

## NOVA'S TONE OF VOICE

An institution's voice, often referred to as tone of voice, is its point of view, a reflection of its personality and its verbal signature. Institutions can present themselves in any number of ways — as quirky, inspirational, authentic, sophisticated, academic, humorous, authoritative, streetwise, bold, professional, cultured, highbrow, or cheeky. Almost any tone of voice can be effective; the key is to be authentic.

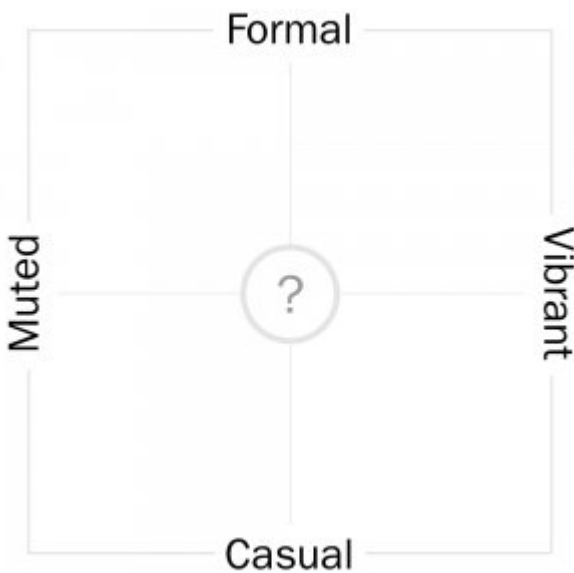
For content creators, voice is the written or spoken expression of a brand. A college's voice should remain consistent regardless of the medium — written, spoken word, video, photos or graphics. The challenge for any institution where countless people are generating content is to stay within the guardrails of the established brand.

Why do we strive for consistency in our tone of voice? Because if we speak too formally or with too much academic jargon, we lose our audience. If we lack humor and warmth, we lose our audience. And if we offer inconsistent, out of character, or confusing messages, we lose our audience. If we lose our audience, we lose our way.

## RANGE OF FORMALITY AND EMOTION

Voice or tone can be measured by its range from informal to formal as well as its range from emotional to informational. Put another way, it's the degree of formality and emotion when choosing how we speak and write about ourselves. An Ivy League institution, for example, may speak with a tone of voice that is authoritative, academic and formal. But that doesn't feel much like NOVA, does it?

For visual thinkers, tone of voice can be represented this way:



So, at NOVA, ...

- Are we formal or informal? Conversational or academic? Inspirational or informative? Humorous or buttoned up? Confident or understated? Slangy or authoritative?
- Do we have a sense of humor? A sense of swagger? Or is being direct and concise the point? Does our audience need entertaining or simply informing?

You've probably wondered these things when you're creating content, so this page exists to answer these questions and give you direction.

## A BRAND-DRIVEN TONE OF VOICE

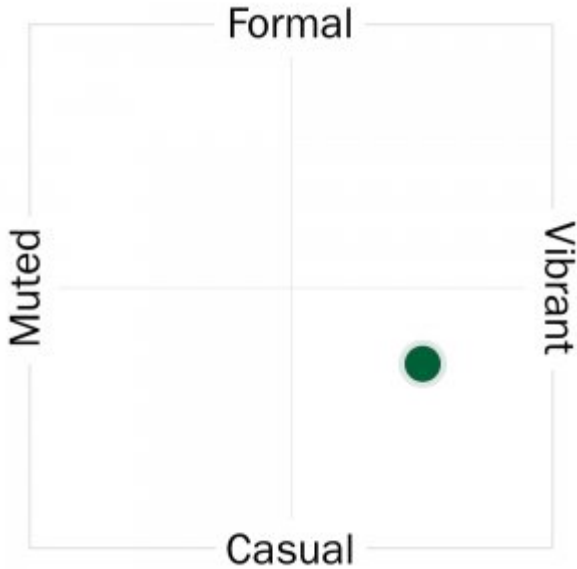
The good news is that NOVA's brand guidelines have done the hard work for us because our Brand Personality Traits anchor our Tone of Voice.

### NOVA IS:

- Confident, even a bit defiant.
- Secure and established.

- Clever and good-humored.
- Direct.
- Warm.
- Sincere.

Taken together, those qualities place our tone of voice on the vibrant side of the spectrum, more casual than formal but still maintaining our professionalism.



### **Confident, even a bit defiant**

We chose “Boldly” as our tagline for a reason. NOVA is doing great things, on a daily basis, for our students and for our business community. But not everyone knows our accomplishments. In fact, some people still think disparagingly of us as just the local community college — even though we are the nation’s second largest! Walk through the hallways, talk with our faculty and see the great careers our students are starting — NOVA has great momentum and our people have, dare we say, a swagger about them. Some on the outside may still doubt us, but we don’t. We are confident, even a bit defiant. It’s time we grew more comfortable touting our successes.

Sample Tweet: **NOVA faculty have won Pulitzer Prizes, worked for Fortune 500 companies and registered hundreds of patents. Now they're ready for you.**

Sample Tweet: **Rock star faculty, innovative classes, partnerships with local businesses (like Inova, BB&T, and Verizon) — NOVA is your springboard to opportunity.**

### **Secure and established**

Not only are we the second largest community college system in the nation, the largest public educational institution in Virginia, and the most diverse school in the Commonwealth, but we're also one of the most established schools in our region. Since 1964 — for more than 50 years now — NOVA has delivered a tradition of excellence and proven its commitment to the Northern Virginia community. With more than 75,000 students, 2,600 faculty and staff members, and six campuses, NOVA is a respected household name.

name in our region. Our voice should reflect our size, reach and reputation.

Sample Tweet: **75,000 students. 2,600 faculty and staff. 50+ years of excellence. Six campuses. NOVA is more than a name in Northern Virginia, we're an institution. Learn more.**

### **Clever and good-humored**

Caution! There is a fine line between being humorous and being a wiseguy. Humor should never be used to disparage or put down. Rather, it should embolden us to engage our audiences, celebrate our successes and be fearless about challenging convention. Entertaining our audience is a way to hook them and entice them into listening or reading our NOVA stories. We can dial up our humor and cleverness when speaking to prospective and current students. Or dial it down for peer, donor, and key business and political audiences.

Sample Tweet: **Our student population is so diverse, we represent over 200 countries. Sheesh, we could throw our own Olympics.**

Sample Headline: **More degrees. Less moolah.**

Sample Tweet: **Degrees earned. Moolah saved. Careers launched. Discover the NOVA difference.**

## **Sincere**

With so many business partnerships, new programs and success stories, we don't have to exaggerate our accomplishments. When we speak to our inclusiveness and diversity, we don't have to fake it — after all, we're the most diverse higher ed institution in Virginia. When we say that our students save money by starting off at NOVA and transferring to one of our partners, they really do.

A lot of money. As a public institution, we never want to be anything but sincere when we report the good news that happens every day here.

Sample Tweet: **NOVA is the most inclusive, diverse educational institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia.**

### **Warm**

There are just so many amazing stories coming out of this place. The positive vibes can be felt across all our campuses. It's a NOVA thing. The students feel it. The faculty feel it. The business community feels it. So, why be anything but warm and positive when we speak about ourselves? We've got a lot to say. Let's make sure our voice reflects this positivity.

Sample Tweet: **So many amazing things are happening today at NOVA, sometimes we forget to stop and tell the individual success stories. Here's Jeremy's, a single dad with a singular story of grit.**

### **Direct and straightforward**

Confident, straightforward messaging is how we tell our NOVA story. When our faculty makes news, we strip away the jargon and get out the megaphone. We want to dial up our achievements and gin up more NOVA pride, but we never want to come across as arrogant or conceited.

Sample Tweet: **We may not have ivy growing all over buildings, but we sure do have a lot of Ivy League professors teaching our classes. Here's just a few of our Ivy Leaguers.**

## **THE GUT CHECK**

Before you speak or write to a NOVA audience, perform this quick test to see if you're staying on brand tonally. Ask yourself, "Does it sound confident, good-humored, established, direct, warm, and sincere — or some combination of our qualities?" Next, does it compel you to want to read on?

## **DIFFERENT AUDIENCES. DIFFERENT EMPHASIS. SAME NOVA.**

When can you bend — not break — the rules on tone of voice? Short answer: When speaking to different audiences. For example, **Tone of Voice | 8**



when we speak to potential donors, common sense says we speak differently than when recruiting potential 18-year-olds. As with any human communication, sometimes we dress up our language and sometimes we dress down. Cleverness and good humor may appeal equally to donors and to high schoolers. However, our humor when speaking to donors should be more elevated in nature, never brash or slangy. However, when speaking to 18-year olds, it might be appropriate to use pop culture references or use slang that might resonate — as long as it's not off-color.

It's OK to modulate our tone — dial it up or down according to different audiences — and still be ourselves. In fact, it's just common sense that we do.