

# Tips & best practices for writing

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# Tips & best practices for writing

Share your story and your organizing in a way that's clear, concise, and respectful. But most of all, write like a human.

## What are two things I need to know?

Pick one point to make per post and be as real as possible—write like a human, not a machine.

Your content should look and sound like something you could actually, semi-plausibly send someone in your everyday life without it seeming really strange (the style, if not the content).

## How should I think about who I'm talking to?

You should be focused on empowering people to help make their voices heard in our democracy. That means treating your readers like grown-ups, not wasting their time, and always reflecting their voice and their values. You're also helping to build a brand for this movement—so be a good brand ambassador.



## What kind of tone should my writing have?

You want everyone who interacts with your writing to feel inspired, hopeful, and motivated to take action.

Always err on the side of plain speech and avoid grandstanding or hyperbole. Try to think of your writing as no-nonsense, but also warm, inclusive, and optimistic. Strive for a tone of voice that is friendly, smart, and simple.

## Are there marketing tactics I should be using?

Don't talk like a marketing company if you're not a marketing company, talk like a human! Everything we write is by a person, for a person. Real stories are what matter, not clickbait. At the same time, keep things professional—you want to be viewed as a mature, credible adult, after all.

## How can I express my outrage appropriately?

Your voice should strive to be the grown-up in the room—a voice of sanity and common sense amid all the other noise on the internet.

Your writing should never be shrill or cynical, and



rarely snarky. It can convey righteous indignation and legitimate outrage, but it's never petulant.

Every piece of content that we send should strive to capture the feeling of a moment.

## How do I make my writing stand out more?

Writing something driven by emotion—hope, joy, determination, anger, frustration, sadness—is the way you cut through noise and move someone to action.

You want your posts to make someone think “Yes, that’s it exactly.” To do that, we should break convention (even the rules we set for ourselves, when the situation calls for it) and reject anything that sounds like a color-by-numbers piece of email marketing.

## Questions you should ask before writing

**It’s usually a good idea to clarify your purpose and target audience before writing, but here are a few other questions you should be asking yourself:**

- How can my post be part of the very best experience that people can have in this moment?
- Is this going to give people a meaningful way to take part in this moment?
- How does this post help our movement?



# 10 tips for better writing

## **1. Be casual, but not too casual.**

Do we use words like “totally” and “super”? Absolutely. Do we like exclamation marks and short, personal posts? Yes. Do we refer to our volunteers and supporters as “Bro” or drop an LOL at the end of a sentence? No. We want to be comfortable with our readers, but in a smart, respectful, professional way. Also try to read your post from the perspective of people with different backgrounds and points of view to gut-check your assumptions about what’s relatable vs. what might be perceived as offensive.

## **2. Be accurate.**

Being casual doesn’t mean we’re careless—we proofread everything. Check spelling. Check stats. Check sources. Then check them again. We want to be recognized as legitimate voices on these issues and as spokespeople for a movement, so when talking about them, OFA programs, or breaking news, triple check everything.

## **3. Be friendly.**

We generally treat everyone as peers. Anytime you write something, think: “How would I phrase this if it were going to my best friend?” We love it when communications feel personal and real (while still being clear that we’re a reputable organization).



#### **4. Be positive.**

Progress can be sloooow. And frustrating. Talking about the challenges we face can really put a damper on things. But we never want anyone to feel powerless or hopeless. We always try to end communications on a positive note. Be honest about harsh realities, but also try to also talk about what we can do to change things and how much better our society works when people are engaged and taking action in politics, government, and their communities.

#### **5. Be inspirational.**

Asking folks to step up and give their time and energy can seem like a lot. So whenever possible, try to give notes of inspiration and support. Make the reader feel like their action matters—because it does. Make them feel like they can be the hero, too, even if it may feel small—because you never know where that may lead. Think about how you'd describe your organizing to your mom or dad—then write that down. Our goal is that every little interaction with OFA will make people feel hopeful.

#### **6. Be clear.**

Transparency is a big part of what we believe. Of course, it refers to our reporting and our promise to tell our audiences the truth. But it's bigger than that, too. Always make your language simple and easy to understand. Provide folks with the right information if you can—don't send



people somewhere else. Don't complicate things unnecessarily. Just be as clear as possible.

### **7. Be brief.**

People are busy. Respect their time. Say what you need to say, then stop writing.

### **8. Use can, not will.**

When talking about our issues or organizing, and the impact individuals can have, never guarantee results. We don't know in advance exactly how the politics of an issue we work on will evolve, or how much life will change once a policy is implemented. Instead, talk about the amazing things our society can achieve when we all work together or when we implement the principles and tools of organizing.

### **9. Talk about real people.**

Connect your audience to the real people we're trying to help and those volunteering and organizing in the field. We tell stories about real people, with names and families. When you're talking about a community, talk about them in a way that will help your audience feel connected to the people they're helping, even when they're strangers.

### **10. Be interesting. People don't share "meh."**

In case it doesn't go without saying: We should never send something that's not interesting. So,



rather than updating your followers on what you had for breakfast, write posts you'd actually want to read. Write posts that your friends would look forward to reading.

**Experiment. If you see an opportunity to be creative or try something new, take it.**

Much of the time, we're talking to people who are on the same side of the issues. But not always! Know who your audience is, and find the right way to connect with them. Try to lean into any shared values that you can identify with that audience.

**Write to peers, not students—but don't assume people know as much as you do, either.**

In a similar vein, all communications should start from a presumption that the person on the receiving end of this is already somewhat familiar with the subject. That doesn't mean we shouldn't explain things clearly and completely, but the tone of the message should be as if writing to a peer, not a student.

**Avoid using “we” in a way that others people.**

Make sure you don't structure sentences so that you're creating a division between OFA and your supporters. This movement is about all of “us,” together. So it's “*Can you help build something...?*” rather than “*Can you help us build something...?*” If you're going to use “we”, use it when referring to all Americans.



## Pro-Tip #1:

Keep it short and pick one point per post. To keep your content focused and prevent it from getting too long, try picking one idea per post to get across rather than combining multiple topics into one.

Remember that Twitter only allows for up to 140 characters in each post. And you'll have less space if you want to include a link, so try to keep your posts concise. You can always write another tweet!

## Pro-Tip #2:

Remember to use hashtags and handles to plug into the right conversations and make sure your post can be seen by other organizations and supporters.

[Learn more about using hashtags and handles →](#)

## Pro-Tip #3:

Facebook and Twitter both suggest that including a photo or a video drives more engagement with content, so try including a visual element like a photo, a graphic, a well-cropped screenshot, or a video. Twitter will allow you to attach up to four images with each post and Facebook and Instagram



will let you attach even more. Most platforms also offer editing tools to crop, filter, and adjust your photos before your post. Use these tools to make your photos (and your events) look their best!

[Learn more about how to capture the best moments on camera →](#)

**If you have feedback on this guide or would like to see other topics covered in future toolkits, email us at [organizing@ofa.us](mailto:organizing@ofa.us)**

