

BRAND VOICE & TONE



FIRST LEARN THE
MEANING OF WHAT
YOU SAY, AND
THEN SPEAK.

Epictetus

THIS IS A GUIDE TO THE BASIC VOICE AND TONE FOR OUR BRAND. ALLOWING US TO SPEAK AS ONE...

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What is a Brand Voice?

Brand voice is the uniformity in selection of words, the attitude and values of the brand while addressing the target audience or others. It is how a brand conveys its brand personality to the external audience.

Your brand voice cuts through all of your communication and content. It's your brand's expression of its personality and it can be felt through the words you write and the content you create. If we're going to get cheesy (permission granted) then let's say it's the heart and soul of your brand.

How else will your audience determine your brand's vibe – your words are a vehicle for your brand voice.

**This document is available
to download at:
obrienmedia.co.uk/brand**

THE VOICE & TONE OF O'BRIEN MEDIA.

A FEW THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW.

Our Voice

At O'Brien Media, we've walked in our customers' shoes, and we know web technology and digital marketing is a minefield of confusing terminology. That's why we speak like the experienced and compassionate business partner we wish we'd had way back when.

We treat every hopeful brand seriously. We want to educate people without patronising or confusing them.

Using offbeat humor and a conversational voice, we play with language to bring joy to their work. We prefer the subtle over the noisy, the wry over the farcical. We don't take ourselves too seriously.

Whether people know what they need from us or don't know the first thing about marketing, every word we say informs and encourages. We impart our expertise with clarity, empathy, and wit.

Our Tone

O'Brien Media's tone is usually informal, but it's always more important to be clear than entertaining. When you're writing, consider the reader's state of mind. Are they relieved to be finished with a campaign? Are they confused and seeking our help on Twitter? Once you have an idea of their emotional state, you can adjust your tone accordingly.

O'Brien Media has a sense of humor, so feel free to be funny when it's appropriate and when it comes naturally to you. But don't go out of your way to make a joke—forced humor can be worse than none at all. If you're unsure, keep a straight face.

When we write copy:

1. We are plainspoken. We understand the world our customers are living in: one muddled by hyperbolic language, upsells, and over-promises. We strip all that away and value clarity above all. Because businesses come to O'Brien Media to get to work, we avoid distractions like fluffy metaphors and cheap plays to emotion.

2. We are genuine. We get small businesses because we were one not too long ago. That means we relate to customers' challenges and passions and speak to them in a familiar, warm, and accessible way.

3. We are translators. Only experts can make what's difficult look easy, and it's our job to demystify B2B-speak and actually educate.

4. Our humor is dry. Our sense of humor is straight-faced, subtle, and a touch eccentric. We're weird but not inappropriate, smart but not snobbish. We prefer winking to shouting. We're never condescending or exclusive—we always bring our customers in on the joke.

Style tips

Here are a few key elements of writing in O'Brien Media's voice.

- **Active voice** Use active voice. Avoid passive voice.
 - **Avoid slang and jargon** Write in plain English.
 - **Write positively** Use positive language rather than negative language.
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GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS. KEEP OUR WRITING CLEAR AND CONSISTENT.

Adhering to certain rules of grammar and mechanics helps us keep our writing clear and consistent. This section will lay out our house style, which applies to all of our content unless otherwise noted in this guide.

Basics

Write for all readers. Some people will read every word you write. Others will just skim. Help everyone read better by grouping related ideas together and using descriptive headers and subheaders.

Focus your message. Create a hierarchy of information. Lead with the main point or the most important content, in sentences, paragraphs, sections, and pages.

Be concise. Use short words and sentences. Avoid unnecessary modifiers.

Be specific. Avoid vague language. Cut the fluff.

Be consistent. Stick to the subject at hand.

Writing about people

We write and build websites with a person-first perspective. Being aware of the impact of your language will help make O'Brien Media a better place to work and a better steward of our values in the world.

1. Don't reference age or disability unless it's relevant to what you're writing.
2. Avoid gendered language and use the singular "they."
3. When writing about a person, use their preferred pronouns; if you don't know those, just use their name.

Related resource: [The Conscious Style Guide](#)

Writing for accessibility

We're always working to make our content more accessible and usable to the widest possible audience. Writing for accessibility goes way beyond making everything on the page available as text. It also affects the way you organise content and guide readers through a page. Depending on the audience and country, there may be laws governing the level of accessibility required.

At minimum, an accessible version should be available. Accessibility includes users of all mental and physical capacities, whether situational (broken glasses!) or more permanent.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS. KEEP OUR WRITING CLEAR AND CONSISTENT.

Abbreviations and acronyms

If there's a chance your reader won't recognize an abbreviation or acronym, spell it out the first time you mention it. Then use the short version for all other references. If the abbreviation isn't clearly related to the full version, specify in parentheses.

First use: Network Operations Center
Second use: NOC

First use: Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)
Second use: UTC

If the abbreviation or acronym is well known, like API or HTML, use it instead (and don't worry about spelling it out).

Active voice

Use active voice. Avoid passive voice.

In active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action. In passive voice, the subject of the sentence has the action done to it.

Yes: Sam logged into the account.
No: The account was logged into by Sam.

Words like "was" and "by" may indicate that you're writing in passive voice. Scan for these words and rework sentences where they appear.

One exception is when you want to specifically emphasize the action over the subject. In some cases, this is fine.

Your account was flagged by our abuse team.

Capitalisation

We use a few different forms of capitalisation. Title case capitalises the first letter of every word except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Sentence case capitalizes the first letter of the first word.

When writing out an email address or website URL, use all lowercase.

hello@obrienmedia.co.uk
obrienmedia.co.uk

Don't capitalize random words in the middle of sentences. Here are some words that we never capitalize in a sentence. For more, see the Word List.

website
internet
online
email

Contractions

They're great! They give your writing an informal, friendly tone. In most cases, use them as you see fit. Avoid them if you're writing content that will be translated for an international audience.

Emoji

Emoji are a fun way to add humor and visual interest to your writing, but use them infrequently and deliberately.

WRITING BLOG POSTS & ARTICLES. TALKING DIRECTLY TO OUR CUSTOMERS.

O'Brien Media blog posts are written by people from all over the company, not just those with "writer" in their job titles. We love having experts from around the office blog about their work. The person most familiar with the subject is in the best position to convey it..

Basics

We update the O'Brien Media blog a couple times every week. We generally publish:

We publish blog posts that explain the "why" behind the work we do at O'Brien Media. We want to show people that we're an industry leader with the best products, and we use our blog to tell the stories behind those products.

Guidelines

When writing for the blog, follow the style points outlined in the Voice and tone and Grammar and mechanics sections. Here are some more general pointers, too.

Be casual, but smart

This isn't a term paper, so there's no need to be stuffy. Drop some knowledge while casually engaging your readers with conversational language.

Be specific

If you're writing about data, put the numbers in context. If you're writing about a O'Brien Media user, give the reader plenty of information about the company's stage, workflow, results, and values.

Get to the point

Get to the important stuff right away, and don't bury the kicker. Blog posts should be scannable and easy to digest. Break up your paragraphs into short chunks of three or four sentences, and use subheads. Our users are busy, and we should always keep that in mind.

Link it up

Feel free to link away from O'Brien Media if it helps you explain something.

Make 'em LOL

O'Brien Media is a fun company, and we want our blog to reflect this. Feel free to throw in a joke here and there, or link out to a funny GIF or YouTube video when appropriate. Just don't overdo it.

Use tags and keywords

In WordPress, add keywords that apply to your article. Look through existing posts for common tags. If you're not sure if a word should be a tag, it probably shouldn't.

Use pictures

Include images in your blog posts when it makes sense. If you're explaining how to use our services or service features, include screenshots to illustrate your point. Make sure to use alt text.

**THIS DOCUMENT MAY BE MADE AVAILABLE
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PLEASE CONTACT OUR MARKETING
DEPARTMENT FOR FURTHER DETAILS.**

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