

Tone of Voice

Putting our **Brand** into our **Words**



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Welcome to the latest edition of *Tone of Voice—Putting Our Brand into Words*. The essence of our brand is that we create lasting relationships built on understanding. How does our brand live up to the promises we make? In a large part, by the types of communication we use: words, pictures, sounds, and gestures. We do that as speakers, listeners, writers, and readers.

This book is about our words, the words we use to send signals about what we are like as people and what we are like as a company. Sending the right signals through the right words is our tone of voice. A consistent and credible tone of voice is a powerful tool for us.

In a world of 140-character tweets and many thousands of messages received daily, both online and off-line, it has never been more important to be clear in our messages. Compelling content that allows companies to tell stories about themselves and the capabilities of their people is a true source of differentiation. Indeed, it has always been that way. It is just that the methods of delivery have become many and varied.

Above all, we hope it inspires you to think differently about the power of words and how you can personally contribute to a tone of voice for our company that is believable and easily understood.



Section

01

Our Brand

The words we use are an essential part of how we do business. **Our brand makes demands on the way we speak and write when we represent our company,** in letters, e-mails, reports, proposals, brochures. Through our words, we need to align the brand's image to its promise and delivery. This is what creates a consistent brand experience.



Our **promise** to all
customers, internal and
external is this . . .



Understanding

Integrity

Passion

We will consistently anticipate customer needs and provide what customers truly value.

We will always be true to our words. Whenever we commit to a promise, we will deliver.

We have a burning desire to exceed customer expectations for mutual benefit.

There's more to our brand statement—
the part that says ...

tell me

What does that mean?

... a phrase we use to express our desire
to understand

... a prompt to start and continue
a meaningful conversation for
mutual benefit

more

... a phrase in the middle of a conversation to say, “we’re intrigued, please go on”

... an indication of interest and curiosity

We need to bring these attitudes to our words so that we create the right relationships with our audience.

We all represent the Air Products brand. Whether we're dealing with colleagues, customers, suppliers, financial analysts or people in our local communities, we want to create a good impression of ourselves and our company. The brand makes demands and creates expectations for the way we behave on behalf of Air Products.

Our words are an important aspect of our behavior. The words we use should reinforce the feeling that Air Products operates with understanding, integrity and passion.



Section
02

Understanding

What is the implication of our brand values for the words we use, for our *tone of voice*? If we aim to show our understanding through our language, what will that look like? How will our words change? What will be distinctive about them?

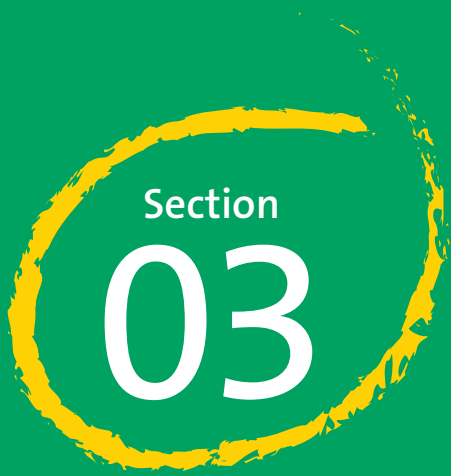
To show understanding, we should

- use everyday but very clear language, thinking about the needs of our readers
- write as if we were speaking
- avoid the use of jargon and acronyms that confuse
- think carefully about making our words as easy to follow as possible
- anticipate the questions and concerns of our customers

Here's an example of what this looks like.

We often use a standard paragraph in our news releases that gives the journalist a picture of Air Products. Like most companies, we've used a "news" style. This tries to be objective and dispassionate. It uses third-person references, sometimes with long sentences and paragraphs that are densely packed with information. This is a less appropriate style for most other communications that describe our company. It is better to use a more conversational style similar to the example on the right.

We started small, over 70 years ago. Our company was the vision of Leonard Pool. He grew the business by understanding what his customers really wanted from industrial gases. Today we're a nearly \$10 billion company. We make gases, chemicals, and equipment, but the same principles apply. We've grown by building lasting relationships with our customers.



Section
03

Integrity

Integrity

suggests
completeness.

It means living our values, all of them. Whenever we promise something, we deliver. We honor the commitments we make.

Actions are paramount, of course. But clearly, words are at the heart of this brand value, integrity. We have to pay close attention to the language we use, to saying what we mean and communicating in as clear, straightforward, and effective a way as possible.

Here are some thoughts about writing with integrity:

- take an honest approach that doesn't rely on exaggeration
- prove and demonstrate, don't just make a claim; actions speak louder than words
- put our customer at the center of our thinking, basing conversations around how we can solve a problem

- back up what we promise with a commitment that shows we stand behind what we sell
- be authoritative without being boastful or off-putting
- never slam our competition, even when we know we're better



Section

04

Passion

Our third value is **passion**. Passion is having a burning desire to exceed customer expectations for mutual gain.

Here are some thoughts about writing with passion . . .

- engage the reader's attention with writing that reads as if it were spoken
- talk in a very direct way, using personal pronouns (**I, we, you**, etc.) rather than the corporate persona (**the corporation, the company, the department**, etc.)

- have a high proportion of verbs and use active, not passive forms of verbs (**just do it**, not **make sure it's done**)
- choose adjectives with real meaning, or don't use them at all
- show compassion as well as passion; always think of your reader as a real person to whom you are writing

Yes, you can do this in business writing. Let's look at **another example**, this time a technical article for a trade magazine. These typically lack color and point of view. But here we use a more direct style, with a more conversational tone that still retains the authority needed for this type of article. Take a look at the opening.

We've been living in a time of mega-mergers and joint ventures. From the mid-90s onwards, particularly in the petroleum business, companies have focused on increasing returns from refining and marketing assets. They've done this by gaining economies of scale, reducing costs, and seeking access to larger markets for transportation fuels. Still, the outlook remains challenging. The market for refinery products is mature, and competition is getting fiercer. At the same time, environmental regulations are increasing. This combination of pressures will continue to push corporate managers to try new paths to profitable growth.



Section

05

Principles

We have 10 *tone of voice* principles.

Here are three of them . . .

- 1 Learn to care for the words you use
- 2 Learn from what you like
- 3 Think in headlines

We need to bring the qualities of clear, direct vernacular to our business writing. But don't take our word for it. Read the words of world-renowned investor Warren Buffett . . .

“One unoriginal but useful tip: write with a specific person in mind. When writing Berkshire Hathaway’s annual report, I pretend that I’m talking to my sisters. I have no trouble picturing them: though highly intelligent, they are not experts in accounting or finance. They will understand plain English, but jargon may puzzle them. My goal is simply to give them the information I would wish them to supply me if our positions were reversed. To succeed, I don’t need to be Shakespeare. I must, though, have a sincere desire to inform.”

Warren E. Buffett



Section

06

More Principles

Four more *tone of voice* principles . . .

- 4 Grab your reader's attention with a powerful opening
- 5 Put your own personality into the words you write
- 6 Don't undermine our integrity by being too pushy or hard-sell
- 7 Write as if you were speaking

Compare these **two examples**, this time using the opening of a press release. First, traditional corporate language, with long sentences that seem intended to impress more than to convince.

In support of its objective of being an industry leader in environmental, health, and safety performance, Air Products has initiated a new Product Stewardship section of its company website to communicate information more effectively regarding the safe handling, distribution, use, and disposal of the company's products to suppliers, distributors, and customers.

And second, in more human, everyday language.

Air Products has launched a new section on its website. It's on Product Stewardship. The company wants to communicate better to suppliers, distributors, and customers. In the new section, these important stakeholders can learn about the safe handling, distribution, use, and disposal of the company's products. This supports Air Products' goal to be an industry leader in environment, health, and safety.

It says the same thing, but more effectively.

Instead of one long, windy sentence, we have five shorter sentences that the reader can digest.

Even when writing for the company, be yourself. Don't try to dress yourself up with words to be someone you are not.

Yes, we want to project the Air Products brand. But we need to give more of our own personality to our writing to make real connections with real people.

You might think you can't do that if you are writing for the company. You can. Remember that companies don't talk to each other, people do. Your writing needs to come from you and your personality. If it does, it will have more chance of engaging with another human being.

The ***tone of voice*** principle, “Write as if you were speaking,” does not mean writing with all the umms, errs and inconsequences of meaning left from ordinary speech. It means that we have the opportunity to edit our words to reflect the way we would ideally like to speak. The edited written version sounds as if we had spoken it. And it sounds good.

Never accept your own first draft as the final draft. Even though we want our writing to sound spoken, we have to make editing a habit. Editing our own writing will make us all better writers—writers who win more hearts and minds.



**“I’m not a great writer,
but I am a good editor.”**

David Ogilvy, one of the 20th century’s
greatest writers for business



Section

07

Still More Principles

Three final *tone of voice* principles . . .

- 8 Beware of language that fails to express passion by being boring and flat
- 9 Setting ourselves a challenge releases creativity
- 10 Think about whom you're writing to

Here's how we address the people we market our hydrogen and related technology to. See how conversational even this business pitch can be. We try to project a personality, even when talking about energy and the environment.

The world's future depends on alternative energy solutions. Hydrogen, the simplest and most plentiful of all the elements, could be the solution. It may be the way we solve some of the world's biggest problems, including the diminishing stocks of oil and the rising effects of pollution and climate change. The element that may solve future energy problems is all around us. Hydrogen is abundant; it's clean and it's efficient.

Never retreat into easy formulas. Even the kinds of writing that have a well-established best practice—for example, direct mail and press releases—need to have their conventions challenged every so often. It’s like going on a familiar journey and finding the road ahead blocked; then you find out if a different route might be quicker or better.

We always need to keep things in balance, though. Your writing needs to meet the needs of you, the Air Products brand, and the people you are writing to.

Here’s the advice from a recent Air Products training program. It’s about tone of voice, but it focuses on face-to-face, spoken communication when you meet a new member of a customer company.

Convey to the customer how you feel about what you are doing: a personable, sincere tone can create a positive response.

- Adjust the volume of your voice as appropriate.
- Avoid speaking in a monotone. Vary the tone of your voice.
- Speak clearly so the customer can understand you.
- Adjust the rate of speech when appropriate. You may need to speak at a slower or faster rate.

We can adapt that advice to our written ***tone of voice***. The same principles hold true.

- Sometimes our written words need to sound loud. Short words or sentences give emphasis, or speed up the reading. Longer sentences, on the other hand, often slow the reader down or lend a calming effect. Both are appropriate in the right setting.
- Always listen to what you have written—either by reading it aloud or inside your head. The sound will guide you to places where you need to change what you have written to achieve more variety.

- Be conscious of clarity. Ask yourself:
Is this written as clearly as possible?
Will my reader understand it easily?
- Think about punctuation. A misplaced comma or period can create a barrier to understanding. Well-placed punctuation can do the opposite.

Keep in mind the advice of Warren Buffett. He talks about writing with a specific person in mind. He pretends he's writing to his sisters. By doing so, he ensures that he keeps complex information simple, clear, and jargon-free. He concludes:

“No siblings? Borrow mine: Just begin with ‘Dear Doris and Bertie.’”

Warren E. Buffett



Section

08

Pointers

Some specific pointers:

→ prefer the everyday word
to the ceremonial word
start, not commence

→ prefer the concrete to
the abstract
we deliver, not we manage
the logistics

→ *prefer the single plain word
to the convoluted phrase*

deadline, not *anticipated*
cut-off point

→ *prefer the short to the long*
about, not *regarding* or *concerning*



Section
09

Stories

When you're writing about Air Products, put real people at the center.

True stories about real people make an impact. They are believable and convincing. They demonstrate the company's ability not to make claims, but to meet commitments.

An example: In an article about supplying a hospital customer with oxygen, we focused on people more than products and processes. Our brand shines through when we show how our employee's deeper understanding had a personal impact. That's how relationships are built.

Air Products employee Jim Ackerson helped a North Carolina specialty hospital’s staff and patients breathe easier, in more than one way. Because of an unreliable supply, our hospital contact frequently had to use his personal time to check oxygen levels at all hours of the day and night. Jim took time to understand the customer’s problems and came up with the best solution—a microbulk tank with telemetry equipment for remote monitoring of the product levels.

Jim explains: “Once we understood his needs, we were able to give the hospital a system that helped staff care for patients without worry. Ever since then, our contact has never had to revisit the hospital in the middle of the night.”



Section

10

People Communicate

Again, companies don't communicate. People do. Each interaction matters. We need people who live up to our brand principles.

- *Salespeople* who are good listeners—and then make the right decisions as a result
- *Operations people* who care for the detail and the process—and get things right
- *Distribution people* who are flexible and tuned to the needs of customers—and make decisions to fit those needs
- *Engineers* who are obsessive about safety and operational excellence—but never lose their courtesy
- *Accounts people* who keep invoicing errors to a minimum—but always help if there are any concerns

- *Direct marketing people* who communicate in a powerful way—that always respects and helps the recipient
- *Digital-business people* who design transactions that are easy to deal with—and support both parties
- *Drivers* who are always safe and courteous—and become the eyes and ears of the customer at the delivery point
- *Research and development people* whose work is driven by the customers' needs—and who make a difference to the our customers' business

It's clear that each of these functions depends on a series of relationships. Any relationship depends on good communication. Listening and exchanging words, thoughts, ideas, smiles: It's the way we begin, establish, maintain, and strengthen relationships.

In business it's no different. So let's continue to build good conversations with all of our audiences. When conversation breaks down, so does the relationship. Let's make good communication a habit. Some well-known people have wise advice to give about habits: You remember what some well-known people said about habits, don't you?

Winning is not a one time thing, it's an all the time thing. Winning is a habit.

Vince Lombardi

We are or we become those things which we repeatedly do. Therefore excellence can become not just an event but a habit.

Albert Einstein

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We are what we keep doing. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

Aristotle

Section

11

Recap

Ten *tone of voice* principles recapped

1

Learn to care for the words you use

2

Learn from what you like

3

Think in headlines

4

Grab your reader's attention with a powerful opening

5

Put your own personality into the words you write

6

Don't undermine our integrity by being too pushy or hard-sell

7

Write as if you were speaking

8

Beware of language that fails to express passion by being boring and flat

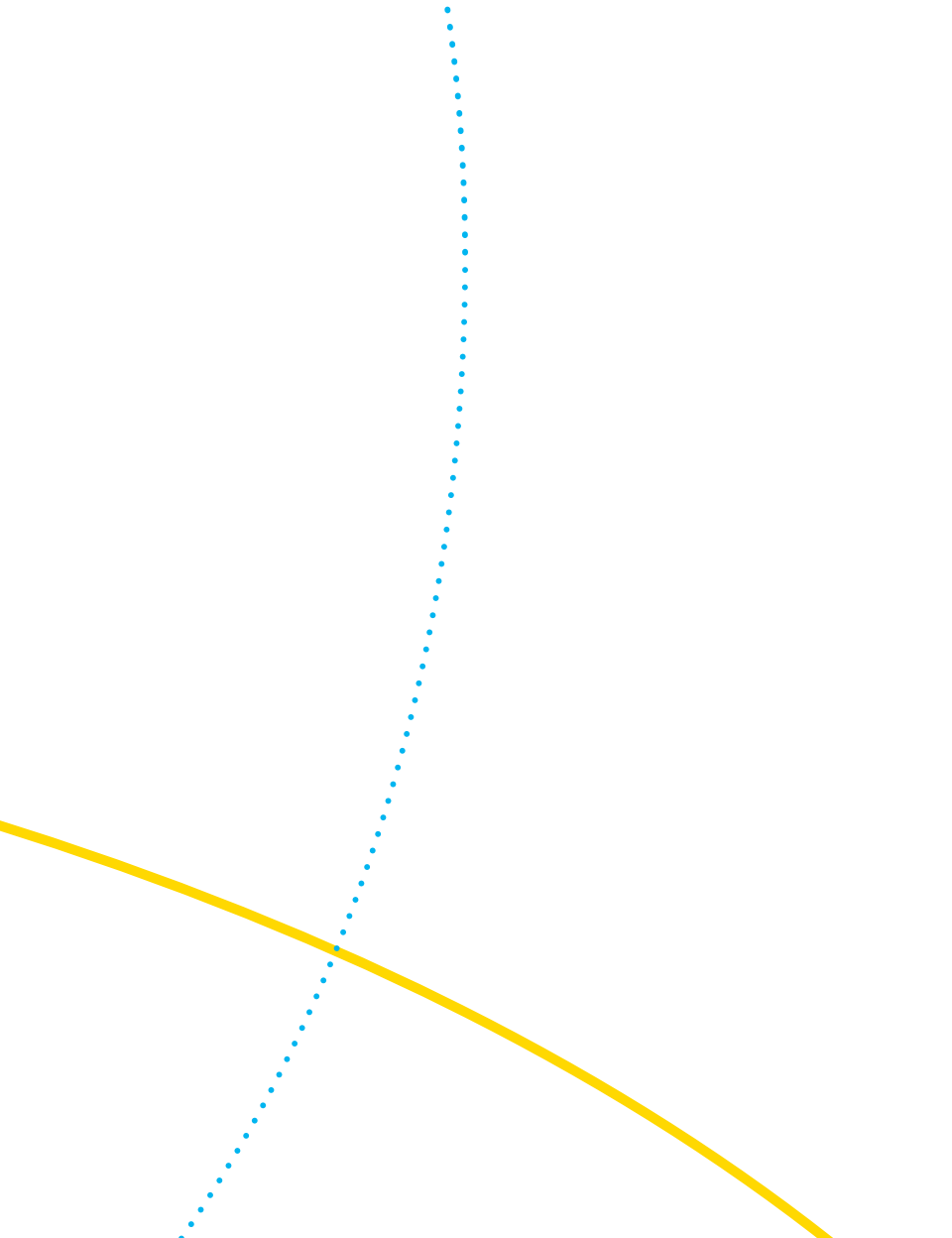
9

Setting ourselves a challenge releases creativity

10

Think about whom you're writing to

Well, there you have it. That wasn't so bad, was it? Our lesson is over. Now you get to apply the principles you've learned whenever you have to communicate with someone. Use your experience, your memory, and your creativity to guide you. It can be fun. Enjoy your writing.



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