



WRITING FOR THE CONTENT AGE

The evolution of audiences from readers to 'information consumers' has fundamentally changed what counts as effective marketing writing. Rather than something new, meeting the demands of today's content age actually requires the application of something classic: journalistic editorial principles.

'Scannability' is vital

With more information to sift through than any generation in history, none of us could get by without skimming pages and screens for relevant content. We have become what Isaiah Berlin might have called 'foxes', darting from one thing to the next -- versus 'hedgehogs' going deep into any one topic.*

Effective writing has to reflect this, giving prominence to the important stuff so scanners will catch it. This is what journalists have always done, delivering the guts of a story in a headline and top-loading articles with key content. Putting the big stuff first is called Inverted Pyramid style, and ensures people who read only the beginning of a piece come away with real information.

Substance trumps style

People no longer have time for lyrical, persuasive reasoning. They're convinced by facts presented in a

LINEUP

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SHOUT-OUT ALGONQUIN COLLEGE

Ascribe congratulates longtime client Algonquin College for being named one of the National Capital Region's Top 25 Employers in February 2014. Algonquin earned the distinction for its commitments to communication, transparency and continuing education for employees. You can read the full announcement [here](#).



WHAT MAKES STORIES SO POWERFUL?

context that means something to them. At best, readers will ignore rhetorical flourish; at worst, they'll distrust it, undermining the credibility of the argument.

With its emphasis on objectivity and lack of hyperbole, brisk, active editorial writing meets the expectations of contemporary readers head-on.

Hand in hand with editorial-style writing is good planning: knowing which messages are most important before putting them down in words -- so the right highlights jump out at information-saturated readers.

**We've taken a slight liberty with Berlin's fox/hedgehog formula. You can learn more about his essay on the topic [here](#).*

PUNC'D PUNCTUATION EXPOSED

Punctuation is essential to making even the simplest communications clearer and more powerful. PUNC'D tells the hidden stories of punctuation marks and how they're used.



Technology changes language, creating words, rendering others obsolete; "selfie" became word of the year in 2013, as digital media has made the word "rewind" as relevant as a butter churn. And perhaps one of its most impressive feats is transforming the hashtag into a buzzword.

The hashtag is thought to have originally been an abbreviation for the pound, as in the unit of weight, which is why it's sometimes called the pound sign. In Canada, it's usually known as the number sign; in Singapore and Malaysia, it can be referred to as the hex; among telephone and computer engineers, the octothorpe, a term which was apparently intended as a joke, as it sounds like someone choking on sushi.

Then came Twitter, which used the symbol as a signifier to help group tweets and track trends. When Twitter exploded, the hashtag did too, and it's quickly becoming a part of speech. "Hashtag rap," coined by Kanye West, replaces the "like" or "as" in similes with a pause followed by a Twitter-esque punchline. And who can forget Jimmy Fallon and Justin Timberlake's [hashtag-themed sketch](#)? #hilarious.

PRACTICE POINT MAKING TABLES TIDY IN MS WORD

Tables are great for presenting volumes of concise information in a scannable way. But when you have dozens of rows spanning multiple pages, maintaining scannability can be hard. Some tips:

1. Set headers to repeat. A repeating header row reminds readers what each column contains, no matter what page they're on. You can repeat your headers automatically by:

- Clicking inside your header row

With the ability to touch our hearts and change our minds, stories have always been vital tools for teaching, sharing and communicating. What makes them work? Read our online [Story Book](#) to find out.

CONTENT MATTERS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TECHNOLOGY CANADA

In 2013, Ascribe client Sustainable Development Technology Canada teamed up with the Canada Science and Technology Museum to launch Let's Talk Energy, an awareness-raising initiative focused on made-in-Canada clean technologies. Throughout 2013, our team wrote a full series of Q&A-style articles for the [Let's Talk Energy blog](#), making technologies like fusion reactors, anaerobic digesters and hybrid garbage trucks easy to understand for a wide audience. Ascribe regularly writes blog entries and other social media content to support clients' integrated communications strategies.



STORYTELLING KEY MOMENTS IN STORYTELLING HISTORY

Since humans have had language, we've probably had stories. What those have been -- and how they've been told -- has changed constantly over the centuries. Here's a little

- Clicking "Table" and then "Table Properties" in the top menubar
- Under the "Options" heading of the "Row" tab, check "Repeat as header row at the top of each page"

2. Keep rows whole. Whether to keep similar ideas together or simply to make your file look prettier, you may want to keep rows from splitting across pages. Under the "Options" heading of the "Row" tab in "Table Properties", uncheck the box marked "Allow row to break across pages".

POP

THE CULTURE FILE

What stories say about their tellers

Stories reveal many things -- including the preoccupations of the people who tell them. Looking at the films that dominated this recent movie award season -- *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *American Hustle* and *The Fifth Estate* among them -- money and media were on Hollywood's collective mind last year.

This isn't new. Watergate spawned a host of paranoia-tinged movies in the 1970s: *The Conversation*, *Chinatown*, *Taxi Driver*. In the 90s, a simmering distrust of technology spurred everything from *Terminator 2* to *Hackers*.

Corporate storytelling has cycles, too, driven by market changes, news cycles and political trends. In recent years we've seen companies stake their brands on sustainability and a renewed focus on results sharpen the messaging of annual reports. What current will be running through marcom messaging next year? Only time will tell.

Questions? Suggestions?

Send us an [email](#).

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storytelling time travel for you:

500 - 1200

The Dark Ages: travelling bards keep history alive through oral storytelling while much of the rest of European civilization falls apart.

1938

Orson Welles puts on a radio drama called War of the Worlds and sends listeners into a panic that the Earth is being invaded by creatures from Mars.

2014

Ascribe writer Al Kratina brings a shocking, acerbic vision of greed, corruption and pop culture to TV with the launch of his series *24-Hour Rental* on SuperChannel.

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Ascribe Marketing Communications Inc. | 402-1390 Prince of Wales Drive | Ottawa | K2C 3N6 | Canada