Penn State Social Media Content Guidelines

Penn State and its diverse social media presence reach audiences throughout Pennsylvania and around the world. As with Penn State communications overall, one goal of our social media is to stay true to the voice and tone of the Penn State brand.

This document was developed to serve as a compass with regard to the purpose, mission, language, character and tone of social media communications. It is not meant to be prescriptive for how exactly to communicate via social media channels, but rather should serve as a set of guidelines so that all University-related social media communications sound like many voices from within the same chorus.

Purpose and Mission

One of the underlying components of a brand voice is the purpose of communications. The University’s social media communications serve many purposes for many different audiences. Our channels reach traditional current undergraduate and graduate students, students studying at a distance, prospective students, nontraditional students, Penn State alumni, faculty, staff, Penn State athletics fans, community members who wish to be involved, patients of Penn State Hershey and their families, and many others. When speaking with these diverse audiences, refer to these initial questions to define the purpose of your specific social media channels:

- Who is the audience?
- How does the audience benefit from connecting with Penn State on this social media channel?
- What should the audience think/feel/do as a result of reading or interacting with this social media channel?
- What is the standard behavior of the audience on this social media channel and does your post match? (i.e. people use Facebook differently than they use LinkedIn)
The mission of each Penn State unit will drive the purpose of social media communications. Social media channels could be used to:

- Inform, educate, relay messages
  Example:

  ![Image of Penn State World Campus news article](image1)

  **Penn State World Campus** Ranking Up: Military Times recognized Penn State World Campus as a top veteran-friendly online university in their 2015 "Best for Vets" category.

  Penn State World Campus rated as veteran-friendly by Military Times | Penn State University
  news.psu.edu  Penn State World Campus received another accolade for its support and services for veteran students. The Military Times ranked the World Campus No. 13 on its "Best for Vets" listing of colleges and universities.

- Connect, establish community, create connections amongst audience
  Example:

  ![Image of Penn State Alumni tweet](image2)

  **Penn State Alumni** @PennStateAlums  Feb 26
  We’re the biggest alumni network in the country and must be gathering somewhere! Share your #PSUAlumEvents with us and spread the word!

- Support, respond, interact, provide customer service, gather feedback
  Example:

  ![Image of Penn State Twitter response](image3)

  **@JSummer786** Most, but not all. Libraries, fitness centers closed. Many computer labs, all dining halls are open.
• Inspire, empower, motivate, retain, engage through storytelling
Example:

Michelle Woodyear
Master of Business Administration student
Michelle is a fighter with incredible persistence. She overcame a brain injury and is battling breast cancer — but she won’t let anything stop her from graduating this December!

• Build brand or reputation, spread awareness, manage perceptions
Example:

Penn State online bachelor programs ranked No. 1 by U.S. News and World Report | Penn State...
Penn State World Campus was ranked highly in U.S. News & World Report’s 2015 Best Online Programs, including No. 1 for best online bachelor’s programs.

NEWS.PSU.EDU

30,320 people reached
• Market, promote, drive to action, advertise offerings or events
  Example:
  
  ![Image of Penn State Senior Night](image)

• Spark conversations, create a dialogue, offer insight about current events or relevant topics
  Example:
  
  ![Image of Penn State social media post](image)

**Language**

A second component of the Penn State social media voice is the type of language used – essentially what kinds of words are used in your social media conversations. Regardless of your audience or purpose, the language used should be grammatically correct, spelled correctly, and be appropriate for the audience and channel that you’re using.
Overall you should consider language that is:

- Engaging, thought-provoking, optimistic, interesting – Ask open-ended questions to provoke conversations and collaboration.

Example:

We hope your semester is off to a great start!

Finish the sentence: The thing I'm most looking forward to this semester is ________.

- Conversational, friendly, relatable — Use words and phrases that welcome diverse perspectives and confirm a commitment to high-level customer service.

Example:

SnowWhite @Sierra_Mist1234 · 34m
@TempleU or @penn_state? 😊

@Sierra_Mist1234 Penn State. Definitely.

- Accessible, concise, jargon-free, academic but understandable, and actionable – Use words that are straight forward and phrases that clearly illustrate the point of the communication.
Example:

**WPSU @WPSU · Mar 3**

Dr. Mike Roizen explains how to erase poor health choices, reboot the body and lead a healthier life. Tonight on WPSU-TV at 9:30 p.m.

• Current, savvy – Communicate using words and phrases that are consistent with how your audience speaks while remaining professional and up-to-date.

Example:

**PSU Lehigh Valley @PSULehighValley · Jan 3**

Oh, we like this one. We like this one a lot. Keep on sharing your #PSULV pics in 2015! 😁🎉 #ifoundthelion

• Shareable, fun – Use engaging and pleasant dialog that people can share, like or retell.

Example:

**Penn State Hockey @PennStateMHKY · Mar 4**

What's the big fuss? It's easy to travel on ice. #HockeyValley

**Character/Persona**

If each Penn State social media channel were a person, their character/persona should have the essential traits that define not only the people who make up the University, but also the audiences we look to attract and connect with on our social media
channels. The character/persona of Penn State social media channels should demonstrate the following qualities and values:

- Well-rounded, well-educated, respected, strives for excellence
- Visionary, knowledge-leader, innovative, inspirational doer
- Hard-working, active, engaged, involved
- Optimistic, passionate, confident, proud but not boastful
- Genuine, honest, trustworthy, responsible, reliable
- Altruistic, helpful, compassionate
- Collaborative, inclusive, community-minded, global-minded

**Tone**

Tone is an important subset of the Penn State social media voice. It should vary slightly based on the audience, situation, topic and channel of the communications, while keeping the overall brand voice intact. Depending on these variables, the tone of social media communications should fall into one or more of the following groups:

Tone:

- Informative, knowledgeable
- Passionate, confident, optimistic
- Innovative, insightful, thought-provoking
- Friendly, lighthearted, conversational
- Relevant, present
- Helpful, supportive, encouraging, empathetic
- Reliable, accurate, honest
- Inclusive, unified

It’s about expressing our personality as a University!

Having a strong, creative and consistent social media voice lets our community — new and old — know what to expect when they interact with Penn State.

As communicators, we have a tremendous opportunity to connect, listen, respond, and speak a language that others understand and want to “friend,” “like” “follow,” and contribute to on a regular basis.

As communicators, we should ask ourselves every day: “What amazing thing am I going to offer my audience today?”