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What makes quality content, are capitalization rules dead, what it's like to be in public again and more.

asterisk

Insights and smart practices from your content team

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WHAT CONSTITUTES "QUALITY" IN CONTENT?

Organizations are generating more content than ever before — and the timelines for development keep shrinking. It can be enough of a challenge just getting to the "go live" point, never mind ensuring work is high quality.

Yet quality continues to count. While executives spend four to five hours a week reading thought leadership materials, [only 17% rate what they receive as "very good" or "excellent"](#). Thirty-eight percent of decisionmakers say they [may lose respect for a company](#) that produces sub-standard work, and 27% say they've [decided against awarding new business](#) based on poor content alone.

Because there are real stakes to producing subpar content, ensuring quality even in times of high demand is key. But what is quality, exactly? How can you know if a piece is objectively good?

There may not be hard and fast rules, but look for the following characteristics in quality content:

- **Clear purpose.** Have a clear strategic or tactical reason for each piece beyond simply "filling the pipeline". Consider the questions you're trying to answer for your audience.

- **Freshness.** Make sure you're bringing something new to the conversation, whether that's new information or an alternative perspective. Uniqueness has value and helps differentiate.
- **Timeliness.** Produce content that connects with what's on the minds of your audience today. Whether you're reviewing events in an annual report or envisioning the impact of a transformative technology, make it relevant.
- **Substance.** Even when putting forward opinions or offering advice, [back them up with facts and stats](#) that reinforce the credibility of what you have to say.
- **Interest.** Style often hooks readers and holds their attention, but that doesn't mean always being clever or provocative. A clearly written piece with energy, flow and good information can have high value for an interested reader.

UP NEXT

In the next installment of our series on content quality, we'll look at more practical steps you can take to produce higher-quality content more consistently.

If you're interested in boosting the quality of your own content, we'd be happy to talk about your needs and how we can help. Email dale@ascribeinc.ca.

style watch*

TO CAP OR NOT TO CAP?

Writing style preferences are constantly changing. Some shifts are pure fashion (this year the Oxford comma is in, next year who knows?). Others — such as recent capitalization trends — may be driven by technology or a desire to cut through the noise and be heard.

Texting, IMs and social media seem to have influenced a lot of people away from using sentence case and capitalized nouns in business correspondence. We've all gotten emails along the lines of: *hey, will be 5 minutes late for the meeting! — thx, bill.*



On the flipside, many organizations have started to over-capitalize certain words and phrases in formal documents as a way to make Important Ideas and Significant Things stand out and be noticed. Corporate headquarters are Corporate Headquarters, generic analytics tools are Analytics Tools and, chances are, somewhere lunchtime has been valorized as Lunch Time.

While style guides don't always agree on which words to capitalize when — *The Canadian Style* says yes to “the Prime Minister”, *The Canadian Press* says no — a good rule of thumb is that too much capitalization makes text hard to read. In a tight, well-written sentence, syntax and cadence will give words the right emphasis without needing caps or other adornments.

Where do you stand on capitalization?

Are principles still relevant in the age of social media — or have we reached the point of “anything goes”? Weigh in by answering our [LinkedIn poll](#) (make sure to sign in to see the poll).

content matters*

RESEARCH FOR REAL LIFE

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funds research on a vast range of issues that affect people in Canada — from food security to refugee settlement to gender inequity in the film industry. Since 2013, Ascribe has been proud to help SSHRC raise awareness of that work by interviewing

researchers and writing short web articles on their projects. Recently, that's included stories about [creating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ people](#), [transforming math instruction with Indigenous teaching methods](#), [resilience after great loss](#) and more. Check out the [most recent SSHRC stories here](#).



practice point*

GREAT VIDEOS START WITH GREAT THINKING

Videos are a great way to connect, communicate and engage with an audience. They can help tell your organization's story in a concise, effective way. If you're tackling a video project — whether live-action or animated — keep the following in mind for the best results:



- **Be evocative.** Video is a medium of impressions. To make a real emotional connection with your audience — something they'll remember long after they're done watching — focus on telling a *story* rather than just reciting facts.
- **Have a big idea.** The most memorable videos have a clear, strong concept: a central image or idea that carries through the entire piece.
- **Think holistically.** It's called video for a reason — from the Latin word meaning “to see”. To truly captivate viewers, a video should be visually driven, supported by tight, compelling narration and audio.
- **Be selective.** The best videos are quick and to the point. They get in, give viewers a few pieces of information (typically three to five main ideas, depending on length), then get out.
- **Know your budget.** The overall look and feel — stock footage vs. freshly shot, simple graphics vs. full-out animation — is determined largely by how much you can spend. The best concept, if it can't be executed, isn't really the best concept. That said, some very creative concepts can be executed within limited budgets.
- **Be accessible.** If you need a bilingual version of your video, remember that French takes longer to read and narrate than English. Again, sticking to just a few main ideas will ensure you can say everything in the time you've got, no matter the language.

Thinking about doing a video? [Contact us](#) — and let our team help bring your next story to life.

shout-out*

THE FULLEST PICTURE YET OF BIO-ECONOMY LABOUR NEEDS

Companies in Canada's bio-economy are driving innovation in fields from life sciences to the future of energy. Since 2008, BioTalent Canada has been tracking the sector's need for talent through increasingly robust labour market intelligence (LMI) reports. This October, BioTalent Canada published the first pieces in its [most comprehensive suite of LMI materials](#) to date: [a report presenting national-level findings](#) as well as [a drill-down on demand and supply](#). As a longstanding partner of BioTalent Canada, Ascribe is proud to have participated in the development of these reports and others still to come.



A SPOTLIGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH IN COVID-19

Mental health has received more attention than ever in the past 18 months, but COVID-19 has also brought new challenges that make it harder for some people to stay mentally well. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) funded research on how the pandemic is affecting the wellbeing of [people in correctional facilities](#), [parents and young children](#), [people who work with the homeless](#) and other vulnerable groups. Ascribe helped develop two-pagers summarizing the findings along with MHCC's recommended public policy changes to address service gaps.



pop*

REMEMBER HOW TO GO TO THE MOVIES?

Movie screens have started lighting up again, with blockbusters like *Dune* and the latest James Bond installment sure to draw (safely distanced) crowds. But after nearly two years of living-room-only entertainment, have we forgotten what it's like to watch in public...

- **Who are all these other people?** While we've all enjoyed entertaining our roommates and partners with hilarious running commentaries during screenings at home, the rest of the world may not find us quite so amusing. Good news: we can all look forward to sharing our thoughts over after-credits drinks.
- **The old no-phone rule is back.** As much fun as it's been to have our phones handy to look up actors and other trivia or sneak a peek at game scores from the couch, out in public it's time to tuck the blue light away. (It may be a relief!)
- **Time to bust out the pants again.** This one might be tough after 18 months in PJs, but we've all got to face our closets again sooner or later. The good news is that if all our jeans seem to have mysteriously shrunk during COVID, sweatpants are acceptable.



It should all come back to us as we venture back out for some popcorn and the big-screen experience.

wordplay*

SPOT THE FAKE WORD

Writers love finding new words to say exactly the thing they mean. More than a few — looking at you, William Shakespeare and James Joyce — have gone so far as to make up perfectly cromulent new words when there wasn't an existing one for the job. We thought we'd try the same in search of just the right words for this fall season. Guess which one we made up:

- Braithy (adjective): Just cold enough to need a sweater.
- Feuilemort (adjective): Having the colour of a dying leaf.
- Hibernaculum (noun): A shelter occupied during the winter by a hibernating animal.
- Psithurism (noun): The sound of rustling leaves.
- Susurrous (adjective): Full of whispering, murmuring or rustling sounds.



Highlight below for the answer:

Questions? Suggestions? Send us an [email](#). To find out more about us, visit www.ascribeinc.ca.

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