



**Second  
Edition**

# **Acrolinx** **Tone of Voice** Workbook for Brands



**acrolinx**

Better Content. Faster.

*Defining your brand tone of voice is no easy feat.*

You need to conduct industry research, identify your brand values, use them to guide your tone of voice guidelines, and then systematically roll that out across your enterprise. We spoke about the specific details in our eBook: [Watch Your Tone! Why Your Company's Tone of Voice Matters, and How to Get It Right](#). And in this workbook, you can start bringing your brand tone of voice to life. We know this can be daunting — but we're here to make it easier for you!

### **This workbook contains:**

- Industry analysis worksheet
- Brand values questionnaire
- Competitor analysis worksheet
- Tone of voice worksheet and word cloud exercise
- Inclusive language exercise and examples
- Tone of voice rollout strategy worksheet



The goal of this workbook is to help your brand define and maintain your tone of voice across all enterprise content. This is the best place to start if you either don't know your brand's tone of voice or you want to refresh it. We'll guide you through different exercises and highlight important things to consider when defining and maintaining a consistent tone of voice.

And in case you needed a reminder, here's our definition of tone of voice:

**Tone of voice is how you sound when you talk. When used in a business context, tone of voice helps customers understand and connect with your brand. Every content touchpoint is another opportunity to show your core values, brand personality, and the value that can provide to your customers.**

We'll also show you the benefits of using a technology-driven solution to meet the challenges of maintaining a consistent tone across all enterprise content. Content improvement platforms can increase the impact and effectiveness of all content touchpoints, and guide content teams to write consistently in your brand tone of voice. But more on that to come!

## Before You Start

Please bear in mind that everybody's situation is different. These worksheets are intended as guides to help you, not rules to constrain you. If you feel your industry, company, brand, or culture doesn't fit the templates given here, go ahead and adapt them as you see fit. The important thing is to consider the questions here in a way that works for you, rather than complete the worksheets for their own sake.

## Identifying Brand Values

Tone of voice can't happen in a vacuum. It has to begin with brand core values.

In our [Watch Your Tone!](#) eBook, we discuss the different ways to identify your brand values: outside in or inside out. Outside in begins with your market, while inside out starts with your company. Below are different activities, such as an industry analysis and company questionnaire worksheet, to help you identify your brand values. You can use one or the other, or even a mixture of both.

### Industry Analysis

This approach starts with your market, so begin by surveying other brands in your industry. For example, consider the market for office furniture:

**Office Depot** positions itself very clearly as a cost leader, with a strong low-price message and simple, practical language that focuses on physical features and concrete benefits.

**Herman Miller** puts a strong emphasis on design, ergonomics, and optimizing workspace. They express this through quieter, more nurturing, and more refined language.

**Kinnarps** draws on its Swedish heritage to communicate a green message and a minimal, no-nonsense approach with very clean, clipped, and almost scientific language.

Use this worksheet to analyze the prevailing **brand values** in your industry:

<b>Industry Analysis</b>			
<b>Where you work</b> What industry are you in?			
<b>Universal values</b> What three values or qualities must all companies in your industry have?	<b>Value 1</b>	<b>Value 2</b>	<b>Value 3</b>
<b>Other values</b> What other values are projected by some companies in your industry, but not all?	<b>Value 1</b>	<b>Value 2</b>	<b>Value 3</b>
<b>Unused values</b> What values aren't being used by any companies, or by very few?	<b>Value 1</b>	<b>Value 2</b>	<b>Value 3</b>

## Enterprise Analysis

This approach starts from within your company. You'll begin at the core of your business and build outward to values, then on to tone.

To get started, use this questionnaire to work through the process of identifying your own brand values, as discussed under "Brand Values, Inside Out" in the [Watch Your Tone!](#) eBook.

Brand Values Questionnaire			
<b>Who you are</b> Describe your company in one simple sentence.			
<b>What you do</b> Explain what you do in one simple sentence.			
<b>USPs and differentiators</b> What makes you special or unique? List three points.			
<b>Messages</b> What are the most important things you want your audience to know? List three messages.			
<b>Presentation</b> How do you present yourself to customers? List three values/ attributes you aim to project, and say why/how in each case.			
<b>Perceptions</b> What do customers think of your company? List three quotes or sentiments from actual customers.			

<p><b>Personality</b></p> <p>If your brand were a person, what would they be like? How would they speak? List three personality traits and explain each one.</p>			
<p><b>Values</b></p> <p>Based on your answers, choose the core values that describe your brand. List three values and explain exactly what you mean by each one.</p>			

## Competitor Analysis

Regardless of how you approach identifying your brand values, you'll also want to consider the tone your competitors use in their content. Use this worksheet to analyze the way competitor brands use language.

<h3 style="text-align: center; background-color: #f4a460; color: white; padding: 5px;">Competitor Analysis Worksheet</h3>				
		Company 1	Company 2	Company 3
<p><b>Reference Companies</b></p>	<p><i>Example: Microsoft</i></p>			
<p><b>Reference Materials (Optional)</b></p> <p>What did you base your analysis on?</p>	<p><i>Website copy, blog posts, support documentation, social media, etc.</i></p>			
<p><b>Brand Positioning</b></p> <p>How does each brand position and differentiate itself?</p>	<p><i>As the market leader and a brand that customers can count on.</i></p>			
<p><b>Use of Language</b></p> <p>How does each brand use language to communicate?</p>	<p><i>To share big ideas in short and simple sentences - "<u>Less head, more heart.</u>"</i></p>			
<p><b>Type of Tone</b></p> <p>How would you describe this brand's tone of voice?</p>	<p><i>Relaxed, clear, and helpful.</i></p>			

# Developing Your Tone of Voice

## Different Types of Tone

To help you define your own tone of voice, you first need to think about the different types of tone and how they sound. One way to think about tone of voice is as a set of sliding controls, like a graphic equalizer. By moving the controls to one extreme or another, you change one aspect of the tone. This word cloud shows a few examples:

**Humorous**

**Serious**

**Passionate**

**Calm**

**Formal**

**Informal**

**Inspirational**

**Practical**

**Punchy**

**Flowing**

**Academic**

**Approachable**

**Warm**

**Detached**

**Verbose**

**Concise**

**Assertive**

**Relaxed**

**Determined**

**Lighthearted**

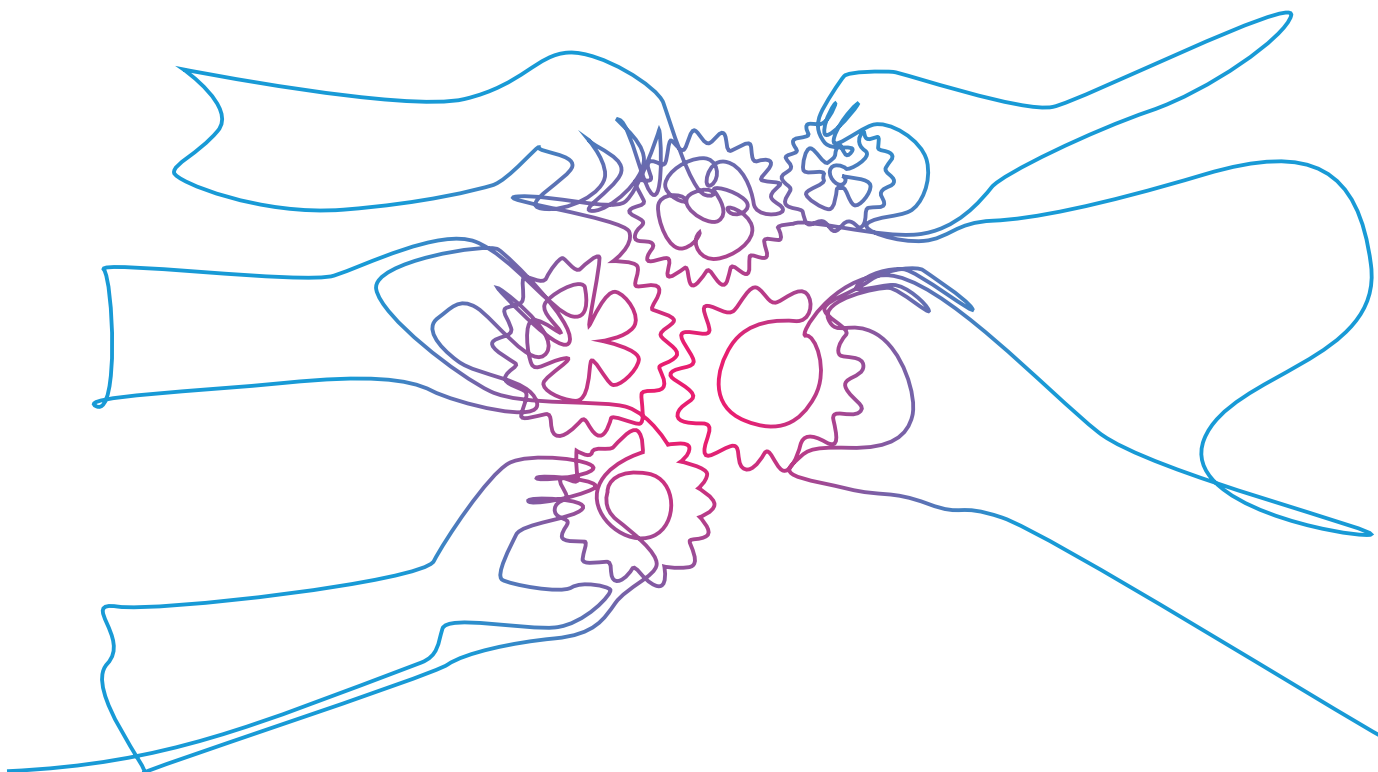
**Traditional**

**Contemporary**

**Inward-looking**  
(enterprise focused)

**Outward-looking**  
(customer focused)

Using this word cloud, start circling or highlighting words that relate with your brand values. Consider which different types of tone you want your brand to communicate with. And remember, this isn't a complete list, so feel free to add your own words.



## From Values To Tone

The next step is to align your values and your tone. This means thinking about how each value translates into writing style. And remember, you aren't trying to find the perfect tone, but the right tone for your brand and industry. Use this worksheet to build a bridge from brand values to tone.

Tone of Voice Worksheet				
		Value 1	Value 2	Value 3
<p><b>Brand Values</b> Enter your three one-word brand values.</p>	<p><i>Example: Rigorous</i></p>			
<p><b>How do your values sound?</b> Give a brief description of how each value sounds when "it speaks."</p>	<p><i>Clear and concise when specifying projects or explaining ideas. Always give concrete details and don't generalize. Stick to shorter sentences, etc.</i></p>			
<p><b>Types of tone</b> Using some of the types shown in the word cloud, enter words that correspond to your values.</p>	<p><i>Punchy, concise, practical, etc.</i></p>			
<p><b>Elements of tone</b> Start thinking about how that will affect your content and how to put your tone to work.</p>	<p><i>Word length, sentence length, less jargon, etc.</i></p>			

If you want to learn more about the different elements of tone, make sure to check out our [Watch Your Tone!](#) eBook. It has a dedicated section outlining the 12 elements of tone to watch out for when you're bringing your tone of voice to life.



## Keeping your Tone Inclusive

Inclusive language demonstrates awareness of the vast diversity of people in the world. Using inclusive language offers respect, safety, and belonging to all people, regardless of their personal characteristics. Inclusive language includes many different aspects of inclusivity, such as:



- A) Proper acknowledgment of people and cultures
- B) Intentional language
- C) People-first language
- D) Respectful language
- E) History-conscious language
- F) Accessible language
- G) Diverse and accurate representation
- H) Non-stereotypical language
- I) Gender neutral language

Here are a few examples of how non-inclusive language might appear in public facing content. See if you can identify which aspects of inclusive language these sentences violate, and rewrite them using inclusive language. If you need help, the [Acrolinx Inclusive Language Guide](#) goes into more detail.

1. Blacklist filtering works by checking the IP addresses of mail servers that attempt to send you mail.
2. With every sale, we're donating \$1 to an organization advocating for the rights of illegal immigrants.
3. Three names are being considered for the office of deputy chairman of senate as the ruling coalition's candidate.
4. If the programmer wishes to uphold the invariant, he must satisfy the function's preconditions. [\(Source\)](#)
5. For approximately 8% of the young epileptic population, epilepsy is fatal.

What's great about being fluent in inclusive language? It amplifies your message and your tone of voice, making it more accessible to a wider audience than it was before and supports safety and wellbeing for every kind of human. Who wouldn't want that?

## Rollout Strategy

Once you define your tone of voice, you then have to strategize about how to roll out and maintain that tone across your enterprise content. Use this table to think about how to implement your tone definition into your content workflow. Here are some ideas for how to get started:

<i>For example, a tone of voice guide, page on internal website, PDF, automated content software platform, etc.</i>			
<b>How/where will your tone of voice guidelines be published?</b>	<i>Will you have internal training and communication, etc.</i>		
<b>How will your tone of voice be shared?</b>	<i>Will you be self-monitoring, using an automated platform, getting documents approved by supervisors, etc.</i>		
<b>What techniques will you use to maintain your tone of voice?</b>	<i>List individuals or managers of the relevant teams.</i>		
<b>Who is in charge of maintaining and monitoring tone of voice?</b>			
<b>Which individuals/teams are involved in creating content, and who will monitor tone?</b> This could include teams or departments. Content creators could also be responsible for monitoring their own tone.	Content creators:  Tone monitors:	Content creators:  Tone monitors:	Content creators:  Tone monitors:
<i>Consider stages such as content strategy, content planning, writing, submission, feedback, edits, final approval, publication, revision, etc.</i>			
<b>Outline the process you'll use for creating/ approving content.</b>	<i>Consider different technologies.</i>		
<b>How will tone of voice be integrated into your content creation process?</b>			

<p><b>Which pieces of content will you work on first?</b></p>	<p><i>Identify content that needs attention through metrics and prioritize them.</i></p>
<p><b>Which content can be left until later?</b></p>	

*This part of the process is where technology comes in. Maintaining your tone of voice across all enterprise content is a lot of work. And to do it efficiently, you need to harness the power of AI and automation.*

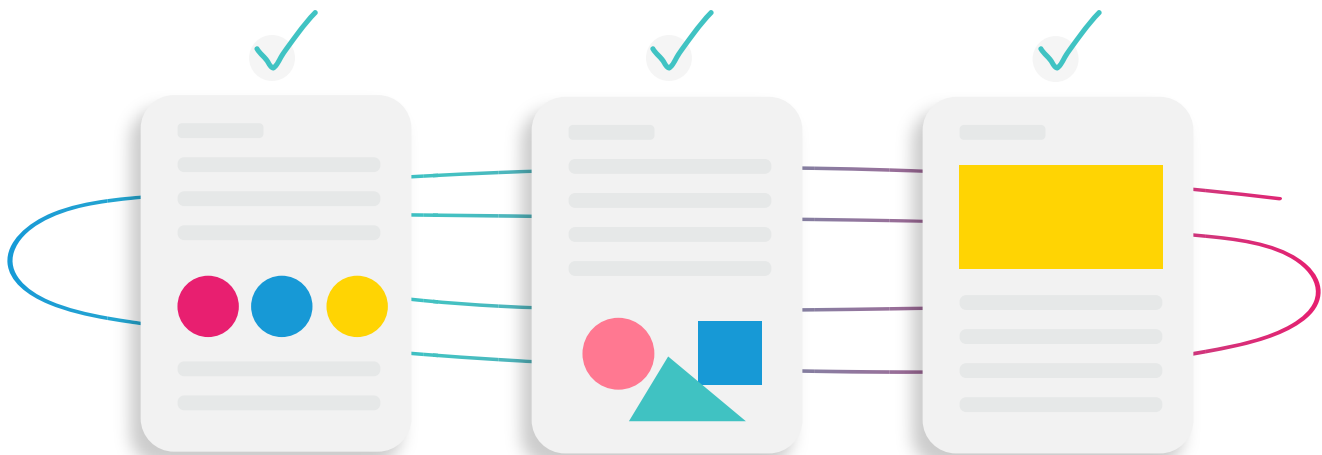
## Technology and Tone of Voice

Just because you have a style guide, doesn't mean everyone at your organization is using it. That's the danger of static style guides that live in a PDF or Google Drive. Researching the right style, or terminology to use for product information, technical documentation, or even marketing messaging can slow down content creation. And if your content creators are writing in a language other than their native language, it's normal for some inconsistency to arise.

Technology like a content improvement platform makes writing content in a unified tone of voice a breeze. It negates the need to check PDFs for tone of voice guidelines, because ideally, it guides writers with immediate feedback on their tone of voice, style, and terminology as they create their content.

The best thing about content improvement and governance software is that quality checks for tone can be done at scale – powered by AI and automation. Everyone in your organization, regardless of location and department, are aligned to your tone of voice standards. Plus, automation carries the burden of time-consuming editing for quality control, because it integrates seamlessly anywhere in the content lifecycle.

Content improvement software may also check how emotionally appealing your content is, to make sure you're evoking the emotions you originally intended. Likewise, it can check for the clarity of your content – making sure it's accessible for all readers. And all of this has an amazing impact on customer experience!



# About Acrolinx

Acrolinx is an AI-powered software platform that improves the quality and effectiveness of enterprise content. We help some of the world's most valuable brands meet complex content challenges at immense scale — across writers, languages, and cultures. From day one, our platform maximizes the value of your content, by boosting its overall quality and effectiveness, and giving you time and money back to reinvest in other higher value activities.

When it comes to tone of voice, Acrolinx helps you define and deploy your brand voice universally, with guidance available to all content contributors as they create content.

To see how you can use Acrolinx to unify your company's tone of voice, please visit [www.acrolinx.com](https://www.acrolinx.com) or [Let's talk](#).



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