



BOOK 1: WRITING TO CONNECT

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ASSIGNMENT 4

TOOLKIT 4:

WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE



Amplify Mobilise Change is a DG Murray Trust Innovation project designed to help South African civil society shift its thinking about and develop more creative, impactful and efficient online communication and technology practices.

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About this toolkit

Our words and writing need to inspire and amplify our vision, mobilise our audiences into action and create lasting social change. To achieve this, many of us need to step out of our organisational writing style, into the realm of social language, especially if we are using popular media channels like social media. In this toolkit we unpack simple writing techniques and SEO practices to help you create the best experience for your readers online, while still maintaining your brand and voice.

Please note: Our toolkits use a Book and Chapter structure.

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

BOOK 1: WRITING TO CONNECT

Description

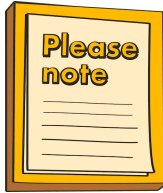
At the heart of good writing is the intention to write for how you want your audiences to read and enjoy your text. In this book, we revisit some writing fundamentals as well as review some extra tips for using text purposefully and directly to bring about what you need done and to encourage positive feelings from your audiences.

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Chapter 1. Writing tips for any online context

Words are the cornerstone of all our communication. When you plan your content, spend time analysing how you want to present yourself to your audiences using language. Is your aim to be inclusive, challenging or gentle? It's worth finding the words that reflect your intentions and the relationships you want to create with your audiences.



Much of this first chapter is available in Toolkit 3: Online Content Strategy. If you don't have this toolkit, you can download it from our website. If you do have the third toolkit, and find this chapter repetitive, please skip over it!

Here are some strategic principles of how to write in our context:

Use direct language and relatable words

While it is tempting to stick to a style of language with which your organisation is most comfortable (perhaps the academic style of reports or the scientific jargon of hard science-based organisations), your messaging and intentions can be lost if your audience feels like your language is unapproachable. If an online user can't relate to what you are saying in your online communications because of how you are wording your information, they are less inclined to stay attentive and may leave your page or website.

Language is not simply a neutral device. Language can give away your position and perspective on something and can create or prevent closeness between you and your audience. The way you express something in words can help your argument in more ways than you realise. In our field, our aim is to encourage our audiences to make an emotional connection to what we are doing and saying.

Think about the word 'stakeholder'. What does this word mean to you? Does it make you feel included and appreciated when you are referred to as a 'stakeholder'? Or would you prefer to be referred to as a community member? Or a supporter? The words we choose are loaded with meaning. If you want to frame your messaging to encourage as much positive engagement as possible, make sure you use words and language that mean what you want it to mean.

Plain language, short sentences

Using plain language in manageable sentences is also an inclusive strategy and helps your audience understand your messaging, thus feeling more connected to your brand, cause and services. If your audience can understand the language you use, they can grasp the issue you're addressing and realise the role they can play in supporting your organisation.

For example, adapting your core strategic messages from academic or organisational speak into terms and words that make more sense to the average person. This removes barriers that may exist between organisational practices and the social practices of humans you want to have emotional connections with.

Plain language goes much further on digital channels than organisational or technical language, even when communicating with donors and partners. Remember, even if a big institution donates to your organisation, a human being in that institution will read your report. And so should everyone else!

Use active sentences

Similarly, for example, if you use the passive voice a lot, your messaging loses its sense of action and directness. If you use big nouns a lot, instead of verbs, you lose out on the chance to connect and simplify with verbs. This is especially true for online environments. Remember the Gutenberg parenthesis – the online world is an especially social zone, characterised by fluidity and openness. Content and information meant to engage audiences should be easy to understand and access.

What about mixing languages?

We know that words and language can change your relationship with your supporters and audiences. Ideally, you would speak to your audience in their preferred language. If your organisation's chosen language of communication is English, which is common in South Africa, then aim to use the most relatable language possible – that is, a language that people can relate to and understand easily. Most organisations who have done audience research with local communities, especially in rural and under-resourced areas, find a demand for information in a community's home language – often in tandem with the language of the organisation. Consider translating the text into the home language of your target audience, and offer it along with English, if that is your main organisational language. You would do this with intention and in a way that sits well alongside your other languages.

My Vote Counts creates some of its advocacy messages in isiXhosa on their English page, which is aligned with their advocacy work. Using a home language makes it easier to engage with the frames and feelings of isiXhosa-speaking audiences, who are critical in My Vote Counts' advocacy movement.



Are slang and colloquialisms okay?

You may find that using colloquial language, vernacular or slang in your content can have a positive effect on your target audiences. Your language must be authentic though and not 'rude'. Do not write colloquially if you can't do it confidently and with integrity and if it's not in line with your brand personality.

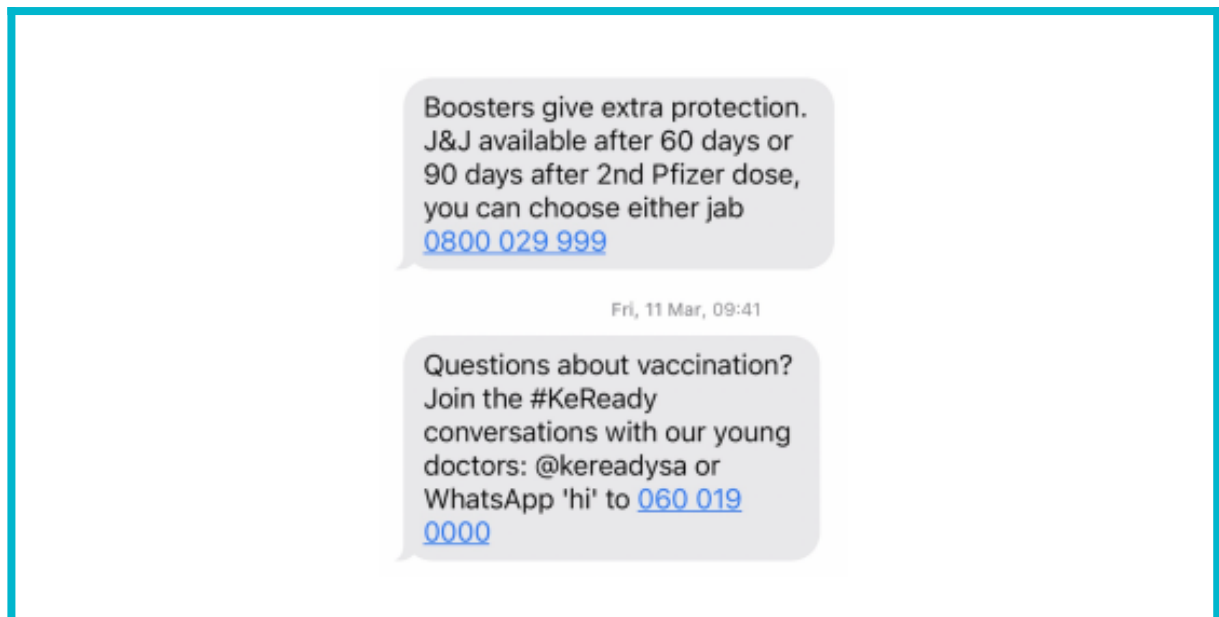
You would also need to do audience research to test any slang or colloquialisms before you introduce them to make sure they have the effect you want and do not come across as patronising or demeaning.

Example:

A few years ago, the City of Cape Town used slang in an anti-litter campaign, which came across as patronising and demeaning to those who speak Afrikaans and identify as Cape Coloured. The ads used local slang like 'eish' and 'bra' which are used casually by many in the Western Cape. The City of Cape Town is a DA stronghold and is often seen as anti-poor in its policies and bylaws. Also, this campaign seems to imply that poor people are to blame for littering. The campaign was not well received.



But, used respectfully and with authenticity, colloquial language can bring people closer to you and your messaging, as seen in the South African government's use of the #keready campaign's hashtag and slang words like 'vooma' and 'jab' in their vaccine awareness campaign work and approach to Covid (seen below on SMS). Here, slang is used to unify and is done authentically in line with the South African national identity.



Watch your tone

Along with language, audiences respond differently to the tone of your message. Where possible, avoid using an argumentative tone or scare tactics in your communication, as this can threaten your audience. Consider if your organisation would have a more formal or casual tone. Perhaps it is friendly, informative, assertive or urgent. Your tone carries meaning and elicits emotional responses in people. It's important to make sure that your tone reflects the position and message you want your audiences to engage with.

Example:

[Side-by-Side](#) is a local, national Early Childhood Development (ECD) campaign that promotes the Department of Health's ECD services. While their aim is to see an increase in the use of ECD services and an improved understanding across South Africa of how to care for children between 0 to 2 years old, the campaign frames its information in a way that is relevant for South African caregivers and the needs of their children, as opposed to focusing on and promoting the ECD services themselves.

The campaign uses simple, conversational language and a supportive tone to share helpful and relevant advice on the campaign's 5 pillars, Nutrition, Love, Protection, Healthcare and Extra Care. By relating to caregivers in a language that they understand, the campaign, in turn, builds the caregivers' trust in the Department of Health (DOH) as an expert on ECD as well as in its services.

[You can find their messaging and content resources on the Side-by-Side website.](#)

Use words that include your readers and audiences

Your language needs to take stock of everything you want to say, and don't want to say. Even our spelling is heavy with meaning and often, heavy with power.

Example:

The dominant use of the word 'man' in our language to refer to humankind embeds a patriarchal lens into society. Even the word 'woman' has been found wanting by feminists and nonbinary people – having 'womxn' as a viable alternative to 'woman' shows how one letter can change the way a word makes people feel, and includes those who felt excluded by the concept and history of the word, 'man'.

Even pronouns have power! First-person pronouns like 'you' and 'us' include the whole. 'They', as a gender-neutral pronoun replacing the binary of he/ she represents an important breakthrough in gender framing.

How do we use references to people that are more conscious and empowering? Referring to someone as a 'survivor' rather than a 'victim' allows someone who has experienced sexual violence to choose a path to healing rather than being confined to trauma.

How about changing how you use the word 'beneficiaries' and use references to people that rather reflect their chosen identities? Calling someone a 'beneficiary' is alienating if the person you are referring to is a mother within a community, for example. Plus, the word beneficiary implies they simply benefit from your services but are we not building active citizens and participating with the people we work with?

Similarly, referring to your 'stakeholders' draws on a big, abstract group and doesn't help anyone feel how important and nuanced the humans are in your network.

A very simple but highly effective strategy is to replace misleading or negative phrases or words with ones that embody your values and shift an audience's perception, giving them new words and phrases to use themselves.

Example:

Shifting power

Reclaim the City is campaigning to shift attitudes to the homeless and people living in squats and empty buildings. Their work and campaigns are aimed to help citizens and public servants understand the homeless or the unhomed as people who have as much a right to a home as anyone else. A simple use of words makes their argument clear:



Reclaim the City
about a year ago



Residents, not occupiers, live at Cissie Gool House



NEWFRAME.COM

Residents, not occupiers, live at Cissie Gool House

A zine that depicts those living in what used to be an abandoned hospita...

Building up, not taking down

For parents and guardians – whose work is usually hard – our language carries huge importance. Society likes to allocate negative tropes onto children who may not be ‘easy’. Changing the words to describe children who may be challenging us helps society counteract this tendency and develop more understanding, compassion and curiosity about a child’s state of mind. Here is an example from the Gentle Mamma on Instagram:



Engaging consciously with context

Another example of how language can be used to create a different standpoint can be seen below, also from Instagram, this time on the activist account.



thconsciouskid 
2.0M followers

[View profile](#)



Janel Cubbage
@JanelCubbage



We are not minorities, we have been
minoritized.

We are not underrepresented, we
have been historically excluded.

Language matters.

[View more on Instagram](#)



112,825 likes



By undoing the noun forms, people who are typecast and locked into a certain position against their will can shake off oppressive labels and become something other or more. Simultaneously, this act of rephrasing removes the accountability carried by those who have been discriminated against and places it back on the discriminatory systems themselves.

This kind of language work is hugely important in activism. Even if your organisation does not have an activist project, you can, in subtle ways, shift perceptions simply by changing word order, converting nouns into adverbs or selecting different phrases!

Despite the demands of different online platforms and audiences, audiences have some basic needs when it comes to engaging with the written word.

Chapter 2. Ten point checklist

Need an easy checklist to guide you? Here are 10 tips to help you write better for online:

1 Write for your reader, not for yourself.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What language does my audience speak?
 - What will they best understand and relate to?
 - How can I make this an enjoyable and useful experience?
-

2 Lead with your important information.

The subject line, headline and first paragraph are there to serve a function — they need to capture your audience's attention.

3 Make it easier for the reader to remember the key points.

For non-native English speakers, this also helps reduce the likelihood of making grammatical errors.

4 Keep your subject, verb and object close together.

This helps the reader to understand the information quickly and retain it easily.

For example:

The impact that nutrition has on children's cognitive development is significant.

vs Nutrition has a significant impact on a child's cognitive development.

5 Cut out any unnecessary words or information.

Use the following shorter words instead of their longer alternatives:

In order to	>	to
In the event that	>	if
Subsequent to	>	after
Prior to	>	before
Despite the fact that	>	although
In light of	>	because, since
Owing to the fact that	>	because, since

6 Use strong verbs instead of nouns.

If you want someone to act, use a verb. Verbs promote action and nouns indicate a state.

For example:

The next generation is all of our responsibility. vs *We are all responsible for the next generation.*

7 Write in the positive.

Tell your reader what you want rather than what you don't want. Most people only hear the main verb and miss the 'not' in a sentence.

For example:

Don't forget to buckle. up. vs *Buckle up.*

8 Aim to use the active voice, always.

The active tense gives responsibility to the subject of the sentence. The passive voice removes that responsibility.

For example:

An email was sent out to the wrong board member. vs *I sent an email to the wrong board member.*

9 Watch your punctuation.

For example:

Eats, shoots, and leaves vs *Eats shoots and leaves*

Beware the Panda. vs *Beware the Panda!*

10 Avoid clichés and cheesy metaphors.

They're not going to advance your argument and may irritate your reader.

[illegible]

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

BOOK 2: WRITING FOR HUMANS AND ROBOTS ON WEB

Description

In this book, we tackle how you should strategically approach your website's written content to ensure the most fluid experience online. We also take you through the beginnings of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) for content and one of its most important features – keywords and keyword strategy.

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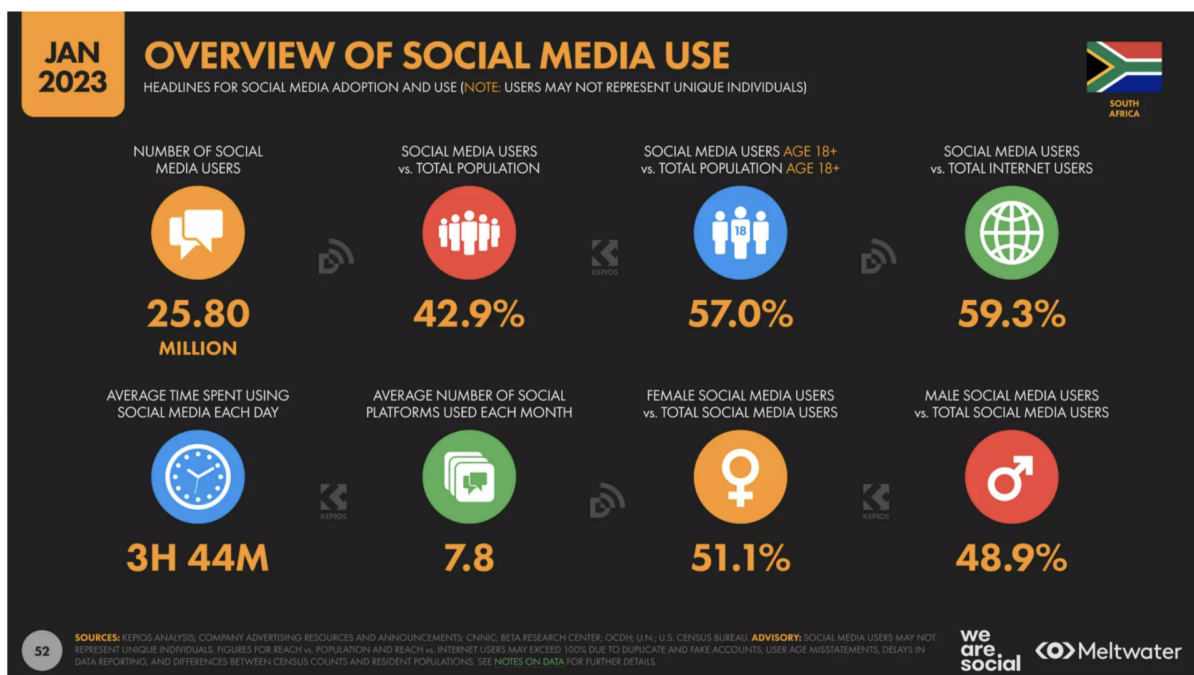
1. Writing for mobile, wherever you are
 2. How to bring SEO into your content practice
 3. Optimising content and keywords
 4. Web on-page SEO
-

Chapter 1. Writing for mobile, wherever you are

What does 'writing for mobile' mean? Well, in short, it means understanding the experience of the mobile audience or reader when you create content. This does not mean creating less, it means creating content and text that reads and shows well on mobile and gives a user/ reader a good experience on a smaller, portrait-format device.

While online users may have access to both their mobile and desktop computers, an increasing number of users grab their phones when they want to check something or read something online. This trend is universal, and South Africans are some of the most mobile-connected people on earth.

Here is an example showing how hyper-mobile South Africans are: 98% of South Africans accessing social media use their phones. This makes sense since social media platforms are usually app-based, but it also shows you how audiences want and expect their content to be served – on a small screen, compatible with a good mobile experience.



Source: [We are Social: Digital 2023 Report: South Africa](#)

The typical mobile user is someone accessing online content with a small device, usually with less time and less patience, and potentially (especially in our country) with limited data.

Connected media has enabled a new generation of 'readers' who are able to be, and expect to be, active participants in a content journey, rather than passive recipients. Owing to this, connected users, especially the 'digital native' generation (or millennials), are less tolerant of 'bad experiences' than those who are used to the print experience (where you couldn't change much about the information you were consuming). Now, if something does not satisfy or create value, online users feel no obligation to remain on a page or engage with a post.

As data is precious, content not worth watching or reading is easily ignored. And as screens are small, content that doesn't enable a great user experience (like being difficult to read or see) holds little appeal. You have to create content with all these things in mind and your writing should aim to be as user-friendly as possible, without being 'dumbed' down.

Ok, so what do I need to remember as I go?

We read differently on mobile

The way people read on a mobile device differs from the way they read on a desktop. On desktops, we tend to follow what's known as the 'golden triangle' or 'F-shaped' reading pattern. But on mobile, our attention is more evenly spread over a much smaller screen.

We are more impatient and goal-driven

Our behaviour is typically even more goal-driven on mobile than on desktop: searching for something, scrolling through reams of content for something to stand out, scanning for actionable information rather than browsing in a more open-ended way as we do when we are on a desktop and have more time. For example, your online audience might visit a website on their phone to sign a petition via social media, but then do deeper research about a subject on their laptop or desktop at work.

We are less patient and more fluid

We are also less patient or have less time when connected on mobile. Where do you spend time consuming connected content via your mobile phone? This graph gives a telling picture of how transitional our content consumption is on our mobiles.

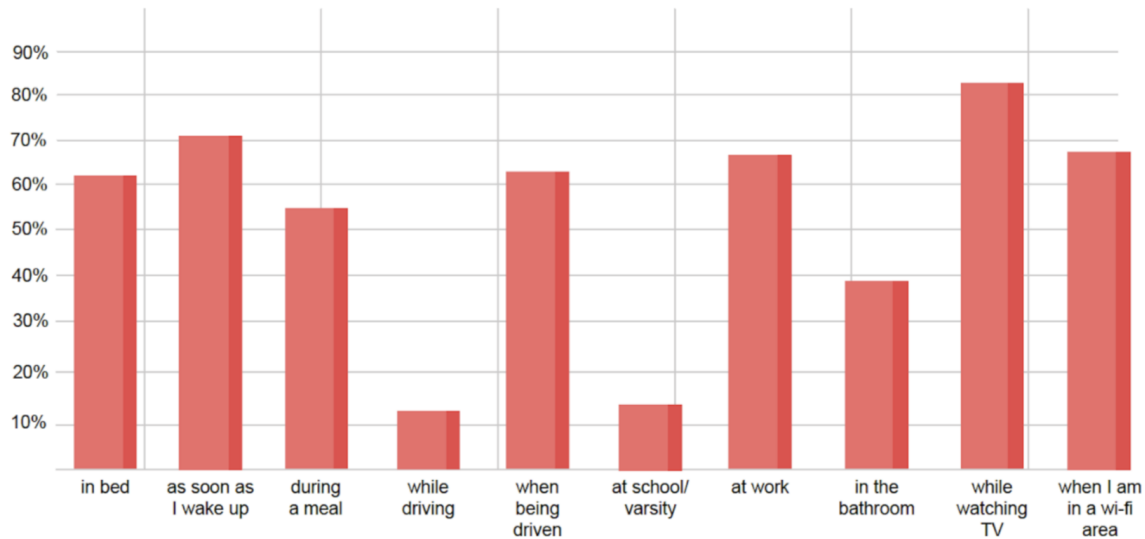
TIME OF USE

83% of respondents admit to using internet on their devices while watching TV in the last 30 days, with 71% saying they do as soon as they wake up.

39% admit to using the internet on their devices while they are in the bathroom, and 12% admit to doing so while driving.

TIME OF USE OF SMART DEVICES

Smart Device



iab.
south africa

www.effective measure.com

Source: Effective Measure, Nov-Dec 2015

PAGE 7

Source: [Mobile in South Africa Report for 2017](#) (IAB, Effective Measure)

As you can see, mobiles are the go-to place while we are in-between things. This transitional characteristic of mobile is telling for how we consume information. (Think back again to the Gutenberg parenthesis; mobile is like a super-accelerated version of this phenomenon.)

We are always 'on'

Our mobile phones are ubiquitous — they are with us everywhere! As we can see in the graph above, they can often function as a 'second screen'. We are on them even when we may have a desktop or TV in front of us.



Most of the world uses Google to search for information online. As the world's leading search engine and publisher, Google will nowadays penalise your site if you don't consider the mobile experience FIRST.

Key things to remember

Writing for mobile does not mean you write less or avoid details. Your audiences (and Google) still want a rich and valuable reading experience, regardless of screen type. However, the technology of mobile and screen size means there are some fundamental mobile-centric considerations you should keep in mind as you write:

Keep your sentences short	Long sentences that run over several lines are difficult to follow on a smaller screen. You do need to vary your sentence length though, or you'll sound robotic.
Split your text up with images and spaces	This makes it easy for a user to see where they are on a page.
Make your content easy to scroll through	Your user does not have a mouse or trackpad – it's all touch or scroll-based reading.
Get to the point as quickly as possible	As we know, in South Africa, data is still very expensive. And mobile users tend to bounce away from a page much quicker than those on a desktop or laptop.
Test or analyse your online content on your phone	Check what you have posted or published on a mobile device. It will help you experience your content as the majority of your online users will.
Avoid anything that slows the reader down	Revise and cut long sentences with complicated clauses or punctuation, such as semicolons and parentheses.

Ditch the jargon	Unless your audience happens to use a specialised term often, don't use it on your website. Instead, opt for plain and accessible language. Remember, you need to use words your users are likely to enter into their search engines in order to be found.
Put your website text through the Flesch-Kincaid readability test	Aim for a score of 70 or above. Even if your audience is highly educated, you're trying to facilitate speed and ease, often on a mobile screen. You can test your text in both Microsoft Word and Outlook. Here is a guide on how to test your readability.
Eliminate ambiguity	In print, it can be playful and witty, but online it's just self-sabotage. Prioritise clarity and transparency.
Break up blocks of text with devices such as bullets and numbers	Include descriptive points, which help search engines find your content and make the text easier for your users to scan.
Opt for modern language and conventional usage	In other words, use 'email' instead of 'e-mail', 'internet' not 'the internet'. Put your own opinions aside and consult <i>The Associated Press Stylebook</i> if you don't already have an organisational language style guide.
Choose your terms thoughtfully and keep them consistent across your site	If you're going to use 'donate', don't switch to 'fund' or 'give' elsewhere.
Beware of so-called 'zombie nouns'	These are lifeless nouns made from multisyllabic verbs. For instance, 'implementation' (from 'to implement') and 'upliftment' (from 'to uplift'). Academics and policymakers are fond of them, but their effect is vague and they don't reflect the way we use Google.  Beware of nominalizations (AKA zombie nouns) - Helen S...

Chapter 2. How to bring SEO into your content practice

Prioritising your audience is at the heart of good online content practice.

If you are writing and producing content for your online audience and publishing what you think they want online, then your online publishing practice is already solid.

As an online content specialist, this is your single most important job: to create content that resonates and improves the experience of the online users you want to please. Google's bots will love you for this. It is the heart of good SEO and if you do it well, your ranking will improve which means more people will see your content when they search for related topics.



WHAT ARE GOOGLE BOTS?

Google bots are web crawler machines or robots that 'crawl' your site to gather information about it, which they then feed back to Google. At the beginning, these bots and the way they operated were designed like machines and fed Google linear data related to content and websites. Over the years, Google has refined its approach to crawling the internet so that its bots can better assess the value and authenticity of a website. In other words, the bots are thinking more like humans and are looking for content that gives a valuable and authentic experience to humans.

What is 'ranking' and why does it matter?

When you type a word, phrase or question into a Google search bar, the results display or 'rank' in a certain order. Featuring high up on the first page of these results is hugely important to the success of your site because people very rarely look further than the first three or so results of the first page.

Search engines (Google is by far the most widely used) trawl through and evaluate sites based on a complex set of rules and criteria – a mathematical process or algorithm that defines and orders search results. Google doesn't make its algorithm public, but Search Engine

Optimisation specialists spend a great deal of time testing out what the algorithm prioritises, so we have reliable evidence about what it values. High on the list is a well-written text that directly answers users' questions. You don't have to be an SEO specialist to write website content/ text that ranks. This comes down to knowing your audience and taking the time to consider what matters to them as part of your writing process.



Breathe deeply...

SEO can be a complex field and for those of you who are interested in adding content SEO to your skill set, we can recommend some excellent online courses to you. We also spend some more time explaining SEO in the next chapter. For now, it's important to know that your website will rank higher if your writing gives people what they are looking for, simply and swiftly, and adds 'value' to their experience online.

So, what do people (and Google) want from website experiences?

You may have a list of objectives for your site and, while those objectives are certainly important, you will need to map them directly to the needs and interests of your audience if your website is to succeed.

Below are the key things to consider when you plan and publish content or pages on web:

Relevance and depth

People want information that matters to them or that is genuinely useful to them, nothing more, nothing less. For every paragraph you write, think: 'I am writing this so that my audience can have or do X'.

Writing for online web environments does not mean you need to write less or abbreviate more, in fact, the richer and more interesting your content, the better. However, you need to make it format well for the online experience, and make your text easy to read and 'skim' over too.

Ease of use

As we mentioned, people don't want to struggle to view, read or do something online. Make sure your text is legible on mobile, that images load easily, that URLs go to the right place and that you make the journey super clear every step of the way.

Here are some tips to help with this:

- Write as if your audience is trying to find something specific, fast (because they are!).
- Do not expect them to read everything on your website in a linear way, or to wade through non-essential information to find what they're looking for.
- It also helps to think of each page on your site as a discrete unit of meaning, to avoid topic overflow that could frustrate your reader. Use elements like summary blocks and subheadings; break your text up into pieces with images.

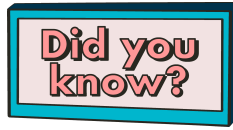
A clear path to action and easy search

People want to be able to take action immediately and effortlessly. Although the design and 'user experience' of your site contribute to function, words are the most important cue for action.

Your content should be easy to find and search for on your site. Keywords and correct categorisation is a big part of this as is a good social media and email strategy.

Here are some tips to help with this:

- Pay special attention to your calls to action and the words that tell your audience what to do, such as Contact, Donate, Download, Sign Up, Share, View, Watch, etc. Make sure these are prominent and familiar to your audience.
- Use internal links to help users take the right path to action.
- Make sure all pages open in a new tab.
- Avoid popups or pages that obstruct a person's journey for no reason.
- Make sure you let them know when an action has been completed. A thank you page or a confirmation email should be good.
- Consider chat bots to help with difficult processes online.



Accessibility is important

Keep in mind the reading experiences of older people, the visually impaired and people reading in their second or third language. Your visitor may also be reading your page in translation via a browser's auto-translate function. The clearer and simpler your writing, the better the quality of the translation.

Chapter 3. Optimising content and keywords

If you want to optimise your content to rank well on Google, you'll need to have a keyword strategy in place. Keywords are words that are central to your area of work and your audience's search habits online.

Keywords are the words and phrases in your written content that match the terms that people use to search for content like yours. Keywords can be single search terms – like 'poverty' or 'education' (we call these short-tail keywords) – or longer phrases like 'where are the poorest areas in South Africa' or 'how can we improve South Africa's education system' (we call these long-tail keywords).



Why is SEO so important?

Even though as nonprofit organisations much of our work happens offline and on the ground, our websites should be a core function of how we operate too. Ranking on Google is your organic online strategy – meaning, it's the only way to build an organic audience (the one you don't have to draw to your site with campaigns or marketing). The benefits of being listed high up on a search engine results page (SERP) are multiple:





Optimising content can be understood in three phases

- 1. Content creation:** Everything you do to make sure your actual content is written and researched to rank for the topics you want to be seen as an authority for.
- 2. Content publishing:** Everything you do to make sure the content you want to publish is then packaged in the right way with all meta data and accompanying structural elements to meet the expectations of the online user and the Google bots.
- 3. Site-wide SEO:** Everything you do on your site to ensure you have optimised your content for the (mobile) user to meet their expectations of what online content must do, as well as the expectations of the Google bots.

As a content producer, you would be responsible for 1 and 2. However, your content's ranking strength is contingent on the technical aspects of your website and the sites where your content is published, so wherever you can, deploy best practices and upskill where necessary.

Your SEO strategy and organic ranking are also integrated; the content you put up on social media influences your ranking tremendously. You want your keyword strategy to flow across all your publishing channels, and you also want to leverage the biggest platforms you can to make sure all the traffic they command boosts your ranking in Google's eyes.



Google, sure...but audiences first

If you are writing and producing content for your online audience first, the users you care about most online, and if you are publishing what you think they deserve to be getting from you online, you're already an SEO champion!

While an SEO specialist uses technical tricks that can help your relationship with Google behind the scenes, their single most important job is to create content that resonates and improves the experience of the online users you want to please. And, ultimately, Google will recognise the relationship between you and your audience as evidence of your content's trustworthiness.

At the heart of SEO is keywords. But keywords are not simply gimmicks. They carry in them the relationship and experiences you want your audiences to have with your content and your service offerings. You are optimising experiences by optimising keywords.

What does it mean to optimise for keywords?

Before you write, you should know which keywords you want to prioritise in your content. You'll keep these keywords in mind when you're writing and find natural, authentic ways to include them in your content.

It doesn't help to add keywords after you've published or completed a draft. Your keyword strategy is a planning strategy and a core component of how your content is designed and framed. Keywords are meant to be integrated into your writing, not added in as window dressing.

Remember

Keywords do not mean only single words. In practice, you should work with a combination of short tail and long tail keywords – that is, single terms or words (short tail), like 'books' or whole phrases and search sentences (long term) like 'online books free'. You would need to research which keywords you want to rank for and strategize around this idea. But remember, you want to rank for keywords that resonate with the online audiences whose needs you are focused on meeting.

Keyword choice

Don't choose keywords that have nothing to do with your content or operation and don't try to rank for keywords that are unattainable. You need to find the most suitable place for you to play and build visibility and authority.

Example:

A new website shouldn't try to rank for a keyword with a high level of competition – it will be a waste of effort since more established websites already have a pretty big SEO advantage.

At the same time, you would want to rank for keywords with a reasonably high level of search volume. Unless you have a super niche business, a monthly search volume of less than 100 won't do you much good.

Remember

If you rank for keywords that have a high ranking in Google but have nothing to do with your core services or positions on your topics, then you will attract people who won't engage with your information online. They'll bounce out or go away. You want people to engage with you so you can build up your support base.

Keyword intent

When you're using SEO to drive organic traffic to your website, you need to make sure you're driving the right kind of traffic. A simple tactic for being purposeful with your keyword choice is to consider the intent behind the term – that is, what is motivating someone to use that search term? Keyword intent can reveal where someone is in the user's journey.

Remember

You need to ensure integrity between your keywords and the content you're writing. If you're on the right track, it should be a natural process to add those keywords in, as they will fit comfortably into the context. If you rank for keywords that have a high ranking in Google but which have nothing to do with your core areas of focus, then you will attract people who aren't necessarily interested in your work or organisation. These users will bounce away, and this will damage your ranking and frustrate you.

Keywords for the user journey

When you are doing your keyword research, don't only use strategies to use keywords that relate to your field of work, but use keywords that speak to the stages of a human user's journey in your web environment too. You would incorporate this strategy in your editorial calendar – it would be filled up with pieces that help customers at every stage.

Steps to start your keyword strategy

STEP 1

Brainstorm your keywords

Create a set of topic buckets that sit at the heart of your organisation and work. Make a list of as many potential keywords as you can think of that relate to these topic buckets. Useful resources here include your mission statement, your framing strategy, existing communication materials, and the websites of similar organisations.

STEP 2

Define the profile of your searchers

If you were your intended audience, what words would you most likely search for?

How well do you know what terms or phrases your audiences use to search for content or information that you publish?

Use your user personas to develop search terms you think your web audience would use to look for content online.

STEP 3

Find keyword variations

Look for keywords that you haven't considered. The easiest way to do this is to type your chosen keywords into Google and scroll to the bottom of the page. You'll see a section titled 'Searches related to...'. These are the words and phrases Google deems related to your keyword. Consider incorporating these into your writing (provided they make sense for your organisation). You could even go one layer deeper and see what suggestions come up for those suggestions.

STEP 4

Track your keyword rankings

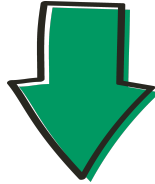
Research some of your core keywords to see how they rank online and see how they might rank in future; pare down, cull or add keywords from your original list to keywords that matter to searchers. You can do this using a number of free tools:

[Moz Keyword explorer](#)

[Google Adwords Keyword Planner Tool](#)

[Google Trends](#)

[Wordtracker](#)



Download these steps in a word document

[Steps to start your keyword strategy](#)

Steps on how to do keyword research

You want to make sure that any words you use do actually have some search value and are not so obscure that you don't rank for the most common searches around that topic

Try to use keywords that have:

- Low-medium competition; and
- 100 monthly searches.

Here are some steps to guide you:

STEP 1

Make a list of all the keyword topics (short and long) that you believe best represents your work and content online.

You can make this list around the content buckets on your site, your existing site topics or around natural topic buckets relevant to your business. Aim for about 5 -10 keywords that you think matter.

STEP 2

Check search volumes

Research some of these keyword topics to see how they rank online and then pare them down to ones that show the most potential. You want to make sure that the keywords you use do actually

have some search value and are not so obscure that you don't rank for the most common searches around that topic.

You can do this using free tools like:

[Moz Keyword explorer](#)

[Google Trends](#)

[Uber Suggest](#)

STEP 3

Subtopics

Come up with subtopic keywords to sit under the topics you have chosen. You want to brainstorm various short and long tail keywords related to your core topics. Consider your context and your work and what you think people are looking for, as well as what your offering is. You can always trim this list down later, so don't worry if it looks too long now.

STEP 4

Consider intent

What are people looking for when they search for content related to your organisation? What kind of intentions and needs is your content trying to meet?

How can you find this out?

1. Use Google to search for your terms and see what comes up in the SERPs (Search Engine Results Page) – this will indicate what people are searching for and clicking on when using that search term.
2. Check suggestions in Uber Suggest or a similar tool.
3. Run a survey with your core audiences and ask them what they want to find when using certain search terms.

(Steps 1+2) What journeys have you noticed that you weren't aware of, related to your subtopics? What intentions do you think could work for your content strategy?

STEP 5

Get more ideas

Uber Suggest is brilliant for showing suggestions based on traffic and intent online already. You can use the free or paid for version.

Suggestions help you figure out more keywords you can use as well as content opportunities you may not have thought of.

Brainstorm synonyms and associated phrases – how else can you say a keyword? What other semantic opportunities can you see? Google likes richness and rewards it. If your team needs help, you can compile a glossary which everyone can refer back to when they are creating content.

STEP 6

Start trimming down your keywords

- Which have the strongest search volumes? (Volume)
 - Which are most connected to your audiences and their online search needs? (Relevance)
 - Which are most connected to your work and your role in the nonprofit world? (Authority)
-

STEP 7

Make sure you have a good mix of long and short tail keywords

‘Short stories’ may rank higher than ‘how to write a short story’ but the latter has longer-term value; short tail keywords are quick wins but long term keywords are more intentional. Therefore, you want to make sure you rank for both and have a healthy mix.

STEP 8

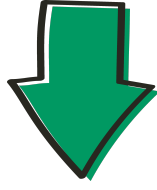
Trim your keywords

Cut your subtopic keywords down; remove any words that don’t rank (check using a tool) and which don’t matter to your work and your content.

STEP 9

Assimilate and create

You want to turn your keywords into content strategy if you see content opportunities you’d like to pursue after this exercise. You can also create a handy content guide with keyword rules and alternative words and phrases that you want your content producers to use so that you start to rank consistently for the same keywords.



Download these steps in a word document
[Steps on how to do keyword research](#)

Keyword research is important, your goal is NOT to stuff as many of the keywords that you've identified in your writing. If you do, your text will sound unnatural, and your visitors won't stick around.



Although you have just started the process, hopefully, you will see the beginnings of how keyword research is a tool for content strategy, which is the best tool for SEO!

Chapter 4. Web on-page SEO

Everyone who publishes content for a website will be using a CMS (Content Management System), whether it is WordPress (the biggest in the world), Wix or another similar functioning platform.

Your CMS should be used to its best abilities; how you create posts and content is a big part of your SEO writing strategy and is a primary place for your keyword strategy to evolve.

When you create a post, there will be features of the post that are either visible (on the front end) or invisible (on the back end) to your website audiences. Either way, these features give your audiences a good experience on your site, help organise your content and also help Google search engine bots discover your site and bring it into search results.

Here is a breakdown of how you want to use yours to ensure your content and experience are optimised for the web:

General content and style	Write in a natural, conversational tone (brand relevant). Ensure your article content does justice to its title. Write complete and meaningful articles that genuinely inform and help your visitors. Make sure to use videos as much as possible, and always images. Aim for Good UX (user experience). THINK: MOBILE EXPERIENCE. Always consider: Does your content look nice and informative on the results pages?
Keywords	Use a light hand, but a strategic one: Always use your main keyword in your headline/ title. Aim for one other use of keyword and 1-2 synonyms in the body of the text. Ensure your article is richly and authentically relevant to your relationship to the topic.
Headings and subheadings	Always use H1 for headers. Break up paragraphs with H2s (subheadings).
Post description	Always create a post description. The description is a short summary of what the content talks about. Aim for 160 characters. Tip: Apply the target keyword at least once in the description and aim for one synonym of it too!

Tags	Meta keyword tags are simple snippets of text or words you input in your CMS. They describe the idea of an article. Aim for around 10 smart, on point tags. On-page tags are a very important part of your article. Google directly uses it to gain insight into a webpage, and to test whether duplicate text exists. These elements are used to determine the quality of the website as a part of a ranking algorithm.
Linking	As much as possible, use internal linking to create links to your own content (related) as well as anchor text links for aggregated articles (authority building), if relevant to the site you are working on. External link building is simply the act of building links to content within the website or to a webpage or domain to enhance its search visibility. Links are also a very important factor in determining ranking ability of a website in search engine results pages.
Image size	Make sure your images are no bigger than 1MB as loading time affects a good experience.
Alt tags	All images must be tagged up with an alt tag. Alt tags are a descriptive phrase that explains the image, ideally using the keyword again and one synonym.

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 28 evenly spaced horizontal blue lines across the entire page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The lines are consistent in color and thickness throughout.

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

BOOK 3: WRITING FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Description

In this book, we cover some of the basics in your writing strategy for your social media platforms.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Tapping into why people use social media
 2. How to write for social media
 3. Hashtags and keywords in your social media
-

Chapter 1. Tapping into why people use social media

Social media is a giant in digital publishing, with billions of active users worldwide. Social media's popularity comes down to its capacity to grant users a platform to engage, speak their minds, stay socially connected, be informed and, on a basic level, fill their time with something entertaining or highly relevant.

Although designed for social interactions, because of its enormous reach, organisations wanting to connect and engage with as many people as possible online need to tap into the social media engine.

The best approach to using social media is to make sure your content meets the expectations of active social media users. This means understanding why people spend time on social media in the first place and tapping into these patterns (rather than behaving like an institution).

Why do people use social media?

Social activism aside, the top 10 reasons people in South Africa tend to enjoy social media fare:

1. Finding information
2. Researching how to do things
3. Finding new ideas and inspiration
4. Staying in touch with friends and family
5. Researching brands
6. Education and study
7. Following news and current events
8. Watching videos, TV shows and movies
9. Listening to music
10. Researching health issues and products



You can see more of these statistics on the [2023 South Africa Digital Report](#).

As you can see, people use online media to help them with their everyday lives. There is an immediacy to our needs when we go online and with social media, we want to feel connected to

people and things we care about. This is something you want to tap into when you design content and write for social media, even more business-oriented ones like LinkedIn.



Conversation works!

When writing and posting content on social media, and especially Facebook, it's essential to remember that the more conversations your posts generate amongst your audiences, the further your content will go organically.

If you want to use social media as an advocacy tool to build engagement around issues or topics important to your organisation and contribute to broader social change, you'll still need to tap into social media behaviour patterns and use them to your advantage.

The peer community is a powerful mechanism for generating interest around a topic and for validating an approach. How can you generate the right kind of conversations around your content so that your organic reach is strong?

Sharing an opinion is a big draw of social media platforms – Don't just tell your social media audience about an issue. Ask them to contribute to the conversation. Write posts that invite engagement, interaction and community building.

Content that shares an important message must still be well-made and made for social – that is: Don't let your message get lost in the feed. Captivate social media users before they thumb down to refresh their feed. Make sure your content is well-written but punchy, visually striking but tasteful, and tells a story but not a tale.

And don't post for the sake of posting – make sure your content has a strong and clear objective for you to measure.

Chapter 2. How to write for social media

When it comes to effective writing, shorter does not necessarily mean quicker or easier. Pumping out social content just because you can is not an effective way to use this digital channel to meet your organisation's objectives.

Writing for social media can be surprisingly time-consuming (i.e. time vs value, expertise, training or perhaps compelling data), but it has an enormous impact on how people perceive you and engage with you and your cause or services online – far more than web or email.



According to recent research by the UK think tank, Demos, 50% of young people globally who use social media to engage with campaign groups or charities do so on a daily basis.

This means young people are willing to participate in and engage in campaigns and movements that they connect with. Which language, words, calls to action and messaging appeals to young South Africans?

Read more in [Demos' 'Plugged in' report](#).

Aside from the in-depth research, you'll conduct to really understand how your audiences work online and what they want from you on social media, keep in mind these core principles as you design messaging and write for social media:

1. Write with skill and match your audience's intentions

If you're going to tap into this kind of engagement, you'll need to get to grips with what your target audience wants from the social media platforms they use. This will, of course, differ from platform to platform. Your audience may want breaking news on Twitter and feel-good stories on Instagram. Understanding common consumption trends across major social networking platforms helps you sharpen and tailor your writing to meet your audience's expectations and preferences.

In the writing for the web book, we discussed why Google assigns a higher ranking to content that gives online users a more valuable and authentic experience. While social media platforms don't have the same algorithm system, your aim should always be to publish content that is of

high value to your audience, tapping into the experiences they are seeking out. The more people engage with and interact with your content on social media, the more organic rank your posts will garner, and the more your content will appear in feeds.

This is known as
ORGANIC REACH



2. Write to create a conversation, not just to broadcast

Social media can be a good way to distribute information about your organisation, campaign, or event, but that's not their primary goal. What sets social media apart from other forms of digital media is that they're about connections and the interactions they facilitate. You could set up a Facebook page without any engagement and create a post, but that post would not gain you any impact. Not sure where to start? Here are some pointers to help:

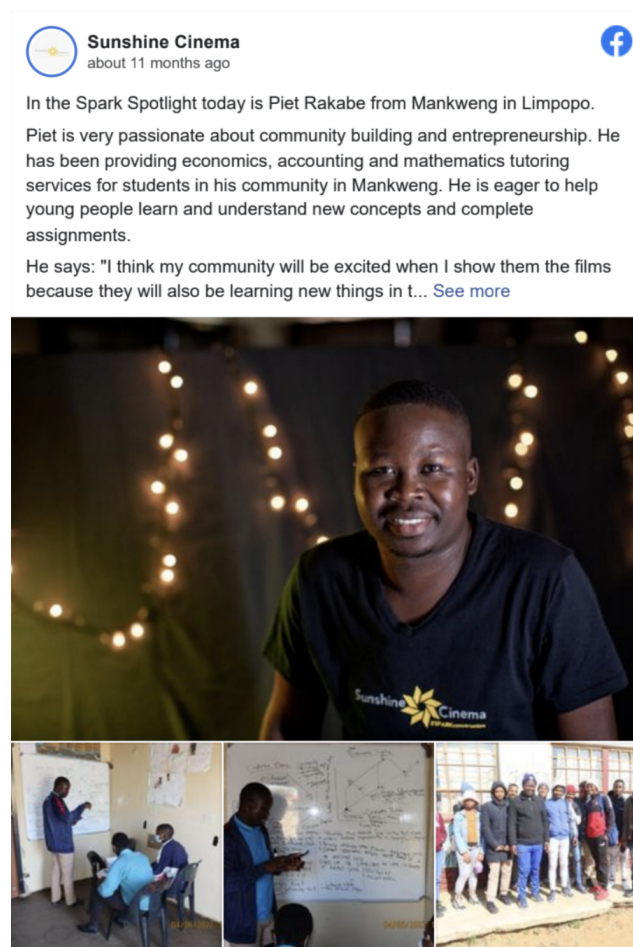
- Start positively, and open up the question with shared values and ideas that resonate.
- Don't talk at, or lecture, your audience.
- Draw them in with questions and encourage their participation.
- Ask explicitly that they share their experiences and views (and then be sure to acknowledge and respond to these!).
- Ask clear questions that are easy to relate to. Be sure to acknowledge and respond as people respond to your question.
- Be sure to direct them to further resources or private conversations if they want to engage more vigorously.
- Don't forget to set the 'rules' and moderate them to ensure no hate speech, discrimination, abuse and so on.

It may help to think here of the characteristics of a good conversationalist: they'd ask questions, encourage other guests to respond, and find ways to move the conversation forward in a stimulating way. This is, in large part, what you're aiming for when you write for social media.

3. Show, don't tell

This is a basic principle of all effective writing. Instead of merely telling your audience that your organisation works, for example, to keep children in school (abstract, impersonal), introduce them to a scenario and to people where those benefits can be explained and your audiences can see who benefited from your programme and achieved something remarkable against the odds (tangible, personal, impact driven).

You could do this with visual narratives and storytelling or character spotlights as seen here with Sunshine Cinema and one of their Sunbox Ambassadors.



4. Create scroll-stopping storytelling

When you're writing for a social platform, think about how people scroll through newsfeeds, thumbing up and up and up...until something catches their attention. You want your post to be the reason for that pause, to 'cut through the clutter', as marketers are fond of saying.

You have perhaps a fraction of a second to stand out from the hundreds or thousands of updates your audience sees daily, and to surprise, delight, or intrigue them enough to give them a pause. The surest way to do that? Tell a story.

Nothing engages the human brain quite like a story, and there's a sense in which that's exactly what social media is – the ancient art of storytelling via a new, screen-based medium.

Social media writing benefits from the story's special ability to take something abstract – a moral value, principle, idea or objective – and make it tangible and memorable.

In the most universal of story arcs, the dramatic arc, we meet a character who faces a central problem. As this character struggles to overcome an obstacle, tension builds. We're drawn in, intrigued to know if and how they will prevail. Finally, our protagonist overcomes and the central problem resolves.

You can use this story arc in direct ways, as Humans of New York does, using their classic formula where a story is told over several frames, released over several days. For example, the 12 images with the man in the black collared shirt are one story of a man overcoming challenges.



**You can also use
in more**

**the dramatic arc
embedded**

ways, using your content to create dramatic energy with your audiences, making them active participants in an overall story, like helping your organisation overcome the odds or fighting injustice, as seen in 350 Africa's action orientated messaging, inviting us to become part of a movement that will aim to overcome a gross injustice:



350 Africa

about 11 months ago



The exploration of oil and gas under the seabed must be stopped to protect [#OurOceanOurFuture](#). Join the call and sign the petition for sustainable, renewable energy solutions <https://tinyurl.com/4cd26uu3> The Green Connection



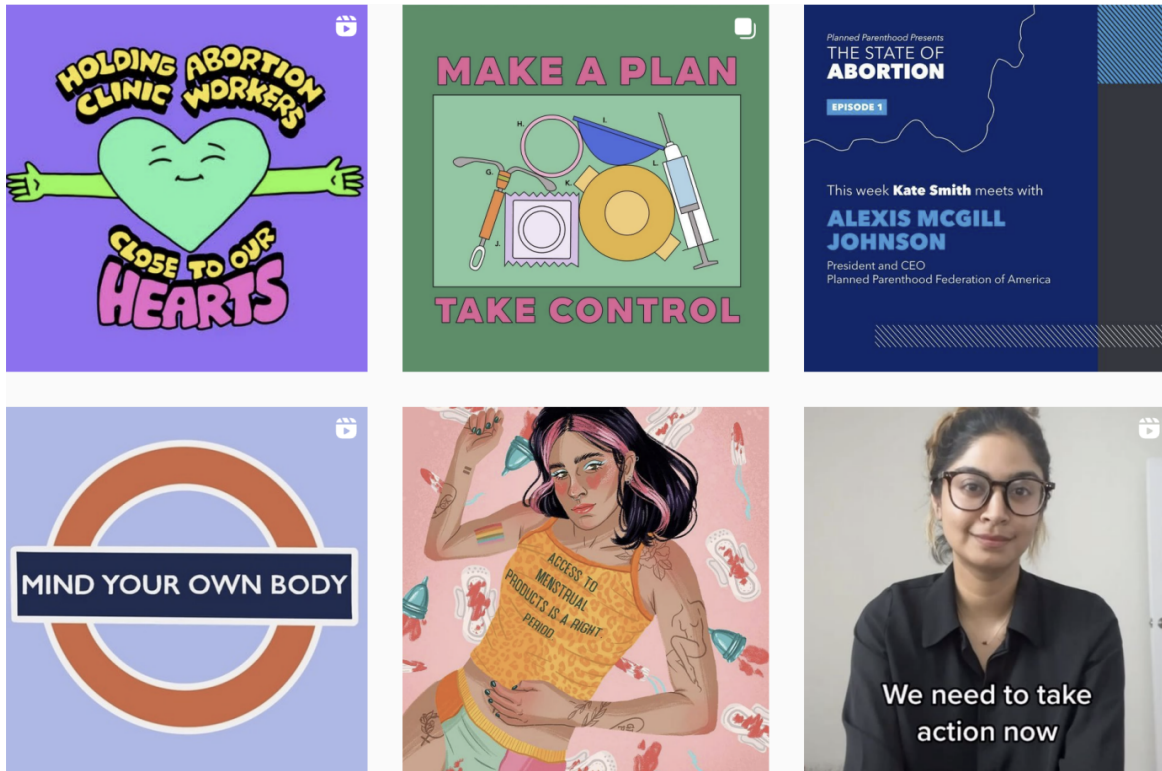
CHANGE.ORG

Sign the Petition

IMAGINE A WORLD WITH OILED UP BEACHES & WITHOUT LIVING ...

5. Use images to share heavy lifting

Rather than writing a post and then adding an image, use a striking image to tell a good chunk of your story. Social newsfeeds are image-driven and, even if you're not constrained by a tight character limit, short and snappy posts typically perform better than long blocks of text. Consider also the great technique of combining text and image in interesting and arresting ways, as seen in the Instagram account of US-based [Planned Parenthood](#):



6. Be clear in your call to actions

Do you want your readers to visit your website to complete an action, to engage or to share your message with their followers? Write directly to that ONE specific goal, and include a CTA (Call To Action).

CTAs can be 'big picture', or more literal and direct. CTAs that aim to persuade a user to click on a link or a button on social media would be more literal and direct (see below). On the other hand, your post text could talk to the bigger CTA (like – 'Help us change the world').

YOU WANT YOUR AUDIENCE TO:	IN ORDER TO:	Useful CTAs from social media dashboards:
Visit your website	Read an article or report	'Read more' >> link 'Read this article' >> link 'Visit our website' >> link
	Sign up for a programme	'Get involved' >> link 'Sign up' >> link
	Donate	'Donate' >> link 'Give' >> link On this level of CTA, avoid fuzzy terms like 'support' or 'help'. Use adverbs of time such as 'now' or 'today'.
Share your posts	Reach a wider audience and increase your impact	'Share if you agree' 'Share to spread the message'
Interact with your posts	Join the conversation or express support	Ask a direct question 'Comment to share your view/ experience' 'Hit ❤️ if you want to see this happen' 'Double tap to spread the word' (on Instagram) '<thumbs up> to show your support'

7. Keep it conversational and real

Of all your digital comms, social media is likely to be the most informal. Use the first and second person – me, you, us, we and simple, verb driven sentences and a chatty, inclusive tone. Even when your subject matter is serious, write as if you're speaking to a friend.



8. Show your PERSONality

Use social media's multimedia tools and culture to mobilise and inspire your audience's imagination and creativity. Bland, purely factual text limits how you engage with your audience and vice versa. Find authentic ways to be bolder, more passionate and personal in your writing, without risking your credibility.

It may take time to find your voice. Be patient and stay focused on clarity and sincerity. It will happen organically over time.

9. Give your audience something useful, help them solve something

Can you help your audience solve a problem that prevents them from aligning with the values of your organisation? Or perhaps you can help them think about a complex issue in a clearer way. If your posts offer something genuinely meaningful, rather than just fishing for engagement, they will have a far greater impact.

In a very simple example, for those who use YouTube, we often forget about the social media nature of YouTube and treat it as a video archiving tool when in fact, well-written, engaging descriptions with your videos, along with well-placed tags and hashtags as well as subtitles, translations and transcripts help you make the most from this channel and helps your audiences engage with your solutions more deeply.

[Cities Alliance](#) uses YouTube's text features to their full capacity as seen below.



A drought happened where we were living and we lost our livestock, so we then moved to Hargeissa but it was

Somaliland: Better urban planning to integrate climate displaced people

31 views Sep 19, 2022 The autonomous region of Somaliland is facing one of the worst climate-induced droughts in decades, forcing nomad communities to move to urban areas. Most of these internally displaced people settle informally in cities, where they lack access to shelter and essential services, with women, children, and other vulnerable groups being particularly affected.

Cities Alliance is working with local authorities and communities in the cities of Gabiley and Borama, to better plan infrastructure and urban expansion needs in a sustainable and manageable way, as the population is expected to quadruple by 2050.

Well-planned urbanization in the region has an enormous potential to drive economic growth and more inclusive societies. Cross-city learning and replicating successful models from neighbouring cities such as Jijiga, in Ethiopia, are also concrete ways forward to improve the living conditions of IDPs and residents in the long term.

This project is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

For more information visit: <https://www.citiesalliance.org/newsro...>
Follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/citiesalliance>
Connect with us on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/citi...>

Transcript
Follow along using the transcript.

[SHOW TRANSCRIPT](#)

Show less

 **Cities Alliance**
473 subscribers

[SUBSCRIBED](#) 

10. Get to know each platform's text and post formats

Choose one that's fit for purpose. For example, Facebook allows you to post polls, carousels, video posts etc. Familiarise yourself with the kinds of posts available on each social media platform. This information will help you decide where and how to initiate different kinds of conversations. Find published examples as references. Consider scheduling posts before you publish them (either on the platform or using a scheduling tool). This allows you to see what your post will look like, and to make edits until it's just right.

Chapter 3. Hashtags and keywords in your social media

Hashtags are created by putting a # in front of a word or phrase. A hashtag groups posts by keyword, serving as a kind of social media index. In this way, it allows users to tap into existing conversations or create new ones.

Social media users click on hashtags to see posts and conversation threads under the same topic. Much like keywords in SEO, they are like searchable categories that create an online archive for your content and allow users to find topics they resonate with.

When used thoughtfully and purposefully, hashtags can be extremely useful tools. They can do the following:

- Continue your web keyword strategy across all your channels
- When selecting hashtags, remember your keyword strategy. Don't be so specific that you limit the scope of your hashtags reach but don't be too generic so that your content or campaign is lost in millions of other posts using the same generic password. Help you build topic content collections you and your audiences can seek out
- Act as rallying cries or calls to action to inspire collaboration
- Help you create and join bigger or unique conversations
- Act as tags to help people find your content in a mass of options



Using hashtags builds your organic reach and engagement

For example, tweets with one hashtag receive about twice as much engagement as those without. But engagement drops when you use two or more hashtags, probably because it looks 'spammy'.

Additional tips for using hashtags:

In general, using a hashtag signals support, so don't use one if you don't have a clear position on the issue it designates.

It's worth paying attention to trending topic features. For instance, on the left-hand side of your Twitter feed you will see trending content. Do not be tempted to try 'bandwagoning' – using a

hashtag just because it's trending, in the hopes of extending your reach. Followers will spot a disingenuous hashtag, and it can dent your credibility. As with emojis, context is everything!



[Hashtagifyme](#) is an example of a free hashtag tool that can help with research, reveal the most popular hashtags under an umbrella issue and give you a sense of context.

When and how should you create your own hashtags?

The short answer is probably not very often (definitely not daily!). Unique hashtags are a bit like tag lines – they should be memorable and defining. In fact, there's a good argument for only using one really strong hashtag of your own making, and using it purposefully to drive your organisation's unique cause, or unique take on an issue.

That said, well-conceived hashtags do have a place in campaigns, helping to distil your message and increase its reach.

Here are some guidelines for creating an effective hashtag:

- Keep it short, catchy and focused on one issue only.
- Do your research across platforms and make sure it is unique, especially if you are using it to initiate and track a new campaign or conversation.
- Capitalise the first letter of each word to make it easier to read.
- Think about whether your audience is likely to use it in their posts (you want them to do this!).
- Call to action phrases work particularly well but so do phrases that ask a question, require an engagement or create a sense of urgency

NOTES:

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

BOOK 4: WRITING FOR NEWSLETTERS

Description

In this book, we discuss and consider some of the ways people prefer to engage with mailers and newsletters, and how you can craft your copy and design your newsletter to engage and even delight your audiences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. What should emails do?
 2. Some guiding principles for writing for newsletters
 3. Smart subject lines
-

Chapter 1. What should emails do?

It's time to write an effective newsletter. Where to start?

It is, of course, vital to know why you're creating one, but those reasons shouldn't come before knowing how to create an email so compelling your recipient can't resist opening and reading it from start to finish. And when you consider that the average open rate for nonprofit newsletters on Mailchimp sits at about 24%, it's clear just how crucial it is to think about what motivates those elusive clicks.

Just as with writing for websites or social media, you are looking for the intersection between your organisation's objectives and what your audience wants. Because you're likely immersed in your own objectives, your writing will always benefit from stepping away from them – just for a moment – and into what your audience values most.

Go back to your audience research and spend some time thinking about what your personas want and need – and how you might give it to them in newsletter form, specifically.

Then, as well as reflecting on what you can give your audience, bear in mind the following general characteristics that people expect and respond to in newsletter writing.

What do people want from newsletters?

If someone has signed up to receive newsletters from your organisation, it's because they care about your cause. They want to learn more about it and to be updated on your progress.

While you'll have to work hard to earn their time and to stand out from the hundreds of other emails in their inbox — an average of 90 a day! — remember: you are an expert. You have unique access to information that they want.

Give them more than what they can quickly Google. Share more than stats and facts. Although data and information can be powerful tools, they're best paired with your organisation's unique insights and analysis. This matrix is potential newsletter gold.

Using this deep understanding to write original content or to curate other people's content for your audience, gives your readers something highly valuable. Not only does it save them the time and work of sifting through reams of information to find the most incisive and credible sources. What is the potential of deep understanding in newsletter form?

Newsletter goals

There are several sub-genres of the newsletter from which to choose according to your audience and objectives. Avoid hopping between them in the same newsletter or risk diluting your impact.

Spark emotion	CTAs need to tap into the matter at heart. Remember, you want to persuade or convince a user that the action is the 'right thing to do'.
Direct and intentional	CTAs should be short, punchy and well-written.
Authentic and community building	Frame calls to action in ways that authentically encourage users to do something. CTAs should be clear, understandable and relatable while maintaining the integrity of your organisation's voice.
Actionable and clear	CTAs need to direct someone by using verbs, to enable an action, whether immediate or long-term.

Chapter 2. Some guiding principles for writing for newsletters

When writing a newsletter, you need to keep in mind that it is most likely going to end up in a sea of emails awaiting replies. So how do you go about making yours stand out from the rest?

Here are a few general guidelines for writing an effective and captivating newsletter:

Respect your recipients space	Avoid grandstanding or anything hard to sell, which will only cause your subscribers to switch off or become annoyed. They've allowed you into their inbox, which is a private space, so speak to them as you would if invited into their homes. Be personable and genuine in your intention to connect with them, build relationships and give them something valuable.
Keep it short	Limit your newsletter to 3-5 brief items, written in short sentences and tidy paragraphs.
Format skilfully	Long, dense blocks of text are the enemy of almost all effective writing for digital media, and newsletters are no exception. Use catchy subheadings, numbers and bullets to break up your copy.
Use your newsletter as a teaser	Give your reader an intriguing intro, summary or excerpt, but then direct them to your site for the full blog post, article or report. Not only will your newsletter read better than if you were trying to cram everything in, but you'll also drive traffic to your website, where your audience can engage with your message more fully.
Write like a journalist	The good old 5W1H formula (Who, What, When, Where, Why and How) works like a charm for lucid newsletter items – especially when you are communicating a piece of news about or relevant to your organisation. Answer each of the questions in simple, direct language, and you'll have a well-written update.
Don't include lots of different CTAs	'Donate', 'join', 'read', 'visit', 'share' in the same newsletter. Choose one main action, featured prominently, and possibly one or two auxiliary actions.
Keep your tone conversational and personal	Imagine you are writing to a friend to share something you love or feel strongly about.



Four (less obvious) ideas for engaging newsletter content

1. Profile a volunteer or beneficiary. Going beyond the purely factual to telling human stories will give your newsletter life.
2. In a similar vein, consider sharing something a little quirky or personal about your staff (with their permission, of course!), such as the books they recommend or their favourite websites.
3. It doesn't have to be all about your organisation. There's no reason why you couldn't include other community events or community activism(local or global) that align with your message.
4. Consider using your newsletters for something interactive – see Pew research Centre's Learning series for inspiration.

What does this look like in action? Here are some examples from home and around the world:

Avaaz

Using their customary evocative language, Avaaz's newsletters are always examples of powerful email communication appeals. Their powerful subject lines, inclusive writing style and present-tense storytelling make this announcement of successful campaigns an uplifting, exciting and easy read.



The sleeping giant has awoken...

3 messages

Dear Avaaz community,

Across the planet, millions of people young and old are flooding the streets and mobilising online to reject corruption and injustice and speak of a more beautiful world. **A new Twitter hashtag in Brazil tells the story: #OGiganteAcordou. Translation: "The sleeping giant has awoken".**

And **Avaaz - now nearly 25 million strong!** - is there almost everywhere it's happening. In one example, the Brazilian Senate repeatedly cited our community last week when they voted to give any 500,000 citizen petition the power to directly introduce measures to the government.

We're growing by well over 1 million people per month, and it's accelerating. As more citizens shake off the slumber we are realising that the world really is ours and, while we face great challenges, what happens next, depends on all of us.

Because when we come together, and stay together, we win. **Scroll down for victories and updates, just from the last several weeks:**

350 Org Africa

Honest, direct, to the point and personal, 350 org are experts at using their mailers to build rapport and collaboration around their climate campaign solutions.

R25 may not seem like a lot 

 **Glen Tyler - 350Africa** <350@350.org> [Unsubscribe](#)
to me ▾

26 Sept 2022, 12:43 (21 hours ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Emma,

I am writing to you today because we have a goal of raising R100,000 before the end of our financial year on 30 September and I'm **hoping I can count on you to help by making a contribution today.**

I know that R25 may not seem like a lot of money to some people, but if everyone reading this email chipped in R25 — or any amount they can — we could hit our End of Financial Year fundraising goal before the end of the week.

So before I explain why this goal is so important to the future of our climate campaigns here in South **Africa** and around the globe, [if you are prepared to make a contribution today, please chip in now.](#)

Our R100,000 fundraising goal is extremely important to the future of our climate campaigning. Here's why:

1. In order to fund the climate campaigns we have planned, we rely heavily on individual contributions, mostly from emails like this one.
2. We don't have the same cash reserves that gas and coal companies do for their exploration and operations.
3. But what we do have is thousands of supporters like you, Emma. While people power is our biggest asset, we also need those who are able to help, to chip in and fund our work.

So that is why I am asking you to contribute today and help us ramp up our work to dismantle the fossil fuel industry:

[Can I count on you to contribute today to help reach our R100,000 fundraising goal before 30 September so we can continue organizing as part of the global climate movement?](#)

One of the things I am most proud of about our movement is that even as you finish reading this email, climate activists all over the **country** will have already chipped in to help us hit our goal.

So thank you again for making your contribution today. It means everything to know we have you in our corner in a fight for building a safer world for all.

In solidarity,

Glen, for the 350Africa.org team

Coal and Oil companies may have endless funds, but we have the power of our movement. And when we come together, we can win the bold, transformative solutions we need to protect people and the planet.

[Please make a donation today to help hit our ambitious goal to fund our campaigns in South **Africa** and across the continent.](#)

CONTRIBUTE

UNHCR

This email leads with a personal message and a contextualising image of refugee children and then uses a known and celebrated sportsperson's story, to help us step into the refugee children's worlds. Even though the report would use more research-style language, the email uses relatable anecdotes, personal, first and second person language and straightforward style to get us excited and curious about the report. Lewis Hamilton's story inspires us to think outside the box and imagine the potential of every displaced child.



Dear Emma,

Sir Lewis Hamilton – one of the most successful Formula One drivers in the history of the sport – has been sharing his own experiences of growing up to highlight the need for all children to have access to quality education.

The 2022 Refugee Education Report, titled '**All Inclusive: The Campaign for Refugee Education**', has just been released and it shows how refugees lag behind their peers when it comes to enrolment in all levels of education.

While the enrolment rates for primary school-aged refugee children are at an average of 68%, they drop dramatically to just 37% at the secondary school level and 6% for tertiary-level education.

Digging deeper into the statistics reveals even more areas of concern, as countries like Chad, Mali and the DRC have exceptionally high drop-out rates, even at the primary level.

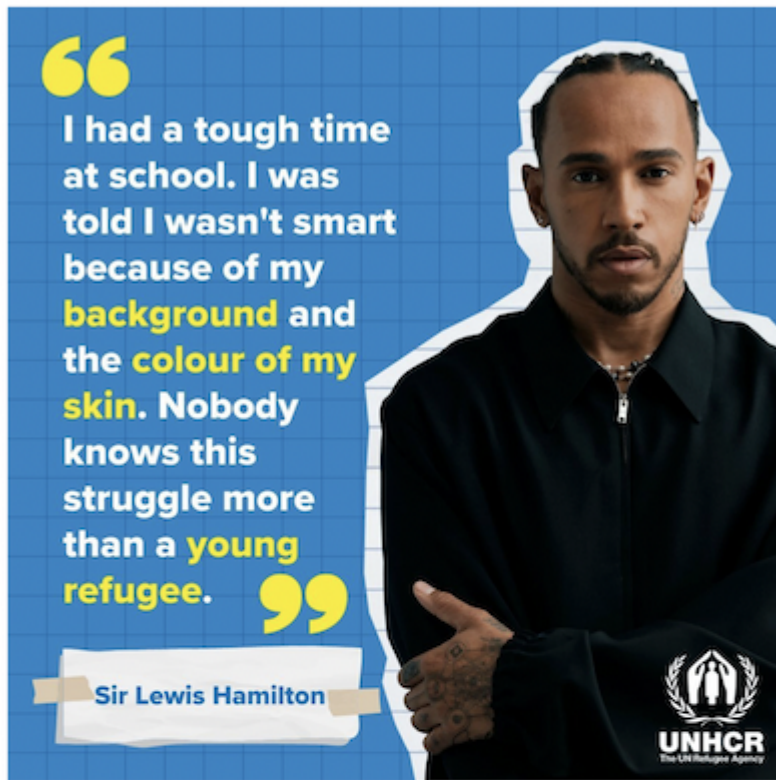
We are campaigning for refugee children and young people to be included in national education systems at every level of the education cycle.

Inclusion means:

- Physical access to classrooms
- Reliable funding for refugee education, including the provision of teachers, fully equipped classrooms and adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities
- Access to sit exams and gain qualifications
- Closing the digital divide between refugees and children from host countries

Sir Lewis said: "I'm proud to lend my voice to the campaign for refugees to get fair and equal access to a full quality education.

"It's not just about creating better life chances for young people, helping them to find their purpose and forge their own futures. It's about the knock-on effects of that: greater diversity in positions of leadership and influence, in the world of work, in sport, culture, politics."



“
I had a tough time at school. I was told I wasn't smart because of my background and the colour of my skin. Nobody knows this struggle more than a young refugee.
”

Sir Lewis Hamilton

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Pew Research Centre

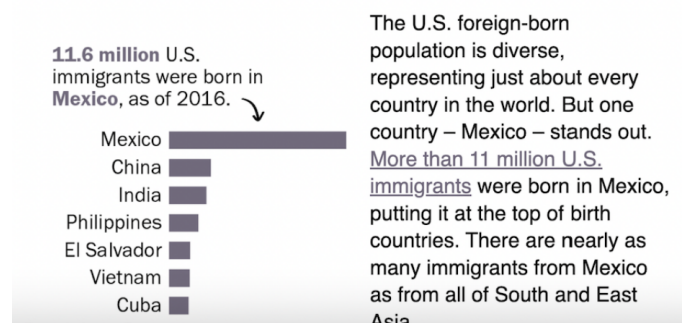
Pew Research centre has highly segmented topic-based email lists and they also offer an ingenious learning email series that supporters can sign up to. In weekly or biweekly instalments you receive your lessons. They are largely text based with some graphs and with lots of links to Pew reports and articles. Using accessible language to make complex topics simpler to understand, the emails break up information into manageable pieces and have an excellent flow to them. Upbeat and encouraging in tone, with clear next steps in each lesson, the email series has become very popular and helps Pew not only educate and build awareness of topics but also of their work and brand.



Who are today's U.S. immigrants?

The United States has more immigrants than any other nation in the world. In 2016, there were [43.7 million immigrants](#) in the country, meaning one in every seven people living in the U.S. was born in another country and was not a U.S. citizen at birth. These immigrants include both residents with legal status and those in the country illegally.

Mexicans are the largest group, but not among new immigrants.



Chapter 3. Smart subject lines

It may contain only a handful of words, but it's not an exaggeration to think of your subject line as the most important piece of your newsletter writing. It's your tiny ticket to standing out in a crowded inbox, so don't make the mistake of making it an afterthought.

At the same time, do not be tempted to use cheap tricks, such as over-promising on the contents of the newsletter, or shock tactics, as these so easily backfire. Remember that this channel is about establishing a regular and personal connection with your audience — it's just not worth the risk of losing their trust.

Because the stakes are high (the effectiveness of your newsletter hinges on these few words!), it's easy to develop a block of subject lines. Even very strong, experienced writers struggle. The key is to give yourself enough time to experiment and tweak.

Consider the following guidelines:

Keep it to 50 characters or less	Use a character counter while you're writing and rewriting so that you stay within this limit. Subject lines that are too long will get cut off, especially on mobile screens, diluting their impact or becoming nonsensical.
Personalisation works	Subject lines that include a recipient's first name have higher open rates than those that don't. If, for some reason, that doesn't work for your organisation or newsletter (or you can't automate the personalisation) 'you' and 'your' are direct addresses that also have a personalising effect.
Start with short, strong verbs	'save', 'change', 'help', 'give'
Create a sense of urgency with adverbs of time	'now', 'today'
Try out a question	'Can you help X'?
Cut out any words that aren't performing a clear purpose	Experiment with creating some personal connection ('[First name], we have great news...').

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

BOOK 5: WRITING FOR PRESS AND MEDIA

Description

In this book, we take you through some of the basics of how to work with the press. While some of us may feel cautious about our relationships with the outside media, especially when working with vulnerable beneficiaries, it's best to ensure that your stories get out there with your angle, and this means writing them (well) yourself. Press releases and building your relationship with the press are two ways you can do this.

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1. What does it mean to write for the press?
 2. The guiding principles of writing for the press
 3. Building blocks of an effective press release
 4. Writing online news or thought articles
-

Chapter 1. What does it mean to write for the press?

In the previous three books of this toolkit, we've emphasised the importance of writing expressly for your target audience, in plain language that resonates with them, and in the sweet spot where your organisation's objectives meet their wants and needs.

But when you're writing for the press, it's a little different. In this case, you're writing to convince a journalist or editor that something is newsworthy enough for inclusion in their publication. Whereas with your website and social media, you are writing for your own platforms, here you are hoping to use the authority and reach of their platforms to amplify your message, change the way people think, and mobilise them to take action.



Since journalists may receive dozens of press releases daily, many (if not most) of which they'll ignore, you'll need to write from a keen understanding of their priorities.

What do news editors and journalists want?

Newsworthiness

The American Press Institute puts it this way: 'Anything can be news, but not everything is newsworthy'. What journalists are skilled at sniffing out is precisely the combination of something that really matters to their readers and has the bones of a compelling story. Strive to offer them a decent whiff of both.

Timeliness

Your pitch may have the quality of newsworthiness in principle – just not right now. When you're releasing information to the press, you'll need to consider the news cycle. This means knowing the rate at which an outlet publishes, and taking into account what its focus is likely to be within a given cycle. Daily newspapers operate on a 24-hour cycle, but digital media may have an even shorter cycle (what is known as the 24/7 cycle).

While you can't predict what will be breaking at the time of your release, paying attention to the rise and fall of news stories (as an ongoing practice) will help you feel its relevance. If you want to announce a campaign, don't do it in the week of a national election, unless it happens to be very directly related (you're supporting voters to get to polling stations). If, however, you want to take a stand on a new law or policy relevant to your organisation, be sure to do it within the news cycle (in other words, immediately!) or you may miss your moment of opportunity.

Absolutely anything that will save them time

Without being overly cynical about the state of newsrooms today, you're writing for people who live from deadline to deadline, who have to think, act and work fast. Anything you can do to save them time will greatly increase your chances of getting their attention. As well as providing all the relevant facts with impeccable clarity and structure, do everything you can to line up quotes, case studies, beneficiaries, and credible, savvy spokespeople who are waiting to answer their calls.

Chapter 2. The guiding principles of writing for the press

Press releases play a small, but important role in how people view your organisation. Essentially, a press release is meant to appeal to journalists who will then (if the press release is written interestingly enough) promote the event at hand. This will in turn gain some exposure for your organisation, and help you reach a broader audience.

However, a press release will never make it past a journalist's inbox if it doesn't captivate them within the first few seconds of reading it. **Below are a few tips for writing a press release that won't make a journalist want to click 'move to trash':**

Know exactly what you are trying to achieve.

This is fundamental and yet surprisingly easy to overlook. What action do you want your release to inspire? It's not enough to hope that people will read your message and infer what to do. Write an explicit call to action in your release.

No matter how much time it takes to compile, a report is only worthy of a release if there's a clear takeaway for the public, something people can do with the information. If you are commenting on a story in the current news cycle, do so in a way that drives the story forward.

Distil your message (and then interrogate it thoroughly).

Cover the 5W1H (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How) in no more than three sentences that read as naturally and smoothly as possible. This is called your 'hook'.

Now ask yourself, 'And so'? Be brutal. Why should anyone outside of your organisation care about this story? If your sentences don't already make this clear, rework them until they do.

Avoid the temptation of 'hyping'.

Don't be tempted to call your initiative 'pioneering' or 'revolutionary' when you're writing for the press (even if it really, truly is!). If you are clear in your purpose for writing, the value of what your organisation is doing should also be clear without you having to claim it in flowery language. Keep your writing matter of fact, your tone utterly neutral.

Weed out the jargon.

Words like 'stakeholders' have an uncanny way of sneaking into press releases, even if you're usually wary of them elsewhere. Also weed out specialist or technical terms that are unfamiliar to laypeople.

Stick to the story.

A list of all the things your organisation does is not newsworthy. Keep that for your website or requests for funding, and stay doggedly focused on the once-off message you're writing to share here.

Think about SEO (but don't force it).

Do some keyword research (see 'Writing for the web') and incorporate target words and phrases, provided they are relevant and appropriate to your story. Although you will be mailing your release to news outlets, you should also consider publishing it on your website. If you've optimised for the web, it's much more likely that a journalist will pick it up when googling related topics.

Chapter 3. Building blocks of an effective press release

A press release is an official statement written to announce a significant 'happening'. You send it directly to selected publications (both print and digital) in the hope that they might cover your story and, in doing so, help you spread your message.

You may choose to write a press release because you have identified the need to take a position on a major news event related to your cause. Perhaps you're launching a new programme, releasing an important report or reaching a major milestone.

Whatever you're announcing, the structure remains the same. Because they are very formulaic and strictly formatted, press releases can be a little intimidating to write. Here are ten steps you can follow to ensure consistency.

Remember

Journalists love engaging, conversational text!

They are as much a 'reader' as any of your other audiences. In fact, the more engaging your text, the more likely they are to read it to see if there is a story to cover.

Ten steps for writing consistent press releases

- 1.** At the very top of your release, write: 'Press release from [name of your organisation]: the title'. Make sure your headline is clear, punchy and likely to stand out as a subject line in a busy journalist's inbox.
- 2.** Put the date beneath the title.
- 3.** Your opening sentences, known as your 'hook', should 1] communicate the gist of the story (Who, What, Where, When, Why and How) and 2] inspire the reader to want to keep reading. Make it clear in these early sentences why the story matters to the target publication's readership (read: ordinary people outside of your organisation).
- 4.** Keep your paragraphs very short (two to three sentences each) and the whole press release to a single page or less.
- 5.** Use the next two to three paragraphs to expand on the story, adding details and supporting information, as well as spelling out the call to action.
- 6.** Include quotes from relevant and credible sources: your organisation's CEO, experts, people on the ground.
- 7.** Include data, images, links to resources or anything else useful that can help embellish your story (ideally that journalists can use in their coverage).
- 8.** It is common to write 'Ends' after your story section to signal to the journalist the end of the press release.
- 9.** Include a 'Notes to the Editor' section where you give details:
 - Any dates, time and venues relevant
 - People to be contacted for interviews (including cell phone numbers).
 - Link to your work or broader context
- 10.** Finally, include a 'boilerplate' — a brief summary of your organisation and what you do.

Chapter 4. Writing online news or thought articles

Longer form writing is usually between 700-1200 words providing more depth and value to the reader where the writer shares an opinion, thoughts and their ideas on a given topic. Examples of this type of writing are op-eds, LinkedIn articles and blog posts.

Why write long-form written pieces?

- It's a great way to build trust with your audience.
- You can expand on or explain your position on issues that affect your community. (audience)
- It's a great way to become an authority or leader in your field.
- It's a conversation starter with your audiences.

The main principles:

- Create a focus statement.
- Start with a news angle (what is your argument?).
- Get to your argument straight away (unless you have a narrative start that creates suspense, excitement). Stick to 1 200 word count and below.
- Keep your sentences short and effective/ punchy.
- Write for your audience.
- Use plain and familiar language (no jargon).
- Use context and examples.
- Take your ending seriously (end with a strong quote, a call to action, a strong sentence that pulls your argument together).

Core principles explained:

Focus statement

This is the main topic of the writing piece. When writing an opinion piece, your focus statement should be clear, and your arguments must be supported with evidence. A good rule of thumb is that things that don't relate to your focus statement can't be in your piece.

What about news angles?

The news angle or hook is what makes the piece topical and relevant to current events (this isn't limited to what's topical in the news/ current affairs but also topics that are relevant to your cause).

Your piece should start with an effective hook to grab readers' attention, draw them in and convince them that they should keep reading your piece.

However, not everyone will be so familiar with your topic, so you may need to demonstrate why they should care. Show them what's at stake, and why they need to be invested.

You might use a brief anecdote to create a narrative hook or open with a 'news flash', or a powerful statistic in which you briefly introduce the relevant news item or current event that your piece centres on.

Write for your audience

Research and understand the target audience for the channels/ publications you choose. Use language, metaphors and a style that resonates with the people you are trying to reach. Decide if you are writing for the general public or a specific demographic (within your audience cluster) then tailor your writing to their specific needs, interest and concerns, ensuring your content is relatable and valuable.

Use context, examples and credible evidence/ data

Context and examples will make your piece more credible. Don't use arguments you can't substantiate with concrete examples. This will also help you bring your argument to life while making you more relatable to your reader.

You'll need evidence to support your argument, but make sure you only include the most relevant points. Use references – references increase your credibility. Use references and data that are credible – find the original source or study.

Keep it simple

Accurate information is useless if people don't understand what you are saying. Avoid using jargon. Speak to your reader in straight talk. Contrary to popular belief, using fancy and technical language isn't the best way to make an argument or connect better to your audience.

End with a call to action or a unifying statement

Endings are just as important as beginnings. Whenever possible, try to end your piece by looking forward. This means encouraging your reader to look to the future and consider the impact of what you've argued for (or against) and, if relevant, include a CTA. Think about what you want your readers to take away from this piece. What do you hope they will do as a result of reading your article?



Notable examples of long-form online writing:

Online publication:

[‘Bridging the language divide in literature by Africans’ by Zukiswa Wanner](#)

LinkedIn article:

[‘Dear 2021 Graduates: You’re Ready to Get Back in the Boat’ by Elissa Villanueva Beard](#)

[‘When art imitates life – Lessons from Yizo Yizo for South Africa’s literacy crisis’ by Kwandakwethu Ndoda](#)

Blog post:

[‘Improving gender equality by reshaping boys’ gender attitudes: Room to Read’s learnings from Cambodia’ by Dhiraj Anand](#)

NOTES:

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.



BOOK 1: WRITING TO
CONNECT

BOOK 2: WRITING FOR
HUMANS AND ROBOTS
ON WEB

BOOK 3: WRITING FOR
SOCIAL MEDIA

BOOK 4: WRITING FOR
NEWSLETTERS

BOOK 5: WRITING FOR
PRESS AND MEDIA

CASE STUDIES: AVAAZ,
THANDA AFTER SCHOOL,
WORDWORKS

ASSIGNMENT 4

CASE STUDY

AVAAZ

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

CASE STUDY: AVAAZ

The logo for Avaaz.org, featuring the word "AVAAZ" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, followed by ".ORG" in a smaller, blue, italicized sans-serif font.

[Avaaz](#)



THE NEED



[Avaaz's](#) writing needs can be best seen in its drive for sustainable, independent funding. As a 'people-powered movement', Avaaz does not accept grants or funds from governments, corporations or big grantors. This means for Avaaz to build its network and pay for its global campaigns, it needs to communicate its fundraising needs in a way that **encourages its online audience to donate, and to do so regularly and willingly**.

Avaaz is **committed to transparency** and they also need to make individual donors feel as **comfortable and informed** as possible when completing a donation process. Avaaz needs the **language and writing style** deployed during the online donation process to embody the personality of their cause and be **clear, encouraging and explanatory**. This would help them maintain a consistent brand personality and lead to increased donation 'conversions'.



THE APPROACH



Avaaz's approach to its theory of change and its activism model draws on **the power of its online community**. They see their online users as **active members of their community** and **valuable agents in their movement**, supporters are creating the movement with the organisation, and much of this participation happens digitally.

Tapping into the needs of its online community and **understanding** online donation behaviours had to be properly handled to ensure **trust** in their appeals for funds and the ultimate success of their financial model.

To enable **feelings of safety** around donating to a global movement and to encourage consistent 'buy in' and support for their model online. Avaaz knew it had to implement a writing style that embodied a sense of positive action, agency and safety. They also knew they had to manage the user journey in the right way to ensure people followed the online donation process to the final conversion point.



THE SOLUTION



Avaaz keeps its messaging **enthusiastic and positive** to encourage the same feelings in individuals supporting the movement. They use invigorating, inclusive language that speaks to humans who are willing to be mobilised throughout all stages of their users' journey.

To keep the journey clear and transparent and to enable ease of transaction, they developed a clear fundraising structure on the donation section of their website:

By continuing you accept Avaaz's [Privacy Policy](#) which explains how your data can be used and how it is secured.

GOT IT



العربية DEUTSCH РУССКИЙ FRANÇAIS ESPAÑOL PORTUGUÊS 한국어 繁體中文
日本語 NEDERLANDS ITALIANO עברית TÜRKÇE POLSKI ROMÂNĂ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ

START A PETITION +

Donate to Power Avaaz in 2023!



Avaaz works to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform decision-making on the most critical issues of our times.

Our campaigning works. Together, we've won historic victories on climate change and biodiversity, protected communities from dangerous disinformation, campaigned against conflict from Ukraine to Yemen, and mobilised millions in humanitarian aid to communities devastated by disasters and war.

But there's so much more we can do!

In the months ahead, critical decisions are looming on the climate crisis, protecting nature, and standing up for democracy and human

R120

R180

R260

R

.00

ZAR

once-only

Name

Email

South Africa

PAYMENT METHOD



CARD NUMBER

1234 1234 1234 1234

EXPIRY

CVC



On the final page, Avaaz engages users to complete their donation using these strategic communication points:

1. Knowing that people look for valid reasons to donate to a cause and may feel less confident when they are actually on the verge of donating, Avaaz shares some of their past successes and global impact to bolster confidence in the organisation's efforts and their funding model.
2. To assert the validity of their appeal for funds, Avaaz reinforces that they do not receive funds from corporations or governments. This leaves the audience with a sense of responsibility and autonomy to donate.
3. The clear call to action – 'Donate' – gives clear instruction on the next step and helps to close the donation loop.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN?



An organisation's writing style and approach to stages of a user's journey should not only embody your organisation's personality and presence but should always be seen as a tactical device for driving engagement and conversions online.

In the context of donating, Avaaz saw that using the right kind of positive and persuasive language encouraged its online community to donate willingly and regularly.

Giving clear instruction on how to make a donation helps to reinforce a relationship of validity and trust, which is key when working with online transactions and when mobilising participatory activism across the world.

It has paid off for Avaaz to be specific about whom they are requesting donations from and to clarify that the donations will be used effectively. Avaaz understands that individual donors want to feel validated and assured that they are contributing to a just and sustainable cause.

WHAT DOES THIS CASE STUDY TELL US?



Avaaz's success is deeply intertwined with their **communication strategy online**. Avaaz doesn't use their online platforms to support their organisation's outputs and impact: their online presence is their output and achieves their impact.

To be sustainable as an organisation and to mobilise and advocate global movement around their campaigns, they need to be **experts on the behaviours of people online** and know intimately **what triggers people to sign petitions, donate money and mobilise campaigns of their own** – online.

Being an independent organisation with no big donors, Avaaz can afford to be cutting-edge and controversial at times with their communication style: they won't jeopardise their relationship with their grantors. This gives them the **freedom** that not many organisations have.

Individual donors are giving to the Avaaz we meet in our inboxes and online – the Avaaz that makes us feel excited to be involved and also the Avaaz that can shock us into action with their headlines and subject lines.

Avaaz is a nonprofit marketing machine and they show how, by knowing their online audiences and leveraging the power of shared digital ecosystems (web, social media, email, online tools) they can reach and build a global community of millions of active participants.

AVAAZ.ORG



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CASE STUDY: THANDA AFTER SCHOOL



[Thanda](#)



THE NEED



At [Thanda](#), we attract our audiences through emotions, rather than currency or products. Following years of growth, our online content and stories had increased immensely, but our core messaging needed redirection. In order to promote our cause through the written word, we needed to fine tune our storytelling skills.

In 2018, we asked ourselves the important question:

‘Were our written words conveying the authenticity and core messages of Thanda while captivating our various audiences?’

Our staff were all using different ways of describing the same programme and our communications struggled to hold and track our core relationships and outcomes. We knew we needed to resolve this.



THE APPROACH



We decided we needed to look at our **mission statement, vision, programme descriptions and goals, storytelling strategy** and revise all of these documents to be **clear, create emotion and connection, and effectively communicate what we do** at Thanda.

We developed a **Branding Guideline** and a **content strategy** on how to include our new messaging in our digital communications. Our writing style follows the AP guide. We **queried** our monthly donor group, online audiences, close friends and local community to **describe us using three words**.

This practice **helped us to understand** whether our current writing online was effectively communicating our story and therefore our deeper purpose.

We also evaluated the various audiences that our communications reach and the purpose of each audience ... What would they like to hear?



THE SOLUTION



Based on our research, we created **various writing styles** that suited both the purpose and the audience. We created extensive internal programme overviews that different staff members could pull necessary information for proposals, reports or digital marketing communications. These overviews then influenced the re-design of our website where our overviews were shortened, although still detailed and thorough.

Key Programme Components



Supportive Learning Environment

Classes maintain a 9:1 student to facilitator ratio so that each child has the opportunity to learn and engage with adults every day. Each teacher has a special bond with the students in their class!



Feeding Scheme

Provides nutritious meals and snacks including morning porridge, lunch (protein, rice, and vegetables sourced from our organic farms), as well as a morning and afternoon snack of fruit.



Local Community First

Our ECD Facilitators are hired locally & obtain NQF Level 4. Volunteer guardians also assist to ensure that children have adequate support throughout the day. Our team is very passionate about working in ECD!

On social media, we decided to focus on **being conversational and light hearted** while incorporating video and other communication tools to help us **engage** with our audience on a deeper level and create authenticity. This would be the type of content that people would want to forward to their friends and post on their own walls.



We now use a donor management system to track our communications with each group or individual and Google Analytics and social media insights to look at our online audiences.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

We realised that while engagement and audience size is important, whether you spend ten minutes on our website or only follow us on Instagram, **we want our core values to be reflected in the way we write.**

Asking our audiences what message they were receiving showed us that there were **many gaps** in our written communications and that our story is much bigger than we had credited ourselves for.

As we add new programmes, participants, or simply have staff changes it is important that we continually address processes like this and **revise our strategy as needed.**

WHAT DOES THIS CASE STUDY TELL US?

Thanda's impact is pioneered by on-the-ground interventions, and online communication has played more of a supporting role. However, they saw that **their communication is a vital part of their social change model.** To really come to grips with where their best communication impact was happening, they had to audit their communication efforts.

As Thanda saw, their messaging audit allowed them to track what works with their audiences and create meaningful strategies in response.





BOOK 1: WRITING TO CONNECT

BOOK 2: WRITING FOR HUMANS AND ROBOTS ON WEB

BOOK 3: WRITING FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

BOOK 4: WRITING FOR NEWSLETTERS

BOOK 5: WRITING FOR PRESS AND MEDIA

CASE STUDIES: AVAAZ, THANDA AFTER SCHOOL, WORDWORKS

ASSIGNMENT 4

CASE STUDY

WORDWORKS

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

CASE STUDY: WORDWORKS



[Wordworks](#)

THE NEED

The General News section of [Wordworks' website](#) came about when I (Andrea George, Communications Officer) joined Wordworks. I was impressed by how much was happening in the field and concerned that those **stories were not being captured**. I felt we should **document key events** and **share these with our networks** and the public through both Facebook and our website.

I felt the website allowed us to **share longer stories** with more detail than we were able to do on Facebook or Instagram. The need was more from our side – we wanted to record and **make these stories available**.



THE APPROACH



Our articles are generally an expansion of stories written for our Facebook page, and so the style is naturally developed from there. Our general writing style for social media and the website is **relatively informal and engaging**. Our intention is to express through our writing our **warm appreciation** for all our partners that participate in our programme work and for our own staff and the work they carry out – to indicate that **we value them and what they do**.

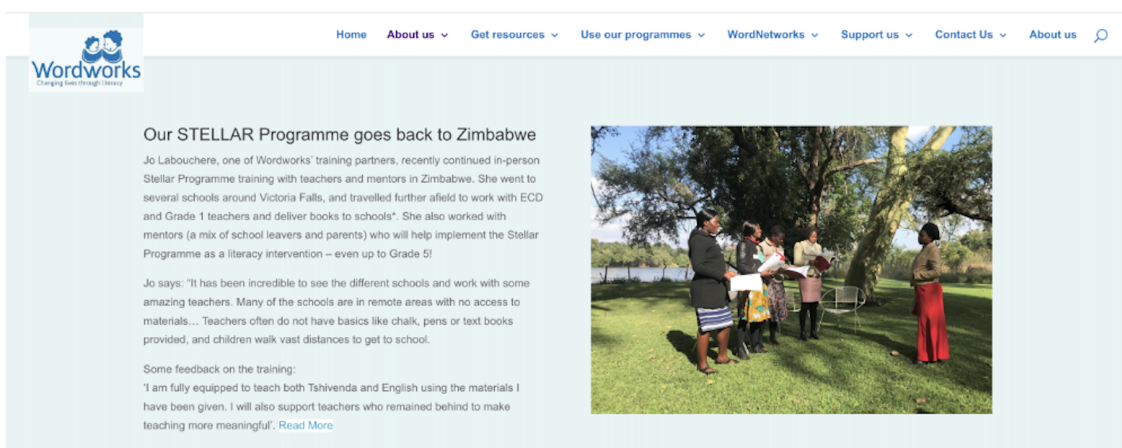
As described above, our audience is **very wide**, from programme implementers to programme trainers and strategic partners. We want to write in such a way that our stories could be read and appreciated by **any member of our network** – from an ECO practitioner to an academic at a university.



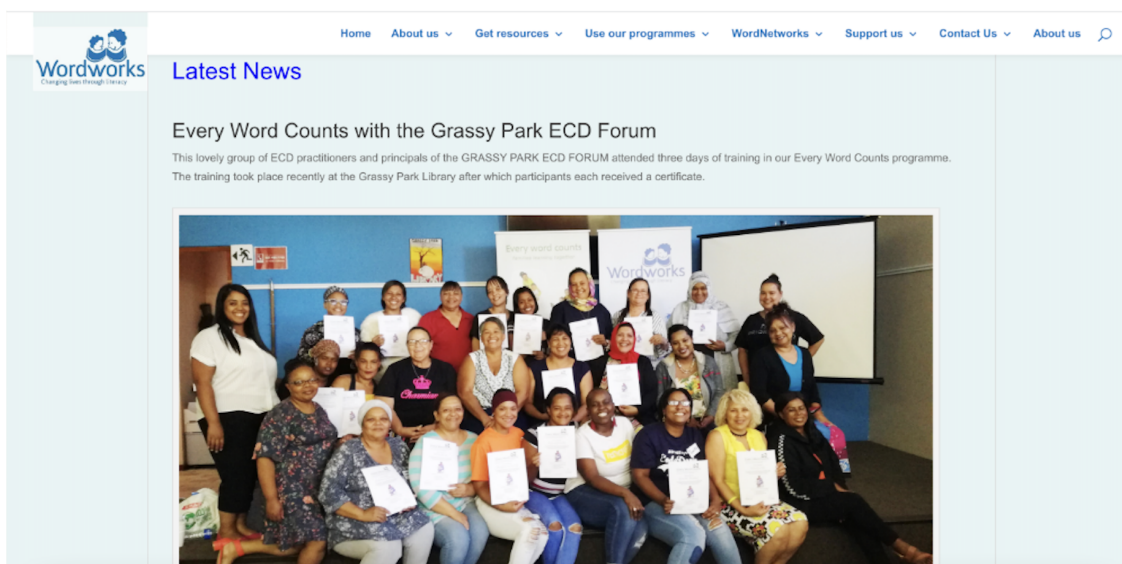
THE SOLUTION



We run four different programmes run by different teams, and each team shares stories that emerge from their programmes. Generally, the programme manager or a person designated to work with communications writes the first draft of the story and I adapt that draft for Facebook and write a more detailed version for the website.



The news is ad hoc, as and when events occur that we think may be interesting to our broader audience and that we think to represent the spectrum of work that we do - across age ranges, programmes, geographies, demographics and forms of work (training, site learning visits, advocacy, materials development etc).



We attempt to post at least one new story a week. You will also see that we have not yet uploaded archival news content from the old site.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN?



We have **not managed to make a link** between our **news stories and the public media** and would like to find a way to do that.

We do not get approached by the press, for example, and while **our network is very active** in their engagement with the mini-versions of the stories on Facebook, our General News section is certainly **not a highly-visited section** of the website. In our experience, it is mostly **participants** at our events that are likely to be very interested in the details and photographs.

At the same time, we are **constantly referring people** enquiring about our work to our website, and while they will mostly need to find out more about our programmes and materials, it feels important that the **public** and specifically **strategic stakeholders** (donors, potential partners and contractors such as government departments) are able to get a flavour of what we do from up to date stories from the field, that they can (even implicitly) confirm that we are a working, **authentic organisation**, that we do what we say we do and that we have been doing so in a sustained and consistent way over many years.

Typically, we have only managed to have **editorial comments** published in dailies, with some **community news** that covered very specific stories – but have submitted these specifically with **no reference to our website news**. We have had a comment from a donor to say it is clear from our website that we are a busy organisation.

However, we do not have any **mechanism to solicit direct feedback** on these pages on our website. We get great feedback on the shorter but similar posts on our Facebook page, but don't know whether this tells us anything about the website news.

These questions make us **think about our audience** for the news stories and question to what extent the stories are well received. Depending on that audience, we want to look at our **writing style** – but also possibly our **writing length, picture to text ratio, focus and theme of the stories, frequency, how we drive people to the news stories**, etc.

WHAT DOES THIS CASE STUDY TELL US?

Wordworks is led by a **powerful, people-focused writing style** so their written content is very much on the mark in terms of best practice when writing for the web. Their story process is interesting as it highlights what often happens with online storytelling in the nonprofit sector: **content is developed in an organic and even intuitive way rather than in a systematic or overtly strategic manner.**

This is, in many ways, **extremely powerful** because the content emerges as a **direct response** to opportunities or needs spotted by a digital communicator who knows the organisation and its mission and 'heart' intimately. On the other hand, this approach can mean that further down the line, **tracking the success** of one's writing and one's audiences' responsiveness to one's posts, has to happen **without** working from strategic objectives.

This does not have to be a problem but when you are **producing a lot of content**, and have been for a while (i.e. you have a large online archive), **it's often harder to measure what works and why.** Luckily, Wordworks has an innate knowledge of what makes up a good story, so their future work could be more around developing a solid publishing strategy to streamline their efforts.



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ASSIGNMENT 4



TOOLKIT 4: ASSIGNMENT

2023 TOOLKIT 4: WRITING FOR READERS ONLINE

TOOLKIT 4 ASSIGNMENT

Writing for your reader assignment: Turn your institutional language into more meaningful language!

Your Name: _____

Name of Organisation, Project or Campaign: _____

Download this template to fill in your answers:  **TOOLKIT 4 ASSIGNMENT**

In this assignment, we ask you to turn a piece of academic or institutional writing into writing that engages with your readers. Come up with some guidelines so others in your teams can do this too.

Section 1:

Step 1:

From your website or annual reports, find about a 5-line paragraph that summarises who you (your organisation, project, campaign) are and the work you do, that is written in institutional, academic or jargon-heavy language and that you feel needs to be rewritten to engage more with readers.

Step 2:

Rewrite this paragraph, using words, metaphors, sentence structure and phrases that you think make the paragraph more:

Understandable (direct, plain language, straightforward)

More active (shorter sentences, active tense)

Relatable (more people-centric, not jargon heavy)

Emotionally resonant (appealing to values, to what's at stake, sharing what's important and why)

***Tip:** Aim to make the paragraph engaging, personal and friendly without going against your organisation's brand voice.*

Section 1 answer:

Copy and paste in the original paragraph:

Add your rewrite here:

Section 2:

From this exercise, now write down **5 short guidelines for writers** (focused on your subject matter) in your organisation, campaign or project to help everyone write more consciously, simply and connectedly. Then, write a brief explanation as to why these guidelines are important for you.

Section 2 answer:



Amplify Mobilise Change is a DG Murray Trust Innovation project designed to help South African civil society shift its thinking about and develop more creative, impactful and efficient online communication and technology practices.

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