



Tone of voice and style guidelines

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1. Introduction

An organisation's tone of voice, or how they speak, write and communicate with their customers, members, stakeholders, investors and the general public, forms an essential part of that organisation's character and their DNA.

Deciding the style and content of your communications will have a huge impact on how we as a company are received and in turn how we're treated, the level of engagement we attract and ultimately the number of customers we appeal to.

Some companies position their tone of voice really well, effortlessly capturing their holistic style and appealing to their broad demographic. Think of a company you admire, and chances are their language and tone of voice will not only match their entire product, service or brand, but will appeal to your sense of style and preference, perhaps without you even being aware.

However, other organisations don't communicate so effectively. They struggle to convey their message and their core values may not appear to align with your own, even if you like their product, you may look elsewhere to a company who talks to you on a more personal level.

1.1 Our tone means everything

Due to the nature of our business, the rich diversity of our products and services, together with the wide geographic and demographic of our members and potential members, it's essential we adopt a universally recognised tone and style which appeals the greatest number of people.

While some members may prefer a more formal tone, which conveys authority and tradition, others may react stronger to a simpler more modern voice, showing more compassion and understanding. So, finding this careful balance is imperative for CSSC to appeal to the widest audience possible.

Think back to the organisations you admire. Is their messaging consistent across all their channels of communication? Does their marketing or literature speak to you on a personal level? Do their emails, posters, web content speak with one voice and accurately represent the product they're offering? If so, chances are you could name the company of an advert, even without seeing their logo or name, just by their tone and style. And it's this brand recognition which CSSC need to achieve to maximise the effectiveness of our tone of voice.

Now consider what our tone of voice should be. How can we reflect our wide range of products and services in a way which is instantly recognisable as CSSC? How can we talk to and write to our customers to ensure we appeal to the widest audience and our communications remain as effective as possible?

2. The CSSC tone of voice embodies our values, vision and ethos

We have recently undergone a brand review, employing an external agency to assess and recommend the most effective tone for our service. This has included an holistic review of our branding, colour pallet, logo, advertising, positioning, marketing and communications.

To summarise in essence, frame's findings included, but not limited to the following:

- A more diverse colour pallet, leveraging more subtle colours and less bold choices.
- A new font, (Poppins) which portrays clear, concise, intelligent and straight forward copy.
- Use engaging images which showing people rather than things, to better highlight the feeling our members get being part of CSSC.

Frame's overriding message is to ensure we always consider and take into account our members and what they do for a living. They all share one thing in common, which is, they look after others. Whether teachers, police officers, nurses, refuse collectors or civil servants. So, we should take this into account when positioning our communications.

Always consider how best to incorporate our company value of "helping those who help others". Try to convey the emotional benefits of using our products and services rather than just the financial gains. Yes, we save them a lot of money, but much more valuable than that, we give our members opportunities to spend time with loved ones, make great memories and stay fit and active. Appeal to a member's heart as well as their head.

Other such examples of how best to consider our members, could include:

- Giving back to those who give so much.
- Serving others who serve the country.
- We are the people people, who take care of people people.
- Looking after the health and wellbeing of those who look after us.

There are many other iterations of this ethos and they don't need to be included word for word in your communications, but they should be front of mind when communicating to our members in any channel.

Through researching the various ways and means of talking with our customers, we have settled on emulating the BBC news style of copy. While being formal and functional, it is also widely accessible and comprehensible. It has broad appeal to its many viewers and readers and conveys an air of authority, respect, knowledge and tradition.

This is not to say we will always copy the BBC in all of our communications. For instance, our marketing, social media posts and emails should always utilise a warmth, wit and familiarity wherever practical and feasible. But, to ensure we always stick to the principles of open, honest, clear, concise, knowledgeable, helpful and informative. Consider your communications being read by an engaging, popular TV personality, rather than perhaps a member of the Royal Family.

When writing your communications, if you are in doubt as to the style, language and formality of your work, please refer to this Tone of Voice guideline in the first instance and use the BBC news style guide for additional resource.

www.bbc.co.uk/newsstyleguide

2.1 Our TOV supports our brand and accomplishes our aims

Our brand is one of our most valuable assets. It evokes emotions, passion, history, loyalty, safety, steadfastness, and makes us distinctive in the market place and attractive to new members.

Our tone of voice is an extension of our brand, our values and our vision.

We're not trying to be our member's best friend. Nor do we want to come across as a faceless corporation. We need to find the right balance between friendly and knowledgeable.

2.1.1 Human

We must always see our members as individual people. They have hopes, dreams, ambitions, families, goals, concerns, fears, priorities, motivators and detractors.

We want our members to see we too are people with similar hopes, dreams and ambitions. And that we recognise and care about their priorities and that we can help them to make their goals more achievable with our products, services, savings, communities and inspiration.

2.1.2 Interesting

We are in the people business. Not product business. We look after the people who look after people. Individuals who have chosen to serve others and so we need to recognise that our members are people, people, who care about others and their communities. And so not lose sight of the social side of our offering.

2.1.3 Knowledgeable

We always recognise that members can get some of our offers, products and services on their own. They may not need us to provide discounted dining or cheap theatre tickets. So, we need to always remind our members, they come to us for more than just convenience of a one-stop-shop. They trust us to provide the kinds of products they want and need to fulfil their ambitions, to look out for the health and wellbeing and to inspire them to live their best lives. And they trust us to know about our products and services and how they may be of help to them.

2.1.4 Friendly

Because our members are people people, who look after others, it's essential we instil that ethos in everything we do. Never forgetting that the community element of our products and services may be of paramount importance to our members. By always remembering the social benefits of CSSC membership and speaking with our members in a friendly, informal, person-to-person style will ensure this is always apparent.

2.1.5 Emotive

We know our members join us for the great value we offer, but stay with us for the community, camaraderie and fun. Not only do we save our members money, but perhaps more importantly we inspire them to try new things, meet new people and create wonderful memories. As well as the financial side, always remember to appeal to the emotional benefits of CSSC membership, with energetic adjectives like: exciting, adventurous, fantastic, amazing. And emotional nouns like: Love, family, friend, community.

2.1.6 What should our tone of voice convey?

Human • Approachable • Informative • Interesting • Insightful • Intelligent
emotional • Witty • Knowledgeable • Direct • Easy to understand • Familiar
Friendly • Personable • Confidence

2.1.7 What shouldn't our tone of voice convey?

Authoritative • Condensing • Funny or too familiar • Use complex words • Austere
Stuffy • Old fashioned • Boring

3. Use of font

CSSC's standard font is Adobe Poppins or if this is not available use Arial

POPPINS

Thin, Light, Regular, Medium, **Semibold, Bold, Extrabold, Black**

The font we select is essential in helping us to convey, not only our message, but our brand too. As a service provider which relies on written communications, either via web, email, or social and doesn't interact with its members either face-to-face or via the phone as often as others, both what we write and how we write is paramount to exciting, retaining and engaging with our members.

If we use a formal font like 'Times New Roman', we risk coming across as old fashioned, stuffy, authoritative. Yet if we use an informal font, like 'comic sans' we risk eroding our members' trust and confidence as a serious business and service provider.

The font we've chosen is easy to read and understand, especially on smaller devices like phones and tablets. It's professional yet engaging and entices the member and potential members to read the whole communication.

To ensure our tone and style is consistent throughout our communications, so our brand is easily recognisable, you can use Poppins font on all our communications, including: account maintenance emails, marketing emails, web site content, annual reports, on-site and event literature and marketing.

The size of the font should also be considered to ensure we meet minimum requirements for our visually impaired members. A suitable size font, either pt11 or pt12, ensures we do not include too much information on our emails and further risk overloading our readers.

3.1 Use of images with text

The use of relevant images to accompany text should always be considered and prioritised, wherever possible.

A picture does indeed paint a thousand words, sometimes more if the right image is used. Not only can a good photo or diagram lend extra information to the text it can also add credibility and reference to further convey our message.

Adding appropriate images can help break up text, which can be especially important in long blocks of copy or particularly 'fact heavy' information.

Images should be relevant to the text or overall theme of the communication and should be a good size, so as to balance with the text.

Each image should, where possible, include a banner or information detailing the image and again, where possible, we should minimise use of stock images and instead utilise our own image library.

It's important not to overuse images and they should always be appropriate to the subject matter and where possible represent our diverse audience and membership. They should be energetic, active and represent our exciting range of products and activities. Pictures of people and families enjoying each other's company are preferable to static images of our partners.

For example, a family having a great day out at an English Heritage site conveys more energy and excitement than an image of a castle.



4. Website copy

Our primary method of communication remains our website, which should always include everything members need to know to maximise their experience with CSSC. If we need to provide additional information we should clearly link to our members' CSSC branded webpage, if possible, or their most relevant offer page.

We need to fully and clearly include any actions members need to perform and the price and discount or saving they can make.

To ensure our web pages are picked up by search engines and increases our visibility, we need to find the right balance between copy in front of and behind our pay wall. Too much copy visible to non-members and we risk exposing our competitiveness. Too little and we risk not appearing on the first page of Google and other search engines, minimising our reach and effectiveness.

All web pages should be optimised for Search Engine Efficiency/Optimisation. In as much as we should perform regular diagnostics with research on key words and phrases to ensure our pages appear and remain as high as possible on search engine lists and be more easily findable by existing and potential members.

4.1 Use of images on our website

Where possible and practical, we should include images, graphs or charts to help better explain our offers, services and savings. They should always be relevant, formatted and sized correctly and include a description.

Our images help our members better understand an offer and help us to enliven our products. The best way to do this is to use images and photos of people enjoying activities, rather than inanimate objects, such as buildings. Where feasible the images should represent the broad diversity of our membership and always entice members to find out more.



5. Email copy

Email is our secondary form of communication and should also contain everything a member needs to fully utilise our service and access our partners. However, this doesn't mean our emails should be a comprehensive list of actions, offers or instructions, but instead where possible should always clearly and simply link back to the relevant web page, where the member can find out everything they need to know. This serves two purposes. Not only does it free up space on the email to allow for shorter more bite size pieces of information, which readers prefer, but ensures we retain our members' attention and provides the best possible service.

Email copy should always follow the CSSC tone of voice and should match our website copy. It should be open, honest, friendly, informative, interesting and engaging.

Clear headings and subheadings throughout the email should be used as and where appropriate. They help break up text which improves readability and comprehension. Headings can include intelligent wit as an additional aid to encourage further reading, but they need to match the overall tone of the communication, subject to audience and subject matter.

There is no minimum or maximum length of an email, but less is usually more. If a person has to scroll more than twice to reach the bottom of the email, it's probably too long. As most emails are read on phones, scrolling too many times can put readers off. You should always lead with your most interesting and eye-catching offer at the start to entice further reading.

Copy should not be underlined as this always implies a link. Copy should never use block capital letters unless required by business logos, start of sentences or other pertinent reasons.

Links should always be in blue text and either left aligned, central or included within the copy.

Copy should usually be in black on white background or white on coloured back ground. If neither colour is appropriate, an easily legible colour should be chosen, which matches the overall design of the email.

5.1 Subject line and sub-heading

An email's subject and sub-heading lines should be short, eye catching and informative. As these appear in a person's inbox, it may be the only opportunity we have to catch their attention.

Quite often a reader will decide if they are going to open an email based solely on an email's subject line. If we fail to intrigue or captivate them, they are unlikely to read any further. A negative or even misleading subject or sub-heading may even entice readers to cancel their marketing preferences.

Subject lines should be no longer than 10 words and preferably around six words, to ensure optimisation for mobile friendly viewing. 50% of people read their personal emails on their mobile phone, which only accommodates 6 words, when held in portrait. Any longer and the reader may not fully understand our message. However, in some circumstances longer headings may be useful and necessary. If the subject needs to be longer, ensure the most relevant information is within the first 6 words.

The sub-heading can be a little longer as phones usually allow for two lines of text per email. Keep sub-headings down to 14 words, ideally under eight. They should not repeat the copy in the subject line as repetition will not only waste valuable real estate in the email but convey a convoluted message.

6. Social copy

The use of social media is an important and growing tool in communicating to our members and one we should fully embrace at every opportunity. More customers and members are utilising social media to contact their customers and it provides a quick, simple and effective channel to convey our message. However, social media represents a unique challenge in many ways.

While we cannot dictate or control the font type or size of our social media posts or content, we can and should control what we say and how we say it.

Great care needs to be taken with social media. While it allows us to communicate directly with individuals and can provide an excellent personal experience, it poses the risk of being instantaneous messaging. A tweet or Facebook post can quickly become a news item and shared with thousands or millions of people within seconds. A negative experience on social media can escalate and threaten a service provider's reputation.

Our voice should match our email and web tone of voice, but social media does allow for a more light-hearted tone. Users of social media are aware and often enjoy communicating in an abbreviated manner. The attention span on social media is often less than print communications or even email, this together with the often-limited character count ensures readers expect to use abbreviated text, more commonly referred to as text speak. EG LOL = Laugh out loud, or Rly = really. Where possible these shorten references should be minimised but can be used in the right circumstances.

For an even simpler way to communicate on social media, it may be appropriate to use emojis. (smiley face icons etc). However, these should be reserved for only the most suitable and appropriate occasions, once a relationship has been established and you are confident they will not cause offense to the reader.

Social media also allows for more humour and intelligent wit. Members enjoy more familiar conversational tones on social media and so we should utilise this to convey our human relationships. Always adopt the appropriate tone for the occasion, complaints or even the marking of a death should be handled with care, seriousness and in a professional way.

Always keep social posts, as short and succinct as possible. conveying the message in as few words as feasible. Always provide a link back to our offer or webpage or partner page. Be friendly and familiar, but don't try to be our members' best friend or over familiar. Try to encourage socialising on social media and the sharing of our message. Social media is so popular and effective due to its connectivity and we should always try to leverage that wherever possible to grow our audience.

7. Use of contractions

Where possible and appropriate we should attempt to use contractions in our copy. They make our writing more familiar and more conversational. However, we should be aware that not all members like to use contractions and so we should be comfortable matching their language in conversations. Additionally, some circumstances may require more formal tones, such as board presentations or the Annual Report. In these circumstances where we choose not to use contractions we need to ensure consistency across the messages. So, throughout the same document or communication and between messages of the same type in a series of communications.

Please be mindful of the overuse of contractions. A general rule to follow is try not to use more than one contraction per sentence.

We also need to be mindful that not all contractions are common parlance. Some are too informal for our brand. Please see list of appropriate and inappropriate contractions below.

These are fine to use	These must be avoided
You'll	That'd
You're	That'll
You'd	It'd
We're	Would've
We've	Wouldn't've
We'll	Couldn't
Won't	Couldn't've
They're	Mustn't
I'm	Mustn't've
I'll	Shouldn't
It'll	Shouldn't've
Can't	Ain't

8. Use of full stops and capital letters

Capital letters and full stops should always be used to start and end sentences. However, there are some notable exceptions to this.

- When used as lists in bullet point form. Sentences can start with a capital letter, but do not have to use a full stop. In some instances, you may prefer to use full stops in your bullet points. This is recommended if each bullet point is longer than one line of text. The rule is, you must stay consistent throughout the communication and series of communications if part of a larger strategy or project.
- If the sentence ends with a web address ie: cssc.co.uk you do not need to add a full stop as this may appear to be part of the web address and confuse readers.
- In headings and sub-headings we do not need to use a full stop.
- In social media posts we can omit full stops and some other punctuation to increase character count.
- Where the sentence starts with the name or trademark of a company which uses lower case logos or forms part of their name or branding.



9. Lists

Using lists, either as bullet points, hyphens or in tabular form can often help breakdown large unwieldy blocks of information into more manageable bite-size pieces. If you have a series of steps or actions your reader needs to understand and follow, consider using a list. If the series requires the reader to follow set steps, consider numbering your list rather than bullet points or hyphens.

Where possible, lists should be short (ideally no more than ten steps) and each point should be no more than one sentence long. In instances where more information is needed, consider whether a list is the correct and most useful format. A diagram or process flow may be a more pertinent way to communicate more complex processes.

10. Use of acronyms and capital letters

Acronyms can be useful and form part of many types of communication. Where possible we should always attempt to use common acronyms, especially if they have become common place in association with the reference. ie BBC and NHS. And always if it forms part of a company's identity and logo. ie HSBC.

In instances where the acronym is less common and well know, we should always use the full name of a phrase, meaning or institution, followed by the acronym in brackets ie Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). You may then refer to it in its abbreviated form throughout the remaining document.

Try to avoid using capital letters, wherever possible. Especially in social media. They have become synonymous with shouting and anger.

If you need to emphasise some text, only use bold text. **This is much clearer for screen readers.**

We should never use coloured text and do not underline copy. This can be confused with links.

11. Asterisks and caveats

When we need to refer to supplementary or additional information, which may be complex or a legal requirement, we should consider the use of caveats. These should, in most instances, use a '*' symbol in the body of the text and another '*' symbol at the end of the text where the supplementary information is written*. This can be immediately after the paragraph or image or it can be at the very end of the entire page or booklet at the bottom of the page.

In instances where more than one caveat is required consider adding numbers to your asterisks ie '2'. *



12. Company Logos and Trademarks

Always replicate a company's entire logo, exactly as it appears on their communications. We must always seek permission from a company before using their Logo. If the Logo includes a 'TM' or '®' this must also be included in any and all references.

Always use the company's exact name and style. If they use lowercase or upper case, replicate their branding precisely. ie LEGO or tastecard.

13. Links

Links form a vital part of writing, especially for marketing communications such as emails or web pages. They can be extremely useful when asking readers to follow a series of steps or to understand more detailed information. A well-placed link can ensure that a reader is steered to a correct webpage and completes the action the communication is intended for. However, a poorly placed link can take the readers' attention away from your communication and lose their focus.

It's important to find the right balance with the number of links in your writing. Too many and it looks messy and confusing, too few and you risk not providing enough information. A good number is no more than one per paragraph, but this depends greatly on the content and style of your communication.

Where possible a link should be embedded into the writing and form part of the copy in a natural way. [Such as this link to more information](#). By doing so, it helps those who are visually impaired and may use screen readers or specialist software. When embedding links into text always ensure it links to the correct web page or anchor link and always ensure that link is working and does not lead to an out of date or broken link. The linked copy should be informative and reference where you are linking to and should not simply say 'here'. ie You can read more about it [here](#). This confuses screen readers and may provide a poor service to our members.

In some instances, you may need to provide a stand-alone link or URL to a web page, rather than imbed your link into your copy. Such as a link to one of our partners offers. In these cases, always keep the link as simple as possible and never show the full URL address.

Good example: Discover the wonderful castles of [English heritage](#).

Poor example: go to <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/our-places/>



14. Dates and formatting

CSSC use the UK date formatting of Day / Month / Year. For example: 15 March 2021 or 13/03/2021.

The numerical version can be simplified to 13/03/21, however, the alphanumerical version should not be simplified to 13 Mar, unless this forms part of a table eg. accounting or where space doesn't permit the full month.

On days 1-9 we use a single digit version ie 3 March 2021 not 03 March 2021. We do not use ordinal indicators. ie st, nd, th.

15. Times and formatting

CSSC use the time format of **9am** and **9pm**. In instances where minutes are necessary we use the format **9.10am** or **9.10pm**.

For time periods between two fixed times we use the format **9-10am**, however, if the time crosses 12 noon we use the format **9am-1pm**, including the full stop. When writing about 12 o'clock midday please use the phrase '12 noon'.

16. Salutations and valedictions

How we greet our readers and sign off our communications can make a subtle, yet extraordinary impact. And the way we do it should reflect the type of communication we're writing and the audience we are writing for.

16.1 Greetings and Salutations

In direct communications to individual people, where possible always use the members' first name proceeded by Dear. ie Dear John. In more formal communications or where we do not know the readers first name use their surname and title or honorific. ie Mr, Miss, Mrs, Dr, Rev.

In generic communications like mass marketing it is advisable to use colloquial greeting such as 'Hello' or 'Hi', which may be especially useful in social media, where less formal language is expected and actively encouraged.

Whichever greeting we use, it should always be the first line in the top left hand corner. And should no longer be followed by a comma. ie: Dear John or Dear Mr Smith. Not Dear John,



16.2 Valediction

When ending a communication or correspondence it should match the tone and formality of the greeting and content. If you begin your communication formally, you should end it just as formally.

If we know to whom we are speaking and have used their first or surname in the greeting, we should always use the valediction 'Yours sincerely'. If we do not know to whom we are writing and have used a greeting such as 'Hello' or 'Dear Sir' we should use the sign off 'Yours faithfully'.

In less formal communications we can use friendlier more conversation farewells, such as 'Warm regards' or 'Many Thanks' or even 'Bye' on social media.

17. Common uses of phrases and terms

- Company name – CSSC Refer to our organisation as 'CSSC' in marketing and internal literature. Only use full name of CSSC Sports & Leisure for official documentation in Annual Reports or Auditing etc.
- CSSC is a singular entity rather than a collective group. So when referring to CSSC and most institutions or companies, ensure you say 'CSSC is' and not 'CSSC are' and not 'The CSSC'.
- public sector – Use lowercase letters unless starting a sentence or as part of a named individual's job title.
- civil service – Use lowercase letters unless starting a sentence or as part of a named individual's job title. For example: Simon Case is the Head of the Civil Service.
- Armed Forces – Always use uppercase A & F
- COVID-19 – Capitalised with a hyphen
- Always use 'Chair' or 'Vice-chair' when referring to the 'chairperson' or 'vice-chairperson' of an organisation.
- 'Logon' is the noun and 'Log on' is the verb. So, you could 'Log on to your logon'
- Use the '£' symbol not 'GBP' when discussing amounts.
- Use 'TV' or 'Television'. Rather than 'Tele'.
- Use 'Mobile Phone' rather than 'Cell Phone'
- 'Health & Wellbeing' can be abbreviated to 'H&W' if already referred to once in the copy.
- Direct Debit must be written with capital Ds as it is a registered brand and logo.

18. Boiler plate – October 2021

For the last 100 years CSSC has supported life's true champions. Those who give their all protecting, defending, healing, teaching and serving others. And at the heart of our organisation is our vision to unite the public sector through sports, games, health, fitness and leisure.

It's this belief and determination that drives us to continually look out for and take care of the people who take care of the country.

By joining our exclusive membership, we help and encourage everyone from the civil service and public sector to maximise their leisure time, with our unparalleled range of discounts, offers, communities and events, amidst guidance, support, passion and understanding.

Discover more about CSSC at cssc.co.uk

Shorter boiler plate <100 words

For 100 years CSSC has supported life's true champions, taking care of those who protect, defend, heal, teach and serve others. Our mission is to unite and inspire the public sector through sports, fitness and recreation.

Discover how we help our members maximise their free time and make unforgettable memories doing the things they love, with the people they love, at cssc.co.uk.

Shortest boiler plate <50 words

For 100 years we've supported life's true champions, by looking after those who look after others. We unite and inspire the public sector through sports, fitness and recreation.

Discover how we help members maximise their free time, save money and make unforgettable memories at cssc.co.uk.

CSSC in a sentence

CSSC unites, inspires and supports life's true champions through sport, fitness, savings and recreation.

