* and *Laser* are classic examples, but so is the Russian GNSS *Glonass* (opposed to the American satellite system GPS). As always, exceptions prove the rule.

Slang, (pop) culture

The phrase *Alle Eier in einen Korb legen* (putting all your eggs in one basket) is probably only understood by people who have a lot to do with English compatriots. Germans would rather *Alles auf eine Karte setzen* (betting everything on one card). When a lyric refers to *Toto* or the *Tin Man,* all of America knows it's about the Wizard of Oz. You cannot always expect a German readership to come to the same conclusion.

Slang, jokes, and innuendo should be avoided.

3. Punctuation

Quotation marks

The German quotation marks are „ and ". Where they cannot be found on a keyboard, the key combinations are Alt + 0132 or Alt + 0147 (using the numeric keypad to enter the digits while holding down the Alt key).

Apostrophe

The apostrophe is not one of the characters ´, ` or ', but only ' (Alt + 0146). It is rarely used in German.

Hyphens, dash

Short hyphens (-) connect several words to a new word, for example *Albert-Einstein-Gymnasium,* but also *Microsoft-Word-Dokument.* According to the German Duden, a trademark or a proper name is no reason to do without this so-called hyphenation (example: *Deutsche-Bank-Berater* are consultants of Deutsche Bank, while *Deutsche Bank-Berater* are German consultants of a bank or sales people for benches). Even the "Würfel Zucker" (*Würfelzucker* = cube of sugar) found in the groceries department store actually represents a request made to the sugar to roll a die (although, strictly speaking, a comma is missing).

Hyphens also stand for parts of speech in enumerations: *Hand- und Badetücher* (small and large towels).

If the first part of a compound word is omitted, care should be taken to use a non-breaking hyphen: *Selbermacher and -bauer.*

Hyphens also couple foreign words with German words: *Due-Diligence-Projekt.* In addition, they bring clarity to very long compounds. In general, it is recommended to use a hyphen for more than three components for better readability: *Großraumtaxiwaschanlage* is harder to read than *Großraumtaxi-Waschanlage.* The *Fugen-s* usually is not be combined with a hyphen (exception in compounds with foreign words).

Finally, the hyphen serves as a separator when a word is wrapped on a line break. The rule here is to separate words sensibly, i. e. "Lautstärke- regler" rather than "Laut- stärkeregler" or even "Lautstärkereg- ler."

The longer n-dash (–, Alt + 0150) is referred to as *Gedanken-, Bis-* or *Streckenstrich.* When used as a *Gedankenstrich* it marks an insertion and is stronger than a comma, but weaker than a semicolon. It can often be replaced by a parenthesis in these cases. It is recommended to place a protected space (Alt + 0160) in front of the dash (or, for pairs, after the first and in front of the second dash), so that the dash does not slip to the beginning of the next line and is inadvertently interpreted as a bullet. Used as a *Bis-Strich* it separates two values: *10–15 Grad* (according to Duden without a space before and after the dash, according to DIN 5008 with a narrow, non-breaking space before and after the dash). If used as a *Streckenstrich* marking distances between places, you never add spaces (*Strecke Hamburg–Kiel*).

Spaces

In German, only one space is placed between sentences. In certain cases, non-breaking spaces are used, so that the words/elements are not wrapped before and after the space.

There is always a space between a number and a unit of measurement (non-breaking or narrow space). This also applies to the percentage symbol.

Operators

The most harmless mathematical operator is the plus sign (+). A hyphen or dash is often mistakenly used as a minus sign (–). Asterisk (*) and slash (/) are often used for multiplication and division symbols. However, × (Alt + 158) and ÷ (Alt + 0247) are better because they avoid confusion.

Formulas should be placed in one line if possible. For this purpose, it is recommended to use non-breaking spaces before and, if necessary, also after the operators and numbers.

Note: ± (Alt + 0177) can be a calculation instruction (10 ± 5 = 15 or 5), but also a tolerance (10 meters ±2 cm). In the latter case, no space is placed between the plus-minus symbol and the number.

Numbers, currency, date, time, telephone numbers

Numbers from one to twelve are usually written out, number from 13 on in digits. For mixed forms (10–20 people), it is recommended to use numerals for a better overview. In tables, only digits are usually used.

In Germany, a decimal point is used (12,50 Euro, 2,3 million units). In tables and financial texts, the dot is used as the thousands separator (50.000 USD). In continuous texts, a space can be used instead for numbers that are not currencies (… 30 000 years ago …). Depending on the customer, the thousands separator should already be used for numbers above 999 or only from 10.000.

In continuous text, currency names should be written out, in tables etc. the symbols should be placed after or the ISO codes should be placed in front of the amount. According to the Duden, most currencies do not have a genitive s (*des Dollar, des Euro*), but there are a few exceptions (*des Frankens, des Pfunds*). In numerical values with currency specifications, a dot should always be used as the thousands separator (even between 1.000 and 9.999).

Dates should be written either in the format YYYY-MM-DD (2021-07-17) or with the name of the month written out: 17. Juli 2021.

Times are written with a colon in 24-hour format: 9:15 Uhr (AM), 21:15 Uhr (PM).

For telephone numbers, it is recommended to prefix the country code: +49 for Germany, +1 for the US, +44 for the UK etc.

4. Grammar, spelling, syntax

Duden

Basically, Duden (the German variant of Merriam-Webster) is to be followed. If there are several variants, the recommended spelling shown in Duden with a yellow background should be preferred.

Active or passive voice

Man nehme drei Eier und eine Prise Salz. This passive voice is still common in cookbooks, but also in workshop manuals. Its advantage is that facts can be written concisely and precisely. However, such texts sound rather ponderous and can sometimes be difficult to understand due to too many nouns.

Active voice sounds livelier and fresher, but also leads more often to subordinate clauses.

Headings

In the past, headings were often written in nominal style (*Anlegen von Projekten*), but today the verbal style is becoming more and more common (*Projekte anlegen*). However you like it: Consistency is key.

Lists, enumerations

Mind the following: If the list continues an introductory sentence, list items are lowercase and punctuated. Otherwise, each list item begins with a capital letter and ends without punctuation unless it is a complete sentence. Two examples:

Satellitensignale sorgen dafür:

- dass wir uns von Navigationssystemen ans Ziel führen lassen können,
- dass Geldautomaten Abhebungen korrekt buchen,
- dass auf Baustellen alles rund läuft und
- dass Flugzeuge die Position aller anderen Flugzeuge in einer Region kennen.

Satellitensignale werden für unterschiedliche Zwecke genutzt:

- Zielführung mit Navigationssystemen
- Korrekte Buchungen von Geldautomaten
- Baustellenmanagement
- Kollisionskontrolle im Flugverkehr

5. Miscellaneous

Formatting

Formatting such as boldface, italics, underlining should be used judiciously. According to typographical rules in German, a following punctuation mark always shares the markup of the preceding text:

> **Satellitensignale:** Von Navigationssatelliten übermittelte Funkwellen.

> Die Messwerte einer Totalstation sind *Strecke, Horizontalwinkel* und *Vertikalwinkel.*

While it is difficult to notice, the colon is bold and the full stop in the second example is italic.

Exception: For e-mail addresses and web links, any closing period or comma should not be underlined so that it is not interpreted as part of the address.

Menu and command names

Commands and menu names should be highlighted consistently, such as in boldface. If a translation is involved, check whether the software is available in a target language version. If this is not the case or if the respective equivalents are not known, the command name must be used in the source language and ideally supplemented with a translation in brackets at each occurrence:

> Klicken Sie im Menü **Postprocessing (Auswertung)** auf den Eintrag **Least Squares Adjustment (Ausgleichung nach der Methode der kleinsten Quadrate).**

Superlatives and guarantees

German regulators, but especially competitors, do not like it at all when unsubstantiated superlatives are used or other guarantees are made for which there is no evidence. Customer expectations can also be falsely stoked in this way.

Trademarks

The term "Warenzeichen" is obsolete and has been replaced by "Marke."

Some standard texts regarding trademarks and copyright:

English	German
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* The definite article "die" is used for companies (Inc., Corporation, Ltd, GmbH, AG, etc.). Otherwise, "von" is used.

Dos and Don'ts

In the German language, inanimate objects do not act. In general, the computer does not calculate, but people can calculate with the software. Documents do not show, but they contain explanations or are used to explain something.

In contrast, "anzeigen" is rarely correct for something people do (unless they report to the police or use the car indicator). Instead, they "lassen anzeigen." Often, the German "betrachten" or "informieren" is meant, when "anzeigen" ist used.

Generally, the subject should follow a descriptor, i.e., "die Schaltfläche **Weiter**" instead of "die **Weiter-Schaltfläche**."

References to books, articles, etc. that are in a foreign language should be given with the original title, a translation in parentheses, and the words "in englischer Sprache."

> Die Mathematik dahinter wird in englischer Sprache im Artikel „Performing a Least Squares Adjustment" (Ausgleichung nach der Methode der kleinsten Quadrate durchführen) erläutert.