

Choose your words carefully

Writing warm, friendly text to engage potential parents

“I don't know the rules of grammar*... If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language, the language they use every day, the language in which they think. We try to write in the vernacular.”

David Ogilvy

Known as “the father of advertising”

This week's message is vital. The text on your website needs to not only inform people but engage them in a warm, friendly way.

Write to a friend.

When you sit at your computer, imagine you are sitting in your living room talking to a friend. Write as though you are sharing with him/her.

- Write in first person.
- Write in an active, not passive, tense.
- Forget you have a "caps lock" key—text in all uppercase is hard to read and looks like you're shouting.
- Use bold sparingly.

Do **not** imagine you are an attorney trying to answer every possible question and close every possible loophole.

The two examples come from student handbooks, not websites. In fact, I do not recommend listing your financial policies on your website. But I think they are good examples of the differences in writing styles.

Friendly example (from a student handbook, not a website):

"Our goal is for no child to be turned away because of finances. Of course, we have bills to pay and a budget to balance in order to keep our doors open. But we believe we are partners with God and our families in providing Christian education to all students and families who want to be here.

"This takes commitment from our school to being fiscally responsible and helping families find and apply for all available scholarships. And it takes your commitment to prioritizing your child's education in your family's budget."

Not so friendly example (from a student handbook and website--cringe):

"The following financial policies have been adopted by the school board. Strict adherence to these policies is imperative to the best interest of the student and school."

Review every word and comma.

Sounding friendly and sounding educated are not mutually exclusive. You still need to proofread carefully to ensure your grammar and punctuation are correct--and ideally have another person review your copy as well.

*Ogilvy was awarded two scholarships: Fettes College, Edinburgh and Christ Church, Oxford. I suspect he did know grammar.

Delegating:

All of this can be delegated, but I would read samples of someone's writing before sharing this task.

Binder tab: June

School size: All

Marketing process step:

- 1) Who are we?
- 2) What do families want?
- 3) What needs to change?
- 4) How do we tell our community?
- 5) How do we track results?