



WHAT ARE TRANSLATOR STYLE GUIDES? WHY SHOULD WE HAVE THEM?

Like a corporate style guide for content creation, a translator's style guide defines the grammar, syntax, and tone translators should use to convey a company's brand and desired end-user experience to the target audience.

It is likely that your company has a style guide for creating content. It probably defines the conventions that writers should use to ensure they accurately convey brand image and desired user experience.

However, it is just as important to define the style to be used in translated versions of the content.

Commonly, content is checked by companies' in-country employees, either as a formal process after translation or in an ad hoc manner after content is published. In both cases, problems with the translation are noticed at a very late stage, making it more difficult and expensive to correct them.

Another issue that often comes up in this type of "review" is that most people tend to make changes according to personal preference: it just sounds better when it's written a certain way. But, when translations are reviewed, it is important that clear quality and style guidelines are followed.

By implementing translator style guides, you can proactively outline the expected style and tone for translated material. This allows translators to know up front what conventions they should use. Your reviewers can also use the style guide to understand what they should be judging against when reviewing content, which will make them less likely to request changes according to personal preference. And, you can save precious time and effort at the critical end of your publishing cycle, and reduce costs.

How it Works

Translator style guides are market-specific, so you should have as many style guides as you have markets. They can be written either in English with target-language examples, or fully in the target language.

If you have personnel in your target markets, and especially if these personnel review material before it's published, you should have them participate in creating the guides. It might be challenging for them to find the time to do this, so anything you can do to make the process simpler will be appreciated.

- ➔ You could give each reviewer a checklist where they indicate their style preferences, then use those to create a formal guide, or have your language service provider (LSP) create it.
- ➔ You could create a guide for one market, have the reviewers in your other markets comment on that, and then use their notes to make a guide for their markets.

When the guides are ready, you should give them to your LSP for distribution to translators, who will use them in doing their translations.

When the translations are reviewed, the in-country reviewers will use the guides to specifically define what they are checking in the translations. This gives them a baseline for translation quality.

What's in a Translator Style Guide?

Information about target audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will be the main users or readers of the material (for example: network administrators, HR staffs, home users)? • What level of education does the end user have? • How technical/savvy is the end user about the topic?
Tone of voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should a personal or formal tone be used in translations? (Example for German: should the translator address the reader as 'Du' or 'Sie'?) • Content is often written in the active voice. Should that be done in the translations too, or should it be changed to passive voice? Should translations be so informal that even slang words are allowed?
Wording/writing style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are sentence fragments allowed? • Should technical terms be used or should it be simplified? • How much detail should be provided? • Should the translation be as close to the original text as possible? Or can the translator be creative and paraphrase source text?
Key terms (if your company doesn't have a separate glossary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List the key terms used in the product and the preferred translation for them

Benefits

Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your brand image is intact in all markets Your content is consistent throughout → reading is easier Key terms and concepts are always translated in the same way
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You avoid delays in publishing You avoid late-in-process corrections that are often more expensive You can reduce the need to have in-country reviews of content Improved consistency means that translations are more efficient, TM leverage is higher, and your publishing cycle is quicker
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Style conventions are agreed on early in the process → smoother review cycles, fewer comments near the end of the cycle

Example

Real scenario: Your web pages for a new product have been localized for five markets and you send them to your in-country organizations to do a final check before sales launch. Reports come back from two different markets claiming there are serious mistakes in the translations and the content is not publishable. Your deadline for making the web pages live is very soon so you have to quickly figure out the exact cause of the claims and get corrections made.

When you talk to the in-country people again, you find out that many of the “mistakes” they found were simply things they would have worded differently. A few issues were true errors. Your company decided to have the items translated in a certain way, but did not make this entirely clear to the translator as there was no style guide provided.

You put through a rush order to your LSP to make corrections, paying a premium to get the corrections back for the deadline.

Best Practice scenario: Before starting this localization project, you have style guides made for each target market. These are adhered to in translation and in the review. As a result, the reviews are given a passing report from all markets, your pages are published on schedule and at cost, and the product is launched as planned.

What you Should Know

1. Style guides are a small investment with a large return. They typically take 8-10 hours to create and can save countless corrections of errors in tone, syntax, and style.
2. Guidelines allow translators to develop your material with the right tone for your target market.
3. Style guides are owned by your company and can often be stored within your translation system.

About Lionbridge

Lionbridge (Nasdaq: LIOX) is the leading provider of translation, localization, and testing services. Organizations in all industries rely on Lionbridge language and testing services to increase international market share, speed adoption of products and content, and ensure the integrity of their global brands. Based in Waltham, Mass., Lionbridge operates across 26 countries, and provides services under the Lionbridge and VeriTest® brands.

Corporate Headquarters

Lionbridge
1050 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451
USA

www.lionbridge.com

Contact us: marketing@lionbridge.com