

**Warwick tone of voice:
Full guidelines
March 2015**

What is tone of voice and why do we need a 'Warwick' tone of voice?

The tone of our language defines the way people respond to us. By writing in a tone that's true to our brand, we can express what it is that makes University of Warwick unique.

Our brand: defined by possibility

What is it that makes us unique? We're a university with modern values and a formidable record of academic and commercial achievement — but not the only one. So what sets us apart?

The difference lies in our approach to everything we do. Warwick is a place that fundamentally rejects the notion of obstacles — a place where the starting point is always 'anything is possible'. This can be best communicated using the language of what could be and a phrase — *'what if'*.

Brand positioning statement:

What if there were a place of infinite possibilities, where your only boundaries were the limits of your energy, imagination and potential? Comfortable with breaking new ground and taking risks, the people around you would be the very best and their focus would be to make you the very best too. An environment shaped only by its own ambition, safe and tireless, it would move at the fast pace of the world around it.

What if there were a world-leading university with the highest academic and research standards, the acumen of a business and for whom entrepreneurialism, innovation and international were a way of life, not buzzwords? Striving to lead rather than follow, the environment would be supportive and challenging for undergraduates, renowned and enterprising for postgraduates, and cosmopolitan for everyone. As respected for boundary-breaking research as for teaching and business collaborations, its single-minded pursuit of excellence and intellectual curiosity would set the standards for others to follow.

What if teaching didn't end with learning your subject and you were encouraged to take your skills into the real world? You'd view challenges from unique perspectives, and become world-ready as well as work-ready, marking you out by organisations across the globe for life. Prospering in an environment supportive, demanding and enjoyable enough to find out who you are and how far it can take you.

What if you were to work somewhere every day so different, you might never want to leave? Where lines of command were short and you were empowered to act on ideas, provided they were first class. And if you were to move on, your distinct approach would successively influence the people and organisations around you.

*So what if all these things existed in one place? We think they do: the University of Warwick.
What if?*

What if summons up a whole identity. The person who asks *what if* is a relentless challenger, always in search of the new and constantly asking questions about different, better ways of thinking, doing and being. Someone who thinks big and dares to defy convention.

How would that sound?

Like the conversation that leads to a breakthrough; like the voice of an entrepreneur sharing a point of view: ambitious, confident, challenging, persuasive, energised and focused.

Sound bites

"We can solve it by..." "No one else has tried..." "That would create a new way to..." "It may be different, but..." "We can make it better by..." "Thinking ahead..." "By next year, we'll be..." "Imagine..."

What it is...

A point of view worth pursuing
Fresh
Forthright
Clean
Honest
A conversation with your reader
Outward-looking

What it's not...

Style over substance
Formulaic
Tentative
Clumsy
Contrived
An academic tract
Self-absorbed

How do I use the new tone of voice?

We can embed the language of possibility across all our communications by:

- Applying the seven tone of voice principles below
- Making use of the *what if* device

Each communication calls for a slightly different tone, so while you should use the seven principles for all your writing, you can dial up or down on the language of possibility according to the situation. For example:

- Dial up for a keynote presentation, a prospectus or any marketing content.
- Dial down for personal messages that need more empathy than challenge.

Use these guidelines in conjunction with our style guidelines and plain English principles.

Seven principles of the language of possibility

1. Look to the future
2. Keep it positive
3. Speak collaboratively
4. Start dialogue
5. Give examples
6. Be proactive
7. Say it like you mean it

1. Look to the future

What if doesn't dwell in the past. Focusing on the future creates a sense of anticipation, progress and change.

From

We saw the potential to expand our research in this field

We began...we wanted...we have seen...we look back on...we have become...our experience...our heritage...etc.

To

By expanding our research in this field we will have the opportunity to...

We begin...we want...we will see...we look ahead to...we'll become...our plans ...our ambitions...etc.

2. Keep it positive

What if is optimistic. Use language that highlights the benefits rather than limitations. Make the reader feel that you're there to help them.

From

We cannot continue until
This is only for
Due to negligence

Those who failed to attend the meeting will have missed

To

We'll do this as soon as
This is for everyone who
We're working to fix

If you couldn't make the meeting, you can catch up by

3. Speak collaboratively

Create a sense of collaboration by talking in the first and second person: you, your, yours, we, our, ours, us, I, my and mine. In this way, you and the reader belong to the same, shared vision.

From	To
University of Warwick; the university, the department; the team; the organisation etc.	We
Colleagues; staff; members; candidates; applicants; employees, those individuals	You

From	To
The University of Warwick helps to increase job opportunities for graduates	We are here to help you get the job you want
These workshops demonstrate the value the university places on staff development	We want you to have the best opportunities to develop your skills

4. Start dialogue

Write in a way that hooks your reader in:

i) *Asking questions* demands a response and can provide a good launch into a topic:

- What if? ... How should we? ... Do you feel/know/think? ... Where can you? ... Is there?
- Why study Economics at Warwick?
- What will I learn?
- What is a MOOC [Massive Open Online Course]... Who can apply?

ii) You can also engage by using phrases that *offer a point of view*:

- How to...(attain, make the most of, minimise, stay ahead, keep up with etc.)
- Three ways to...etc.
- The secret of...etc.
- The quick/smart way to...etc.
- What everyone in/thinking of/involved with/connected to/etc. [area of interest] should know about...

5. Give examples

Don't just tell your reader: show them with concrete facts and stories that give the proof.

From

We are leading experts

We build international links to advance our research and reputation

To

Our research rankings are... We have achieved...

Professor Martin Hairer won the Fields Medal: the first UK winner of the medal since 1998

Our association with the Large Hadron Collider project helped bring our research in physics to the fore

6. Be proactive

i) *Use the active voice* to give a clear sense of people doing things. *What if* is about seizing the initiative, taking ownership of opportunities and acting upon them.

From

Your application was received

Your skills can be improved by

Important research is being carried
out

Enquiries are being made

You'll be informed in due course

To

We've read your application

You can improve your skills by

We are carrying out important research

We're looking into...

I'll be in touch soon

ii) Add energy by *using the verb rather than the noun*.

From

Our thinking is

A meeting was held

Your attendance is required

Achieve cost savings

To

We think that

We discussed

Please join us

Cut costs

7. Say it like you mean it

Show conviction by limiting the use of tentative words such as *possibly*, *hopefully* or *maybe*.

From

We hope to become a top fifty world-ranked university

We might be able to

We're committed to the ideal of giving everyone the opportunity to...

To

Our aim is to become a top fifty world-ranked university

We will be able to

We give everyone the opportunity to...

How to use *what if*

Using the phrase *what if* in your writing can have a highly creative effect. It forces you to present your thoughts in a different way and sets you up to talk about possibility. It'll also make your writing recognisably consistent with other Warwick communications, by reinforcing *what if* as a motif of our language.

Use it to give deliberate emphasis to the language of possibility, for example for in marketing headlines, speeches, proposals and strategic communications. But use it appropriately and sparingly. Also find alternative techniques to create pictures in readers minds of different possibilities.

Here is one way to incorporate *what if* in your writing:

- a) Start by using *what if* to set up a compelling and relevant question: “What if we banned chairs at our meetings?”
- b) Use *then* to offer outcomes and answers: “Then everyone would have to stand. Then nobody would get too comfy. Then we’d get down to business straight away and be done more quickly...”
- c) You can then throw it back at the reader with another challenge: “What then?”

More examples:

- i) Inspiring a prospective student:

What if you could study at Warwick from anywhere in the world?

Then you could experience [...etc.]

By signing up to one of our open online courses, you could be a part of Warwick’s growing global community.

What then?

Finishing on a question like ‘What then?’ can be particularly useful when you want your reader to think of different possibilities for themselves. An example would be at the end of a prospectus, where you’d like the reader to imagine their own future at Warwick.

- ii) *Galvanising a team:*

What if there were a way to produce more food using less water, land, and energy, while reducing waste and environmental impacts?

Then we could tackle one of the biggest challenges facing us today [etc.]

With this new funding we can build on our skills and training to maintain a leading position in the field of Biosciences.

What next?

iii) Solving everyday problems:

What if we could automatically turn off all non-essential electronics at night?

Then we would save [amount of energy/money] each year. And we could invest the savings across the University.

What then?

iv) Promoting participation in One World Week:

What if I want to experience new cultures without leaving campus?

Then you can get involved with One World Week's parades performances and workshops that will broaden your horizons. One World Week, established in 1995, is an event celebrating the cultural diversity at Warwick. It is now recognised as the world's largest student-run event.

What next?

v) Bringing strategy to life:

What if we raised our research profile to even higher levels of international excellence?

Then we could be ranked as one of the world's top fifty universities.

What then?

Varying the approach

There are many other ways to use *what if*. For example, you can use it to present an outcome and then follow with a question as to how we achieve the outcome. Taking the example above on strategy, an outcome-led approach would be:

What if we could be ranked as one of the world's top fifty universities?

We can — if we raise our research profile in the following areas...