



Canterbury
Christ Church
University

Tone of voice

Quick guide

We are **Canterbury Christ Church University**.

A place where **every person is welcomed, known, and valued**. An **educational experience** that meets **individual aspirations**, evolving workforce demands, and emerging societal challenges. What we deliver isn't just academic. It's transformative.

Our brand has evolved to reflect our **confidence** and **compassion**. It is more assured, dynamic and inclusive than ever before.

To help us bring our refreshed brand to life through what we say and how we say it, our tone of voice is evolving too.

Contents

Welcome to the short version of our Tone of Voice guide. It walks through all the key parts of our verbal brand and provides guidance to help anyone creating content on behalf of the University.

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Why our words matter

The words we choose to express ourselves hold immense power. They can unify our community, connect us with our audiences, and open us up to new people and partners. Done right, they do justice to our unique strengths and help build our reputation as an organisation.

The tone of voice we use impacts how we are viewed and remembered as a brand. Every phrase we select reflects not only our values and aspirations as a university but also the very essence of our identity. It contributes to us having a cohesive and impactful brand no matter who we are talking to.

Building trust

Consistency of voice establishes credibility and builds trust with our audiences because they know what to expect from us.

Creating connection

A consistent, authentic tone of voice allows us to create an emotional connection and maintain relationships with our audiences – inside the University and out.

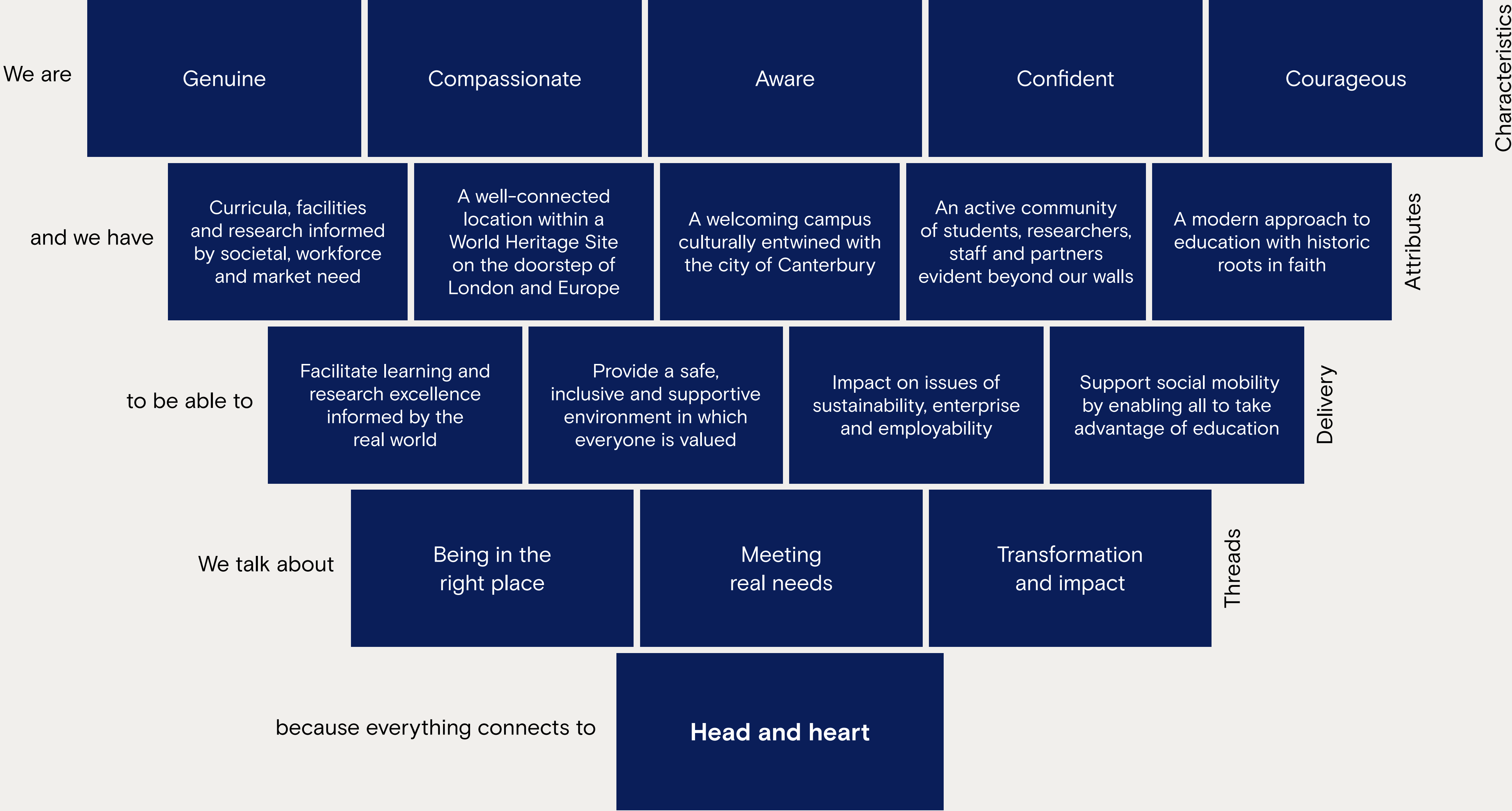
Gaining recognition

Working in harmony with our visual expression, a consistent tone of voice helps us to establish a distinct and recognisable brand identity.

Achieving differentiation

In the crowded HE sector, a unique and consistent tone of voice helps to set us apart from our competitors with confidence.

Our narrative pyramid



Our narrative pyramid

Our narrative pyramid brings together the building blocks that make up our brand. It covers what we are like as an organisation, what we have to offer and how we deliver our education. The pyramid is a useful tool for summarising the personality and themes in our content, and helps us to better tailor key messaging and creatives.

Our characteristics

Together these form our brand personality and are reflected in how we write, design, and communicate.

Our attributes

These are the bedrock of our offer and can be referred to across all types of content.

Our delivery

This is unique to us and we should underline it in what we communicate.

Our themes

These are reference points to help us to write all kinds of brand headlines, messaging, and content.

Our golden thread

This connects everything in our brand. It supports us in creating new concepts and ways of expressing ourselves.

What do we mean by “head and heart”?

At CCCU, we're led by head and heart in all that we do. We guide every student from potential to success, balancing community and belonging with ambition and employability.

We've long been known for our supportive and inclusive environment. But we also have many other successes that we should be proud of and speak about more confidently, such as our TEF Silver rating.

Leading with both head and heart means celebrating both of these sides of CCCU.

Our personality

As a brand, we are genuine, compassionate, aware, confident, and courageous. This is as much a reflection of our community as it is the University. These five characteristics are a distillation of our personality and should be reflected in how we sound as a brand.

We are genuine

What we mean

Human, authentic, relatable, a sense of commitment

What we don't mean

Bureaucratic, fussy, clinical

How does “genuine” sound?

We are deeply motivated by social mobility – closing the gap and enabling everyone to take advantage of education. In order to do this we must be human and relatable in how we talk.

Some tips

Authenticity first

The cornerstone of a genuine tone of voice is authenticity. Ensure that our communications are rooted in honesty and sincerity. Avoid exaggerations, false claims, or insincere language.

Speak to our audience's needs

Invest time in understanding our audience's preferences and aspirations. Tailor messaging to resonate with them on a personal level. Show genuine interest in their needs, and communicate how we address them.

Use relatable language

Speak in a language that our audiences can relate to. Avoid jargon and corporate-sounding or overly formal language that might create a barrier between us and who we're talking to. Instead, use words and phrases that feel accessible and understandable.

We are compassionate

What we mean

Empathy, warmth, support, collaboration

What we don't mean

Soft, gushing, disingenuous

How does “compassionate” sound?

Like when visiting our campus, we need to make people feel welcome. Talking with empathy and warmth helps our messaging to be human. It demonstrates the friendliness of the University, as well as our sense of pride in our community.

Some tips

Empathetic language

Ensure that the language we use reflects empathy and understanding. Acknowledge the feelings and experiences of our audience, showing that we genuinely care.

Positive and uplifting messaging

Focus on delivering messages that inspire hope, positivity, and comfort. Avoid using negative or judgmental language and instead use words and phrases that uplift and reassure.

Transparency

Maintain transparency in our communications. Avoid empty or insincere platitudes and instead, be genuine in our responses. When we are taking action to support a cause or address an issue, we should clearly communicate our intentions and progress.

We are aware

What we mean

Relevant, interested, informed, respectful

What we don't mean

Judgemental, overly critical, tentative

How does “aware” sound?

We speak with a level of mindfulness and understanding. Never jumping to conclusions or generalising. Showing we understand the world we occupy and responding to the challenges and opportunities around us.

Some tips

Do your research

Aim to foster a deep sense of understanding within our communications. Demonstrate awareness of the challenges, concerns, and aspirations of our audiences. Use language that shows we are in tune with the contemporary world around us.

Stay informed and inclusive

Ensure our brand's tone is inclusive and respectful of all individuals, regardless of their background or beliefs. Avoid divisive language and promote diversity and inclusivity in our messaging. Stay well-informed about current events, social issues, and cultural shifts.

Advocate responsibly

Advocate for causes that align with our ethos and resonate with our audiences. Remain balanced in our communications and avoid the spread of misinformation. Encourage meaningful conversations and positive change where can.

We are confident

What we mean

Assured, accomplished, successful, leading with conviction

What we don't mean

Aloof, arrogant, self-importance, boastful

How does “confident” sound?

A confident tone communicates the ethos and expertise that define CCCU, reinforcing the trust we place in our knowledge – and the trust others can place in us. We are self-assured and direct when we speak, reflecting CCCU's reputation in transforming lives and delivering real-world impact.

Some tips

Clear and authoritative language

Use clear and authoritative language that leaves no room for ambiguity. Express our messages with conviction and assertiveness. Avoid vague or uncertain phrases. Opt for straightforward and decisive wording.

Keep it digestible

We use straightforward language and clear headlines – eliminating unnecessary filler words. Maintain consistency in our messaging and only use language familiar to each communication's audience.

Celebrate successes

Don't be afraid to celebrate our successes, putting them front and centre. Make clear the relevance and broader impact of our innovations and achievements. Do justice to our people and the excellent work that happens here.

We are courageous

What we mean

Bold, prepared to be different, candid, truthful

What we don't mean

Disagreeable, confrontational, dismissive

How does “courageous” sound?

Our community aren't just changing their own lives for the better – they're improving the world. Let's not ignore or downplay the critical challenges being tackled, or our passion for sustainability. We can achieve by speaking boldly and fearlessly; capturing people's imagination and igniting our passion in others.

Some tips

Be bold and fearless

In the right moments, adopt a bold and fearless approach to communication. Use language that showcases a willingness to take risks, challenge the status quo, and push boundaries. Express our convictions and aspirations with confidence.

Inspire and motivate

Use words that encourage our audiences to step outside their comfort zones, embrace change, and take action. Share stories and messages that resonate with a sense of purpose and determination.

Embrace challenges

Acknowledge challenges, both internal and external, and address them head-on. Share our efforts to overcome obstacles transparently and demonstrate a willingness to learn from setbacks and mistakes.

Example messaging

Our recent Open Days campaign shows how these personalities can be used in a campaign across different audiences.

Audience	HTML banner	OOH	Social copy
Applicants in Kent	<p>Headline (slide 1) Forget Open Days</p> <p>Headline (slide 2) Come to our Answers Days.</p> <p>Supporting stat 1st in the UK for graduate employment</p> <p>Practical information 1 October Canterbury Campus 7 October Medway Campus</p> <p>CTA Book now</p>	<p>Headline Forget Open Days Come to our Answers Days.</p> <p>Supporting stat 1st in the UK for graduate employment</p> <p>CTA Book now: canterbury.ac.uk/answers</p>	<p>Thinking about Undergraduate study? Forget Open Days. Find everything you want to know at our Answers Day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1st in the UK for graduates in employment – World-leading research – Study locally
Parent/ guardian/ Influencer in Kent	<p>Headline (slide 1) Helping someone find the right university?</p> <p>Headline (slide 2) Forget Open Days</p> <p>Headline (slide 3) Come to our Answers Days.</p> <p>Supporting stat 1st in the UK for graduate employment</p> <p>Practical information 1 October Canterbury Campus 7 October Medway Campus</p> <p>CTA Book now</p>	<p>Headline Forget Open Days Come to our Answers Days.</p> <p>Supporting stat 1st in the UK for graduate employment</p> <p>CTA Book now: canterbury.ac.uk/answers</p>	<p>Is someone you know thinking about university?</p> <p>Forget Open Days. Find everything you want to know at our Answers Day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1st in the UK for graduates in employment – At the Heart of a UNESCO World Heritage city – World-leading research

Example messaging

The annotations shown opposite indicate how each element of the Open Days campaign messaging links back to our brand characteristics.

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Compassionate

Courageous

Genuine

Confident

Aware

Our audiences

Our audiences are diverse. We've put together a list of the most common audiences we speak to, along with suggestions for varying the tone, formality, and content used.

Audience segment	Prioritise tone and formality on...	Prioritise content on...
Students		
Undergraduate (UG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keeping language conversational – Being ambitious and inviting – Being supportive 	<p>Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Courses available – Culture and community – Student life – Reputation – Employability and prospects – Location and facilities – Explaining the process and how university works – Affordability and funding <p>Current student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Academic studies – Services and support – Student life and opportunities – Careers and employability – Wellbeing, community and belonging
Postgraduate (PG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A more mature tone than UG/International – Being empathetic to balancing study with work/life – Being more formal when talking about subject-specific content 	<p>Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Courses available – Advancing your career – Flexible or part-time study – Professional networks and expertise – Affordability and funding <p>Current student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Research Support – Networks – Academic studies – Services and support – Student life and opportunities – Careers and employability – Wellbeing, community and belonging
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using language understood by non-native English speakers – Being warm and friendly – Being reassuring 	<p>Recruitment</p> <p>The points above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Region specific requirements – Application process – Safety, heritage and attractiveness of Canterbury – Links to London and the world <p>Current student</p> <p>The points above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Living and studying in the UK – Compliance requirements
Parents/guardians/influencers of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keeping language concise and informative – Being nurturing and warm – Being empathetic to the worries of parents/guardians/influencers 	<p>Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reputation – Transport links – Safety <p>Current student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support and wellbeing – Employability and prospects – Affordability and funding

Our audiences

Think about formality as a sliding scale. The same message that is considered formal for our student audience may not be formal enough for an academic audience. There will also be times when the same audience requires different levels of formality.

Audience segment	Prioritise tone and formality on...	Priotise content on...
Non-students		
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A more formal tone than student audiences – Ensuring we use subject and industry-language – Talking confidently about our research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Connecting to real-world impact – Research publications – Researchers and facilities – Research partnerships
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Speaking confidently to position CCCU as experts – Demonstrating CCCU is rooted in the business world – Get to the point quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supporting information with financial data – Business case studies – Collaboration and networks – Facilities and expertise
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using clear language that's easy to process – Building trust through consistent messaging – Understanding what's effective by asking for feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Long-term strategies – Employee benefits – News and announcements – Recognising excellence
Teachers/school/college staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using clear language that's easy to process – Showing we're supportive and inclusive of all – Being friendly and open for engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Courses available – Reputation – Employability and prospects – Location and facilities – Pathways to university

First or third person

For official announcements of high importance:

- Write in the third person i.e. the University
- Avoid emotive punctuation like exclamation points or ellipses unless they are being referenced
- Don't let a formal tone become convoluted
- Keep it concise and easy for the audience to digest

For less formal communications where we want to build audience engagement:

- Write in the first person i.e. we
- Stay concise and organise content into a clear structure
- Stay objective and avoid subjective opinions
- Keep it professional; avoid any language that could be misinterpreted

How we describe ourselves

The following copy can be used to introduce our brand, who we are and what we stand for.

The beating heart of opportunity

At Canterbury Christ Church University we go beyond the expected. Here, every person is welcomed, known, and valued. When the world changes, we respond. Advancing knowledge and guiding every student from potential to success.

Based in one of the UK's most iconic cities, we're defining the modern educational experience to meet individual aspirations, to meet individual aspirations, evolving workforce demands and emerging societal challenges.

How we describe ourselves

Naming conventions

We have a proud heritage. Our name represents both our roots and how far we have come. It's important we use the correct name to represent our brand and avoid confusion.

Our full name

Canterbury Christ Church University

Avoid referring to ourselves as:

- Canterbury University
- Christ Church

Exceptions

Christ Church should not be used in isolation unless as part of an established group, i.e. Christ Church Students' Union.

Capitalising "University"

When referring to ourselves the word "University" must be capitalised.

"The University's next Open Day is in September."

Can we say "CCCU"?

Yes, it's OK to say CCCU as long as it's obvious to the audience what it stands for. Use the table below as a guide.

	Internal audiences (staff and students)	External audiences
Canterbury Christ Church University	✓ All communications	✓ All communications
CCCU	✓ All communications, except very formal messaging. For example, qualifications or important notifications.	✓ Communications that exist in spaces that we have clear ownership of, for example, our campuses or website ✓ Long-form content when we want to avoid repeating our full name. For example, in a content with a lot of text like a report, blog, brochure or prospectus you can use our full name the first time followed by our acronym in brackets: Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) After this, the acronym alone can be used: CCCU

Dos and don't Capitalisation

Lowercase

The following words should always be lower/sentence case:

- academic schools (general term)
- am/pm
- applicant days
- biology labs, sports labs
- campus e.g. “our campuses”
- clinical skills suite
- degree apprenticeships
- doctorate
- e.g.
- etc.
- foundation degree
- government
- halls, halls of residence
- higher and degree apprenticeships
- library
- postgraduate
- sports arena
- student records
- subject areas e.g. “our accounting and finance courses”
- undergraduate
- university/universities (in general)
- [the] University (referring to CCCU)
- year 12 (year groups at school)

Note: normally items in a list like this should be capitalised. See “Bullet points and numbered lists” below for more information.

All caps and initial caps

The following words have some form of capitalisation:

- A levels
- BTEC
- Buildings and facility names
e.g. The Verena Holmes Building
- CCCU locations e.g. Medway Campus, Canterbury Campus
- Clearing
- Course titles e.g. Accounting and Finance or BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance
- Faculties, Schools and Centres
e.g. School of Teacher Education
- GCSE
- National Insurance Number
- NHS
- Offer Holder Days
- Open Days
- SU/Students’ Union
- Team names e.g. Marketing Team

Acronyms

Always spell acronyms out in full, with the acronym in brackets for the first time you use it. No full stops. The only exceptions are for organisations that are so universally well-known that there’s no need to explain:

- A&E
- BBC
- CCTV
- GCSE
- GMT
- NHS
- NUS

Titles and headings

Capitalise the first word in a title or heading:

A welcome message from our Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Seasons

Only capitalise a season if it’s part of an official day: “Winter Open Day”

The rest of the time seasons should not be capitalised: “spring, summer, autumn, winter”

Dos and don't Punctuation

Ampersands (&)

Use “and” instead of an ampersand for course titles, Schools, Faculties, buildings. E.g “Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education”.

Apostrophes

Only use these to indicate ownership or a contraction, never in plurals:

- Dos and don'ts
- FAQs
- Students' Union
- The University's heritage

Brackets

(If it's a full sentence, the full stop is inside the brackets.) In a sentence that contains a detail in brackets, (the full stop is after the brackets).

Bullet points and numbered lists

Introduce your list with a colon.

For a list of short items, capitalise each one but do not use a full stop.

For example:

- Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education
- Faculty of Medicine, Health and Social Care
- Faculty of Science, Engineering and Social Sciences

For lists where each item is longer, resembling a full sentence, use a full stop. For example:

- Your household income is £25,000 per year or less.
- You have provided your consent for the Student Loans Company (SLC) to share this information with the University.
- Your fees for each year of study are more than £6,165 (full-time) or £4,625 (part-time).

For bullets after headings, you don't need a colon. If items in the list are full sentences, use a capital letter and full stop.

Commas

Only use commas where they're needed – or a dash (not a hyphen) if it fits better. If you've added a lot of commas because a sentence is too long, see if you can rephrase your writing into shorter sentences.

The Oxford comma

Use the Oxford comma as a final comma in a list of things:

- We have locations in Canterbury, Medway, and Royal Tunbridge Wells.
- James, Nicole, and Isaac live on King Street.
- First-year students must work on their research, writing, editing, and revising.

Ellipses

They can be used to create a dramatic effect in writing, suggesting there is more to come. But be mindful not to use them too much, as this can start to imply confusion or hesitation.

Exclamation marks

Avoid the use of these too unless you really do mean to shout.

Hyperlinks

They should be clearly differentiated from other web copy through the use of colour, a bold font weight or underlining. Never write “click here” or “read more” because it's confusing for audiences who use screen readers.

When using a canterbury.ac.uk URL on printed communications make sure it's short and simple with no hyphens. Never include “https://” and “www.” if the URL you want to use on your print is too long or complex, speak to the Marketing Team who can create a shortened version that redirects to the right page.

brand@canterbury.ac.uk

Dos and don't Punctuation

Hyphenation

- Cooperation
- Cutting-edge
- Email
- Full-time
- Industry-standard
- Log-in with your login details
- Online
- Part-time
- Postgraduate
- Real-world experience
- Undergraduate
- Up-to-date
- Timetable
- Vice-Chancellor
- World-class

Italics

Only use for disclaimers or captions.

Bold text

This helps to structure content. For example on titles, headings, and labels.

It can also be used very occasionally to draw attention to important text in a sentence. For example, a date or words like “do not”. Only make a few words bold, rather than the entire sentence. Too much bold sentence text can have the opposite effect, making messages confusing.

Spaces after full stops

Only use one space after a full stop.

Quotation marks

Most of the time double quotation marks are used. This includes:

For direct speech and quotes:

- “The library will be open tomorrow,” she said.

For drawing attention to a specific word or phrase:

- Remember to bring your “proof of address” that’s on file.

Use a colon to introduce reported text quotes:

- They said: “We will soon be releasing our Vision 2030 strategy.”

Use single quotation marks for a quote within a quote:

- “He always used to say ‘good morning’ when I saw him.”

Dos and don't Numbers and times

Contact details

Always write these in list format rather than embedded amongst the copy. It's much harder to read.

Telephone numbers

For UK-only audiences split telephone numbers into two parts:

01227 927700

Numbers for international audiences must include the UK dialling code '+44 (0)' and be split the phone number into three parts:

+44 (0)1227 927700

Addresses

Our campus addresses should ideally be written across multiple lines. If this is not possible use commas to separate different parts of the address:

Canterbury Christ Church University
North Holmes Rd
Canterbury
CT1 1QU

Add a Google Maps link when using them online.

Times

Show the time in 12 hours using am or pm:

Monday to Friday 10am – 5pm

Weekends 10am – 5pm

Dates

Write dates in the British style of day–month–year, but without abbreviations after the date, such as –th or –st. Use the month in full wherever character limits and space allow and give all the digits for the year: 25 September 1990.

If the day of the week is needed, do not use a comma: Friday 1 March.

Write the 1980s, not the eighties, 80s or 80's. There's no apostrophe.

Use numerals for centuries: in the 19th century.

Numbers

Use words up to and including ten, numerals for 11 upwards (except for centuries where we use numerals throughout).

Numbers in the thousands have a comma only if there are five or more figures: 5000, 50,000, 500,000.

Spell out round numbers in text: a thousand years ago, a hundred times.

Currency

Amounts written in their variations as follows:

- £100 million or £100m
(not 100 million pounds)
- £1,962
- £122.79
- 27p

Dos and don't Spelling and useful terms

A or an

Use 'an' before words starting with a, e, i, o, u or silent h, e.g. 'an honours degree'.
Otherwise use 'a' – a module, a subject.

A lot

Not 'alot'.

Affect or effect

In general, use 'affect' as a verb and 'effect' as a noun:

- Sound effects
- Cause and effect
- Does part-time study affect my funding?
- The weather may affect the experiment

Compass points

When used as a place name capitalise but do not hyphenate:

"Visit our campus in the South East."

When used as a direction hyphenate but do not capitalise:

"Head south-east on the motorway."

Ise or ize

Avoid 'ize', which is the American spelling.

Its or it's

'Its' for possession.

'It's' for the contraction 'it is'.

Less or fewer

Use 'fewer' to refer to people or things in plural – or 'less' for things that can't be counted or don't have plurals:

- Fewer applicants
- Fewer students
- Less money
- Less time

Licence or license

"Licence is the noun and 'license' is the verb.

Practice or practise

"Practice" is the noun and "practise" is the verb.

While or whilst

"Whilst" is used in British English.

Spell checking

We recommend using your software's spell checking tool. Ensure it's set to British English and review any suggestions first in case they conflict with this guide.

We hope this quick guide helps you to feel confident in creating messaging for our updated brand. Please contact us if you have any questions or require more support.

Contact

brand@canterbury.ac.uk