

# Tone of voice guide

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# Putting our brand into words





# Why we need a tone of voice

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What we say is as important as how we say it – this is what we mean by tone of voice.

We want the people we serve – our consumers, partners and people – to understand and value what we do in a way that creates the right impression of our brand. Which means we need to bring the Ombudsman Services brand to life through a clear and consistent tone of voice that reflects our values. A voice that comes through in everything we say and do – from our website, to our leaflets, letters, tweets and conversations. Because in branding, consistency is key.

**The way we speak and what we say is our tone of voice.**

# Why we've changed our tone of voice

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We've chosen to refresh our brand and tone of voice to better reflect our audience and why we exist today. Feedback told us that Ombudsman Services was coming across as authoritarian and inaccessible; using language and jargon that a layperson wouldn't understand. Our new tone addresses this head on and presents Ombudsman Services as a modern organisation that is in touch with consumers, partners and the industries we serve.



# Using this guide

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This tone of voice guide is designed to help you write our communications consistently across the business. The more it's used the more our tone of voice will become second nature.

Remember, this is a guide, not a rule book, so please use your judgement too.

**So what are our brand values and personality? Read on.**



# Our brand

Our brand is our identity. It sums up our belief and purpose – why we exist and what makes people believe us. Our brand is our DNA.





### Reason to believe in Ombudsman Services

Today we make clear, considered decisions. Upholding consumer rights, helping businesses transform their customer experiences with unique data and a considered, impartial perspective. But the future lies in our ability to shape customer experiences, building an environment of trust from the very beginning, helping businesses strive for better, supported by our meaningful & unparalleled human insight.

### Our brand proposition

**Human insight.  
Transformative  
change.**



# Our brand statement, what we stand for.

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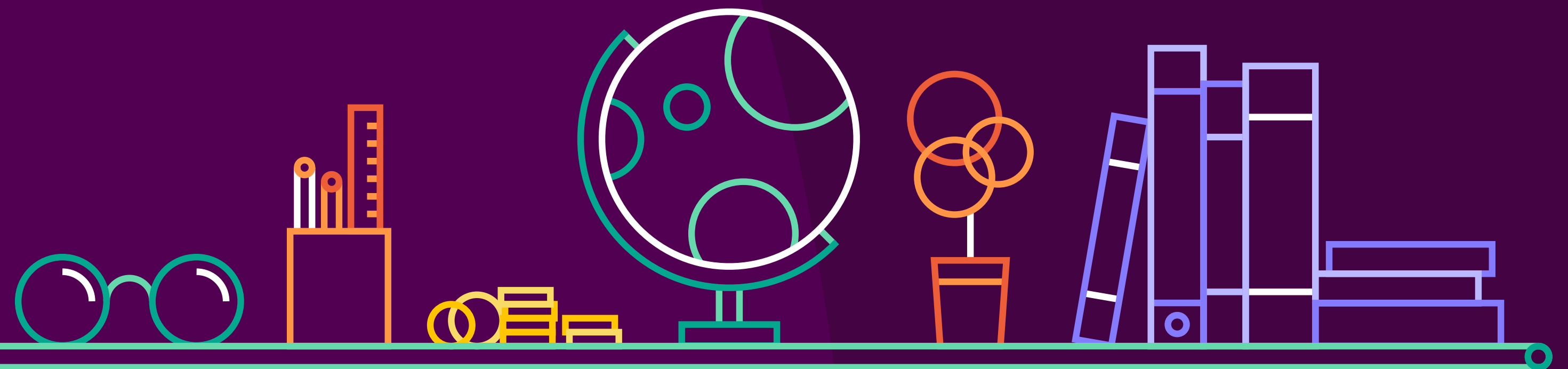


“Ombudsman Services exists to ensure fair treatment for all, with unique data, human perspective and meaningful insight. Enlightening businesses and supporting consumers to build trust and work in harmony.”



# Our brand values

Our values are what define us and guide our decisions as a business.







Brand value #1

# Believable & real

We are a people business, defined by trust. Trust earned through impartiality, fairness and empathy. Putting people at the heart of our business, we are an approachable, helpful and human voice for consumers; an inspiring and enlightening companion to partner businesses.

**No jargon. Speaking clearly, with empathy, from the heart.**



Our brand



Brand value #2

# Open-minded & curious

To stay agile, we must remain open to fresh ideas. Seeking out new ways of collaborative working, adopting the latest technologies and constantly pushing ourselves forward in an ever expanding, digital world.

Learning today to empower tomorrow.



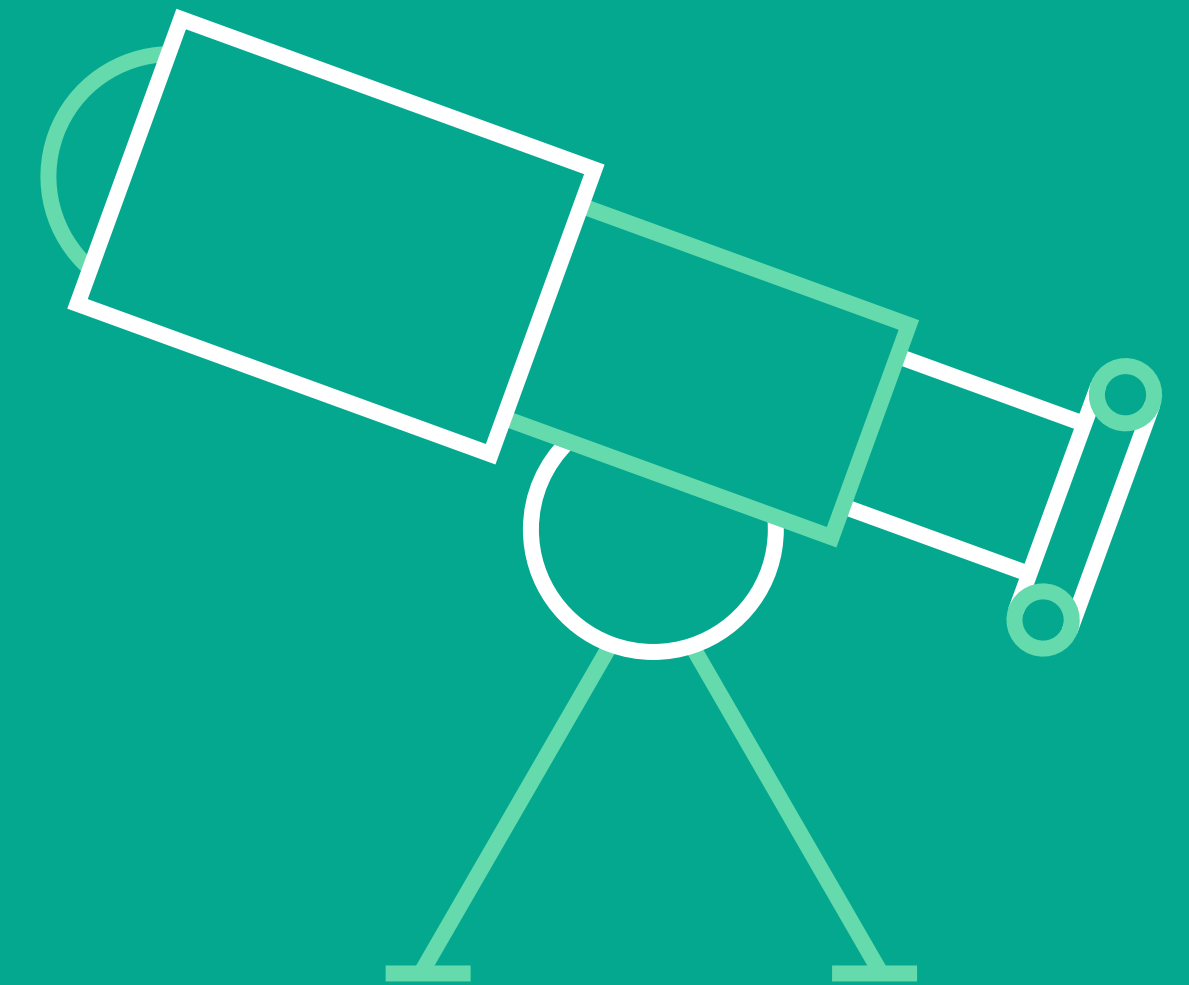


Brand value #3

# Insightful & focused

Every detail matters. In all consumer complaints, within every line of customer data, we embrace the grey between the black and white to create a clearer picture, with analytical interrogation and a human focus. Consumers and partners count on us to make considered decisions and offer insightful thinking, based on truth, built on trust.

Getting it right. Making things better.





Brand value #4

# Ambitious & spirited

A company of individuals, together we celebrate what makes each of us unique. With the opportunity to have meaningful, enriching careers; constantly learning and growing, achieving personal goals, meeting the ambitions of our business. Here to succeed by doing the right thing.

**Personal bests. Together for success.**





# Our brand values

## **Believable & real**

No jargon. Speaking  
clearly, with empathy,  
from the heart.

## **Open-minded & curious**

Learning today to  
empower tomorrow.

## **Insightful & focused**

Getting it right.  
Making things better.

## **Ambitious & spirited**

Personal bests.  
Together for success.



# Our brand personality

Because our tone of voice is an extension of our brand values and culture, it must sound authentic for it to be credible. If you think of Ombudsman Services as a person, our tone of voice is how we express our personality. To help you get into character, we've aligned our brand to a real-life personality.



If we were a real-life famous person we would be...

# Sir David Attenborough

We know what makes up the Ombudsman Services brand DNA and have identified our brand personality, but what is our tone of voice? We've put together some practical pointers to help you...



**Passionate**

**Not preachy**



**Down to earth**



**Humble**

**Known for being specialist**

**Steady partner in a relationship**

**Committed to his ideas and vision**

**Never stops learning**

**Ever relevant**

**Loved across cultures**

**Expert**

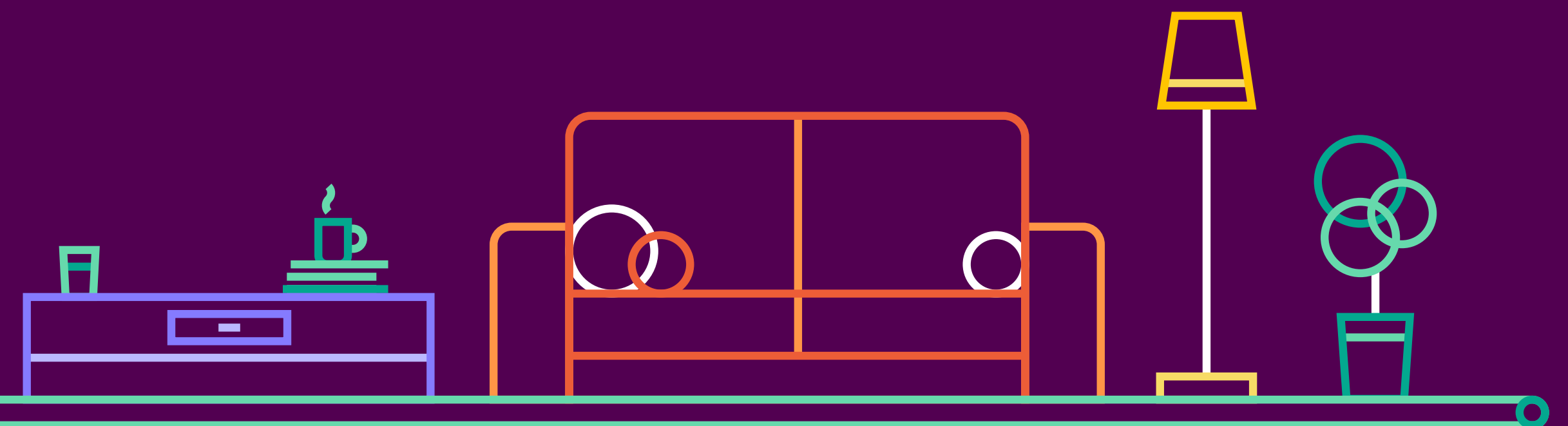


# Our tone of voice

In a nutshell. Our tone of voice is a natural extension of our brand. It is the spirit of Ombudsman Services that informs everything our brand does, and inspires the way we write copy. But how do we bring it to life?

The Ombudsman Services tone of voice is:

- ✓ Positive, we deal in complaints but never want to sound like one.
- ✓ Personable and friendly but never over-familiar – ‘hello’ versus ‘hey there’ or ‘ok mate’. Hello works for everyone. Not too formal or informal, it’s great balance in helping us be more approachable.
- ✓ Accessible; we always use Plain English and explain technical and legal terms in a non-patronising way – and with no jargon.







# What we mean to our audience affects what we say

Our tone of voice won't change for our audience groups, but our point of view will. Understanding what we mean to our audience will help us ensure we make our communications as meaningful to them as possible.

## To our consumers we are...

the people they can turn to for impartial advice and a solution that's fair.

## To our partners we are...

the people they look to for knowledgeable and insightful ways to help them reduce complaints by enabling them to make the changes they need to deliver better customer service.

## To our regulators we are...

champions in protecting rights as well as partners in information sharing, we share our analysis so that regulators and business partners can make improvements.

## To our people we are...

here to enable them to deliver clarity to consumers and partners through meaningful work.



# Before you write, think...

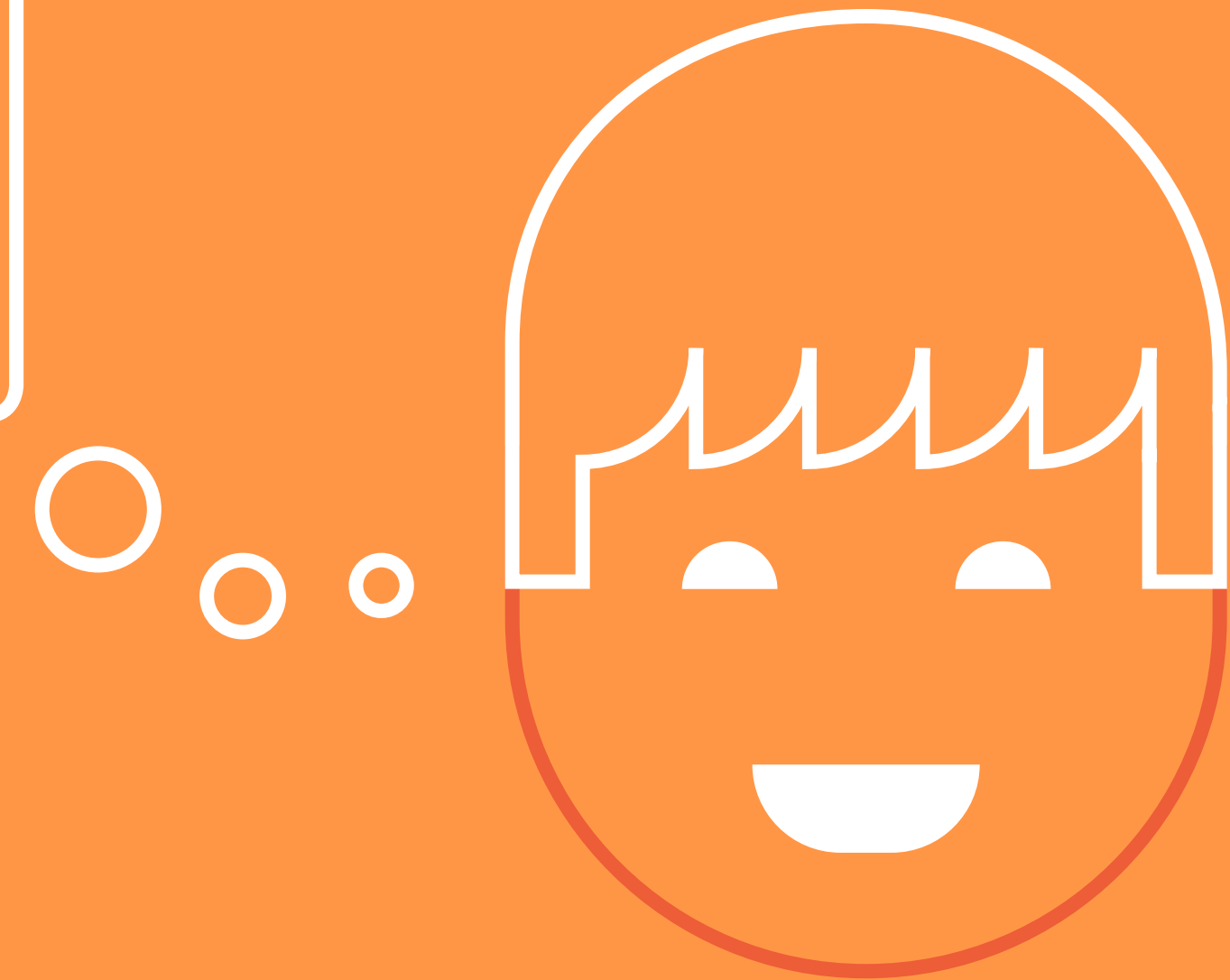
Who's going to be reading your words? Picture the individual – your audience will most likely be one or any of the audience types we list on the previous page.

**Think about what you know they know, not what you assume they know.**

Adapt the point of view to suit them where possible – using the 2nd person 'you' when directly addressing them and the 1st person 'we' when talking about us or what we've done. In some instances, use 'I' when applicable – this may be relevant when a decision is down to the individual writing the response.

**Above all, be clear and remember, no jargon.**

Here are some tips to help you...





# 1. Relate to your audience

Our brand value statement talks about meaningful insight, finding one that relates to your audience shows you understand them.

## **In practice:**

Start with a relevant insight or say something new that your audience will relate to and connect with – also address your reader in the 2nd person point of view (You). Take a look at this example taken from a decision report:

‘You’ll be reassured to hear that we’ve now taken a look at the information you and your supplier shared with me. Your supplier has included a file that features their version of events along with your account history ...

Taking all of this into consideration, we’re going to recommend that your supplier send you a written apology. We’re also going to recommended that your supplier pay you £30 as a goodwill gesture.

Directly addressing the consumer engages them instantly, following up with news keeps their interest and encourages them to read on. You’ll notice that the language is less formal too and more in tune with the consumer’s level.



## 2. Show we are human

Ombudsman Services deals in complaints; a time when people are already frustrated. We don't want to frustrate them further by lacking understanding and a human tone. Instead of telling somebody what they have to do, explain it to them as if you were helping a colleague.

### **In practice:**

Showing a human perspective is at the heart of our brand value statement. Bring this to life by being open and honest. Give people clarity in a way that comes across as warm and helpful – not cold and corporate – this will also help build trust. Here's an example taken from some decision report wording:

'I realise how frustrating it must've been to have had several engineers come to your home on numerous occasions. However, I'm satisfied that this had to happen so that your supplier could put right any wrong. I also accept that the supplier could have acted sooner – the delay has caused you inconvenience.'





# 3. Show empowerment

Ombudsman Services is all about giving consumers, partners, regulators and our people the help they need to find a solution – our expertise and support is here to empower them whether that's through knowledge, guidance or enabling them to take action.

**In practice:**

Show (rather than tell) our audience we understand their challenges and needs. Prove that Ombudsman Services has fairness to consumers'/partners/employees' at heart by putting them at the centre of our communications – here's an example:

'We're here to help you get to a solution. Our people are trained to listen and offer a helping hand when you need it. Fairness is at the heart of what we do. By looking at both sides of the story, we come up with a solution that's fair to everyone.'



## 4. Show positivity

Despite being in the complaints business, Ombudsman Services is a positive force, we want this to come through in our communications – but be mindful, we don't want to oversell and under deliver.

**In practice:**

Never start on a problem or a negative, always frame something as an opportunity or a solution, even when it's not good news, for example:

'To reach a solution that's fair, we recommend that you pay the outstanding balance. As you know, you haven't been able to keep up with the monthly repayments, so paying the amount will also protect your credit file.'



# For any piece of writing, ask yourself

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1

What do I want my readers to know?  
We're ready to help you  
It's time to act

2

What do I want them to think or feel?  
Reassured  
Listened to  
Looked after  
Informed

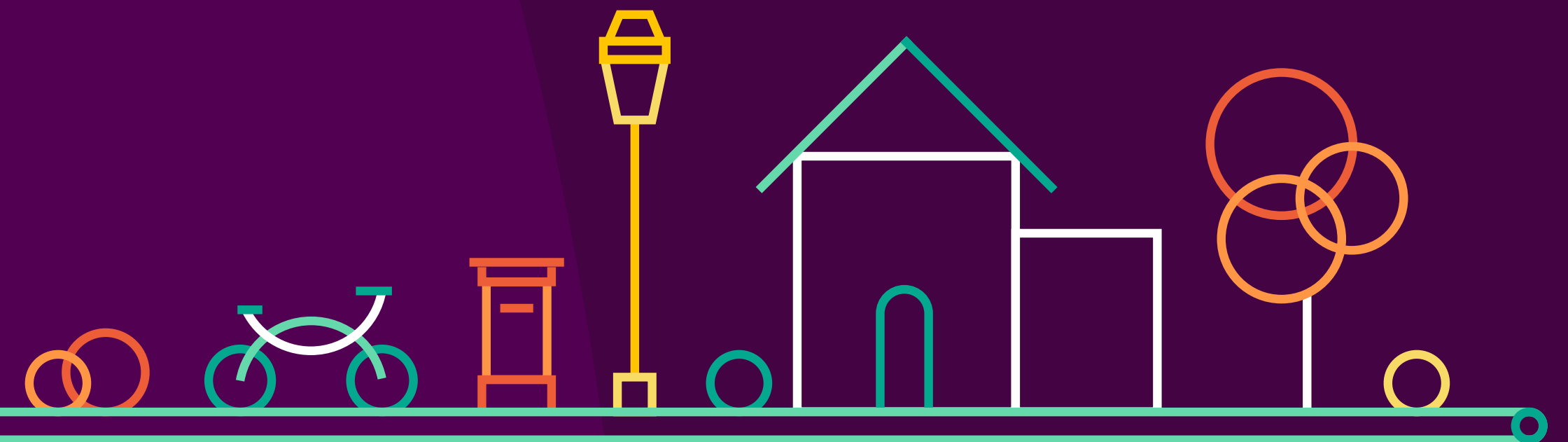
3

What do I want them to do after reading  
my writing?  
Respond  
Consider options  
Take action



# Talking the talk

Our tone of voice in action







# Our tone of voice in action

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Bringing a brand personality to life can be tricky – especially when it’s new to you – on the following pages there is a range of examples to help you. There are examples of copy in our old tone and re-written to show you how the Ombudsman Services tone and style has changed, providing some useful notes on the differences. Notice how you don’t have to cram our brand personality into every line. Above all, the copy needs to flow, feel natural and be consistent.



# 1. Before and after

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The following pages show a range of communications 'before' and 'after' to demonstrate how we've applied our tone of voice. Text has been highlighted in the 'after' examples to show some of the differences.



## 'About us' web copy

**Before:** this excerpt of copy is from our "about us; how we work" web page. It's written in our old tone and style:

### How we work with consumers and companies to resolve complaints

#### Our people

Our people are friendly, approachable and down-to-earth. We are trained to listen and to provide a firm and fair helping hand to consumers and service providers. We help to get the complaint resolved as quickly as possible with the most appropriate outcome.

We also work closely with companies to provide one-to-one support and industry-wide advice; this helps to improve the way services are delivered and complaints are handled. By participating in our schemes, companies show to their customers that they take complaints seriously – our brand is a mark of quality.

 **Before**

**After:** the same message rewritten in our new tone and style:

### Here to help you

#### Our people

Friendly, approachable and down-to-earth, our people are trained to listen and offer a helping hand to consumers and service providers. We're here to help by looking at both sides and coming up with a solution that's fair to everyone.

We also offer companies one-to-one support and industry-wide advice, helping make services better so that complaints become fewer. By working closely with us, companies also show customers that they take complaints seriously – our brand is a reassuring mark of quality.

### The difference:

- We've simplified the sub head to offer a clear benefit.
- In the body copy, we've removed the repetition of "our people" from the sub head, opting instead to open the sentence with the team's positive attributes: "Friendly, approachable and down-to-earth".
- We've put our audience at the heart of the communication by speaking directly to them – using 'I', 'we', 'you' – as well as using language that is less formal (but still business like).
- We've used 'we're' instead of 'we are' to mimic everyday speech, giving the tone a more friendly feel.
- We've also highlighted a few key words and phrases to illustrate how the language has become warmer, more inclusive and empowering.

**After** 



# Comms - Example 1

**Before:** a communication template written in our old tone and style:

Dear [Name]

Thank you for contacting Ombudsman Services about your complaint. The information you have provided is now recorded on our system. Your case reference number is 12121212.

Please put this case reference number in the subject line of any emails you send to us as this will help us to process the information efficiently.

**Sending us evidence about your complaint**

Any information you have to support your complaint such as bills, emails or call logs should be sent to us within 10 working days. You will shortly receive full details on how to use portal to get 24 hour access to your complaint. This is the quickest way to add supporting documents and view updates on your case. Alternatively, send your information to: [osenquiries@os-communications.org](mailto:osenquiries@os-communications.org) quoting your case reference number in the subject line.

You can also send your information to us by post:  
Ombudsman Services: Communications  
PO Box 730  
Warrington  
WA4 6WU

**Yours Sincerely**

 **Before**

**After:** the same communication template rewritten in our new tone and style:

Subject line: We've received your complaint Here's what to do next...

**Dear [Name]**  
Thank you for sending us your complaint. Everything you've shared with us has been recorded on our system. Here's your case reference number: [xxxxxxx]

Please use this reference number whenever you get in touch with us. This will help us make sure your case is handled as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

**What to do next**  
Please share all the information you've collected to support your complaint – such as bills, emails or call logs – with us within 10 working days. Do this via our consumer portal. It gives you 24-hour access to your case and is the quickest way to add your supporting documents and check for updates. You'll be sent an invitation to the portal shortly.

We look forward to hearing from you.  
Your Ombudsman Services Team  
Did you find this email helpful? Y / N

## The difference:

- We've softened the copy tone to make it feel less 'official' and authoritarian, i.e. addressing it to the consumer using their name as well as 'you' and 'your' – see highlights.
- We've also made the tone of voice more sympathetic, without taking sides and highlighted some consumer benefits.
- We've used 'you've', 'you'll' instead of 'you have' and 'you will' to make the style less formal and sound more human.
- We've added a consumer service focused function

**After** 



## Comms - Example 2

**Before:** an investigation communication template written in our old tone and style:

Dear [Name]

**Your complaint regarding your supplier**  
Thank you for your email. It is always advised that you continue to make payments to prevent any adverse markers on your credit file or disconnection of your service. I would suggest that you call your supplier and ask if you can pay any undisputed however, the company would need to agree to this to prevent you going into debt.

I can request the company hold the debt until the outcome of our investigation however, the company does not have to do this, we can only request this.

Yours sincerely  
[Name]  
Investigation Officer

 **Before**

**After:** the same investigation communication rewritten in our new tone and style:

Dear [Name]

**Help with your complaint to your supplier**  
Thank you for your correspondence. We'd always advise you to keep making payments to avoid any impact on your credit file or loss of service. We'd also suggest that you call your supplier to ask if you can pay any undisputed amounts – they'd need to agree to this first to prevent you going into debt.

If you like, we could ask your supplier to hold the debt until our investigation has been completed. However, your supplier does not have to do this – but do let us know if you'd like us to get in touch with them for you.

Best regards

[Name]  
Your Investigation Officer

### The difference:

- We've softened the copy tone to make it feel less 'official', i.e. addressing it to the consumer using their name as well as 'you' and 'your' – see highlights.
- We've used 'we'd' instead of 'we would' to make the style less formal overall and sound more human.
- We've made the tone of voice more sympathetic, without taking sides.
- We've also highlighted a few key words and phrases to illustrate how the language has become warmer, more inclusive and empowering.

**After** 



## Trust pilot

**Before:** this is an example response to a consumer's online review written in our old tone and style:

"We are sorry to hear that you are unsatisfied with our service. It was disappointing to read that you consider both our decisions were biased in favour of the managing agent. Ombudsman Services takes seriously its responsibility to provide independent and impartial review of all complaints it receives and has measures in place to ensure independent decisions are based on the evidence and information brought to us by both the customer and the company involved. We always aim to deliver the fairest outcome to the complaints brought to us."

**After:** the same investigation email rewritten in our new tone and style:

"Hi [name] We're sorry to hear that you're unhappy with our service. We take Ombudsman Services our responsibility seriously and do our best to look at both sides of the story so that we can come up with a solution that's fair to everyone. If you'd like to send us your full name, case reference number and postal address to [social@ombudsman-services.org](mailto:social@ombudsman-services.org) we'll look into this for you. Many thanks."

### The difference:

- We've made the copy more personal, i.e. addressing it to the consumer using their name, removed the formal language and replaced 'Ombudsman Services' with 'we'.
- We've used some contractions to make the style less formal.
- We've removed some of the 'detail' as this can inadvertently make the consumer more frustrated. Instead, we've offered to look into the problem, this is more positive as we're taking ownership of the problem – again this presents us as having a more human and caring point of view.

 **Before**

**After** 



## Social media

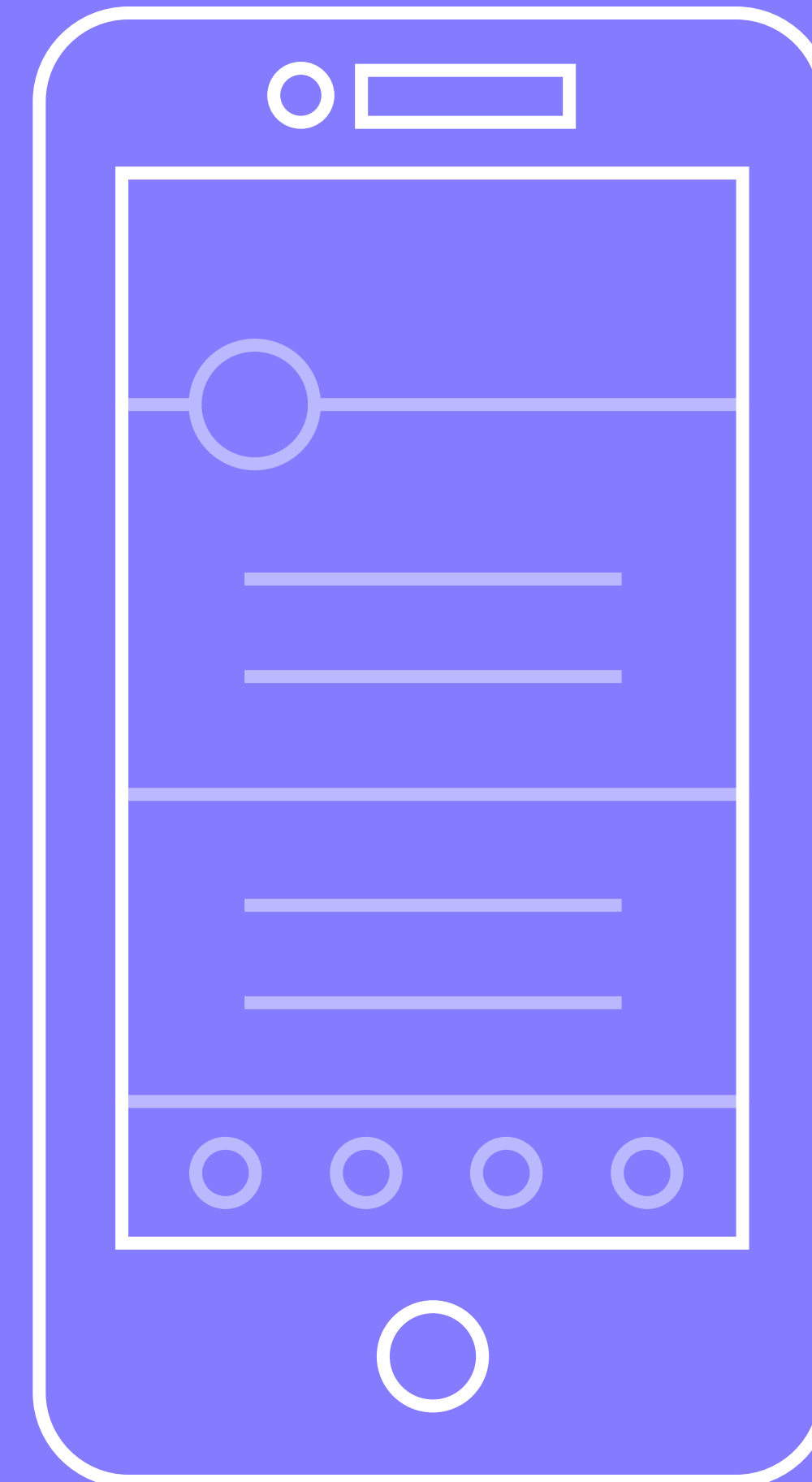
As a more informal platform, social media is one of the few places that we can add a little more brand personality. Remember to use hashtags too and capitalise each word: #ToneOfVoice #BrandingMatters #BeConsistent

### Example tweet 1

Ombudsman Services: Our CEO @shandsmith speaking at DG Justice and Consumers ADR conference today. Waxing lyrical on the massive potential of ADR to bring citizens greater protection and much, much more. Not familiar with ADR? Find out more here -> -> -> [provide link to blog article on ADR] #ADR #heretohelpyou

### Example tweet 2

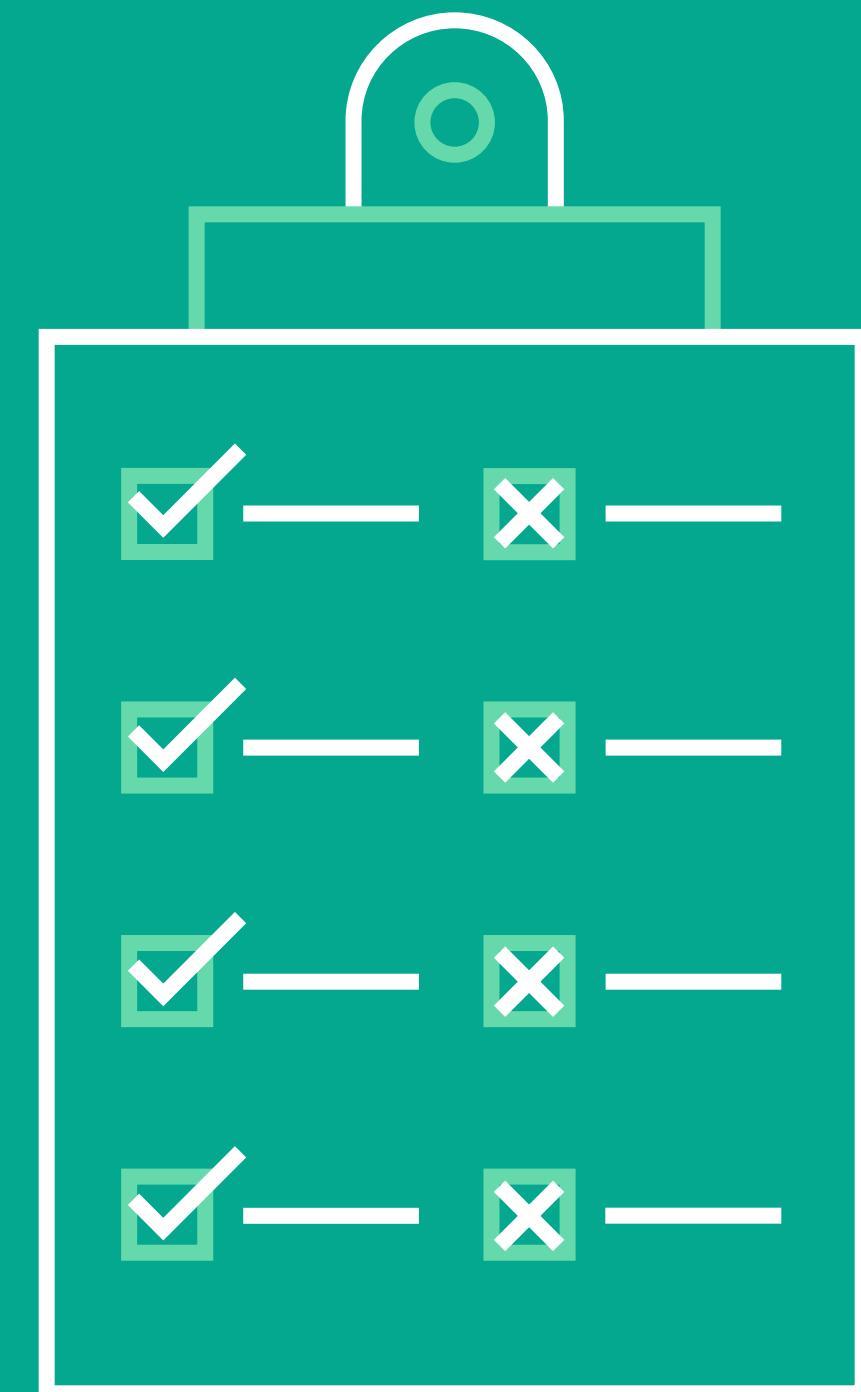
Ombudsman Services: meet Zoe, this is her story on why going to the Energy Ombudsman was: “the best decision I’ve ever made.” #NoComplaints [link to video]





## 2. Dos and don'ts

The following pages show a range of communications 'before' and 'after' to demonstrate how we've applied our tone of voice. Text has been highlighted in the 'after' examples to show some of the differences.







# Dos and don'ts

## Our name:

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Consistency is key to good branding, so ensuring the Ombudsman Services name is communicated correctly in all communications is very important.

- ✓ Ombudsman Services
- ✓ OS [for internal use and on social media only]
- ✗ Ombudsman

## Our sub brands:

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- ✓ Ombudsman Services: Communications
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: Copyright Licensing
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: Energy
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: UK Finance
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: Home Improvements
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: Property
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: [reallymoving.com](https://www.reallymoving.com)
- ✓ Ombudsman Services: Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)

## Customer or consumer?

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Do use the term 'consumer' and not customer. People consume our service, they don't buy our service, and we don't typically have an ongoing/repeat relationship with them as you would a customer:

- ✓ consumer
- ✗ customer



### Bullet points:

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Do keep these nice and concise. Punctuate with full stops as this supports the decisive nature of our brand.

For example:

- The consumer has tried to resolve the complaint with their service provider.
- The dispute isn't serious or distressing.
- The dispute hasn't been considered by another ADR scheme or court.
- The consumer put forward the dispute in good time.

### Capital letters:

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Job titles

If a job title is attributed to an individual it should have capital letters, e.g.:

- ✓ Sophie Tait, Consumer Advisor
- ✗ Sophie Tait, consumer advisor

If you are talking about a job role in general terms, keep it lower case, e.g.:

- ✓ managing directors, sales directors, partners
- ✗ Managing Directors, Consumer Advisors, Partners

### Headings and sub heads:

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Do use initial caps only, and full stops, for example:

- ✓ When to get us involved.  
Before talking to us, you need to have already raised your complaint with your energy supplier.
- ✗ When To Get Us Involved  
Before talking to us, you need to have already raised your complaint with your energy supplier.
- ✗ WHEN TO GET US INVOLVED  
Before talking to us, you need to have already raised your complaint with your energy supplier.



### Numbers:

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In body copy, write zero to nine in full:

✓ Zero, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten

✗ 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

NOTE: this rule is breakable for headlines or a call to action, when you need to grab attention.

For numbers of 10 or more use digits:

✓ 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19...

✗ Ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen

### Speech marks:

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Only use “double” speech marks when highlighting a direct quote from someone. In all other instances, use ‘single’.

✓ Matthew Vickers, Chief Executive and Chief Ombudsman Designate at Ombudsman Services, described MSE’s comments as a “timely, relevant and significant contribution to the debate on the future of the ombudsman model.”

✗ Matthew Vickers, Chief Executive and Chief Ombudsman Designate at Ombudsman Services, described MSE’s comments as a ‘timely, relevant and significant contribution to the debate on the future of the ombudsman model.’

### Acronyms:

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We use lots of these internally. But they can be a real barrier to communication. Especially if you assume your audience knows what the acronym stands for. If you must use acronyms, please ensure you write out what they mean in brackets on first appearance in your copy (you can then revert to using the acronym):

- ✓ CSC (Case Status Change)
- ✗ CSC
- ✓ FIT (Feed in Tariffs)
- ✗ FIT
- ✓ OFCOM (Office of Communications)
- ✗ OFCOM
- ✓ DCA (Debt Collection Agencies)
- ✗ DCA

### Miscellaneous:

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- ✓ online
- ✗ on-line
- ✓ email
- ✗ e-mail
- ✓ website
- ✗ web site or Web Site or Web site
- ✓ Internet
- ✗ internet



# 3. Style tips

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### Do keep it simple

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- Explain complex things in simple ways, strip the complexity back
- Use everyday terms, avoid jargon, legal terms or acronyms (where possible)
- Short, simple sentences are always better than long, complicated ones

### Different points of view

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- When talking about us use the first person narrative: 'We'
- When addressing a consumer, partner, regulator we want to use a more persuasive way of writing, so use the second person narrative: 'You'
- In some instances, use 'I' when applicable – this may be relevant when a decision is down to the individual writing the response

### Words/phrases to avoid using:

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- ✗ Your comments have been noted and we will not correspond further with you – very formal
- ✗ To complete verbal acceptance – too robotic
- ✗ We are not able to accept your complaint for investigation – not helpful

### Common contractions

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Peppering your copy with common contractions will make it warm and friendly, but don't use too many – becoming over familiar will make our tone of voice too 'chatty' diluting its professionalism.

You will	You'll
We have	We've
We are	We're
We will	We'll
Will not	Won't
You are	You're
You have	You've

### The ampersand (&)

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Please use 'and' within body text rather than the ampersand. The ampersand can be used in headlines and social media when you need to keep your headline/post as short as possible.

- ✗ We cannot deal with your problem – negative language
- ✗ What we can and cannot do is set out in our terms of reference – no human focus
- ✗ You may wish to contact xxx for further help. [without explaining who they are or how they can help]

### Body copy

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- ✓ We do our best to solve disputes between consumers and energy companies. Our service is free, impartial and simple to use.
- ✗ We do our best to solve disputes between consumers & energy companies. Our service is free, impartial & simple to use.

### The em dash (–).

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You can use an em dash instead of a colon, but please use it sparingly:

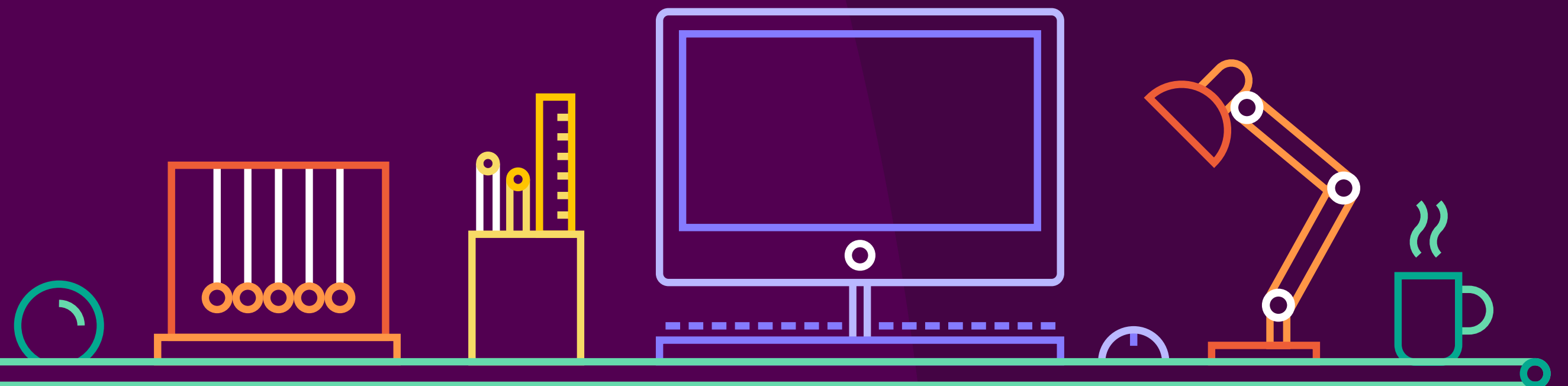
- ✓ Please share all the information you've collected to support your complaint – such as bills, emails or call logs – with us within 10 working days. You can do this via our consumer portal.
- ✗ Please share all the information you've collected to support your complaint – such as bills, emails or call logs – with us within 10 working days – you can do this via our consumer portal.



# The checklist

Think about your audience again. Ask yourself: will the person I'm talking to understand what I've written and relate to it?

- ✓ Is it clear?
- ✓ Is it simple?
- ✓ Is it short?
- ✓ Does it empower the reader with knowledge and/or advice?
- ✓ Is it written from a positive standpoint?
- ✓ Have I removed any jargon?



# Need more guidance?

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If you've got a query on tone of voice, or you're stuck and simply need some advice on your copy, please contact:

The Marketing Team

[OSMarketingCommunications@Ombudsman-Services.org](mailto:OSMarketingCommunications@Ombudsman-Services.org)

