

Copywriting for Promotional Literature

In promotional literature, the terms **you** and **we** are the preferred form for addressing the reader. They can be used wherever appropriate to the purpose of and readership for the publication/document. It creates a welcoming and engaging tone of voice without becoming patronising.

There will be certain highly formal publications where this is not appropriate, but these are likely to be in the minority.

Read your copy aloud. It enables you to identify places in the text where the language does not flow smoothly. Asking someone else to read your text also helps.

This in-house Copywriting for Promotional Literature Style Guide is intended primarily for the use of the Marketing and Communications Office staff, and those working with the office on promotional material, news releases, websites and other written documents.

The Brand Project provides a unique opportunity to review, not just our visual identity and our brand values, but also the way in which we address our target audiences.

The five brand values (see page three of The Brand Book) help to create an identity for NUI Galway and the ideas behind them should be part of your messaging when writing promotional literature.

Specific style guides are also available on:

Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation

Writing a Press Release

1. Tone of voice

It is expected that your tone of voice will change according to two elements: the audience that you are addressing and the purpose of your document. For the purposes of recruitment literature, the tone should be informal, but not casual. The language should be intelligent but not arrogant:

Choosing the right university and degree course is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Your teachers, parents and friends can all offer you advice and support, but ultimately the decision is yours. You need to choose the University that feels right for you.

The use of ‘jargon’ or specialist language is only appropriate if you are confident that your reader will easily understand it. Be cautious of using phrases that might be very familiar to you (such as ‘undergraduate’, ‘semester’, ‘modules’ in your promotional literature for undergraduate programmes) and question whether your reader will understand them.

2. Clear and direct

In all communications, text should be clear, concise and confident.

Sentence lengths

Long sentences are difficult to understand in printed documents and this effect is increased on the web. Too many clauses or sub-clauses begin to obscure the meaning of the sentence.

If the sentence structure is limited to up to two or occasionally three clauses the reader will move through the text more swiftly. They will also retain more information.

Your average sentence length should be between 15 and 20 words. For variety you will want to include sentences that are longer and shorter than this, but this is a good average.

When writing for younger audiences, in particular, avoid including long passages of text, with several paragraphs. Find ways of breaking text up by using design devices such as blocks of colour to highlight important points, bullet points, representing information pictorially through charts, diagrams, images, etc.

2.2 Adjectives and hyperbole

‘This **world leading** university offers **excellent** teaching and **cutting-edge** research set in a **beautiful** campus.

On its own, this sentence does not contain any meaningful information and leaves the reader with more questions than answers. If you make claims to greatness then you must be able to support them.

The over use of adjectives and hyperbole reduces the credibility of your text.

Remove unnecessary words

Copy can be full of unnecessary words that add no information to the text. Your reader wants to find the meaning of your text swiftly. Therefore, words that do not increase the understanding or meaning should be deleted. For example, there is no significant difference in meaning between:

‘Sport contributes to academic life and this is very much the case at NUI Galway...’

‘Sport is central to life at NUI Galway.’

Over use of words like ‘more’, ‘most’, ‘very’ and ‘very much’ to create emphasis reduces the confidence of the tone of voice. Question whether they are needed at all.

Also, guard against stating the obvious, for example:

‘This leaflet has been designed to provide you with information about programmes of study in the School of...’

None of the information in the above statement needs to appear in a promotional leaflet, as the purpose of such a leaflet is self-explanatory. If the words add nothing new, delete them.

Accurate use of language

Beware of words and word combinations that have become clichés through overuse. ‘World class’, ‘research-led’, ‘innovative’, ‘dynamic’, ‘unique’ and ‘state-of-the-art’ are all examples of this. Whenever you are tempted to use a stock phrase, question what it means. Consider re-working your text, either to explain the idea more clearly, or use more interesting language.

3. Provide evidence of your claims

Whenever claims are made to promote the University, evidence needs to be provided that will validate the claim. For example,

‘Research at NUI Galway is forward-thinking and global in scale’

Might be supported by going on to provide examples of our forward-thinking, global research, such as:

‘Our Environmental Change Institute is conducting one of the world’s largest studies into how marine plants may affect the earth’s climate by decreasing climate change, while NUI Galway is also home to the world’s largest research institute devoted to developing the next generation of internet technology’.

Substantiated claims are more interesting and trusted than empty claims to greatness.

4. Structure

Following a three-step structure when writing promotional literature can be useful. Start your piece with something interesting that encourages the reader to think more about the subject matter and engage with the document.

For example:

‘Some people see day dreaming as an idle waste of time and students are often encouraged from dreaming. At NUI Galway, we take a more enlightened view. We believe that dreaming is at the very heart of innovation and invention.’

This opening will need to be substantiated and then expanded on in the information that follows.

Finally, close with a ‘call to action’. This is a final paragraph that lets the reader know how they can continue the conversation- who do they call, where can they get more information, is there something more specific you would like them to do?