



Brand Voice, Tone, & Manner Guide

Introduction

Welcome to the AAA-Auto Club Group Brand Voice & Tone Guide. If your job includes interacting with members, customers or prospects, or creating public-facing content, this guide is for you. Our ultimate goal is that every individual team member communicates in the same clear, consistent, and on-brand way across all our brand channels, mediums, and lines of business. This consistent brand voice is an important element in realizing our Connected Member Vision.

While this guide focuses on establishing our Brand Voice & Tone, it also outlines basic guidelines for consistent writing, grammar, style, and word use. Beginning on page 7, you'll find additional Channel-Specific Guides for more targeted communication approaches.

Our hope is that this guide strengthens our collective voice as individual communicators for the AAA brand. When we're all pointed in the same direction, we maintain a strong brand presence and reliable experience that sets us apart from the competition and solidifies us as the preferred choice—time after time.

Voice vs. Tone

Voice and tone are two closely related aspects of communication, but they are not the same thing. So, what's the difference? Think of it this way: You have the same voice all the time, but your tone is likely to change depending on the emotional state of the person you're addressing.

In other words, you wouldn't use the same tone of voice with someone who's angry as you would with someone who's singing your praises. The same is true for how we approach our brand communications. Our collective voice should remain consistent from day to day, but our tone changes all the time depending on the situation, medium, and message.

Voice = Constant + Consistent

How we convey our distinct, high-level brand personality.

Tone = Situational + Adaptive

How we convey our member-centric, highly relational approach.

Why Voice & Tone Matter

Voice and tone are incredibly important to any organization, but they are especially important to a member-based services organization like ourselves. As a legacy brand that's over 100 years old, we thrive on our strong reputation and the high-quality, long-term relationships we build with our members.

As is true in any relationship, customers seek emotional connection, authenticity, trust, and consistency from AAA. Our voice—well-executed—helps strengthen and deepen these relationships, one interaction at a time.

Our Brand Voice

When we speak or write, we aim for a voice that sounds like...

Your Most Reliable Friend (Trusted Ally)

Our voice is that of a supportive, confident, knowledgeable peer who is always there when you need them. Someone who cares about your emotional well-being just as much as your physical well-being. A trusted ally who always gives the best, most practical advice. Someone who's got your back and will drop anything to help you in any and every way they can. The person who always picks up the phone. The one who's been by your side from the start.

What makes our voice unique? The voice of Your Most Reliable Friend is always...

PERSONABLE — We speak human-to-human vs. entity-to-human.

→ *Avoid: happy-go-lucky or pandering*

SUPPORTIVE — We offer quick encouragement and steady reassurance.

→ *Avoid: paternal or bossy*

CONFIDENT — We're established and know our stuff...and it shows.

→ *Avoid: arrogant or braggadocious*

RESPECTFUL — We deeply value our members and their experience.

→ *Avoid: stuffy or overly formal*

STRAIGHTFORWARD — We are clear and concise. We don't waste members' time.

→ *Avoid: harsh or curt*

CONVERSATIONAL — Our language is relevant and easy to understand.

→ *Avoid: long-winded or chatty*

CLUTCH — We adapt to every situation and always come through for members.

→ *Avoid: brash or inconsistent*

Getting Tone Right

Consistently using the right tone of voice is how we stand out as the relationship-driven, member-centric organization we are. The trick is to put yourself in your customer's shoes. Ask yourself questions like: *How would I feel in this situation? How would I want to be spoken to? How can I make sure this customer feels heard?* A little empathy goes a long way.

In oral and in-person communications, you may pay attention to things like body language and your actual tone of voice. In written communications, you don't have physical cues to convey additional depth and meaning to your audience. These high-level guidelines show how to adopt a tone that's appropriate for the situation.

When a member is experiencing...	We adopt a tone that's...
Fear, frustration, confusion	Reassuring Make sure they know we've got their back.
Urgency	Determined Let them know you're on it.
Anger, disappointment	Apologetic & Empathetic Express your apologies about the situation. Validate their feelings.
Gratitude, joy, satisfaction	Grateful Return positivity with positivity. When our members are happy, so are we!

Grammar & Style

Active voice

All our communications should aim for the active voice. In the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. In passive voice, the subject of the sentence has the action done to it. Using the active voice conveys a strong, clear tone—the passive voice sounds subtler, weaker, and less direct.

- ✗ New safety legislation was proposed.
- ✓ We proposed new safety legislation.

Capitalization

We use a few different forms of capitalization. “Title case” capitalizes the first letter of every word except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. “Sentence case” capitalizes the first letter of the first word. When writing out an email address or website URL, use all lowercase.

- ✓ bob@autoclubgroup.aaa.com
- ✓ aaa.com

Concise language

If there’s a shorter, simpler way to say something, say it that way. We strive to be as direct and forthcoming as possible for our busy customers. Our written and spoken language should cut through the clutter rather than contribute to it.

Contractions

As we seek to modernize and add warmth to our use of language, feel free to use contractions (we’ve, I’ve, I’m, we’re, etc.) in customer-facing communications. Consider the tone of the message, however. If the communication is more serious in nature, it might be appropriate to limit contractions.

Emoji and slang

We do not use emoji in any channel but social media. Even there, we use them sparingly and avoid any controversial or entendre-laden characters. We avoid slang on all channels—including social—but permit conversational, colloquial language if appropriate.

Pronouns

Use the collective “we” and “us” (aka the first-person plural) only when you’re truly referring to the organization as a whole or any of its goals, initiatives, policies, or procedures. Use “I” or “me” (aka the first-person singular) when you’re referring to any action, emotion, or communication you are personally responsible for.

✗ We’re so sorry to hear that.

✓ I’m so sorry to hear that.

✗ I will not stand for that type of experience.

✓ That is not the type of experience we stand for at AAA.

When interacting with customers, avoid referring to their gender if possible. If you know a person’s preferred pronouns, feel free to use he/his or she/hers. If you do not, refer to the singular “they.”

Punctuation

Ampersands: *Only in official titles, never as shorthand for “and.”*

Oxford comma: *Our standard style, AKA the serial comma.*

Semicolons: *Avoid as much as possible. Use only when necessary.*

Exclamation points: *Limit to one (1) per communication.*

Periods: *Don’t forget them! Use one (1) space before the next sentence begins.*

Refer to the [AP Stylebook](#) for how we treat all other writing style choices, including numbers, time, dates, money, and locations.

Channel-Specific Guides

Medallia Survey Follow-Up

Medallia is the customer service monitoring and analytics tool we use to track customer experiences across five areas of business: Insurance, Roadside Assistance, Travel, Digital, and Claims. We also use it to follow up with customers who have left freeform comments and questions in the final field of the survey. Closing the loop in is critical to making sure our members feel heard, valued, and able to maintain peace of mind.

Our Voice & Tone on Medallia Survey Follow-Up

The reality is that the majority of our follow-up emails will be crafted in response to negative experiences or questions that could or should have been answered elsewhere. Channeling the voice of “Your Most Reliable Friend,” written responses will need to focus on the qualities of being **respectful**, **supportive**, and **clutch**. The member we’re interacting with has likely been let down, and follow-up provides a huge opportunity for us to restore trust and brand affinity. Make sure to have a good grasp on the mental state of the feedback-giver and adjust your tone accordingly. Apologize, but focus on solutions.

Opportunities of this channel

- Closes the loop
- Ability to make things right
- Direct line of communication

Pay close attention to

- Showing you listened
- Calibrating your tone
- Focusing on solutions

5 Best Practices

1. **Read the feedback carefully and empathetically.**

The open-ended survey question allows customers to share their most personal thoughts and feelings—and sometimes just vent. Review their response carefully, noting every detail of their experience that went awry and how it made them feel.

2. **Craft a custom-tailored response.**

While it is OK to start with a response template, make sure you’re tailoring the tone and content to the individual person and their situation. Use our Brand Voice & Tone document as a guide.

3. Lead with empathy and apologies (if necessary).

Kick off the response by communicating that you truly listened; that you understand their issue and empathize with them. Take ownership for any mishaps on behalf of AAA. Keep apologies short and direct.

4. Focus on solutions.

The bulk of your response should focus on solutions. Emphasize what you *can* and *will* do, rather than what cannot be done or remedied. Perhaps the solution won't be exactly what they're asking for, but focusing on a remedy helps diffuse the situation.

5. Execute and follow up.

Once you've promised and/or agreed on a solution, implement it as soon as possible. Make sure to inform the customer once the solution is delivered or, if the process is more extensive, keep them abreast about the steps you're taking along the way.

Dos/Don'ts

- ✓ Do let them know you read their feedback
- ✓ Do apologize for any negative experience
- ✓ Do acknowledge the mistakes our company made
- ✗ Don't merely link to sites that answer questions; answer directly
- ✗ Don't disparage the company or the employees involved
- ✓ Do give a brief explanation of what may have gone wrong
- ✗ Don't include your personal opinion on the situation
- ✗ Don't be long-winded or overly defensive
- ✓ Do focus on solutions—immediate and ongoing
- ✓ Do offer an approved incentive, refund, or discount when necessary
- ✓ Do ask them to respond with further questions, comments, or concerns
- ✓ Do ensure your email aligns with our Company Voice
- ✗ Don't forget to check grammar and spell check before hitting "send"

Examples

Example 1: First-person plural (us/we) vs. first-person singular (I/me)

We were so happy to read your experience with Roadside Assistance was so positive! We're here to answer the question you submitted to us.

Instead of the above, make it more personal:

I was so happy to read your experience with Roadside Assistance was so positive! I'm writing to answer the question you submitted to us.

→ Takeaways: Since the call or email is clearly coming from you as an individual, make sure to express your emotions, feelings, and actions through the first-person singular (I/me/myself). If we use "we" for this type of expression, we risk coming off as a big, opaque, impersonal organization. The use of "us" is correct because the customer submitted a generic survey via one of our sites with our high-level branding.

Example 2: Strong subject lines are key

Subject Line: Re: Your customer experience survey response

Instead of the above, try this quick-hitting one:

Subject Line: Re: Your Issue with Roadside Assistance

→ Takeaways: Subject lines are a great spot for improving our clarity and straightforwardness. Avoid wasting members' time by describing what content is specifically found in the email vs. a generic, one-size-fits-all subject line.

Example 3: Avoid overly formal, old-fashioned language — especially on intro

Dear Sir,

I regret to have learned about your challenging experience with our Roadside Assistance program the other evening, Tuesday, September 12.

Instead of the above, make your language more active, simple, and personal:

Dear Bob,

I'm so sorry to hear about your terrible Roadside Assistance experience last week on Tuesday, 9/12.

→ Takeaways: It's important for our brand to avoid sounding stuffy and it's relatively easy to avoid. Make sure to always use members' names in the greeting. Don't shy away from contractions ("I'm" vs. "I am"). Feel free to shorten dates and refer to time in a more tangible, relatable way (by using markers like "last week"). Call the baby ugly if you need to ("terrible experience" vs. "challenging experience").

Example 4: Close by leaving the channel of communication wide open

I hope this plan resolves the issue for you. Let me know if you have any further questions, comments, or concerns. Happy to assist you in any and every way!

→ Takeaways: Avoid making customers feel as though we are merely pacifying them and shutting closing the conversation. As the Most Reliable Friend, we are always game for continued dialogue and want to reinforce our openness and helpfulness.

Glossary

Word List

The following is a list of keywords in their approved usage:

AAA

(never ACG or Auto Club Group in member-facing communication)

AAA Member

(capitalized when locked up with “AAA”)

email

(not e-mail)

homepage

(not home page)

internet

(not Internet)

member

(not capitalized when standalone, never customer or driver if speaking to a member)

OK

(not okay, ok, or O-K)

Roadside Assistance

(never RA, Emergency Roadside Assistance, or ERA)

username

(not user name)

website

(not web site or web-site)

WiFi

(not wifi or wi-fi)