healthwatch

Brand language guide

How to write like Healthwatch in an accessible way

Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

Why is brand so important?

When you think of your favourite brand, what makes it stand out? Maybe it's an excellent service, personable staff, or an easy to use website. Many people fall into the trap of thinking 'brand' only covers the logo and colour palette. But what makes a great brand is so much more than that. It's the overall experience you get.

Why do we need a tone of voice?

One part of that experience is how a brand sounds and the language it uses – often called a 'tone of voice'. A tone of voice isn't what we say, but how we say it. In a nutshell, it's how we project Healthwatch's personality and the way we come across to our audiences. No matter who we're speaking to or what we say, it should always be obvious it's Healthwatch speaking. The more familiar and consistent we sound, the more trust we build.

How can this guide help you?

Before you read on, please make sure you've read our one-page '**Brand messaging guide**', which includes Healthwatch's full tone of voice guidance, as well as our values, strapline, proposition and messages for different audiences.

This 'Brand language guide' will help you put and the full tone of voice into practise in your day-to-day work. It also covers good writing tips, bringing the brand personality to life, a style guide, how to talk about different people, and an accessibility checklist.

Top tips for writing in our tone of voice

Be clear, focused and get to the point

84% of people don't read web pages word-for-word.[1] Most people will skim read text, so:

- Try to keep your sentences short and easy to read.
- Use meaningful headings that help your readers understand the main points.
- Always put your most important information at the top of the page.
- Break up your text with paragraphs and bullet points.

Be accessible

We're talking to everyday people, so we need to use everyday language. Always try to write as you'd speak. Be conversational, keep it light and don't try to be formal. That means avoiding all jargon, when an alternative exists in everyday language and explaining any terms people might not understand. We want people to understand us and not feel alienated, which is why we use plain English.

---

[1] Nielson Norman Group. *How users read on the web*. https://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-users-read-on-the-web/

Jargon swaps	
Instead of saying	**Say**
Co-production	Working together
Lived experience	Experience
Seldom heard	People who have not been asked /people whose experiences aren't being heard/ people who aren't being listened to
Primary care	Be specific about the service. Say GP surgery, doctor, pharmacy, dentists
Secondary care	Be specific about the service. Say hospital or clinic
Enter and view	We visited a local care home/GP surgery. [Although Enter and View is the official name for local Healthwatch's powers to formally visit health and social care settings, it is not a widely recognised term. For public facing communications use more accessible language]

Use active language

Active language makes the sentence straightforward and concise. It can often sound stronger and more direct. For example:

- Say: 2,000 people came to the event.
- Don't say: The event was attended by 2,000 people.

Avoid acronyms

Although it's quicker than saying or writing something in full, don't assume everyone understands an acronym. Acronyms and abbreviations aren't plain English and make it harder for people to translate.

- Acronyms to avoid: HWE, LHW, ICS, CCG.
- A few well-known acronyms you're safe to use: NHS, GP, A&E.

Be specific

Remember, cynicism and apathy are a big challenge for our audiences. So:

- Be exact and be concrete.
- Try not to caveat your work as phrases like "some people" and "may have" can dilute your message.
- Be confident and say how many people who have helped and, if possible, how this has made a difference. Try to find out how did your advice helped someone? Or how many beds have been added to wards, how much waiting times have been reduced, how systems and processes have changed as a direct result of people's feedback.

Talk to the reader and avoid the third person

Words like "we" and "you" sound more friendly and approachable. Try to put people first and the emphasis on their experiences and stories. For example, say "Thanks to everyone who shared their views, X has changed."

Words to help you bring our brand personality and attributes to life

Our brand personality is made up of our brand attributes, as well personality points.

Our attributes are Strong. Brave. Effective. **Strong** because people (especially those who are vulnerable or marginalised) need an advocate. **Brave** because working within the system to hold decision makers to account is never easy. And **effective** because it's vital that people get the advice they need to make informed decisions and that their valuable feedback is taken on board – there's nothing to be gained from listening if nothing ever changes.

Our personality points are evidence-based, trustworthy, on your side, supportive and insightful. And we're also caring, expert, curious, fair, personable and courageous.

You don't need to use the full list of brand personality and attributes in your writing. But ask yourself which two or three points are most suitable for different communications.

For example:

- Your advice and information articles could be personable, trustworthy and supportive
- Your news release calling for feedback could be curious, strong and on your side
- Your report of your findings could be brave, evidenced based and fair.
- Your article on your impact could be effective, on your side and courageous.

To help you, here are words that you can use to help demonstrate our attributes and personality points.

Tone of voice	Words to use
Caring	Advice, You, Thanks, Help, Support, Join
Courageous	Bold, Daring, Launch, Protect, Transform, Honest, Solution, Results
Curious	Fascinating, Unveil, Discover, Learn, Harness, Uncover, Join, Interesting, Thought provoking, Startling
Evidence-based	According to, Best, Approved, Dependable, Proven, Professional, Reliable, Research, Safety, Tested, Track record, Studies show
Expert	Authentic, Absolute, Backed, Conclusive, Definitive, Formula, Guaranteed, Ironclad, Official, Legitimate, Proven, Reliable, Report, Research, Solution, Strategy, Studies

Fair	Just, Open-minded, Honest, Honourable, Trustworthy, Impartial, Independent
Insightful	Intuitive, Perceptive
On-your side	Advocate, Champion, Committed, Dedicated, Definitely, Encourage, Overcome, Succeed, Achieve, Resolve, Outcome
Personable	Friendly, Engaging, Supportive
Supportive	Anonymous, Always, Best, Easily, Quick, Protected, Practical, Recommend, Really, Secure, Understand, Tested, Welcome
Trustworthy	Best, Expert, Evidence-based, Genuine, Privacy, Truly, Results, Worthwhile, Advantage, Effective, Supported

Style guide

A consistent way of writing will ensure we always sound like Healthwatch and help us build trust with our audiences.

Ampersands (&): Should be avoided except in recognised cases (e.g. A&E). Otherwise, use 'and' in full.

Capitalising headings: Only capitalise the first letter of the heading, everything else should be lowercase (e.g. Our annual report 2020-21). We don't use title case or caps for headings or sub-headings.

Dates: Should be written as 'Friday 11 March 2021'. We don't say 11th, 22nd 23rd etc. Don't use commas within dates.

Healthwatch England/local Healthwatch: When we talk about ourselves, say 'we' 'us' 'our', rather than speaking in the third person. If you're using our name, write it in full. We don't use acronyms such as HWE or LHW as not everyone will understand.

Talking about local Healthwatch: 'Local' before 'Healthwatch' should only start with a capital letter if at the beginning of a sentence or the start of a title. Otherwise use 'local Healthwatch' or simply 'Healthwatch'.

If you're talking about a specific local Healthwatch, say, 'Healthwatch Anytown' not 'local Healthwatch Anytown'.

Talking about more than one Healthwatch: Don't say 'Healthwatches' – it's always 'Healthwatch'.

Talking about the Healthwatch network: We don't capitalise the 'n' in network. For example, 'our network' or 'the Healthwatch network'.

Job titles: Should be capitalised. For example, we are hiring a new Engagement Manager.

Numbers: Small numbers from one to ten should be written out in full. Larger numbers (i.e. above ten) are written as numerals.

Writing about people

It's important for us to write about people in a way that's respectful and inclusive. Our language should reflect the communities we serve. Please remember this list is not definitive and the language we use will continue to evolve. Individual people may also prefer to use different words to describe themselves, so ask them and never assume.

Seldom heard: This is predominantly used within the healthcare sector and falls under 'industry speak'. Where possible, avoid it and use more accessible phrases like 'people whose experiences aren't being heard' or 'people who aren't being listened to'.

Ethnic minorities: Use this term to refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group. Ethnic minorities include White minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups. We don't say 'non-white'.

Avoid using BAME/BME: Historically, this acronym was used to describe Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. We don't use this term as many people dislike it and don't understand what it means. One of the issues with this term is that it is too broad and covers so many groups of people who are all very different. When planning your work, think about your audience and exactly who you're trying to target and why, and be as specific as possible (e.g. Do you want to hear from the Pakistani community?)

Age: You don't need to refer to a person's age unless it's relevant to what you're writing. If you are talking about older or younger people avoid stereotyping these groups (e.g. assuming older people don't use technology).

Disability: We talk about disability in a positive way, which means not using phrases like 'suffers from' or 'confined to…'.

We use the term 'disabled people', to describe this group. Whilst you might still see the term 'people with a disability' it's used more by organisations than by people themselves.

Autism: We say 'autistic people' as many see their autism as a fundamental part of who they are.

Gender and sexuality: When writing about a person, use their preferred pronouns. If you're unsure, just ask or use their name.

Mental health: We talk about 'people with a mental health condition' or 'people with mental health issues'.

Accessibility checklist

Using the writing tips above will ensure that you write in an accessible way. However, there are some small things you can do to make sure your work is accessible across the web, publications and social media. Here's a checklist to help you put it into action:

Web copy

- ☐ Headings, subheadings, bullet points, numbering are used consistently to break up text and make it easy to follow for screen readers.

- ☐ Ensure links are formatted properly. If you use the Healthwatch website template your links should be pink not blue.

- Use plain English. You can use online tools like Grammarly to ensure your copy is easy to read. We advise a score at least 90 before publication.

- Use keywords in title, lead paragraph and within text to support Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). SEO is the process of making your site better for search engines – meaning more people can find your website.

- Include alt text on all your images. Alt text is a short written description of the image, which is useful when your image doesn't load correctly, can't be viewed, or to support screen readers.

- Closed captions or transcripts should be available for all your videos.

- Make sure your web pages work properly on mobile or tablet (particularly if you're including anything such as a chart or table).

- Ensure any documents that are uploaded are in an accessible format.

- Provide information about how people can access documents in a different format for every download.

- Ensure links have meaningful text (not 'click here') and any link to external sites are set to open in a new window.

Regular checks:

- Monthly check to fix any broken URLs and misspellings

Publications

- Use plain English.

- Use the accessibility checker on Word (Review → Check accessibility).

- Ensure all visuals including diagrams/images/charts have the appropriate alt text.

- Keep any text within visuals short and easy to read.

- Ensure hyperlinks are meaningful (include the title of the page you're linking to rather than 'click here').

- Use enough contrast for text and background colours.

- Use built-in headings and styles. Ensure you're using headings, subheadings, bullets and numbering.

- Use built-in navigation such as a table of contents for longer documents to help screen readers skip to the bit their interested in.

- Use a simple table structure and specify column header information.

- To save a word document as an accessible PDF:

  o Go to File > "Save As…" and select PDF from the choices provided. By default this produces a PDF that preserves the document's accessibility features.

  o When saving, select *Options* and be sure that "Document structure tags for accessibility" is checked. This is checked by default, but could become unchecked under certain circumstances.

o   If you select "Minimize Size" to reduce the size of your PDF, be sure to repeat the preceding step, as this option might uncheck the "Document structure tags for accessibility" checkbox.

Social media

Hashtags

☐   Use hashtags in moderation.

☐   Put multi-word hashtags in Camel Case (#CamelCase not #camelcase).

☐   Place hashtags at the end of posts and tweets when possible.

☐   Place hashtag clouds in the first comment of Instagram posts instead of the caption.

Emojis

☐   Use emojis in moderation.

☐   Do not use emojis as bullet points.

☐   Avoid putting emojis in the middle of written content.

☐   Stick to default yellow emojis unless a custom skin tone is necessary for context.

Images

☐   Add alt text to all images, including GIFs.

☐   Add alt text for all copy on images that include flattened text (quote cards etc).

☐   When using images with text (e.g. statements) link out from the post or tweet to a webpage where the full statement is available as readable text. Add alt text to the image.

☐   Check colour contrast on any social media imagery that you produce.

Videos

☐   Add closed captioning to all videos that contain dialogue and/or audio. Closed captioning (CC) and subtitling are both processes of displaying text on a video to provide interpretive info about the dialogue or other audio in the video. Subtitles are intended for viewers who can't understand the language being spoken in the video. Closed captions can be toggled on and off.

☐   Provide a written or audio description of a video if it doesn't contain audio.

☐   Add open captioning to videos where closed captioning is not possible (Instagram stories, reels etc) Option captions are captions or subtitles that are burned into a video during post-production and always visible. They cannot be turned off by viewers.

☐   Make live captioning and/or an on-camera interpreter available for live videos.