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The Chartered
Governance
Institute

Tone of voice



The Chartered
Governance Institute

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Introduction

Welcome to The Chartered Governance Institute tone of voice guidelines. This is a document offering direction on how your writing for the Institute should sound. How we sound is just as important as how we look. We have developed this guide so that anyone writing on behalf of the organisation can do so in a consistent and confident way.

You will find here guidance on our values, what to include and avoid in your writing, general writing tips and more. It's important to refer to this guide and the editorial style guide that goes along with it regularly. These are two distinct but complementary documents. The style guide gives you specific rules – where should this comma go, which abbreviation is correct – to apply to your writing. The tone of voice will give you an overall idea of what your writing should sound like. Taken together, these two documents should answer any question you have.

Along with the brand guidelines, our tone of voice is a core part of our overall brand identity. We have deliberately kept it short and included elements we believe are important to keep in mind when creating your communication.

We are aware that the Institute comprises a variety of departments all with different styles, purposes and audiences. For instance, a guidance note from the Policy team is of course going to look quite different from Marketing copy. This document has been designed with that in mind, and it's our hope that the guidance contained here is applicable and useful to everyone. If, however, you find that this isn't really the case for your team please come and speak to the Publishing team. We can sit down with you and design a set of guidelines specific to you.

If anything is unclear or you would like further guidance on our tone of voice, please speak to a member of the Publishing team.

The Chartered Governance Institute

Language

Why language matters

We communicate in three ways: the way we look, the way we sound and the way we behave. As well as our visual identity, our verbal identity is a crucial part of who we are and how we connect with people, be it students, members or (business) partners.

Consistency is everything

The more consistent we are, the more likely it is that people will understand what makes us unique. The way we express ourselves has to be joined up and consistent so that people admire, respect and crucially, trust us. Consistency makes our writing look more polished and professional.

Values

A tone of voice is an expression of an organisation's values and way of thinking. Everything we say to a colleague, member or customer should embody one or more of these values:

Openness

We are open, accessible and honest in our (business) behaviours.

Integrity

We are impartial, independent and informed.

Authority

We speak for our profession with experience and expertise.

What is the difference between voice and tone? Think of it this way: you have the same voice all the time, but your tone changes.

Voice vs tone

Voice

Whether people know what they need from us or don't know anything about The Chartered Governance Institute, every word we say should inform and encourage. Considering our core values, when we write copy we should be:

- **Authoritative**
- **Trustworthy**
- **Informative**

Tone

The tone is the attitude your writing employs and it changes depending on the emotion you are trying to convey and who you are speaking to. Consider how you want your writing to sound. Neutral? Confident? Analytical? Friendly?

On the next page is a chart that gives examples of how we can achieve our specific tone through our content.

Voice vs tone continued...

Description

Voice characteristic

We speak for our profession with experience and expertise.

Authoritative

We are open, accessible and honest in our (business) behaviours.

Trustworthy

We are impartial, independent and informed.

Informative

Do

Ensure the information we present to members and customers is useful, relevant, respectful and credible.

Use facts, figures and third-party endorsements to convey the organisation's achievements.

'We have around 34,000 and students and members worldwide, of whom 14,000 are in the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Crown Dependencies and associated territories.'

'I am sure that it will soon become one of the most thumbed items on your team bookshelf.'
– Victoria Whyte FCG

Choose information carefully and ensure it is easily understood and presented in a logical way.

Write in the active voice. Sound clear and confident.

'We provide professional development, guidance and thought leadership.'

Display a deep knowledge of the company's industry and an understanding of the issues affecting our members.

Provide step-by-step explanations.

'The Qualifying Programme covers seven subjects at two levels. Students with a law, finance or governance background may be able to start at Part One at Level 6 (equivalent to final year undergraduate level).'

Don't

Use clichés and gimmicks, such as puns and overused phrases.

'We think outside the box.'

'As a valued customer, we would like to offer you our latest product.'

Use unreliable or overly complex information.

Write in the passive voice.*

'Professional development, guidance and thought leadership are provided.'

Write in a way that is vague or 'waffling' and does not offer concrete information.

'There are a few different pathways that can be taken on the Qualifying Programme, Depending on your background, you may be able to start at a later level which is equivalent to some degrees.'

* Tip – Passive voice: Want to check if a sentence is in the passive voice? Add 'by _____' at the end of the sentence. If it makes sense, it's in the passive voice. If it doesn't, it's active!

'Professional development, guidance and thought leadership are provided by our team.' This makes sense, it's in the passive voice.

'We provide professional development, guidance and thought leadership by our team.' This doesn't make sense, it's in the active voice.

Our audience at the Institute is large and varied. It's important to keep these different personas in mind. Who are you addressing?

Personas

Our audience

Depending on the audience you are communicating with, this will have an impact on your tone. There will be slight changes in your communication to a student in comparison to how you speak to a Fellow. By researching and understanding our audience, we can then adapt our content to their personas.

Guidance on personas has already been developed for The Chartered Governance Institute. We will update this guide and provide a link to the document once it is finalised.

Below we have listed the personas that have been developed and suggested tone profiles that best suit them.

Persona	Audience (general, knowledgeable, expert)	Formality (informal, neutral, formal)	Suggested tone profiles (neutral, confident, welcoming, optimistic, friendly, promptness, analytical, respectful)
Professional subscriber	Knowledgeable	Neutral	Confident, neutral
International associate	Knowledgeable, expert	Neutral, formal	Confident, respectful
Fellow	Expert	Neutral, formal	Confident, respectful, analytical
Graduate	General, knowledgeable	Informal, neutral	Optimistic, friendly
International student	General, knowledgeable	Informal, neutral	Optimistic, confident, prompt
Prospective student	General, knowledgeable	Informal, neutral	Optimistic, friendly, welcoming
Free subscriber	General	Neutral	Optimistic, friendly neutral
Associate	Expert	Neutral, formal	Confident, respectful
Student	Knowledgeable	Neutral	Optimistic, friendly, prompt

Personas in practice

Below is an idea of what some of these types of formality and tone profiles look like:

Formality:

- **Neutral** 'David is a Corporate Governance Director at Morrow Sodali, focusing on the firm's growing corporate governance activities across Europe/UK, the US and Australia.'
- **Formal** 'A board evaluation is a process whereby the performance of the board is assessed in order to ascertain its capacity for providing good governance.'
- **Informal** 'Keep the winter chill at bay with a festive afternoon tea hosted by the AWCS on Tuesday 3 December 2019. Book your spot now!'

Tone profiles:

- **Confident, respectful** 'In order to combat the critical issue of modern slavery, organisations need to put an emphasis transparency. Here we will explore the latest developments in detail to help ensure an ethical supply chain.'
- **Optimistic, friendly** 'The room was abuzz with excitement as attendees listened to expert speakers throughout the day. A big thanks to everyone that attended and we look forward to seeing you again.'
- **Optimistic, confident, prompt** 'We want to celebrate all of the incredible innovations and accomplishments within the governance community – but we need your help to make sure those who are deserving receive a nomination. Make sure you nominate today!'

Writing for all

Diversity

In order to make people feel welcomed, it is important to use inclusive language. We should not be making assumptions about the reader's sexuality, gender, relationship and so on.

Avoid gendered terms in favour of neutral alternatives, like 'chair' instead of 'chairman' and 'businessperson' instead of 'businessman'. This is reflected in the style guide as well.

'Guys' is not gender-neutral. The 'universal male' (i.e. using 'guys' to mean 'people') assumes that the normal, default human being is male.

Simplicity

It's also important to keep your writing simple. Don't use overly complex language unless it is necessary. This is another way of making your writing inclusive. Writing that is full of highly technical words and jargon automatically excludes certain readers.

Simple language is also more readable and gets your point across in the most direct way. Why use three words when you can use one? This all comes back to our core values of openness and authority.

Common terms

Before you finalise your writing, have a look for words that might break these diversity and simplicity rules. Swap them out for more inclusive, simpler terms. Below we have selected a few words/terms that come up regularly in our communication and provided more appropriate alternatives. There are further examples in the style guide.

Instead of...	Use...
Chairman	Chair
Businessman/businesswoman	Businessperson/executive
Sportsmanship	Fairness/sense of fair play
He/she	They
Man hours	Work hours
Whilst	While
E.g.	For example
Etc.	And so on
Henceforth	From now on
Give consideration to	Consider
In order to	To
Commence	Start

Here is a checklist you can use before writing any communication to help identify the appropriate tone to use.

Writing guidance

Checklist

Content type: What are you writing? What do you want your audience to gain from reading your communication?

Audience: Who are you talking to in this scenario?

Purpose: What do you want the reader to learn or do?

Audience feelings: What's the reader feeling in this scenario?

Your tone should be: What words describe how you should sound in this scenario?

Write like this: Give a brief example of how the writing should sound.

Here's an example of what this might look like in practice:

Content type: Social media post (Twitter)

Audience: Professional subscribers, students

Purpose: Download content

Audience feelings: Eager and engaged to find interesting content and information

Your tone should be: Helpful, informative, clear, approachable

Write like this:



icsa The Chartered Governance Institute 16,157 followers 1w

Our new academy guidance notes give you detailed insights into the purpose of articles of association in academy trusts as CLGs.

Guidance notes provide independent advice on a wide range of governance issues and practical specimen materials that you can adapt and use.

Free to download and share now!

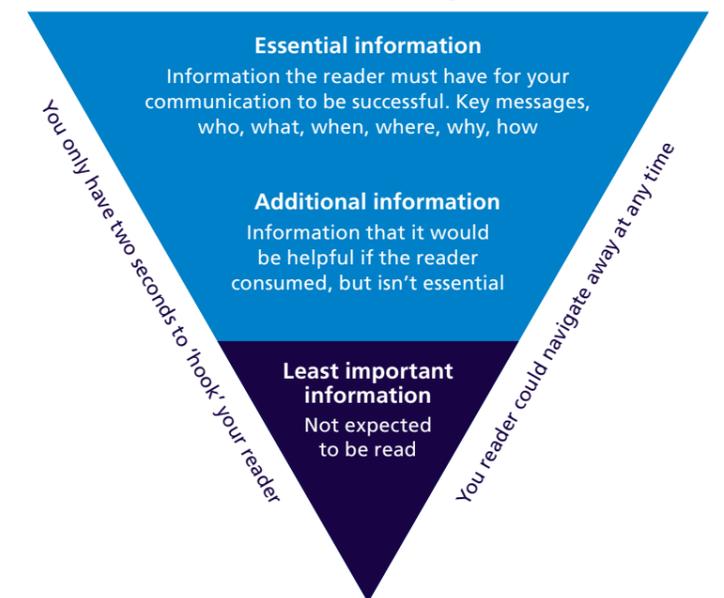
Writing guidance continued...

Writing for the web

- 1 Digital content is not the same as print content.** People encounter and read it differently – they scan it. This needs to be considered when writing digital content. It won't follow conventional paragraph styles and it should be divided into smaller chunks with subheadings.
- 2 Legibility.** It's hard to read on a screen. It's 25% slower than print. Help your reader. There's no need to use a large amount of bolding, italicising and capitals. Avoid using underlining for emphasis because it will make your text look hyperlinked and confuse your reader.
- 3 Credibility.** There can be no excuses for poor spelling and grammar. It undermines the credibility of your message. Spelling mistakes will not make you look serious or professional. It could even make your communications appear fraudulent.
- 4 Ambiguity isn't good.** Your writing should do what it says on the tin.

- 5 Searchability.** Write to be found. What words would people type into Google to find you? Use those words in your copy. But don't overuse the same phrase to the detriment of your writing or marketing. Subheadings should include key words people search for or a question that is answered on the page.
- 6 Accessibility.** Don't exclude visually impaired readers. Don't let your copy rely heavily on imagery, and use tags and captions as opportunities to fully describe pictures. Remember to describe hyperlinks fully.
- 7 Structure.** When structuring your work, think of an inverted pyramid. The most important information first, the broader detail later (see image on the right).
- 8 Questions.** Don't be afraid to use questions in your copy. By doing this, you are inviting others to learn and discover which starts a conversation with your audience. This also lends itself to Google search needs.

Inverted pyramid for web writing



Some helpful pointers to remember whatever, whenever and wherever you are writing

Writing guidance continued...

General writing tips

- 1 Think about what you are trying to say**
Take a few moments first. What are you trying to say? Jot down the main points.
- 2 Remember who you are talking to**
What's important to them? What would help them? How much time do they have? How old are they? The more detailed the picture, the easier it will be to write for them. Try and put yourself in the audience's shoes and read it from their perspective. Is it easy to read? Does it provide them with the right information?
- 3 Create a clear structure**
Divide your work into manageable paragraphs of no more than eight sentences and sentences of no more than 20–25 words with a single idea in each. This helps create a clear narrative that people can easily navigate.

Note: This only applies to print, as copy would need to be much shorter for digital.
- 4 Use headings**
Headlines for chapters, pages, sub-sections and paragraphs create a narrative. These act as signposts for busy readers and ensure that even at the quickest glance they get some of the messages you want them to.

Other resources

Dictionary and thesaurus

For any queries on spellings or word usage, we recommend using Lexico, an online dictionary powered by the Oxford English Dictionary.

www.lexico.com/en

It also has a great built in thesaurus. A thesaurus is an invaluable tool for keeping your writing fresh or for helping you find the perfect word when you're stuck. Don't hesitate to use it!

Grammarly

We would encourage everyone to use 'Grammarly' which is an easy to use online platform dedicated to checking grammar, spelling and plagiarism. You can either:

- copy and paste your text into Grammarly's Editor;
- install the free browser extension for Chrome; or
- download Grammarly for Microsoft Office.

Visit the website to download the software: www.grammarly.com

Articles

There are many useful articles out there to help with writing a range of content across different platforms. We have listed some relevant ones we think will be helpful:

- What is concise writing and why does it matter?. [Blog] Grammarly. Available at: www.grammarly.com/blog/what-is-concise-writing/
- Why consistency is key to your writing. [Blog] Grammarly. Available at: www.grammarly.com/blog/consistency-in-writing/
- What's the easiest way to write an annual report? [Blog] Falcon Windsor. Available at: blog.falconwindsor.com/whats-the-easiest-way-to-write-an-annual-report/

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