A Guide to Tone & Voice

Introduction

This guide is designed to help you establish a consistent and impactful tone and voice in your communications efforts. By maintaining a coherent and appropriate tone and voice, you will effectively convey your organization's mission and values to your target audience.

1. Purpose and audience

Purpose: Define the primary purpose of your communications. Is it to inform, educate, inspire, advocate, or mobilize? Be specific about your goals.

Audience: Identify your target audience(s). Who are they, and what are their needs, interests, and demographics? Consider both internal and external stakeholders. There can be multiple target audiences for various communications purposes.

Guiding Questions:

- What do we want to achieve with our communications?
- Who are we trying to reach, and why is it important to them?

2. Core messaging

Key Messages: Clearly define your organization's key messages. What are the core ideas and values you want to convey in your communications?

Taglines/Slogans: Do you have any taglines or slogans that encapsulate your mission or campaigns?

Guiding Questions:

- What are the three to five most important messages we want to communicate consistently?
- How can we distill our mission and values into a memorable tagline or slogan?

3. Tone and voice guidelines

Tone: Describe the desired emotional tone of your communications. Consider adjectives like compassionate, authoritative, empowering, or urgent.

Voice: Define the personality of your organization. Are you formal, informal, conversational, or academic in your approach?

Guiding Questions:

- What emotions should our communications evoke in the audience?
- What words or phrases embody our organization's voice?

4. Language and terminology

Inclusive Language: Specify guidelines for using inclusive language that respects diversity and avoids bias.

Jargon: Identify industry-specific or technical terms and decide how to handle them in your communications.

Guiding Questions:

- How can we ensure that our language is inclusive and respectful of all individuals and communities?
- Which technical terms should be explained or avoided for a broader audience?

5. Style and formatting

Grammar and Punctuation: Set standards for grammar, punctuation, and writing style.

Visual Branding: Include guidelines for visuals, such as logos, colors, fonts, and imagery.

Guiding Questions:

- What rules should be followed for consistent and error-free writing?
- How should our visual elements reinforce our brand identity?

6. Content types

Press Releases: Specify the tone, format, and key components of press releases.

Social Media: Define the style for social media posts, including hashtags and emojis.

Blog Posts/Articles: Provide guidance on structure, tone, and content for blog posts and articles.

Guiding Questions:

- How do we adapt our tone and style for different communication channels?
- What should be the ideal length and format for each content type?

7. Crisis communication

Emergency Response: Detail how to handle urgent and sensitive situations, including crisis messaging and spokespersons.

Internal Communication: Address internal communication during crises and guidelines for maintaining a unified voice.

Guiding Questions:

- How should we communicate during a crisis while maintaining trust and transparency?

- Who should be designated as crisis spokespersons and what guidelines should they follow?

8. Review and approval process

Workflow: Describe the process for drafting, reviewing, and approving communications materials.

Roles and Responsibilities: Specify who is responsible for each step in the communication process.

Guiding Questions:

- How can we ensure that all communications align with our tone and voice guidelines?
- Who should be involved in the approval process, and what are their roles?

9. Training and education

Team Training: Outline plans for training team members on tone and voice guidelines.

Documentation: Create a reference document summarizing key guidelines for easy access.

Guiding Questions:

- How will you ensure that all team members are aware of and follow the tone and voice guidelines?
- What resources and materials will you provide for ongoing education?

10. Monitoring and feedback

Feedback Mechanisms: Establish channels for gathering feedback on communications efforts.

Regular Review: Schedule periodic reviews of your tone and voice guidelines to ensure relevance.

Guiding Questions:

- How will you collect feedback from both internal and external stakeholders?
- How often should you revisit and update these guidelines?