

In this issue:

The long and short of narrative, how to use hotkeys, cannabis wordplay and more.

asterisk



Insights and smart practices from your content team

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IS NARRATIVE DEAD?

Marketers are well aware their audiences wade through massive volumes of information on a daily basis. It's why so many principles of [information design](#) focus on reaching "skimmers" and "scanners" versus in-depth readers.

So is there even a place for narrative prose in marketing copy anymore?

Definitely.

[Surveys show](#) long-form content online is shared more often -- and gets higher Google results. There are

times when people still want to read. The key is to know when those times are, and when other ways of presenting information might be more effective. A blog post is the right place for narrative, for instance, whereas a timeline showing key milestones in your organization's history probably isn't.

Here are some other quick guidelines:

| Use narrative to... | Don't use narrative to... |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Tell stories and engage people emotionally● Show understanding of the reader (i.e., create a sympathetic connection)● Reinforce your brand voice● Set context● Recap history● Analyze and explain data | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Describe processes or systems● Present or summarize data● List facts● Convey timelines, milestones, chronologies |

Alternatives to narrative

For the items in the "don't use" column, solid alternatives to narrative are bullet lists, tables, charts, graphs and infographics. People retain 55% more of the information they hear after three days if that information is accompanied by a meaningful visual. Smart, interpretive infographics that are conceived as content pieces in their own right (not just "accompanying images") go a long way.

Vary it up

Variety holds people's interest. The choice to use narrative or not may be less "either/or" and more "also/and". Whether you're developing content for online, print or a presentation, an ideal approach is often to mix things up: use narrative for intros and explanations and bulleted callouts, and infographics to deliver data at a glance. In most cases, keeping narrative blocks short and modular -- five lines or less -- is useful even in longer narratives because it helps readers pick out key ideas and navigate through the read.

If you'd like help planning your content to get the right narrative mix, drop us a line at dalemorris@ascribeinc.ca.

Not all blogs are created equal.

Make yours stand out. Whether you're aiming for thought leadership or building relationships with customers, a few key best practices will ensure your blog content hits the mark. Learn more by reading our Ascribe "[Blog on Blogs](#)", the latest addition to our Marketer's Toolkit.

punc'd*

THE BREAKDOWN ON BRACKETS

PUNC'D tells the hidden stories of punctuation marks and how they make writing clearer and more powerful.

(Parentheses) [Spike]
[Square] 「Corner」
{Curly} 【Lenticular】

For a punctuation mark used mainly to indicate asides, brackets sure come in some wild varieties. Spike parentheses, corner brackets and lenticular brackets are among the more exotic. Then there are run-of-the-mill variations like round brackets (parentheses), [square brackets] and those weird squiggly brackets {what *are* those things called?}.

So what's the right way to use all these punctuational bookends?

- *Parentheses* (once poetically called *lunula* because they look like the crescent moon) are the most common in English writing. Their main use is to set off information that is interesting but not necessary to understand a sentence.
- *Square brackets* show where text in a quotation has been omitted or altered. They can also indicate a parenthetical aside within a parenthetical aside (because using a second set of parentheses would be confusing [and hard to read]).
- *Curly brackets*, which is the most common name for these guys { } (though you'll also hear them called squirrely brackets, accolades, fancy brackets and moustache brackets) don't actually have much use in everyday English writing, but do show up in math, music and (sometimes) poetry.

A key thing with brackets is to not go overboard. Too many asides make it hard to follow your main message. And if information isn't necessary to understand a sentence, it's always worth asking yourself if it's necessary at all.

content matters*

THE ROADMAP TO CANADA'S FUTURE PROSPERITY

In 2016, the federal government convened six industry working groups to develop ambitious strategies for their sectors' global success. This fall, those Economic Strategy Tables published a comprehensive set of reports detailing the actions needed to ensure Canadian leadership in advanced manufacturing, clean technology and other key industries. Our team was proud to work with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada to write and edit the Tables' interim and final reports. You can learn more and read the reports [here](#).



pop*

O CANNABIS! A PUFF PIECE ABOUT MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

What do you call a high lizard? A mariguana.

To put it bluntly, if you think puns are the lowest form of humour, we may not be best buds for long. In the leadup to the recent legalization of cannabis, media outlets and other agencies have engaged in a joint effort to smoke out the highest-quality marijuana-related plays on words.

The result has been a potluck of wordplay. Here are some of our favourites:



Blazing the Trail -- the Conference Board of Canada's report on cannabis and the workplace

The Blunt Truth -- the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's youth guide to marijuana use (you can thank them for the lizard joke)

Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis -- a literature review by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction on the effects of cannabis use

Legal pot: We'll learn to roll with it -- a headline from *The Leaf News*, the cannabis beat of the *Winnipeg Free Press*

Of course, not to be downers, but sometimes it may be better to get straight and just deliver the message uncut just for clarity.

shout-out*

LEST WE FORGET

This month we shout out to the Royal Canadian Mint, whose important role in commemorating pivotal Canadian milestones extends to Canada's wartime history. In November 2018, the Mint issued a series of coins to observe the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that ended the First World War. In addition to creating copy for a [webpage promoting the Mint's Armistice-themed collectible coins](#), our team was proud to write a [blog reflecting on Canada's role in the war and its impact on our nation](#), featuring an interview with historian Tim Cook.



practice point*

THE KEY(S) TO MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY IN MS WORD

There are generally two ways to do things in Microsoft Word. The slow way -- digging around in menus and tabs until you finally find the right thing to click on -- or the fast way, using hotkey shortcuts to access essential features.

While hotkeys won't keep you warm in these cold winter months, they can save a lot of time -- and your backside. The hotkey combination Ctrl/Command + S saves the current document and is a reflex for writers who have learned the hard way how important it is to save work frequently.



Other hotkeys include:

- Ctrl/Command + C -- Copy text
- Ctrl/Command + V -- Paste copied text
- Ctrl/Command + D -- Open the Font menu
- Ctrl/Command + A -- Select all text
- Ctrl/Command + B -- Bold selected text
- Ctrl/Command + I -- Italicize selected text
- Ctrl/Command + U -- Underline selected text
- Ctrl/Command + Enter -- Insert a page break

There are plenty of other, less-known hotkeys that can be just as handy. Did you know, for example, that you can search the web for selected text with Command + Shift + L on the macOS version?

You can discover all Word's hotkeys -- and tweak them or even define new ones -- in the Customize Keyboard menu. Look under the Customize Ribbon submenu in Word Options on Windows or the Tools menu in the menu bar on macOS.

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](#).

440 BCE

Herodotus creates the genre of history with *The Histories*, a series of books chronicling the rise of the Persian Empire and the Greco-Persian Wars -- a vital record of ancient traditions, politics, geography and conflict.

1853-1855

The first modern war correspondent, William Howard Russell, covers the Crimean War for *The Times* -- coining the phrase "the thin red line" while introducing the general public to the realities of war.

1960s

Cheap handheld cameras bring the Vietnam War directly into the living rooms of America, with many blaming the unprecedented and explicit media coverage for the U.S. defeat.



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