

Product Design Content Style Guide

About this guide

No matter what product we design, we should always design a conversation between a product and its user. Every word in REEF's products is part of that conversation. Well-designed content empowers people to use our products effortlessly and without friction (and occasionally delight).

The goal of this style guide is to provide direction on copy and communication throughout REEF's product ecosystem. The purpose:

- Create clarity and consistency across products and applications.
- Make products sound more conversational and human.
- Use written content to create unified, on-brand experiences for all users.

References and resources

Content in this document was influenced by several open-source design systems and style guides and tailored for REEF. For additional guidance that's not included here, see one of these manuals.

 **Material Design**
<https://material.io/design>

 **Mail Chimp**
<https://styleguide.mailchimp.com/>

 **Carbon**
<https://www.carbondesignsystem.com/guidelines/content/overview/>

 **PatternFly**
<https://www.patternfly.org/v4/ux-writing/about/>

Helpful tools and plugins

Plugin

Find and replace

<https://www.figma.com/community/plugin/735072959812183843/Find-and-Replace>

Cool feature

Easily find and replace terms, fix capitalization, and adjust case.

SPELLL

<https://www.figma.com/community/plugin/754028612886638376/SPELLL---Spell-Checking-for-Figma>

Check for typos automatically. Fix or ignore multiple instances.

Ditto

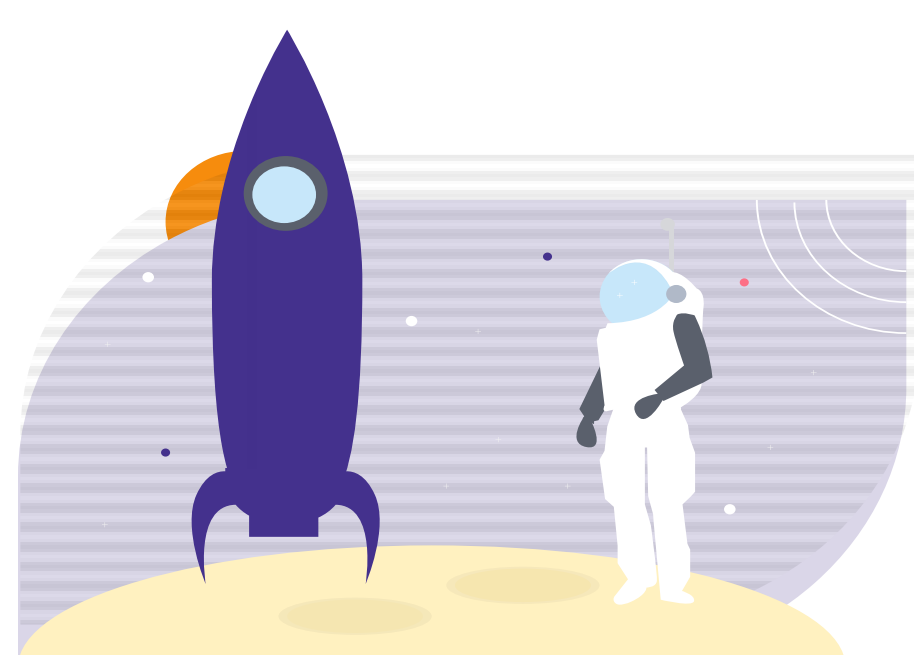
<https://www.figma.com/community/plugin/798826068406007173/%E2%9C%8D%EF%B8%8F-Ditto-%7C-collaborate-on-copy>

View detailed edit history of your text.

Power Thesaurus

<https://www.powerthesaurus.org/>

Your thesaurus. On steroids.



Copy Flight Check

TLDR? Use this checklist to review your designs for the most common style issues

Language

- ☑ Omit jargon and uncommon or unfamiliar terms
Is it easy to understand? Or will it require an interpreter?
- ☑ Consistent copy from one screen to the next

Punctuation

- ☑ No punctuation. Period.
Unless UI absolutely requires several sentences of text
- ☑ Use ampersands (&) in labels: navigation, buttons, charts, tables, etc.

Capitalization

- ☑ Default is sentence case
- ☑ Exceptions:
 - Buttons, Nav, Formal Names are Title Case
 - Filters, Overlines, HLM warning copy are ALL CAPS

Button labels

- ☑ Use strong verbs that indicate action that will happen
- ☑ Use "OK."
 - Not "Okay," "O.K.," "Ok"

Search fields

- ☑ Use icon + placeholder text (to indicate intent or format)

Dates

- ☑ Use 3-letter abbreviation for month.
 - Ex. Apr 17, 2022 or Apr 2022

Day

- ☑ Use 3-letter abbreviation for days of the week.
 - Ex. Sun or Sun, April 17, 2022

Language

Write like you're talking to the person sitting next to you.

Use short words. Make short sentences. End with prepositions. Use contractions. Read your copy out loud. Keep it simple. In most cases, compound sentences with formal diction—like the one you're reading right now—are acceptable for journalistic prose but not for product interfaces.

General language rules

Write for all levels of readers

Text should be understandable by anyone, anywhere, regardless of their culture or language. Use common terms that both beginning and advanced English readers can understand.

Write simply and directly

Guide the user with clear, accurate, and pithy text makes interfaces more usable and builds trust.

Be concise

Strunk and White wrote, "Omit needless words." Write in small, scannable chunks to facilitate navigation and discovery.

Get to the point

Users scan, so put the important points first. Put actions before explanations. Don't make the user have to figure out what to do next or hunt for what they need.

Avoid jargon

Avoid uncommon or unfamiliar terms, like industry-specific terminology, internal jargon, names invented for UI features. Use what you know about your audience to determine whether certain words or phrases are appropriate.

Never say "never"

Avoid "never" and other absolutes.

Be positive

Present information in a positive light and be solution oriented. Don't blame or put down the user.

Use contractions

Contractions can make copy easier to digest. Sometimes, however "do not" can give more emphasis than "don't," so use when needed.

Use active voice

The active voice is usually more explicit, more direct, and easier to read than passive voice. And it's almost always shorter.

Brand Voice

We follow REEF’s brand guidelines.

Be natural, explain with empathy, and focus on the user. Complement the design with language that is intuitive, simple, and solution oriented.

REEF’s personality is...

Human

We speak like people, not robots. And, like all good conversationalists, we always put our audience’s understanding first.

Bright

Our words spark with solutions, ideas, and insights. We speak with authority, experience, and intelligence—without ever being preachy.

Spirited

We want everything we say to pulse with the electric energy we feel; to spark curiosity in what we do and fire an appetite to make it happen.

Purposeful

We think before we speak. Every word has a purpose. Just like our hubs, our writing is pragmatic, deliberate, and created with a clear audience in mind.

How we write

Clear and conversational. We engage our audience as we would a valued acquaintance: with empathy, honesty, and a genuine desire to connect.

Thoughtfully. We know our business is new and complex. We take great steps to spark curiosity and build understanding—but we never condescend.

With vigor and determination. Our words punctuate a clear vision. We convey passion through bold word choices—not exclamation marks.

With concision and meaning—whether it’s to explain, compel, or inspire. We don’t use flowery language or adjective strings.

How we sound

Friendly not overfamiliar
Personable not unprofessional
Approachable not laidback

Knowledgeable not preachy
Well-rounded not academic
Grounded not condescending

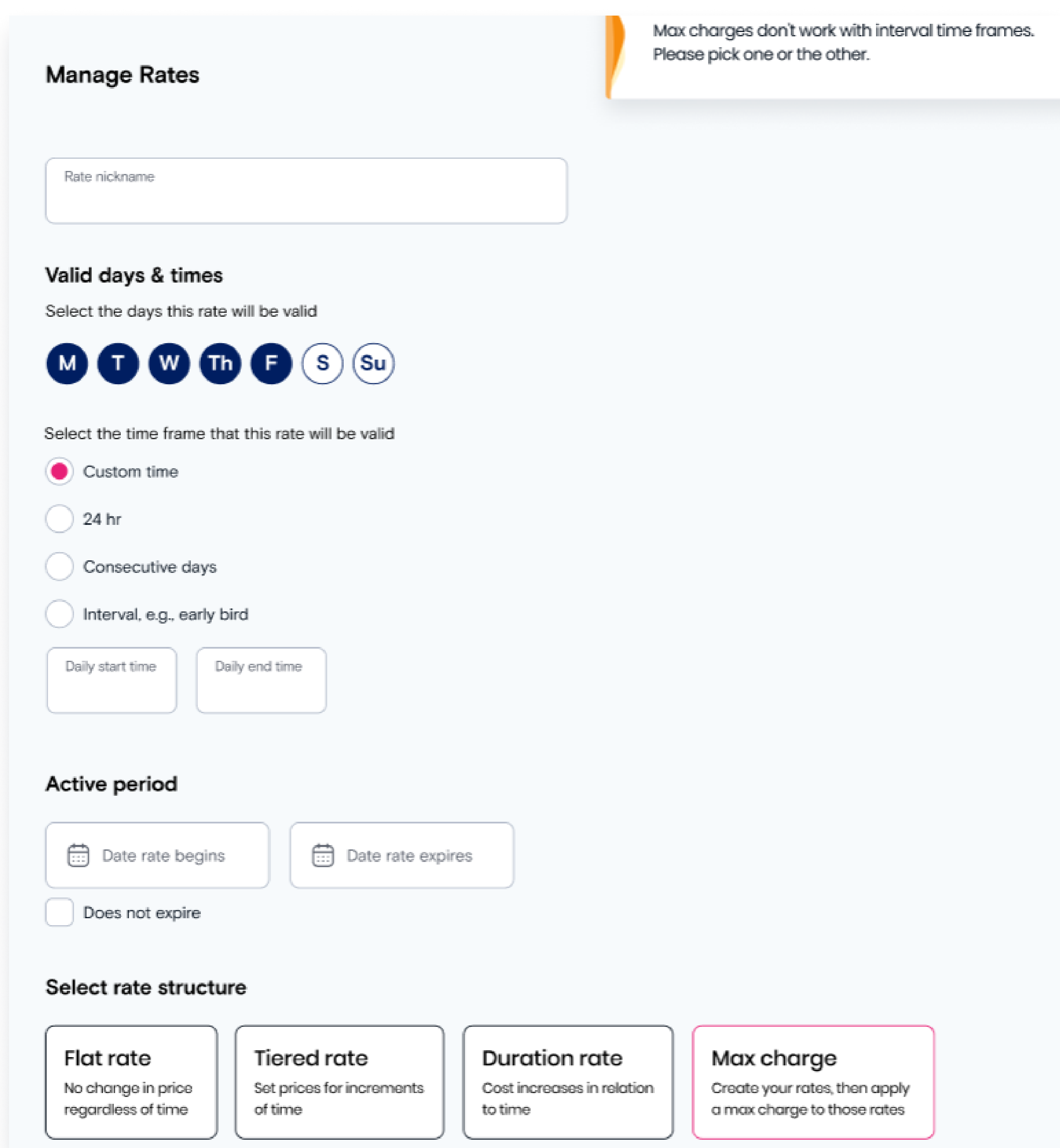
Determined not abrasive
Passionate not overzealous
Bold not brazen

Concise not curt
Confident not braggy
Straightforward not lacking

Modulation

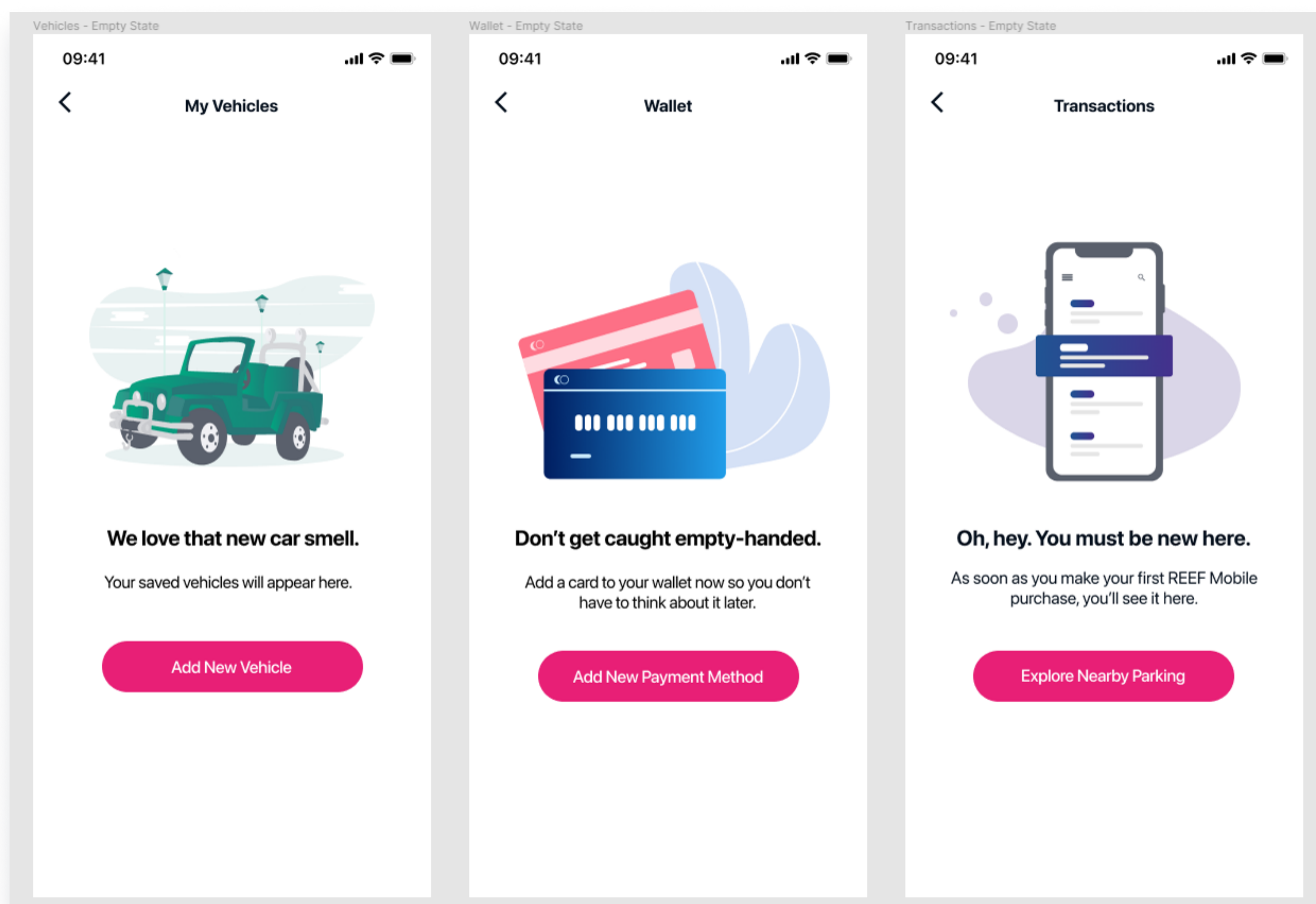
For REEF Cloud and other B2E and B2B products, lean in to the Human and Purposeful characteristics.

PRICING ENGINE HELPER COPY AND LLM ARE STRAIGHTFORWARD AND CONCISE, NOT CURT OR LACKING



For consumer products or marketing, a tone that is more Bright and Spirited is appropriate.

MOBILE APP EMPTY STATES USE BOLD AND PITHY STATEMENTS THAT SPARK CURIOSITY



Keeping tone in check

Use discretion with tone and avoid the following:

- Sounding patronizing, chummy, cheery, childish, or otherwise inappropriate in an attempt to seem informal and relatable.
- Colloquialisms, jokes, sarcasm, jargon, and slang. Avoid anything that’s too culturally specific.
- Anything that causes the user to pause or hesitate unless you explicitly want them to.

(Note: Guidelines obtained from Marketing in Feb 2021. Occasional review will be needed to stay aligned.)

Capitalization

We use sentence case within our design

Readability is reduced with all caps because all words have a uniform rectangular shape, meaning readers can't identify words by their shape.

Therefore, be very conservative when capitalizing.

Avoid using all caps/uppercase or title case

Sentence case looks casual, cleaner, improves readability.

People spend more time skimming, and sentence case makes it easier for them to read.

With sentence case, you capitalize the first letter of the sentence (and any proper nouns).

Case types

Sentence case **This is proper use of sentence case.**

Uppercase **NOT THIS, WHICH IS UPPERCASE OR ALL CAPS.**

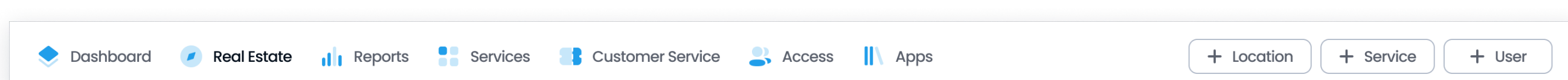
Title case **Or This, Which is Called Title Case.**

Exceptions

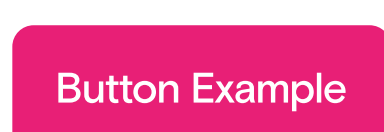
There are a few exceptions to the sentence case rule. They apply where the REEF Cloud Design System requires them in order to emphasize hierarchical importance or urgency of message.

When Title Case is OK

Universal navigation



Buttons



When ALL CAPS is OK

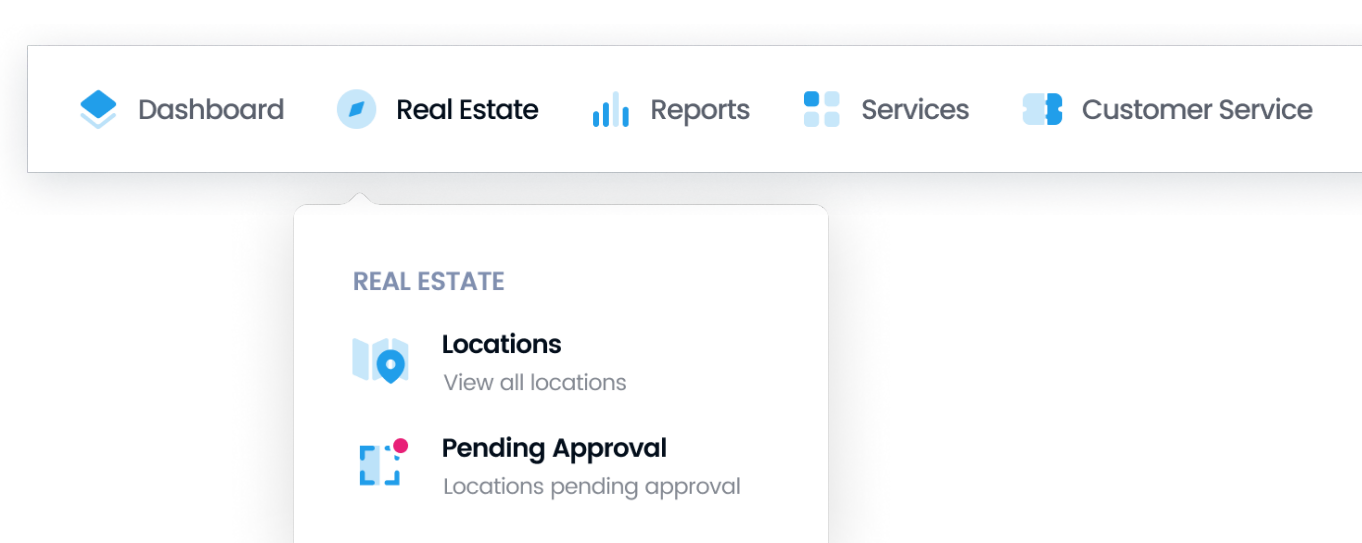
Table and filter labels

Names of filter groupings only. Filter group elements are sentence case.

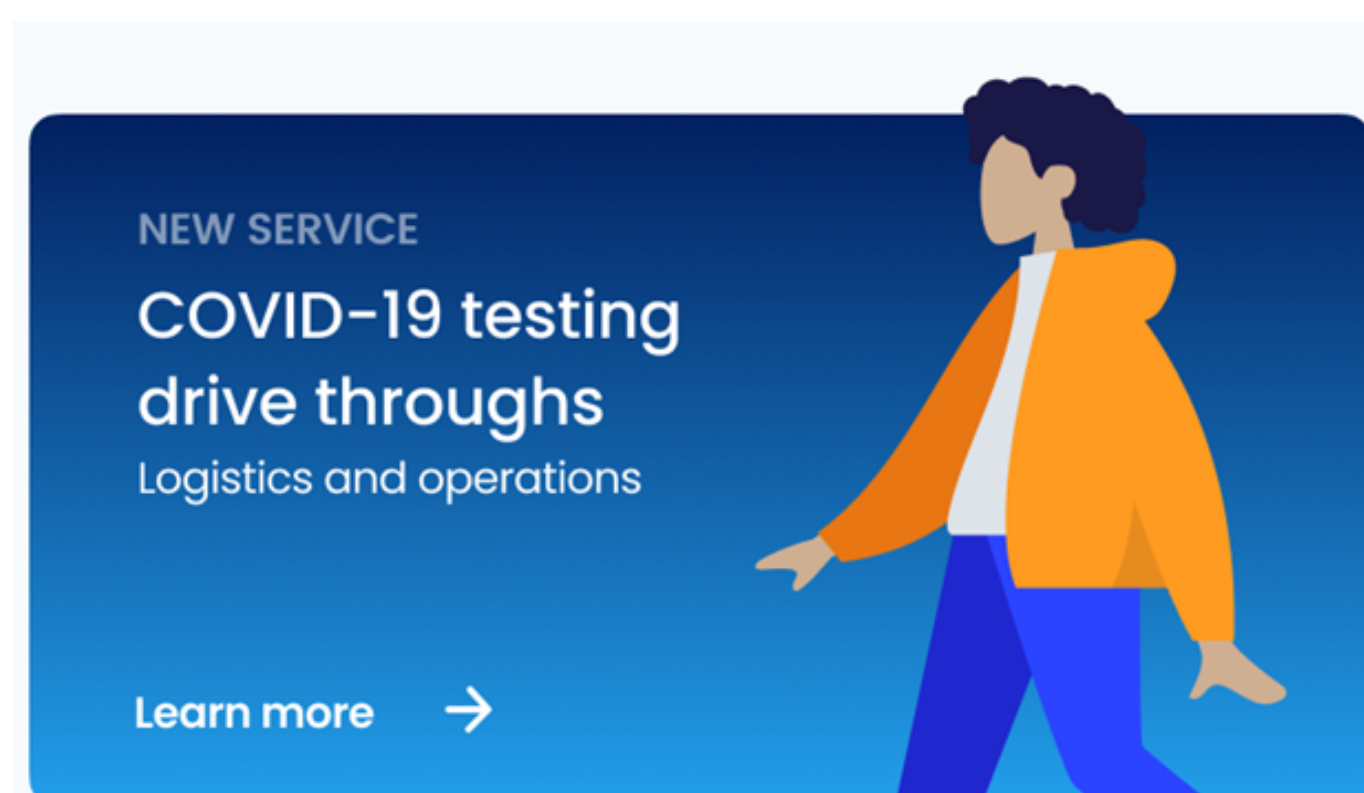
DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL ↓	FEBRUARY ↓	BUDGET ↓	VARIANCE ↓	VARIANCE % ↓	EXPLANATION
▶ Revenue	\$100,848.34	\$100,848.34	\$100,848.34	\$100,848.34	65.6%	New equipment ✓ ✕
Sales tax	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	45.9%	Explanation (optional) ✎
Sales tax	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	34%	Explanation (optional) ✎
Sales tax	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	\$40,003.58	23%	Explanation (optional) ✎

Overlines

Use uppercase in navigation pop over to indicate distinct sub-categories.

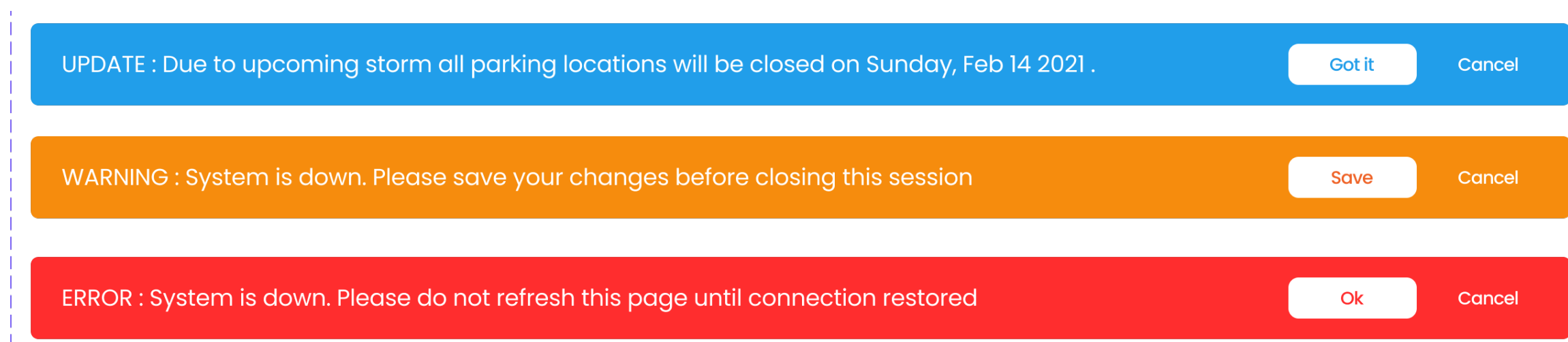


Use uppercase in cards/ads/flexible content area (FCA) overlines where text length is shorter than one line



High level messaging

Use capitalization for first word identifying HLM type (informational, warning, error). Explainer copy is sentence case.



Product names

Spell and capitalize product and brand names correctly, as well as proper nouns.

The REEF product ecosystem includes:

- REEF Cloud
- REEF Mobile
- NBRHD Market
- Proximity
- OrderLord
- QA Scan App
- Brand Management Tool (BMT)
- Kitchen Display System (KDS)
- Recipe Display System (RDS)

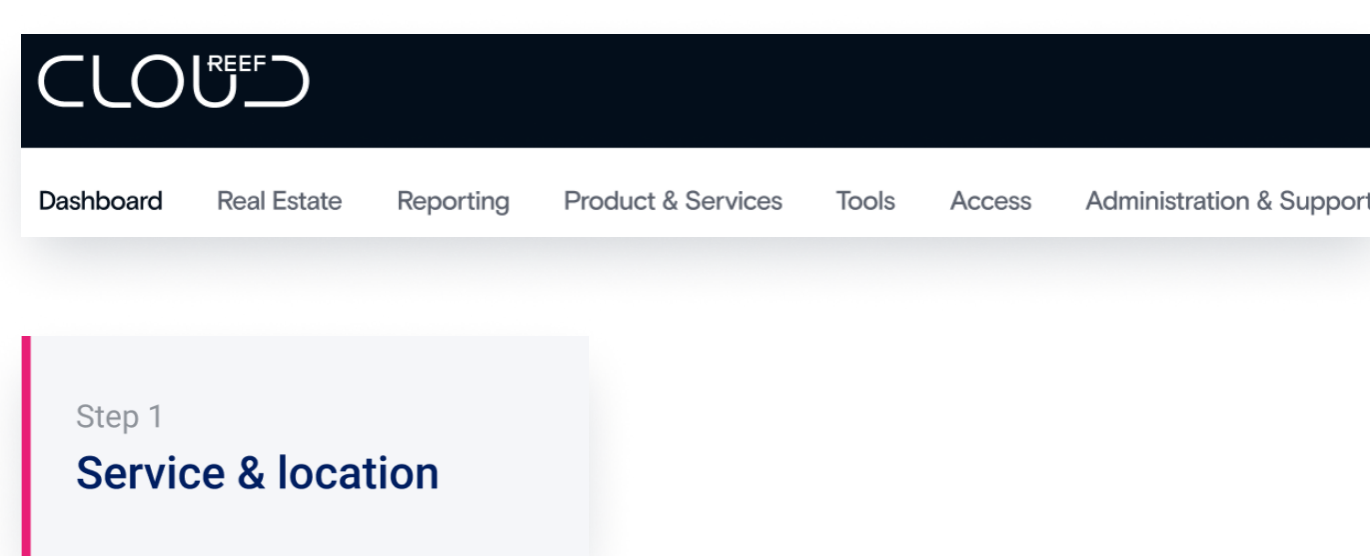
Punctuation

General Rule:

To help readers scan text at a glance, avoid using periods and other unnecessary punctuation.

Ampersands (&)

- Use ampersands for labels: navigation, buttons, chart, and table headers, etc.
- The subjects/concepts joined by the ampersand must be related.
- Note that ampersands might create issues for translation and localization.

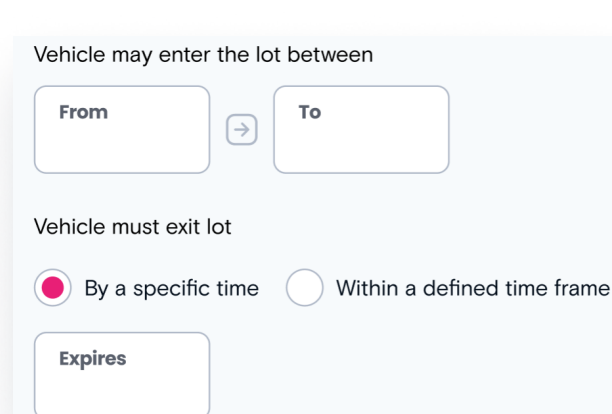


Colons

Do

- Use a colon when giving examples if it helps make the copy easier to read.
- Use a colon to introduce a list when the introductory text is a complete sentence.
- When using an abbreviation with a colon, include the period.

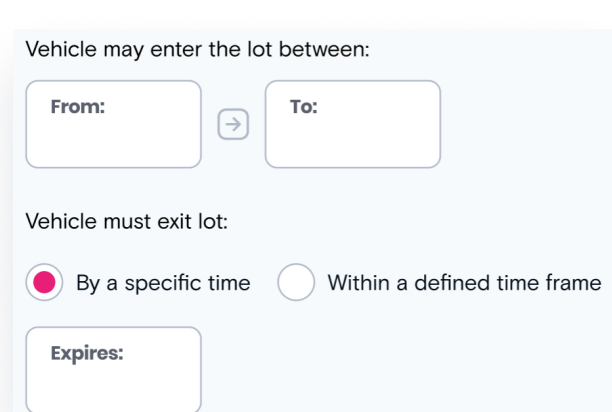
Do



Don't

- In general, don't use colons in headlines and subheads, even when you're introducing a list. If you feel like you need a colon in a heading, see if there's space for a subheading instead.
- Don't use colons to introduce radio buttons or checkboxes.

Don't



Commas

Use a serial (or Oxford) comma before and or or in a list of three or more items.

CORRECT:

This lot has parking spaces available for standard vehicles, compact cars, pickup trucks, SUVs, and motorcycles.

INCORRECT:

This lot has parking spaces available for standard vehicles, compact cars, pickup trucks, SUVs, and motorcycles.

Exclamation points

We use meaningful and purposeful words to get our "point" across, not exclamation points.

Steer clear of them. They tend to come across as shouting, and using them goes against our brand voice.

Do

Welcome to REEF

Don't

Welcome to REEF!

Periods

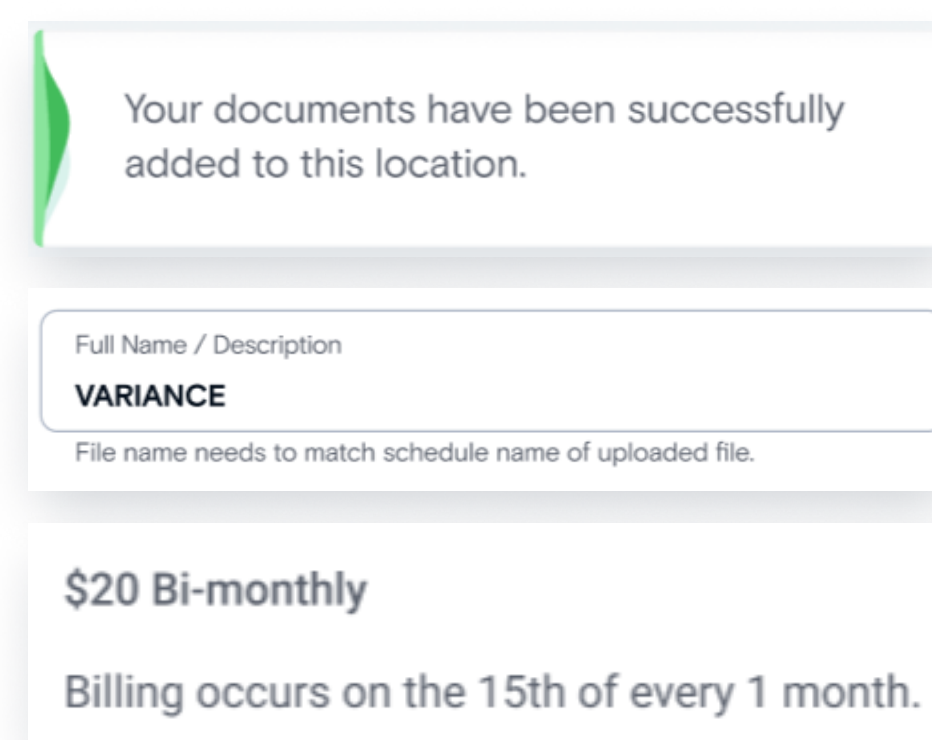
In general, don't use periods in interface copy. Period.

Don't

Avoid using periods in solitary sentences in these elements:

- Navigation and menu items
- Labels
- Buttons
- Bulleted lists
- Dialog body text
- Sentence fragments
- Top-level headings and titles
- Notifications
- Placeholder copy
- Hover/tooltip text
- Radio button and checkbox text

Don't

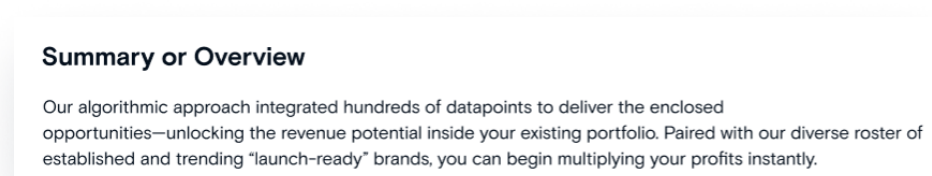


Do

Periods should be used on:

- Multiple sentences (when they are necessary, like in empty states)
- Any sentence followed by a link

Do



Acronyms & Abbreviations | Pronouns | Tense

Acronyms and abbreviations

When a term with an acronym appears for the first time, spell it out and include the acronym in parentheses. Use the abbreviation for all other references on that page.

First use: Delivery Platform (DP)

Second use: DP

The exception: If the abbreviation or acronym is well known use it instead (and don't worry about spelling it out).

These include:

API

HTML

USB

ATM

PDF

WiFi

FAQ

SMS

YTD

GPS

SUV

ZIP (code)

For plurals, use a lowercase "s" without an apostrophe.

APIs, FAQs

Use Latin abbreviations sparingly. These terms aren't easily understood by everyone. Write out their meaning instead.

e.g. – for example

i.e. – in other words

etc. – and more/so on

Tense

Use the present tense to describe product behavior. Avoid using the future tense to describe the way a product acts. When you need to write in the past or future, use simple verb forms.

Pronouns

Second person ("you" or "your") is the default.

"You" or "your"

Use this conversational style for most situations, as though the platform is speaking directly to the user.

"I" or "my"

In some cases, you may need to use first person to emphasize the user's ownership of content or actions.

Avoid mixing "me"/"my" with "you"/"your." It can cause confusion to see both forms of addressing the user in the same context.

Numerics

General rules

Use numerals in place of words for numbers.

"1, 2, 3" not "one, two, three"

\$2.00 not two dollars

One exception is when mixing uses of numbers, such as "Enter two 3s."

Don't use ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) in dates.

If you need to abbreviate "number," use "no." and not "#."

Currently, REEF's date and time formats follow the American standard.

All date and time formats should be localizable, however, not hard-coded. When localizing, use the appropriate format for the language locale and follow ISO standards. (When building localized date and time formats, development teams should share the same library by using resources like date-fns or Dayjs.)

Dates

Element	Description	Example
Month Date Year (Default format)	Use 3 letter abbreviation	Apr 17, 2022
Tables, links, and footers	Abbreviate months in 3 letters for UI elements	Jan Jul Feb Aug Mar Sep Apr Oct May Nov Jun Dec
Mobile	Abbreviate months in 3 letters	Jan Jul Feb Aug Mar Sep Apr Oct May Nov Jun Dec
Days of the week (Default)	Use the day's 3-letter abbreviation	Sun Thu Mon Fri Tue Sat Wed
Days of the week (Extreme constraints)	In extreme space-constrained cases, shorter letter abbreviations are OK	S Th M F T Sa W
Day and date together	Abbreviate both elements	Sun, Apr 17, 2022
Month and year (usually for space constraints)	3-letter abbreviation + yyyy	Apr 17 2022
When year is not needed	3-letter abbreviation + date	Apr 21

Time

Element	Description	Example
Time of day	12-hour time notation is the American standard	3:00 PM 3:30:11 PM
AM and PM	Use the day's 3-letter abbreviation	3:00 PM
Duration	HH:MM:SS or HH:MM	3:15:30 3:15 0:15
Ranges	Abbreviate both elements	Sun, Apr 17, 2022
Units of time	Spell out word May abbreviate when space is extremely tight.	second sec minute min hour h day d week wk month mo year yr

Currency

Element	Description	Example
Currency symbols	Use Short format unless additional context needed and then use Explicit	\$12.50
US Dollar (USD)	Explicit format	\$12.50 USD
	Short format	\$12.50
Canadian Dollar (CAD)	Explicit format	\$12.50 CAD
	Short format	\$12.50
Currency type	Showing different currencies to apply to all rates	USD CAD

Other Numeric Elements

Element	Description	Example
Phone numbers	Use hyphens when writing phone numbers. Don't use brackets, spaces, periods, or plus signs	613-555-1234 1-514-555-1234
Percentages	Use the % symbol instead of spelling out "percent"	25%

Content Patterns

Buttons

Label buttons and interactive elements appropriately. Users should be able to tell immediately what action will be taken.

Always lead with a strong verb that encourages action.

To provide enough context to users, use the verb+noun content formula except in the case of common actions like “Done”, “Close”, “Cancel”, or “OK.”

KEY ACTION TERMS

See product glossary for definitions and context for use

Add	Delete	New
Apply	Done	Next
Approve	Download	OK (Not “Okay”)
Back	Edit	Reject
Browse	Export	Save
Cancel	Filter	Sign up (Not “Register”)
Clear	Finish	Sort
Close	Import	Start (Not, “Launch”)
Copy	Log in (Not, “Sign in”)	Top (Not, “Back to top”)
Create	Log out	Upload
Customize		

Confirmations

Confirmations are presented for actions that can't be undone or are difficult to undo.

Confirmation messages should:

- Always give the user the option to either confirm or cancel their action
- Be used for a single, primary task
- Keep to one line of text and not use more than two calls to action

Confirmation titles should:

- Not start with, “Are you sure?”
- Ask if the user wants to continue, using a concise <verb>+<noun> question
- Be one sentence and avoid using punctuation, except for question marks
- Avoid articles (the, a, an) to keep content short and actionable

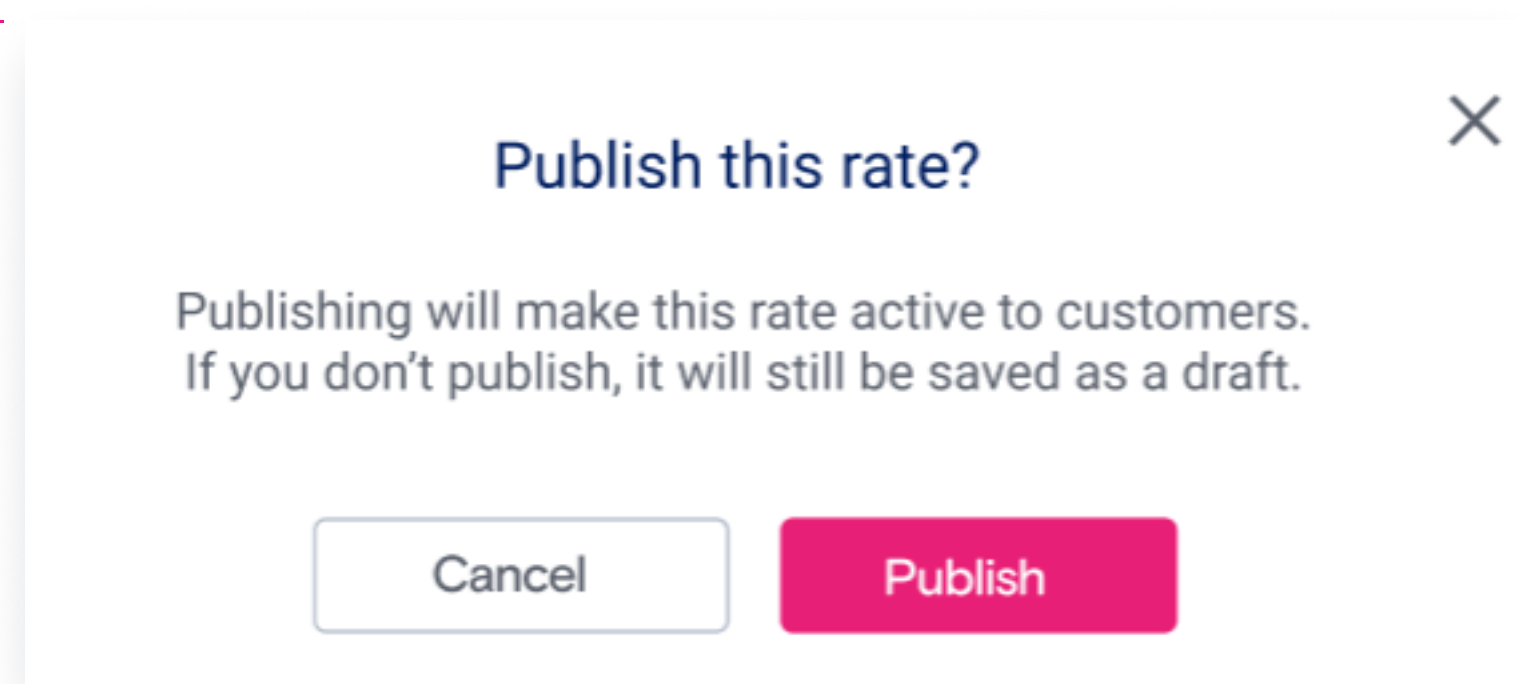
Confirmation **body** content should:

- Not start with, “Are you sure?”
- Explain if the action is irreversible or difficult to undo using plain language
- Be concise: use only one line of text when possible

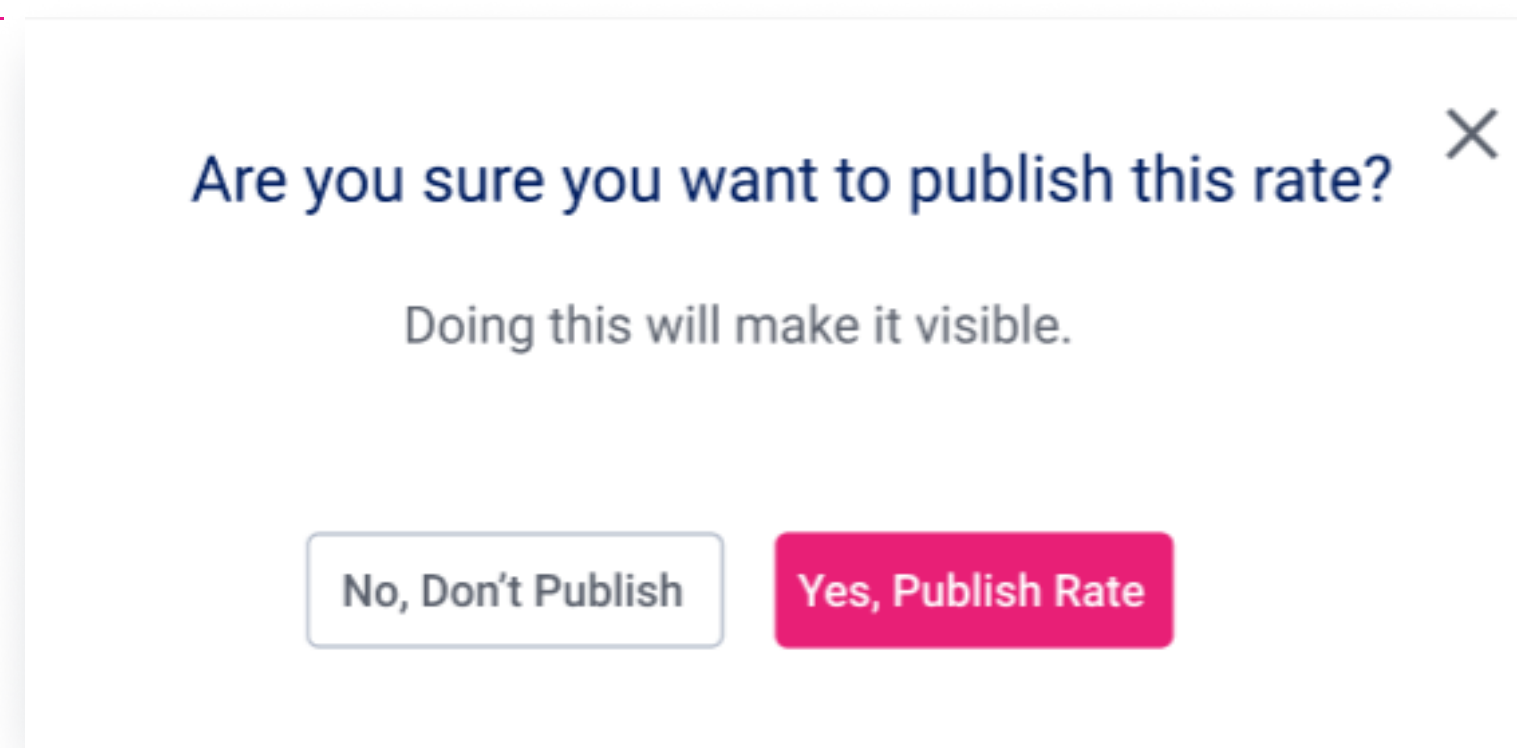
Confirmation **primary** and **secondary** actions should:

- Be clear and predictable: Users should be able to anticipate what will happen when they click a button
- Exclude unnecessary words and articles such as the, an, or a

This



Not This



Error messages

A user typically sees an error message when they attempt to perform an action but cannot continue because something isn't right.

Error messages should be brief yet descriptive. Some best practices:

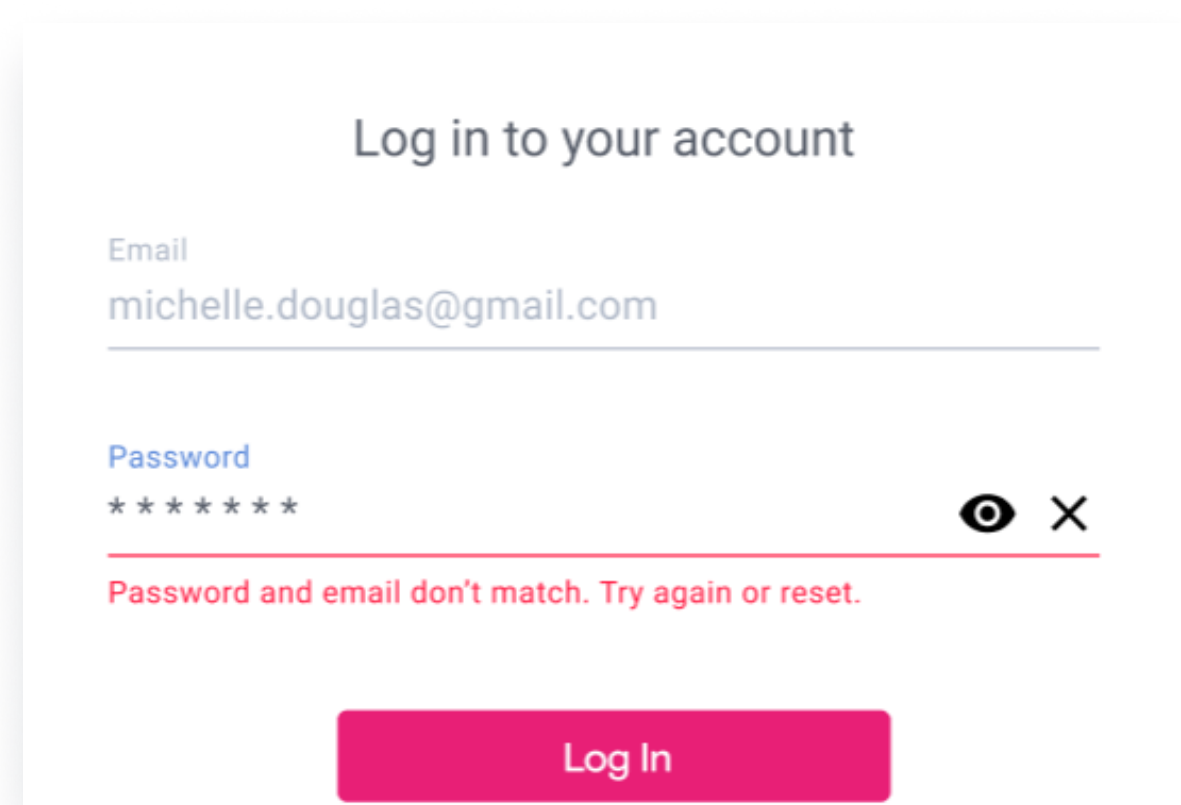
- **Don't blame.** A user should never feel like the error is their fault. Avoid language like “You did something wrong.” Depending on the message, using passive voice instead of the active voice may be used.
- **Avoid jargon.** Error messages are frustrating enough without technical terms that users might not understand. Use plain language and familiar terms.
- **Explain what's going on...** Tell the user what went wrong. An error without an explanation can add frustration and prevent the user from finding a solution.
- **But don't include too much info.** The user doesn't need to know exactly what is going on behind the scenes. Get to the point – explain what went wrong and what they can do next.
- **Give users a next step.** A user should never feel stuck. If they're hit with an error, give them the information they need to continue with their task.

A simple rule to follow is **Description, Reason, and Resolution**:

Description: What happened? (Example: The user's login failed.)

Reason: Why did it happen? (Example: Password and email don't match.)

Resolution: How can it be resolved? (Example: Try again or reset.)



Forms

Forms are meant to gather information and guide users with as little fuss as possible. Only request information that REEF needs and intends to use. Don't ask for information that could be considered private or personal, including gender. Key elements of forms include:

Heading

Headings quickly and clearly convey the form's purpose.

Labels

Label text is used to inform users as to what information is requested for a text field. Every text field should have a label.

Placeholder text

Placeholder text provides hints or examples of what to enter and disappears once the user begins to input data. When the requested input may be unfamiliar to the user or formatting is in question, use placeholder text.

Best for need-to-know information. Helper text appears below the input label and assists the user to provide the right information.

Tooltips

Tooltips provide additional explanation to users that may be unfamiliar with a particular form field.

They can also offer rationale for what may seem like an unusual request. Use sparingly to provide context or background information that is “nice to have.”

Errors and validation

When text input isn't accepted, an error message can display instructions on how to fix it.

Error messages are displayed below the input line, replacing helper text until fixed. Ensures that the correct information is collected before the form can be submitted to the system.

Addresses and places

Instead of “Address 2” as a field label – too ambiguous – use “Apartment, suite, etc. (optional)”

Even though the “Apartment, suite, etc. (optional)” means that the field is optional for customers to complete, it should always be included in the address form.

Put ZIP/postal code first, which should follow with an auto populate with city/state or city/province/region. <Example>

Headers and subheads

Headings and subheadings organize content for users. They should include the most relevant keywords and indicate the purpose of the page and its content.

Headings and subheadings are written in sentence case.

Organize headings and subheadings hierarchically, with headings first, followed by subheadings in order. (An H2 will nestle under H1, an H3 under H2, and on down.)

Headings (H1) give people a taste of what they're about to read. Use them for page titles.

Subheadings (H2, H3, etc.) breaks content into smaller, more specific sections. They give readers avenues into your content and make it more scannable.

Use them in order to make sure visual hierarchy is clear on page

Search

Users expect and understand search fields, and a label is not necessary.

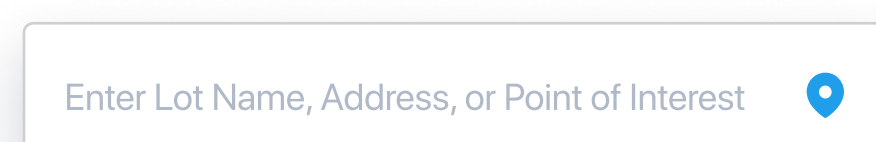
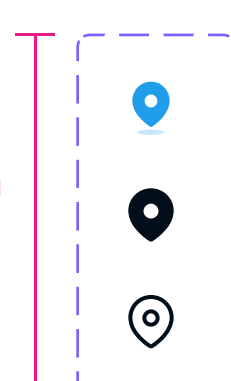
Placeholder copy should provide context for how to search.

A search icon along with useful placeholder text should clearly indicate that the field is intended for search.

Use a pin or geolocation icon when searching for a location. Use a magnifying glass icon for all other searches.

If a search returns “No results,” suggest a follow-up action. Provide suggestions and helpful resources to aid the user in finding what they are looking for.

Location search



General search

