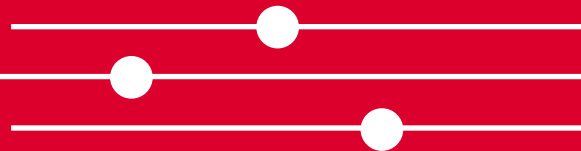


One voice

A Tone of Voice Writing Guide for the University of Groningen



Introduction

Every day, the University of Groningen creates a massive amount of written communication. We send emails, draft newsletters, craft catchy lines for posters and update our websites with the latest and greatest UG news.

And while the content and quality of what we write is most important, the words that we choose and the style that we use can have an even bigger impact. As your mother probably told you: 'It's not just what you say, it's how you say it'. The same is true for writing.

Finding our unique voice

As with people, organizations have their own voice. A style that is always recognizable, with words that match who we are and what we stand for. A smart, clear tone that makes you want to sit up and pay attention. A consistent approach that allows the reader to understand that the University is speaking, no matter who is doing the writing. And there are a LOT of us writing. Below you can find

tips on what matters to us, what to think about and how to style it. This guide will get us all on the same page, no matter who the reader is — a current or prospective student, a ‘stadjer’ (i.e. Groningen local), a journalist or a politician — our voice is always that of the UG.

Who is this guide for?

For anyone who writes on behalf of the UG — from president to professor, marketer to recruiter, administrator to curator — this Tone of Voice Guide will help you on your way.

But what exactly should we, the University of Groningen, sound like?

Who is the UG?

We are the University of Groningen. Internationally oriented, but strongly rooted in our region since 1614. A place where education, research and collaboration come together. An open academic community with the common goal of providing meaningful impact for the world of today and tomorrow. From students, teachers, researchers, and staff members to everyone who works with us. Check out our manifesto...

Our manifesto

*A university of connections.
Between ideas and impact,
research and education,
tradition and future;
at the crossroads of disciplines,
near and far, across borders.
A university of collaboration:
from knowledge and curiosity
to new insights.
Where people work together
to create meaning
for the world of today and tomorrow.*

Our principles



Our principles: What we stand for

Principles are the things you believe in. What you stand for. They guide how you think, what you do, and how you look at the world.

At the UG, we constantly strive to be:



**Engaged
Inclusive
Collaborative**

What do principles have to do with writing?

Principles are reflected not only in what we say and do, but also in what we write.

Imagine the University as a human being with the same principles as a regular person. Someone who cares about meeting diverse and unique people, who connects ideas, who cares about and is involved in the world around them. Would that person speak or write the way you have written it? If so, then you've hit the nail on the head!

Following this Tone of Voice Guide doesn't literally mean using the words inclusive, collaborative, and engaged (or a bunch of synonyms for them). Instead, look at our principles as an underlying theme, a thread running through every story. So grab your idea, speech, or e-mail... that article, brochure or LinkedIn post... and give it a second look: does it sound like us?

Diving into our principles: What they really mean & how to use them in your writing

Engaged

Being engaged means being highly committed, interested and involved. It's about committing your full heart and attention to something — a topic, a cause, a conversation — even life in general! Engagement is about active participation. It's the combination of passion and commitment in all that you do. It's actively taking responsibility for something and then going the extra mile. The University of Groningen attracts students and staff members who are highly engaged in their work, their lives and everything around them — like our core values as a University.

But engagement is also relevant to you, the writer! The job of a writer is to engage their reader — inspire, educate and fascinate them. And not only should your poetry or prose be engaging — your subject matter should be too (and it makes your job easier!). Choose fascinating people, topics or success stories that will really draw your audience in.



**Tips &
Questions**
to consider about
engagement

- › Who are the people we work with who are contributing to or solving social issues? Or who are particularly passionate about what they do?
- › Can you describe how someone's work has had a positive impact on the world around us? And how has the engagement (passion, commitment) of the people behind that work contributed to their (and our) success?
- › Conversely, what are the important burning topics for the UG, the community and the planet that we are not doing anything about? Engagement is about starting the conversation!
- › What are we doing to grow, develop and nurture our students, our staff, our researchers, our community? What's in it for them?
- › How are you drawing in your readers? Encouraging them to participate? Get them involved! Ask them a question, issue an invitation or give a real-life example; make the subject relevant and important to them.

Once we have engaged an individual or community, it's important for everyone to feel included. That's why the UG believes in being a truly inclusive community.

Inclusive

We are an open academic community and we want everyone to feel welcome at the UG. From the first day that you visit, study or work with us, we want you to feel that sense of openness. That you are somewhere special.

For us, this means having an open mind, including others and paying attention to different opinions. It does not mean tolerating hurtful opinions.

It's about creating a place where you are free to express yourself and your opinion. Where differences positively reinforce our view of the world. It is by being a strong community that we recognize individual differences: in gender, background, religion, nationality and political preference. We reflect this diversity in our stories: in the examples we choose and in the people we portray. And where differences lead to inequality, we explicitly state this and strive for equality.

Inclusivity refers to ideas, disciplines and people. Embrace differences! The more diverse a group is (in terms of race, age, background, education or personality) the more likely you are to increase knowledge and find answers to current challenges. Different backgrounds lead to unique perspectives. Encourage people to think out-of-the-box about what this means, not just in obvious areas, such as race or gender, but in all areas.

Being inclusive doesn't just mean being open to input from others or them join us. It also means a responsibility to contribute to the societies in which we operate. As a leader in education, this means disseminating knowledge and helping to apply it in sustainable economic and societal practices, services and business activities, both near and far.

**Tips &
Questions**
to consider when
communicating
inclusiveness

- › How do we ensure that everyone feels welcome and at home?
- › How do we involve people who do not have an academic background? And people with different cultural backgrounds?
- › Are we helping international students and staff to thrive?
- › Do we take into account in our communication that Dutch people can be much more direct than other nationalities? Are we doing anything to soften this?
- › Are we doing everything we can to avoid prejudice in our texts?
- › How inclusive are the examples that we give? Is there sufficient diversity in what we are writing or producing? In the people we interview or photograph? Or does everyone look the same? Do we constantly talk about the same topic? Do things in the same way? Shake it up!
- › Which disciplines reinforce each other? Find a way to draw parallels for your audience.
- › Which disciplines have nothing to do with one another? Experiment! Put them together and see what they can learn from a totally different approach.
- › What are some good examples of cross-pollination? How do people work together? Make it tangible! Share specific examples.
- › Keep an eye on your target audiences: are you updating the groups that you include? Is your audience growing and changing with time? Is everyone being included? Think: staff and alumni, local and global.

Once we have engaged our audiences and included all the right people, it's time to get them working together!

Collaborative

Collaboration in its simplest form is about sharing and working together. For us, it's about connecting disciplines to shed new light on relevant research questions. We are proud of the vast and varied connections that we make: people from knowledge institutions, companies, governments, NGOs, local Groningen residents... our country, our region and our world.

At the UG, we believe in a 'meeting of minds'. We want everyone to collaborate: connect, work together, share, learn, create. In our work, we should include interns and experts, scholars and scientists, businesspeople and humanitarian organizations, students and teachers, as well as the 'average' person — who often has a lot to offer, depending on the topic.

Collaboration, for us, isn't just about working well with others. It's also about how research and education are closely intertwined. How teams, faculties and individuals should mix across disciplines. Whatever you write about, a subject never stands alone; it is only enhanced by additional and unique perspectives.

We also realise how fortunate we are and that we have a role to play in society. We want to give back to the world in a big way, but we never forget where we come from — where our roots lie. So, when it comes to including knowledge and expertise from multiple communities — whether from around the corner or around the world — our doors, our minds and our ears are always open.



Tips

for communicating
(and encouraging!)
collaboration

- › Which people or organizations work together in the topic of your text?
Tip: within the UG, think of students and/or researchers connecting on a project with local government; or a faculty inviting cutting-edge scientists or business people to speak.
- › When writing, don't just focus on technical topics or data but also on the collaborations that have made things happen.
- › Be specific, especially with interdisciplinary teams — who was involved, what was their role, what did you accomplish together?
- › How valuable was the interaction? What did people learn from each other? What did they achieve that they might not have if they'd worked in isolation?

Get in touch!

Collaborating with one another shouldn't just be a lofty principle... for us it is a practical one too. Students, staff and administrators should know how to find each other and get in touch easily.

It's how you say it...

Now that we know what we collectively stand for — what should be reflected in our topics, our writing, our intentions — how should we say it?

Our personality



Our personality



Like people, organizations also have their own personality. And like a family or a group of people that all have the same beliefs or principles, their personalities and their styles of speaking can be vastly different.

That's why a clear, recognizable style in writing — our tone of voice — is paramount in reflecting our UG personality.

So what are our personality traits?

Approachable
Straightforward
Sincere
Dynamic

Below you will find some ideas about how to apply this tone of voice in your writing. This helps to ensure that your text always has a recognizable UG style, regardless of the subject or writer.

Approachable

For us this means: warm, friendly, personal, welcoming, comfortable, appealing, inclusive and interested.

It doesn't mean: fake, artificial, phoney, flowery or over the top. It is not stand-offish, patronizing, invasive or too familiar.

How do you write in an approachable way? What to do, and not to do...

We are people. And obviously, our readers are too. With people, you can often sense whether it feels right to approach someone or whether they are uninterested, cold or hard to connect with.

To connect with our readers, our language must be accessible and approachable. We can do this by using words that people use in real conversation.

Let's get rid of old and stuffy writing styles and make it more personal: not 'the University' or 'the student' but 'we' and 'you'. We can involve our readers in our stories by having our finger on the pulse of what is important to them. We can address them in a genuine, personal way. Our readers want to be treated well; even a weighty academic text doesn't need to be cold and aloof.



Tips
for
approachable
writing

- › Keep it real! If you were to speak to the reader in person, would you use the same words? Instead of: 'Students are welcome to register', make it approachable: 'Welcome! Ready to register?'
- › What's in it for them? Always ask yourself about the benefit to your audience. Is the subject relevant to their work, studies or daily life?
- › Inspire your audience. Ask questions that engage your readers. And consider whether you need a call to action to get your reader to do something. (e.g. 'Sign up today!', 'Click here to take part', etc.).
- › Be careful! Don't overdo the personal style or personal pronouns. At times, you may have to state the obvious (e.g. 'the University'), so people have a frame of reference or for the sake of variety. Be relaxed but still be professional and grammatically correct!

Straightforward

For us this means: clear, concise, down-to-earth, understandable, concrete and unfussy.
It doesn't mean: rude, blunt, insensitive, overcomplicated, one-dimensional or without substance, detail or nuance.

How do you write in a straightforward way?

- > Tell clear stories with a defined topic: an ideal text is limited to one main subject. If you have many examples or sections that are relevant to your story, that's fine, but be sure to link them back to your main point to keep it clear.
- > It's all about the content: a reader should immediately grasp the point of the piece. Don't write long, unrelated introductions or a million sidebars. But do include context and concrete examples!
- > If a topic is complex, then explain it clearly. And if a message simple, keep it simple. Use the active voice, not the passive. Use: 'The President addressed the PhD students at their graduation ceremony', and not: 'The PhD students were addressed by the President at their graduation ceremony'.
- > Edit, edit, edit! Proofread. Take a break, and then do it again. Ask someone else (a native speaker) to proofread your work before publication.
- > Avoid generalized assertions and back up points of view with evidence. For example, don't say that we want to be at the 'Top of education'. Do your homework and find out from a reliable source. What does the university really strive for? 'The UG aims to achieve a top 100 listing in the Shanghai Ranking (ARWU) or in the Times Higher Education ranking'.
- > Avoid jargon. If you must use it, explain what it is clearly, in everyday language, and give an example if it is too abstract.

Sincere

For us this means: authentic, reliable, honest, genuine, accurate, transparent, trustworthy, with integrity. What you see is what you get. It means standing by our beliefs and our facts because we know that they are correct.

It doesn't mean: we are soft, arrogant, think we know best or that we view the world from an ivory tower.

How do you write sincerely?

We write with confidence, but we do so in a genuine, honest way. We share our ideas because of our own excitement and belief in them, not because we are imposing them on others. We feel accountable for our work and for the knowledge that we share. We are reliable as researchers, experienced as teachers and with a genuine concern for our students, staff and partners. Sincerity is deeply embedded in who we are and all that we do. For example, the ability to honestly admit when something goes wrong.



Tips for sincere writing

- › Be transparent. Can you state the reasons for choosing your topic? Why is it important to the UG? Share the drivers behind a topic, research study or decision.
- › Be accountable. Be sure to have the facts to back up what you are saying, particularly for research or persuasive topics.
- › Be humble. Openly admit it when you are wrong. Honestly saying 'I'm sorry' is not a weakness, but proof of maturity and responsibility.

Dynamic

For us this means: imaginative, creative, young, fresh, energetic, bold, positive, enterprising, spirited, innovative, talented, multi-layered, a force for change.

It doesn't mean: aggressive, arrogant, pushy, confused, chaotic, bossy, over-complicated.

What does 'being dynamic' mean for us?

For us, being dynamic is the summary of everything that our University should be. We have a lot to offer the world and we bring energy and imagination to all that we do, without imposing our beliefs on others. We are excited to have talented people with many strengths and gifts and who bring their dynamism to their work and studies every day.



Tips

for
dynamic writing

- › Be bold. Don't be afraid to talk about fresh, creative ideas or innovations that are still dreams. We can't promise what we don't have, but get the dialogue going — even if we haven't figured it out yet, we will!
- › Ask tough questions. Get to the real story. No fluffy stuff! Being dynamic means having depth, so go beyond the superficial.
- › Share personal, unknown information if it adds human interest to a topic. For example, when profiling a professor of anthropology who also happens to be an accomplished musician, share this

- › Think creatively. In your words, visuals and the people whom you profile.
- › Share the talent that we have at the UG and that we appreciate in the world. The most dynamic people are those who admire and learn from others' successes, not those who are intimidated by them.
- › Show amazing examples from real life — alumni, people or communities that are making things happen — and what the UG can learn from them or emulate.

It's a guideline, not a laundry list! Allow one trait to shine over others

Our tone of voice is the combination of the above principles and personality traits, but the emphasis may change. Ideally, all these traits should be reflected in our writing, but sometimes one may be less relevant than others or should be highlighted. Don't force it! Allow the right traits to shine.

Our tone of voice in brief

Just like our staff and students, our UG writing is always **approachable**. We are human and our writing is too. That is why our texts are like a conversation: down-to-earth, appealing and interesting. We use a **straightforward** style and language. Not too wordy or beating about the bush, but clear and to the point.

Whoever reads our stories knows that we are **sincere**. We are genuine and confident about the quality of our work because we know that it's honest and accurate. At the same time, we are open and forthcoming if we make mistakes. You can see that we are **dynamic** from our words, sentences and text choices. Energetic, imaginative and bold, we bring freshness and life into all that we do.

We are **engaged** in the world around us and in all that we do. We recognize the differences between people and we give those differences a voice so that everyone feels **included** at the UG. We connect and **collaborate** to learn, grow and excel. And our writing and topics reflect this.

Writing tips



Write with a clear goal

In your work, writing always has a purpose. Whether you email your boss to ask for a day off, write to recruit new students or request a supplier to change an order. So, always ask yourself first: what do I want to achieve with my words?

Win their hearts and minds

A reader should not feel that you are telling them what to do because of a reason unconnected to them. Show them what the benefits are for them. Influence, excite and inspire them. They will then be motivated to act on their own behalf and you will more likely achieve the outcome that you desire. Simply put: if you want someone to register for a programme, for example, your words should make the reader feel that there is something in it for them. What will they get out of it? How will they grow? What will they be able to do afterwards that they couldn't do without your programme?

Know your target audience

Who will read your text? Is your audience young or old? What is their background? What makes them enthusiastic? Also consider whether your target group already knows the UG or the subject. What will they think? For example, if you write about earthquake research, one reader may be enthusiastic about our scientific expertise while another may be suspicious about the topic. If you have a point to make, don't dilute your message by trying to please everyone, but keep multiple points of view in mind and respond to relevant concerns.

Use a logical structure

Create an outline first to help you. With a clear flow to your text, people will understand your message quickly and won't be annoyed or get lost trying to figure out what you are trying to say.

Briefly summarize

Briefly summarize your entire piece (ideally one sentence!) in your introduction. This doesn't mean you have to give away all the excitement up front, but draw the reader in with a synopsis.

Use headers

Write catchy headlines. Use bold font and/or subheadings to provide an overview. This is essential online because many readers only scan texts. But even on paper and in emails, people need something to help them follow the logic of the text.

Keep it short and sweet

If it's possible to cut it short, do so. This applies to sentences, paragraphs and complete texts. If sentences are too long, readers are more likely to lose the thread. Regardless of the reading level of your audience, shorter sentences usually have more impact. However, avoid incomplete sentences and don't cut out all the detail — it's important to bring a story to life or explain complex ideas. In other words: simplify but don't oversimplify.

Write in the active voice, not the passive.

‘The President of the University gave an exceptionally inspiring speech at the graduation ceremony’;
not: ‘An exceptionally inspiring speech was given at the graduation ceremony by the President of the University’.

Position things positively

People are more likely to listen to you if you formulate your story positively, even if you are asking them to do something. Say: ‘Silence, please’, rather than: ‘No noise.’

Tantalize your audience, and be specific!

Appealing language uses very specific word choices. Things that you can see, smell, taste, feel and imagine in front of you when you read. Give your writing colour, texture and variety. However, don’t use overly flowery language. Be descriptive, not excessive.

General: ‘fruit’; specific: ‘ruby-red pomegranates’.

General: ‘top-quality training’; specific: ‘Our programmes score in the top 100 of all international rankings.’

Read it aloud — Is your text finished?

Now read it out, as if you are speaking to the reader. In written texts, people can often sound too formal or old-fashioned. The UG is neither, so we shouldn’t sound that way. Be critical of the words you choose. But don’t forget, we are aiming for informal, not unprofessional.

The final (but vital!) touch: proofreading and spelling

- › Use grammar and spell checks but always proofread for errors. Auto-correct is not your friend! Often, you know better. Make sure you set the correct proofing language (British English for us at the UG)!
- › You can find answers to language questions using Grammarly, www.englishgrammar.org or the Oxford dictionary.
- › Be careful when using thesauruses in your non-native language or if you aren't familiar with a word: the nuances can be vastly different and don't mean the same thing in every context.
- › For specific terms and English writing tips, consult the Style Guide and the Language Centre Terminology Database.
- › Tips for writing quality web material are available on the intranet. Check the web page manuals.

Happy writing!