

# How to

## ...choose the right tone and style

Tone and style refer to the way you put your message across. It's not only about the words you use but also about the way you say or write them. The same words can mean different things, depending on the context, style and tone of voice used. You might say, for example, 'You look well', which could mean:

- 'You look healthy'
- 'You look as if you've put on weight', or
- 'You look better than you did yesterday when you were covered in spots.'

It all depends on the situation and how you express yourself.

The tone and style you adopt will depend on your purpose and audience.

### PURPOSE

What is it you need to achieve?

How important is it?

Do you need to persuade?

### AUDIENCE

Who will be receiving your message?

What is their relationship to you?

How will your message affect them?

What is their understanding of the topic and the language?

## Style

Once you are clear about your purpose and audience, you need to think about what form of language and format would be most appropriate. Should it be formal or informal, simple or complex, technical or not?

### Try this!

Match the communication type with the appropriate style.

Type	Style
1 business letter	a factual and formal
2 talking to a friend	b technical
3 message	c friendly but formal
4 talking to visitors	d clear and concise
5 talking to colleagues	e formal
6 leaflet for a product	f persuasive
7 report	g conversational

Communication at work usually has a degree of formality.

## Tone



Tone is about *how* you say or write something, or what you appear to mean by your body language. Does it seem angry, sympathetic, sarcastic/ironic, informed, professional, caring, uninterested or bored? These are all things that can make a difference to the tone of your communication:

**In spoken communication, various factors contribute to the tone of what you say**

Posture

Facial expression

Animation (lively or dull)

Volume

Pace (how quickly it is said)

Pitch (high or low)

Tone of voice

**When writing, you must choose your words carefully**

Choice of vocabulary

Length of sentences and paragraphs

Use of humour

Type of illustration

### Try this!

What's the tone of the following? Choose from the options below.

- 1 'I told you not to do that!'
- 2 'Please be careful on the steps, Mrs Brown.'
- 3 'Be careful, Mrs Brown!'
- 4 'I'd be grateful if you'd help Ben with the display.'
- 5 'She's skived off early again today.'
- 6 The manager decided to contact the Health and Safety Executive for advice on how to make the entrance safer for customers.

*formal      caring      angry      persuasive      casual      anxious*

## What's the author's intention?

When you are reading a passage of text, think about the author's intention. Is the text meant to amuse, persuade, encourage, give information, warn or sympathise? Is it fact or opinion? Read carefully, looking at the types of words and phrases and the way they are used.

### Try this!

Look at the phrases below and place them under one of the headings in the boxes. Say why you chose the heading.

- beautifully located in wooded grounds
- buy one, get one free
- the kids
- the children
- the temperature was 22°C
- it's boiling in the store room
- the walls should be blue
- the child caught his finger in the door
- the customer tripped over a box left on the floor
- the door was too heavy
- he was grief stricken

<b>factual</b>	<b>opinion</b>
<b>persuasive</b>	<b>emotional</b>

### Jargon

Every industry and sector has its own jargon - technical words, acronyms (laser = Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) and abbreviations (NVQs) and trendy 'buzzwords'. You and your colleagues may understand it, but would a customer? It could make them feel inadequate or even frightened.

Always use simple, direct language. It is less likely to lead to confusion or upset.

### Try this!

Discuss with a colleague some of the jargon that is used in your work setting.

Is it 'good' jargon, which helps you to explain something technical more precisely, or 'bad' jargon, which makes something simple more confusing?

**Good**

**Why?**

**Bad**

**Why?**

## Clichés

Clichés are expressions that are over-used. Most people fall into using clichés at times, but they may not be appropriate to use at work.

Here are some examples:

outside the box	generously proportioned
cutting edge	fresh as a daisy
joined up thinking	safe and sound
take ownership	personal space
You will find more at: <a href="http://www.saidwhatguides.co.uk/cliches.php">www.saidwhatguides.co.uk/cliches.php</a>	

I've been really snowed under – had to go to a meeting yesterday about where our team is at. It was all press the flesh and talking shop. You know how it is. Well, it's all a learning curve isn't it? Let's see how it pans out. At the end of the day, it'll be noses to the grindstone and all hands to the pump. As for our unit, we need to broaden our horizons and start thinking outside the box.

### Try this!

- 1 Underline all the clichés in the passage on the left.
- 2 Rewrite the passage in plain English without using the clichés.

### Now try this!

- 1 You have 10 minutes to write a passage with as many clichés as you can think of.
- 2 Now rewrite your passage without the clichés.

## Show respect

At work it's important to remember that if you show respect to others, they will show it to you.

### Try this!

When this happens	I do/do not feel respected because
In a shop, the assistant answers my question without looking at me	
I ring up to complain about something and the person at the other end sounds bored	
I arrive on time for an appointment but I am kept waiting	