

EXCERPT

Tone of Voice Guide

with a Canva appendix

An internal guide I wrote for Common Desk: what the brand sounds like, and the grammar and style rules that hold it together across a marketing team, a design team, and community managers at every location.

It ends with an appendix for Canva — the tool everyone at the company actually used — so a community manager making a sign for the coffee bar lands in the same place marketing does.

What follows is six pages of it. The full guide is available on request.

IN THIS EXCERPT

Voice and tone — what the brand sounds like, and the four things that are true of every piece of copy

The importance of “all” — writing and image standards for an inclusive brand

Appendix: Navigating Canva — brand kits, photo libraries, elements, and the font rules

Voice and tone

One way we write empowering content is by being aware of our voice and our tone. This section explains the difference between voice and tone, and lays out the elements of each as they apply to Common Desk.

What's the difference between voice and tone?

Think of it this way: You have the same voice all the time, but your tone changes. You might use one tone when you're out to dinner with your closest friends, and a different tone when you're in a meeting with your manager.

Your tone also changes depending on the emotional state of the person you're addressing. You wouldn't want to use the same tone of voice with someone who's scared or upset as you would with someone who's laughing and having a good time at a happy hour.

The same is true for Common Desk. **Our voice doesn't change much from day to day, but our tone changes all the time.** That's where this guide comes in—to help you know how and when to change your tone in an effective, on-brand manner.

★ Voice

The Common Desk voice should be an expression of how we as a collective entity talk in real life. It should sound natural, authentic, and most importantly: **human**.

We've all experienced the feeling of potentially dreading going to the office, or picturing a future of a miserable workspace environment. The original workspace wasn't designed with community and creativity in mind, and all too many people have experienced workdays that are soul-sucking versus inspiring. Common Desk exists to prove that the 8-5 doesn't have to be something people dread for the bulk of their adult lives, and we're here to invite everyone to something better—something different: Common Desk.

Close your eyes and think back to that feeling you felt the first time you learned of the term “coworking” or walked into a Common Desk space for the very first time. Think of the awe, the surprise, and maybe even the sense of relief you felt when you learned that claustrophobic cubicles don't have to be the future for all professionals. Always go back to that when you're wondering what should power the Common Desk voice.

Though the concept of flexible office spaces has been around for years, we know that there are so many people who have yet to experience the life-changer that is Common Desk. We think that

everyone deserves to experience the hospitality and intentionality that our set of brands offer, which is why, at the end of the day, **our voice is an invitation to the party.**

Using offbeat humor and a conversational voice, we play with language to bring joy to our members' work. We prefer the friendly over the formal, and the witty over the serious. To keep it short, we don't take ourselves too seriously, but we do take pride in what we do.

Whether people know what they need from us or don't know the first thing about Common Desk and our brands and offerings, every word we say invites and encourages. We share our knowledge with clarity, empathy, and wit.

All of this means that when we write copy:

1. **We are conversational.** We understand the world our members are living in: one muddled by hyperbolic language, pretentiousness, and over-promises. We strip all that away and value authenticity above all, using a nice mix of slang, cultural relevance, and professionalism to be a voice that's both fun and reputable.
2. **We are authentic.** Everything we do, create, design, and say is done so from a place of authenticity. We do things from the heart, and we pride ourselves on being original. Our voice strives to be honest, genuine, and real—not flashy, salesy, or kitschy.
3. **We are connectors.** We highlight real people doing real things, aiming to connect with others, connect others to one another, and make “human connections” happen before anyone ever walks into a Common Desk physical space.
4. **We have a blast.** Do these sound a lot like our values? It's for good reason. Writing good copy should be fun, and, in the spirit of never taking ourselves too seriously, we never hesitate to throw a zinger into our copy to catch people by surprise and delight them with our endearing charm :) Our humor is dry. Our sense of humor is straight-faced, subtle, and a touch eccentric. We're weird but not inappropriate, smart but not snobbish. We prefer winking to shouting. We're never condescending or exclusive—we always bring our customers in on the joke.

★ Tone

Common Desk's tone is usually casual, but it's always more important to be clear than performative (in the words of Brene Brown, “Clear is kind”). Practice empathy when you're creating content by putting yourself in the reader's shoes; how do they feel on the platform

you're producing content for? For email, are they relieved to be finished with the campaign? On LinkedIn, are they looking for a reputable resource to give quality information on a certain industry? Once you have a picture of what their emotional state could be, you can adjust your tone accordingly.

Common Desk has a sense of humor, so feel free to be witty when it's appropriate and when it comes naturally to you. But don't go out of your way to make a joke—forced humor can be worse than none at all. If you're unsure, keep a straight face and opt for a warm, encouraging tone instead.

The key takeaways for tone:

- **“We” over “me.”** Speak in third person as a collective “we.” Never speak in first person, using personal pronouns like “I” as the brand.
- **Be clear.** We speak in plain English and try to avoid using jargon that could isolate people from getting the reference. But there are times when culture phrases and sayings keep us relevant and help land the joke, so use culture cues and jargon when appropriate, but use a clear angle/direct context so that if people don't know the reference, they can make an assumption.
- **Be an optimist.** Write with a positive attitude. No one likes a negative Nancy (sorry, Nancy).

The importance of “all”

Remember the “for all” moment of our mission statement? We take that part really seriously. Like, really really. Part of upholding our value of “value everyone” means speaking with an inclusive tone, always keeping open eyes to consider diversity, equity, and inclusion in literally everything we produce. How does this play out in real time, you ask?

- In our weekly newsletter, Desk Notes, we make sure to keep an eye out on the age, gender, race, and team type of the person or group we’re highlighting in the “Member Spotlight” section in hopes that everyone sees someone they relate with.
- On our Instagram profile grid and in stories, we make sure more than one shade of skin tone is represented in the photos we’re posting.
- On our website, we try to showcase humans of all kinds within our imagery and even down to the icons of people we use.
- When conducting photo/video shoots, we set expectations with the creatives we’ve partnered with, coaching them to keep diversity top of mind when shooting.
- In promotional email campaigns, we check to make sure we’re not limiting photography to show one demographic more than others.
- When writing blog posts mentioning members or extending our blog for guest posts, we try to open the floor to professionals from all backgrounds. Is there a background we’re not reaching? How can we extend the invitation to them?
- When we use emoji of people, hands, or anything else that has multiple skin tone options, we use only the default yellow skin tone—our brand is not any one skin tone. (You’ll see more on this later).

Hear us out: we still have a lot to learn in this category, but that doesn't mean we're not passionate about it. Though it may never be intentional, forgetting to keep a proactive eye on examples like the practices listed above on a weekly basis could result in Common Desk as a brand featuring people that fall into one bucket—either all the same gender or all the same race—creating a picture that our brand only promotes, highlights, and/or affiliates with one type of person. That’s our literal worst nightmare. Our community is comprised of a diverse mix of game-changers, and if we want to keep it that way and even advance that, we have to showcase that diversity intentionally, thoughtfully, and regularly.

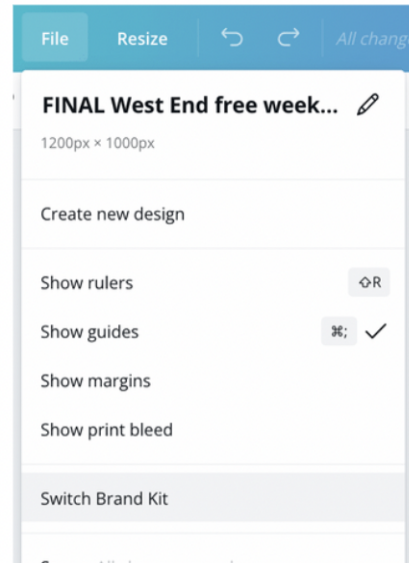
Navigating Canva

There are a few places that we keep our most frequently used assets and brand colors. Here's where we'll lay it all out.

★ Brand kits

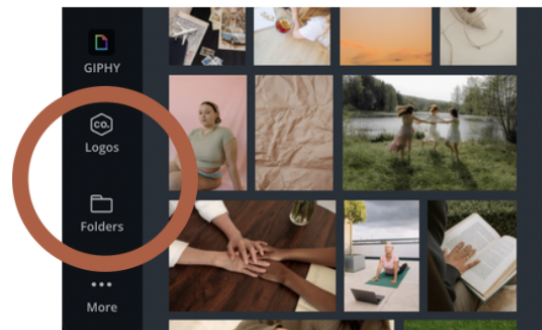
We have four different brands within our portfolio, all with their own set of colors and fonts. Some of them overlap, but you'll find them separated into groups in Canva. You can switch between brand kits by going into a design and choosing *File - Switch Brand Kit*. If you know what you're looking for, you don't always need to switch kits—but when you're getting used to the guidelines, it helps!

Each kit has its own set of colors, fonts, and logos. All Common Desk locations will fall within the “Common Desk Brand Kit” *except* when you're making something for Continental Gin Building as its own brand (not as Common Desk - Continental Gin).



★ Photos

Location photos are sorted into their own folders, but they're not all easily accessible from the left-hand sidebar. Your two most frequently used input choices will probably be *Logos* and *Folders*, both of which are unfortunately at the very bottom of the sidebar—so just keep on scrollin' till you find them.



★ Elements

There are a few elements that we use often in our designs, so pointing them out here as tricks of the trade will come in handy. These will all be found in the *Elements* folder at the top of the sidebar in a design.

- **Shapes.** We use this element a ton to add pizzazz to a photo or text, particularly the square. Coloring a square and placing it behind a photo, slightly offset, gives an interesting shadow effect. We also use this element to highlight or group important text.
- **Grids.** When you're curating a collection of photos in one spot, the grid is your best friend. Instead of spending valuable minutes trying to line up photos with just the right amount of space between, grab a grid and drag your photos into them. If you need to move around the photo within the grid space, simply double-click the photo in question and you'll be able to resize or drag it around so it shows only the part of the photo that you want.
- **Squiggle.** If you've seen much of anything we've designed, you know the squiggle. We love the squiggle. You may be tempted to grab a squiggle from the vast selection available within the *Elements* tab, but resist! We have the Common Desk Squiggle™ (not really trademarked, but may as well be). It's a very specific squiggle and it's found in the *Logos* folder of the Common Desk Brand Kit. They're scattered throughout that folder, but we've got it in pretty much every color you could need.

★ Fonts (and other text stuff)

We use specific fonts for specific purposes to enhance readability and keep things consistent. For the vast majority of graphics, we use the following four fonts: Tiempos Headline Black, Circular Std Bold, Circular Std Book, and Yellowtail. All of these are found in the brand kit.

For headings, we typically use Tiempos Headline Black. Occasionally, we'll use Circular Std Bold, but Tiempos is a bit more fun!

For body text, use Circular Std Bold / Book, depending on the nature of the graphic. If you're typing a whole paragraph and there's a lot of text, use Book. If you want to draw attention to a small amount of text, use Bold.

For a spark of fun in graphics, use Yellowtail—but sparingly. We really only use this to add interest to a couple of words or to highlight the main point of a graphic.

Did you notice we did NOT mention Industry? (You're a smart cookie.) Industry is the font we use for our Common Desk logo, *and nothing else*. This is how we keep our logo strong and distinctive; if we used the same font for a bunch of other things, our branding would become diluted and the logo would look less special.