

INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND SHORTWRITING GUIDE

2025 EDITION



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This writing guide is for Invest NI colleagues and any third parties writing on our behalf. Writing guides like this one help to give a single voice to a community of individuals. Invest NI has a single purpose – to help Northern Ireland prosper. Our voice works to further that purpose.

This guide can help you with all our communications, whether addressing the public or our colleagues. Our communications must be accessible to as broad an audience as possible, so this guide incorporates Plain English principles. It is not an exhaustive document, so if you encounter a style challenge that it doesn't cover, please consult the UK Government's Style Guide.

The information in this guide does not override the design principles outlined in the Brand NI guidelines, Invest Northern Ireland brand guidelines or the Writing for the Web guidelines.

OUR BRAND VOICE

Our brand has a distinctive voice that reflects our core vision and values. We call that voice 'natural energy'. This gets to the heart of who **we are, as an organisation, as people, as business partners and as a region.**

NATURAL ENERGY

Natural

We want to speak in a voice that sounds natural, human and conversational. We want it to feel real and engaging, so we need to write like we speak. Writing like we speak doesn't make our writing any less professional, it'll still be punctuated and structured properly. It just means we'll be more engaging and interesting because we'll avoid jargon and 'corporate speak' as much as possible. When they read our writing, our audience should feel like they're chatting face-to-face at a casual networking event. It should feel more like a conversation than typical corporate writing.

Energy

Our writing should convey a sense of energy. We want readers to sense our enthusiasm, positivity and can-do attitude. It's important to remember that we're offering fantastic opportunities to our audiences and chances to grow and develop – that's an exciting prospect for them, and we want them to feel it when they engage with us.

They should feel like we're energised and motivated by their potential and the great things we could achieve together. To keep this energy high, we want to use lots of strong active verbs, vary our sentence length, avoid being too wordy and maintain a sense of positivity and enthusiasm throughout.

ADJUSTING OUR TONE

With our brand voice, we always aim to sound approachable and professional. However, the level of energy and enthusiasm in our tone should be adjusted depending on the situation.

There are times when a more straightforward and functional tone is necessary. For example, when discussing technical information, it's important to focus on clarity. In these situations, we maintain a warm and natural tone but keep it straightforward.

On the other hand, when we're celebrating success stories, announcing events or engaging on social media, we can let our excitement and positivity shine.

Think of it like this: for important, formal communications, dial the tone to a level 2 or 3, keeping things clear, helpful and respectful. For more casual or celebratory content, you can turn it up to level 8 or 9, showing our vibrant and optimistic side.

By adjusting our tone appropriately, we make sure we're always in tune with the context, helping us build strong, lasting connections with our audience.

VOICE EXAMPLES

Website content

Before: “Our team provides expert advice on business strategy.”

After: “Let’s sit down and map out your next move. Our experts are here to help you craft a winning business strategy.”

Before: “Invest NI offers workshops and training to develop skills

After: “Sharpen your skills and help your team stay ahead with our workshops and training sessions.”

Before: “Northern Ireland is an ideal location for international companies due to its skilled workforce and pro-business infrastructure.”

After: “Why Northern Ireland? It’s the ideal base for your global operations, with skilled talent and a business-friendly environment.”

Before: “Invest NI supports innovation across various sectors.”

After: “Got a big idea? We’re here to help you turn that spark of innovation into something amazing.”

Before: “Our agency offers various programmes to assist businesses with growth and development.”

After: “Let us help your business grow in Northern Ireland. Our support can make your expansion happen.”

Before: “We offer funding options to help businesses expand.”

After: “Ready to grow? We’ve got funding options to help your business reach new heights.”

Social post copy

Before: Northern Ireland is the #1 international investment location for US cyber security development projects (FT fDi Markets, 2023). Companies in the region deliver expertise in advanced persistent threats to national security, critical infrastructure, networks, capital markets and web applications. Contact us to learn more: www.investni.com/americas

After: Looking to expand your cyber security business? You're in the right place. Northern Ireland has been ranked the #1 location for US cyber security development projects – and for good reason. Our companies lead the way in tackling advanced threats to national security, critical infrastructure and more. Let's talk about how Northern Ireland can support your international business growth: investni.com/americas

Social post copy

Before: “Our Western Regional Office in collaboration with Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, is hosting a series of drop-in clinics at The Workhouse, Enniskillen and Connect Centre, Omagh, over the next few months. Invest NI has a range of advisory, capability development and financial support that could help you succeed. <https://okt.to/vksboU>”

After: “Got a brilliant business idea? Ethna and the team offer the expert advice and financial support you need to turn your idea into reality. Pop down to one of our drop-in clinics in Enniskillen or Omagh: <https://okt.to/vksboU>”

Before: “We have developed our recent webinar into a video tutorial called ‘Navigating Green Success in Life and Health Sciences,’ that provides information, tips and resources to help address sustainability requirements within medtech, diagnostic and pharma sectors. <https://okt.to/lsgin1>”

After: “If your pharma business is looking for ways to become more sustainable, we’ve got just the thing for you. Check out our new video tutorial here to find out how you can make small changes that make a BIG difference.”

WRITING RULES

Be clear and direct

Use simple, straightforward language. Avoid complex sentences and industry jargon unless absolutely necessary.

Use active voice

Communicate actions clearly by using the active voice. For example, “We support businesses” rather than “Businesses are supported by us.”

Keep it positive

Focus on the benefits and opportunities on offer. Highlight success stories and potential for growth. Stay consistent. All writing should feel like a one-to-one conversation with someone who is engaging, enthusiastic about Northern Ireland and genuinely invested in the success of the reader’s business.

Focus on the reader

Always talk about the reader more than you talk about Invest NI. People are self-interested, so the best way to engage them is to talk about their problems, goals and needs. For example, “You can get help navigating export regulations,” rather than “Our team supports businesses in navigating export regulations.”

Write for engagement

Keep your readers engaged by varying your sentence length in pieces of extended writing. A lot of similar-length sentences with the same construction can become monotonous. Varying the sentence length creates a better rhythm and more momentum. So mix it up.

Organising text

Organise long pieces of writing into paragraphs – preferably with subheadings. Group similar pieces of information together, introduce each paragraph with a topic sentence and think about how one paragraph flows into the next. Try to keep each one relatively short. It might be better to break it into two if it’s more than four sentences long. Use bullet points to break up the text if you have an exceptionally long or complex topic.

Handy tip

Make sure “you/your” appears more often in your writing than “we/our”.

HYPHENS AND DASHES

Hyphens (-) link words to form compounds or clarify meaning.

En dashes (–) can be used in place of commas, brackets or full stops, and allow you to join two connected thoughts. The en dash is longer than a hyphen but shorter than an em dash.

Em dashes (—) work like en dashes but they're more common in US English. We stick to en dashes.

Use hyphens:

- in compound adjectives before nouns, for example, “state-of-the-art technology”.
- to avoid awkward combinations, for example, “re-evaluate”.
- to clarify words or phrases that might otherwise be misinterpreted, for example, “re-sign” vs. “resign”.
- to join numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine when written in full.

Use en dashes:

- to connect related thoughts and add drama or emphasis e.g. “The quarterly report was clear – profits had soared beyond expectations.”
- as an optional alternative to brackets or commas when adding related information to long or complicated sentences e.g. “We recently expanded our service offerings – a move that involved coordinating with multiple international partners and restructuring our entire operations framework – to better serve our clients in emerging markets.”

BULLET POINTS

Use capital letters for complete sentences in bullet points.

Example

This is a bulleted list that consists of full sentences.

- This is a full sentence.
- This is also a full sentence.
- If the first bullet is a full sentence, the other bullets should be, too.

Some bulleted lists contain phrases that each end a sentence differently – the way semicolons work in a regular paragraph. Lead into the bullets with a colon, and make sure each bullet ends with a full stop.

Example

Bulleted lists can:

- simplify complicated information.
- make a text.
- enable the reader to capture more information when skim reading.

Simple bulleted lists need only a fullstop at the end.

Example

This bulleted list has three points:

- one
- two
- three.

CAPITALISATION

Capitalise nouns such as people’s names, job titles, place names and names of organisations.

All website addresses should be lowercase, especially investni.com

Examples

“the Prime Minister” or “Prime Minister John Doe”

“the Chief Executive” or “Chief Executive Jane Doe”

Business innovation grant ❌

Business Innovation Grant ✔️

Marketing & communications manager ❌

Marketing & Communications Manager ✔️

Business support team ❌

Business Support Team ✔️

Resource matching workshop ❌

Resource Matching Workshop ✔️

Sector titles such as ‘materials handling’ or ‘life and health sciences’ do not need to be capitalised because they are not proper nouns. Only capitalise them if they are at the start of a new sentence or heading.

Examples

Aerospace and defence is a multi-billion pound industry in Northern Ireland. Our strong engineering heritage has helped make this small region a powerhouse in aerospace and defence.

Heading: Materials handling expertise

Body copy: The materials handling sector employs 20,000 people.

Heading: Life and health sciences in Northern Ireland

Body copy: Northern Ireland is a prime location for life and health sciences businesses.

HEADINGS AND SUBHEADINGS

Generally speaking, headings and subheadings should be written in sentence case, without full stops, and highlighted in bold. However, there are some variations when it comes to designed visuals or campaign assets such as adverts and graphics.

Invest NI (Local)

Headlines: uppercase in designed or campaign assets, sentence case everywhere else. No full stops.

Subheadings: sentence case, no full stops.

Brand NI (International)

Headlines: sentence case, no full stops.

Subheadings: sentence case, no full stops.

LANGUAGE SPECIFICS

Abbreviations and acronyms

You can use acronyms and initialisms, so long as you use the complete phrase first and introduce the abbreviation in brackets.

Example

The Department of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Ampersand (&)

Do not use an ampersand unless it is part of a brand name or title like Wild & Bloom, H&M or Johnson & Johnson. In most cases, just use “and”. But you can ignore this rule in any formats where character counts are very limited, such as PPC ads or the headline fields on paid social media ads.

Bold

Highlight text in bold sparingly. Reserve it for headings and subheadings.

Colons

Use colons to introduce a list, explanation, example or to create a strong pause for emphasis.

Example

“We need three things for the project: time, resources and commitment.”

You shouldn’t use a capital letter directly after a colon unless it’s for a proper noun, title or a quote.

Dates and times

Always be specific about the day and the month. Don’t use commas or add -st, -nd, -rd or -th to digits. In most cases, spell out days and months in full. Ignore this rule when space is tight, such as in tables and social media.

- Monday rather than Mon
- December rather than Dec
- The 1990s rather than the 90s or the nineties.

Date formats – Domestic audiences

Set out dates as day, date, month, and year.

Example

Monday 4 May 2001

Unless it is automatically generated by an online system, do not prefix single-digit dates with a zero, i.e. Monday 04 May 2001.

Date formats – International audiences

Different countries set out dates in different ways. Always check the location of your target audience to ensure the correct format is used. For example, the United States uses the ‘month, date, year’ format (April 1 2025). Whereas the UK uses the ‘date, month, year’ format (1 April 2025).

Use “to” in date ranges rather than hyphens, en-dashes, or em-dashes. “To” is quicker to read than punctuation and easier for screen readers.

- “tax year 2011 to 2012”
- “Monday to Friday”
- “10 November to 21 December”

Italics

Use italics sparingly.

Line spacing

Use single line spacing.

Numbers

When writing numbers zero to nine, write them in words. Write anything larger than nine as numerals, except at the beginning of sentences. Insert a comma for clarity in numbers over 999. Example: ‘We support over 1,000 businesses.’

Open punctuation

Open punctuation removes unnecessary punctuation to make text cleaner and simpler. You can use this approach for acronyms and initialisms.

Examples:

INI (not I.N.I.)

Mr Fitch (not Mr. Fitch)

Phone numbers

Don’t use brackets in phone numbers. Instead, put a space between the code and the number. Break the number into groups of four numerals to make them easier to scan.

Example

028 9032 0202

Slashes

Avoid using slashes to show a relationship between two words – they are too ambiguous. Instead, think about the word that the slash replaces and use that.

Example

“Please bring your driving licence/birth certificate.” ❌

“Please bring your driving licence or birth certificate.” ✅

Time formats

Use the 24-hour clock format.

- 23:30 rather than 11:30 pm
- 09:00 rather than 9 am

Separate hours and minutes with a colon (:) and use “to” in time ranges rather than hyphens.

Example

12:30 to 13:30

Do not abbreviate the words “hours”, “minutes”, and “seconds”. Be specific. Avoid vague timeframes such as “soon” or “next month”.

Underlining

Avoid underlining text, especially on digital formats – readers may mistake it for a hyperlink.

Web addresses

Always use lowercase, with a maximum of one forward slash extension.

Example

InvestNI.com ❌

investni.com ✅

investni.com/support-for-business/go-further-grow-stronger ❌

investni.com/exports ✅

THANK YOU

If you have any further questions or would like to request any of the brand assets or additional guides, such as our Brand Guidelines or Short Writing Guide, please contact the Communications Group at:

communications@investni.com