

OUR  
TONE OF  
VOICE

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THE TRUSTED  
VOICE OF A  
RESPECTED  
SOLICITORS'  
PROFESSION

# VISION

(THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE)

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The trusted voice of a respected solicitors' profession

# MISSION

(WHAT WE ACTUALLY DO TO BRING THIS VISION ABOUT)

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- To serve, represent and support our members and the public.
- To ensure fair and effective regulation of solicitors in the interests of the profession and the public.
- To provide excellent legal education and training.
- To raise awareness within members of the public of how the profession can help to vindicate their rights.
- To participate fully in public life so that issues of fairness and justice are to the fore in public discourse.

# VALUES

(WHAT WE STAND FOR AND WHAT GUIDES OUR BEHAVIOUR IN OUR DEALINGS WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS)

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## OF SERVICE

- We act to protect and champion the rights of the profession, their clients and the public interest.
- We provide a responsive, courteous and efficient service to our members and the public.
- We value and seek feedback and are constantly striving to understand and meet the needs of our members and the wider public.

## RESPECT

- We show respect by listening well to different views and perspectives without pre-judgment.
- We show respect by giving reasons for our decisions after due consultation and consideration.

## OWNERSHIP

- We act to the highest professional standards, constantly reviewing our systems and processes to ensure that these are fit for purpose.
- We are accountable for our work in a transparent manner.
- We involve a broad representation of our members in core activities.

## INTEGRITY

- We act with integrity and fairness and report on our activities and decisions in a transparent manner.
- We speak clearly, plainly and accurately in our communications.

## INDEPENDENCE

- We act in an independent and fair manner, without fear or favour of any section of society or any state institution or body.

The way we speak and write reflects our values and what we stand for. When we communicate we speak from a position of service and with respect for different views. We act with the highest possible standards of integrity, fairness and independence.

## WHEN PEOPLE HEAR US THEY KNOW WE ARE:

### ASSURED

We speak and write with confidence. We don't need to raise our voice to be heard. We set out to persuade our audience rather than impose our own point of view.

### INDEPENDENT-MINDED

We speak without fear or favour of any section of society or any state body. We embrace change in a positive, considered way.

### APPROACHABLE

We create opportunities for people to have their say – whether they are members of the profession, members of the general public or other stakeholders. People know they receive fair consideration and a prompt, reasoned response, even if they disagree with our policies or decisions.

## WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

It's important that, across all sections of the Law Society, we speak with a consistent tone of voice that reflects our values.

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## IN THIS DOCUMENT WE SET OUT:

- 1 Basic guidelines that apply across all our communications.
- 2 The core principles that apply to the Law Society's overall tone of voice with examples of what we try to do and what we want to avoid.
- 3 Specific examples of letters and notices we use in our different departments, which show how our guidelines and principles outlined here are used in practice.

1

BASIC GUIDELINES  
FOR COMMUNICATION

- Use 'we' and 'you' where possible in communications.
- Use the active voice, not the passive voice. For example, 'we will send you confirmation' rather than 'a confirmation will be sent'.
- Address issues one at a time. Don't cover too many points at once.
- Seek to explain clearly – avoid use of jargon or unfamiliar terms (explain these if necessary). Though, specialised terminology, which can reasonably be expected to be understood by the reader, may at times be necessary.
- Facts are friendly – stick to the facts and evidence.
- Use a consistent date format. For the Law Society that is, for example, 10 September 2014.
- Only use capital letters for a person's name and title, for proper nouns and at the beginning of a sentence.
- Keep it short - review with this in mind.

\*Note, for certain formal, regulatory documents these guidelines may not all apply. For example, using 'we' and 'you' may not be appropriate for investigation reports and may require the use of the passive voice.



# 2

## THREE CORE PRINCIPLES FOR TONE OF VOICE

Our tone of voice is distilled into three principles that guide the way we talk and write.

- 1 Courtesy and respect
- 2 We serve
- 3 Clear and concise



# 1 COURTESY AND RESPECT

- We talk and write person-to-person.
  - We show respect by asking permission or by offering an invitation.
  - We show empathy and understanding.
  - We give clear reasons for our decisions.
  - We write in a serious tone for serious messages, especially regulatory messages.
  - We expect to be treated with courtesy and respect.
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## TRY TO...

- Address the person by name whenever possible: 'Dear Mr. Trant', 'Dear Mrs. Davey'.
- Give your own name and your department title when answering the phone or writing a letter, except in exceptional circumstances when responding to a member of the public who is engaging in vexatious correspondence.
- Say 'May I ask what this is in connection with?' or 'May I come back to you when I have checked the details further?'
- Be clear about what is required: 'We ask that you give this your attention and send a reply within the next ten days. It is in your best interests to do so.'
- Give clear reasons for our decisions: 'The decision to postpone the meeting is to allow for further consultation with members.'

## BUT AVOID...

- Being impersonal when we speak or write - avoid 'Dear Sir or Madam' or 'To whom it may concern'.
- Being anonymous, for example, signing letters 'The Administration Dept.'
- Phrases like, 'What's your query?' or 'I'll have to come back to you on that'.
- Giving orders or issuing threats inappropriately: 'This situation needs to be dealt with immediately. Unless we hear from you in ten days, we will have to take further action.' Note, some regulatory situations do require issuing mandatory directions.
- Curt notes: 'The meeting is postponed until further notice.'

## 2 WE SERVE

- To be of service means to communicate the clear benefits of the services we provide to people (even in difficult situations such as regulatory matters).
  - We show we understand their needs, we say how we can help and we are clear about the ways services can be accessed.
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### TRY TO...

- Provide links to more information: 'You can find more information about the main points of the Data Protection Acts, including your rights under the Act, by clicking (link).'
- Include a clear benefit in the headline of notices: Autumn Courses and Seminars Designed to Develop Your Skills and Knowledge. Contact k.kerry@email for more information.
- Demonstrate what the overall result will be in proposal designed to make positive change: 'Law Society proposes fairer system for appointing judges'.

### BUT AVOID...

- Offering no explanation of form terms or what they mean: 'This correspondence is covered by the provisions of The Data Protection Acts 1988 – 2003 in the case where reference is made by you to third parties.'
- Descriptions that don't offer any benefits: 'Autumn Courses Now On. See brochure for details.'
- Leaving people wondering what the effects of reform or change will be: 'Law Society proposals for radical reform of procedures for appointing judges'.

### 3 CLEAR AND CONCISE

- Keep sentences short.
  - Write or say only what is necessary.
  - Use a new paragraph for each new point.
  - Explain any special terms that your audience may be unfamiliar with as simply as possible.
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#### TRY TO...

- Be clear about what action you want people to take: 'Please return the completed form'; 'call us for further information on xxx xxxx.'
- Group related information in lists or bullet points.
- Include directions to further information or assistance.
- Use simple language. Always ask, 'Is there a simpler way to say this?'

#### BUT AVOID...

- Imprecise or vague instructions: 'please get back to us in due course.'
- Having related information in different sections of the same letter or notice so that the person has to search for information needlessly.
- Leaving the person to figure out themselves where they can go to get assistance or information.
- Using jargon or 'old fashioned' language – for example, 'in regard to same'; 'notwithstanding the above'.

## OVER TO YOU

We hope this document will help guide you in all your communications. Overleaf, you will see more detailed and specific examples of letters, announcements and proposals that demonstrate the principles outlined here.

If you have any suggestions or useful examples that convey our values and tone, please send these to Kathy McKenna at [k.mckenna@lawsociety.ie](mailto:k.mckenna@lawsociety.ie).



# 3

EXAMPLES  
FOR DIFFERENT  
DEPARTMENTS  
AND SITUATIONS

# REGULATORY EXAMPLES

## COURTESY AND RESPECT

**When advising a solicitor that we have received correspondence in relation to a complaint, we are clear about the complaints handling process and emphasise that the process is fair, transparent and professional. We provide as much information as possible, including suggestions on ways that the complaint can be dealt with effectively and quickly. The tone can be quite formal as well as respectful.**

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Private & Confidential

2014

Our Ref: (please quote our reference on all correspondence)

Your Ref: <Enter Reference>

Re:

Dear Mr.

I enclose a copy of correspondence that the Law Society has received from Mr/Mrs Name of Person. In order to resolve the matter as quickly as possible for all concerned, we ask that, within the next 10 working days, you provide the Law Society with your written observations on the correspondence, including any explanation that may clarify the issues raised or, where appropriate, your proposals for resolving the matter.

I enclose a copy of the Law Society's information booklet "Resolving Complaints" which provides suggestions on practical ways complaints may be resolved to the satisfaction of all involved.

In the interests of transparency and fairness, the Law Society's policy in relation to the investigation of complaints means that we provide the person who is making the complaint with copies of any relevant letters and documents that you send to us in response to the complaint. Similarly, we provide you with copies of any letters and documents that the person who made the complaint sends to the Law Society.

Any of the letters and documents relating to the complaint will not be used or published for any other procedure or proceedings other than those arising under the Solicitors Acts 1954-2011.

Please be aware that, if you refer to another person or company in your communications with us, under the Data Protection Acts 1988-2003 we may, if requested, be obliged to provide that person or company with any personal data contained in your communications. In some cases we may have to make entire files available to the Data Protection Commissioner.

The Law Society is empowered by statute to investigate complaints of excessive fees, inadequate professional services and misconduct. We carry out any investigation in a thorough, professional and transparent way to ensure that all parties involved are treated with fairness and respect at all times.

If you have any queries about policies or procedures, please include these in your reply or consult the Law Society's website.

Yours sincerely,

NAME

Title

Your Client:

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## WE SERVE - TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS

**In letters explaining how a complaint is dealt with, be clear by defining important terms and what they mean for the recipient while focusing on the benefits. For example, explain how data protection legislation offers benefits to the recipient as well as third parties. Where possible, provide a link to further information. The tone can be quite formal as well as respectful.**

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Please be aware that if you refer to another person or company in your communications with us, under the Data Protection Acts 1988-2003, we may, if requested, be obliged to provide that person or company with any personal data contained in your communications. In some cases we may have to make entire files available to the Data Protection Commissioner. You also have rights under the Acts to access information held in our files concerning your own case. If you have any concerns about this point, please contact me.

You can find out more about the main points of the Data Protection Acts by clicking here (link given).

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## CLEAR AND CONCISE

**Opt for language that is clear and concise. Review and ask yourself, ‘is there a simpler way to say this?’**

- **Use bullet points to group related information.**
  - **Be clear about what action you want your reader to take.**
  - **Include directions to additional information or assistance.**
  - **Point to the online Compendium of the Solicitors’ Acts where possible.**
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Re: Compensation Fund Claim -

Dear Mr xx or Ms yyyy (address the person directly)

I refer to your letter of (date written in full, e.g. 20 October 2009)

Please find enclosed a Compensation Fund claim form. A completed, sworn form should be returned to me in order for your client to make a claim.

A guide to making claims on the Fund is also enclosed.

- Grants from the Compensation Fund are made for losses sustained “in consequence of dishonesty” on the part of a solicitor. The relevant provisions are Section 21 of the Solicitors Act 1960 as amended. A copy of the Compendium of the Solicitors Acts is available at [www.lawsociety.ie](http://www.lawsociety.ie) as a facility to assist in tracking amendments to the Acts.
- A number of other provisions within Section 21 may alter this situation; for instance, grants may be refused in respect of losses that have “arisen otherwise than as a result of the dishonest misappropriation or dishonest conversion of moneys, securities or other property of a client”.
- Grants from the Fund are not made in respect of losses that have arisen due to a solicitor’s negligence or breach of contract.
- If all or part of your client’s loss did not result from the dishonest misappropriation or dishonest conversion of moneys, securities or other property, your client may wish to consider pursuing recovery from [solicitor’s name].

When making a claim please supply:

- Full details of the loss claimed, including a detailed breakdown of the amount involved.
- Copies of any documentation that substantiate the provision of funds to [solicitor’s name] in respect of your client’s matter, as well as copies of any documentation (such as correspondence in which funds were requested, balancing statements, bills of costs, etc) showing the intended use of these funds.

Where possible, the Law Society will assist with any information and documentation. Your client ultimately must substantiate their claim on the Fund. Page 12 of the guide (enclosed) has useful information on this point.

The Compensation Fund claim form and guide can also be downloaded from the “Consumer Interest” section of the Law Society’s website: [www.lawsociety.ie](http://www.lawsociety.ie).

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me in writing.

Yours sincerely,

NAME

Claims Administrator

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# REPRESENTATION EXAMPLES

## COURTESY AND RESPECT

We have a basic approach of ‘asking permission’.

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**Examples include answering the telephone with** ‘May I say who is calling?’; ‘May I ask what this is in connection with?’; ‘May I come back to you when I have checked the details further?’

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## WE SERVE - TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS

**In press releases or other external messages, benefits are clear in the headline and throughout the communication. Here the tone is assured and confident but also respectful.**

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### **Law Society proposes fairer system for appointing judges**

The Law Society’s recommendations are designed to de-politicise the system for appointing judges to ensure that the core principle of judicial independence is assured and protected. The 38-page submission to the Minister for Justice makes clear proposals on how the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board can work more effectively, including adopting a more rigorous assessment of proposed candidates.

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## CLEAR AND CONCISE

**We say clearly and concisely what the communication is about, what the benefits are, who it came from and how to contact us.**

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### **Welcome to LawWatch**

LawWatch is a new weekly newsletter from the Law Society of Ireland. Members who wish to subscribe to the service will be kept up-to-date on important Supreme and High Court written judgments, recent Acts and selected Statutory Instruments and topical articles from a range of Irish, UK and European journals. LawWatch is compiled by the Law Society Library. For further information please contact us on email..... or tel...

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# EDUCATION EXAMPLES

## COURTESY AND RESPECT

**We are transparent and share information. We clearly state the reasons for decisions and show we understand how this might impact on the recipient.**

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Re: Today's seminar cancelled

Dear Student,

This afternoon's seminar, State Pathologist Case Examples, has been cancelled as a nominated guest speaker's flight has been delayed. We have revised the term seminar schedule accordingly, which I have attached for your information.

We realise that this change may be inconvenient for you and apologise for this in advance.

Yours sincerely  
John Doe  
Tel/ email

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## WE SERVE - TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS

**When advertising courses, we state the benefit in the headline. We invite further engagement and feedback. Here, the tone is less formal and more friendly. We show respect by demonstrating that we understand members' needs and try to meet them effectively.**

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### **Autumn Courses and Seminars Designed to Develop Your Skills and Knowledge**

See the details of our wide range of courses, seminars, certificates and diploma courses for this year and early 2014. Developed in response to members' needs, we welcome suggestions for further topics you would like to see covered. Please contact us for further information on tel and email.

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## CLEAR AND CONCISE

**Be specific. State simply what to expect with clear timelines. Indicate how to check on progress in a variety of ways.**

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Thank you for your application for xxxx. The closing date for applications is 30 March 2014. You will hear back from us by 30 April 2014 at the latest in relation to your application. If you have not heard back from us by this date, please tel or mail Mmm on extension xx who is looking after the administration on this project. We post updates in relation to xxx regularly in the yy section of our website lawsociety.ie

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