

Tone of voice guidelines

Introduction

Why do we need voice and tone guidelines?

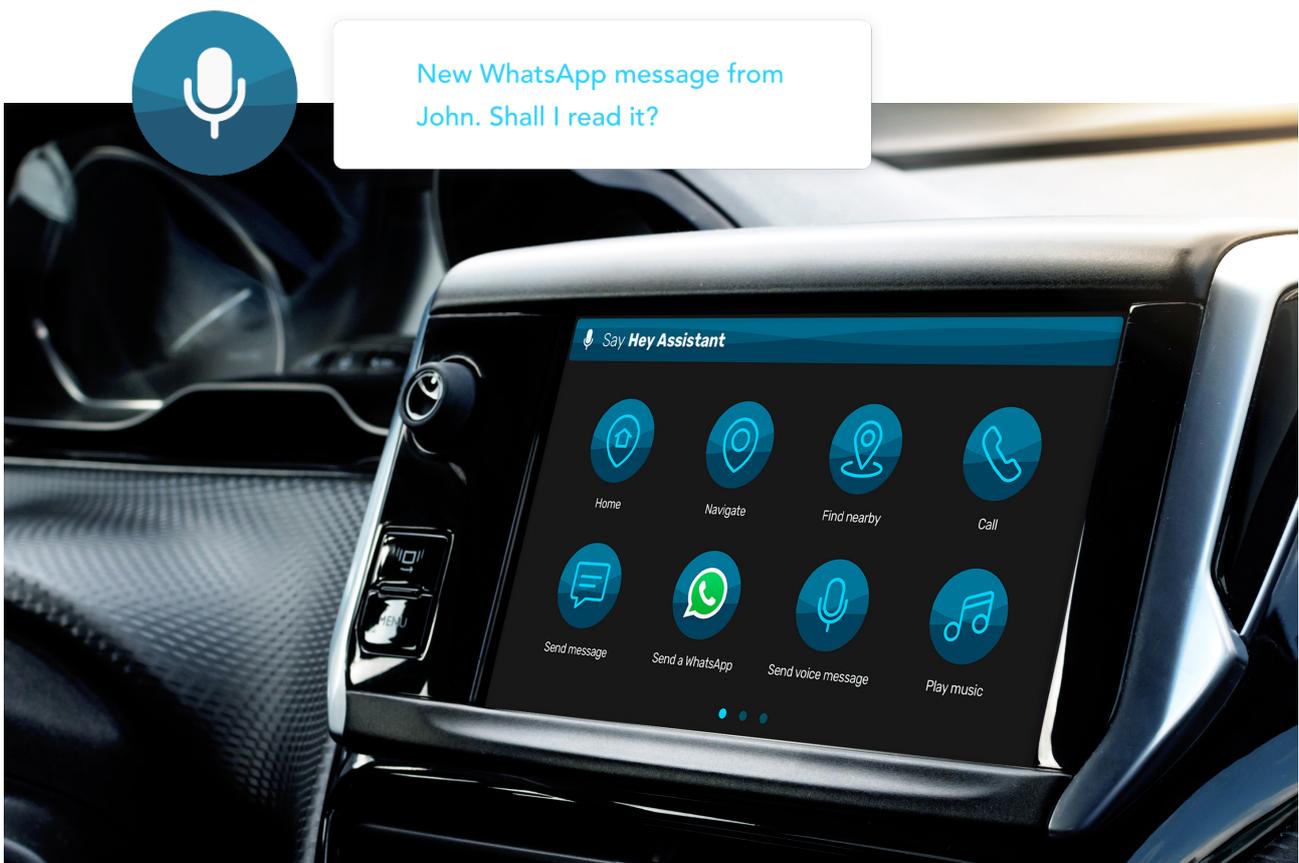
To connect with people, we need to talk in a way that resonates with them. The right voice makes people feel at home through content that speaks their language.

How is voice different from tone?

Voice reflects our personality. It's what we say.

Tone is the way we speak. It's how we say things.

Our voice stays consistent across all of our content. Tone expresses the mood or feeling — which should change based on your audience and the situation.



Our Voice, Tone, & Audience

When writing for German Autolabs, our voice is always:

Honest – Trust is our #1 value, and we’re truthful in our writing.

Clear – Our writing is concise and easy to understand.

Fun – We’re dedicated to conversational, upbeat language.

Inspiring – We help people live their best lives, and our writing harnesses that genuine emotion.

While our voice (our personality) doesn’t change, we adjust our tone based on the audience. For example...

Users like encouragement and the occasional “You did it! Good job.”

Developers, not so much. They’d prefer we just get to the point, and they like it when we’re honest. Less is more here.

New users can be intimidated by new concepts. They need approachable, step-by-step introductions to terms and concepts, such as you might find in a typical onboarding flow.

Bizdevs don’t have time for lots of text. They need to get in, find what they need — and get back to closing deals. They are lean, results-driven and modular. Their copy and presentations reflect this.



Hey Assistant, what’s my
next job?

Your next job is:
James Collins, 5 Cole Street.



Writing Guidelines

Part of what makes German Autolabs documentation special is the way we talk to the reader. It doesn't sound like automotive voice assistance software documentation. It sounds more like a conversation with a friend. With that in mind, here are some tips for writing "the German Autolabs Way."

Be concise.

- Use as few words as possible. Avoid unnecessary and redundant information.
- Focus on user goals; make sure that you create content for an actual use case.
- Avoid large blocks of text. Avoid long, complex sentences.

DON'T

In order to access call functionality in Chris, please head to the Settings menu and activate the Apple Shortcut to allow Calls.

DO

To call with Chris, add the Calls Shortcut.

Be conversational.

- Use natural, conversational language with a friendly, upbeat tone.
- Contractions are OK.
- Write from the users' perspective to help them accomplish tasks.
- Avoid developer-focused terminology, unless you're writing for a developer.

DON'T

Sorry, I cannot play the radio yet. Would you like to play some music instead?

DO

I can't play the radio yet. Play music instead?

Be direct.

- Use plain English. Avoid buzzwords, jargon, and words you wouldn't say in person.
- Use active voice, and avoid complex verb structures.
- Refer to user-interface elements by their literal names, not variations thereof (e.g., "click Submit" vs. "then save it").

DON'T

One moment please, handing over to Siri. In order to send messages with Chris, please set up the Chris Shortcut in the Chris app.

DO

The call is not connecting. Make sure you have set up the Calls Shortcut in the Chirs app.

Be positive.

- Whenever possible, phrase sentences positively, not negatively.
- When describing feature improvements, focus on new benefits to users, rather than on the design problems they addressed. Example: *We've made important improvements to the Home screen that increase accessibility.*

DON'T

Settings are not accessible through the Bluetooth screen.

DO

Settings are accessible from the Home screen.

Be clever. But don't try too hard to be funny.

- Have fun! But use humor judiciously, and know your limits. (Not everyone's a natural comedian.)
- *Focus on clear, concise content over clever language. Make sure content is understandable in dependent of any witticisms.*
- *If you do use jokes, keep them family-friendly and inclusive. (For instance, don't make jokes about dads unless you make jokes about moms, too.)*
- *No religious, gender or cultural jokes.*

DON'T

The message is a web address. I do not currently support web address display.

DO

The messages contain a web address. Take a break from driving to view it.

Give information “just-in-time.”

- Introduce required conceptual information only when the user is performing the related task.
- Explain rules or constraints only when the user encounters their constraining effects.

DON'T

You have not downloaded the offline map for all of this route. Navigation will still work. To download more maps, open “Settings” in the Chris App.

DO

You have not downloaded the offline map for all of this route.

Watch out for cultural references.

- Be careful with allusions or culturally-specific language that may be lost on a diverse audience.
- If you use any idioms in the UI, clarify them in a comment for the localization team.

DON'T

Let's go, geezer.

DO

Let's go.

Use please sparingly.

- Use please only when asking the user to do something inconvenient or when the system is to blame.

DON'T

Please note: you may wish to download offline maps for this area.

DO

The firmware update may take a while. Please wait until the process completes.

Avoid sorry.

- Use sorry only in error messages that result in serious problems for the user (for example, connection loss, the user can't continue to use German Autolabs' product, or the user must contact Support).
- Before you use sorry in UI text, ask yourself if we could change the design to avoid the situation.

DON'T

Sorry, but you must supply a search string of at least two characters.

DO

Sorry, you'll need to contact Support.

Use exclamation points sparingly.

- Use exclamation points to be encouraging or generate excitement.
- Don't use exclamation points in error messages, confirmation messages, or instructional text.

DON'T

Your changes were saved!

DO

*Almost there!
[To show progress during a process.]*

Design text for easy scanning.

- Users often scan rather than read, so put the important points first. Put actions before explanations.
- Use short bulleted lists where appropriate.
- Assume that after users have figured out what they need to do, they immediately stop reading and do it.
- Use *See Also* links at the end of topics to refer users to additional, related information if needed.

DON'T

In order to register your account you will need to create a new user name and set a strong password containing a mix of letters, numbers and etc etc

DO

Enter a unique username and password to set up your account.

Provide clear instructions for users to correct errors.

- For error messages, give the user clear instructions on how to correct the error.
- Avoid phrasing that blames the user or implies user error. Passive voice can be appropriate in messages to achieve this purpose.

DON'T

You have chosen an incorrect username.

DO

This username already exists. Choose a unique username.

Avoid referring to the location of items on a page.

- Don't use *below*, *following*, *above*, or other directional words to refer to the location of elements on a page.
- Exception: In walkthroughs, and in error messages where a user has clearly missed a button or control, directional instructions can be helpful.

DON'T

Enter a unique user name and then tap the button at the bottom of the screen.

DO

Enter a unique username and press Confirm.

Don't brag.

- Stay humble, stay hungry and keep it friendly. Good rules for life in general.

DON'T

The new Android Auto skills are very disappointing, compared to German Autolabs' technology.

DO

Interesting new skills in the latest iteration of Android Auto.
