

# Lists & Tables Guide

In your pursuit of making your content more concise and easier to read and understand, reshaping portions of your text into lists or tables helps shorten and clarify complex and dense material. Lists and tables are a good idea for any content topic, but they are especially necessary if your subject matter is impacted by elaborate processes, complicated steps, and/or large amounts of numbers and percentages.

## Difference Between Lists and Tables

- Lists help users focus on important material.
- Tables help users more easily understand complex material.

## Lists

Lists outline a series of steps, requirements, components, or pieces of information in a concise and visually clear way that makes it easy for readers to scan and skim. Lists accomplish the following:

- Simplify complex text
- Highlight levels of importance
- Convey the order of steps in a process
- Identify all steps in a process
- Add white space for easy reading
- Clearly present items, conditions, and exceptions

## Lists Best Practices

### Do not overuse lists.

- Only use lists for important information.

### Use numbered lists when outlining steps in a process or for sequential or prioritized items.

- When using a numbered list, start the list items with an imperative verb, like “open,” “start,” “download,” or “login.”

### Use bulleted lists for information that shares a common theme or idea but does not need to appear in a specific order.

### Use only simple round or square bullet points to avoid distracting or confusing the reader.

- Creative or unusual shapes may not display correctly on all devices and platforms and may reduce accessibility for some users.

### Ensure the purpose of your lists is clear by including a heading, lead-in sentence, or a sentence fragment that ends with a colon.

### Use a parallel list structure with your lists.

- Aim to make each list item a complete sentence when combined with your lead-in sentence.

### End list items with a period if it forms a complete sentence on its own or when combined with your lead-in.

- It is not grammatically incorrect to use commas, semi-colons, or the words “and” or “or,” but avoid their usage in lists because it can cause confusion and distraction for the reader.

### Start each list item with a capital letter unless there's a spelling reason to keep lowercase.

### Use no more than two or three levels in your lists.

- If you need more levels than that, divide your text into more parts.

### Avoid using directional words, like “below,” “above,” or “above mentioned” to reduce confusion of exactly what content to which you're referring.

- If your list lead-in doesn't make it entirely clear, use “the following” with a colon.

### Always left-justify lists – never center or right-justify.

## ✘ Before

Congress appointed a committee to write the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The committee was made up of Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston, and John Adams.

## ✔ After

In 1776, Congress appointed a committee of the following people to write the Declaration of Independence:

- Thomas Jefferson
- Roger Sherman
- Benjamin Franklin
- Robert R. Livingston
- John Adams

## Tables

Tables shorten and clarify complex material by helping readers see relationships that can be obscured by complex, dense text. Tables apply a clear structure of columns and rows that allow readers to more easily find the information relevant to them without having to sift through content and/or data that don't apply to them. Tables accomplish the following:

- Simplify and organize complex text, data, and values
- Highlight applicable information
- Increase the findability of relevant information
- Identify information and data relationships
- Add white space for easy reading

## Tables Best Practices

### Do not overuse tables.

- Only use tables for information complicated by textual explanations.

### Make sure you're a table for information that is arranged in two or more rows and two or more columns.

### Include a table title and/or a brief introduction to make sure the purpose of your table is clear.

- Avoid using a colon. Instead, use a complete sentence that ends with a period.

### Use parallel structure with your tables.

### Place information that identifies the contents of a row in the leftmost column.

### Include a header row to help identify information in columns.

- Distinguish header row text by making the font size larger, bold, and/or a different color in text or cell fill.
- Make sure the header row is always visible, especially in a long table. If possible, use a fixed header row that stays in place during scrolling. If your platform does not allow for a fixed header row, repeat the header row where appropriate.

### Avoid putting too much text in a table cell.

- If it's more than two to three sentences, consider shortening the information or presenting it in a different format.

### Use "Not Applicable," "N/A," or "None" if there's no information for a cell.

- Don't leave a cell blank or use a dash/hyphen.

### Use periods and other punctuation in text entries only if it's a complete sentence or its meaning would change without it.

### Start each table entry with a capital letter unless there's a spelling reason to keep it lowercase.

### Balance row height.

- Increase the width of text-heavy columns and reduce the width of columns with minimal text.

### Consider the responsiveness of your table design, especially if it has many rows and columns.

- Test how it appears on different devices and platforms before going live with it.

## ✘ Before

The Declaration of Independence was a statement adopted by the Continental Congress in 1776 declaring independence from the British Empire. In 1791, the Bill of Rights was created. This document consisted of the first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing rights and freedoms. A document written during the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 outlined the rights that American women should be entitled to as citizens. The Emancipation Proclamation, created in 1863, was an executive order granting freedom to slaves in designated southern states.

## ✔ After

Document title	Description	Year
Declaration of Independence	Statement adopted by the Continental Congress declaring independence from the British Empire.	1776
Bill of Rights	The first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing rights and freedoms.	1791
Declaration of Sentiments	A document written during the Seneca Falls Convention outlining the rights that American women should be entitled to as citizens.	1848
Emancipation Proclamation	An executive order granting freedom to slaves in designated southern states.	1863