Tone of voice guidelines for contractors

Tone of voice

When you're communicating with people on our behalf, it's important that you follow our tone of voice guidance. This is a key part of our brand - it's what we say, how we say it, the images we use, how we want to be perceived and it affects the way people think of us. It's a key part of our personality and often creates a first impression. It should flow through all communications, whether they're written or spoken.

It's important to be consistent in the language you use, whether it's a letter, a poster, a phone call, or a leaflet. When people read something, they should always know you're contacting them on our behalf or working on a project with us.

We want to connect with people and sound like real people – not a corporate body. The language you use should always be:

- friendly and engaging – do not be boring, too formal or rude

- clear – do not use jargon or unnecessary words

- open and honest – do not hide away from hard facts or difficult messages

- positive and taking ownership– do not be defensive or passive.

Consider your audience

Always keep your audience in mind. Who are you writing for and what language should you use? People from many social, economic and ethnic backgrounds live in Edinburgh, so it's important to make sure everyone can understand what you're telling them.

Write in plain English and simplify language to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Will people understand technical terms, jargon and acronyms? Probably not.

Think about structure:

- break it down into manageable readable sections
- use headings and sub-headings to act as entry points for your reader
- use bullet points to break up information or lists
- often a question-and-answer style works well for public information
- keep sentences short
- keep paragraphs short – three or four sentences
- make contact details as clear and prominent as possible.

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Writing style

- Be friendly and avoid formality - use 'we' and 'you' instead of 'the resident' or 'the tenant', use contractions where possible – ie we'll, you'll
  - unless it's negative ie cannot, do not, must not
- Do not use jargon and keep it simple, write for a reading age of nine – use the gunning fog website to check
- Be clear and do not use unnecessary words – use words the reader will understand
- Use the active voice (I/We/you) and not the passive
- Use active and not passive verbs – you can find information on…, rather than information can be found…
- Do not change verbs into nouns ie install/installation
- Avoid capital letters, except for proper names
- Font size must be legible – no smaller than 11 point
- Always include a friendly URL – www.edinburgh.gov.uk/counciltax
- Job titles are written in uppercase: Business Manager, Operations Officer, but roles are written in lowercase: eg business managers will brief operations officers
- Please use 'and' rather than the ampersand (&).

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Do not

- Use exclamation marks but if you really need to, then just use one

- Use strings of capital letters as they are hard to read

- Be too formal

- Use clichés and over-used phrases

- Use jargon

- <u>Underline</u> and use *italics* in body copy – use **bold** instead

- Talk about a department delivering a service, it's the Council.

Using our name

Please use our name correctly, it's: The City of Edinburgh Council.

Dos

- **The City of Edinburgh Council** employs over 19,000 people…

- There are many services run by **the City of Edinburgh Council**… - use a lowercase 't' in 'the City of Edinburgh Council when it appears in the middle of a sentence (except where it is in a list of organisation titles eg NHS Lothian, Scottish Government, The City of Edinburgh Council and Police Scotland

- **The Council** runs services that range from recycling services to art galleries… – use the Council when you have already introduced the organisation, but use a capital 'C'

- Social media – you can abbreviate to **EdinCouncil**

- The Council is **singular** ie the Council owns, the Council is…

Do not use

- Edinburgh Council

- Edinburgh City Council

- CEC

- The council – this needs a capital 'c'

Using our logo

Our logo is a key part of our brand and should be included on communications you're producing on our behalf.

Please read our brand guidelines to find out where, when and how to use it.

Please do not download our logo from our website. Always request a copy of it from us.

Accessibility

You can find accessibility guidance on our website.

Communications must be inclusive, easy to access, read and understand by people with physical disabilities, situational disabilities and socio-economic restrictions.

If you're producing documents on our behalf which will be made public and/or put on our website, they must be accessible as we are now legally obliged to meet certain legal standards. This includes applying styles and formatting properly in Word, using alt text and making sure colour contrast is sufficient. Microsoft has excellent resources on how to make your Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents meet accessibility standards.

Text can be difficult to read if the contrast is not high enough, particularly on screen at a smaller size.

Always

- use good colour contrast – white text can be reversed from our brand colours (except orange if font size is below 18)
- use black text if you're using our brand orange as a background unless the font is + 18 point
- use a readable font size – aim for 14 point for people with visual impairment and 11 minimum point for other readers.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Do not

- use coloured text for long blocks of copy – headings in font +14 can be used in colour
- use low colour contrast
- use a small font size (less than 10 point)
- use white text on our brand orange unless the text is + 18 point
- use text on busy backgrounds or images.

Translation

We must provide information in different formats and languages on request. This includes Braille, large print, different languages including British Sign Language. Council services must include the 'Happy to Translate' symbol and this text on documents and reports:

'If you would like this leaflet/document in another format such as Braille, large print or translation, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service email its@edinburgh.gov.uk quoting the unique reference xxx.'

Please speak to your council contact who will be able to contact our interpretation and translation service to request the unique reference number.

Top tips

Always remember:

- think from the customer's point of view
- Keep sentences short
- Use active and not passive verbs – you can find information on…, rather then information can be found…
- Use words the reader will understand
- Don't be afraid to give instructions
- Don't change verbs into nouns ie install/installation
- Break up lists with bullet points
- Use contractions, ie we're, we'll, they're, I've, you'll
  - Unless it's negative ie cannot, do not, must not.