

Our Voice & Tone

Friendly

We're here to help the public. We make things easier and simpler. Anything we say is useful and easy to understand. Be approachable. Be honest and open. But don't make it too personal - slang or incomplete sentences sounds strange from an institute of authority.

Confident

We're an authoritative source for people looking for answers. Be concise and direct. We use strong statements, with a clear point of view. Get to the point quickly and avoid the subjunctive.

Conversational

Imagine you're talking to the user over the phone or at the front counter. Use personal pronouns like 'we' or 'our'. Instead of "residents" or "applicants," say "you." What words would you use to answer questions directly? Remember, overly wordy content makes it even harder for a person living with a disability.

How to Write in our Voice & Tone

Keep it simple. Use plain language (it's the [law!](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/law/))

<https://www.plainlanguage.gov/law/>

Do:

- Write at an 8th grade reading level
- Use active voice throughout your site

Avoid:

- Too many adjectives, excess modifiers, and repeats.
- Jargon and government legalese (if you have to use an acronym, make sure to spell it out first)
- Incomplete sentences, irony, or idioms.

Instead of:	Use:
Conduct an analysis.	Analyze.
Present a report.	Report.
Absolute success.	Success.
Completely finished.	Finished.
At a later time.	Later.
In relation to.	About.

Make it actionable

People visit our website to do something: answer a question or complete a specific task. Most users will spend an average of 30 seconds on a webpage. Avoid “intro” text (ex. “Welcome to our division homepage.”). Ask yourself: What key questions can I answer for your users? How can I answer them quickly?

Know your audience

We serve a wide range of people. They have different needs, preferences, and abilities. When writing, ask:

- Who is my audience? (Homeowners, Business owners, Parents)?
- Are they first-time visitors, or savvy returning visitors?

Did you know these facts about the average website visitor?

- Average American adult reading level: **8th grade**
- Maximum time most users will spend on a webpage: **30 seconds**
- Number of visitors to City websites using mobile devices: **53%**
- San Jose residents over the age of 65 years old: **10%**
- San Jose residents who are foreign born: **39%**
- San Jose residents speaking a language other than English at home: **57%**
- Percentage of Americans with disabilities: **20%**
- San Jose residents over 25 without a high school degree: **18%**