

**In this issue:**

The evolution of the annual report, a creative award for Ascribe, the proper order of adjectives...and living in a "post-truth" world.

# asterisk



Insights and smart practices from your content team

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## feature\*



## WHAT'S THE RIGHT ANNUAL REPORT FOR YOU?

Annual reports have evolved radically in the last few years, not only in form but also significance. More readers are getting their information online, and they're also getting information more *continuously* by doing so. With access to daily real-time updates, the need for one big end-of-the-year report has been, in many cases, displaced.

Yet the AR can still be an important marketing tool. It gives organizations the chance to summarize progress and put it into context; to tell strategic stories and position their brand.

The question for many today is, "What kind of AR should we make?" An online web shell that can be

refilled each year? An interactive PDF? A traditional glossy "book"? Some organizations will even take a hybrid approach -- printing a highlights document for key audiences while posting their full AR online.

Choosing a format depends on the answers to a few key questions:

### 1. What do you need to achieve?

Being clear on your core purpose helps "set the goalposts" for what you need your AR to be. Is it to communicate strategy and financial results to shareholders? Demonstrate to Parliament responsible use of public funds? Recruit new talent? Drive sales? Build your approach around your goal.

### 2. Who are you trying to reach?

Knowing how your audience prefers to receive information helps narrow down the ideal format for your annual report. If you're a national association with thousands of members, an electronic AR may be most efficient to push out. If you're a company whose sales teams use your AR to market to prospects, an impressive print version could still be the best way to go.

### 3. What's your budget?

A PDF annual is typically far more economical to produce and distribute than a printed book or an HTML-based AR site. But good PDFs still require design and layout, and any extra interactivity can add cost and complexity. An HTML site may be pricier to build, but over time the costs should come down as the architecture gets reused. There's also the question of whether or not your AR needs to meet accessibility requirements like AODA. And increasingly, it's becoming key to ensure your online AR is mobile-responsive.

In the end, the medium is the message -- and format dictates execution, with printed and online annual reports having very distinct requirements for structure and storytelling approach.

If you need help figuring out the right approach for your next annual report, drop us a note: [dale@ascribeinc.ca](mailto:dale@ascribeinc.ca).

## punc'd\*

### CONNECTING THE DOTS... THE ELLIPSIS



The whole point of punctuation is to bring clarity to written communication. The colon and semicolon tell us when ideas are linked. The period tells us when we've reached the end of a thought. And the ellipsis... Sorry, what were we talking about?

Ellipses are outliers in the punctuation world because what they clarify is unclarity, irresolution and omission. Formally, they show that a word, sentence or section of text has been removed from a quote. In that usage, they're a badge of honesty, because taking out words can change meaning. For example, "I did not...take those cookies from the jar," could be a crafty elision of, "I did not, *without smelling them first*, take those cookies from the jar."

It's generally a good idea to use ellipses sparingly. As some *Washington Post* editors put it in 2013: "An overuse prompts readers to wonder what information we are leaving out."

In marketing content, ellipses can build suspense ("What happened next was amazing...") or suggest continuity ("And so it goes...").

The ellipsis may be vague, but it's also a versatile piece of punctuation, so we can all be reasonably sure its story is to be continued...

## content matters\*

### ASCRIBE RECEIVES 2016 IABC AWARD OF MERIT FOR iMINDS WORK

It's been more than two years since we started writing for the Flemish digital agency iMinds (now imec), tackling some of the most forward-looking topics we've ever handled (including, most recently, articles on data science and artificial intelligence). That ongoing work earned an IABC Silver Leaf Award of Merit at the end of 2016 for excellence in business communication. Thanks to Stefan, Wim, Thomas and Els at imec, and all the researchers we've interviewed over the years, for letting us help tell their groundbreaking



## shout-out\*

### SENDING THE MESSAGE: EATING DISORDERS ARE NOT A CHOICE

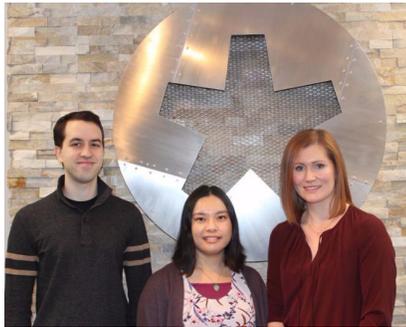
Ascribe is a longtime supporter of the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC). This past fall, we were honoured to help NEDIC prepare for 2017's National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (February 26 - March 4) by writing copylines for its hard-hitting #notachoice campaign. Sharing the perspectives of those with eating disorders and their families, loved ones and caregivers, the campaign is a powerful reminder that eating disorders and their destructive effects are not anyone's choice. Learn more at [nedic.ca](http://nedic.ca) or [nedawareness.org](http://nedawareness.org).



## team profile\*

### THE RULE OF THREES

They say things coming in threes is a sign of good fortune. We think so, with the second half of 2016 bringing three new talents to our Ascribe team:

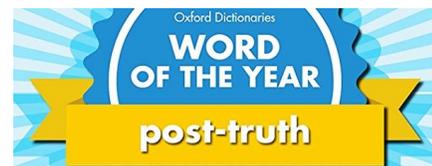


- **Kitty So**, Project Coordinator and Client Service Administrator extraordinaire, keeps our writers on track and our clients informed.
- **Michael Monette** joined as a Writer/Editor with a range of editorial experience and a proofreader's eye for detail.
- **Meghan Baxter** also brings her talents to the ranks of our writing team having written and edited for a wide range of audiences and media on the West Coast.

## pop\*

### LOOKING BACK ON A YEAR OF "POST-TRUTH"

In a year of blindsides that included Brexit and Donald Trump's election, the Oxford Dictionary chose "post-truth" for its 2016 Word of the Year.



Oxford defines post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Use of the term went up 2,000% over 2015 in the lead-up to and aftermath of the Brexit vote and U.S. election.

So how, exactly, is post-truth different from good, old-fashioned lying? While a lie is meant to convince others that something opposite to the truth is fact ("I didn't say a swear word behind your back, teacher. It was Steve."), in a post-truth scenario facts simply don't matter.

A great example of this from the Brexit campaign was pro-leave spokesperson Michael Gove saying, "People in this country have had enough of experts."

The banishment of facts from public discourse has opened the door to "fake news" like Pizzagate, the conspiracy theory implicating high-ranking members of the Democratic Party in a pedophilia ring that prompted one man to bring an assault rifle into a pizzeria in Washington, DC.

Oxford Dictionaries selects its word of the year based on frequency of use. So what were the runners up? Coulrophobia, "the extreme or irrational fear of clowns," was also top-ranked along with hygge, "a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being" (think cocoa by candlelight). Such a mixed bag underscores the inarguable *fact* that 2016 was a

## practice point\*

### "HEAR YE, HEAR YE! PRESENTING THE ROYAL ORDER OF ADJECTIVES!"

Most of the time we instinctively know the order of words to describe something -- for example, "sweet little baby" versus "little sweet baby." But when thoughts get more complex, the right order of adjectives isn't always so clear.

Putting your words in the correct sequence doesn't just make your sentences sound better -- it also helps make your meaning clear. Here are the established rules for building a descriptive sentence:

1. Determiner (e.g., a, an, her, our, five)
2. Opinion/observation (e.g., adorable, repulsive)
3. Size (e.g., huge, tiny)
4. Shape (e.g., square, round)
5. Age (e.g., young, old)
6. Colour (e.g., green, pink)
7. Origin (e.g., Canadian, French)
8. Material (e.g., wooden, plastic)
9. Qualifier/Purpose (e.g., sports, as in a sports car)

To string all of these together: "Her adorable, tiny, round, young, pink, French plastic sportscar really turned heads."

Clearly, a list that long at a certain point loses reader interest. As a rule, using more than three adjectives at a time can make for a clunky read. Separate from putting them in the right sequence, it's also a good idea to focus on the most important adjectives to get your point across.

## moments in storytelling\*

*This is where we look back at some of the big milestones in storytelling history. If you're interested in learning more about our take on stories, check out our [Story Book](#).*



### 508 BC

Greek aristocrat Cleisthenes is the driving force behind Athens' original democratic constitution, putting power in the hands of the people.

### 1948

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* has to rewrite its headlines after wrongly declaring Thomas Dewey winner of the U.S. presidential election over Harry S. Truman.

### 2016

Life imitates the twists and turns of a thriller -- with even a bit of cybercrime -- when Donald Trump stuns pretty much everyone by being elected president of the United States.

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