

Excerpts from style guide I developed at Active Network, to define standards for voice & tone and copy style

activeworks | Style Guide [Last Updated October 6, 2011 03:50 PM Demo / Demo Source](#)

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Voice and Tone

The purpose of this section is to define and provide guidelines for achieving consistency of voice and tone in ActiveWorks products and platforms. This purpose can be further described as follows:

- **Voice:** To give our copy a “personality.” In simple terms, the voice is the Active Network brand speaking directly to the user through the user interface.
- **Tone:** To give this personality (voice) a friendly and engaging attitude that eases understanding and conveys excitement.

Voice and tone are subtle, abstract concepts, but they can have as much an impact on user experience as the interaction or visual design. Like these other aspects of the UX, the voice and tone should emulate the characteristics of ActiveWorks users:

- They are passionate about their event, camp or program.
- They have a limited amount of time.
- They need to move through the UI quickly.
- They need a voice and tone that speaks *to* them—not *at* them.

With these characteristics in mind, we have developed a voice called “The Achiever.” This voice, embodying the Active Network brand, should convey a tone that is:

- **Quick** and **efficient**; helps the user get through the steps in the user interface quickly.
- **Excited** and **passionate**; mirrors the user’s excitement about their event, camp or program.

In practical terms, this means that our ActiveWorks copy and technical documentation must adopt a more engaging and familiar style. Wherever possible, we must also trim the fat and consolidate instructional copy to help users find the information they need quickly. Less is more: be excited, and be brief!

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Style: General Guidelines

These guidelines offer general recommendations for writing copy. With these as well as specific copy style guidelines, they are just that: guidelines. They are in place to ensure consistency, but are not written in stone. Exceptions, when made with good reason, are acceptable.

Be Concise

Use fewer words whenever possible.

Examples:

Wordy	Concise
Send me an email notification when I receive a donation on my fundraising page.	Notify me when I receive a donation.

Be Consistent

Choosing the **right** style of copy is less important than using it consistently. Whichever style choices are made, consistency will pay off big in terms of usability.

Use Verbs in Button Labels

Use verbs in button labels to convey the action taken by clicking the button.

Examples:

Avoid	Use
New session	Create session Add session

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Style: Error Messaging

Error messages should conform to the following guidelines. If error messages for specific cases are not provided in the design spec, please consult the [copywriter](#).

Voice and Tone

By definition, the display of an error message means the user is experiencing a problem. Thus, the voice and tone of the error message should try to minimize distress by being **friendly**, **useful** and **short**.

- Preface informational error messages (example: a modal dialog box with only an OK button to dismiss it) with "We're sorry...."
Example: "We're sorry, your changes could not be saved."
- Preface in-line, field-specific error messages with "Please," and describe the action to be taken to solve the error.
Example: "Please enter a valid email address."

Generic Error Message

In cases where a generic error message is displayed (e.g., at the top of a page) in conjunction with a field-specific error message displayed alongside the problem field, the generic message should read "Please correct the following errors."

Use Contextual Dialog Box Titles

Whenever possible, provide contextual titles for modal dialog boxes. As a backup, when a contextual title is not possible, use these titles as defaults.

Dialog box type	Default generic title
Informational	Attention
Warning	Warning

Use Correct Button Labels

If the text of a modal error message is phrased as a **Yes/No** question (for example, "Are you sure you want to continue?"), then the button labels should be Yes/No; otherwise, use **OK/Cancel** button labels. [Consult the copywriter](#) if you're unsure of which labels to use.