

**WE ARE  
MACMILLAN.  
CANCER SUPPORT**



# TOP TIPS

Ten ways to be top  
of your game when  
writing for *Mac Voice*

## Hello there

If you're reading this top ten guide, there's a good chance you're thinking of writing for *Mac Voice*.

Because *Mac Voice* is aimed at a variety of health and social care professionals, it's essential that it's engaging and easy to understand. With that in mind, we hope that these tips help unleash the writer inside you and that you're inspired to write an article.

And remember – you can find our main style guide on [be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk) – it's filled with everything you need to know about Macmillan's style.

For more help and advice, and to discuss your story ideas, email the managing editor of *Mac Voice* at [macvoice@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:macvoice@macmillan.org.uk) or call 020 7091 2219.



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## Get the ball rolling

Sometimes the most difficult part of writing is simply getting started. Think of your introduction as setting up your stall in a crowded market. How can you make it different enough to grab a browser's attention?

Your intro needs to engage the reader instantly and give a clear indication of what the rest of your story will be about. Try to pose a question, present an interesting fact or state an opinion in a way that will encourage the reader to continue.

Don't give too much away though. It's not a summary of everything yet to come. The best intros contain two or three facts max. Why not have a look at the latest issue of *Mac Voice* for some ideas?

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## Punchy paragraphs

No one likes to be bombarded by too much text – it’s exhausting and can put the reader off. If possible, keep paragraphs to five sentences or fewer and start a new paragraph each time you write about a new subject.



## Play it straight

Even though *Mac Voice* is targeted at health and social care professionals, we don’t want to use overly complicated language that will confuse your average Joe. Just follow these handy tips and everyone will catch your drift:

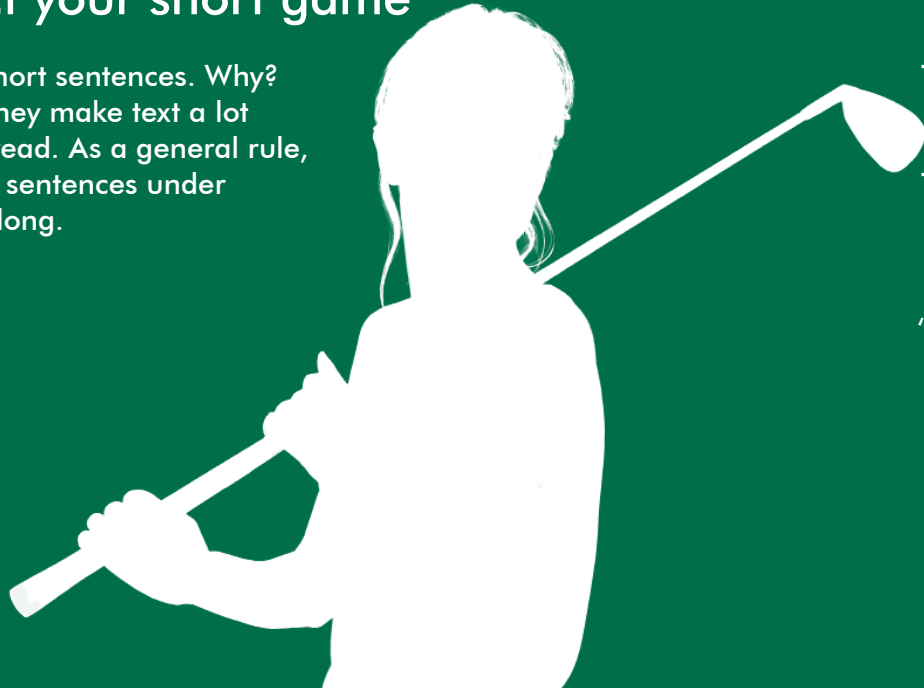
**Keep it simple** – always use plain English. This means using short words rather than long ones.

**Steer clear of jargon** – anything readers don’t get makes them feel left out. They may even stop reading. So avoid jargon such as complex medical terms or explain them wherever you can.

**Avoid using acronyms and abbreviations** – if you really have to use them, spell them out the first time they appear, eg The World’s Biggest Coffee Morning (WBCM).

## Perfect your short game

We love short sentences. Why? Because they make text a lot easier to read. As a general rule, keep your sentences under 25 words long.



## Good apostrophe formation

The apostrophe has lots of jobs on its CV. Here's a quick refresher:

- It shows possession, eg 'the employee's award'.

This seems simple. But not so fast. When the possessor is plural and doesn't end in an S, the apostrophe comes before the S. For example, 'the children's nurse'. But when the possessor is a regular plural, the apostrophe comes after the S. For example, 'the fundraisers' wigs'.

- The apostrophe also indicates a missing letter, eg, I'll let the racket do the talkin' (I will let the racket do the talking)
- When deciding whether or not to use an apostrophe in 'it's' or 'its', the rule is: the word 'it's' (with an apostrophe) stands for 'it is' or 'it has'. If the word doesn't stand for 'it is' or 'it has' then what you need is 'its'.

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## Stay active

Activity is interesting. So try to write sentences with subjects that are doing things, and not subjects that are simply having actions done to them. Compare these two sentences:

The mat was sat upon by the cat.  
The cat sat on the mat.

The first is an example of what grammar geeks call the passive voice; the second is the active voice.

Don't be put off – it's really very simple.  
**Passive voice:** B is done (usually by A).  
**Active voice:** A does B.

The active voice will make your writing more ... well ... active. It's also clearer, more immediate and uses fewer words. So use it whenever you can.



## Serve your readers

Always think of how to keep your readers engaged. Inject your writing with atmosphere, emotion and colour. The reader should feel like they've learned something new, been captivated by an interesting story or gone on a journey.

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## Comma challenge

The comma is one of the most misused punctuation marks of all time. It's either abused or completely ignored. Here are a few examples of where you would use a comma.

### For lists

She was a small, kind, friendly woman.

### For joining sentences

It was a rainy day, yet she had no umbrella.

### To fill in for missing words

Robbie has dark hair; Gary, fair.

### Before direct speech

The Queen said, 'Off with his head.'

### To set additional information apart from the main sentence

Melanoma, a type of skin cancer, is on the rise in the UK.

## Nice header

If it's starting to look like you've packed too much into your copy, what's the best way to break it up? With lots of lovely headlines and subheadings.

Readers appreciate a break in information – it gives them time to digest what they've just read. Subheadings introduce what to expect next, so to get your message across, make sure they clarify what's in your copy rather than being too cryptic or cute.



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## Team work

When you're writing, try to make your copy as interactive as possible – encourage feedback and ask readers to submit their opinions. This is a great way to gather research for your next article. Just remember to ask their permission, before using a direct quote.

And remember – if you get stuck or would like more support, simply email Mac Voice at [macvoice@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:macvoice@macmillan.org.uk) or call 020 7091 2219.

We're here to help.

