

## Voice and tone guidelines

Use the right tone of voice is key to making sure everyone who interacts with our content has a consistent experience.

### What is our voice and tone?

**Brand voice** is the words we use and how we use them. Voice must be consistent no matter where we're communicating. Use the department's [Content style guide](#) to ensure you're being consistent.

**Tone** is not what you say, but how you say it. It will vary slightly depending on the channel you're using and who you're talking to.

Using the appropriate voice and tone while writing helps:

- reinforce the department's brand
- set us apart from other communicators
- influence and persuade our audience
- build trust with our communities.

### Creating a brand persona

A brand persona helps everyone who communicates on behalf of the department to adopt a similar style.

If the NSW Department of Education were a person, what kind of person would we be?

The NSW Department of Education is a trusted mentor, supporting our communities to raise education standards in NSW.

We support this persona with four personality traits.

- **Authoritative** - we take an evidence-based approach, using facts to back up our decisions.
- **Transparent** - we are reliable and informative, using open, honest language.
- **Inclusive** - we are unbiased and apolitical, drawing our audience into the conversation by using active voice and the first and second person ('we' and 'you').
- **Encouraging** - we are warm and inviting, using supportive, inspiring language without jargon.

### Three tones

We use these personality traits in three different tones depending on who we're talking to and in what medium. Just as you might use a different tone when speaking to your boss, your co-workers or your partner.

- Use the **everyday tone** for most web content and publications.
- Use the **community tone** for social media, blogs and newsletters.
- Use the **official tone** for policies, procedures and official reports.

Find out more about each tone by selecting the menus below.

## Everyday tone

- Keep language simple. Be vivid but not too detailed.
- Use informative and inclusive language.
- Establish an emotional connection with the audience by being supportive and knowledgeable.
- Use a mix of short, sharp sentences and slightly longer sentences to give your writing rhythm and flow. Aim for an average of 20 words per sentence.
- Use a combination of first person plural ('we' and 'our') and second person singular ('you').
- Use active voice.
- Use contractions ('you're' instead of 'you are').
- Avoid acronyms, buzzwords and clichés.
- Use humour sparingly, through wit rather than cheesy jokes.
- Always apply correct grammar and punctuation.

## Community tone

- Keep language simple and vivid.
- Use friendly, encouraging and supportive language.
- Establish an emotional connection to inspire engagement from the audience.
- Use short, sharp sentences as well as one-liners to create an impact while being as brief as possible.
- Use a combination of first person plural ('we' and 'our') and second person singular ('you').
- Use active voice.
- Use contractions ('that's', 'where'd', 'you're', 'can't').
- Use colloquial expressions when appropriate (will not offend), but avoid buzzwords and clichés.
- Use humour through word play, reworking idioms and exploring paradoxes.
- Apply correct grammar and punctuation for the most part. Use shortened versions of words on the appropriate channel (for example, Twitter).

## Official tone

- Provide the essential details using simple, straightforward language.
- Use authoritative, realistic language without being condescending or pompous.
- Take an evidence-based approach – concentrate on conveying factual information rather than seeking to connect with the audience on an emotional level.
- Focus on one idea or concept per sentence and keep it as brief as possible without compromising meaning.
- Use a combination of first person plural ('we' and 'our') and second person singular ('you') when your audience is clear and you need to convey a call to action. Use third person ('the department', 'students', 'staff', 'teachers') in policies.
- Use passive voice sparingly, and only when it provides greater clarity to the sentence.
- Avoid using contractions ('won't').
- Don't use colloquial expressions, acronyms, buzzwords or clichés.
- Don't use humour as it will undermine the message.
- Always apply correct grammar and punctuation.

## Writing resources

If you would like to improve the voice and tone of your content:

- Download the department's [voice and tone poster \(PDF 104.64 KB\)](#) for your office.
- Register for [Writing for the web e-learning \(staff only\)](#).
- For correspondence and briefing guidelines, see [Ministerial and Executive Services](#).

Category:

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Topics:

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Business Unit:

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