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PUTTING AI TO WORK · RESOURCES

Make It Write in Your Voice

The voice file: teach it by example, then keep it honest.

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Every assistant writes the same way out of the box: competent, agreeable, and interchangeable. If you send that, you sound like everyone else who sent that. The fix is not to train a model on your writing. I looked at that and decided against it — fine-tuning is a heavier project than this problem deserves, it ties your voice to one vendor's model, and you would be maintaining it forever. The fix is a document. You teach the assistant your voice the way you would teach a new hire: here is what we sound like, here is what we never say, and here is what I meant when I marked up your first draft.

That document is the voice file. Three steps build it. One loop maintains it.

Step one. Collect eight to ten samples of your writing.

Real writing, not samples you polish for the occasion. Emails you actually sent. An internal note. Something longer if you have it — a memo, a letter, a post. Ideally written before you started using assistants, so the machine is learning you and not an earlier machine.

Mix the registers. One sample of how you deliver bad news. One of how you ask for something. One of how you write when you are at ease. Trim each to the part that sounds like you on a normal day — your normal day is the voice you need on tap, not your best day.

Step two. Build the file.

Give the samples to your assistant with this:

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Here are ten samples of my writing. Read them and describe my voice precisely enough that a stranger could imitate it: typical sentence length and rhythm, how I open and how I close, words and phrases I reuse, words I never use, how formal I am, and how I handle disagreement. Then list ten rules that would keep a draft inside my voice. Do not flatter me. Where my writing has a bad habit, name it — I will decide whether it stays.

Read what comes back and correct it. The machine will get some of it wrong, and the corrections are where the file earns its keep — cross out what is not you, add what it missed. Save the corrected description together with the samples as one document. That is the voice file. It is yours: a file you own, not a setting inside someone's product.

Step three. Standing instructions.

Put the voice file where the assistant sees it every time: custom instructions, a project or workspace that holds it, or pasted at the top of the conversation. Then set the standing rule:

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You have my voice file. When you draft anything for me, follow it. When you are unsure whether a line is my voice, choose the plainer option. Never add enthusiasm I did not put in. When a draft drifts from the file, I will show you my version — treat the difference as a correction, and update the file.

The loop: draft, compare, correct.

Now use it. Ask for a draft of something real. Edit the draft the way you actually would before sending — and then, instead of just sending it, hand the edit back:

COPY THIS PROMPT

Here is your draft, and here is what I actually sent. List the differences as rules: what you did that I undid, and what I added that you missed. Update the voice file with the rules worth keeping.

Run the loop every time a draft needs real editing. The file converges fast, because you are not teaching it English — you are teaching it the distance between its defaults and you. You will know it is working when drafts start going out with light edits or none.

Even then, read every word before it goes. The voice file gets you your register. It does not get you your judgment.

What this is not

You are not fine-tuning a model. Nothing is trained, nothing is hosted, nothing needs maintaining, and nothing is stuck with one vendor — next year you can hand the same file to a different assistant and be home in an afternoon. That portability was the reason for the decision.

And one boundary worth keeping, from the talk: before you send a drafted message, ask whether the effort was the message. A voice file makes the machine sound like you. For a condolence note, an apology, telling someone you are proud of them — the sound of you was never the point. Write those yourself.