



HOW TO  
REVIEW  
STORIES,  
CONTENT  
AND COPY.

WORDTREE<sup>®</sup>



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# HOW TO REVIEW STORIES, CONTENT AND COPY

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Reviewing text is something a lot of us have to do as part of our jobs. Even more of us need to persuade managers and stakeholders to sign off on something we've written – or had written for us – before our projects can proceed.

And for people who regularly go through this process, we know it's rarely super-efficient and 100% objective.

A large part of the reason for this is that many of us have never had any kind of training or guidance on how to assess – or give feedback on – the written word.

So what can happen is that we replicate approaches we've seen in environments like school and university.

But the workplace isn't school – and the purpose of us reviewing text isn't to "mark" it, or to have it comply with our own personal preferences.

Instead, it's to have text and stories that reinforce your organisation's brand – and that resonate deeply with your audiences.

So this guide is to help you review stories, content and copy as objectively and efficiently as possible.



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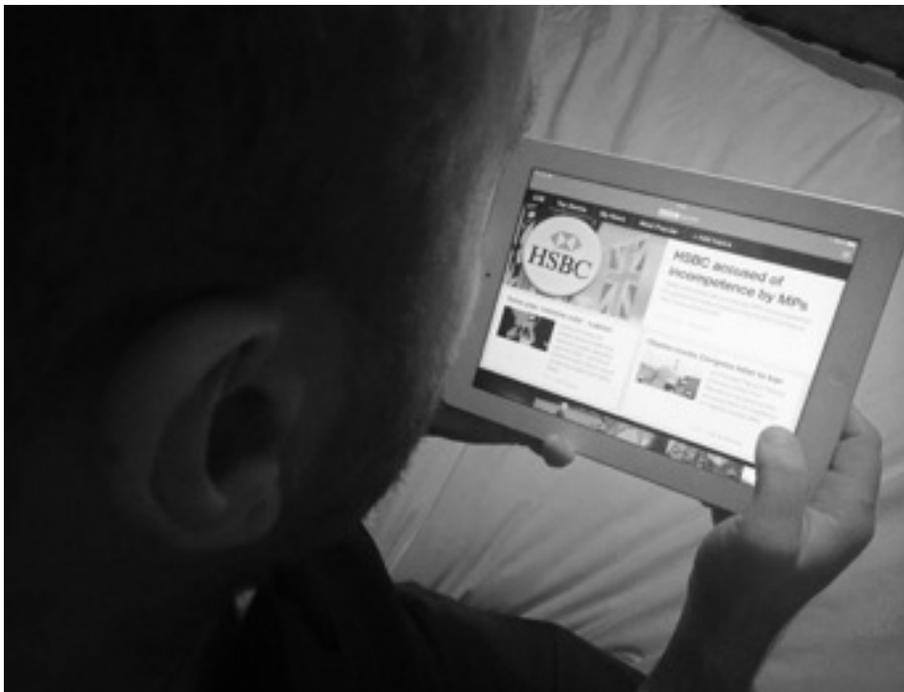
# DISTANCE

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Remember, this document isn't about you or your personal preferences. It's about persuading your customers or audiences to think something, feel something, buy something or know something.

The style and tone of the document should express your brand.

The messaging should answer the requirements of your brief. So it can be a very good idea to revisit your brief before you read through a first draft. Use it to remind yourself of what your audiences need – and what you need them to think, feel and do as a result of reading it.



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# PLAN TO READ THE DOCUMENT MORE THAN ONCE

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## **First time**

Read the draft as though you're its audience. Well, as much as you can. Read it through in one go. DO NOT pick up a red pen, or any kind of pen. Just read and keep reading. Why? Because when your customers or clients read the document, they'll be doing it to extract information and maybe to be entertained.

They will not be looking at it with a critical eye and a red pen. In other words, they won't be assuming the role of "teacher". Instead, they'll just be trying to find out what you're offering them.

## **Second time**

Now read the document more critically. Does it flow (from your audience's point of view)? Is it accurate? Are there any ambiguities? Is anything missing?

Make notes of any inaccuracies, ambiguities and omissions.



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# HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK

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## Consolidate

If you have more than one person feeding back on a single document, then it makes sense for the owner of the project to consolidate all their feedback into one single instruction. Otherwise your copywriter may have to contend with conflicting requests – or instructions that don't make sense.

## Use colour

We're big fans of colour-coded feedback. It's a system that allows people who are signing off to make a distinction between types of feedback. At its most basic, a colour-coded feedback system could stipulate that feedback in red shows inaccuracies – things that must be changed. Feedback in blue, on the other hand, shows personal preference or opinion.

When you're explaining this system to your colleagues who are also involved in signing off, it's a good idea to make it clear that red feedback will always be acted upon. Blue feedback, on the other hand, will be considered, but not necessarily actioned.

## Anecdote

The least productive feedback system we've ever seen was when a project manager took a rather lengthy piece of text that we'd written, extracted every sentence from it and inserted each into a spreadsheet. There were more than a thousand of them.

Next to each sentence were columns for: Do you like this sentence? Score 1-10. Do you dislike anything in this sentence? Please elaborate. Please give the whole sentence a mark out of 10.

A total of 16 stakeholders had to grade each sentence. They were not happy because it took them ages.

At the end of round one of feedback, the PM gave us our "score out of 10" for the whole piece – and gave us a target to improve that score by in the next round. We were free, explained the PM, to act on or ignore any of the comments – we just had to get our score up.

This isn't the way to assess a piece of writing – mostly because it isn't based on reading it like your audiences are likely to. Also, because it alienates everyone in the feedback chain.

(And interestingly, at the end of this first round of amends, none of the stakeholders knew what the piece was about.)



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# HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK

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Not so useful feedback...	Useful feedback...
I don't like it.	I'd rather we said X because... I'd rather we didn't use this phrase because...
This isn't right.	This isn't quite right for the brand because... This is inaccurate. The most up-to-date figures are...
I'm not sure about this...	This isn't right for the brand because...
Please refer to the brief...	Section two, point six of the brief explains what we need to say here...

## **Managing other people involved in giving feedback**

Share this document with them – and explain how your colour-coded feedback system works. This approach will save you time and effort in the long run.



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# CONTACT

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Thank you for taking the time to read through this document. If you have any questions, this is how to contact us:

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THANK  
YOU.

