WRITE.

**TONE OF VOICE
GUIDELINES**

WRITING IS THINKING ON PAPER.

WILLIAM ZINSSER

CONTENTS

WELCOME TO WRITE.

Write is here to help you write more creatively and effectively in your day-to-day life at the University of Leeds.

We all need to influence and persuade people at work. Whether we're lobbying for funding, recruiting students or asking for much-needed cup of tea, words are our most powerful tool. What's more, they're free, available and ready to use. With a little consideration, a few gentle guidelines and a bit of imagination, they will do great things for us and for our University.

So, think of this less as a book of rules, more a gateway to sparkling and powerful language that's as enjoyable to read as it is to write.

FREE TEA

FREE INSPIRATION

WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

Like any commercial organisation, we are competing. We're competing for the best students, staff and funding. So, we need to be clear about what makes us different from other universities and, importantly, we need to be able to communicate this.

So...

We communicate in three ways; the way we look, the way we sound and the way we behave. As well as our visual identity, which includes our logo, colours and typography, our verbal identity is a crucial part of who we are and how we connect with people, be it colleagues, undergraduates, postgraduates, suppliers or business partners. It comprises our tone of voice, our stories and our names. We'll take a look at each of these over the following pages.

Consistency is everything

The more consistent we are, the more likely it is that people will understand what makes us special. The way we express ourselves has to be joined up and consistent so that people admire, respect and, crucially, trust us. It's no good saying we're imaginative if our language is anything but. So we need a strong verbal identity that we all understand and know how to use.

TRUST

WRITING IS A LOT EASIER IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

SHOLEM ASCH

Our tone of voice is the way in which we write and speak, what we say and how we say it. Like a person, **what** we say is dictated by our principles, experiences and aspirations, **how** we say it is informed by our personality.

We've been through a rigorous process to define our unique qualities. We've distilled these into a vision, big idea, principles and personality for the University. Here we explore in more detail how each of these elements affects the language we use.

STRAIGHTFORWARD FRIENDLY IMAGINATIVE CONFIDENT

CHALLENGING GENEROSITY

COLLABORATION EXCELLENCE

WE PROVOKE A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS AND ON SOCIETY

TO BE CONSISTENTLY IN THE TOP 50 IN THE WORLD RANKINGS, 5TH IN THE UK.

OUR VISION

OUR BIG IDEA

OUR PRINCIPLES

OUR PERSONALITY

OUR VISION

What's a vision?

A vison captures your overall direction in life, where you're heading, where you want to be in the future. It's your big, stretch goal.

Our vision…

TO BE CONSISTENTLY IN THE TOP 50 IN THE WORLD RANKINGS, 5TH IN THE UK.

How does our vision sound?

We don't talk about our vision, not in the outside world anyway. In other words, our vision is for us, it's there to guide us in our daily decisions and actions and to give us a clear focus for our efforts. It should never find its way into our communication with people outside the University. If we're living, and talking about, our principles and personality, our ambitions will come across loud and clear anyway. Use it as a guiding principle when you're writing. Will these words help us realise our vision?

What's a big idea?

A big idea is your reason for being. It's why you're on the planet. It's what's different about you, distilled down into one short sentence that's easy to understand and remember. It's your one-line sales pitch.

WE PROVOKE A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS AND ON SOCIETY.
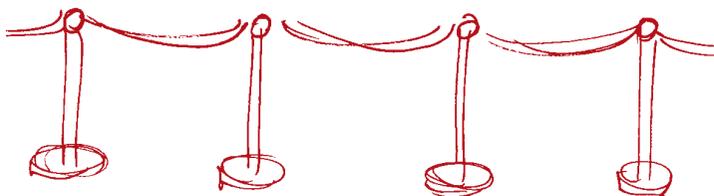
How does our big idea sound?

If we break our big idea down into separate elements and explain what we mean by each of these, it's much easier to see how to bring it to life in the way we write and speak. Think of scenarios where this happens and bring them into your writing where it's relevant and useful.

We - we work together as a team, in the same direction towards the same goals. There's a supportive culture here, which gets the best out of everyone.

provoke - we actively provoke new and different ways of thinking and doing things. We stimulate thought and challenge and push to make it happen.

a collaborative approach - we collaborate with each other, cooperating between faculties and disciplines as well as external organisations and people to create exciting ventures and to break new ground.

to knowledge - we create and disseminate knowledge through our world-class research and teaching and also share our knowledge with other sectors and disciplines.

to make a positive impact - we believe passionately that our role is to bring about significant change for good. It is part of our ethos and we achieve this through our creative ways of working.

on individuals - this creates an exciting environment and opportunities for each and every person who works and studies here as well as the lives of those we cooperate and collaborate with.

and society - the way we create and apply knowledge has a direct and positive impact on society and the world at large. This interdisciplinary, integrated approach gives a real-life relevance to our learning.

Tip

- We wouldn't include this in any of our written communication, but use it as a benchmark. Does it sound like we provoke a collaborative approach to knowledge?

What are principles?

These are beliefs that you hold dear and would stick to no matter what, even if it cost you money. Just like a person.

Our principles

COLLABORATION
CHALLENGING
GENEROSITY
EXCELLENCE

How do they influence what we say?

Our principles inform **what** we say. They should come through in the content of our language and the messages we try to communicate.

How to express our principles

If it helps, try and imagine a person who is collaborative, challenging, generous or excellent. Words are slippery so we've also defined what we do and what we don't mean by each one.

Take each of these defining words and think of examples that demonstrate them. Always bear in mind what you're trying to say, who you're talking to and where. This will affect which examples, facts and stories you choose. Each principle has a number of nuances, you'll want to use different ones depending on who you're talking to and when.

The more specific we can be about our claims, the more convincing they will be. Words like freedom and inspirational can seem vague. Think of specific examples of where these qualities have come to the fore and how they have been successful.

We believe in…

COLLABORATION

What we mean

Joined-up thinking, being a team, mutual understanding, openness, cooperation, responsiveness.

What we don't mean

Having to do things in a certain way, giving in, just doing what we're asked, being weak or unstructured.

How does 'collaboration' sound?

Collaboration is very important to us. This is about our ability to bring people together and make exciting things happen. It's active and dynamic, not weak and unfocused. We can do this because of the sheer scale, size and diversity we offer on one relatively compact campus. But it's also because of our culture - our collaborative way of working, our openness to new thinking and people, our willingness to share ideas and knowledge.

TIPS

- **Joined-up thinking.** What does this mean to us? Are we all working to one shared vision? Give as much specific detail as you can to support this idea.

- **Being a team.** How do we all work together as a team? In what ways do we share ideas and thinking between us? How do we help each other? What good things come out of this team-spirited culture?

- **Mutual understanding.** In what ways can we demonstrate mutual understanding? Think about small everyday instances as well as the bigger picture.

- **Openness.** When have we been open to new ideas, partnerships, people? What examples could you give?

- **Cooperation.** Think of interesting collaborations between individuals, faculties and external partners. What have been the results? Emphasise the unique possibilities offered by our one compact campus. When you're talking about the scale and size of our campus, be specific. How many faculties are there; what's the range of subjects, what does this mean day-to-day? Is it easier to collaborate, get from one place to another?

- **Responsive.** When have we been quick to react? What did we do? And what was the outcome? Use hard facts and figures where you can to back up your claims.

We believe in being...

CHALLENGING

What we mean

Inventive, thinking differently, being the first, inspirational, ambitious, passionate.

What we don't mean

Unrealistic, forcing things, making life overly difficult, taking unneccessary risks.

How does 'challenging' sound?

Challenging for us means genuinely pushing things. We do this through our collaborations and our world-leading research. It's about being creative and inventive and having the energy and dynamism to make it happen. We're not afraid to do things differently and to lead the way if it's something we believe in. We encourage debate and encourage each other to challenge and question - internally and externally. We have a long history of being 'quietly radical'.
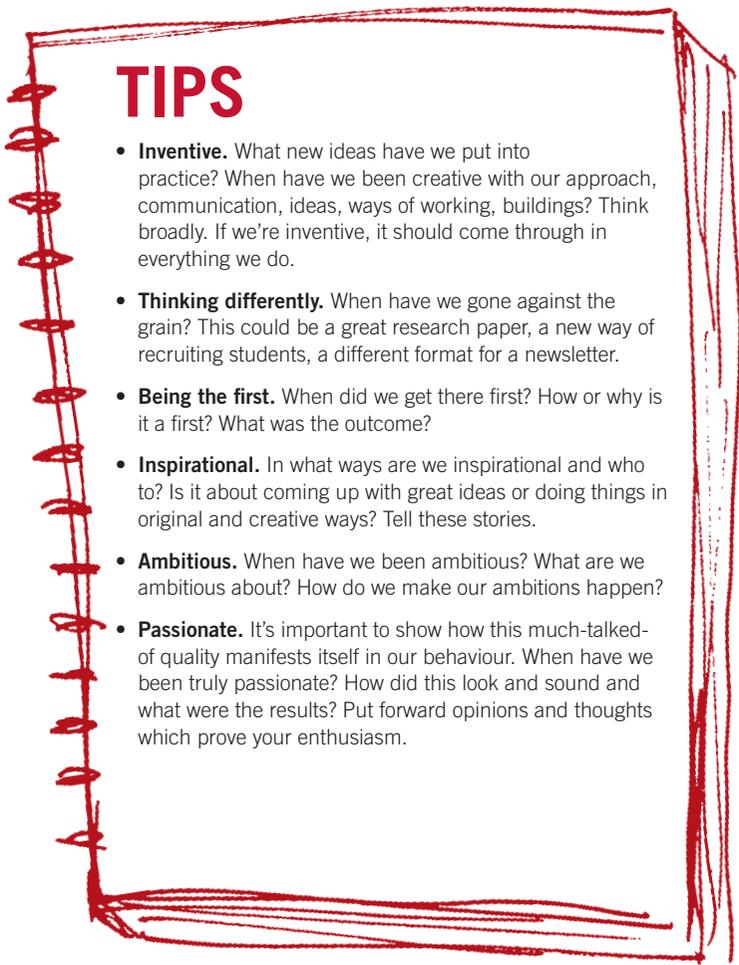
TIPS

- **Inventive.** What new ideas have we put into practice? When have we been creative with our approach, communication, ideas, ways of working, buildings? Think broadly. If we're inventive, it should come through in everything we do.

- **Thinking differently.** When have we gone against the grain? This could be a great research paper, a new way of recruiting students, a different format for a newsletter.

- **Being the first.** When did we get there first? How or why is it a first? What was the outcome?

- **Inspirational.** In what ways are we inspirational and who to? Is it about coming up with great ideas or doing things in original and creative ways? Tell these stories.

- **Ambitious.** When have we been ambitious? What are we ambitious about? How do we make our ambitions happen?

- **Passionate.** It's important to show how this much-talked-of quality manifests itself in our behaviour. When have we been truly passionate? How did this look and sound and what were the results? Put forward opinions and thoughts which prove your enthusiasm.

We believe in...

GENEROSITY

What we mean

Community, caring, integrity, giving, open, ethical.

What we don't mean

Giving to the wrong things or people, for the sake of it, open to exploitation.

How does 'generosity' sound?

We're generous of spirit and this manifests itself in many ways. There's a community here on campus with groups and individuals collaborating, working together to break new ground, across disciplines and departments. We contribute to society locally and globally. We care about what happens to each other and out there in the world at large. Our knowledge is relevant to real life and benefits society. People are attracted to us because of our ethics.

TIPS

- **Community.** This means lots of different things. Think about the community here. What do we do to encourage it? What are the benefits? What about our impact on the local economy? Use facts and figures not generalisms to demonstrate this.

- **Caring.** How do we make new staff and students feel welcome? How do we support each other? What do we do that's special or different in this way?

- **Integrity.** How have we contributed to society? Think of the '10 Ways Leeds Changed the World' booklet.

- **Giving.** Are we generous with our time, our ideas, our approach, our resources? How do we support the local community and businesses? What do we give to society and to each other?

- **Ethical.** In what ways are we ethical? This could be on a big or small scale, past, present or future. Is this about where we source our coffee, what we do with our waste paper, the way we heat our buildings or the way we treat people?

We believe in...

EXCELLENCE

What we mean

Freedom, creativity, inspirational, world-leading.

What we don't mean

Image only, too directional, trying to be good at everything.

How does 'excellence' sound?

This isn't just about the quality of the knowledge we create and disseminate, fundamental as this is to our reputation and to our future success. Excellence here is about freedom and creativity, giving people the freedom to explore new ideas and make them happen. It's about being creative, setting new standards and inspiring people worldwide. This culture exists throughout the University and works on many levels.

TIPS

- **Freedom.** What freedoms do we have here? How does this benefit us as individuals, the University and the other partners we work with? These could be everyday examples of how we work together or larger-scale ones related to our research and other achievements.

- **Creativity.** Think of examples of creativity here at the University. Give them a human touch. Who was it, when and how?

- **Inspirational.** When have we been inspirational? Has it been in our words, our actions or both? What was the outcome? The more hard facts and human insight you can give your stories the better.

- **World-leading.** How have we been truly world-leading? Tell the story. How did it come about, who was involved? Paint a picture. Think about our research breakthroughs but also our buildings and other initiatives that demonstrate that we really do lead the world.
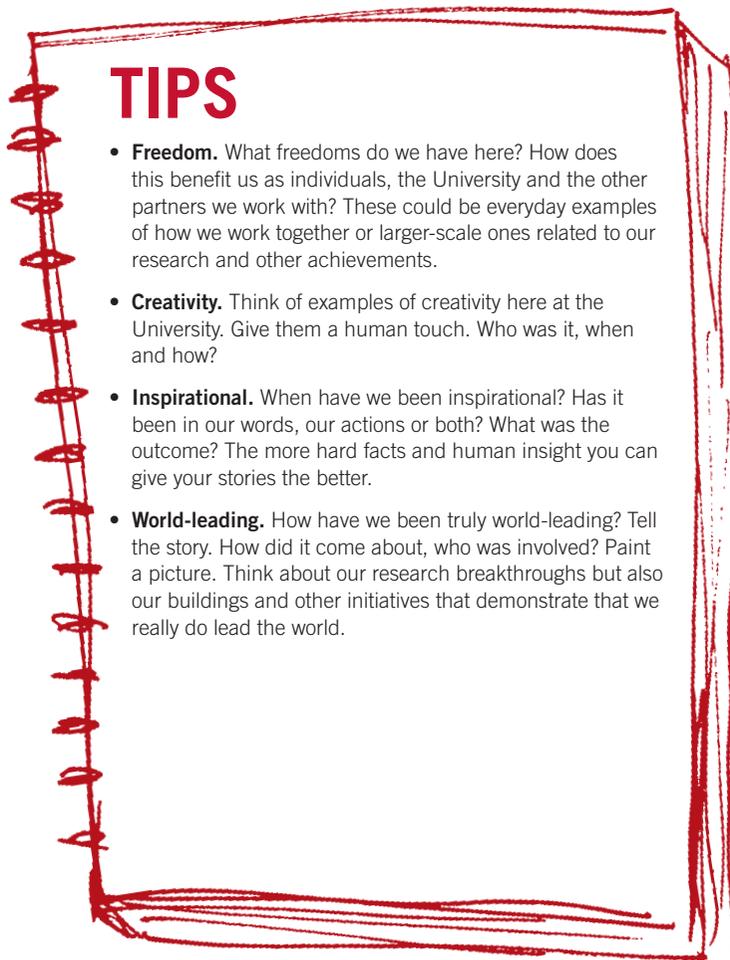
OUR PERSONALITY

What's a personality?

Your personality traits inform how you express yourself, how you do things.

STRAIGHTFORWARD
FRIENDLY
IMAGINATIVE
CONFIDENT

How does it influence what we say?

Our personality guides how we talk and write for the University.

How to express our personality

If a person were friendly, straightforward, imaginative and confident, how would they sound? Use the following pages for ideas on how to bring these personality traits to life in your writing.

If we are friendly, we should sound friendly. Bring some warmth to your words. Likewise, if we're imaginative, our language should be too. No falling back on tired old clichés or bureaucratic jargon. Remember, this is as much about the style of your writing as the content.

We are...

STRAIGHTFORWARD

What we mean

Clear, uncomplicated, easy to understand and single-minded.

What we don't mean

Dumbed down, patronising, facile, lacking in substance.

How does 'straightforward' sound?

Straightforward doesn't mean that we're dumbing down, over-simplifying or being patronising. It means that we avoid over-complicated terminology and jargon that is exclusive to our sector or discipline. We make our language as easy as possible to understand. People don't have time to wade through complex and long-winded explanations and we stand a much better chance of getting our message across if we keep it simple. You'll see more tips on clarity and simplicity in the general writing tips at the end of this section.

TIPS

- **Clear.** Don't use 10 words when three will do. Don't use an over-complicated, long word if a shorter word would do just as well. What format are you writing for? Is this a website, a leaflet, a prospectus? Will it be kept and studied or will it be all too easy to press the 'next' button? Bear this in mind when you're writing.

- **Uncomplicated.** Communication sent does not necessarily equal communication received. Don't get bogged down in complex jargon-laden language and legal conditions. People don't have the time. Give yourself your best chance of being read.

- **Easy to understand and buy into.** Think about your audience. Who are you talking to? How much time have they got? What's important to them? Use these questions to focus and simplify your language. Good writing is accessible to all its audiences.

- **Single-minded.** Don't over-complicate your writing with lots of different ideas. Try to be clear about what it is you want to say and stick to it. With one single clear idea, you can be sure that your audience (with many other messages and lots of other communication noise to deal with) will get it.

We are...

FRIENDLY

What we mean

Inclusive, welcoming, responsive, supportive, warm, down-to-earth.

What we don't mean

Lacking ambition or drive, too soft, no focus.

How does 'friendly' sound?

Our friendliness comes in part from our Northern roots. We're straight-talking and down-to-earth. We don't hide behind pompous, over-formal language or ambiguity. We're direct and honest. We connect with people in a human way and are inclusive and warm. People often talk about the welcome and support they get at the University. We're quick to respond and help to make things happen (big and small). We're in touch and relevant.

TIPS

- **Inclusive.** What active steps do we take to make people feel involved in their team, in the University as a whole. Use inclusive language, so rather than talking about 'the University', talk about 'we'. Instead of talking about 'staff' (this sounds quite hierarchical), refer to 'the team' or 'people in x team' or, even better, 'you'.

- **Welcoming.** What does welcoming mean to us? How do we welcome our students? How do we welcome new people? What is the first day experience like? How does it sound? Could we start with a warm 'Hello'?

- **Responsive.** When and how do we react quickly? How can we demonstrate our positivity? How has this benefited us and the people and partners we work with?

- **Supportive.** In what ways are we supportive? Think of examples of how we help each other, how we make things easier for students and other partners. Give advice, be helpful, encourage feedback.

- **Warm.** Bring some warmth to the way you write. Write as you speak. Try reading it out first. This is the acid test and will soon tell you if you haven't quite hit the right tone. There could even be some gentle wit.

- **Down-to-earth.** Don't stand on ceremony or hide behind outdated formalities. Writing is an opportunity to connect with people. Use it.

We are...

IMAGINATIVE

What we mean

Visionary, creative, experimental, open to new ideas, at the forefront.

What we don't mean

Unrealistic, not living in the real world, flights of fancy, dreaming and not doing.

How does 'imaginative' sound?

Yes, we've got our feet on the ground. What we do makes a difference to people all over the world. But this requires imagination. We're people with vision, with the foresight to see and believe in new ideas. And more importantly, we'll act on our vision. This doesn't just apply to the big stuff but the little details of everyday life here at the University. It might be in the way we connect with business partners or alumni, the way we target undergraduates or the tea we serve in our cafés.

TIPS

- **Visionary.** Remember who you're talking to. What's exciting and visionary for one audience may not be for another. Find an imaginative headline or opening sentence to attract and hook your reader.

- **Creative.** Does it have to be a letter, an A4 prospectus or a newsletter? Be imaginative. What will excite and seduce your readers? Think of specific instances where we are or have been imaginative. Again, think big or small.

- **Experimental.** When have we been experimental and how? Why did it work? And what were the results? How can you show this flair in your language?

- **Open to new ideas.** Remember this is as much about how you say it as what you say so think about the style of your language. When and how have we been open to new ideas?

- **At the forefront.** Think like Orange and First Direct who used everyday language that flouted sector conventions. Can we do the same for ours?

We are...

CONFIDENT

What we mean

Accomplished, authoritative, we celebrate success, we take pride in what we do.

What we don't mean

Arrogant, style over substance, over-promising, self-important.

How does 'confident' sound?

We'd like to be more confident. So let's recognise and showcase our achievements - individually and as a University. Let's take pride in the great things we do and celebrate our successes. This isn't about being boastful but doing justice to the people and work here. We need to take stock and acknowledge our achievements. We need to talk with authority as well as confidence. If we are confident in ourselves, other people will be too.

TIPS

- **Accomplished.** Talk about our achievements. If we've jumped the league tables, if we've done some influential research, if we've got an award-winning academic, if we've benefited the world in some way, let's talk about it.

- **Authoritative.** This doesn't mean being pompous or jargonistic. It's more about showing that we know what we're talking about. We are the authority. Get a University expert testimonial or comment. Be specific about our expertise in a particular area. How many years, what papers, which awards?

- **We celebrate success.** Explain why this is relevant, why it's useful, why it's impressive, what difference it will make.

- **We take pride in what we do.** Put some emotion into it. Yes, we are proud. Yes, this is exciting. Always substantiate what we say. This isn't puff and vanity. It's about sharing our knowledge and giving people useful information about us.
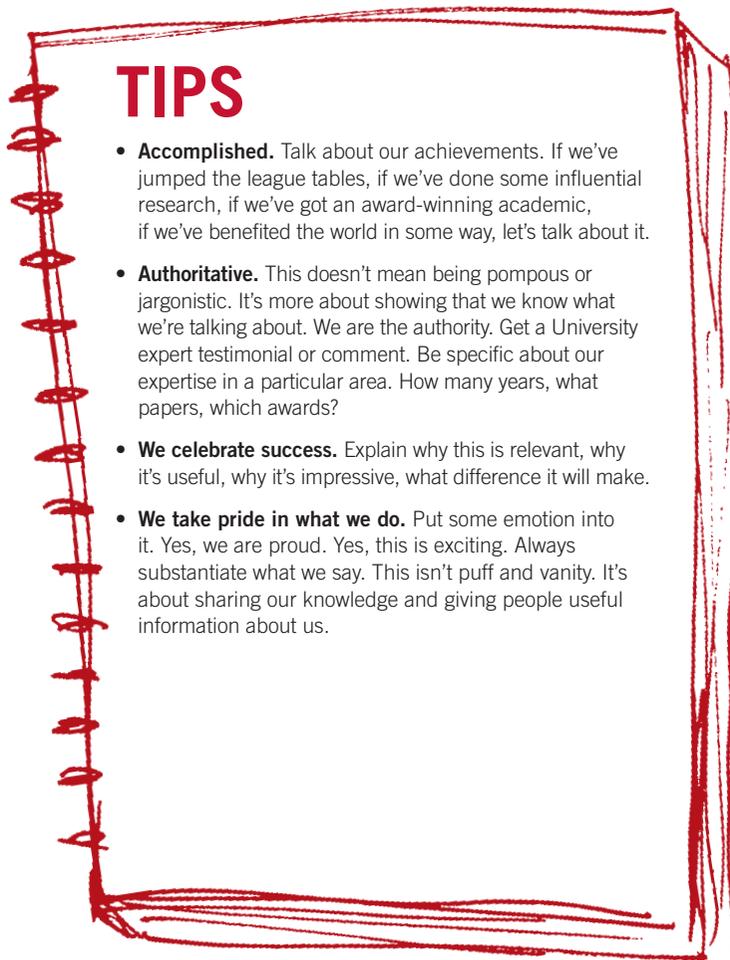
OUR STORIES

Stories are a powerful way of bringing to life our unique qualities. In other words, they help us sell ourselves more creatively and effectively. An interesting narrative is much more interesting than a list of facts and figures.

Stories come in the form of anecdotes and real-life scenarios that demonstrate in a more compelling, emotionally engaging and memorable way what makes us special and different.

We've gathered a collection of stories you can use. You'll find them at leeds.ac.uk/comms but feel free to find your own.
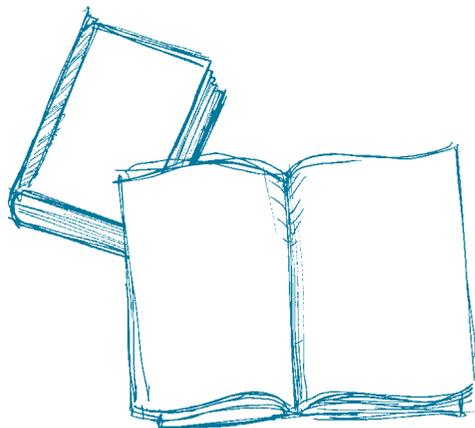
NO TEARS IN THE WRITER, NO TEARS IN THE READER.

ROBERT FROST

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. Don't worry about structuring them. Let the ideas flow; you can organise them later.

2. Remember who you are talking to
What's important to them? What would excite or 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. Think of someone you know who is in this target audience. Imagine them sitting right in front of you. Read it out. Would you talk to this person like this?

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. It helps you get your message across too.

4. Use headings
Headlines for chapters, pages, sub-sections and paragraphs create a narrative. These act as signposts for busy readers and ensure they get, even at the quickest glance, some of the messages you want them to.

5. Just start
Now you have the bones of a structure. Start writing. Write to your structure, but let the ideas flow. Don't worry about getting it right first time. You can edit later.
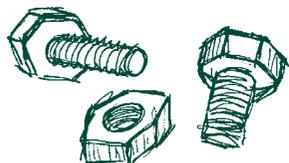
THE FIRST DRAFT OF ANYTHING IS S**T.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

GENERAL WRITING TIPS

6. Edit, edit, edit

Always edit. Editing is as important as writing itself. The art of great editing is knowing when to stop. Strive for concision, but don't cut it back so far that the language has no personality. Be brutal. Your writing will be better for it.

7. Avoid the passive

Why? The passive sounds weaker, is less direct, more formal and impersonal. Have a look at this simple example:

Your letter will be replied to in due course.
We'll reply as soon as we can.

8. Get straight to the point

No-one has time to navigate reams of copy to find out what you're trying to say. Get to the point quickly and make it interesting. Be clear about what you want to say and stick to it.

9. We / you

Give your writing a more personal, human touch. Instead of saying 'The University has an active relationship with students', say 'You can get involved'. The emphasis here is on 'we' and 'you' rather than 'we, we, we'. Remember it's about what our readers want to know and not just what we want to tell them.

10. Use everyday English

Additional	– extra
Advise	– tell
Applicant	– you
Commence	– start
Complete	– fill in
Comply with	– keep to
Consequently	– so
Ensure	– make sure
Forward	– send
In accordance with	– under/keeping to
In excess of	– more than
In respect of	– for
In the event of	– if
On receipt	– when we/you get
On request	– if you ask
Particulars	– details
Per annum	– a year
Persons	– people
Prior to	– before
Purchase	– buy
Regarding	– about
Should you wish	– if you wish
Terminate	– end
Whilst	– while

KILL YOUR DARLINGS.

WILLIAM FAULKNER

WRITING FOR THE WEB

Top ten tips for writing for the web

1. **Digital content** is not the same as print content. People encounter and read it differently – they scan it, so you need to write it differently. Divide it into smaller chunks with subheadings.

2. **Language** is most powerful when used economically, and that's doubly true online. Write in tabloid-size packages using a maximum of 25 words per sentence, one sentence per paragraph, four to six words per headline.

3. **Legibility.** It's hard to read off a screen. It's 25% slower than print. Help your reader. Don't go crazy with bolding, italicising and capitals. Never use underlining to highlight because it will make your text look hyperlinked and confuse your reader.

4. **Credibility.** There can be no excuses for poor spelling and grammar. It seriously undermines the credibility of your message. Sloppy spelling will not make you look serious or professional. It could even make your communications appear fraudulent.

5. **Ambiguity isn't good.** Your writing should do what it says on the tin.

6. **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.

7. **Accessibility.** Don't exclude visually impaired or blind 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.

8. **Personality.** Just because you're writing for digital media doesn't mean that you have to lose your brand's personality. There is always a way to infuse even the most restrained copy with personality.

9. **Spam.** Don't unintentionally make emails to customers look like spam. This is especially important in subject lines. Avoid words like 'free', 'win'. Avoid spelling mistakes, text speak abbreviations and acronyms as these are all on the spam filter hit list. Think hard about the words you use and how they'll look sitting in your customer's inbox…

10. **Structure.** When structuring your work, think of an inverted pyramid. The most important information first, the broader base of detail later.
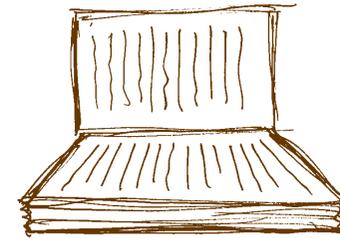
THE TWO MOST ENGAGING POWERS OF AN AUTHOR ARE TO MAKE NEW THINGS FAMILIAR & FAMILIAR THINGS NEW.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Our name

In higher education, names often conform to a simple formula - 'university' + location. The words themselves are usually inherited, fairly functional and do nothing more than provide a clear signpost.

At the top level, however, our name is a label, one that people will come to understand and recognise. It's at the pinnacle of our verbal identity and is underpinned by many other verbal and visual elements which support and add richness and depth to it.

In other words, our name is a blank canvas to which we can give meaning, colour and texture by consistently communicating and acting out our aspirations, values and personality.

Our faculty names

An umbrella brand, like Virgin, has sub-brands such as Virgin Vie, Virgin Media, Virgin Brides, etc.

For the University of Leeds, we have a number of different faculties, centres and schools which together make us what we are. Although each of these has their own identity, they are ultimately part of the University. The hierarchy and naming structure should reflect this relationship.

Be mindful of this when naming new initiatives, buildings or departments.

HI, MY NAME IS _____

I HAVE MADE THIS LETTER LONGER THAN USUAL, ONLY BECAUSE I HAVEN'T HAD THE TIME TO MAKE IT SHORTER.

BLAISE PASCAL

DON'T BE A STRANGER

Everything you need to write creatively and effectively is here in Write*. But (and it's a big 'but'), it will only work if you use it. Sound obvious? Well, yes, it is but you'd be surprised how easy it is to lapse back into old habits when life gets busy, no matter how much more boring this might make life (for you and your readers). So, treasure Write, enjoy it but most of all use it.

If there's anything you're unsure of, please don't be a stranger, call us or drop us a line. We'd love to help.

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www.leeds.ac.uk/comms**

Good luck.

*A few of your own ideas can only make it even better.