STRATEGIC WRITING

Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More

CHARLES MARSH, DAVID W. GUTH
AND BONNIE POOVEY SHORT

Fifth Edition

COMPANION WEBSITE

ROUTLEDGE

Strategic Writing

This practical, multidisciplinary text teaches high-quality public relations and media writing with clear, concise instructions for more than 40 types of documents.

Strategic Writing takes a reader-friendly "recipe" approach to writing in public relations, advertising, sales and marketing, and other business communication contexts, illustrated with examples of each type of document. With concise chapters on topics such as ethical and legal aspects of strategic writing, including diversity and inclusion, this thoroughly updated fifth edition also includes additional document samples and coverage of writing for various social media platforms. Packed with pedagogical resources, *Strategic Writing* offers instructors a complete, ready-to-use course.

It is an essential and adaptable textbook for undergraduate courses in public relations, advertising and strategic communication writing, particularly those that take a multidisciplinary and multimedia approach.

Strategic Writing is ideally suited for online courses. In addition to syllabi for both online and traditional courses, the instructor's manual includes Tips for Teaching Strategic Writing Online. Those tips include easy guidelines for converting the book's PowerPoint slides to videos with voiceovers for online lectures. The book's recipe-with-examples approach enhances student self-instruction, particularly when combined with the companion website's sample assignments and grading rubrics for every document. Visit the site at www.routledge.com/cw/marsh.

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"This text is a comprehensive guide of persuasive writing techniques for advertising, public relations, marketing, and business writers. It's an ideal learning tool for beginners as well as a reference for advanced writers. The book is unique in its approach of presenting small, digestible chunks of different types of writing styles illustrated with lots of examples. It includes thoughtful sections on writing for diverse audiences. The updated sections on writing for social media feature practical tips beyond writing, including when and how often to post. *Strategic Writing* should be on every writer's bookshelf!"

– Frauke Hachtmann, University of Nebraska—Lincoln

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Fifth Edition

Charles Marsh
David W. Guth
Bonnie Poovey Short

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Introduction
How This Book Works

New to This Edition

New technology continues to revolutionize the world of strategic communication. The fifth edition of *Strategic Writing: Multimedia Writing for Public Relations, Advertising and More* reflects these changes. In addition to a line-by-line revision and updated examples, this edition features three new sections:

- Social media calendars
- Creative briefs
- Promotional news releases

Based on new research and requests from professors who use this textbook, we've also updated and often expanded instructions for every document in this book. Digital communications and social media are transforming the media of strategic writing, and this new edition reflects that reality. (Actually, we had planned to bullet-point *all* the updates and expansions here, but the list is just too long. Every document from news releases to strategic message planners to marketing communication plans has been updated to reflect current usage.)

One thing that *hasn't* changed is the book's closing focus on grammar and style (although we have revised the book's grammar and style appendices). It remains our hope that the appendices will allow a professor simply to type "PM3," for example, on a student's assignment rather than explaining at length the wondrous nature of the comma splice.

Once upon a time (longer ago than we want to admit), the three authors of this book were young professionals. Our careers took us through jobs with corporations, government bureaus, nonprofit organizations and marketing agencies in addition to freelance work. Then we went crazy (according to some) and decided to become professors. As professors, we quickly learned three things about textbooks that teach writing for such careers. Although there are many good books,

- Most tend to cover only one area of writing, such as public relations or advertising.
- They're long.
- Being long, they don't always give concise instructions about how to write particular documents.

As professionals, we hadn't been limited to just one area of writing. All of us wrote speeches (public relations), advertisements (advertising), brochures (sales and marketing), business reports (business communication) and more. We wrote for print, for video and, more recently, for online and social media. We believe that kind of multidisciplinary, multimedia convergence is standard for today's writers. We wanted a book that prepared students for that diversity.

As professionals, we worked on tight deadlines. Therefore, we wanted a book that got right to the point. For example, if your professor assigns a social media calendar that's due tomorrow, we wanted you to have a book that offered a clear set of instructions—a recipe, basically—for writing that document. We wanted a book that you could use as a desktop reference—either digital or paper—while you wrote. And we wanted a book that you could take to the job after graduation.

Finally, we wanted a book that emphasized the importance of strategy. As young professionals, we weren't always sure *why* we were writing *what* we were writing. Sometimes we wrote documents just because the boss told us to; we didn't always examine *why* we were writing those documents. We didn't always wonder *how* those documents helped move our organization toward the achievement of its goals. We want you to be better than that. We want you to realize that, ideally, every business document you write—whether it's a business report or a tweet—advances the organization toward a specific business goal. We want you to understand that every document should aim at a desired effect. We even want to help you identify what the goal-oriented message of each document should be. Our name for this goal-oriented writing is *strategic writing*. We describe strategic writing in Section 1.

How This Book Is Organized

We've divided this book into five sections:

- The first section gives you the background on strategic writing. It's packed with information, but we've kept each segment short.
- The second section gives instructions for public relations documents.
- The third section gives instructions for advertising documents.
- The fourth section gives instructions for sales and marketing documents.
- The fifth section gives instructions for business communication documents.

Of course, some documents—podcasts, brochures and tweets, for example—could fit into each of these four professional categories. The book concludes with four appendices that offer guidelines for punctuation, grammar, style and oral presentations.

Another useful way to categorize strategic communication documents is to understand the four kinds of media in which they appear. You can use the PESO acronym to remember paid, earned, shared and owned. These are the four traditional paths to reaching target audiences:

- Paid media generally are outlets, such as YouTube or a paper/digital newspaper, that accept advertising.
- Earned media generally are news outlets that accept news releases and similar offerings—if those offerings are approved by the medium's gatekeeping editors.
- Shared media generally are social media, in which we share information and opinions with others.
- Owned media generally are those controlled by an organization, such as a company's digital newsroom.

Just like advertising, public relations, sales and other areas of strategic communication, these four kinds of media can overlap with one another. YouTube, for example, can be paid or shared, depending on what type of message we're using it to send.

We hope the purpose of this book is clear: It explains strategic writing. It offers instructions—recipes—for dozens of different strategic documents. And it offers help with punctuation, grammar and style. It's designed to be a user-friendly tool that helps make you an effective writer.

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The authors wish to thank the many people who helped make this book possible, including Dean Ann Brill and the faculty, staff and students of the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Kansas.

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And, as always, the authors thank their families for their love and patience.

Part of good communication is feedback, and we invite you to write us with questions or comments on this book.

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Appendices Summaries

The full appendices begin on page 333.

Punctuation Rules: Appendix A

PM1	Commas with coordinating conjunctions
PM2	No commas with coordinating conjunctions
PM3	Comma splices
PM4	Commas with opening subordinate clauses
PM5	No commas with closing subordinate clauses
PM6	No commas with restrictive relative clauses
PM7	Commas with nonrestrictive relative clauses
PM8	Commas with nonrestrictive nouns
PM9	Commas with titles
PM10	No commas with restrictive nouns
PM11	Commas with dates
PM12	Commas with state and nation names
PM13	Commas with adjective series
PM14	Commas with *and* series
PM15	Commas with opening quotation marks
PM16	Commas with attributions after quotations
PM17	Commas following other punctuation marks
PM18	Commas with attributions that split quotations
PM19	No commas with attributions before paraphrased quotations
PM20	Commas with closing quotation marks
PM21	Commas with direct address
PM22	Commas with *yes* and *no*
PM23	Commas with people's ages
PM24	Commas with present participial phrases
PM25	Commas with past participial phrases
PM26	Commas with opening phrases
PM27	Commas with opening *-ly* adverbs
PM28	Commas with *not*

PM29	Commas with interjections
PM30	Commas with conjunctive adverbs (*however*, etc.)
PM31	No commas after opening coordinating conjunctions
PM32	Commas that incorrectly separate subject and verb
PM33	Semicolons with independent clauses
PM34	Semicolons with series
PM35	Colons only after independent clauses
PM36	Colons with lists
PM37	Quotation marks within quotation marks
PM38	Quotation marks with multi-paragraph quotations
PM39	Quotation marks in headlines
PM40	Quotation marks with titles
PM41	Quotation marks with unfamiliar words
PM42	Question marks with closing quotation marks
PM43	Question marks in two-question sentences
PM44	Question marks that don’t end sentences
PM45	No question marks with statements
PM46	Exclamation points with closing quotation marks
PM47	Exclamation points that don’t end sentences
PM48	Periods with closing quotation marks
PM49	Periods with sentence-ending abbreviations
PM50	Periods with parentheses
PM51	Dashes with sentence interruptions
PM52	Dashes with dramatic pauses
PM53	Dashes with explanations of words or concepts
PM54	Dashes as informal colons
PM55	Hyphens with compound modifiers
PM56	Hyphens with prefixes
PM57	Suspensive hyphenation
PM58	Apostrophes with contractions
PM59	Apostrophes with possession
PM60	No apostrophes with personal pronouns
PM61	No apostrophes with adjectival plural nouns

PM62	Apostrophes with decade abbreviations
PM63	Parentheses with nonessential comments

Grammar Rules: Appendix B

G1	Pronoun disagreement
G2	False series/lack of parallelism
G3	Subject–verb disagreement
G4	*Who* and *whom*
G5	Dangling participles, dangling modifiers
G6	*That* and *which*
G7	*I* and *me*

Style Guidelines: Appendix C

S1	Business titles
S2	Abbreviations in company names
S3	Second reference
S4	Numbers
S5	Abbreviation of month names
S6	State names
S7	Percentages
S8	Commas in series

SECTION

1

Strategic Writing

OBJECTIVES

In Section 1: Strategic Writing, you will learn what strategic writing is. In doing so, you will learn about:

- The importance of good writing
- Research, planning and the writing process
- Writing for the ears
- Writing for the web
- Writing for social media
- Strategic design
- Integrated marketing communications
- Ethics and strategic writing
- Diversity and strategic writing
- Persuasion and strategic writing
- The law and strategic writing
- Jobs in strategic writing

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1A

Introduction to Strategic Writing

Strategic writing is goal-oriented writing. Well-managed organizations have specific, written goals they strive to achieve. Strategic writing helps those organizations achieve those goals.

Another title for this book could be *Writing That Helps Organizations Achieve Their Specific Business Goals*—but that's too long. We prefer *Strategic Writing*. In the paragraphs that follow, we'll further explain what we mean by strategic writing. Right now, however, you'll establish a solid foundation in this exciting profession if you focus on the following key idea: Whenever you write a specific document for public relations, advertising, business communication or sales and marketing, you should know the purpose of the document and how that purpose relates to a specific organizational goal. Imagine what a successful strategic writer you'll become if every document you produce moves your organization closer to the fulfillment of its specific goals.

The word *strategy* comes to English from Greek. In Greek, *strategos* means *military leader* or *general*. As a strategic writer, you're like a general: With each document, you direct your ideas, words and other multimedia elements on a specific mission. Most dictionaries define the word *strategy* as meaning something like "planned actions in support of a particular policy." In strategic writing, your "planned actions" involve the process of writing, and the "particular policy" is the business goal you're helping to achieve.

As a strategic writer, you should be familiar with business goals, so let's examine where they come from. Many organizations have a values statement, a brief set of core values that ideally guide their actions. Those general values often lead to a mission statement that more precisely describes the organization's purpose. In order to fulfill that mission, organizations usually create annual business goals.

As a strategic writer, your job is to help your organization achieve its values-driven, mission-related goals. That sounds like a big job—and it is. If you're writing a multimedia newsletter story, you need to know what business goal or goals your story and the newsletter are helping to achieve. The same is true for a mobile ad and a content-marketing video. Ideally, everything you write on behalf of your organization moves it toward the fulfillment of its mission.

Your communication skills will be particularly important to your organization: To achieve their goals, organizations rely partly on resources controlled by other groups.

For example, nonprofit organizations rely in part on the resource of contributions made by donors. For-profit companies rely on the resource of purchases made by customers. Both nonprofit and for-profit organizations depend on the resource of fair coverage that the news media hold. In every organization, top management relies on the resource of productivity held by other employees. Your mission as a strategic writer is to secure those resources through effective communication. Much of your work as a strategic writer will involve building productive relationships with resource holders.

In building those relationships, the documents that you produce can be divided into two groups: on-strategy and off-strategy. On-strategy documents remain focused on a clear message that helps an organization achieve a particular goal or goals. Off-strategy documents fail to connect with business goals. Either they began with no consideration of business goals, or they attempted but failed to create a goal-oriented message. Off-strategy documents can be worse than a waste of time. Their nonstrategic messages can confuse target audiences, who become unsure about what message you're trying to send and what kind of relationship you seek.

There are many ways to categorize strategic messages. In this book, we divide them among the overlapping disciplines of public relations, advertising, business communication and sales and marketing. A different way to categorize them is to identify the four kinds of media in which they appear. You can use the PESO acronym to remember paid, earned, shared and owned media. Those are the four traditional paths to reaching target audiences. For more information on PESO, see pages 2–3.

We'll close this chapter with some cold, hard truth. Although strategic writing is the ideal for successful organizations, it's not always the practice. Some organizations lack leaders who understand the importance of strategic communication; other organizations become distracted and overwhelmed by the many demands of successful management; still others may lack writers with your knowledge and skills. The authors of this book often receive documents from our graduates. Sometimes a former student will include a note that says something like this: "I know this is off-strategy, but the client insisted" or "This seems off-strategy to me, but my boss made me do it this way because it's how we've always done it."

As young professionals, we encountered the same problems. We've been there, and we sympathize. Our best advice is to try some strategic communication with your boss and your clients. Surely they want to succeed. If you can politely emphasize the advantages of strategic writing (without sounding like a pushy know-it-all), you may succeed in transforming your organization's communications.

On-strategy: That's our message.

1B The Importance of Good Writing

The authors of this book have lost count of the dozens and dozens of employers (your future bosses) we've interviewed. And those professionals all say the same thing: "Please give me someone who can *write*!" Yes, employers want diplomatic team players. And they want hard-working graduates with social media experience. But they almost always begin by asking for good writers.

We've noticed a similar trend in surveys of employers that list necessary job skills for success in strategic communications professions such as public relations. Good, strategic, multimedia writing usually tops the list.

This book is all about helping you become a first-rate strategic writer. As you already know, strategic writing involves delivering goal-oriented messages—messages that are on-strategy. Strategic writing also involves carefully crafted sentences. You don't want to distract your audiences with bad grammar, sloppiness or wordiness. The appendices of this book contain guidelines on punctuation, grammar, style, editing and proofreading. We hope you'll review those. What follows here are tips for strengthening sentences.

10 TIPS FOR WRITING BETTER SENTENCES

1. **Challenge *to be* verbs**: Challenge every appearance of *am*, *is*, *was*, *were*, *be*, *being*, *been* and every other form of the *to be* infinitive. Sometimes a *to be* verb best suits the needs of a sentence, but often you can find a stronger, more evocative verb.

Original	**Revision**
He *will be* a good communicator.	He *will communicate* well.
We *are inviting* you. . .	We *invite* you. . .

2. **Use active voice**: By active voice, we mean active subject. In active voice, the sentence's subject does the action described by the verb. In passive voice, the subject doesn't do the action.

continued

Passive Voice	**Active Voice**
Our profits *were affected* by a sales slump.	A sales slump *affected* our profits.

Passive voice is grammatically correct, and it's the right choice when the action is more important than the action's doer (for example, "She was fired"). But passive voice can seem timid, and it requires a weak *to be* verb. In contrast, active voice is confident and concise.

3. **Challenge modifiers**: Modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) can strengthen a sentence by sharpening your meaning. But sometimes they prop up poorly chosen words, especially imprecise nouns, verbs and adjectives. A precise, well-chosen word needs no modification.

Original	**Revision**
We are *very happy*.	We are *ecstatic*.
Quickly take your report to the client.	*Rush* your report to the client.
He is *rather tired*.	He is *tired*.
Please deliver the package to our *headquarters building*.	Please deliver the package to our *headquarters*.

4. **Challenge long words**: If a long word or phrase is the best choice, use it. Otherwise, use a shorter option.

Original	**Revision**
Utilize	Use
Prioritize	Rank

5. **Challenge prepositional phrases**: To tighten sentences, turn prepositional phrases into shorter adjectives when possible. Avoid a string of prepositional phrases.

Original	**Revision**
I will present the report in the meeting *on Thursday*.	I will present the report in *Thursday's* meeting.
We will meet *on* Thursday *in* Weslaco *at* the Lancaster Hotel *on* McDaniel Street *near* the park.	We will meet Thursday at Weslaco's Lancaster Hotel, 1423 McDaniel St.

6. **Challenge long sentences**: How long should a sentence be? Long enough to make its point clearly and gracefully—and no longer. Challenge sentences that have more than 25 words; realize, however, that some good sentences will exceed that length. As discussed earlier, you can tighten sentences by eliminating *to be* verbs, modifiers and prepositional phrases.

continued

7. **Avoid overused expressions**: Clichés such as "It has come to my attention" and "I regret to inform you" lack original thought. They sound insincere. Overused figures of speech such as "He's a fish out of water" don't create the engaging image they once did. Overused expressions suggest to readers that you didn't take the time to devote clear, serious thought to the message you're sending.
8. **Avoid placing important words or phrases in the middle of a sentence**: The beginning of a sentence breaks a silence and calls attention to itself. The last words of a sentence echo into a brief silence and gain emphasis. The middle of a sentence generally draws the least attention. A writer friend of ours says, "Words go to the middle to die." (This dead zone can be useful for minimizing the impact of bad news.)
9. **Keep the focus on the reader**: Tell readers what they want and need to know—not just what you want them to know. Keep the focus on how they benefit from reading your document. Talk to them about themselves and what your message means to them.
10. **Read your sentences aloud**: At least whisper them to yourself. That's the surest way to check for effective sentence rhythms. Reading aloud also can be an effective editing technique.

Good writing is also concise, so we'll end this chapter.

1c

Research, Planning and the Writing Process

Good writing is more than just good luck and natural talent: It's the result of a logical process. Because the writing process can seem intimidating (or just plain hard), some people prefer to just rush in and start writing. But that's like leaving for a Spring Break trip with no destination, no map, no budget—and no hope. Other writers may feel so overwhelmed that they avoid the job until it's too late for their best work.

Good writing isn't easy. There's nothing wrong with you if you find writing to be hard work. You can, however, make that hard work a little easier by following a nine-step writing process.

Step One: Research

This book shows you how to write dozens of documents for public relations, advertising, business communications and sales and marketing. For each document, we begin with an analysis of purpose, audience and media. We recommend that you do the same.

Begin your research by defining the document's purpose: What is its goal? What should it accomplish? What business goal does it support? With your answers to these questions, you should begin to answer another purpose-related question: What should be the one, key strategic message of this document?

Now extend your research to the target audience of the document. To whom are you writing? Audience research generally falls into three categories: demographic, psychographic and behavioral data. Demographic data consist of nonattitudinal facts such as age, income, gender, educational level, race and so on. Psychographic information contains attitudinal details about values, beliefs, opinions and, of course, attitudes. Psychographic information can include political and religious beliefs, personal ethics codes, goals in life and so on. Behavioral information describes habits and actions, such as media usage. Use your research to deeply understand your readers. Perhaps the most important question you can answer is why members of your target audience should care about your document. What's in it for them?

With your understanding of your target audience, you might want to refine the one, key strategic message you've begun to identify.

Finally, you should gather information about the medium or media you'll be using. Will you use Snapchat? Digital ads? Special events? Mobile messaging? All of the above? The characteristics of your chosen media can help you further refine your one, key strategic message. One of the best ways to select the best media for your message is to study your target audience. Which media does it prefer in this situation?

Step Two: Creativity/Brainstorming

Some documents, such as advertisements, newsletter features and proposals, call for a high degree of creativity. Other documents, such as news releases and business reports, are more straightforward. When your one, key strategic message requires creativity, consider using a basic five-step approach to developing ideas. Advertising expert James Webb Young has written that the creative process consists of these steps:

1. Gathering research
2. Thinking about your research
3. Concentrating on other matters and letting your subconscious mix your research with other things you know (such as history, music, literature and movies). Young believed that a new idea was really a combination of two other ideas, facts or themes.
4. Recognizing when your subconscious reports back a great idea
5. Refining the great idea

A process known as brainstorming can assist the creative process. Brainstorming usually is a group activity in a comfortable setting. Group members toss ideas back and forth, building on one another's ideas, reviewing key research findings and encouraging everyone to be innovative. Brainstorming works best when two rules apply: No one's idea gets ridiculed, and no one worries about who gets the credit.

Step Three: Organizing/Outlining

You've gathered all the necessary information. You've identified a key message and, perhaps, developed a creative approach. Now it's time to determine what to include and how to organize that information.

Many things affect organization, including the target audience's interests, the type of document you're writing and the importance of each piece of information. The best general guidelines for good organization are to consider your audience (what order of information will keep it interested?) and to be logical. You should have a reason for the order of presentation: One part of the document should lead logically to the next.

Writing an outline, whether it's formal with Roman numerals or just notes scribbled on a restaurant napkin, will help you refine and remember your document's organization.

Don't be surprised if you change or reorganize items as you write. New options may appear as you progress. (Experienced writers sometimes can create outlines in their heads—or, as they begin to type, they type a few organizational ideas and then begin composing.)

Step Four: Writing

Finally. Now for perhaps the hardest part of the writing process. Again, writing is tough work for most of us. If you just can't get the first few sentences, start somewhere else. Your outline allows you to do that. And don't worry about getting the words just right in your first draft. It's more important to get the ideas and meanings right.

Step Five: Revising

One truism about writing says, "Good writing isn't written; it's rewritten." Even if you love your first draft, set it aside for as long as possible. Return to it fresh, and be critical. Poet and novelist Robert Graves recommended imagining that your intended reader is looking over your shoulder and saying, "But what does that mean? Can't it be clearer? What's in this for me? How do I benefit by reading this?"

You might also try reading your document aloud. This can be a good way to catch mistakes or language that doesn't flow well.

Writers who get serious about revision sometimes find that they have accidentally memorized all or parts of a document. With the document temporarily lodged in their memories, the writers are able to revise it as they eat lunch, ride in an elevator or drive home. This may sound excessive (even weird), but it illustrates the point that good, successful strategic writers don't settle for first drafts.

Step Six: Editing

Sure, colleagues may edit your document. But you should be the document's first editor. Think of editing as the last fine-tuning before you send the document to your boss. Editing consists of two parts—macroediting and microediting—and you should do both. Macroediting involves looking at the "big picture" of the document. Is the document's key message clear and goal-related? Does the document appeal to readers' self-interests? Does it cover the important parts of who, what, when, where, why and how? Is it well-organized—does one section lead logically to the next? Is the format—the way it looks on the page or screen—correct?

Macroediting also can involve a final revision. Can you find a precise noun to replace a current adjective–noun combination? Can you find a precise verb to replace a current adverb–verb combination? Are you using boring *to be* verbs too often? Can you find more interesting action verbs?

Microediting is proofreading. It involves going through the document one sentence at a time and double-checking grammar (including spelling and punctuation) and accuracy. *Double-check all names, dates, prices and other facts*. Use your computer's spellcheck program, but don't rely on it exclusively. Use a dictionary to look up every word or phrase that could be wrong. Double-check the accuracy of quotations. Microediting is best done backward, starting with the document's last sentence. Moving backward breaks up the flow of the too-familiar document. Moving backward makes the document sound new and different; it helps you focus on each sentence. You'll see what you actually wrote instead of what you meant to write.

Step Seven: Seeking Approval

What could be hard about this stage? All you do is give the document to your boss and anyone else who needs to approve it before distribution. But experienced writers know that this can be one of the toughest steps in the writing process. You've done your best with the document, and you're committed to your approach. What if someone with authority wants to change part of it—or all of it?

Keep an open mind. Would the proposed changes make the document more strategic? That is, would the changes help it reach its goal more effectively? If so, swallow your pride and realize that a successful document often requires a team effort. But if the proposed changes seem to hurt the document's strategic value, do your best to politely debate the revision. Keep everyone's attention focused on the goal.

Never send a document to the target audience without undertaking this approval stage. By this point in the writing process, you're probably too close to your document. It's hard for you to be objective. The document now needs other reviewers and editors. And that can be hard. Avoid being a *prima donna*—that's the term given to temperamental opera singers who won't accept advice because they think they're perfect.

Step Eight: Distributing

You must now send your document out into the world—or at least to the target audience. You may not be responsible for distribution, but you have a major investment in the document's success. Be sure you know where it's going and how it's getting there. And then be sure that it got there. As we said earlier, the best way to deliver a document is whatever way the target audience prefers. Be sure your research includes *how* the target audience wants to receive the information.

Step Nine: Evaluating

In one sense, you began to evaluate your document much earlier in the writing process. When you considered different creative approaches and when you revised and edited, you were evaluating. In the approval stage when others edited your document, they were evaluating.

But now it's time for the big evaluation: Did your document succeed? Did it accomplish its strategic mission and fulfill its purpose? Learning the answers to these questions can help you do an even better job next time. If your document succeeded, why? If it failed, why? Did it have the desired effect on the target audience? Was its distribution effective and efficient?

Because strategic writers are so busy, evaluation can get overlooked in the rush to the next assignment. However, evaluation of past documents can lead to future successes.

The top three problems your authors see in student writing are a lack of research, a lack of strategic (goal-oriented) focus and a lack of polish (too many first drafts with small errors and awkward passages). We know that the writing process recommended here can seem like busywork. It can seem like something that textbook authors write just to fill pages or professors say just to fill class time. If you're doubtful about the writing process, we ask you to try it before rejecting it. We think the experience will make you a believer—and a better writer.

1D Writing for the Web

No other audience in strategic writing is as potentially diverse as a web audience. Your viewer could be the person next door or someone in Algeria. The web may be a mass medium, but it is still one-to-one communication. After all, people don't surf the web in groups.

People also don't read websites in the same way they read print: A study by Jakob Nielsen, a web usability researcher, found that almost 80% of users scan webpages rather than read them word-for-word. His research concluded that people read information on a computer screen 25% slower than information in print. This, coupled with the fact that people must first find your website before they can read it, means that writing for the web requires a different approach from writing for print. For this medium, it's essential that you hone your skills as a strategic writer. Your job as a web writer is to first make your site easy to find and then hook the user with beneficial content before they impatiently click away.

A website is an active, nonlinear medium. That means that the user doesn't necessarily start at the top and read to the bottom. A website, like other social media, is user-driven; the user decides when, how much and where to read next. Typically, web users are on a specific mission, looking for answers to an immediate problem. They want to sort through content, make a decision and then act. They are not interested in verbose explanations or long narratives. Thus, concise, tight writing is essential.

One main difference between print and online documents is that the former are tactile: Readers can hold a book or report in their hands and flip through the pages. That's not true on the web unless the user prints out the entire site. Users entering a site have no idea how many pages it includes or exactly what information it contains. That's why good navigation is critical. As a web writer, you must always provide cues as to where the user is in the site and how they can navigate to additional information. Navigation clues include page titles, subheadings, description tags and links.

Search Engine Optimization

Typically, the user will enter your site through a search engine query. Therefore, your first job as a web writer is to write so users can find your site.

When a user searches for information via a search engine, the engine returns a list of webpages that match the query, placing the best matches first. Thus, your goal as a web writer is to get listed near the top of search responses. You do this by creating webpages that search engine crawlers will determine are matches for keyword searches.

Top Search Engines in the World (2020)

Google, Bing, Yahoo!, Baidu (China), Yandex (Russia), DuckDuckGo, Ask.com, AOL.com, WolframAlpha and Internet Archive

A **keyword** is a word or phrase included in the website content to help a search engine locate particular pages. Users also type keywords into search engines seeking relevant websites.

Thus, **search engine optimization (SEO)** plays a vital role in getting your website found. SEO involves editing content and inserting HTML coding to increase the relevance of specific keywords and to remove barriers to search engine crawlers. Theoretically, the better optimized your website, the higher on the search results page it will appear.

SEO is not a science or an art, although many in the field would argue it is a bit of both. Because search engine software is proprietary, Google, Yahoo!, Bing and the others don't want you to know exactly how they sift through data. In fact, the processes are ever-changing, so it's impossible to know exactly what formula will work best at any given time. Google reportedly changes its algorithm 500 to 600 times per year and says it uses hundreds of different ranking factors that range from location of keywords to basic content reading level and the inclusion of videos. The search engines themselves do provide suggested practices that will help your site be found, ranked and indexed.

Content and Keywords

So what's the best way to optimize your website? Google answers this question clearly in its guidelines: "Create a useful, information-rich site and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content" (support.google.com). In other words, "Content Is King," as Bill Gates declared in 1996. The primary way to increase your rankings in Google, or any other search engine, is to:

- Provide original information not available elsewhere on the web.
- Provide information of value that can benefit users.
- Clearly describe the content of your website.
- Ensure that other sites link to your site. (If others reference your site, Google sees it as more reliable.)

- Use good navigation tools and structure in building your site. (For example, eliminate broken links, slow downloads and duplicate copy.)

Google provides a detailed Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide that walks you through the best industry practices.

As discussed earlier, people find your website by typing keywords into a search query. Your task as a web writer is to use keywords in the content of your website that match users' search queries. The higher up your company or organization appears on the search response, the more likely a user will click through to view your website.

Website owners often think they know the viable keywords that people will use to find their site. This isn't necessarily true. Many site owners aren't objective about their site's content and are too tied to industry jargon. The following suggestions can help you identify keywords for your site.

- **Create a list of potential keywords**: Ask yourself: What other names or terms are related to your product or service? What is your site hoping to do or promote? What services will it provide?
- **Brainstorm**: Ask friends, colleagues and loyal customers or users for potential keywords.
- **Visit discussion forums**: Record the words prospective customers are using. Think like a consumer. What are they searching for? What is their intent?
- **Know your competitors**: What keywords are they using?
- **Use single words as well as phrases**: Remember the term “keyword” doesn't refer only to single words but also to phrases, called long-tail keywords.
- **Avoid industry jargon**: Users might not understand trade-speak.
- **Use a keyword research tool**: Google Adword Keyword Planner or the Bing Keyword Research Tool can identify possibly overlooked keywords.
- **Dig deeper**: Use the keyword research tool to learn more about each word or phrase, including its conversion rate (its success in drawing viewers), search volume (how often the word has been entered into search engines) and competition (similar keywords).
- **Narrow your choices**: Refine your list of keywords to include a mix of broad and highly targeted words. Also create some “negative” keywords—ones that do not describe your site's product or service. Obviously, avoid using these.
- **Finalize your list to 15–25 keywords**: Consider ranking them as primary or secondary keywords.

Now that you have your list of keywords, how do you use them to write strategically?

- **Content**: Use three to four keywords per page when writing your content. Using more will dilute the content and could be viewed as "keyword stuffing." Google no longer gives good rankings to pages that employ this technique.
- **Heads, Links and Navigation**: Use keywords in page content, page titles, internal headlines, <Alt text> (text that substitutes for images that a browser can't open) and links, including navigation links. Vary the titles of different pages in order to use as many keywords as possible.
- **Meta Description**: Use keywords in the meta description for the page, a sentence of up to 155 characters that describes page content. Description tags are HTML-coded passages that don't appear on the visible page. Search engines often use this embedded tag as the snippet that appears along with the search results. If you don't provide a tag, the search engine will construct one from the contents of the page.
- **Ranking**: PageRank was developed by Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Google's founders, as a system for ranking webpages by giving each page a relative score of importance. While the exact formula of PageRank still remains a secret, quality backlinks (incoming links) and efficient internal links seem to increase search engine results.

As the needs of your site and its visitors change, so should your keywords. Constantly monitor your keywords, and update them as needed. Remember: Keywords are ultimately about people—your audience. The better you know your target audience, the more targeted your keywords will be. The best advice still remains: Write information-rich content that is relevant to your audience.

Web Writing That Works

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.
>
> William Strunk Jr., in *The Elements of Style*

A modern-day web writer can benefit greatly from the advice William Strunk Jr. penned in 1918 in his "little book" of essential rules for good grammar and composition. Less is more when it comes to web writing.

- Documents intended for online reading should rarely be longer than 1,000 words. A good target is 500 words or less. If your website is most likely to be viewed on a mobile device, a good target length might be closer to 250–300 words per page, according to Google. Remember: People find it more difficult to read information on a computer screen or hand-held device, and thus read it more slowly. Edit. Then edit again. Use the 10 Tips for Writing Better Sentences on pages 11–13.

- Split content into information bytes. To attract and hold a reader, make text short with one idea per paragraph. Strive for paragraphs no longer than 50 words and sentences that contain no more than 15 words. Use short, simple words. One of the handiest tools for the online writer is your software's word-count function. Use it!
- Skip introductions or welcomes. Instead, establish why this page is important in a single, short statement. In other words, start with your conclusion! Give a concise overview of the information first.
- Use the inverted pyramid organizational scheme (page 100): In passages of more than one paragraph, information should become progressively less important.
- Put key information in the first sentence of a paragraph. In fact, the first three words should be loaded with information.

  Don't Write: 2021 was a big year at Riverview Community Medical Center with surgeries for knee replacements reaching all-time highs.

  Do Write: Knee replacement surgery soared at Riverview Med in 2021.
- Use links to provide more in-depth coverage or background information. Think in terms of layers. The top layer is the outer skin of your website, and as you go deeper inside, you reach the meat. Use internal links to appeal to specific audiences.

  Don't Write: For articles about knee replacement procedures **Click Here**.

  Do Write: **Advances in knee replacement procedures at Harvard** show. . .
- For in-depth information, use the bite-snack-meal approach developed by Marilynne Rudick and Leslie O'Flahavan. On the website homepage a headline serves as the bite and is a link to the full article (the meal), which appears on an interior page. The snack is a two- or three-sentence summary of the article beneath the headline. This allows readers to choose what level of detail they want.
- Be objective. Don't use a promotional writing style. Web users want straightforward facts. Link to other websites to increase credibility.
- Make text timeless (avoid words such as *recently* and *today*).
- Use sentence fragments where helpful. Print documents generally call for complete sentences, but complete sentences often aren't necessary in online writing. Sentence fragments often let you pull information-carrying keywords to the front.

  Do Write: *25% less fat!*
- Use numerals rather than spelling out numbers, even at the beginning of a sentence or in a headline. This doesn't apply to really large numbers, such as a billion.

  Do Write: 10 Reasons to Choose Riverview Med

- Use bulleted lists to make text scannable. Bullets (•) slow down the eye and highlight information. Use bullets when the sequence doesn't matter; use numbers when it does. In websites, bulleted information should be one or two words in length.
- Make text scannable by using headings, subheadings, links, keywords and lists.
- Highlight text for emphasis. Put keywords (not whole sentences) in bold or colored text. Avoid blue and purple, however. The default settings on most computers are blue for unvisited sites and purple for visited ones.
- Limit the use of italics or underlining for emphasis. Italic type is more difficult to read on a computer screen (although advances in vector graphics and higher-resolution monitors have minimized this issue), and underlining may be confused with links. Think in terms of eyebytes—two or maybe three emphasized words. Use about three times as many as you would in a similar print document.
- Integrate graphics within the text. Use charts and visuals to explain complicated information. Avoid graphics with movements that might distract the reader from the content. Caption all graphics clearly. Clear captions also assist visually impaired viewers whose specialized computers may not display the graphics.
- Make printer-friendly versions (PDFs) for information likely to be printed.

Web Headlines

Website headlines must work overtime. Their job is to help users skim through copy and locate their desired information. Headlines are probably the single most important words on your webpage. After all, they have to appeal to three audiences: your Reader, Search Engines and Social Media. It's a rare case when the same headline can captivate all three, however.

Your first consideration should always be the readers. If your headline doesn't immediately grab readers' attention, they may click through to another site, and you've lost them. Search engines seek very specific content connected to an intended search, so your headline must contain those keywords.

- Write headlines, subheadings and internal headlines that summarize content. Since users can enter the site from any page and freely move among pages as they choose, make each page stand on its own and not be dependent on previous pages. Headlines often appear separated from their associated story in search results, tweets, blog posts or newsfeeds. That means they must be meaningful out of context.
- Make every word in a headline meaningful. Don't be cute. Don't be promotional. Don't run the risk of confusing international audiences with slang. The headline should clearly explain what information follows.

  Don't Write: Get the Most Bang for Your Buck

  Do Write: Increase Your Sales by 15%

- Write short, direct headlines that feature keywords. Try to write headlines that average about five to eight words. Google will only show the first 55–60 characters on a page title. Pay attention to what words might be cut off. Remember short headlines are better for tweets, too.
- Front-load your headlines, placing the most important keywords first.

  Don't Write: Scientists Reveal Slower Metabolism Causes Weight Gain

  Do Write: Weight Gain Due to Slow Metabolism, Study Says
- Use passive voice when it allows you to place keywords first in a headline or sentence.

  Active voice: *flavours!* Introduces Soy Milk Diet Bars

  Passive voice: Soy Milk Diet Bars Introduced by *flavours!*
- Use numerals rather than spelling out numbers.

  Don't Write: Five Tips to Weight Loss

  Do Write: 5 Easy Tips to Weight Loss
- Use lists and how-to titles.

  Do Write: How to Lose 10 Pounds This Week
- Use internal headlines. The job of an internal headline is to select and highlight a word, phrase or idea from the following few paragraphs that will make the reader want to keep reading. Internal headlines also serve to break up uniform blocks of type into manageable chunks.

Finally, pay attention to websites that you visit. What works? And just as important, what doesn't?

1E

Writing for Social Media

Social media may be as commonplace as eating lunch or brushing teeth, but they're still new and ever-changing tools. For people born at the turn of the century, most of these media were created after they first attended preschool. And the evolution of social media continues at the speed of imagination.

Let's start this discussion of social media with some basic definitions:

- **Social media**: Software, platforms and websites that allow people to share information
- **Social listening**: The practice of identifying engagement opportunities by monitoring social media conversations that align with our personal and organizational interests
- **Social engagement**: Interactions that can result from social listening and joining the conversations

These definitions suggest that the first step in the strategic use of social media is listening—not unlike research being the first step of strategic writing. Understanding your organization's target audiences—both present and potential—is key to successful strategic communication. These definitions also suggest the second step in strategic writing: planning. Organizations need to know what they want to accomplish through social media, whether it be growing and empowering a network of passionate supporters or providing a human face for the organization through shared stories.

Social media posts are an increasingly important part of strategic writing. In one recent survey, international CEOs identified social media as their company's most valuable communications channels. In the same survey, international public relations professionals rated social media as growing in importance faster than other communications channels.

Given that importance, how often should an organization post? Social media experts surveyed by *Inc*. magazine recommend these posting frequencies:

- Twitter: 10–15 tweets per day
- Instagram: 1–2 posts per day
- Facebook: 1 post per day

- LinkedIn: 1 post per day
- Pinterest: 10 pins per day

To this advice, your authors would add two things:

- Each post should communicate something of interest to your target audiences consistent with your goals and values.
- The above numbers indicate original posts. Those numbers don't govern how often you should join conversations or respond to inquiries delivered via social media.

Because social media platforms evolve rapidly and differ from one another—Facebook isn't Twitter, which isn't Snapchat—it can be tough to supply tips that apply to strategic writing for *all* social media. But experts agree that some basic guidelines do exist.

10 TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA WRITING

1. **Pause to plan**: Don't write until you've considered purpose, audience and media. The purpose of social media generally is to encourage audience engagement and interaction with your organization. Your audience is technologically literate, and the media should be those preferred by your target audience.
2. **Focus on audience wants, needs or interests**: Don't post unless you're addressing one of those categories.
3. **Create a social media personality (voice) for your organization**: Experts recommend informality with a slightly edgy sense of humor—but that advice is not appropriate for all organizations, such as nonprofit groups that address serious health issues, or in all circumstances. Even humorous personalities sometimes must deliver serious, straightforward messages.
4. **Don't shoot from the hip**: Do be proactive with posts, and respond quickly to opportunities and to the concerns of key audiences—but be sure that every social media message is reviewed, edited and approved before posting. Social media dashboards (page 247) that require levels of authorization can assist with the approval process.
5. **Stay up to date**: Social media dashboard technologies allow you to schedule social media messages; coordinate those messages with information from your databases that store information on customers and/or other key audiences; and organize the editing and approval process.
6. **Engage your readers**: Again, create posts that captivate readers and, ideally, become individual relationship-building conversations. Strategic writers often craft social media messages to pull readers to a so-called landing page within their organization's website.

continued

7. **Be concise**: Tweets are limited to 280 characters and spaces, and experts at Sprout Social recommend aiming at 100 characters for such posts. Facebook posts of 40–80 characters spark the highest levels of engagement.
8. **Use visuals**: Posts with photos, videos or GIFs draw more attention and engagement from readers than do simple text messages.
9. **Use analytics to learn which posts work best with which audiences**: Facebook, for example, has a Page Insights section, just as Twitter has Twitter Analytics. (If we're not studying reactions to our messages, we don't know if we're succeeding.)
10. **Think beyond "buy now" messages**: The Content Marketing Institute recommends restricting direct sales messages to just 20% of your social media posts. The remainder should be entertaining and informative messages, including so-called hacks and how-to posts and responses to current events.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the strategic use of social media is finding a correct balance in your organization's social engagement. While there are many positives in encouraging interactions with your various target audiences, there is also risk. Poorly planned posts can attract worldwide scorn, and even private posts by employees can reflect poorly upon an organization. It's imperative, therefore, that organizations establish social media policies, as well as train employees in their use. And not all threats to social media success come from within. Again, organizations should regularly monitor the social media environment for potential threats as well as opportunities.

One more piece of advice: Be a student of social media writing. Learn from what works—and what doesn't.

1F

Writing for the Ears

Have you ever noticed that it is often easier to silently read a book or email than it is to read it aloud? You may not have realized it at the time, but that was your first experience with the difference between writing for the eyes and writing for the ears.

Aural writing—writing for the ears—is increasingly important in the age of digital and social media. It is the style of writing used when making a live presentation in front of an audience (such as a speech or sales presentation) or for one that is recorded or transmitted to the audience (such as radio/television commercials, online videos or podcasts).

There are three major similarities between print-style writing (which is created for the eyes) and aural writing (which is created for the ears—*and* eyes, in the case of video). We write each in a manner best suited to the audience. We write each in a manner best suited to the purpose behind the message. And we write each in a manner best suited to the medium used to convey the message.

The major difference is that writing for the ears uses language and formats that make it easier for the narrator to read the copy and for the listener to understand it. Aural communication, what we hear, is linear. That means there are no second chances. When we're reading, we can pause, reflect and re-read a sentence. However, that doesn't happen when listening to the spoken word. Once the message is delivered, it's gone—unless we're able to rewind a recorded message, which is more difficult than simply re-reading a written sentence. For this reason, the aural style of writing features short, active voice, subject-verb-object sentences with key information at the start of a sentence. The style remains the same regardless of the message.

Writing for the ears is different from writing for print in several other ways. Print media are better suited for details. An audio listener or video viewer can easily get lost in an avalanche of facts and figures. That's why the use of broad concepts, tangible examples and big ideas is preferred in aural writing. It's also why broadcast and podcast writers repeat key phrases and names—especially in advertising and other persuasive messages created to be remembered.

And, of course, major differences separate writing for audio, which has no pictures, and writing for video, which is dominated by pictures. In video, words and pictures must work in unison. For example, strategic writing for television commercials and video news releases involves designing images as well as crafting the words that enhance them.

The value of learning how to write for the ear has grown with the increasing prominence of social media videos as well as podcasts—a digital audio file downloaded from the internet for use by the listener on a device of their choosing. Podcasts have become important in the branding of organizations. They also help create a connection, a relationship, between the source and the listener. Podcasts also present their sources as trusted experts.

Consider *Serial*, a 12-part series of podcasts produced and distributed by National Public Radio in 2014. It was an evolving story, a murder mystery, about the 1999 death of a young woman in Baltimore and the questionable conviction of her boyfriend. *Serial* became one of the most-downloaded podcasts in history. And what did NPR get for its efforts? It attracted a younger, loyal group of subscribers who may assist in the nonprofit organization's future fundraising. Because of its success, *Serial* was extended for new stories in subsequent seasons.

10 BASIC RULES OF WRITING FOR THE EARS

1. **The announcer has to breathe**: Stick to short sentences of 20 or fewer words. The shorter, the better.
2. **One at a time**: Only one major idea per sentence. Avoid compound sentences. (The word *and* should raise a red flag.)
3. **Make it personal**: It really doesn't matter how many people are listening. In reality, you are speaking to one person at a time. Speak directly to that person. The best copy is conversational, so write like you talk. Sentence fragments are acceptable, just as long as they make sense.
4. **First things first**: In contrast to writing for print media, attribution of paraphrased quotations should be at the beginning of the sentence. This makes it easier for the listener to distinguish opinion from fact. All titles go before a person's name. That goes for official titles, such as "Mayor Mary Smith," and unofficial titles, such as "community activist Mary Smith."
5. **Write S-V-O**: Use simple subject-verb-object sentence structures. Eliminate *to be* verbs whenever possible.
6. **Use active voice**: Make the subject the doer of the action. "Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address" is better than "The Gettysburg Address was written by Lincoln."
7. **There's nothing like the present**: Use present tense—except when past tense is necessary. Electronic media are instantaneous. Present tense expresses this sense of urgency. It is especially important that attribution be in present tense, preferably using the neutral *say* and *says*.
8. **Write it as you would say it**: Avoid bureaucratic jargon. Speak the language of your audience. When using initials in lieu of an organization's name, use hyphens between the letters if the announcer is expected to pronounce each

letter. (For example, “F-B-I” for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. However, the common second-reference pronunciation for Mothers Against Drunk Driving is “MADD,” pronounced as a word rather than four separate letters.)

9. **Know your numbers**: In a broadcast script, write words for single-digit numbers (for example, “six” and “nine”). Use figures for two- and three-digit numbers (for example, “23” and “147”). For numbers with four or more digits, use a combination of figures and words (for example, “156-thousand”). Because aural communication is better suited for big ideas than details, round-off large numbers and fractions unless precision is required. For example, “more than 25-thousand” is better than “25,389.” However, there is a big difference between earthquakes that measure five-point-one and five-point-six on the Richter Scale. And spell out *dollars* instead of using the dollar sign.
10. **Make it easy to find**: For online audio and video files, create captivating titles that draw attention. Podcast program notes should include relevant keywords and phrases easily identified by search engines.

The format used in writing audio and video scripts focuses on the needs of the announcer and/or actors. Each script serves as a roadmap for how to present the message. In addition to the words that will be read aloud, the script contains instructions for the use of music, sound effects or recorded voices. Video scripts also contain visual instructions. To make a script easier for the announcer or actors to follow, you should use large typefaces and double-space the lines.

Although it is not unusual for television and film writers to use single-column scripts in long-form productions such as a television drama or a documentary, a two-column script is more common. This book will go into greater detail about script formats in later discussions of specific documents, including video and audio advertisements (see pages 203–209; 210–216).

One important detail of these scripts is the special language strategic writers use to communicate with producers, directors and editors. We’ll close this discussion with a brief glossary of terms you should know to write scripts and talk the talk with the pros.

Actuality: A short snippet of a longer interview used in an audio script. Also known as a **Soundbite**.

Chyron: Words shown on a video screen. Also known as a **Super**. A slash (/) indicates a line break in a chyron message in a script.

Crossfade: The overlapping of audio or video as one source fades in and the other fades out.

CU: A close-up shot in a video script, often of a face, hands or feet.

DOG: Digital on-screen graphic. Also known as a **Watermark**.

Dolly: To physically move a video camera forward or backward rather than zooming, panning or tilting the camera from a fixed location.

Establish, then under: A description of playing music or a sound effect at full volume for a short time to attract attention or allow recognition, then lowering the volume to allow use under voices.

Establishing shot: In a video script, a wide shot (WS) that clarifies the scene for an upcoming sequence of shots.

Fade: In audio, a gradual decrease of volume. In video, a gradual darkening of a visible scene.

MS: A medium shot in a video script, often of a person shot from the waist up.

Pan: To move a camera's lens from left to right (or right to left) without moving the camera itself from a particular location.

RT: Running time. Specified at the end of audio and video production scripts.

Sequence: A group of related shots in a video script.

SFX: Sound effect or sound effects.

Shot: A still or moving picture taken from a particular location, width and angle.

SOT: Sound on tape. Refers to use of natural sound or music from a previous recording.

Tilt: To move a camera's lens up or down without moving the camera itself from a particular location.

Under: A description of background sound or music that runs unobtrusively beneath voices in an audio or video production.

VO: Voiceover. Words spoken by an unseen announcer.

WS: A wide shot in a video script, often of a building, a room or a group of people.

Zoom: The process of making images larger or smaller by adjusting the focal length of a camera's variable-length lens.

TIPS FOR VISUAL STORYTELLING

Have you ever watched someone's home videos and thought they were similar to a toddler's first efforts with a camera? Shaky camera movements, rapid scene changes and an absence of a coherent storyline often characterize these homemade productions. However, that's OK. Most home videos serve their intended purpose: to remind us of people and places.

What works for a home video doesn't necessarily work in a strategic communication campaign designed to deliver a clear message to a targeted audience. Just like strategic messages told in words, strategic messages told in pictures have a specific structure designed to enhance the audience's understanding. Like all other strategic communication, visual storytelling involves research and planning. With that in mind, here are a few tips for visual storytelling:

1. **Decide where you are going**: Research your purpose and audience. Before you do anything else, determine the desired outcome. Even before you pick up the camera, you also need to understand any time, budget and logistical limitations.
2. **Put the words first**: Write the script first. It is more strategic to shoot pictures that match a script than to shoot first and write later. You often have only one opportunity to photograph a certain person or location. Writing first and shooting later ensures that you come away from your video session with all the material you need. A storyboard (page 212) also can help you plan each shot.
3. **Use a tripod**: Professional photographers use them because they help create a steady image. Remember that something that may seem like a small movement on a phone or tablet is magnified when it appears on a larger screen.
4. **Know your video grammar**: Think of each shot as if it were a sentence. Just as a paragraph is a series of related sentences, a sequence is a series of related shots. Just as a topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph, an establishing shot sets the stage for the remaining shots within a sequence.
5. **Variety is the spice of life**: Vary the length, angle and width of shots within a sequence. Avoid predictable patterns that may cause the viewer to lose interest. Avoid putting two wide shots or two medium shots back-to-back. Know the desired length, angle and width of each shot—but also shoot each shot with different lengths, angles and widths to allow variety in editing and to provide just-in-case backup shots.
6. **Do not cross the axis**: The axis is the direction of action within a sequence. For example, when two people are in a shot, the axis is located on a line between them. All the shots within the sequence should stay on the same side of the axis. Otherwise, you confuse the viewer by reversing the flow of the action. It would be like showing a football player running down the field and switching to a camera on the other side; our player would suddenly be running in the opposite direction.
7. **Hit and run**: In visual storytelling, hit-and-run writing involves the relationship between pictures and words. Pictures and words are connected during an establishing shot in a sequence; that is, the words help explain the picture. During the remainder of the sequence, the relationship between pictures and words does not have to be as strong. But when the scene changes, the pictures and words should reconnect during the first shot of the new sequence (hence the name "hit-and-run").
8. **Continue action and setting**: It is possible to achieve the look of a multi-camera shoot using just one camera. By paying attention to detail and matching the

continued

action and setting of one shot with the next, even the most modest production can have that big-budget look.

9. **Avoid jump cuts**: Jump cuts are unnatural movements created by bad editing. They also are known as breaks in continuity. An example would be when a person sitting in a chair in a sequence's first shot is suddenly—a fraction of a second later—standing on the other side of the room. It is physically impossible and therefore appears unnatural.
10. **Cutaways are your friends**: Cutaways help maintain continuity by briefly shifting the viewer's attention to another subject. Using the previous example, it is easy to remove the jump cut—and the unnatural movement it creates—by placing a shot of another person in the room between the shots of the subject first sitting and then standing. It looks natural because the viewer rationalizes the action occurred off-camera during the cutaway.
11. **Empty frames are your friends, too**: This is another popular technique for maintaining continuity—especially when the same subject is in consecutive sequences. This is achieved by having the subject move out of the frame at the end of one sequence or into the frame at the beginning of the next. It looks more natural than having people pop from one location to the next in a fraction of a second.
12. **Let the action come to you**: It is usually best to have action come toward the camera rather than move away from it. The exception comes when movement away from the camera makes sense within the context of the production.
13. **Action is recorded, not created**: Avoid unnecessary camera movements and zooms. They tend to distract the viewer.
14. **Go easy on the special effects**: Use special effects only when they complement your message. Unnecessary effects distract the viewer.
15. **Use the right light**: Proper lighting gives the illusion of a third dimension in a two-dimensional medium. As with everything else, you want the subject to appear natural. Unnatural lighting will distract a viewer's attention. Avoid backlit situations, as well as those in which the lighting is diffuse/flat or creates a sharp contrast.
16. **Challenge authority**: One final piece of advice: It is OK to break any of these rules if doing so makes sense within the context of what you hope to achieve. However, you need to know the rules *before* you can break them.

1G Strategic Design

Words alone often won't suffice to convey your message as clearly and strategically as possible. That's why you need to understand design as it relates to strategic communication: Even if you don't see yourself as a designer, it's in your own best interests to understand basic design principles. Research shows that communication with a visual component is far more effective, persuasive and memorable. Whether you're producing an annual report, marketing proposal, website, brochure or print advertisement, good design principles will enhance the message. Good design attracts and holds the reader's attention. It amplifies the message and provides direction and order. Good design should work seamlessly with your words to reinforce the strategic message.

Graphic design uses typography, visual art, page layout, paper, computer software (design software) or other creative devices to combine words, symbols and images to enhance the overall message. Different typefaces create different moods and emotions. For example, a typeface appropriate for a wedding invitation would not work as well for a corporate annual report.

Wedding Invitation: *You Are Cordially Invited . . .*

Corporate Report: **Riverview 2023**

Adjusting the point size, line length, leading (line spacing), tracking (general space between letters) and kerning (the space between particular letters) has an impact on the overall appearance of the page.

Most often, graphic artists design pages using a grid system that provides an invisible structure for aligning and repeating elements on a page. Grids are meant to be flexible yet provide a continuity for a multipage project. A grid can help clarify design concepts such as balance.

The principles of design govern the relationship of the elements on a page or screen. While there are no absolute rules, less is usually more when it comes to design. The goal in good design is to create a harmony between elements that works in tandem with the overall message.

Principles of Design

Balance means equalizing the weight on both sides of a centered vertical or horizontal axis. When elements spring out symmetrically from a central point, such as a point on an axis, they have radial balance; the central point provides a center of gravity for the design. Each element in a design has its own visual weight. For example, a photograph is visually heavier than a headline, which is heavier than body copy. The heavier the element, the more your eye is drawn to it. You can create symmetrical or asymmetrical balance. Symmetrical balance (Figure 1.1) centers elements along the vertical or horizontal axis and creates a more conservative, formal look. Asymmetrical balance (Figure 1.2) places elements off center and creates a sense of tension and movement. For example, a one-third/two-thirds division of space is more dramatic than dividing space in half along a centered axis. This Rule of Thirds divides your design into three rows and three columns. An intersection of these guidelines provides an ideal place to position your most important element. The Rule of Odds states that having an odd number of objects in your design is more interesting and, therefore, more pleasing to your audience than having an even number of objects.

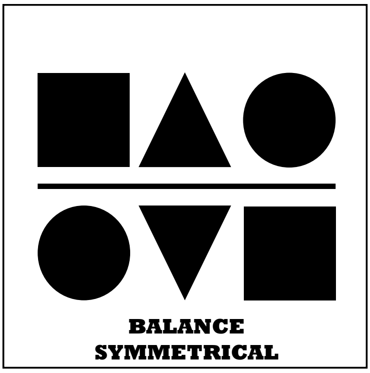


FIGURE 1.1

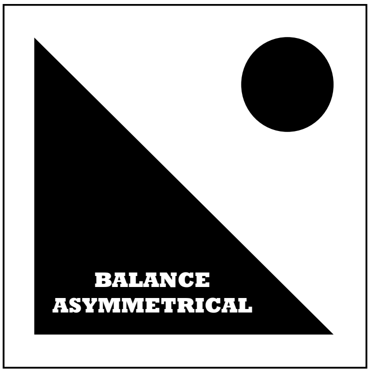


FIGURE 1.2

Movement adds excitement and energy to your page by directing the path the eye follows (Figure 1.3). Movement can create unity through repetition and rhythm. For example, repeating a pattern of lines or shapes will force the eye to follow them. Movement can also be created through action. This can be done in the two-dimensional world by taking a "freeze frame" of an object in motion, such as a dancer or jogger. Additionally, the downward angle of the dancer's arm could lead the viewer's eyes to the next important element—a paragraph, for example. Good design directs the eye in the desired sequence of movement. Typically the eye enters the page at the top-left corner and moves across to the right, then diagonally down the page to the lower-left corner and then off the page in the lower-right corner—a basic Z pattern. For this reason, logos are frequently placed in the lower-right corners of print ads. Thus, a logo is the last thing on the page that the consumer sees.

Emphasis creates a point that acts as a bull's eye or focal point for the viewer (Figure 1.4). When a layout has no emphasis, nothing stands out, and the viewer doesn't know where to focus. Making an object larger, more sophisticated, more ornate, more brightly colored or closer to the foreground can increase its emphasis or dominance.

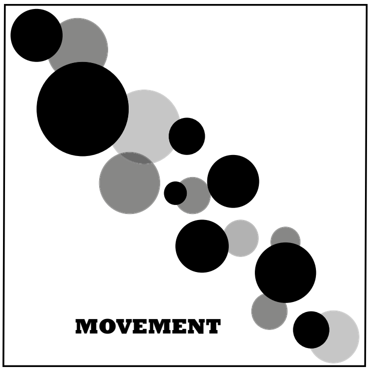


FIGURE 1.3

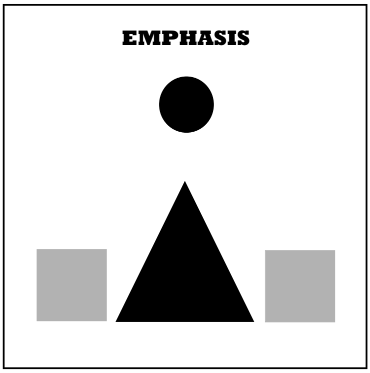


FIGURE 1.4

Contrast occurs when two related elements differ—the greater the difference between elements, the greater the contrast (Figure 1.5). Contrast adds variety to the total design and creates unity. Too much similarity of components in any design becomes monotonous; nothing stands out. Common ways to create contrast include establishing differences in size, shape, color, value (lightness or darkness), alignment (see *balance*), type, movement, direction or texture.

Proportion deals with how one element relates to another in terms of size, weight, shape, color or location (Figure 1.6). The dominant element is where the eye naturally goes first. Every layout should have one and only one dominant element. Elements that are placed closer to the center have less visual weight than elements in the corners. Good proportion creates harmony by having shapes fit properly in relationship to other shapes.

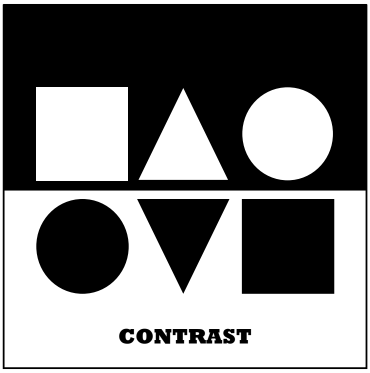


FIGURE 1.5

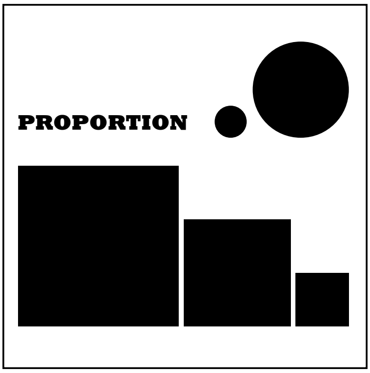


FIGURE 1.6

Space refers to the distance or area between, around, above, below and within shapes and forms. Positive space is the occupied area in a layout that contains copy, photographs, headlines or other design elements. Positive space dominates the eye and is the focal point of the layout. Conversely, negative space (also known as white space) comprises the unoccupied areas around the other elements. White space (Figure 1.7) helps balance the elements on the page and gives the eye a place to rest.

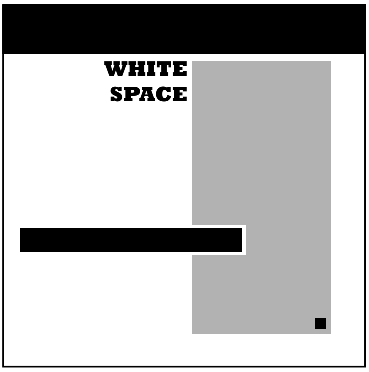


FIGURE 1.7

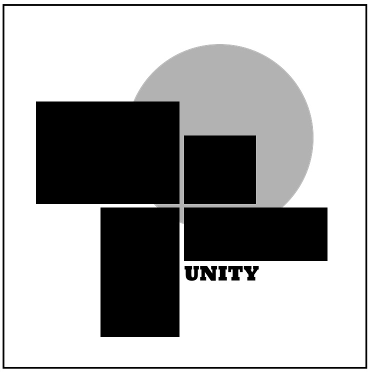


FIGURE 1.8

Unity brings order to your design. It makes all elements appear to belong and work together (Figure 1.8). Unity can be achieved by:

- Similarity: repeating colors, shapes, textures, values and related design elements
- Continuity: treating different elements in a similar manner
- Alignment: arranging shapes so that the edge of one element leads the viewer's eye to another element
- Proximity: grouping elements together so that several are viewed as one

Color is not generally considered one of the basic elements of design, but it plays an important part in communicating a message. The colors on the spectrum (the full range of colors within light) evoke different temperatures: Blue, green and the neutrals white, gray and silver are cool colors. Cool colors visually recede on a page. Warm colors, such as red, yellow and orange, however, create excitement. They appear larger than cool colors and overpower cool colors when used in equal amounts. Color has three distinct properties: hue, value and saturation.

The colors of the spectrum are called **hues**. A color wheel is a circular arrangement of colors organized in the order of the light spectrum. Traditional color wheels use three primary colors: red, yellow and blue. Separating them are three secondary colors: orange, green and purple. The colors that divide the primary and secondary colors are tertiary (third-level) colors. They are named for their parent colors, with the primary color first (for example, yellow-green).

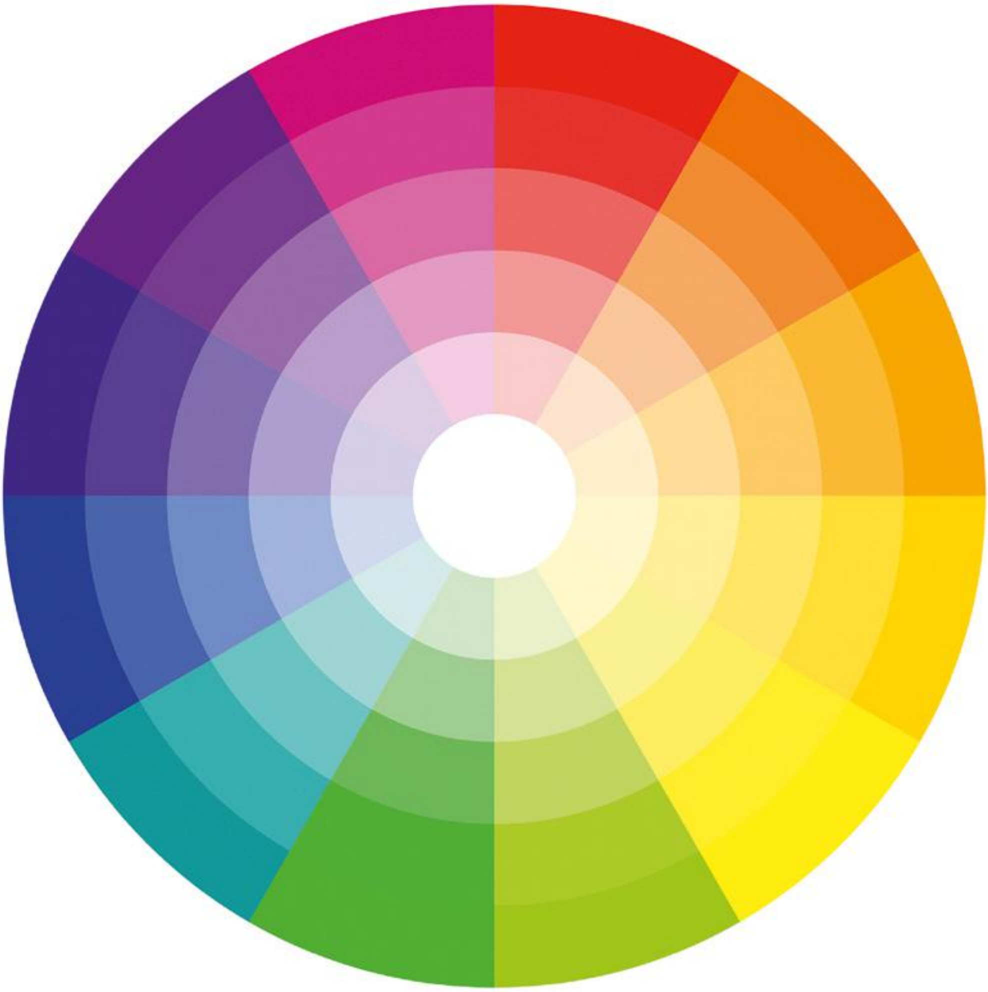


FIGURE 1.9

Credit: opicobello/shutterstock.com

The key to creating a successful color scheme lies in understanding the relationships between the hues on the color wheel (Figure 1.9).

- Monochromatic color schemes use tints and shades of only one hue. The hues can vary in value (lightness or darkness). This visual effect is extremely harmonious, quiet, restful and, depending on the range of values, subtle.
- Analogous color schemes comprise three colors side by side on the color wheel. They are easier on the eye and often have a very soft feel. This scheme can become a monochromatic effect with analogous accents, with one dominant and two additional colors.

- Complementary color schemes use two colors located opposite each other on the color wheel. Each pair contains one primary and one secondary color. When placed side by side, a complement enlivens the other color, making it appear brighter, stronger and more interesting to the eye. A split complementary scheme begins with one color and then adds the two colors on the sides of its complement.
- Triad color schemes contain three colors that are of equal distance apart on the color wheel. They may include tints or shades of a triad color. A triad creates a bold color scheme.

Value concerns the light and dark properties of color. The strongest contrast is black to white. Strong contrast is useful in directing attention. Variations in value can help create a focal point. Graduations of value can be used to create the illusion of depth.

Intensity, also called saturation, refers to the brightness of a color. A color is at full intensity when not mixed with black or white. You can make a color duller by adding gray.

Color is the visual component people remember the most and increases brand recognition by up to 80%. Artists have known for centuries that colors evoke emotions and strong feelings. How you use them in design affects the overall message. Colors create a *personality* for your brand.

Different cultures and areas of the world view colors differently, so choosing a color scheme for your design and its audience is an important process. Consider these colors and how they are viewed in other countries:

Black means high quality and trust in China. In Africa, it means age, maturity and masculinity.

White represents death, mourning and bad luck in China and Korea.

Blue means immortality in Eastern cultures and good health in Ukraine.

Green signals high-tech in Japan, luck in the Middle East, independence in Mexico and death in South America.

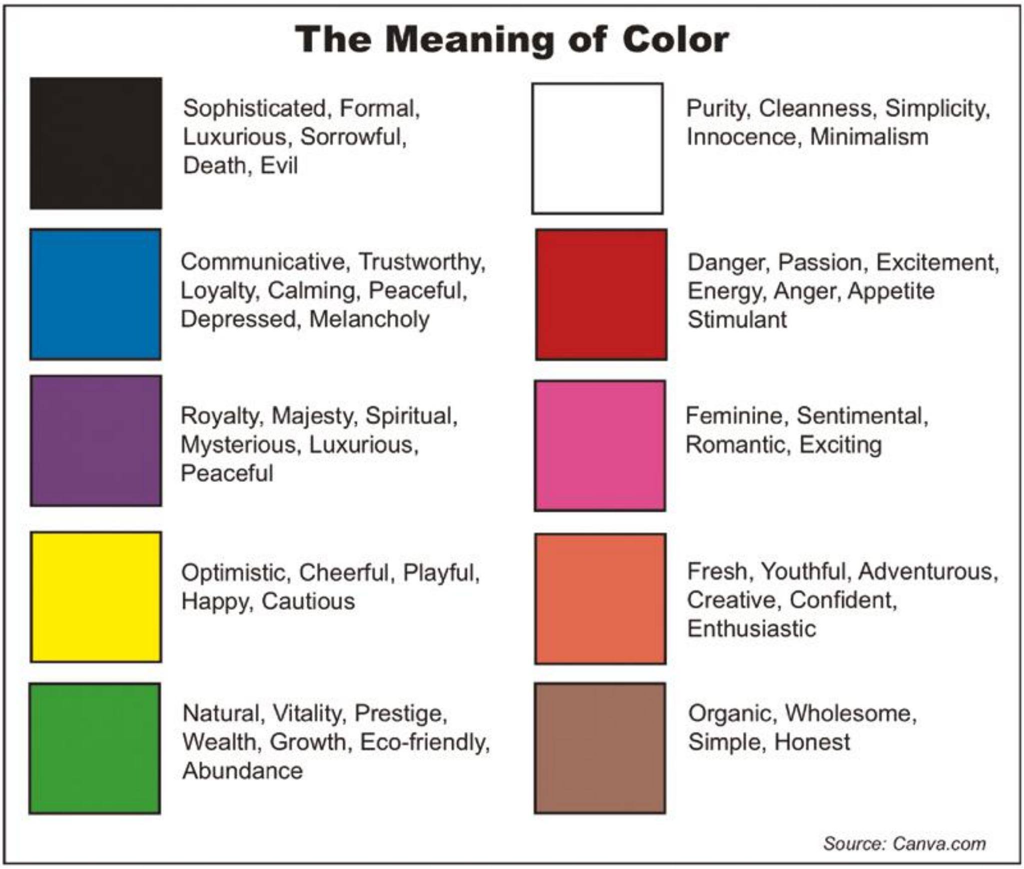
Yellow represents envy in Germany, mourning in Mexico and strength in Saudi Arabia.

Orange is considered auspicious and sacred in Hinduism. It represents sexuality and fertility in Colombia and love, humility and good health in Eastern cultures.

Red is good luck, joy and prosperity in Asian cultures, danger in Europe, purity and spirituality in India, mourning in the Ivory Coast and death in Turkey.

(Source: Shutterstock, Inc.)

Compare the meaning of colors noted here to the chart below (Figure 1.10) that shows generally agreed-upon color messages in Western society.



The Meaning of Color

Sophisticated, Formal, Luxurious, Sorrowful, Death, Evil

Purity, Cleanness, Simplicity, Innocence, Minimalism

Communicative, Trustworthy, Loyalty, Calming, Peaceful, Depressed, Melancholy

Danger, Passion, Excitement, Energy, Anger, Appetite Stimulant

Royalty, Majesty, Spiritual, Mysterious, Luxurious, Peaceful

Feminine, Sentimental, Romantic, Exciting

Optimistic, Cheerful, Playful, Happy, Cautious

Fresh, Youthful, Adventurous, Creative, Confident, Enthusiastic

Natural, Vitality, Prestige, Wealth, Growth, Eco-friendly, Abundance

Organic, Wholesome, Simple, Honest

Source: Canva.com

FIGURE 1.10

Again, the focus of this book is strategic *writing*; this is not a design textbook. However, a basic knowledge of design can improve your strategic communication, enhance your value as team member and increase your value to an employer.

1H

Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated marketing communications—more commonly known as IMC—is a valuable concept for strategic writers. The philosophy of IMC maintains that your target audiences receive many messages from your organization: ads, news stories triggered by news releases, speeches, tweets and other social media messages, and random exposures to products. IMC suggests that all those messages should be coordinated and "on-strategy." Otherwise, your target audiences will receive mixed messages from your organization and will become confused. To better understand IMC, let's look at each of its three words, beginning with *marketing*.

At its core, *marketing* means preparing a product that consumers want and helping them to acquire it. The "marketing mix," meaning everything that might persuade consumers, consists of product design, packaging, pricing, product demonstrations, ads and more. The marketing mix even includes the product's name. Years ago, marketing professors Philip Kotler and Jerome McCarthy defined the marketing mix with what they called the "Four P's" of marketing:

- Product (including name, design and packaging)
- Price
- Place (including putting the product where the consumer can buy it)
- Promotion (including tactics from advertising, public relations and sales and marketing)

Strategic writers sometimes believe marketing and the marketing mix mean only the fourth P, promotion. But marketing means much more.

Now for the word *communications*. The IMC philosophy says that each of the four P's communicates something to consumers. The name, design and package of a product send a message about quality to members of a target audience. So does price ("Wow, that's expensive; it must be luxurious") and place ("Hey, that's an upscale store; this must be a good product"). It's easy to see the communications aspect of the fourth P: Promotion directly involves the strategic writer, who will create ads, Facebook posts and other sales-related documents. In marketing, communication increasingly means two-way communication—almost a conversation between a company and a customer.

Finally, the word *integrated*. As you know, the IMC philosophy says that each of the four P's sends messages to consumers. The word *integrated* means that all those messages should work together. In other words, those messages should pursue a single strategy. The messages should not be haphazard and contradictory. For example, a luxurious product with a shockingly cheap price would send mixed messages to a target audience ("I thought that product was prestigious, but not at that price, I guess"). Or that luxurious product, now with a high price, would be out of place in a discount store ("I like that product, but it loses its prestige by being sold here").

Strategic writers should help create promotions with consistent messages. For example, that luxurious product shouldn't have an ad campaign that stresses one benefit (such as luxury), while a related public relations campaign stresses a different benefit (such as price) and a point-of-purchase campaign (in-store or online) stresses yet a third benefit, such as reliability. Who could blame the target audience for being confused about the product's image? Strategic writers should do more than simply ensure that all written messages are integrated; they should also help ensure that all the messages from the marketing mix—from the Four P's—are integrated.

Strategic writers often use a document called a strategic message planner (pages 171–191) to help develop the clear, consistent message that will be used to promote a particular product.

Recent studies show that the wide variety of social media outlets can pose a challenge to the integration of marketing messages. Slightly more than 80% of organizations say that their social media conversations are on-message—but that means that almost 20% of organizations remain challenged in this area.

There's more to IMC than just integration of messages. IMC practitioners:

- Focus on individual consumers. As much as possible, they develop products for individual consumers, and they create sales messages to target specific consumers' self-interests.
- Use databases to target individual consumers rather than huge audiences. These databases contain a wealth of information on individual consumers' wants, needs, preferences, media choices and buying habits.
- Send a well-focused message to each targeted consumer through a variety of communications, including mobile ads, news releases, texts, tweets and all other forms of marketing communication, including packaging and pricing.
- Use consumer-preferred media to send their marketing messages.
- Favor interactive media, constantly seeking informative conversations with individual consumers. New information goes into the databases mentioned earlier.

IMC is a logical extension of strategic writing. Strategic writing begins with the philosophy that a document's message should be on-strategy. IMC extends that philosophy to all related messages, ensuring that a variety of coordinated communications will send the same message to a target audience.

11

Ethics and Strategic Writing

Ethics are a combination of values and actions. In other words, being ethical means acting on our values (concepts to which we attach worth).

An ethics code, therefore, establishes guidelines for behavior. Ethics codes go beyond legal codes into the sometimes confusing world of right and wrong. Something legal, for example, isn't always ethical.

Knowing the right, values-driven course of action is often easy. But sometimes difficulty arises in *performing* that action. Sometimes, an unethical alternative can appear easier and less troublesome. For example, announcing and taking responsibility for a serious error—when that error is your own—can be difficult. In other cases, however, knowing the right, values-driven action seems impossible. In an ethics dilemma, our values seem to clash with one another, and every possible course of action seems to betray a value and cause unfair damage.

The origins of the word *ethics* suggest the challenges of behaving ethically. The Greek origin is *ethos* or *character*. But the earlier, Indo-European root of the word, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is *s(w)e*—which means that related words include *secret*, *solitary*, *sullen*, *desolate*, *idiot* and even *suicide*. Even the history of the word *ethics* suggests the difficulty of ethical behavior.

Rewards of Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior is good for business. Although scholarly studies disagree about whether ethical behavior leads to financial success, they do agree on the opposite: Unethical behavior hurts profits and organizational success. Who would want to do business with crooks and liars? Poor ethics can interfere with the fulfillment of an organization's goals—especially long-term goals.

But there are other reasons for practicing good ethics. Ethical behavior is part of most of the world's religions. The philosophers Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, who agreed on very little, all believed that we can never be truly happy unless we act on our values—in other words, unless we are ethical.

An emerging reward of ethical behavior involves a process called indirect reciprocity. Indirect reciprocity is a process in which one person or organization helps another with no likelihood or expectation of return and is rewarded by third parties who have observed and admired this behavior. In business terms, others seek economic relationships with your organization because they now view it as a reputable, reliable partner. The strategic value of indirect reciprocity was first noticed by evolutionary biologists and, in recent years, has been confirmed by studies in economics, psychology, anthropology and other human-behavior disciplines. New studies in psychology, in fact, demonstrate that individuals and organizations that practice indirect reciprocity earn more money, over time, than those that don't. Evidence from several disciplines now shows that helping others in need without the expectation of direct return is good for business.

Ethics Codes

Ethics codes—written and unwritten—exist at several levels:

- International codes (such as the Caux Business Principles, www.cauxroundtable.org)
- Social or cultural codes (for example, the Ten Commandments)
- Professional codes, including the following: Public Relations Society of America (www.prsa.org); American Advertising Federation (www.aaf.org); American Marketing Association (www.marketingpower.com); International Association of Business Communicators (www.iabc.com)
- Organizational codes (such as the Credo of Johnson & Johnson, www.jnj.com)
- Personal codes (an individual's ethics code, written or otherwise)

In recent years, the ethics code of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association has gained increasing respect for its focus on establishing standards for the responsible use of social media within strategic communication.

Probably the ethics code that matters most to you is your personal code. As a writer, you know that writing down your thoughts stimulates precise thinking. Therefore, consider writing a personal ethics code, a document that specifies the core values that will guide your actions.

In writing your ethics code, you may wish to consider some of the great ethics principles of past millennia. In addition to focusing on principles established by important religious figures, university courses in ethics often emphasize these key philosophers and ideas:

- Both Aristotle and Confucius believed that virtue was a point somewhere between the extremes of excess and deficiency. For example, courage is the virtuous mean between cowardice and reckless bravery.
- Immanuel Kant believed that before committing ourselves to an action, we should ask ourselves if we would want to live in a world in which everyone did the same thing.

For example, could we live in a world in which *all people* broke their promises? Kant also believed that the end did not justify the means. In other words, he believed you couldn't justify a bad action that produced a good conclusion.

- Unlike Kant, John Stuart Mill believed that the end could justify the means. Mill believed that in an ethics dilemma, we should take the action that creates the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In other words, Mill believed the end *could* justify the means.
- John Rawls believed that justice involved fairness in the distribution of advantages and disadvantages. For example, he recommended that individuals who received unearned advantages such as good genes and birth into a stable upper-middle-class family should aid those who received unearned disadvantages in those areas.

These philosophies may help you act on the values specified in your ethics code. The best times to create and revise your code are when you are *not* facing an ethics crisis. In the depths of such a crisis, you'll need the clear, well-reasoned standards you established when you were free from doubts and fears. A crisis, of course, can prompt you to revise your ethics code.

Ethics Challenges

As a strategic writer, you may face many challenges to ethical behavior:

- *Dilemmas*, in which every course of action will cause damage. Dilemmas occur when important values clash and it seems impossible to find one solution that honors all the involved values. A public relations agency, for example, might face a dilemma in wishing to part company with a disreputable client—but realizing that the separation would mean a loss of jobs within the agency.
- *Overwork*, which can lead you to inadvertently overlook important ethical considerations. A social media specialist facing a tight deadline, for example, might be tempted to use a photograph from an earlier event to represent something that just happened.
- *Legal/ethical confusion*, stemming from the dangerous belief that something legal is always ethical—and that something ethical is always legal. It's legal, for example, for an ad agency to work for two companies that compete with one another, but many professionals consider that practice to be unethical, particularly if the two companies are unaware of the situation.
- *Cross-cultural ethics*, in which important values from different cultures clash. The gift-giving norms of one business culture, for example, may clash with the gift-accepting norms of a different culture.
- *Short-term thinking*, which promotes a solution that postpones and increases pain and damage. Promising to meet an impossible deadline for the completion of a marketing