

Hertford College tone of voice guide

Tone of voice guides the way we write: on the website, but also in communications of all kinds.

The guiding thought behind how we write is the desire for our core audience – students and potential students – to perceive what is special about Hertford:

Why apply to Hertford?

We believe in your ability to make the most of the positive possibilities in life. To discover more, in ways that will change your life and the lives of others. That is our tradition; this is your opportunity.

Please use these guidelines when you write for Hertford, and check against them when you have written your communication. They can guide your tone in a creative not proscriptive way.

Above all, we want to feel a sense of humanity and personality in Hertford's words.

Be Lively

We'd like you to cast aside any inclination towards a formal, 'corporate' style. We want Hertford's words to be expressive.

- Start with an arresting sentence. It sets the tone for you as a writer and grabs the reader's attention.
- Favour verbs whenever you can, rather than nouns. They communicate more quickly.
- Use active forms of verbs rather than the passive. In particular, turn abstract nouns into verbs, where possible. "We consider" rather than "Consideration will be given".
- Make your words close to a speaking tone – you can use contractions, personal pronouns, informal phrases. That said, avoid slang.
- Avoid jargon and management-speak. Challenge your words to make sure they mean what you want them to say.
- Think of your reader. Often the reader will be a student, but not always. Keeping a real person in mind helps liberate your language from the formulaic and the formal.
- Keep it simple. Avoid long sentences. Don't rely too much on sub-clauses.
- Use a wide vocabulary without resorting to words that are arcane or obscure.

Before

"Academic excellence framed by deep commitment to fairness and opportunity."

After

"We'll give you the best opportunity to succeed academically."

Be Personal

Write with the perspective of your primary audience in mind. Most often, this will be the student or potential student:

- Sentences with the pronoun 'you' can work better than 'we'. It forces you to put yourself in the place of your readers and think about their needs and expectations
- Are you telling a story, thinking of engaging with your reader?
- Give details that can bring a piece of writing to life. Hertford is a special place, so try to create that sense of place by picking out the usual details that people might not know.

- Use examples of real people to establish a human connection.
- It helps your reader if you guide them with clear headings, sub-headings and bullet-points.

Before

"We pride ourselves on the fact that our undergraduates will be taught predominantly in tutorials by fellows and lecturers who are recognised experts in their subjects."

After

"You will learn from tutorials with recognised experts in your subject."

Be Interesting

Think of the reader's needs. Ask and anticipate questions. Convey the college's personality. Keep it interesting.

- Use questions to open up conversations and to keep your reader engaged. They help to create a conversation rather than a lecture.
- Think about the use of poetic techniques in prose (alliteration, rhyme, assonance) to give rhythm and energy to your writing.
- We said earlier to keep sentences short, but you can vary it. Monotony in sentence length bores a reader, whereas you want to make sure they stay with you.
- Think of structure. Even a short paragraph can have an arresting opening, thoughts developing in the middle, and come to a satisfactory ending.
- At the end of your piece, what are you asking your reader to do next? Are there clear pointers on what to do now?

Before

"Hertford College has a long-standing commitment to widening participation in higher education and a well-established policy of open access."

After

"Hertford has always believed the best students come from all over. If you're committed to your subject and you're aiming high, we want you to apply here."

Ask yourself

Some final questions to ask yourself before pressing the 'send' or 'publish' button.

- Could you make it shorter? Is that word doing anything useful? Does it add to the meaning or personality of your writing?
- Have you told a story? Does it engage the reader?
- What do you want your reader to do? Is there a clear path to follow?

Enjoy it

This guidance is not a set of rules.

There's a pleasure in using the right word for the right occasion. Above all we strive for simplicity, but recognise that simplicity can be hard to achieve.

Here are some words to get you started:

[illegible]