

Treetops Hospice's Tone of Voice

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This is a guide to help us write clear and consistent content. Please use it as a reference when you're writing or editing content for Treetops Hospice.

Our guidance goes beyond grammar and punctuation, it also explains how we express ourselves as an organisation. Where something isn't specified here, please follow the [Guardian style guide](#).

Talking about Treetops Hospice:

When talking about Treetops Hospice, in the first instance it should always be Treetops Hospice. Once we've initially introduced ourselves, it's fine to shorten our name to Treetops – as this is shorter, more approachable and in line with how we'd speak in conversation.

Tone of Voice:

Our tone of voice is an expression of our brand personality.

We express our brand every time we communicate with people outside of Treetops; whether we're talking to them in the hospice, in their home, in our shops or at an event, sending them direct marketing or interacting with them online.

Our overall personality must be reflected in our overall tone of voice:

- Compassionate
- Positive
- Caring
- Friendly
- Professional

All our copy should be positive, caring, friendly, compassionate and professional. These five parts can be toned up and down according to message, mood, channel and audience. But they should always be present. Following our Content Principles will help achieve this.

Content Principles:

Have a clear purpose

Making sure that all our content has a reason a clear aim, plays a strategic role and helps us achieve our goals.

What does this mean in practice?

At the point of conceiving the content, make sure that there are answers to these four questions:

- What's the strategic aim of the content?
- Who is the content for?
- What do we want people to do after reading/viewing the content?
- How will this help us achieve what we're trying to do?

Put the user first/focus on the audience

Knowing our supporters is crucial to creating effective content.

Encouraging people to get involved and empowering them with useful and interesting content helps us to build a community.

Using language and frames of understanding that work for our audience means that we don't alienate people.

What does this mean in practice?

Be clear about who you're trying to reach with your content and how it will be received by your audiences. Whenever possible, talk to your target audiences. Put yourself in the shoes of people outside the Treetops bubble and ask yourself: will they find this interesting or useful?

Choose quality over quantity

Paying attention to detail and creating thoughtful, well-designed content is worth the time and effort.

Investing in quality makes our content more effective and more sustainable. It means we can look after it properly and deliver a first-rate experience to our users.

What does this mean in practice?

When planning and creating content, factor in enough time to make it accessible, accurate, beautiful (where possible), consistent and coherent.

Teamwork makes the Dreamwork

Working collaboratively helps us to create the most effective content. This is made possible through clear, honest communication and a recognition of expertise.

What does this mean in practice?

Work across teams and trust and empower each other. You will rarely be the only person producing content on an issue or campaign. Identify colleagues who are working on the same things. Collaborate to make sure you don't double up – and respect each other's expertise.

Test, iterate and learn

A culture of content innovation means testing things out, learning from the results and making improvements based on the evidence.

Trying new things and having processes to measure, learn and improve helps us to reach new heights.

What does this mean in practice?

We split-test content where possible and appropriate. We're constantly thinking about, and looking for, new ways of doing things. We try to draw conclusions about why content worked well, or less well. We share the results and keep learning.

Be open and transparent

We are most effective when we are honest with people. Supporters respond best when we're human, even when we're fallible. Defaulting to sharing our experience and insights, even when things have gone wrong, makes us authentic.

What does this mean in practice?

There are times when we can't be completely open, for various reasons. We assess each case on its merits. But we strive to be as honest and human as we can.

Promote flexibility and modularity

The more adaptable our content, the more use we can make of it. Considering all the channels and use-cases at the outset prevents the duplication of work and words. It also means that we can be responsive to external events.

Voice Characteristics:

Our voice, as expressed through content: on our website, on social media, in letters, appeals and emails, is distinctive, flexible and identifiable. It's the personification of our relationship with our supporters; it brings Treetops to life and inspires support.

Our voice is about who we are, not the things we do. It describes our character, not the attributes of our work. It is the common thread that makes us recognisably Treetops.

Whenever we create content, we consider the context and what our audience might find relevant and motivating.

We don't change who we are, but we do moderate our tone, depending on who we're talking to.

Friendly

When talking to our supporters (including volunteers), or potential supporters, using a friendly tone helps to make people feel at ease. Write as though you were talking to someone.

How to achieve this:

- use contractions: we're, you'll and haven't rather than we are and you will and have not
- use inclusive language that speaks directly to people, such as you and we

- simplify complicated words

Authoritative

When talking about the care we provide, for example, an authoritative tone helps to underline our credentials and the importance of what we're saying. That doesn't mean we use jargon.

How to achieve this:

- be concise and to the point
- use accurate, appropriate statistics and information to back up your point
- be confident

Areas to Cover:

Abbreviations and acronyms

Avoid using abbreviations (e.g. approx. for approximately) and acronyms (e.g. FYI for for your information) whenever possible. If you really need to use an abbreviation or an acronym, spell it out the first time you mention it and include the short version in brackets immediately after it. Then use the short version for all subsequent references within that piece of content.

Bold and Italics

Bold copy can be used sparingly to emphasis within a letter, appeal and online content. Italics should be used sparingly.

Bulleted Lists

Bullet points are great for emphasising important information. Use them when the items in your list are in no particular order. And do so sparingly: too many bulleted lists in the same piece of content will mean that their impact is lost.

If you're introducing your list with some text, follow that text with a colon (:).

Bullet lists made up of incomplete sentences should:

- begin with an upper-case letter
- not have any punctuation at the end of each point
- have a full stop at the end of the list.

Headings

Using headings helps make our content readable and accessible by breaking up text and making it easily scannable. Headings should be in sentence case as this aids readability and fits with our voice. To make a heading more visible, increase the font size and make bold. Don't use block capitals.

Links:

Provide a link whenever you're referring to something on our website or an external website. Use links to point users to relevant content elsewhere on the website and trusted external resources.

Good hyperlinks tell people where they're going to end up when they click on them (e.g. Read our Brand Guidelines tells the reader they will go to our Brand Guidelines). Avoid using words that wouldn't make sense without the link. And definitely don't use "click here" or "read this". Write the sentence as you normally would, and link relevant keywords.

Don't include preceding articles (a, an, the, our) when you link text. If a link comes at the end of a sentence or before a comma, don't link the punctuation mark.

Numbers

Use words from one to nine and then numerals from 10 upwards. Always use words at the start of a sentence. Where using a numeral adds impact, exceptions are OK but use these sparingly.

Numbers from 1,000 upwards use commas.

Punctuation

Punctuation helps readers understand our content, clarifying, signposting and generally making life smoother for everyone.

Colons

Don't capitalise the first word after a colon.

Commas

We don't use the serial comma (sometimes called the Oxford comma) except where it's needed to clarify meaning. In a list of three or more items, don't include a comma before the conjunction. But do use a comma to clarify meaning.

Dashes

When offsetting a phrase with dashes you should use the en dash (–), with a space on either side of the dash.

Spaces

Sentences should always be separated by a single space. Never two spaces.

Ampersands and plus signs

Use "and" instead of an ampersand (&) or plus sign (+), unless they're part of an official title or company name.

Quotes

When using quotes, make sure the punctuation relating to the quote sits within quote marks, and the punctuation that doesn't sits outside it.

Use double speech marks in the first instance, and single speech marks for quotes within quotes. When quotes go to another paragraph, speech marks are only needed at the start of each paragraph and the end of the quote, not at the end of every paragraph.

Orphan Words:

When creating copy, orphan words – which are words on a line by themselves should be excluded.

Split Words:

In all copy, words should not be split across a line, if they are, they need to be tweaked so the full word appears on the same line.

Spelling

- Use English, not US, spelling wherever there is a choice:
- ise endings, not ... ize, e.g. realise, organise, specialise
- yse endings, not ... yze, e.g. analyse, paralyse

Make sure your spell check is set to English (UK) not English (US) and beware of this when using a document created by someone else.