The IBM Style Guide

Conventions for Writers and Editors

Francis DeRespinis · Peter Hayward

Jana Jenkins · Amy Laird

Leslie McDonald · Eric Radzinski

Foreword by JoAnn Hackos, PhD

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Contents

Chapter 3   Formatting and organization   73

Foreword

Why do we communicators become so attached to our style guides? We believe they are necessary to promote consistency, especially at a time when we hope to use topic-based content in numerous scenarios to improve our customers' experience. If the topics we write are not consistently presented, they will not fit together easily. If they are consistently presented, they will seem to speak with the same voice even though they are written by many individuals.

However, a style guide appears to have a power and influence beyond a simple desire for consistency. It seems to represent what we value about the art of technical writing at a time when we continue to widen the scope of whomever we call a technical communicator.

On the bright side, a well-informed style guide that represents a set of writing rules helps inform our discussions with people in the wide-ranging enterprise community. We want to encourage contributions to a body of useful information from people who are typically not well versed in the standards of writing for publication. Likely, many of the rules and recommendations that we record in our style guides are unknown among a general, albeit college-educated audience. For example, if our enterprise audience members use commas, they do so by hunch rather than by punctuation rules.

The requirement that we work across the enterprise with content contributors means that we will work with people who vaguely remember punctuation and grammar (even spelling) from elementary school. We no longer call it grammar school, which I almost wrote in the previous sentence, for good reason. There isn't much focus anymore on "grammar."

Having a style guide in our back pockets as editors and reviewers means that we needn't face arguments over writing style based on the strength of opinion. I recall some years ago being asked to work with a corporate attorney who was a very poor writer. The request came from the CEO for whom the attorney worked. When I entered the attorney's office, the air bristled with tension around the coming battle. Luckily, when I pointed out that there were basic rules concerning punctuation and grammar and spoke about them in an objective manner, I won over the attorney. He welcomed advice that did not appear to him to be a matter of personal opinion.

A well-organized style guide can provide guidelines for new Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) authors as they make the transition from desktop publishing to structured XML. A DITA style guide, something I recommend to all the teams I coach, includes information about the proper use of XML elements. For example, I urge writers to use titles for the sections they build in concept information types. Although DITA allows writers to begin a section with a paragraph and no title, a best practice is to include titles with every section. Section titles provide a way to divide a concept topic into well-structured parts.

Style guides that include authoring guidelines for the correct application of DITA elements help build consistency in authoring that facilitates the use of topics in multiple contexts.

On the dark side, style guides can become battlegrounds in organizations that use the rules as a club to block innovation and experimentation. It is critical that the writers, information architects, and editors responsible for maintaining a style guide be responsive to changing practices. When a style guide grows with the author and user communities, it remains a vital resource.

I find style guides to be invaluable and often quite fascinating. Making *The IBM Style Guide* available to the author community is long overdue. We need the kind of guidance and example that a world-class style guide like this one seeks to provide. We face the challenges of a global authoring community with many levels of experience and education in the field of information development. All of those in the community need the advice that a changing and growing style guide provides.

The wealth of standards and examples in *The IBM Style Guide* has been developed over two decades and represents the experience and good judgment of the IBM information-development community. The council responsible for *The IBM Style Guide* meets regularly to update the information and consider new proposals from information developers throughout IBM's global organization.

I especially like the combination of correct and incorrect examples. It's challenging to discover interesting new practices, especially those that clearly support DITA. It should make the lives of many editors now working in the DITA environment significantly easier. Authors will find first-rate advice on writing usable procedures or creating tables that make the readers' life easier. Editors and authors will find fascinating tidbits in the comprehensive section on word usage. It is simply fun to read the examples of what is preferred and what "not to use."

So, let's celebrate style guides that help us resolve arguments and support our need to create readable, usable, and minimalist information. Let's celebrate style guides that help us to recognize that there are some standards for grammar, punctuation, and spelling that we should not forget at a time when instant messages and tweets appear to be taking over the world. Let's celebrate style guides when they continue to change with the times.

I congratulate the IBM team that has put together a genuinely helpful and thoughtful volume. I trust that the wider community of information developers will welcome this addition to our resources and profit from the advice.

JoAnn Hackos, PhD
President
Comtech Services, Inc

About this publication

For more than 20 years, the IBM Style and Word Usage Council has been an influential and integral part of the IBM community. Consisting of highly experienced editors from across IBM, this volunteer team is dedicated to supporting their colleagues in creating and producing the highest quality information possible for IBM clients around the world. The council is responsible for managing the IBM Style and Word Usage guidelines.

The IBM Style guidelines define the corporate style, demonstrate good writing practices, and ensure a consistent voice and tone for all external IBM information. The Word Usage guidelines provide advice on preferred spellings, potential ambiguities, and terms for writers to avoid so that information is clear and consistent. These guidelines do not attempt to teach basic grammar and writing principles. The council references *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* and *The Chicago Manual of Style* as resources for more exhaustive guidance.

The council meets on a weekly basis to evaluate style and word usage suggestions from worldwide colleagues, watch industry directions and developments, and discuss findings from their respective teams.

Over the years, the names on the council have changed, but the passion and respect for the work has not. This book represents many years of work by many dedicated volunteers, and we are excited to share this work with a larger audience. Over the years, at conferences and other industry venues, requests have been made to access the IBM Style guidelines, but for various reasons, these requests could not be fulfilled until now. On behalf of the council, we are pleased to share this information and hope that it provides the basis for your company or personal writing guidelines and acts as an inspiration to create quality information for any audience.

Francis, Peter, Jana, Amy, Leslie, and Eric

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to our colleagues and to our families who supported us as we worked on this book. With a project this size, you need some understanding from your family as you work late nights and some patience from your colleagues as they wait for you to grab another cup of coffee on the mornings following those late nights.

We of course want to express our sincere appreciation to our colleagues on the IBM Style and Word Usage Council for their contributions. The council members provided tremendous support of our efforts to pull this book together and did not complain when we asked them to attend additional reconciliation meetings and answer numerous questions as we took over meeting agendas. In addition to the book authors, the current council roster includes the following people:

- Phil Appleby, chair for many years and current co-chair
- Ida Audeh
- Kathleen Callaway
- Simcha Gralla
- Kathy Hancock
- Dave Harlan
- Ann Harris
- Cathy Johnson
- Larry Morlan
- Jenifer Servais
- Aimee Tabor

We are very grateful to Neil Dewhurst of the Hursley iBuild team for setting up a DITA build for us. We are also very grateful to our fellow writer of this book, Peter Hayward, whose DITA skills and assistance made our production work that much easier for all of us.

We want to thank Steve Hughes for designing the graphics and working with Peter Hayward, who made the screen captures.

We want to thank Michelle Carey for her contribution to the messages topic, Carla Quinn for her contribution to the glossaries topic, and Ronnie Seagren for her contribution to the indexing topics.

We also want to thank and acknowledge all the talented editors who have been part of the council through the years, including Elizabeth Wilde, the founding chair, for their contributions and caretaking of the guidelines.

Finally, we want to thank those throughout the worldwide IBM community whose comments and suggestions over the years have helped keep the IBM Style and Word Usage guidelines in step with the ever-evolving discipline of technical writing.

About the authors

Francis DeRespinis

After receiving his Master of Arts in Teaching from Harvard University, Fran embarked on a career in public school education in the Hudson Valley of New York. Eight years later and after one final cold and much too snowy winter, he fled to sunny South Florida where he began his career with IBM as the first Entry Systems Division production control specialist for the IBM Personal Computer products. Fran moved on to become a developer and writer of in-store IBM PC training materials for retail sales, a software division liaison for compatibility testing and software application development, a software product planner, and finally, in 1984, he began his current work as a technical editor for software products in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Fran edits Service Availability and Performance Management software documentation and is a co-chair of the IBM Style and Word Usage Council. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife, Tricia, their two dogs, and a house full of good books.

Peter Hayward

Having gained a PhD from the University of London, Peter's early career was in academic research, observing the life of plants. That was followed by some years in the book trade, both retail and wholesale. He joined IBM 15 years ago on a European-funded project to create a system for searching large databases of images, using image content as well as image metadata. He moved into software development and then to information development, and now works as an editor in the IBM Hursley Laboratory in England. From writing research papers and helping to copy edit a scientific journal, to editing books and catalogs, and now writing and editing technical documentation, the business of stringing words together has always played a part in Peter's career.

Peter lives with his wife, Sandra, near Winchester in Hampshire. His three sons have long since fled the familial abode. When not at work, he prefers to abandon the computer in favor of Victorian technology and the smell of hot steam oil; that is, playing with model steam trains in the back garden. He also finds time to be a Methodist local preacher and for walking in the local countryside and more distant mountains.

Jana Jenkins

Jana joined IBM in 1983 and is currently Manager, World Wide Information Development and Content Community. As a manager on the Corporate User Technologies team, Jana is responsible for leading IBM's Information Development community, overseeing communication, delivery, and implementation of strategies, standards, and best practices. She also chairs the Total Information Experience Quality Governance Board, an enterprise-level board composed of content experts from across the business units, with the mission to improve and support client information quality. Jana has held several positions during her tenure with IBM, including instructor, technical writer, technical editor, and manager. She is recognized within the company as a Corporate Master Inventor. She is currently Chair of the Interface Technologies Invention Development Team. She promotes creative problem solving and innovation throughout the company and mentors new inventors as they consider the possibilities.

Jana has a BA in Advertising Design from the State College of New Jersey and an MBA from Pace University. She lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with her husband, David, son, Tyler, and daughter, Lindsay.

Amy Laird

Amy joined IBM in 2003 and is a technical editor of user assistance for model-driven development software. She is the team lead for a group of editors and is an advocate of plain language and minimalism. Amy has a background in writing, marketing, and publishing. She has edited several books and she created the corporate style guide at another global company.

Amy has a BA in English Literature from the University of Toronto, an MA in Language and Professional Writing from the University of Waterloo, a post-graduate certificate in Book and Magazine Publishing from Centennial College, and is a Certified Proofreader with the Editors' Association of Canada. She lives in her hometown, Ottawa, Ontario, with her partner, Pete.

Leslie McDonald

Leslie has worked in a wide range of roles and areas since joining IBM in 1983. She began her career by working on IBM internal business applications as a programmer, tester, and application support team lead. In the early 1990s, she moved into software product development in the IBM Canada Lab. She worked mostly on compilers, first as a test team lead and then as a development coordinator, before turning her attention to technical writing. Later, Leslie spent five years in IBM Global Services, mostly as a writer, particularly in the sales support area. In 2005, Leslie moved back to the IBM Canada Lab as a DB2 editor.

Leslie has a BA in Economics and Economic History from the University of Toronto and a Certificate in Technical and Professional Writing from York University. She lives in Toronto with her husband, Richard (a fellow IBM employee), and cats.

Eric Radzinski

Eric joined IBM in 1996 as a technical writer documenting heterogeneous data access technologies. After spending six years as a writer, team lead, part-time editor, and part-time QA engineer, Eric transitioned into a full-time editing assignment. For the past nine years, Eric has been the editor and information architect for the IBM DB2 and IMS Tools portfolio, which consists of well over 100 individual products developed on four continents by culturally diverse teams that include both IBMers and IBM business partners. He has been a member of the IBM Style and Word Usage Council since 2002.

Eric received a BA in English with a focus on technical writing from San Jose State University in 1993. He lives in San Jose, California, with his wife, Tina, and their three children: Jacob, Joshua, and Chloe.

Writing for diverse audiences

Apply the following guidelines to make information clear and accessible to everyone.

Accessibility

Accessibility is the successful access to information technology and its supporting documentation by people who have disabilities, such as people with visual impairments and people who cannot use a traditional keyboard. When you design or modify information to allow access by the greatest number of people, you make it accessible.

The following accessibility guidelines are based on the US Standards for Electronic and Information Technology, developed by the Access Board for Section 508 of the US Rehabilitation Act, Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) recommendations, and IBM research:

- To ensure that all users can access documentation, provide documentation in an accessible format. If you provide documentation in multiple formats, at least one of the formats must be accessible. For example, hardcopy information is not accessible because some visually impaired users cannot read it. Because screen reader support for HTML is more robust than it is for other formats, HTML is the preferred format for accessibility.

- Provide a topic or section that describes all the accessibility features that are available in the documentation and in the product:
  - Indicate which documentation format is accessible and indicate how and where users can access that format.
  - Describe accessibility features of the documentation, including ways to navigate the documentation, any unique keyboard commands that are needed to access documentation, and information about accessible syntax diagrams, if they are provided.

- ◦ Document unique keyboard accessibility features in the product. You do not have to document standard operating system keyboard shortcuts.

- ◦ If you provide instructions for completing tasks by using the mouse, also include the instructions for doing those tasks by using the keyboard if the keyboard instructions involve nonstandard operating system keyboard shortcuts.

- ◦ Document preferences that the user can enable in the product to enhance accessibility.

- ◦ If your information includes an index, create index entries for keyboard shortcuts, preferences, and any other accessibility features under both the feature name and under a main (i1) entry of *accessibility*.

- Provide a short text alternative for all graphic images by using the <alt> element. If a graphic is adequately described in the surrounding text or is used for formatting purposes only, include an empty <alt> element. An empty <alt> element causes most screen readers to ignore the image, whereas a missing <alt> element causes the screen reader to read details of the image (file name and size, for example). Alternative text for icons should indicate the function that the icon performs, not describe its appearance. If the short text alternative is not sufficient, provide a long description in addition to a short text alternative. The following example shows a graphic image that requires short alternative text and an additional long description:
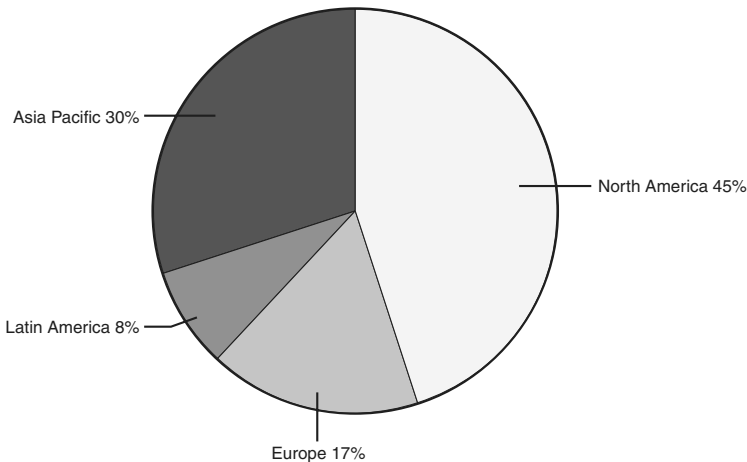
Alternative text

    Pie chart that depicts percentage of sales across geographic regions

Long description

    Sales across geographic regions are as follows: North America, 45%; Asia Pacific, 30%, Europe, 17%, Latin America, 8%.

- Provide accessible syntax diagrams, where applicable. Standard graphic *railroad* syntax diagrams are not accessible to someone who is using a screen reader. In addition to providing railroad syntax diagrams, provide syntax diagrams in dotted decimal format or BNF (Backus-Naur) format. The following example shows a railroad syntax diagram:

```
XYZ command
>>-XYZ--+----------------+------------------------------><
        '- -PARM--=--value-'
```

The following example shows the same syntax diagram in dotted decimal format, which can be read by a screen reader:

```
XYZ command
1 XYZ
2? PARM = value
```

- Do not use color or contrast as the only way to convey meaning. For example, using red text as the only way to indicate an error condition is not accessible.
- Make tables more accessible by defining column headers and row headers and by including a caption. Row and column headers enable screen readers to provide information about the relationship of data cells in a table. Table captions provide an overview of the contents of the table. Refer to the documentation for your authoring tool to determine how to apply these accessibility aids to your tables.

For more information, see *Developing Quality Technical Information*, Chapter 10, "Ensure that all users can access the information."

International audiences

The audience for IBM information includes native English-speaking users, users whose primary language is not English, and users who do not speak or read English but, instead, rely on information that was translated from English into another language.

Follow the guidelines in this topic to ensure that your information is clear for all types of audiences.

Style

Apply the following style guidelines when you write for an international audience:

- Keep sentences as short and simple as possible. Try to keep sentences to 25 or fewer words.

- Avoid slang, jargon, humor, sarcasm, colloquialisms, idioms, emoticons (also called *smilies*), and metaphors.

- Be succinct. Avoid redundant and unnecessary text.

- In general, use a complete sentence to introduce a list. You can introduce procedures with a sentence, an infinitive phrase, or a heading.

> **Examples (incorrect)**
> The setup utility contains:
> After you install the product:

> **Examples (correct)**
> The setup utility contains the following components:
> After you install the product, complete the following steps:

- Make list items grammatically parallel. For example, do not use a mix of phrases and sentences or a mix of passive and active voice in the same list.

> **Example (incorrect)**
> Use the setup utility to:
> - Manage devices
> - For defining space requirements
> - You can also use this utility to register jobs

> **Example (correct)**
> Use the setup utility to complete the following tasks:
> - Manage devices
> - Define space requirements
> - Register jobs

- Do not use contractions. For example, use *do not* instead of *don't*.

- Do not overuse abbreviations and special characters.

- Do not use symbols instead of words in running text. For example, do not use an ampersand (&) or a plus sign (+) to mean *and*.

- Avoid negative constructions.

- Avoid using *please* and *thank you*. Technical information requires an authoritative tone; terms of politeness convey the wrong tone for technical information and are not regarded the same way in all cultures.

- Do not write dates only in numerical form. In most countries, a date written as 9/12/99 means 9 December 1999, not 12 September 1999.

Grammar

Apply the following grammar guidelines when you write for an international audience:

- Write in active voice and the present tense as much as possible.

- Avoid using a phrasal verb (verb and a preposition) if the verb alone provides the same meaning.

> **Examples (incorrect)**
> call up
> click on
> print out
> start up

> **Examples (correct)**
> call
> click
> print
> start

- When you use a verb phrase that begins with a present participle, such as *creating*, or past participle, such as *created*, at the beginning of a sentence, make sure that the verb phrase modifies the correct word. Failure to do so can result in a dangling modifier.

> **Examples (incorrect)**
>
> Having configured your environment, the program is ready to be used.
>
> Cleared of the corrupted data, you can now repopulate the repository.

> **Examples (correct)**
>
> After you configure your environment, you can use the program.
> You can use the program after you configure your environment.
> You must configure your environment before you can use the program.
>
> After you clear the corrupted data, you can repopulate the repository.
> You can repopulate the repository after you clear the corrupted data.
> You must clear the corrupted data before you can repopulate the repository.

- Make the subject of a sentence clear. For example, avoid ambiguous pronoun references in which a pronoun can refer to more than one antecedent.

> **Examples (incorrect)**
>
> If the completed field has text, it does not change.
>
> This can prevent you from completing the process successfully.
>
> Ensure that you apply the fix packs to the servers and applications. These are critical to ensuring that your system does not fail.

> **Examples (correct)**
>
> If the completed field has text, that text does not change.
>
> This restriction can prevent you from completing the process successfully.
>
> Ensure that you apply the fix packs to the servers and applications. These fix packs are critical to ensuring that your system does not fail.

Similarly, avoid using expletive constructions such as *it is*, *there are*, and *there is*, which hide the subject of the sentence.

> **Examples (incorrect)**
>
> There are two databases in the table space.
>
> It is important to verify the serial number before you register the product.

> **Examples (correct)**
>
> Two databases are in the table space.
>
> You must verify the serial number before you register the product.
> **Important:** Verify the serial number before you register the product.

- Avoid using long noun phrases. Limit a noun phrase to no more than three words. When you use a noun phrase, make sure that it has only one meaning and that you use it consistently.

- Do not omit the word *that* from clauses. The use of the conjunction *that*, although technically optional in some sentences, is never wrong and makes the sentence easier to translate and clearer for readers whose primary language is not English. For example, write "Verify that your directory service is working" instead of "Verify your directory service is working."

- Avoid using too many prepositions in a sentence. For example, you can rewrite "The report is a list of the current status of all of the event monitors for this process" as "The report lists the current status of all event monitors for this process."

- Do not omit articles and prepositions that can increase the clarity of a sentence. For example, rewrite "Unload the file using the ULOAD utility" as "Unload the file by using the ULOAD utility."

- Avoid using the same word for different parts of speech. In particular, avoid using words that primarily function as verbs as nouns or adjectives. For example, in English, the word *install* is a verb. Therefore, instead of writing "during the install," write "during the installation," and instead of writing "the install job," write "the installation job." Other verbs that are commonly misused as nouns or adjectives include *configure*, *compile*, *debug*, and *fix*. Note that the same form of some words can legitimately function as different parts of speech. If you are in doubt about which part of speech a word can be used as, consult a dictionary.

- Use simple and clear coordination so that the reader can tell what the relationships are between the elements of a sentence. For example, "the file or result field definition" can have any of the following meanings:
  - The result-field definition or the file
  - The file definition or the result-field definition
  - The file-field definition or the result-field definition
  - The definition of the file or of the result field
  - The field definition of the file or of the result

- Make sure that the elements of a sentence are parallel. Words, phrases, and clauses should be grammatically equal.

Example (incorrect)
network management, databases, and writing application programs

Example (correct)
network management, databases, and application programs

- Avoid ambiguity when you have more than one infinitive within a sentence. For example, the following sentence is ambiguous: "Use the utility to run maintenance activities and save your maintenance settings." This sentence can be interpreted in two ways:
  - Use the utility to run maintenance activities and to save your maintenance settings. (The utility does both steps.)
  - Use the utility to run maintenance activities, and then when you are done, save your settings. (The process consists of two separate steps, only one of which is done by the utility.)

  Rewrite the sentence to clarify which of the two interpretations you intend. For example, if the utility does both steps, include the preposition to before each of the infinitives: "Use the utility to run maintenance activities and to save your maintenance settings."

- When you write a sentence that includes two coordinate clauses, do not omit the verb from the second clause.

> **Example (incorrect)**
> The file names are displayed in uppercase characters and the other file attributes in lowercase characters.

> **Example (correct)**
> The file names are displayed in uppercase characters, and the other file attributes are displayed in lowercase characters.

Terminology

Apply the following terminology guidelines when you write for an international audience:

- Use correct and consistent terminology.
- Minimize the creation of new terms.
- Use the simplest term possible to convey the intended meaning. For example use *large* instead of *voluminous*, and use *small* instead of *diminutive*.
- Define product-specific terms or terms used in a special way in a product glossary, or explain them in the text.
- Avoid culture-specific references that might not be widely understood, such as holidays and celebrations, monetary units, and phone number and address formats.
- If your product uses the # symbol, in most cases refer to it as the *number sign (#)*, and explain clearly how it is used.

- Be selective when you use terms that have different meanings in different environments. For example, use *conversion* for systems or programs, but use *translation* for national languages.
- Avoid using the terms *billion* and *trillion* because they have different meanings in different countries. Use the number instead.
- Avoid using the terms *domestic* and *foreign*.
- Do not use Latin abbreviations, such as *e.g.*, *etc.*, and *i.e.*
- Vary the use of proper names in documentation. Use names that represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds, genders, and locations.
- Do not use made-up terms in examples, for example, *didget* and *gidget*. Use terms that can be translated and understood.
- Avoid terms that might be misinterpreted. For example, use *once* to mean *one time*, not to mean *after* or *when*. Use *since* in relation to the passing of a period of time, not as a synonym for *because*.

For definitions and usage advice for specific terms, see "Word usage" on page 300.

Punctuation

Apply the following punctuation guidelines when you write for an international audience:

- In general, do not use forward slashes between words to mean "and/or"; a forward slash can be ambiguous. Rewrite the sentence to clarify the meaning. For example, use "Insert the CD or DVD" instead of "Insert the CD/DVD," and use "You can select green, blue, or both" instead of "You can select green/blue."
- Use commas between three or more items in a series, including before the conjunction that introduces the last item, to ensure that readers can clearly separate the items. For example, write "Such functions include storage management, program management, and security."
- Do not form a plural by adding *(s)*. Try to rewrite the sentence to use either the plural form or singular form, whichever is more appropriate. If you must indicate both forms, repeat the noun, or use *one or more*. For example, instead of writing "enter the registration number(s)," write either "enter the registration number or numbers" or "enter one or more registration numbers."
- Do not use em dashes in technical information. More common punctuation marks, such as commas, parentheses, or a colon, provide the same result. Rewrite the text or use different punctuation.

  Exception for marketing content: Em dashes are acceptable in marketing content. For details and examples, see "Exceptions for marketing content" on page 274.

Graphics and images

Apply the following guidelines when you use graphics and images in information for an international audience:

- Be careful not to use colors, symbols, and text in a way that some cultures might find confusing or offensive:
    - Colors have different connotations in different cultures. For example, in some Eastern cultures, red is used to convey good luck; however, in many Western cultures, red is used to convey danger or alarm.
    - Similarly, many symbols, such as those of body parts and of animals, have culturally specific connotations. For example, hand gestures that convey a positive meaning in some cultures are offensive in other cultures.
    - Icons that are based on English words present translation challenges. For example, using the letter *B* to indicate bold text is difficult to translate because *B* does not have the same meaning in most languages.
- Consider the implications for images in information that will be translated into a bidirectional language such as Arabic or Hebrew:
    - Be careful about how you refer to left and right arrows or any other directional reference in text that is associated with a directional graphical image. When possible, use words such as *start*, *end*, *next*, or *previous* instead of *right* or *left*.
    - Images are often flipped so that the resulting image is a mirror image of the original. Flipping some images, such as geographical maps or corporate logos, is generally not appropriate and needs special handling. Additionally, image maps can be corrupted if individual images within the image map are flipped.
- Do not use national flags:
    - The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property explicitly prohibits the use of national flags as trademarks.
    - The use of a flag might be falsely interpreted as an expression of approval or sponsorship of that country or as an affiliation with that country.
    - Some countries are particularly sensitive about how and in what context their flags are displayed.
    - International misunderstandings that are based on border misrepresentations and other inaccuracies can have and have had major implications for companies that used maps.

- Be careful about using geographical maps:
  - International misunderstandings that are based on border misrepresentations and other inaccuracies can have and have had major implications for companies that used maps.
  - Geographical information, such as national or internal political boundaries, the names of countries, states, and cities, and the names of other geographic elements, continually changes. Maps that include explicit details might have to be updated regularly.
  - Translation of map content presents additional challenges. In some cases, substituting a similar foreign language map in place of an English language map might be sufficient. If you work with maps in your documentation, consult your geographic specialist to determine the most appropriate course of action.

For more information about writing for translation, see *Developing Quality Technical Information*, Chapter 11, "Applying quality characteristics to information for an international audience."

Index