

UI Modernization

Establishing your Organizations

Voice and Tone Workshop (9/21/23)



U.S. Department of Labor
Office of the Secretary
Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization

What we'll be covering


- Icebreaker
- Introduction - what is voice?
- Differences between voice and tone
- Review of plain language guidelines
- Workshop tutorial
- Additional resources
- Q&A / Open discussion



ICEBREAKER

Think about a positive experience you recently had with a company or organization (this can include government agencies).

What was the company, the experience? What made it positive? How would you describe the experience?





As we move through today's workshop, keep this positive experience in mind.





INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS VOICE?



What is voice?

What is an organization's voice, exactly?

The [18F Content Guide](#) sums it up well, stating that an organization's voice is like its personality – it communicates, in all contexts, “who” the organization is and what they stand for.

It can be helpful to think of an organizational voice as analogous to a human voice.

Voice vs. tone

Differentiating between voice and tone can be confusing, but there's an easy way to remember which is which.

Voice, like a person's voice, remains fundamentally the same across platforms and in different circumstances.

Tone, like a person's *tone* of voice, changes with the situation. (Think about how your tone changes when you're excited vs. when you're angry.)

The importance of a consistent voice

- Helps users develop an understanding of what to expect from and how to interact with an organization
- Creates a heightened sense of brand/organizational credibility (via consistent content across channels)
- Increases brand/organization recognition
- Helps content creators communicate in a way that's aligned with organizational values
- Can help your team in the process of creating content principles

Shifting contexts, shifting tones

Type of writing	Intended readership	Tone	Example
Obituary of a prominent community member	People who knew (or knew of) the deceased	Respectful, reverent, somber	“Professor Pelham was respected by her colleagues and revered by her students. Her wit, gentle humor, and compassion left their mark on everyone she talked to.”
Blog post announcing open source documentation guide	Developers and other readers with a strong tech background	Direct, impartial, informative	“The Open Source Style Guide is a comprehensive handbook for writing clear, accessible, and user-friendly documentation so that your open source code repositories are accessible both internally and externally.”
Introduction to initial UI application	Claimants	???	???

Plain language guidelines – a review

- Write for your audience
- Organize information logically
- Choose your words carefully
- Be concise
- Be conversational



WORKSHOP TUTORIAL



Workshop tutorial - goals

Now that you're familiar with what voice is and why a consistent voice is important, we'll cover how you and your team can craft your organizational voice. During this section of the presentation, we'll discuss:

- How to identify your organizational values
- Crafting "This but not that" statements
- How to synthesize workshop outputs

Workshop components

Step 1: Identify brand values

What are your organization's core values? Spend five minutes brainstorming all the values you associate with your organization, whether they're actual or more aspirational. Please list one value per sticky note, please. Once we're done brainstorming, we'll group like stickies and discuss the values we've identified.

Step 2: Values-driven content revisions

Now that we've identified the top five values we associate with our organization, we'll rewrite some existing UI content (from your site) to better reflect those values. Once everyone has rewritten selected pieces of content, we'll share out our results with the rest of the team.

Step 3: Bringing it all together

Identifying our organization's values helped us speak concretely to what our org stands for, and rewriting content to reflect those values helped us put those values into practice. This final step – creating "This but not that" statements – will help us create an artifact that anyone across the organization can use to create content with a standardized voice.

Step 1: Values brainstorm

1. Grab a notebook and pen (or, if you're working with your team, locate a whiteboard and sticky notes or log into a collaborative whiteboarding program like Mural or Miro).
2. Set your timer for 5 minutes. Use this time to brainstorm as many of your organization's values as you can. If you're stumped, use existing brand collateral, mission/vision statements, comms from your leadership team, and so on.
3. Have each team member share out what they brainstormed.
4. Group like stickies, labeling each group.

Step 2: Values-focused revisions

Prior to the workshop, choose one or two short pieces of content (no more than two paragraphs) from your existing site or application. Package this content in such a way that everyone from your team can access it – this might mean printing a document for each participant or emailing the content.

Take 10-15 minutes and have each person revise the content to better reflect the values identified in step 1. Afterwards, have participants share their work. How successful (or not) do you feel your revisions were? Why?

Step 3: "This but not that" statements

"This but not that" statements are a straightforward way to communicate to the rest of your organization what your voice is (and what it isn't).

Including what your voice *isn't* helps reinforce the characteristics that define your organization.

Step 3: "This but not that" statements

Here are some examples of "This but not that" statements:

Our voice is:

- **Authoritative but not condescending**
- **Friendly but not overly casual**
- **Informative but not too in the weeds**
- **Official but not standoffish**

Step 3: "This but not that" statements

Take the following steps to create "This but not that" statements:

1. Have everyone in the group grab a notebook/pen or their laptop.
2. Set a timer for 10 minutes and ask everyone to brainstorm as many "TbnT" statements as they can, drawing both on the values you've already identified and the values-focused revisions you've written.
3. At the end of 10 minutes, have each participant select their top five most accurate statements.
4. Go around the room and discuss. What themes can you identify?

How to use these materials moving forward

We hope you've enjoyed and gained useful information from this workshop (and if you have any questions, we'll have a Q&A momentarily!).

Here are some ways you can use this deck in the future:

- As a reference to refresh your understanding of voice vs. tone and why it's important to have a consistent organizational voice
- As a basis for building out a content style guide
- As a teaching tool (to help others in your organization learn about voice and tone)
- As a reference when you're creating new content or revising existing content




ADDITIONAL RESOURCES





To learn more about voice and tone, check out the following resources:

- [18F Content Guide](#)
 - [MailChimp's Content Style Guide \(Voice and Tone section\)](#)
 - [Atlassian's Voice and Tone Principles](#)
 - [UX writing: using voice principles and a tone map to write consistently](#)
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Q&A / OPEN DISCUSSION

