



Tone of Voice Guidelines

How to write the IAM RoadSmart way

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What is Tone of Voice?

Our tone of voice helps us to communicate our attitude and culture – not just what we do, but how we do things and what we stand for.

In a competitive market, the way we write is key to differentiating ourselves. Brands with distinct voices (that talk in a way their audiences can relate to and engage with) stand a much better chance of standing out.

A clearly defined tone of voice helps us to write more confidently and consistently. It helps us to judge our writing – not just ‘do I like it?’ but ‘is this right for IAM RoadSmart?’

Our brand voice in a nutshell

Our writing is clear and concise. We get to the point, don't use unnecessary industry buzzwords, and make our communications easy to digest. However, clear and concise is also balanced with an element of informality, inclusivity and emotion.

IAM RoadSmart is a straight-talking, driven charity with a cause. We know our stuff, so we are super-confident in our language – we inspire trust and positive action.

Our voice pillars

All of our language rests on three primary voice pillars:

Simple. Assured. Modern.

These three pillars are further supported by two secondary pillars that can be dialed up or down, depending on the context:

Reassuring. Down-to-earth.

Our primary voice pillars:

Simple

Easy to read. Easy to digest. Clear and concise, we use snappy sentences and plain English. Subheads make our writing easy to scan. Sentences make one point at a time.

They say: *'Our vision is a world with zero road death and injury, where we can all move in a safe and healthy way, whoever we are and however we travel.'*

We say: **'Driver, rider or pedestrian, we're here to make your journey safer.'**

Assured

As the UK's leading road safety charity, our language brims with selfconfidence. Using simple, fluff-free writing also helps the reader to believe in our expertise.

They say: *'The last few decades have demonstrated that effective and comprehensive road safety strategies can reduce the number of people killed or injured on the road, despite increasing traffic levels.'*

We say: **'Safer road users. Safer journeys. Our courses work.'**

Modern

There's a freshness and rhythm to our writing. We avoid formality and elitist language. Our work is relevant to all road users, so our language should be welcoming and inclusive.

They say: *'We offer an integrated, multi-platform programme that encompasses driver assessment and coaching, through to post-crash interventions and management training.'*

We say: **'Your support makes a difference. Together we're helping make the UK's roads safer for all.'**

Our secondary voice pillars:

Our secondary voice pillars are used to inject more warmth and wit. Please note, our secondary pillars aren't appropriate in every communication channel. How we blend our different pillars and where they can be used is demonstrated in the next section, 'blending our voice pillars'.

Reassuring

This is where case studies will come into their own – telling the human stories. Reassuring means talking about the real positives, to make our audiences feel represented and supported.

They say: *'Maximise your drivers efficiency & safety with our Corporate Driver Training and risk management solutions.'*

We say: **'I used to think I was a good driver. Now I know I am.'**

Down-to-earth

This is where we completely drop formalities. We are human and relatable. Here for everyone. We show that our supporters are vital to our work – we're all in this together.

They say: *'These products and services improve driver safety, reduce fleet running costs and ensure compliance with legal obligations and duty of care responsibilities.'*

We say: **'You want on-the-road confidence. We've got you.'**

Blending our primary voice pillars

Simple

This pillar sits at the heart of all our communications. Complex stories told in a more economical way. Clarity of communication before everything else. Only when we're 100% sure our message is clear, do we concern ourselves with any of our other voice pillars.

Use in these places:

Everywhere. Internal and external, formal and informal.

Use for these audiences:

Everyone. Members, volunteers, partners, government bodies, journalists...

How will you know if you've gone too far?

- You've sacrificed important information for the sake of brevity.
- Everything comes across as cold and clinical.

Assured

For us, 'assured' means cutting out the fluff. We remove corporate speak and keep the majority of sentences short and snappy. Many of our competitors use rambling sentences full of long, soulless words. We do the opposite. Confidence doesn't mean using clever language, it means telling it like it is. 'Assured' goes hand-in-hand with 'simple'.

Use in these places:

Everywhere. Internal and external, formal and informal.

Use for these audiences:

Everyone. Members, volunteers, partners, government bodies, journalists...

How will you know if you've gone too far?

- You're always talking in bullet points.
- Copy has become staccato to the point of being machine-like.

Modern

As an 'institute' with 70 years of heritage, it's understandable that we often come across as formal. 'Modern' allows us to drop many of these formalities. Even when talking to corporate partners or government bodies, we can loosen up a little by using contractions ('can't' instead of cannot), referring to ourselves as 'we' and talking directly to the reader ('...keeping you safe on the road').

Use in these places:

Everywhere. Internal and external, formal and informal.

Use for these audiences:

Everyone. Members, volunteers, partners, government bodies, journalists...

How will you know if you've gone too far?

- Colloquial slang has crept in where it's inappropriate.
- You wouldn't feel comfortable saying it face-to-face.

Blending our secondary voice pillars

Reassuring

'Reassuring helps us tell human stories – real-life positives that make our audiences feel represented and supported. 'Reassuring' says we're making a positive difference. It adds warmth and energy wherever it's needed.

Use in these places:

Anywhere you want to inspire. Case studies, social media, newsletters, membership emails, press releases...

Use for these audiences:

Members, volunteers and internally.

How will you know if you've gone too far?

- Copy starts to ramble. It loses its snap.
- Hyperbole ('...we won't stop until there are zero road accidents.')

Down-to-earth

Sometimes we get the chance to drop all formalities and let our hair down. Welcoming, upbeat and delivered with a smile, 'down-to-earth' lets us push beyond what everyone else is doing in the sector. It lets us talk one-to-one with our audiences. Says 'we're all in this together'.

Use in these places:

Anywhere you want to lighten the load. Social media, newsletters, fundraising...

Use for these audiences:

Members, volunteers and internally.

How will you know if you've gone too far?

- We're trying to shoehorn humour in where it just doesn't fit.
- We've started using innuendo.

Our Tone of Voice in action

1) An email aimed at business customers to drive conversions.

Before

Hi ...,

Great to speak to you today and thanks for taking the time to discuss a bit about your requirements.

As the UK's leading road safety charity, we believe that driver education can make the biggest difference to the safety of employees who drive on business, and we want to support this by providing nationwide coverage delivered by highly qualified, DVSA Approved and experienced trainers available to you and your drivers. From today's discovery call, the driver training course that is best suited to match your driver training requirements is our "Driving for Work".

Driving for Work – Our flagship course for business drivers, helping you create a safer, more efficient fleet. Our Driving for Work course is designed specifically to meet the needs of today's company car and van drivers. A practical, one-to-one training session remains the most effective way to address the development needs of individual drivers, as it gives the trainer the opportunity to observe their behaviour and provide targeted coaching.

The curriculum content helps keep your drivers safe, increase their confidence and equip them with skills for their professional and personal life. It's a great way to address the areas that may need improvement and in addition, drivers appreciate that the coaching is also about their well-being and reinforcing the behaviours you expect from your drivers. The course will be delivered by a fleet-registered Approved Driving Instructor, who will come to a location to suit you and your business; delegates attend in their own car or van which must be roadworthy, taxed, with Business Insurance.

Driving for Work – course overview:

Introduction:

- Theory presentation
- Eyesight and vehicle checks

Session 1:

- Eco-driving/ EV driving
- Debrief and discussion

Session 2:

- Principles of safe driving
- Confined space manoeuvring
- Consolidating risk management

End of course:

- Debrief and evaluation

The course is 3 hours long and will start either in the morning at 9am or the afternoon slot at 1.00pm and can be done on a 1 to 1 basis or alternatively for a full day with the trainer taking out 2 delegates.

Price:

- Half day: £280 (1 on 1 training)
- Full day: £450 (1 trainer to 2 delegates)

Why Choose IAM RoadSmart?

- At IAM RoadSmart we've been improving driving standards since 1956 (under Institute of Advanced Motorists)
- As the UK's largest independent road safety charity, our aim has remained the same over 60 years-to make the roads a safer place by improving the skill of drivers.
- Each year we work with thousands of company drivers, of any age and ability.
- Our services are designed to teach new skills, improve existing ones and provide confidence and knowledge to get the most from being on the road.

I hope this clarifies most of the information we spoke about today, but please let me know if you have any questions at all and I would be happy to help.

Look forward to hearing back from you.

Kind regards,

After

Hi ...,

Thanks for taking the time to chat with me earlier.
From what you told me, the course you need is **'Driving for Work'**.

This course is ideal for company car and van drivers.
It's practical, 1-to-1, and seriously effective.

How it works

Half-day, 1-to-1 courses start at 9am or 1pm.
Full-day, two-driver courses can also be arranged.

A fleet-registered, Approved Driving Instructor will come to you.
Your drivers will be assessed in their own vehicles
(which must be roadworthy, taxed and have business insurance).

The course will cover:

- Intro presentation
- Eyesight and vehicle checks
- Eco/EV driving
- Debrief and discussion
- Safe driving principles
- Confined space manoeuvring
- Risk management
- Debrief and evaluation

The benefits

'Driving for Work' boosts confidence, develops skills and keeps your drivers safe.
It's great for your business and shows your staff you care about their wellbeing.

Fees

- Half-day course: £280 (1-to-1 training)
- Full-day course: £450 (1 trainer, 2 drivers)

Why IAM RoadSmart?

We are the UK's leading road safety charity. We work with thousands of company drivers, and no one has as much experience or knowledge.
With IAM RoadSmart, you're in very safe hands.

If you have any questions, please drop me a line.
Otherwise, please let me know if you'd like to arrange course dates.

All the best,

Business email – editing notes

Hi ...,

Thanks for taking the time to chat with me earlier.

From what you told me, the course you need is **'Driving for Work'**.

This course is ideal for company car and van drivers.

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Otherwise, please let me know if you'd like to arrange course dates.

All the best,

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Assured

Modern

Reassuring

Down-to-earth

2) A social post aimed at a fundraising/sponsorship audience, requesting support for The Big Give fundraising initiative.

Before

(Megaphone emoji) **The Big Give Christmas Challenge is LIVE!**

Did you know that young drivers aged 17-24 are almost twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash compared to older drivers? Today through December 10th, every donation will be DOUBLED, helping us raise £25,000 to fund critical Skills Day spaces and Advanced Courses for young drivers and riders. *(Star emoji)*

Donate now to make roads safer for everyone! *(Hand pointing down emoji)*
<https://donate.biggive.org/campaign/a056900002TPXBRAA5?c=53674>

#GivingTuesday #BigGive #DoubleImpact #SaferRoads #YouthEmpowermentb

(Photograph shows a group of young people standing by a car and a motorbike and the 'Christmas Challenge' logo. A headline superimposed on the image reads, 'DOUBLE THE DIFFERENCE' – The headline is reflected and inverted under itself)

After

Give a little. Save a life.

Young drivers and riders are almost twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash. But, skills save lives.

DONATE NOW AND Big Give WILL DOUBLE YOUR MONEY.

Help raise £25,000 for skills days and advanced courses for young drivers and riders. And every penny you give will be doubled.

Quick. Ends December 10th.

<https://bit.ly/IAMgiving>

#GivingTuesday #BigGive #IAMaLifeSaver

(Photograph shows grinning twins wearing 'IAM a lifesaver' T-shirts, giving thumbs up to the camera. A headline superimposed on the image reads, 'EVERY POUND DONATED, NOW DOUBLED')

Social post – editing notes

Give a little. Save a life.

Young drivers and riders are almost twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash. But, skills save lives.

DONATE NOW AND Big Give WILL DOUBLE YOUR MONEY.

Help raise £25,000 for skills days and advanced courses for young drivers and riders. **And every penny you give will be doubled.**

Quick. Ends December 10th.

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(Photograph shows grinning twins wearing 'IAM a lifesaver' T-shirts, giving thumbs up to the camera. A headline superimposed on the image reads, 'EVERY POUND DONATED, NOW DOUBLED')

Simple

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We've used a more compelling headline. Simplified the intro. Made the ask and the benefit clearer (this is not a challenge, it's a call for donations). Shortened the url. De-cluttered the hashtags. Added a sense of urgency. Made the picture and headline work much harder. Removed emojis (arguably trying too hard).

The way we write (rules and tips)

How we write about ourselves

Our name is always written in full – ‘IAM RoadSmart’.

We are a ‘charity’, a ‘road safety charity’ or ‘the UK’s leading road safety charity’. We are not an organisation, a not-for-profit or nonprofit.

British English

At IAM RoadSmart, we always use British English.

Color	–	Colour
Organize	–	Organise
Center	–	Centre
Neighbor	–	Neighbour
Breathalyze	–	Breathalyse
Traveling	–	Travelling
License	–	Licence

Pace and rhythm

Lots of long sentences back-to-back (or lots of short sentences for that matter) can be monotonous to read.

Break it up. Throw a longer sentence in between two shorter ones. Just like this. It makes for a much more entertaining journey.

It’s the same with the words in your sentences.

All short words with no let up and no pause just short words on and on and on make for a dull read.

Throw in one or two words with several syllables and things skip along much more happily.

Whatever you write, read it out loud. If it sounds like a dripping tap or walking through sludge, there’s still work to do.

Long sentences

If your reader has to go back, to work out what you’re saying. If you find yourself running out of breath when reading it out loud. If you’ve crept over 30 words. Chances are your sentence is too long.

Abbreviations and initials

If the shorter version is better known than the longer one, like FAQ, there's no need to spell it out.

If we use acronyms (especially those that may be unfamiliar to our audience), we write them out in full first. E.g. Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Transport Safety (PACTS). From then on, we can use the shorter version in the same piece of copy.

Contractions

In the interest of reducing clutter and ensuring we don't sound too formal, we use contractions:

It is	–	It's
We are	–	We're
Do not	–	Don't
There is	–	There's
You have	–	You've
They will	–	They'll

Headlines

We never capitalise words within a headline (other than the initial word and proper nouns):

We never use full stops at the end of headlines or sub-headings, unless the line combines two or more short sentences. E.g. 'Building skills. Saving lives.'

The rule of three

Lists and ideas often work better when packaged in threes:

We coach. We campaign. We save lives.

Working together, with our **members, volunteers and partners.**

Driver, rider or pedestrian, we're here to make your journey safer.

Sometimes you may need to say less or more. But if your sentence list isn't working for you, try applying the rule of three.

Words we like and words we don't

Formal or complicated marketing words are the enemy. This doesn't mean we never use them, but if possible, we look for simple alternatives.

Optimal	–	Best
Processes	–	How we do things
Interface	–	Speak
Solutions	–	Answers
Objectives	–	Goals
Methodology	–	Way
Component	–	Part
Utilise	–	Use

There are certain words and phrases we need to be particularly wary of:

- Anything that makes us sound elitist or exclusionary – 'elite driving skills', 'prestigious', 'exclusive' (however, we can offer 'exclusive' deals to members), 'like-minded people' (be careful, this is not always appropriate), 'mature' or 'older' drivers (a more positive approach would be 'experienced').
- Anything that makes us sound over-familiar or frivolous – 'passionate', 'we're delighted', 'we are dedicated to', 'fun' (be careful of context – fundraising events can be fun, but our courses aren't, although they may be 'enjoyable', or 'relaxed').
- Anything that we understand internally, but is confusing to the public – 'observer' (use the word, but make sure you explain what one is). Industry acronyms should be spelled out in full first e.g. 'Road traffic accidents (RTAs)'.

The writing process

Getting started

- Sketch out what it is you need to say.
- Put your messages in the most logical and compelling order.

Once you have something you're basically happy with, these are the sort of questions you need to ask yourself:

- Is the 'story' flow right?
- Could it be snappier?
- Does it need a more impactful headline?
- Does it need subheads to aid scan reading?
- Is it audience appropriate?
- Has it slipped into jargon or corporate speak?
- Has cleverness got in the way of the communication?
- If you read it aloud does it sound contrived?
- Does it ring true?
- Does it sound like IAM RoadSmart?
- Would it inspire someone to read on?

Key messaging

(A bank of useful pullout phrases and lines)

Who we are/what we do in a paragraph:

IAM RoadSmart is the UK's leading road safety charity. We coach and educate road users, campaign for change and make journeys safer for everyone.

Who we are/what we do in one line:

IAM RoadSmart is the UK's leading road safety charity.

Who we are/what we do as a rallying cry:

Safer journeys for all.

General brand lines and sentences:

Together we can make the UK's roads safer

Pedestrian, driver or rider. We've all got a part to play in making the UK's roads safer for everyone to use.

Here for the journey

IAM RoadSmart has been making the UK roads safer for 70 years. With your help, we'll be doing it for many more years to come.

Every life matters

IAM RoadSmart is here for every UK road user. We'll give you the knowledge and skills you need to stay safe, and keep others safe too.



iamroadsmart.com