Ensuring your written marketing material ‘speaks’ with the RMIT voice.

This copywriting guide is here to make your job easier.

It contains advice and examples on how to present your written marketing communications in a way that is consistent with the RMIT brand positioning and ensure that your marketing copy ‘speaks with the RMIT voice’.

While the RMIT Visual Identity Manual helps you incorporate the visual aspect of the University’s branding into your marketing communications, this guide explains how to write copy in the brand tone of voice.

A strong, consistent brand will differentiate RMIT from competitors, define our values, share the culture, and most importantly, give people an emotional connection to the University.

By adhering to the principles set out here, not only will you find it easier to produce more effective marketing material, you’ll also be playing a part in the building of an iconic brand.

This supplement is to be used in conjunction with the RMIT Visual Identity Manual and the RMIT Writing Style Guide.
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SECTION 1
The Brand

What is a Brand?

A brand is an exciting, living entity that performs a dynamic and vital function. That function is to accurately represent the spirit and essence of the product or service it is promoting, to all kinds of different audiences so that there is clear understanding of exactly what it is that that product or service is.

For example, the brand of a Swiss watch manufacturer would need to reflect meticulousness and precision.

The brand of a theme park would need to embody fun and excitement.

Brand imagery plays a major role in making sure that the audience receives the right cues when considering a brand communication.

As example of this, the use of technological imagery supports the Swiss manufacturer’s brand values of meticulousness and precision.

Visuals of families enjoying daring and exciting rides communicate the excitement of the theme park.

Just as important as the visual language applied to the brand, is the written language you use when preparing written material for marketing purposes. The style of copywriting that you employ not only helps to inform, but also assists in defining the brand personality of the product or service for which you are preparing that material.

For example, the language and style of copywriting you would use to present information for a retirement village would be dramatically different to the language used to promote a New Year’s Eve party at a popular nightclub, and different again to the language employed to encourage young children to participate in a colouring competition.

This discerning use of language creates a ‘tone of voice’ for the product/service that is being written about.

In turn, this tone of voice then supports the desired perception of the brand, product or service.

So for the retirement village communications your tone of voice would be: Credible, empathetic, professional, caring so as to reflect credible, caring and professional brand values.

As example, a headline within a brochure may read: ‘Join a caring community with over 20 years proven service.’

For the NYE nightclub party it would be: Exciting, hip, stylish, contemporary so as to reflect the ‘so hot right now’/social leadership brand values of the nightclub.

As example, a headline for an invitation postcard may read: ‘(Heart symbol) NYE at Kaz Bar.’

And for the colouring competition it would be: Fun, simple so as to reflect the fun and accessible brand values of the kids’ product/service.

As example, a headline for the colouring in flyer may read: ‘Win hot prizes with your cool picture!’

This same principle applies when you are writing copy for any marketing materials for RMIT.

The language you use, and the tone of voice you adopt, will reinforce what the RMIT brand stands for.

Before you can begin writing your copy, you need to have those RMIT brand values top of mind.
Understanding the RMIT Brand

By keeping the following key messages in mind, you will be able to adopt the correct mind-set with which to prepare your copy for marketing communications.

**Brand promise**—The unique and tangible difference that sets RMIT apart from other educators and researchers.

RMIT enables individuals to fulfill their personal destinies within a fast changing, connected world, by developing creative minds able to solve real life issues.

**Conceptual target**—The student/business personality type who will derive the most benefit from an RMIT experience.

Independent thinkers who approach life with the desire to leave their own original mark.

**Personality traits**—Those attributes that best describe RMIT and its emotional dimension.

Connected, Fearless, Ingenious, Liberal, With an edge

By writing your marketing copy with these key brand attributes driving your tone of voice, you will assist readers understand exactly what RMIT stands for.

Like-minded brands

To better understand the RMIT brand let’s compare it to established brands that hold similar brand values.

If your marketing communications have a similar feel to those of the brands below, chances are you’re on the right track.

**Apple**

Apple’s use of language is always confident, smart, brief and ‘hip’ to reflect its status as a leader and innovator. But it is never flippant – there are always plenty of technological features presented to ensure product credibility.

Copy example from apple.com for the new iPod nano:

*Now you can shake, shuffle, and roll.*

Give your iPod nano a shake and it shuffles to another song in your library — thanks to the built-in accelerometer. And you can turn it sideways to view your albums in Cover Flow.

*Curved ahead of the curve.*

For those about to rock, we give you nine amazing colors. But that’s only part of the story. Feel the curved, all-aluminum and glass design and you won’t want to put iPod nano down.

**Virgin**

Virgin’s use of language is always individual, sassy, confident, smart, brief and ‘hip’ to reflect its status as a leader and innovator. Its use of language also helps to ‘invite’ members into its exclusive club – if you get and appreciate the sense of wit used in the communication, then Virgin is YOUR airline.

Example of poster headline at Brisbane airport:

*Laptops must be removed from carry bags. (Bikini tops are fine)*

Conversely QANTAS now position themselves in every communication as a truly professional service that delivers service and comfort.
Bringing the brand to life

Another way to get a good handle on how the brand should ‘speak’ is to think of the brand as a person.

If you think of well known industry leaders and thinkers, people who fit well with RMIT include:

Steve Jobs—Apple CEO. Visionary, innovative, humanist, challenging convention to deliver better outcomes for business and communities.

Noam Chomsky—Philosopher/Linguist/Political activist/Author. Challenges convention to ensure that society challenges “truths”.

Edward De Bono—Physician/Author/Inventor/Consultant. Challenges the way we think, the way we approach the most simple of tasks to ensure that we approach things with an open mind, so as to allow exploration and discovery of new, better ways of doing things. De Bono’s credited with the discovery of ‘lateral thinking’.

Baz Luhrmann—Film Director/Stage Director. Famous for producing film blockbusters which sit outside of stereotypical film thinking, yet strike a chord with movie audiences. Think an innovative, creative, visually dazzling approach to film.

Richard Branson—Virgin founder and CEO. He is innovative. Irreverent. Adventurous. Spirited. Intelligent. Richard Branson has made his career, and business empire, through always looking for more appropriate product and service solutions for communities. By challenging convention and delivering fresh thinking, Virgin has revolutionised many of the business areas they now operate within.

These personalities will also hopefully spark ideas of leaders you know of that also reflect RMIT values.

Be confident, challenging, dynamic, intelligent and innovative. Getting a handle on who the RMIT ‘person’ is can assist you to write your marketing material with a consistent RMIT voice.

Imagine any of these industry leaders speaking the words you write. Would they sound natural? Do they reflect how exciting and compelling undertaking learning, training and research at RMIT is? That’s your challenge.
Tone of voice

The tone of voice of a piece of writing is the equivalent of a personality. Apple’s tone of voice is quietly confident. They make their point simply and cleverly. Virgin’s tone of voice is more intimate. They connect with their audience by speaking as friends would.

The RMIT tone of voice should reflect our brand personality traits: connected, fearless, ingenious, with an edge.

That’s not to say you simply use these words in your sentences. It means your writing should embody our personality traits by being direct, positive, concise, empowering and motivational. It should sound authoritative but friendly. And, of course, it should sound excited about sharing information that can transform people’s lives.

But enough of theory already, here are some practical examples to give you even more of an idea on how to prepare your communications material.

Writing program information/descriptions for marketing purposes

To ensure your use of marketing copy is as exciting, direct, arresting and individual as the new RMIT visual look and feel is, you need to ensure it speaks to your audience in an inspiring way.

Front Cover/Hero Information

The program name, interest area/discipline, qualification title and year all need to appear on the front cover so as to clearly communicate the actual course offering.

For example, if you were to prepare marketing copy for a fictitious Basketweaving discipline, the following text information outlining the overall discipline and the individual degrees available to study within that discipline, would be required to be clearly displayed as follows:

- Basketweaving
  - Underwater Basketweaving
  - Applied Basketweaving
  - Basketweaving Planning

Degree
2010

In support of this information, you would also need to create a simple, evocative headline to assist your course information guide to strike a genuine chord with your intended audience.

By doing this, you will be able to demonstrate to this audience that you have a greater understanding of who they are, and what their career/training aspirations are; more so than any of the other educational and training providers they are considering.

This headline should speak as directly to your target audience as the new RMIT imagery does, and should focus on either:

- a key belief that the target audience has about themselves and their career aspirations

or:

- a key benefit of completing the course, either personal or professional.
If we again take ‘Basketweaving’ as an example.
Those interested in basketweaving are individuals attuned to the practical and aesthetic possibilities of manipulating three dimensional space to create something both functional and decorative.
Therefore a headline could be something like:
‘I am shaping my own future’
A simple statement, it communicates:
• Individuality
• A key aspect of the specific field/discipline of interest – i.e. ‘shape’
• Aspiration
• Confidence
• Successful outcome from doing the course
Other appropriate headlines would be:
‘I am constructing new possibilities’
‘I am changing the shape of the future’
‘I am placing a new twist on tradition’

Inside front page/introduction
You also need to write a short, simple, confident introduction to the program.
This introduction should:
• Demonstrate that you understand the key interests of those that typically enrol in this course.
• Show an understanding of current industry practices by briefly listing what kind of industries hire qualified professionals.
• Identify kinds of careers available to graduates.
• Specify in a broad sense the training RMIT provides that helps graduates meet the requirements of industry.
As an example, here is how the introduction copy could be presented:
Inside front page copy
You have a plan to shape a career in the world of basketweaving.
You’re keen to learn the rules so that you can break them.
You’re anxious to apply your own twist to the findings of experts, past and present.
Craving the opportunity to share thinking with like-minded peers.
And searching for the ideal environment to do it all in.
Welcome to RMIT Basketweaving.
A major supplier of new talent to the national and international basketweaving industries, RMIT provides you with all the skills, knowledge, experience and confidence you need to make your mark on the basketweaving industry as a graduate.
And whether it's designing a greener basket, a new kind of basket, or seeking new materials from which to make baskets from, RMIT will provide you with a solid framework from which you can build your career.
Further examples
The following marketing copy provides an example of how to write on brand for RMIT communications that require longer copy.

Example 1—Engineering

Engineers

I am making it happen

From the biggest idea to the simplest modification, the opportunity to change the world around you gets your adrenalin pumping.

And whether it's improving what already exists, or dreaming up something new altogether, you can’t think of a better way of spending your time than planning, developing, creating and building solutions.

Which is exactly what engineers do.

Turning discoveries into solutions, and transforming those solutions into everything from building bridges to sending people to Mars, engineers make it happen!

What is engineering?

As an engineer, you’ll work to change and improve the world you live in. The benefits of engineers' work are all around you - from the home you live in, to the food you eat; from the medical care you receive, to the cars that you drive.

Engineers steer tomorrow's products and services and provide solutions today. In a rapidly changing world, engineers can provide solutions to the myriad of problems our communities face, and as such are amongst the most employable professionals in the world.

What engineers do?

Aerospace engineers are working on sending humans to Mars.

Civil engineers are using foam walls to give the Indy 500 Speedway safer curves.

Chemical engineers have developed a spray-on skin that can be used on wounds far from medical help.

Computer engineering students have developed a system designed to maximise the efficiency of water use at a time when water is a dwindling resource.

Electrical engineers develop the fibre optics that change the way information is processed.

Mechanical engineering turns stuttering engines into F1 super rockets.

What kinds of projects do engineers get involved with?

As well as providing bridges and roads (and the cars that cross them), airports and landing strips (and planes that land on them), engineers are also able to help shape the communities we live in.

Daniel Algamor, through his organisation, Engineers Without Borders, is putting his engineering skills to use and helping people around the world.

“The organisation allows young engineers to contribute to and make improvements to the lives of disadvantaged people through mainly small building projects around the world.”
“We roll up our sleeves and get out there, on the job. We’ve supplied wind turbines for electricity to remote regions in Nepal. We’ve set up computers for refugees in Australia. We’ve provided a computer centre for orphans in India.

“Last year, we took a team to a Thai village and installed a simple sand filter—similar to one you’d use in your backyard swimming pool—that now provides the village with clean drinking water and has reduced diseases the people of the village suffered from the contaminated water source.

“Engineers do build rockets and cars, and computers and phone networks, but we also solve problems by applying our skills to everyday problems and finding solutions. If you were stuck on a desert island, you’d want an engineer there with you!”

More Engineers needed

In Australia, $30 billion in infrastructure projects commenced in 2006, including $10 billion in roads. In Victoria alone, civil construction currently delivers over $2.5 billion of work annually. Of course, the ability to actually deliver on projects is dependant on having people with the right skills. With engineers in short supply, the capacity to deliver on projects is already being adversely impacted by this skills shortage.

‘Recruitment firms are looking at the United Kingdom and Europe in an attempt to fill vacancies and councils are struggling to recruit engineers to work on infrastructure.’

The Age, date here

Virtual Reality Centre

Simulating new buildings, cars and more, RMIT University’s Virtual Reality Centre was the first commercial virtual reality centre to be set up in Australia.

The $3 million Virtual Reality Centre builds on RMIT’s tradition of ‘real world’ education and research.

Visual simulation is one of the fastest growing areas of the computer industry—and one of the most exciting. It allows you to simulate a new building before it has been built. The owner could then lead a tour through it and sell space within that facility, as well as choosing colours and furnishings, or checking design or safety issues in a way which is easy to change digitally, saving enormous amounts of time and money.

Within moments, the virtual reality room can be converted from simulating a car, to simulating the view from a helicopter, to a virtual reality environment for rehearsing brain surgery, or even a prototype environment for developing and testing the latest theme park ride.

Career paths

Aerospace engineers—Design manufacturing, Defence technology, Airlines aviation

Civil engineers—Project management, Construction, Transport infrastructure

Chemical engineers—Petroleum, Mining and refining, Electricity, Gas, Pollution

Computer engineers

Electrical engineers—work in communications, the car industry, in power, and electrical technologies, manufacturing and electrical systems.

Mechanical engineering—Transport, Mining

[Breakout quote]

“You can use engineering skills to help people. It’s more than you think.”
Example 2—Architecture, Building and Planning

[Title page]
Making sense of space
It's not enough to just make something; it's gotta have style, pizzazz and function.

[Profile]
Creating your space
Design is many things including form and function. That goes for buildings, interiors, and also the landscape they are formed upon. For Michael Spooner, it's also about creating schemes that at first seem too “unlikely, indulgent and nutty, but too witty and pretty and bold to ignore.”

Michael won the 2007 Architecture Australia Prize for Unbuilt Work with his inventive ‘A Clinic for the Exhausted’. Michael is currently undertaking a PhD at RMIT having followed his graduation with a job as a design architect with a Melbourne-based firm.

“Design and Architecture is a strange world of strong personalities, which often has everyone mixing their various passions, where everyone rocks the boat. You’re inspired by the belief that other people are inspired too.

“It's perhaps this that best serves the teaching and learning environment at RMIT. Students are placed directly in the middle, and with guidance, are asked to critically question their own motivations for undertaking this study, not just in a professional sense, but also their personal growth. It is within this that I was able to ‘shape my own destiny’ by sustaining student and staff relationships with those like-minded few.”

Why RMIT?
Originally from New Zealand, Michael decided to hop the ditch after a conversation with an RMIT graduate.

“A friend spoke rather eloquently about the atmosphere she had been involved in, which she encouraged me to seek out in the hope of continuing to grow my skills in a direction and environment that did not exist in New Zealand.”

On his Architecture Australia award
“I was able to navigate my way through with the help of individual tutors who provided a flexible studio environment to explore and develop my interests and opinions on architecture. The final project grew out of this, so in a sense, while the project was situated at the end of my degree its trajectory began early on.”

Why Architecture, Building and Planning at RMIT?
RMIT has an international reputation for design excellence. RMIT’s Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory (SIAL) is a research centre for innovation in design and education and is open to students. More information on SIAL is available at www.sial.rmit.edu.au
But what will you be doing?
Two of the major issues facing society today are how to sustain life on the planet for an increasing population and how to find and produce integrated solutions to the challenges of the built and natural environments. Architecture, Building and Planning programs at RMIT are designed so you can explore these issues through creative and holistic thinking.

Career paths
List of possible jobs/careers from Architecture, Building and Design

Interior Design and Decoration, Furniture Design and Technology and Building Design are part of a family of design-based programs at RMIT. Students are given the opportunity to work closely with and be mentored by industry professionals. Graduates of these programs are quickly employed because of their ‘work-ready skills’.
Writing marketing copy in a tone to complement the RMIT ‘Advanced’ look and feel

Writing about research at RMIT

It has been recognised that RMIT’s research marketing materials speak to audiences who are well acquainted with the RMIT brand personality. Therefore this audience appreciates an irreverence from the RMIT research community that other research brands may not project.

Known as the ‘Advanced Look’, this look and feel utilises some extra, and/or different, visual elements to those used across mainstream RMIT branding.

So it follows that the tone of voice you utilise to write marketing copy for research needs to be slightly different from that used for other RMIT marketing communications.

With an appreciation of the more specialised audience to whom you are talking – postgraduate researchers, alumni, organisations and businesses from the private and public sector alike, the engaging of the public at large in matters of importance – you need to ensure your copy embraces the voice that sets research at RMIT apart.

The RMIT research tone of voice is deliberately:

Conceptual > Radical > Visionary > Irrepressible

Therefore your copy, particularly your headlines, need to reflect this sense of challenging the status quo to deliver better outcomes and set new directions for businesses and communities.

In the ‘Advanced Look’, headlines are featured without imagery and become the sole focus of the communication.

Therefore the statements need to be as bold, intriguing and colourful as possible to engage with your audience in a challenging and intellectual manner.

If we take the example of the fictitious ‘Basketweaving’ program again, the following headline examples would be appropriate for communications about research in Basketweaving:

When is a basket, not a basket?
I challenge, therefore I am
Accept nothing. Question everything.
Who needs baskets anyway?
Turn a basket upside down, a great idea will fall out.

By no means definitive, these headline samples are provided as thought starters to assist you in the creation of challenging and compelling copy for your communications to complement the ‘Advanced’ look.
Writing style

Writing style can give depth to a tone of voice. Here are some suggestions for a writing style that supports our brand personality.

Show, don’t tell

Don’t tell your readers we’re connected; show them how we’re connected. Don’t tell them we’re ingenious; give examples of ingenuity. Demonstrate RMIT’s liberal thinking. Explain what gives RMIT an edge.

An easy way to show rather than tell in your writing is to give examples for a point you’re making.

RMIT goes to great lengths to make international students feel comfortable. Sure, it’s succinct but it doesn’t give the reader anything tangible. Try writing about the international student support services instead. Mentioning orientation programs, English language support, and the academic and personal advice on offer, shows the reader exactly how the University accommodates international students.

Back up your claims

Our savvy target market knows you can’t believe everything you read, especially marketing material. So support all your claims to give them more power.

For example: RMIT is one of the world’s top universities.

As it stands, it’s the subjective opinion of the writer and will probably be read with some scepticism. However, when we add substantiation to the sentence all of a sudden it becomes impressive:

RMIT was voted one of the world’s top 200 universities by the Times Higher Education Supplement in 2008.

Keep it simple

Avoid jargon and difficult words. Break up your text by using short sentences and paragraphs. Bulleted and numbered points also make things easier to read.

Less is more

Be brief. Don’t embellish information or be too clever. Give them the essentials and get out. Avoid the temptation to write superfluous sentences like this one.

What’s in it for me?

It’s not all about how great we are. Your readers want to know how RMIT can make them great. Pose your information so the benefits for your readers come through clearly. Think about tangible benefits, for example, contact hours or access to facilities, as well as emotional benefits like fulfilling dreams, or reaching one’s potential.

Remember, education transforms people

Undertaking tertiary qualifications is an important, life changing decision.

Education can literally transform a person, their life prospects and the prospects of their family for generations into the future.

The simple use of ‘you’ and ‘your’ – in place of ‘we’ and ‘our’ - makes for much more powerful communications with a prospective student, and can have a profound impact on the personal connection they make with our literature.

So rather than writing about ‘we’ or ‘our’ when describing programs at RMIT, use ‘you’ and ‘your’.
By doing this, you will frame the information in terms of what the prospective students will gain. As a result the reader will automatically put themselves into a mental picture with RMIT. (For more theory on this area of marketing communications, see the Rossiter-Percy model for high-involvement, transformational products.)

It’s much more powerful for a prospective student to read ‘you will be learning about X and Y and then applying your skills to Z’ compared to the more common format used by universities - ‘We teach about X and Y and our assessment is based on application of skills to Z’.

When writing for prospective students, replace references to ‘students’ or ‘applicants’ with ‘you’ where relevant. Writing in the second person will also increase the conversational tone in promotional materials for prospective students and if in keeping with RMIT’s market position as an accessible place of education.

Following are existing samples of the new RMIT voice that demonstrate the power of using ‘you’ and ‘your’ in copy.

Excerpt from 2009 RMIT Postgraduate Program Guide:

Example A

‘If you’re motivated to follow your passions and take your talents to a higher level, then postgraduate study is for you. You can take a new path. Arm yourself with knowledge. Build up the know-how that professionals require. Push the boundaries of your own potential. Through expert teachers and researchers, deep connections to the working world, and stimulating ideas and people, RMIT University will help you shape an individual path to success.’

Example B

‘At RMIT, your thirst for know-how will be met by expert staff with a desire for excellence and innovation. You will receive advice and valuable learning experiences from leaders in academia and in your chosen industry, to introduce you to a new of thinking…’

Example C

‘…RMIT’s postgraduate programs can provide you with the training and help you amass the skills to enter an industry without backtracking to bachelor degree studies…’

Excerpts from Apprentice and Trainee Handbook 2009

‘…You will learn industry skills by combining on-the-job paid work and accredited training…’

‘…You will apply these skills and knowledge across a variety of workplace settings…’

‘…There are different ways you can study for your trade/industry qualifications…’

However writing in the second person is not appropriate when the information being conveyed is procedural. Also, be wary of repetitive use of the word ‘your’. Over reliance on ‘your’ may sound patronising.
SECTION 3  
Writing for different audiences

The target market

The RMIT target market can be defined as independent thinkers who approach life with the desire to leave their mark.
Your writing must talk directly to this mindset. Feed their hunger for personal development. Inspire them. Open up a world of possibilities.
By understanding where they’re coming from and what they’re looking for, you’ll find it easier to write in a way that engages them.

How to speak to different audiences

The RMIT target audience includes:

Secondary school leavers — those embarking on studies that will help them gather the skills and qualifications necessary for their future career aspirations.

Graduates, 21-40 years old, already in the workplace — those looking to add to their qualifications to enhance career advancement, keep their knowledge up to date or accrue knowledge/qualifications to facilitate a career change.

Government and industry bodies looking to educate employees — those postgraduates, alumni, private/public sector businesses and organisations looking to engage with more specialised experts and researchers at RMIT.
You should still consider each of these audiences independent thinkers who approach life with the desire to leave their mark. However, tailor your writing to take into account their different objectives and life stages.

Secondary school leavers

This audience is off on a big adventure. Adulthood has arrived and they’re feeling the pressure of making the biggest decisions of their lives. Your writing, while exciting them about the experiences and learning possibilities ahead, needs to reassure and support them through the process.

Graduates already in the workplace

This audience is looking to add to their qualifications: to get ahead or to change career.

A discerning audience, they have already been through the university market place once, and are looking for more than ‘motherhood’ statements.
Rather, this audience looks for substantiation in all the program information they read, so as to ensure they will be accruing the relevant skills, knowledge and experience they seek to use for promotion or change within the workplace.

Goal orientated, all writing for this audience needs to be approached in a way that clearly defines outcomes.

Government and industry bodies

This audience is a little more specialised, and provides the opportunity to further communicate the core differences that makes RMIT stand apart from other universities. This audience loves to challenge the conventional in order to discover new and better ‘truths’ for business and communities alike. Reflect this in your writing for this audience.
SECTION 4
Step-by-step

Getting started
By answering the following questions you’ll have the information you need to get started. Your answers will also be a great point of reference through the writing process. Make them concise and they’ll provide clear direction should you get stuck.

- What is the objective of your communication?
- Who is your target market?
- What is the essential information they need?

Checking your tone of voice
When you have a draft, gauge if your tone of voice is correct by asking yourself:

- Are these the words of a brand that is connected, fearless, ingenious, liberal, with an edge?
- Are these the words of a brand developing creative minds to solve real life issues?
- Are these the words of a brand enabling individuals to fulfil their destiny?

For further assistance contact University Marketing.