

# Marketing Tone of Voice Guidelines

*A guide to help you if you're responsible for writing marketing copy for Warwick in print and online.*

*When writing copy for prospective students please make sure you're familiar with Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements (March 2015). The requirements mean we have to provide prospective students with consistent, accurate and timely information. Full information can be found [here](#).*

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## **What is the purpose of this document and who is it for?**

We've created a tone of voice guidelines document to help you if you're responsible for writing marketing copy in print and online.

It's just a guide, but it's one that gives us an opportunity to produce varied University marketing content that's underpinned with consistency. It also encourages writing in a way that reflects the personality of Warwick and its people – and that largely means being friendly, inquisitive and confident. It serves a very different purpose to guidelines for academic writing, and is not intended as such.

People are free to use these guidelines in whatever way they wish. For example, some may use it as a guide to creating exciting content for their own departmental brochures. Others may dip into it occasionally if they feel some of their online content could be regarded as a little too impersonal.

The document has been created in line with the refresh of the University brand, and recommends a use of language that's clear and concise. It emphasises that real-life examples and evidence must support what we say about ourselves. If we get the opportunity, we should also feature authentic voices from our community, such as those found in our Warwick student blogs.

The document is best used alongside the 'Writing at Warwick' style guidelines, which encourage consistency in our use of grammar and terms of reference in marketing communications.

### **What do we mean by marketing ‘tone of voice’ and why is it relevant to Warwick?**

The tone of our language defines the way people respond to us. By writing in a tone that’s true to our University’s personality, it can help us express our varied attributes.

### **Our brand: defined by possibility**

What is it that makes us different? We’re a university with modern values and a formidable record of academic and commercial achievement — but not the only one. So what sets us apart?

The difference lies in our approach to everything we do. Warwick is a place that works around obstacles — a place where the starting point is always ‘anything is possible’. We sometimes refer to the starting point briefly through the proposition ‘What if?’ It’s a way for us to express succinctly that through our research and teaching, we engage in new questions.

### **What’s the ‘brand positioning statement’?**

We’ve put the following statement together to help instruct our marketing communications. It’s a statement designed to summarise Warwick’s story, and express our University’s appeal, approach and values. As such, it won’t be used externally in this form — instead, it’s designed to help us consider how we coherently express what makes Warwick such a good place to be.

## **Brand positioning statement**

*What if there were a place of infinite possibilities, where your only boundaries were the limits of your energy, imagination and potential? Comfortable with breaking new ground and taking risks, the people around you would be the very best and their focus would be to make you the very best too. An environment shaped only by its own ambition, safe and tireless, it would move at the fast pace of the world around it.*

*What if there were a world-leading university with the highest academic and research standards, the acumen of a business and for whom entrepreneurialism, innovation and internationalism were a way of life, not buzzwords? Striving to lead rather than follow, the environment would be supportive and challenging for undergraduates, renowned and enterprising for postgraduates, and cosmopolitan for everyone. As respected for boundary-breaking research as for teaching and business collaborations, its single-minded pursuit of excellence and intellectual curiosity would set the standards for others to follow.*

*What if teaching didn't end with learning your subject and you were encouraged to take your skills into the real world? You'd view challenges from unique perspectives, and become world-ready as well as work-ready, marking you out by organisations across the globe for life. Prospering in an environment supportive, demanding and enjoyable enough to find out who you are and how far it can take you.*

*What if you were to work somewhere every day so different, you might never want to leave? Where lines of command were short and you were empowered to act on ideas, provided they were first class. And if you were to move on, your distinct approach would successively influence the people and organisations around you.*

*So what if all these things existed in one place? We think they do: the University of Warwick.  
What if?*

## **The thinking behind the brand positioning statement**

The person who asks *what if* is a relentless challenger, always in search of the new and constantly asking questions about different, better ways of thinking, doing and being. Someone who thinks big and dares to defy convention. Someone who recognises the transformative nature of our research, our teaching and the innovation that results from our work. And someone who can convey the excitement we feel about our research, our teaching, and all that we have achieved – and all that we want to achieve – in all parts of the University. We're not recommending that you write the words 'What if...' in front of everything we do – but it is a question we can regularly ask ourselves when considering our marketing.

## **What kind of words would support this approach?**

Ambitious, confident, challenging, energised and focused.

## **Soundbites**

*"We can solve it by..." "No one else has tried..." "That would create a new way to..." "It may be different, but..." "We can make it better by..." "Thinking ahead..." "By next year, we'll be..." "Imagine..."*

There will be, of course, instances where the conversation will be more nuanced. And, in the spirit of dialogue and audience engagement, we should also pose questions and encourage debate.

## **What it is...**

A point of view worth pursuing

Fresh

Forthright

Clean

Honest

A conversation with our reader

Outward-looking

### **How will the marketing tone of voice help our communications?**

We can use this approach to tailor our marketing content to our range of audiences. There are a number of principles (below) we've highlighted that can aid our marketing communications. Where appropriate, and very sparingly, we can also use devices such as 'What if...'

Each communication calls for a slightly different tone. For example:

- Emphasise more of the principles for a major, national outdoor campaign or a prospectus
- Tone them down for personal messages, for example in email campaigns that need more empathy than challenge

### **Six principles to support the refreshed brand**

1. Look to the future
2. Keep it positive
3. Speak collaboratively
4. Start dialogue
5. Give examples, evidence and tell stories
6. Be proactive

## 1. Look to the future

We don't dwell on the past. Focusing on the future creates a sense of anticipation, progress and change.

### From

*We saw the potential to expand our research in this field*

*We began...we wanted...we have seen...we look back on...we have become...our experience...our heritage...etc*

### To

*By expanding our research in this field we will have the opportunity to...*

*We begin...we want...we will see...we look ahead to...we'll become...our plans ...our ambitions...etc*

## 2. Keep it positive

As an organisation, we're optimistic. Use language that highlights the benefits rather than limitations. Make the reader feel that you're there to help them.

### From

*We cannot continue until  
This is only for*

*Those who failed to attend the open day  
will have missed*

### To

*We'll do this as soon as  
This is for everyone who*

*If you couldn't make our open day,  
you can catch up by reading our  
Storify feed*

### 3. Speak collaboratively

Create a sense of collaboration by talking in the first and second person where appropriate: you, your, yours, we, our, ours, us, I, my and mine. In this way, you and the reader belong to the same, shared vision.

#### **From**

*University of Warwick; the university, the department; the team; the organisation etc  
Colleagues; staff; members; candidates; applicants; employees, those individuals*

#### **To**

*We  
You*

#### **From**

*The University of Warwick helps to increase job opportunities for graduates  
These workshops demonstrate the value the University places on staff development*

#### **To**

*We are here to help you get the job you want  
We want you to have the best opportunities to develop your skills*

#### 4. Start dialogue

Write in a way that hooks your reader in:

i) *Asking questions* demands a response and can provide a good launch into a topic:

- *How should we? ... Do you feel/know/think? ... Where can you? ... Is there?*
- *Why study Economics at Warwick?*
- *What will I learn?*
- *What is a MOOC [Massive Open Online Course]? Who can apply?*

ii) You can also engage by using phrases that *offer a point of view*:

- *How to (attain, make the most of, minimise, stay ahead, keep up with...)*
- *Three ways to...*
- *The secret of...*
- *The quick/smart way to...*
- *What everyone in/thinking of/involved with/connected to [area of interest] should know about...*

Good examples of this can be found on the Knowledge Centre ([warwick.ac.uk/knowledge](http://warwick.ac.uk/knowledge)), which features articles from academics such as 'Is Happiness Homemade?'

## 5. Give examples

Don't just tell your reader: show them with concrete facts and stories that give the proof. Do back up statements about quality with credentials, case studies, student/staff profiles and/or quotations to bring statements to life. Where possible, use or link to blogs from our community that evidence or expand the point.

### From

*We are leading experts*

*We build international links to advance our research and reputation*

### To

*Our research rankings are... We're achieving... Our Centre for Urban Science and Progress brings together data...*

*Our association with the Large Hadron Collider project helped bring our research in physics to the fore*

## 6. Be proactive

i) *Use the active voice* to give a clear sense of people doing things. Warwick's all about seizing the initiative, taking ownership of opportunities and acting upon them.

### From

*Your application was received*

*Your skills can be improved by*

*Important research is being carried out*

*Enquiries are being made*

*You'll be informed in due course*

### To

*We've received your application*

*You can improve your skills by*

*We are carrying out important research*

*We're looking into...*

*I'll be in touch soon*

ii) Add energy by *using the verb rather than the noun*.

### From

*Our thinking is*

*A meeting was held*

### To

*We think that*

*We discussed*

### **How to use words that suggest possibility**

Using phrases such as *what if* in your writing can have a highly creative effect. It forces you to present your thoughts in a different way and sets you up to talk about possibility. It'll also make your writing recognisably consistent with other Warwick communications.

Use these phrases to give deliberate emphasis, for example in marketing headlines, speeches, proposals and strategic communications. ***But use them appropriately and sparingly.*** Also find alternative techniques to create pictures in readers' minds of different possibilities, and use examples where appropriate.

Here are some examples of how to use phrases in your writing that suggest possibility:

#### i) Inspiring a prospective student

*What if you could study at Warwick from anywhere in the world? Then you could experience [...etc.]. By signing up to one of our open online courses, you could become a part of Warwick's growing global community. What then?*

Finishing on a question like 'What then?' can be particularly useful when you want your reader to think of different possibilities for themselves. An example would be at the end of a prospectus, where you'd like the reader to imagine their own future at Warwick.

#### ii) Communicating about our research

*Let's think of a way to produce more food using less water, land, and energy, while reducing waste and environmental impacts. Then we could tackle one of the biggest challenges facing us today [etc.]. With this new funding we can build on our skills and training to maintain a leading position in the field of Biosciences. What next?*

#### iii) Bringing strategy to life

*What could we achieve if we raised our research profile to even higher levels of international excellence? Then we could be ranked as one of the world's top fifty universities. What then?*

## Varying the approach

There are many other ways to use *what if* and other similar phrases. For example, you can use it to present an outcome and then follow with a question as to how we achieve the outcome. Taking the example above on strategy, an outcome-led approach would be:

*'What if we could be ranked as one of the world's top fifty universities? We can — if we raise our research profile in the following areas...'*

An alternative approach would be:

*'What would we do if we knew asteroids had brought water to Earth? We could investigate how we'd deliver water to other habitable planets — and to do this, we'd need to...'*