FARMER STUDIO — RESOURCE

Tone of Voice Guide Template

How to define and document your brand's voice so that every piece of content — from an Instagram caption to a legal disclaimer — sounds consistently like you.

BRANDING COPYWRITING TEMPLATES

Tone of Voice Guide Template

Your tone of voice is how your brand sounds in words. It's the personality that comes through in your Instagram captions, your email subject lines, your out-of-office messages, and the small print on your invoice. When it's consistent, people feel they know your brand. When it's inconsistent, they feel vaguely unsure what kind of business they're dealing with.

Defining your tone of voice is less complicated than it sounds. This guide walks through the process and includes a template you can complete for your own business.

Part 1: Why Tone of Voice Matters

Most small business owners write the way they naturally communicate. This is good — authenticity tends to produce a better result than trying to sound like a brand. The problem is consistency when other people start writing for the business: a new employee who writes very formally, a designer who writes captions in a completely different style, or a social media manager who brings their own voice to your channels.

A documented tone of voice is the solution. It tells everyone who writes for your business what your brand sounds like — including you, when you're writing quickly and need a reference.

Part 2: The Framework

Step 1: Define Your Voice in Three to Five Words

These should be genuine descriptions of how your brand communicates, not aspirational. They should describe what you already do well, not what you wish you did.

Example words:

- Direct
- Warm
- Confident
- Honest
- Specific
- Unpretentious
- Knowledgeable
- Wry
- Considered
- Straightforward

Template:

Our brand voice is: _____, _____, _____, _____, _____

Step 2: Define What You Are NOT

This is often more useful than defining what you are. For each characteristic, identify its opposite — the thing your brand should never sound like.

Template:

WE ARE...	WE ARE NOT...
Direct	Blunt or dismissive
Warm	Over-familiar or sycophantic
Confident	Arrogant or dismissive of alternatives
Honest	Brutal or unkind

Knowledgeable	Condescending or jargon-heavy

Add your own rows.

Step 3: Document Your Style Preferences

These are the specific word-level and style choices that should be consistent across all your communications.

Vocabulary:

- What words do you use and avoid?
- Industry jargon: do you use it? Only with certain audiences?
- Formal terms vs. plain English choices: (e.g. "use" not "utilise", "help" not "facilitate")

Grammar and punctuation:

- Do you use sentence case or title case in headings?
- Oxford comma: yes or no?
- Contractions: "we're" or "we are"?
- Exclamation marks: rarely, sometimes, never?
- Emoji: not at all / occasionally / regularly?

Numbers:

- Spell out "three" or use "3"?
- Dates: "5 April" or "5th April" or "April 5"?

Template:

We always say: _____ We never say: _____ Our punctuation style: _____ Our position on jargon: _____

Step 4: Examples in Practice

The most useful part of any tone of voice guide is real examples. For each of your key writing contexts, write a "do this" and "not this" version.

Social media caption:

Not this: "We are delighted to announce the launch of our exciting new seasonal menu, featuring locally-sourced ingredients from our wonderful Scottish suppliers! Please join us for a dining experience you won't forget! Book now via the link in bio!"

Do this: "New menu is live. Local salmon, summer berries, and a dessert that took three attempts to get right. Book via the link."

Email subject line:

Not this: "Exciting news from [Business Name] — don't miss out!"

Do this: "The thing we've been working on since February"

Response to a positive review:

Not this: "Thank you so much for your lovely review! We are absolutely delighted that you enjoyed your experience with us and we hope to see you again very soon! 🙏"

Do this: "So glad you enjoyed it — the team will be pleased to hear this. See you next time."

Response to a difficult situation:

Not this: "We sincerely apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused and want to assure you that we take all customer feedback very seriously."

Do this: "That's not the experience we want to give anyone, and we're sorry it happened. Can you let us know how to reach you? We want to sort this out."

Part 3: Adapting Voice for Different Contexts

Your voice stays consistent; your tone adjusts for context. Think of it as your personality staying the same whether you're at a job interview or out with friends — you're still you, but you calibrate.

More formal contexts: legal terms, contracts, official communications Keep the personality present but restrained. No contractions in formal legal text. Professional structure.

Neutral contexts: website copy, product descriptions, email newsletters This is your natural register. Write as you would speak if you were explaining something clearly and without performance.

Casual contexts: social media, text messages, event announcements Your warmest register. Shorter sentences. More personality. Contractions. Can include humour if it's genuinely natural for your brand.

Part 4: Maintaining Consistency

Once you have a tone of voice guide, it's only useful if it's used.

- Share it with everyone who writes for the business
- Include it in onboarding for any new employee or freelancer
- Review it annually — your voice can evolve, but it should evolve deliberately
- Use it yourself when you're not sure how to write something

The test is always: does this sound like us? If the answer is uncertain, the guide should make it clearer.