

1. Who is your target audience?

Knowing the emotional and informational needs of your audience will determine the content and the correct tone of voice in your writing. Adopting a formal, casual style or a mix between the two depends upon your target audience. Are they alumni, donors, prospective students, members of the media, or faculty and staff? If you're writing about a scientific or technical topic, don't assume your readers have backgrounds in those fields.

2. What communication platforms are you using to reach them?

Understanding how your audience obtains information will get your message across more effectively. For example, it is more acceptable to be informal and expressive when you are communicating with them on social media.

3. Are you writing to inform, influence, or educate?

Knowing the reason of your writing will help you choose an appropriate writing style that achieves your purpose. Promoting a master's degree program will require a tone that is more persuasive and less educational than announcing a scientific discovery.

4. How formal is the topic you're writing about?

Tone varies with the level of formality of a subject. An email announcing a senior appointment will sound more professional and formal than a Facebook post rallying support for a student fundraising campaign.

The following examples illustrate how we can change the voice and tone of our writing to better align with our new brand identity.

Example #1

Off-brand	On-brand
<p>The BIBU program is designed for students who have strong interests in science yet prefer to develop their career in the business sector. Not only will they build a solid foundation of knowledge in biotechnology, but also gain professional business know-how and skills to understand, manage, and market biotechnology initiatives.</p>	<p>BIBU graduates are ready to make a difference with biotechnology—combating disease, revitalizing our earth, or boosting the nutritional value of foods. From the moment our students step into the classroom, they learn the technical knowledge in biotechnology and to apply practical business skills to bring new biotech products to market.</p>

The On-brand example attracts the reader with active and evocative verbs. It sounds passionate and is confident in its claims, presenting the program as inspiring and invigorating for students and vital to their career prospects.

Example #2

Off-brand	On-brand
<p>An international multi-disciplinary research team led by scientists at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) has discovered for the first time a computational framework that could map out the fitness landscape of a crucial protein in the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), potentially paving the way for rational design of a vaccine that may force the deadly virus to mutate into forms that lead to its demise.</p>	<p>A team led by scientists at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology has discovered a computational framework that could have groundbreaking implications on the design of new HIV vaccines.</p>

The On-brand example delivers the message in a direct and precise manner, leaving the details in the latter part of the writing in smaller, easier to read chunks of text.

Example #3

Off-brand	On-brand
<p>The Institute of Environment was funded a 5-year project named “Personalized Real-time Air-quality Informatics System for Exposure (PRAISE-HK)” by the HSBC 150th Anniversary Charity Program. By combining state-of-the-art sensors technologies, air quality modelling system, big data, exposure science and more, PRAISE-HK provides personalized and location specific real-time (and forecasting) air pollution data and health analysis to Hong Kong citizens. Based on the system data, users can plan cleaner routes and activities for the day, thereby effectively reduce exposure of polluted air and hence the health risks.</p>	<p>The Institute of Environment has initiated a 5 year project, named “Personalized Real-time Air-quality Informatics System for Exposure (PRAISE-HK)” with support from the HSBC 150th Anniversary Charity Program. This innovative program provides personalized and location specific air pollution data and forecast to the end user, enabling them to plan cleaner routes in their daily routine. Now everyone can enjoy a greener day just by looking at their smartphones.</p>

The On-brand example highlights the benefit the program brings to the audience without giving too many technical details which laymen may not understand. It establishes a more personal connection with the reader.