

Developing a Program or Organization's Voice



A voice gives your program consistency and credibility. It helps readers know how to engage with your program and what to expect. It is also an important part of building a professional brand or service. Keep these elements in mind as you work to develop your program's style and voice.

Know Your Audience

All writers have readers. When you are writing, think about your audience to help focus and shape content. Consider the following questions:

- **Who is your audience?** Think specifically about the readers you want to reach and write directly to them. How do they identify themselves as individuals or a community? What are the demographic descriptors of your readers (e.g., age, profession, gender identity, education level, etc.)? What are their values, needs, and interests?
- **What is your relationship to your readers?** After defining your audience or readers, determine your relationship with them. Are you a peer, colleague, educator, service provider, marketer, innovator, or expert in your field?

Define Your Voice

Once you know who your readers are and your relationship to them, define your program and programmatic voice.

- **What are the qualities or characteristics that define your program? What is appropriate and inappropriate for your defined voice? What are examples to help writers become familiar with the program's voice and style.**

Voice characteristic	Description	Do	Don't
Passionate	We're passionate about changing the way the world works.	Use strong verbs Be champions for (industry) Be cheerleaders	Be lukewarm, wishy-washy Use passive voice
Quirky	We're not afraid to challenge the status quo and be ourselves.	Use unexpected examples Take the contrarian viewpoint Express yourself	Use too much slang or too many obscure references Use jargon, overplayed examples Lose sight of the audience and core message
Irreverent (secondary characteristic of quirky)	We take our product seriously; we don't take ourselves seriously.	Be playful Use colorful illustrations or examples	Be too casual Use too many obscure, pop-culture examples
Authentic	We're going to give you the tools and insight you need to make your job easier. That may not always be through our product.	Be honest and direct Own any issues or mistakes, and show how you will address them Stick to your word	Use marketing jargon or superlatives Overpromise Oversell the product's capabilities

Source: Heald, Erika. "5 Easy Steps to Define and Use Your Brand Voice" Content Marketing Institute. 15 October 2015: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/10/define-brand-voice/>

Connect with Your Audience

After defining your audience, relationship, and voice, think how best to communicate with your readers. Consider the following questions:

- **What is your purpose?** Are you trying to engage, educate, sell to, or entertain your audience?
- **What are your audience's expectations?** What is the form, content, and style your readers anticipate?
- **What kind of language or communication is most appropriate?** Consider type of writing or genre to best connect you with your audience? Consider sentence structure and word choice (e.g., concise, descriptive, technical)?

Reflect and Revise

Developing defining your program's voice is never complete. Continually assess the needs and characteristics of your readership. Solicit feedback and consider how others are conversing with you, or not. Reflect and revise to best engage your audience and build your program.