

DSM Writing Guide



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DSM

BRIGHT SCIENCE. BRIGHTER LIVING.

Hello and welcome to this latest version of the DSM Writing Guide. Our aim is to help you write clearly, consistently – and creatively – in a way that is relevant to your audience (whoever they may be).

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1. Getting the basics right

First, a few words about words...

DSM is a global company that communicates in US English. Although many of our people are not native speakers, much of the guidance and advice that follows in this guide is applicable *to all languages*. Why? Because words remain our primary way of communicating, both as a company and as a species. It's therefore essential that we choose the right ones - and put them in the correct order.

In fact, you could say that written communication is a transaction. In return for giving our audience information, we hope to receive their interest, engagement and advocacy: and to do that, our writing first needs to be relevant.

Establish relevance by writing for your reader

The first and most important job of any writer is to ensure that your intended audience *reads what you have written* (otherwise, why bother?). Establishing relevance with the reader means understanding them and their needs – and then balancing this against our own needs and requirements at DSM.

This is easier than you might think, because *every one of us* is a reader. Just like the people we're trying to reach we are curious; we like to be entertained; and if we have the time... we will read it. So, before you write anything, establish:

- Who is your reader (and wider target audience).
- What are they looking to achieve?
- What is the most relevant way of telling our story in a way that most appeals to them?

Example: passing the 'what's in it for me?' test

In 2005 DSM was one of the first companies listed on the Euronext AEX index to introduce a global whistleblower policy, which offers protection to employees who report abuses within the company.



...becomes

Our whistleblower policy protects all employees who report abuses within DSM.



Let's be clear

Being relevant also means being clear and compelling in the way we tell our story.

Start by organizing your thoughts ideas in bullet points that together form a cohesive storyline.

This *does not* mean that you need to start every story at the beginning. Instead, start with the most important or relevant point.

Example: the words are right... but are they in the right order?

Imagine DSM is opening a new state-of-the-art science center. It will include 12 labs and 50 staff working on creating next-generation biobased materials for customers in a variety of industries.

It's clear. But is it compelling? *How might we order this information differently?* How about this:

- A new generation of biobased materials is now being developed by DSM that enables customers to create exciting new products.
- We expect that these materials will be used in a variety of industries (x, y, z).
- A dedicated team of 50 will be doing this work in a new state-of-the-art science center including 12 labs.

Keep it short and simple

Let's be real: people don't read like they used to. They don't have the time to read large volumes of text, and even if they do, their patience is limited.

There is a huge temptation – especially for a science company like DSM – to tell everyone, everything. The problem is that by *emphasizing everything* it's easy to dilute the message. Or, to use the old advertising industry mantra: throw someone a ball (ok, maybe two) and they'll catch them. Throw them six balls and they'll most likely drop them all.

So, keep it concise.

- **Use short sentences.** That's it.
- **Never use a long word where a short one will do.** Why say 'utilize' when 'use' is just as good?
- **Don't overcomplicate:** a doorknob is not 'an innovation in residential access'. It's a doorknob.
- **Lose unnecessary words and phrases.** Rather than actively seeking new partners, aren't we just... seeking new partners?

Avoid jargon

Even within the specialized, niche markets where DSM tends to operate, we should never assume that everyone understands the technical and scientific nuances of what we are saying.

The simple rule here: Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

Example: The dairy matrix = dairy.

Improved nutrition solution = better nutrition

Try not to state the obvious

On the other hand, there are certain facts of life that it's safe to say our readers will know.

- The global marketplace is competitive.
- Customers are looking to become more efficient.
- Protein is an essential source of nutrition.
- The automotive industry is changing shape before our very eyes.

Is there a more relevant or contextualized way of saying this? If not, don't say it (and keep it brief).

Be active not passive

Try writing your important statements and messages using active language. Here's an example from DSM competitor, Kerry – along with how it could be improved.

Example: let's get active

Kerry animal feed additives and processing aids help optimise poultry and swine nutrient absorption, improve animal gut health and support the sustainable and efficient production of feed for a range of animals.



Becomes...

Optimise poultry and swine nutrient absorption, improve animal gut health and support the sustainable and efficient production of animal feed – with our feed additives and processing aids.



Example: don't pause for a clause

We could improve this important message even *further* by removing the long clause and creating two shorter sentences (tip: read it out loud and if you run out of breath...the sentence is too long).

Looking to optimise poultry and swine nutrient absorption, improve animal gut health and support the sustainable and efficient production of animal feed? Try our feed additives and processing aids.

2. Digital writing

The points we've covered so far are even more relevant to the digital medium – whether you're writing a web site, an email (newsletter) or social media.

People tend to 'scan' words online rather than read them in detail; so here are a few key things to remember:

- **Limit punctuation and capital letters.** They are harder to process when viewed on a screen – so go easy on both. For example, reduce the amount of commas in sentences.
- **Keep shortening.** Make headlines, sentences, paragraphs and pages even shorter – and as active as possible.
- **Tell users where they are.** Remember that when navigating a web site, words serve as important signpost for the reader. If the page is about Sustainability, for example, make sure that word is used in the page title.

Web sites and keyword optimization

Web site content presents an interesting challenge because of search engines. One important way of getting our web sites (and their individual pages) found by users is to use relevant and high-ranking keywords and phrases that we know users are inputting into search engines.

The good news is that because DSM works in niche and specialized markets, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is far easier for us than if we were selling mass-market consumer goods like shoes or cars. So here are some tips:

- **Take some time to study google searches** on the topic you're writing about and identify a group of keywords and phrases that are relevant. There are various (free) tools out there to help with this - not least the free google keyword tool.
- **Remember how users generally input search terms** – that is, using strings of words or short sentences, like: 'reduce carbon footprint vitamin production'. Thus, ensure that your story talks about how we...reduce the carbon footprint of vitamin production!
- **Insert keywords in the right places:** headlines, subheadings, page snippets & summaries and links (as well as the main body of page text, of course).
- **It's ok to be inconsistent.** For example, at DSM we use the word sustainability – but potential searchers may use different, related key words or phrases (biobased, ecological, environmentally friendly, green, etc).
- **If in doubt, never compromise** your story or our brand in order to accommodate keywords. No-one wants to read a home page introduction that mentions the word 'sustainability' eight times.

3. Bringing in the brand: how to be creative & consistent

We've covered the basics of good written communication. So how do these apply specifically to DSM and our brand?

The same three personality traits that inform our wider brand identity also drive our writing style and tone of voice.

Courageous: not being afraid to make statements that get people thinking and help us stand out from the crowd.

Example:

If not us, who? If not now, when?
(DSM Animal Health & Nutrition).

Caring: tapping into the emotional side of our brand to write in a human way

Example:

With you when it matters (Dyneema®)

Collaborative: broadening our story beyond DSM to include the wider world we serve (and make brighter!) – not least our customers.

Example:

Join us to see how we can bring exciting new dairy to the table together? (DSM and CSK)

Getting the tone right

Even for professionals, writing in a consistent tone of voice can be difficult. So, let's make it easy.

- **Write as you would speak.** In other words, less formal, and more intimate. After all, people want to feel they are communicating with a human being, not a faceless corporation.
- **Read whatever you have written out loud.** Is it clear – and authentic? You'll know immediately if what you've created sounds like DSM.
- **Ask a colleague to read it.** Writing is subjective, so why not get another pair of eyes on your work – just to check that the tone (and content) is what you intended.

If you're ever in doubt about tone of voice, there are two publications worth referencing: Business Week magazine and the trusted New Scientist. Both do an excellent job of explaining complex ideas in a relevant, concise and engaging way

Getting creative

Consistency is important. But it should never stop us being creative. So when it comes to writing, what does 'being creative' really mean?

Creativity goes beyond being clear and relevant (as we covered in chapter 1). It's about creating stopping power; grabbing attention; making readers think, question – and hopefully act and respond.

Ultimately, we want our brand and its voice to be differentiated from all the other noise out there – and the key is to find fresh and alternative ways of getting our message across.

Here are just a few ways to stimulate your creativity:

- **Be bold:** perhaps by challenging the reader. The future starts now. Are you ready to play your part? (taken from the Careers landing page on DSM.com)
- **Be human:** write like you would speak (or to put it another way), don't write anything you would be hesitant about saying out loud to your audience.
- **Focus less on what it is, more on what it does:** Delvotest® is a testing kit from DSM for detecting bacteria in milk. But for farmers it's the ultimate early warning system for ensuring a safe product.
- **Show, don't tell:** Use hard-hitting facts, statistics, anecdotes and testimonials to support your story. For example: how important is vitamin C supplementation to our diet? Well, you would need to eat four oranges each day to reach your recommended daily allowance.
- **Brutally summarize:** Balancius™ is a product that significantly increases feed efficiency and digestibility in broilers. In other words...it helps poultry farmers produce more food from less feed.
- **Be original:** instead of saying that a product is innovative (a word now used by everyone), why not inventive – or ingenious? In general, try and avoid using terms and phrases that you are used to seeing in print – because the more common they are, the less impact they have.
- **Play off imagery:** for example...
Create high-quality pasta with an appetizing *twist!*



4. Basic style do's and don'ts

- **Spelling:** we always use US spelling, except in the official names of some DSM units (eg, DSM Savoury Ingredients) and external organizations (World Food Programme).
- **Abbreviations:** avoid using abbreviations like BG, BU. Spell out the words in full instead: Business Group and Business Unit.
- **Acronyms:** always spell out in full on first use only with the acronym in parenthesis. For example, the United Nations (UN). Then use UN from then on.
- **Royal DSM or not?** We only use our full name of Royal DSM in very specific circumstances: that is, first reference only in press releases, financial communications, and on the home page of our web site. Otherwise we just use the less formal 'DSM'.
- **Our company:** Should we talk about DSM in the first person (we) or the third person (it)? We suggest you use common sense. For example, in an internal newsletter article, use 'we'; but for a press release on our Q2 results, we would use the more formal third person.
- **Gender neutrality:** If the chairman is female, she is the chairwoman or chairperson. When referring to both genders, simply use the plural form to keep things clean and simple: ie they instead of he/she.
- **Numbers:** write numbers one-to-nine in full (with 10 onwards written in figures). For financial amounts only, always use a decimal point to separate numbers rather than a comma.
- **Financials:** in running text, use the euro sign (€), not EUR. For the US dollar, use the abbreviation USD, not US\$.
- **Bullet points:** always make sure they are self-contained sentences. Start each bullet point with a capital letter and end each one with a full stop (period).
- **Trademark symbols (™ and ®):** always use them on first reference in the text.
- **Capitalization:** use capitals for proper nouns like DSM Engineering Materials. But use lower case in all other instances, eg, DSM is a leader in engineering materials.
- **Latin & scientific terms:** always use italics: eg, the fungus *Aspergillus niger*.
- **Job titles:** Human Resources (not Manager Human Resources).
- **Eg & etc:** don't use periods to punctuation these, but always include a comma immediately afterwards (as demonstrated several times in these guidelines!).
- **Dates:** 19 December 1969.
- **And finally...** is it ok to start a sentence with 'and'? Yes, we think so. And so do most readers these days.

5. References

The fine details of writing in any language are obvious (especially English). There are many rules - and many exceptions to those rules. Our opinion is that getting the basics right - from both a communications and brand perspective - is more important than the technicalities.

However, if you do have a specific technical question, we urge you to consult one of the many reference documents available on usage and grammar.

[The Concise Oxford English Dictionary](#) is acknowledged as one of the world's leading sources on English language usage.

[The Associated Press](#) style guide is useful for American English spelling (although DSM does not follow all American grammar and usage rules).

[Roget's Thesaurus](#) is the place for finding alternative English words (synonyms).

Even better, find a native speaker and consult them.

In the meantime, happy writing!

Welcome to the DSM Financial Terminology Guide

Here you'll find the correct house style for all the terms we use in our financial brand communications, including Dutch translations and various words and phrases we should always avoid using. For more information download our [Financial Terminology Guide](#)