Golden rules:

- Is the content relevant? Keep your audience in mind
- Is your content easy to read and understand with no prior knowledge?
- Is the content original? If information already exists elsewhere, direct customers straight to it
- Can the content be found using search words that make sense to the customer?
- Are graphics and pictures appropriate and do they add value?

General advice for writing digital content:

- Make your purpose clear
  - Consider stating who is your audience
  - Use more detailed information lower down the page not at the beginning
- Think about presentation
  - Content needs to be made easy and intuitive to find
  - Consider using sub headings and lists to make it easier to read
  - Use common-sense order - most common questions answered first
  - Only use 'background information' where necessary
- Make your content understandable
  - Does it makes sense when viewed on its own?
  - Don't make assumptions at the reader's expense
  - If you have to use technical terms – explain them
  - Ask someone to review the content you have produced

1. **Guidance on grammar and presentation**
   - Refer to your service / organisation / council as 'us' and readers as 'you' (unless you need to be formal)
   - Avoid using jargon
   - Abbreviations and acronyms:
     - Well known ones (BBC, UK) are acceptable
     - Spell out in full when used first time
     - Don't use if only referring to something once
     - Use shorter forms instead where possible
     - Don't use full stops
   - Avoid referring to forms / documents by numbers
   - Bullet points:
     - Use lead-in sentence before a list
     - Use capitals at the start of each point
     - Bullets should always make sense running on from the lead-in sentence
     - Don't use full stops (can use commas or dashes)
     - Don't put 'or' / 'and' after bullets
   - Contact information
     - Only use personal contact details if absolutely necessary
     - Use Customer Services details as default
     - Always make the link describe what you're linking to (e.g.: Our [policy])
     - Links should always be in the text
     - All documents linked to should be PDFs (unless they need to be completed then use Word documents)
     - Links to external websites should make it clear that the customer is linking to a different website

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- Write email addresses in full, in lowercase and as active links
- When using a telephone number use spaces in the number between the city dialling code and local exchange
- Avoid using ampersands (&)
- Avoid using special characters in titles
- Capital letters
  - Don't use block capitals (can be interpreted as shouting)
  - Keep everything in lower case unless it's a proper noun
- Dates and times
  - Use 'to' for date and time ranges (2017 to 2018, 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)
  - Use 12 hour clock (5:30 pm)
  - When referring to 'today' include the date as well
  - Only use the ordinal indicators (st, nd, rd, th) when referring to centuries, anniversaries, or positions
  - For financial years, sports seasons and school years write 2012-2013 (not 2012/13)
- 'e' as prefix
  - If the prefix 'e' refers to electronic, it should always be lower case with a hyphen (e-learning) – the only exception is email
  - At the beginning of a sentence, capitalise the first letter of the word that follows the e (e-Government)
- E.g. and i.e. – use full stops
- Geography and regions
  - Compass directions are all in lowercase (the south-west)
  - The only exception is where these are part of a particular name (East Croydon)
- Numbers
  - All numbers are written as figures unless they are over a million
  - Numbers over 1,000 have comma separators
  - Percent should be written in full in the text
  - Use '200 to 400' and not '200-400'.
  - Millions and billions – use singular when referring to money, eg £138 million and plural in phrases, eg: "millions of people"
- Money
  - Use the £ symbol - £75
  - Don't use decimals unless pence are included
  - Write numbers less than £1million in full rather than as a fraction
  - Write out 'pence' in full
- Images
  - Only use when they add value
  - Think about the appearance of the page as a whole and the context
  - Consider copyright
  - Remember to include Alt text - descriptive text used as an alternative to an image for people who use screen readers
- Search engine optimisation
  - Titles need to be short, snappy and front-loaded
  - Avoid using 'of', 'in', 'at', 'for', 'and', 'if'
  - Metadata description / page summary – don't just repeat the title, cover the scope of the content item and sell it to the intended audience
  - Include popular keywords

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- ➢ Use lower case and commas not full stops

2. Guidance specific to particular types of content
   - Digital form
     - ➢ The customer should not have to read through guidance before completing form
     - ➢ Guidance / T&Cs / instructions should be made easily available
     - ➢ Need to include: links to guidance, related information, digital forms and contact information
   - Information relating to a no-cost council service
     - ➢ Do not sell or promote the service
     - ➢ Keep as simple and brief as possible
   - Information promoting an additional, paid-for service
     - ➢ Explain benefits of purchasing the service
     - ➢ The customer should not have to read through guidance before they use the service, but guidance / T&Cs should be made easily available
   - Promotional content
     - ➢ Content should always link to specific service or contact details
   - Blog content
     - ➢ Can contain more opinion and prose
     - ➢ Should always be stated that the views expressed are those of the individual writing, and not necessarily those of our organisation
   - Statutory content
     - ➢ Jargon and acronyms should be explained and simplified where possible
     - ➢ Should include a companion page explaining the content in layman's terms
   - Emergency content
     - ➢ Should describe the problem, how it might affect the reader, what we are doing to resolve or mitigate against it, what the reader can do to resolve or mitigate against it and how the situation might change in the near future
     - ➢ Should be removed as soon as the situation changes
   - Content details for a physical location or service open to the public
     - ➢ Needs to contain the opening hours, address, contact details, embedded interactive map, facilities and access information, links to the social media presences, information about the availability or status where applicable
   - Content details for a team
     - ➢ Needs to contain email address, link to contact form, social media presence and phone number where applicable
   - Data
     - ➢ Needs to contain brief description, links to data in all formats and related information

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