

TENDER WRITING STYLE GUIDE

Presentation of bids and tenders including writing style, grammar, spelling, consistency and layout all have an impact on the overall success of a submission.

Here are some basic rules and suggestions to help you to develop a consistent style and to construct clear and persuasive tenders and proposals.

Creation of a House Style

It is useful to create standard font and style guidelines for everyone in the organisation to work to. This means that ALL documents and policies will appear consistent and need minimal formatting when being added into a tender document, so saving time and effort.

Font Type and Font Size

Choose a font that is modern, clear and easy to read. In many cases this is a matter of taste and preference. Common fonts for tender writing include:

Arial
Verdana
Tahoma
Calibri

Some organisations use Times New Roman. This is a very traditional font and is used more in traditional sectors such as legal. It can be perceived as old fashioned.

Some clients will specify use of a particular font (e.g. Arial 12pt in plain black single line spacing). In such instances you should always follow the tender instructions to the letter!

Format & Layout

Large blocks of text, a lack of consistency, long sentences and a lack of white space will make a document heavy going from the perspective of the reader.

Do

- Left justify or fully justify text (although fully justified text can appear oddly spaced if you use it in tables or small spaces)

- Divide text into paragraphs and ensure that the spacing between paragraphs is consistent (e.g. 1 line)
- Use headings and subheadings to signpost the reader to the different parts of each question
- Keep sentences to around 20 words
- Use bold or background shading to highlight important points (always check with the client that the use of coloured text is permitted and consider if the document is to be photocopied as background shading or highlighting may not always be easy to read when copied in black and white).
- Use bullets or numbers for clarity (using number is especially helpful to the reader if cross referencing text)
- Use charts, graphs and tables where appropriate to illustrate comparisons, changes over time, or multiple numbers. They can have more impact than a written explanation and often illustrate a point which may be hard to convey in words. Be careful to ensure that all pie charts graphs etc. produced in colour are also intelligible when photocopied/printed in black and white.

Don't

- Indent first line of paragraphs
- Use long sentences or waffle
- Insert clip art
- Use long solid blocks of text

Lists Using Bullets, Numbers or Letters/Numerals

Using lists helps to:

- present information clearly
- highlight information
- break up daunting blocks of text

Bullet points don't always need a capital letter to start, particularly if the bullet point would form a sentence with the preceding text if it stood on its own, for example:

Working with Bill meant that Jack had to:

- go to bed early
- remember his tools
- take his sandwiches to work
- collect Bill by 7.30am

Be consistent with punctuation. Options for punctuation include use of semi colons, full stops or simply nothing at all. Whichever one you choose, make sure you apply it throughout the document. Examples are provided below

- Separate each bullet point with a semi colon;
- And then put a full stop after the last one.

Or

- Just use full stops throughout.
- And this includes the last one.

Or

- Nothing at all at the end of each bullet point
- This includes the last one

You also need to think about the order of priority in which your list is set-out particularly if you are using numbers, letters or numerals. For example, if you are listing potential benefits for a client, consider the evaluation weightings or try to anticipate their priorities and put the most important first:

1. Reduce & consolidate costs.
2. Achieve reliable and consistent levels of service.
3. Access and secure the best candidates.
4. Obtain meaningful management information.

Alternatively, you may wish to make them measurable:

- Enable client to reduce costs by ABC%;
- Meet ABC key performance indicators within agreed timescales;
- Receive a maximum of 5 CVs that meet at least 95% of the essential vacancy criteria within 24 hours;
- Receive management information that demonstrates achievement of KPI measures every Friday.

Obviously importance can be subjective if it is not stated in the client's specification. This means we have to be sensitive and try to anticipate what the reader wants.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations that are pronounced as the individual letters (e.g. BBC or VAT) should be written in upper case with no spaces or full stops. Those pronounced as a word (e.g. Nasa, or Nato) should have a capital letter to start and again no spaces or full stops. If an abbreviation is considered to have entered the English language (e.g. awol, asbo, pin number or sim card) then the whole of it should be in lower case. Note the exceptions - pdf and plc are always lowercase.

Use of Capitals

Too many capitals can spoil the appearance of a page.

NEVER WRITE SENTENCES IN BLOCK CAPITALS. THEY ARE TOO DIFFICULT TO READ AND MAKE PEOPLE FEEL THEY ARE BEING SHOUTED AT.

Also, spell check doesn't show any words spelt incorrectly when sentences are written in block capitals unless you turn this feature on. Use **bold** rather than capitals if you want to emphasise a word or sentence in a block of text.

Capitals can be used in headings to highlight them. The following are both fine:

CAPITALS IN HEADINGS

Or

Capitals in Headings

Generic job titles should be written in lower case (for example, a team of recruitment consultants were used to get through the volume of work).

Individuals' titles, for example, Recruitment Consultant, Jim Smith and Branch Manager, Jane Jones should have initial capitals.

Punctuation

Punctuation helps to communicate meaning and helps you to structure and organise your writing. Here are some common punctuation marks.

Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe is used for two purposes:

1. To indicate a missing letter (e.g. can't instead of cannot)
2. To indicate possession (e.g. David's book / the manager's responsibility / new season's asparagus)

For words ending in "s", add the apostrophe plus s when you would naturally pronounce an extra s in speech: Charles's house; Dickens's novels; Thomas's brother. However for personal names that end in -s but are not spoken with an extra s, just add an apostrophe after the -s; Bridges' poems; Connors' sister; Heroditus' writings".

The apostrophe moves to after the s for the plural (i.e. the managers' responsibilities – where there is a group of managers rather than just one).

The exception to the rule is plural nouns that do not end in s – these take the apostrophe in a similar way to the singular above (e.g. children's games, People's Republic)

When denoting timescales (e.g. 12 years' experience or six weeks' holiday)

There is no apostrophe in the plurals of groups of letters and numbers

<u>Correct</u>	<u>Incorrect</u>
CVs	CV's
NVQs	NVQ's
PCs	PC's

It's or its – you only use an apostrophe when there is a letter missing (e.g. it's a big dog). Do not use an apostrophe when you are using the possessive form (e.g. the dog is eating its bone).

Exclamation Marks (!)

Exclamation marks (!) express surprise or alarm. Do not over use. If you do need to use an exclamation mark, never end a sentence with more than one.

Full Stops (.)

Do not use full stops after headings or after abbreviations like Mr, Mrs, or Dr unless it is the end of a sentence.

Hyphens (-)

A hyphen joins two or more words together (e.g. x-ray, door-to-door). Here are some common words that do and don't need hyphens:

Hyphens should be used in:

- twenty-four
- two-thirds
- seventeen-year-old
- full-time

Don't use hyphens in:

- email
- coordinate
- online
- subcontractor
- website
- ongoing
- unemployed

Brackets ()

Brackets can be used when you want to add further explanation, an afterthought, or comment that is to do with our main line of thought but distinct from it for example in the case of:

- **further explanation:** DWP's report (May 2009) shows that the level of un-employment is rising in nearly all areas of the UK
- **comment:** I participated in the health and safety training (which had 21 delegates) in the board room
- **afterthought:** You can use coloured fonts to emphasis a word or text (remembering to check if they are permitted by the client).

Colons (:)

The colon is used to:

- **introduce a list, for example**
You will have to order several accessory components: chargers, cases, cords, cables, and speakers

- **introduce an extract or quotation which follows an introductory sentence, for example**
As Regional Manager, Joe Bloggs, said: "Without this new project, people living in the the area would continue to experience difficulty in sourcing and securing employment opportunities". The full stop comes after the close of the saying here.
- **precede an extended explanation, for example**
There are two conditions that must exist before we can experience true freedom: first, each person must be entitled to act independently of the other; secondly, each must agree not to cross those parameters that have been set in place as protection from harm.
- **precede a restatement of an idea, for example**
The play was poorly performed: it lacked both experience and characterisation from the actors.

Semicolons (;)

While a comma is frequently used, the following are the general accepted rules for the use of the semicolon:

- **To separate two independent thoughts in a sentence that otherwise, would have been separated by using an and or but**
Example:
It was the beginning of April; all the spring flowers were on display (a comma separating these thoughts would not provide a distinct enough pause)
- **To precede the words 'for example,' 'for instance,' 'as in,' etc in sentences**
Example:
The course will include role-playing which demonstrates the practical application of the anger management skills learned; for example, an employer/employee conflict, a spousal argument, and a situation of a misbehaved child with parent
- **To separate items in a long list, especially when commas have already been used**
Example:
Please place the following orders with the restaurant for our breakfast meeting: two boiled eggs, toast, and tea; toast, marmalade, coffee and orange juice; and porridge, orange juice and tea.

Quotation Marks (“ ‘)

Although you will still see the double quotation marks used to quote direct speech it is more and more common to punctuate speech and direct quotations with single quotation marks.

Quoting Source References

Always quote the source if you use statistics. Use a symbol immediately to the right of the data e.g. 'Nearly one-in-five* people of working age (6.9 million, or 19%) in Great Britain are disabled.' In the footnotes, repeat the symbol, followed by the source of the information e.g. * UK Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey, Sept - Dec 2006.

Written Content

Plain English is about clear communication. It is about writing so you cannot be misunderstood. Writing in plain English means keeping your sentences short, avoiding jargon, and using an active voice.

Keeping Words and Sentences Short

People switch off if they see lines of long words, long sentences or both. Think of what you are trying to say and then say it. Always try to cut the number of words you use. Short sentences make clearer reading and reduce misunderstanding.

By sticking to the following principles, you will be able to write fewer and shorter words:

- Never use a long word if a short one will do
- If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out
- Aim for your sentences to be a maximum of 20 to 25 words in length
- Remember what you are trying to say; be specific and avoid long descriptive sentences
- Break up long sentences into more manageable chunks always remember your audience; will people outside your company or your department really understand what you are saying?
- You also need to be especially careful if you use acronyms that may not be widely understood outside your area of expertise. Always give the explanation for any acronym used when using it for the first time, e.g. MP (Member of Parliament) then it is perfectly acceptable to use the acronym only thereafter.

Cutting long sentences doesn't mean having to make every sentence the same length. Just vary your writing so that you have a mix of mid-length and shorter sentences.

Keeping Sentences Active

According to the Plain English Campaign (www.plainenglish.co.uk), active sentences are crisp and professional, passive sentences are stuffy and bureaucratic.

The Plain English Campaign says it's easier to write active sentences once you've understood how a sentence fits together. It adds that there are three main parts to every sentence:

- the doer (the person, group or thing doing the action);
- a verb (the action itself); and
- an object (the person, group or thing that the action is done to).

So, if the sentence is 'Dave wrote the report':

- the doer is Dave (he did the report);
- the verb is wrote; and
- the object is the report (it has been written)

In passive sentences, the order is different: object, verb, doer. So the sentence would read 'the report was written by Dave'.

The Right Tone

A key aspect of successful communication is the tone you use. Using the right tone will help give people a positive image of your company but the wrong tone can have a negative effect on how your message is perceived:

- Make it sound friendly and caring but don't patronise the reader
- Avoid any language that might offend people
- Use everyday spoken language not formal jargon

Avoiding Jargon

Jargon serves a purpose between people who share certain information or knowledge, but when writing for audiences as diverse as ours, leave jargon out. Contractual, technical and other specialist words rarely communicate clearly. Remember, when writing bids there will be a number of people evaluating your response, and some of these will not necessarily be familiar with recruitment (e.g. procurement specialists and accountants).

Other Guidance on Writing Style

Always try to answer questions in the order in which they are asked and ensure that you signpost your response with bold titles and subtitles so that the document is easy to navigate.

Avoid too much cross referencing. Although sometimes the questions can appear to be very similar it is important to answer them all in full – never just say “see response to question X”.

Use of Images

Using pictures, graphs, tables or other illustrations can enhance tenders providing they are good quality, relevant to the question and the client allows it. Images should either support the main body of text, or be accompanied by a text caption explaining their significance.

Proof Reading

Always check fonts and font sizes, margins, page length or word counts very carefully to ensure they conform to the instructions and specification.

Tenders should be checked for consistency of terminology, e.g. Recruitment Manager and Hiring Manager – choose one and then stick to it.

Make sure that if you copy and paste you customised the text to the new document and delete any references to old client names.

Clichés

Clichés are overused words and phrases and should be avoided. Examples might be:

- Blue sky thinking
- Out of the box
- Push the envelope
- Singing from the same hymn sheet

Gender Issues

Our use of language reflects our values, as well changes in society. Phrases such as career woman, and fireman are outdated and potentially discriminatory. Try to use non-gender specific words or phrases instead e.g. use postal worker instead of postman.

Singular/Plural

Corporate entities take the singular: e.g. The BBC has decided (not "have") to listen to the opinions of its (not "their") customers.

Ending a Letter

Yours sincerely should be used when you know the name of the person to whom you are writing (e.g. Dear Mr Jones.....Yours sincerely Mrs Smith). The "s" on sincerely is always in lower case.

Yours faithfully should be used when you do not know the name of the person to whom you are writing (e.g. Dear Sir.....Yours faithfully Mrs Smith). Again the "f" on faithfully is always in lower case.

Spell Check Set Up Standards

Care should be taken to ensure PCs and laptops are set to use the 'English UK' spell checker as opposed to 'English USA'. There are many words in our everyday language that are spelt differently in the USA, for example, in the USA, they use the letter Z a lot where we use the letter S, e.g. 'customization' rather than 'customisation'.

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