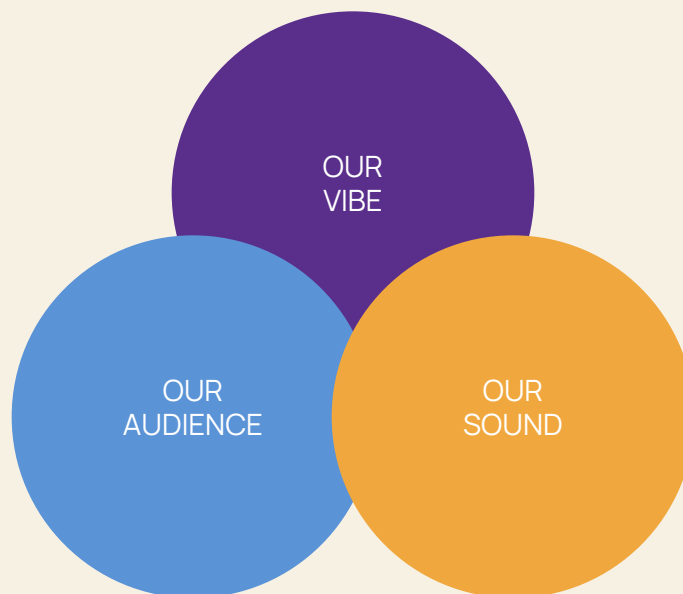


The Brand Principles Guide

Clarify what matters most — and what you want to avoid. A real case study, seven ways to describe your sound, and plenty of room to actually write.



Why name your principles?

Every piece of content you put out is a small decision about who you are. Without a shared reference, those decisions drift — and the brand starts to feel inconsistent even when the work itself is good.

This isn't a full style guide — it's the fast version: the handful of calls that help keep things consistent, even when you're moving quickly.

1

Our Vibe

Three words that capture the feeling people walk away with.

2

Our Audience

Who this is genuinely for — and who it's not for.

3

Our Sound

How your voice actually comes across, dialed in across seven levers.

BEST FOR

A team refreshing a tired vibe, a founder naming their voice for the first time, or anyone tired of every post sounding a little different.

Who this is for, and why



ANDREW'S TAKE

Founder, Studio Groovy

I bring this exercise into many engagements — nonprofits, startups, and solopreneurs alike. A clear voice is what helps your content feel instantly recognizable, even without a logo attached. It's also one of the fastest ways to build trust: people can often tell when an organization actually knows who it is, versus one that's still figuring it out in public. Whether you're refreshing something tired or naming your voice for the first time, this is where that clarity tends to start.

WHY THIS REALLY MATTERS

NONPROFITS

A consistent voice builds trust with funders, donors, and the community you serve — all of whom want to see clear, authentic, values-aligned messaging about who you are and what you do. Building out an earned revenue offer can feel new, and for some, in tension with your values or how you've always approached the work. Communicating it well means finding language that feels energetically aligned to who you are, what you believe, and how you operate — while still feeling distinct enough that your audience knows exactly what this opportunity is about. That's often where revisiting your organizational ikigai or core business hypothesis work pays off.

STARTUPS

Your voice is often the first thing people notice, before they understand your product. Once you've validated that you've actually got something great — with users, with friends and family — traction tends to be next, and that means tapping into real desire. Branding is a big part of that: it helps you stand out in a crowded market and signals who you're for, to early customers and investors alike. As a founder, I've seen that people aren't just buying a quality product or experience — they're buying into the team you're building and the vibe you're going for. It's something I didn't fully appreciate until I watched it play out with our own early customers and investors.

SOLOPRENEURS

When you're a team of one, your voice has to do double duty — building trust in a first email as much as a keynote. It's a flooded market of coaches, consultants, and service providers, so how you stand out matters. What you represent, and just as clearly what you don't, is where real differentiation starts — often the first step in a longer journey toward a genuinely distinct brand, online and offline. A big piece of that is your vibe and your voice — not sounding like the same AI-generated or LinkedIn-flavored content everyone else is putting out, but cutting through the noise in a way that's authentically you and still aligned with your values as a leader.

A recognizable voice earns trust faster — it tells people who you are before they've read a word of what you're actually saying.

Ben & Jerry's

A REAL WORLD EXAMPLE

Full disclosure: I love ice cream, and Ben & Jerry's is one of my favorite examples of a brand that stands out and stays crystal clear about what it's trying to achieve.

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield were childhood friends who turned a converted gas station in Burlington, Vermont into a scoop shop in 1978. From early on, they used the ice cream itself as an activism vehicle — flavor names doubling as commentary, and a standing pledge to put a real share of profits toward community causes through their own foundation.

That streak got tested in 2000, when Unilever acquired the company. The deal came with an unusual condition: an independent board built specifically to keep the social mission intact under new ownership — proof they'd rather build the governance than water down the voice.

That's the kind of tension a sharply defined voice has to hold: without one, "ice cream with opinions" can read as either preachy or toothless.

Here's how their vibe, audience, and sound hold that together — using the same three moves you'll make on the next two pages:

THEIR VIBE IN THREE WORDS

Bold. Genuine. Playful.

WHO IT'S FOR

Adults who never fully grew up. Not kids, and not anyone looking for a buttoned-up, corporate-safe voice.

HOW THEY SOUND

LEVER	THIS IS US	NOT THIS
Tone	Bold and direct	Rude or insensitive
Warmth	Genuine and informal	Fake, corporate, or bureaucratic
Humor	Clever and quirky	Corny, snarky, or sarcastic
Visuals	Playful, hand-drawn	Slick, childish, or clichéd

YOUR TURN

The next two pages walk you through these same three moves — for what you're building.

Your vibe and your audience

Don't overthink this. Write the three words you'd actually use — not the ones that sound good in a deck.

OUR VIBE IN THREE WORDS

WHO THIS IS FOR

Picture the exact person or organization you're building for. Who are they?

WHO THIS ISN'T FOR

Now name who this isn't for — the client you'd actually turn down.

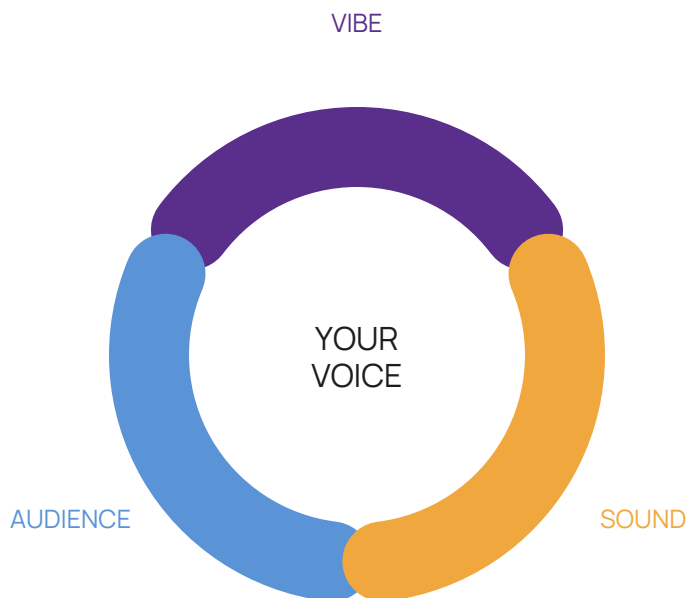
Find your sound

For each one, name the version that's actually you — and the version that misses. A short, honest answer beats a polished one. Skip what doesn't apply.

	THIS IS US	NOT THIS
Tone matter-of-fact vs. playful. Would a stranger reading your last post laugh or take notes?		
Directness softened vs. blunt. Do you cushion bad news or just say it straight?		
Energy calm vs. high-energy. Does your content read like a deep breath or a pep rally?		
Intensity restrained vs. bold. Do you undersell your wins or lead with them?		
Warmth clinical vs. personal. Would a client call you a partner or a vendor?		
Visuals minimal vs. maximal. Is your last deck spare and clean or busy and layered?		
Provocation safe vs. edgy. Have you ever lost a follower on purpose?		

Turn this into your voice

You've got three solid building blocks. Turning them into a living brand voice — the thing your whole team can actually use — takes a bit more.



+ Tagline

+ Visual identity

+ Content pillars

+ Brand story

+ Style guide

+ Messaging examples

+ Tone do's and don'ts

+ Sample captions

Start by testing these against real content: does an actual post, email, or page sound like what you just wrote down? If not, revisit the words, not just the writing.

Two more things worth building: a short style guide teammates can reference, and a few sample pieces of content that show the voice in action, not just describe it.

You have the foundation here — not a finished brand system. How much further you build depends on your team's size, your content volume, and how many other people need to sound like you.

WHAT'S NEXT

This guide is a key input — not the whole picture. Branding and marketing take more than a worksheet, and you may want additional support to get there. Here's one way to think about that mix: AI can be a solid starting point, especially on a tight budget, but branding is fundamentally creative, human work. When you have the resources, a graphic designer or branding expert will take these assets further than any worksheet can. The clarity you've built here, and the reflection you keep coming back to about your voice and identity, is a big part of what sets that collaboration up well.

Now put it somewhere you'll see it.

A brand voice does its best work when it's actually used. Pin this page above your desk or drop it into a doc your whole team can reach.



SURFACE

- Read your three vibe words out loud — to yourself, not your team.
- Circle the one lever where your “this is us” answer actually surprised you.



SHARE

- Put your This/Not This table in front of a client and ask where you've missed.
- Send your vibe words to five people who know your work and see if they match.



SHIP

- Rewrite one live page, post, or email using the sound you just defined.
- Delete the line in your last piece of content that doesn't actually sound like you.

Studio Groovy helps founders, leaders, and mission-driven teams turn stalled ideas into shipped, revenue-generating work — without burning out the people doing it. Together, we build the systems, culture, and revenue that let good work last.



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