

Tone of voice

The way we talk is just as important as the way we look.

One in five adults has a reading age of between nine and thirteen, so it's crucial that our customer-facing communications are easy to understand.

That means being accurate and concise – but it also means being human.

An open, authentic voice makes us much easier to connect with. And your colleagues will appreciate the simplicity just as much as our customers.

The following examples show how this can work:

Before

The Disability and Carers Service is part of the Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) which is an executive agency of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It provides financial support for customers claiming disability benefits and their carers – for example, Disability Living Allowance and Carer's Allowance.

After

We provide financial support for disabled people and carers.

Writing principles

Our principles are grounded in our values. They won't all be relevant to everything, but you should always bear them in mind.

For more detailed rules about our writing standards, see our [Writing style guide](#).

Achieving the best

Clear

Be careful to avoid errors, promotional language or marketing-speak and never use acronyms without an explanation.

Simple

Don't use long words when short ones will do. Say 'after', not 'subsequent to', 'soon' rather than 'imminent'.

Straightforward

Avoid unnecessary capital letters or punctuation – particularly exclamation marks.

Respecting people

Transparent

Tell people what they need to know in straightforward terms that are easy to put into action.

Direct

Don't make unrealistic claims, exaggerate the truth or be ambiguous about products or processes.

Fair

Give reasons for any actions and explain how things work. Offer your audience a chance to feed back, when you can.

Making a difference

Positive

Be optimistic when it's appropriate, and celebrate the benefits.

Confident

Write with warmth, confidence and humanity
– remember, you're talking to a real person.

Single-minded

Stay focused: stick to one subject per communication, one idea per headline, one thought in a sentence.

Looking outwards

Contemporary

Ground things in real life, with everyday examples and testimonials, whenever they're appropriate.

Researched

Talk to colleagues, partners and third parties if you need advice or to get a second opinion.

Relevant

Actions speak louder than words. Don't waste space writing about things that would be better demonstrated in practice.

Naming

The names of our products, schemes and services should always create clarity, not confusion. They should act as useful, easily identifiable signposts and consist of simple and straightforward terms.

The nature of the product or programme, its method of delivery or its intended recipients should form the basis of the name. Avoid metaphors, analogies and word association.

Before you begin

Before you begin the naming process, always ask yourself if it's really necessary. New products or adjustments can often fit into an existing framework. Internal initiatives, extra programmes and support products can often just be described.

Don't spend time and money creating new names and identities when your resources could be put to better use elsewhere.

Naming continued

Essential elements

Once you've established that a new name is necessary, ask yourself three questions:

Who is it for?

What does it do?

How is it delivered?

The answers should help you define your name – but only include the relevant elements.

Remember, do not create new logos or marks for internal campaigns, teams, programmes or events. It's confusing, unnecessary and highly wasteful.

Who	What	How
Disabled people Disability	Living costs Living	Regular payments Allowance
Anyone with a low income	Funeral costs Funeral	A one-off payment Payment

Naming terminology

Words like 'allowance' and 'payment' have a very specific meaning in the context of our organisation. Make sure you use them correctly. All terms should start in lower case, unless at the beginning of a sentence.

Term	Definition
adviser	Person offering one-to-one advice, help and guidance
allowance	Benefit paid regularly and frequently throughout a period of entitlement
benefit	Monetary assistance
component	Conditional part of a specific benefit
contact line	Telephone, web or any other means of making non face-to-face contact
development	Any instance of any part of a customer-facing product being introduced, amended, extended, added-to, or provided differently
direct	Remote access to a complete service over the phone or web

Naming terminology continued

Term	Definition
helpline	Advice or information line without a full service capacity
loan	Repayable payment to cover temporary difficulties
payment	One-off or seasonal benefit
pension	Benefit paid in perpetuity (ie, indefinitely)
premium	Additional payment to recognise an individual's circumstances
rapid reclaim	Payment resuming at a previous rate after a period of non-entitlement
run-on	Continued payments after entitlement has ended, paid as a reward or incentive
scheme or programme	A collection of services or activities for customers with a specific aim