

March 2015

HOPE COLLEGE WEB CONTENT GUIDELINES

*How to create
and maintain
effective content
for hope.edu.*

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INTRODUCTION

- Hello
- Who's in charge of the content?



Whether you're writing a blog post, program description, application requirements, email campaign, social media post or even a headline or button text, this guide will help you write solid and engaging content that fits the Hope College brand.

Our website is never completely finished, and that's a good thing. Features will evolve and pages will be added as we learn more about our audiences and find ways to improve their experience. We're always creating new content, and the content we've already created must change constantly to remain accurate, up-to-date and relevant.

To do this well, we need a common language, common expectations and common standards for creating and maintaining useful content.

In this guide, we'll cover the basics of planning, writing and editing content, introduce you to our audiences and give you a sense of Hope's personality. This isn't a rigid set of rules, so you won't find many cut-and-dry prescriptions for what to do in specific situations. Rather, these standards will empower you to answer questions and solve problems yourself. With practice, you'll soon be writing with clarity and confidence.

Everyone shares responsibility for the content. Part of that is recognizing we're all working together to serve the best interests of the college and, critically, our audiences.

Day-to-day, creating and maintaining content requires Influencers, Authors, Editors and Publishers all working together. Each of these roles is important, and none is more important than another.

No one operates on their own.

While some structure is necessary for quality-assurance and decision-making purposes—with Authors reviewing with Editors and Editors reviewing with Publishers—no single role has all the power or gets to make all the decisions. Authors can push back against a bad idea. Editors can lobby for or against a change. Almost anybody, including students, can be an Influencer—and no Influencer, no matter their title or position, can simply tell someone what to do without discussion.

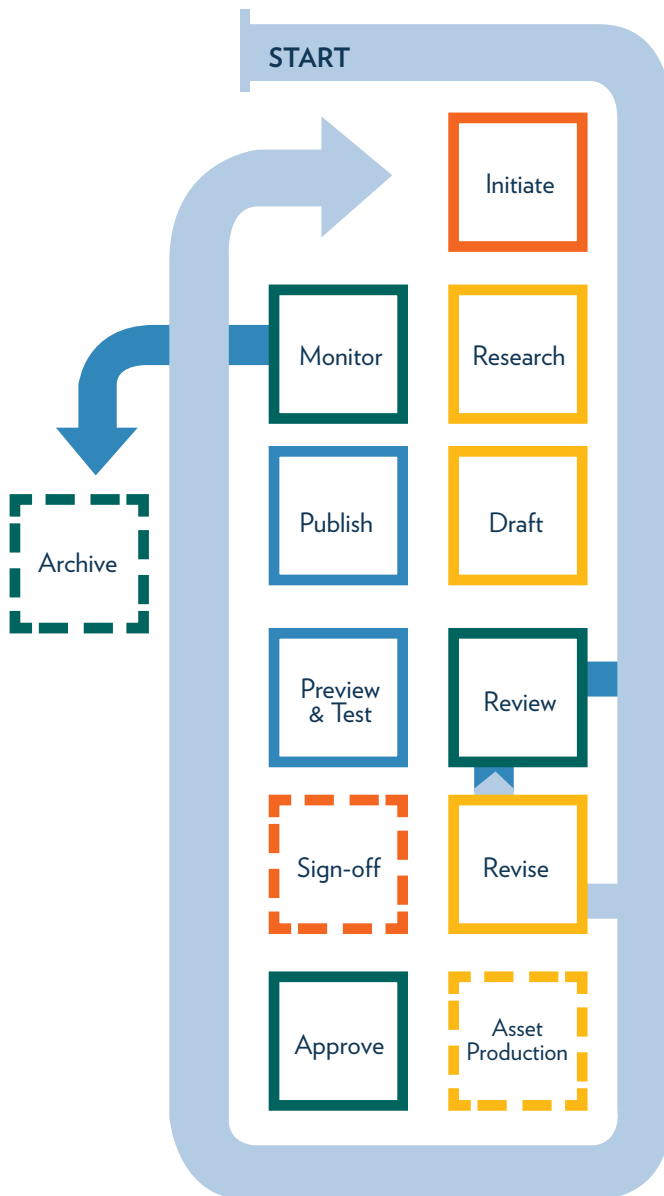
This kind of collaboration requires careful thought, communication, listening and trust. When necessary, Public Affairs & Marketing will make the final call on major website questions, but each of us is accountable to our audiences, each other and the college for making the website the best it can be.

PROCESS, PEOPLE AND WORKFLOW

- The content creation process
- Team member roles
- Editorial workflows



2



ROLES

- Influencer
- Author
- Editor
- Publisher

There are 12 distinct tasks in the content creation process. Let’s take a look at each one.

INITIATE

Identify a need for new or updated content and provide direction.

RESEARCH

Gather everything needed to create the content.

DRAFT

Craft the content.

REVIEW

Carefully read the draft to offer feedback and catch any errors.

REVISE

Make any recommended changes.

ASSET PRODUCTION

(if necessary): Collect, request or produce any required non-text content, such as graphics, illustrations, animations, photos, or videos.

APPROVE

Double-check the finished content, correct any lingering errors and declare it ready for publication.

SIGN-OFF

(if necessary): Get the blessing of any other parties that may need to see content before it goes live.

PREVIEW & TEST

Make sure the content is formatted properly and that everything works as expected on both desktop and mobile devices.

PUBLISH

Post the content to the site for everyone to see.

MONITOR

Keep an eye on the content after it has been published to make sure it’s doing what it’s supposed to. Are people finding it and using it? Is it still relevant, or does it need to be updated? Are there ways to make it better? Use what you learn to initiate changes. The content creation process is cyclical—not linear.

ARCHIVE

Even the best content has a shelf life. If it sits too long, it starts to feel stale, and stale content erodes trust. Redundant, outdated or trivial content needs to be archived or deleted to make sure that users are not confused or distracted.

Content creation is a collaborative process. To spread out the work that needs to get done, we've grouped related tasks into roles. In certain situations, individuals may be given multiple roles. Also, multiple people may sometimes share aspects of a role within the process.

There are four primary roles:

- Influencer: tasks related to initiating and consulting
- Author: tasks related to creating
- Editor: tasks related to guiding and checking
- Publisher: tasks related to final checks and gatekeeping

INFLUENCER

Influencers get the process started. They include any people or parties who must (e.g., the Registrar) or should (e.g., subject matter experts) have a voice in what gets written and published for a particular area, and they may be brought in by Authors and Editors to consult or sign-off on content as needed. Keep in mind that, for any piece of content, the Influencers that initiate and the Influencers that sign off may be different people.



AUTHOR

Authors execute the requests and assignments of Influencers and Editors to produce content that aligns with established strategies and guidelines. Certain Authors may also gather, request or produce non-text content, such as illustrations or videos. Sometimes one Author may be responsible for writing while another handles asset production. Authors collaborate and consult with various Influencers while researching, drafting and revising content, and they work closely with Editors for approval. When writing, Authors think about who needs to know about a content project, who would benefit by knowing and who could help if they knew—and invite those Influencers to the table.



EDITOR

Editors lead, own and approve the content within a particular area and make sure the necessary work is done, done well, done on schedule and performing as expected. Editors work closely with Authors to provide direction, catch errors and hold them accountable to established strategies and guidelines.



PUBLISHER

Fluent in established strategies and guidelines, Publishers preview, proofread and test to ensure that content is acceptable before it's published to the live site.



An editorial workflow describes the way people use a process to get things done. The workflow you use will vary slightly depending on your department, the people on your team, and the roles and tasks you've been given.

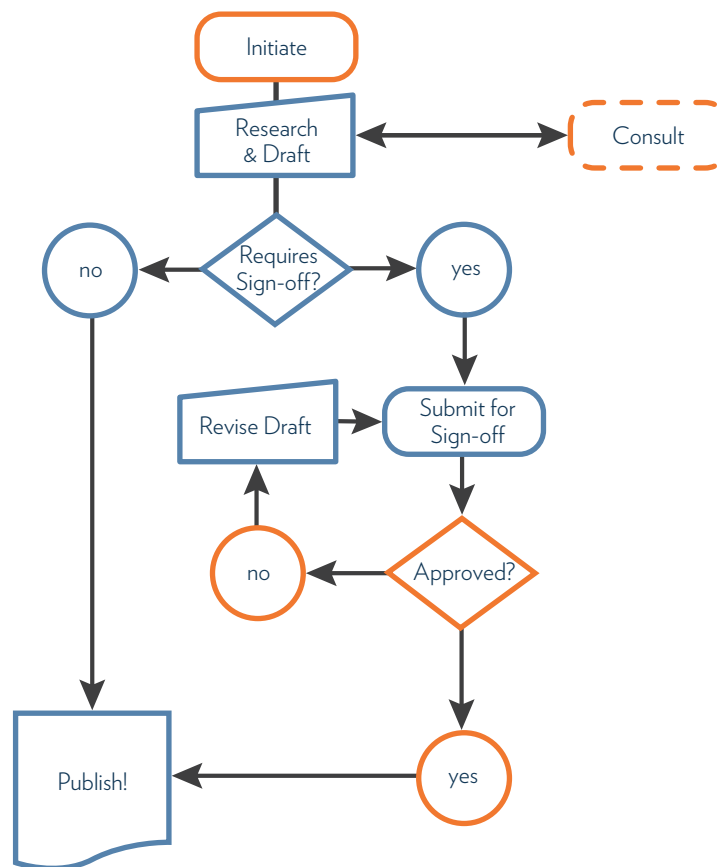
There are four major workflow patterns:

- Two-person workflow with an Influencer and an Author/Editor/Publisher
- Three-person workflow with an Influencer, an Author/Editor and a Publisher
- Three-person workflow with an Influencer, an Author and an Editor/Publisher
- Four-person workflow with an Influencer, an Author, an Editor and a Publisher

TWO-PERSON WORKFLOW WITH TASKS SPLIT BETWEEN AN INFLUENCER AND AN AUTHOR/EDITOR/PUBLISHER

This workflow gives editing and publishing tasks to the Author, allowing for high publication speed. Ideal for tightly-controlled or frequently updated content (e.g., the home page, key landing pages) or content that requires little oversight (e.g., certain inner subpages, person entries). Most effective when the Author is an exceptionally good writer intimately familiar with these guidelines (and isn't overburdened) and/or the content is less critical.

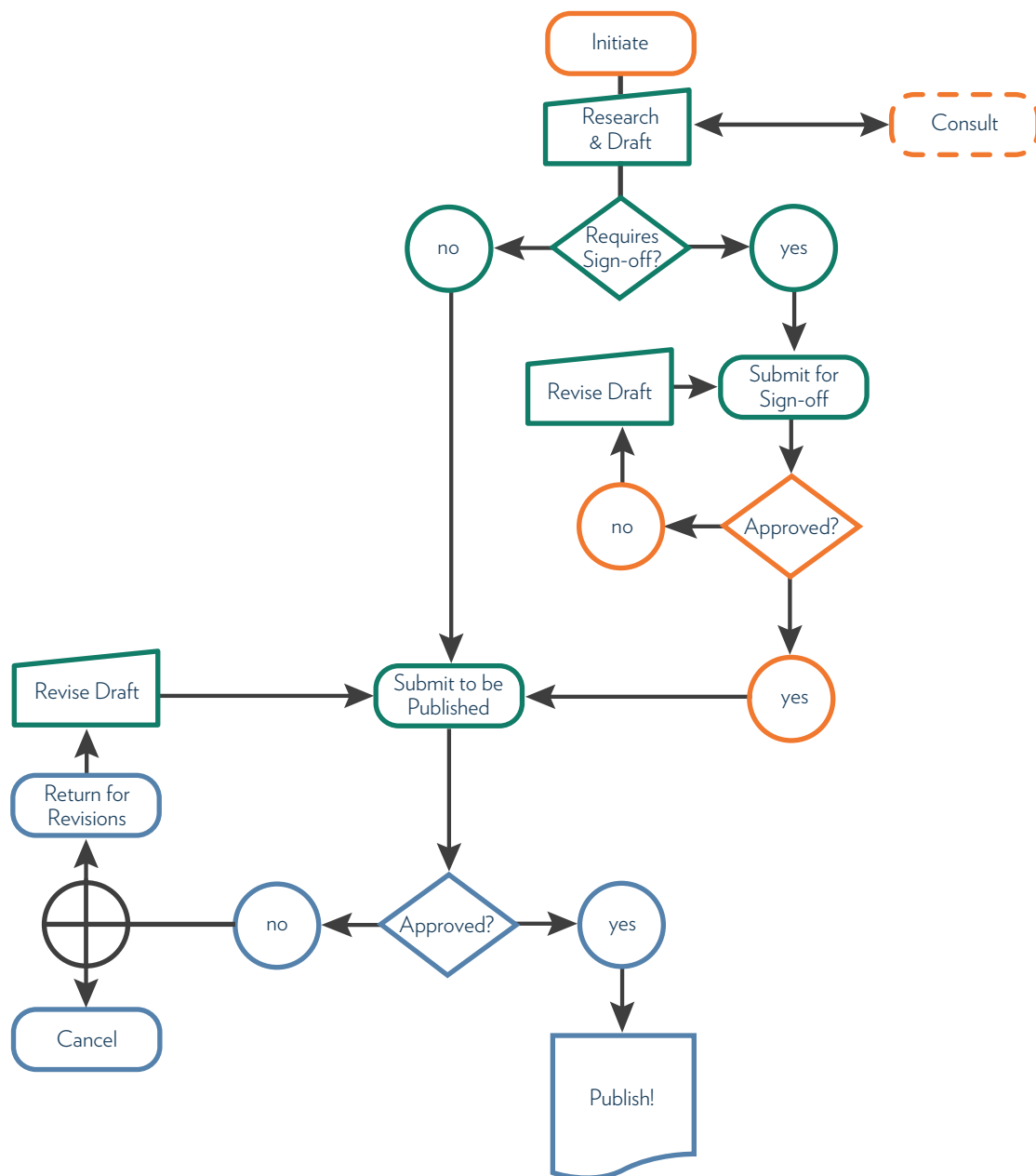
 Influencer Author/Editor/Publisher



THREE-PERSON WORKFLOW WITH TASKS SPLIT BETWEEN AN INFLUENCER, AN AUTHOR/EDITOR AND A PUBLISHER

This workflow gives editing tasks to the Author, allowing for moderate publication speed. Ideal for independently governed content sections or pages that require a final check before going live (e.g., a high-profile office). Most effective when the Author is highly trained or when content naturally requires minimal editing.

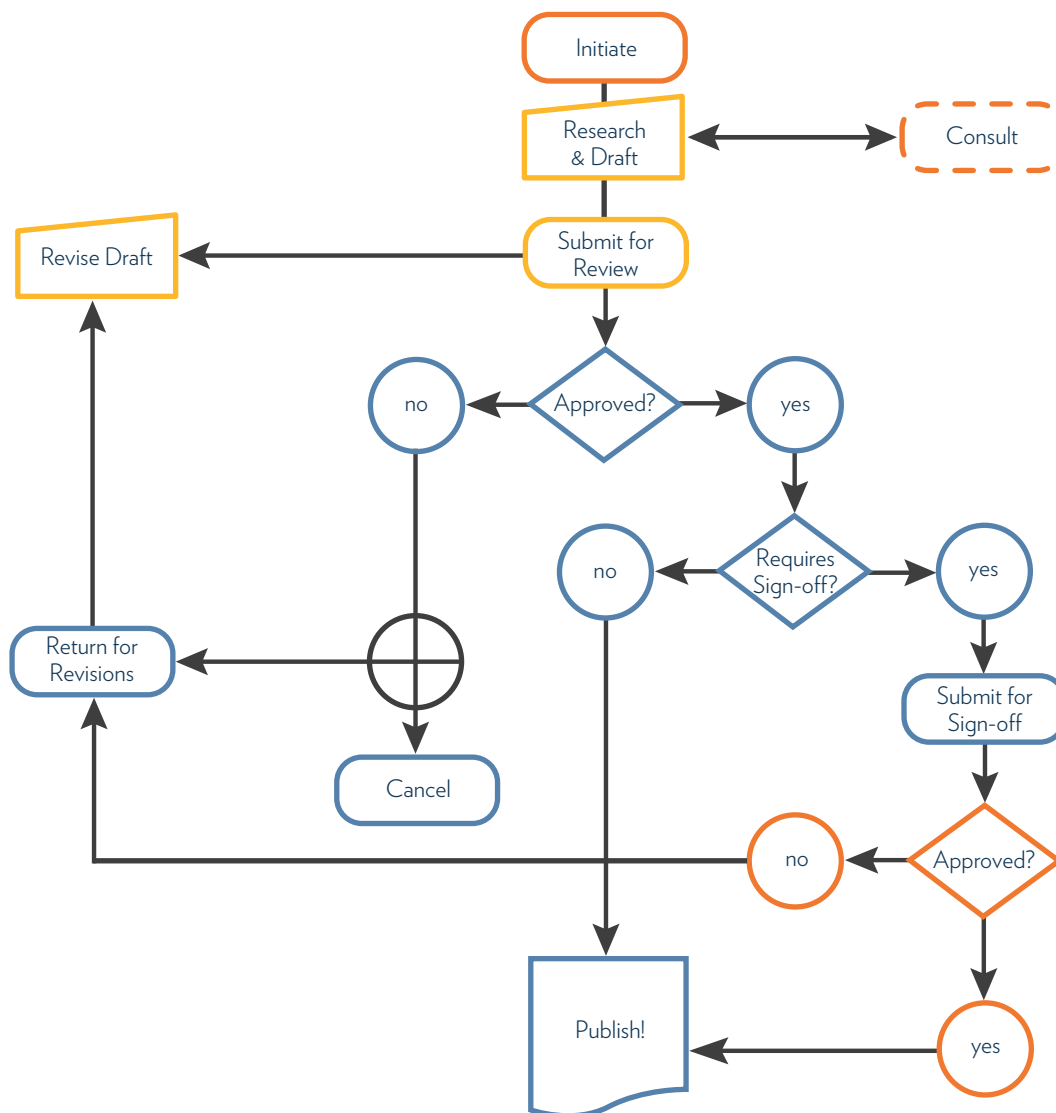
▣ Influencer
 ▣ Author/Editor
 ▣ Publisher



THREE-PERSON WORKFLOW WITH TASKS SPLIT BETWEEN AN INFLUENCER, AN AUTHOR AND AN EDITOR/PUBLISHER

This workflow gives editing tasks to the Publisher, allowing for moderate publication speed. Ideal for independently governed content sections or pages that do not require additional oversight (e.g., an office or department blog). Most effective when an Author's work is likely to require less editing or the Publisher has ample time to edit submitted drafts.

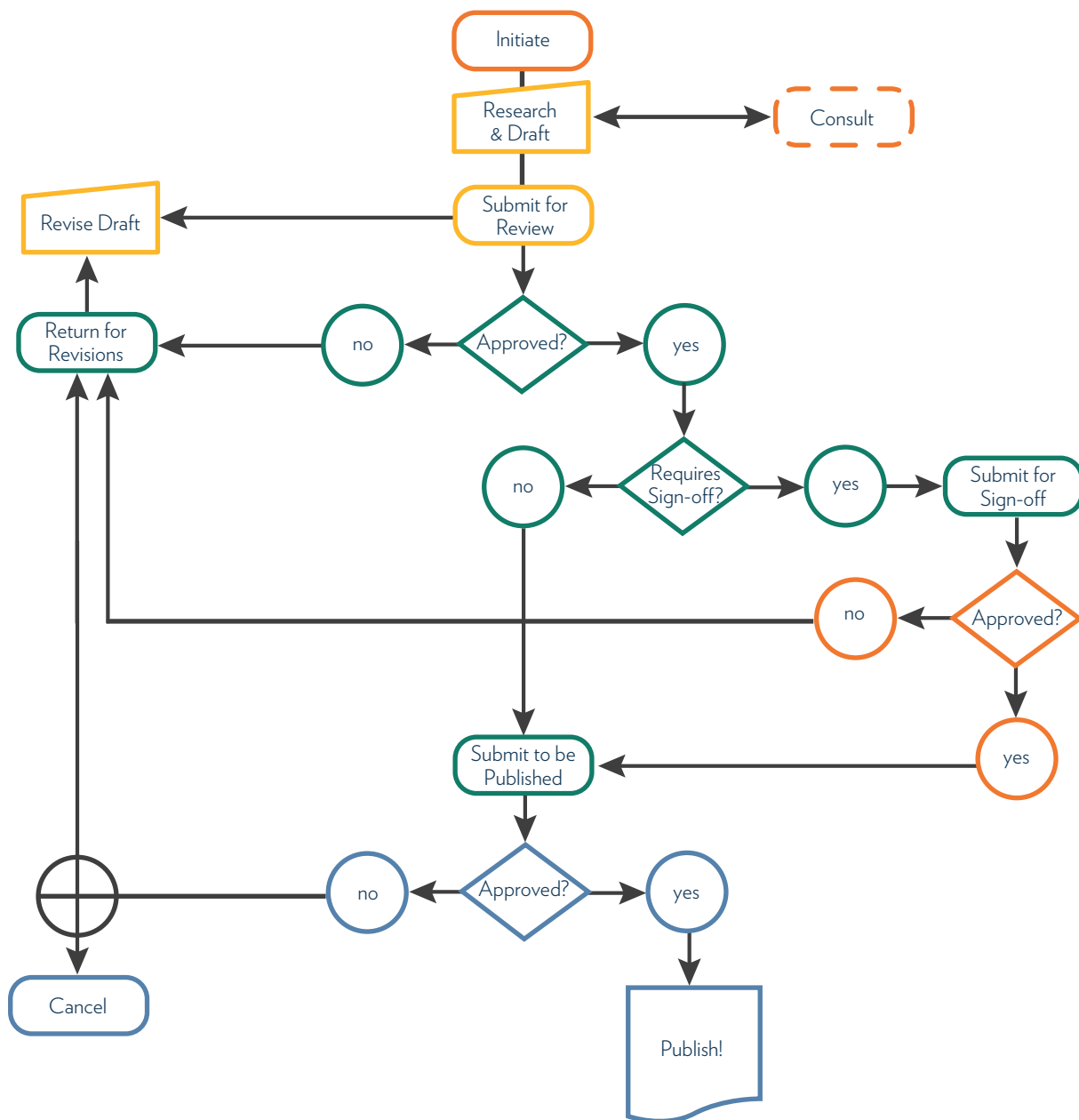
▣ Influencer
 ▣ Author
 ▣ Editor/Publisher



FOUR-PERSON WORKFLOW WITH TASKS SPLIT BETWEEN AN INFLUENCER, AN AUTHOR, AN EDITOR AND A PUBLISHER

With separate individuals in each role, it's the most thorough process, but also the slowest. Ideal for content that requires careful planning (e.g., Why Hope), content that doesn't change often (e.g., the About section), or large sections that require greater distribution of responsibility (e.g., Campus Life, Academics).

▣ Influencer
 ▣ Author
 ▣ Editor
 ▣ Publisher



STRATEGY

- Content strategy 101
- The Hope College brand
- Brand attributes
- Key messaging
- Write for an audience
- Write with an objective



3

Content strategy is simply thinking strategically about your content. Thinking strategically means that, rather than everyone posting whatever they want wherever they want whenever they want, all of the content on our site is part of an overall plan. Process, roles and workflow—as well as brand, voice and tone—are all part of content strategy.

Content strategy also involves making sure that every piece of content we create aligns with the Hope brand, our audience needs and our goals.

When making changes to website content on hope.edu, only write what's needed and useful. Before you write anything, start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who is Hope College?
- Who's reading, and what are they asking?
- Why am I writing this?

Good web writing begins with an understanding of the Hope brand, of who your audience is and what they need, and of what you're trying to accomplish.

Our brand is more than our logo and colors. It's more than a story, and it's more than marketing. Brand is where presentation (what we say and do) and perception (how we're seen and experienced) meet.

“Because a brand is the total of all the experiences someone has with Hope College, any of us who represents Hope (student, staff, alumnus/a or employee) shapes the College’s reputation and how others experience it. The success of our brand is up to us.”

—Hope College Brand Guidelines

Those of us who create content for the college bear a special responsibility. We speak and write on behalf of the school—to people who know Hope well and to those we've just met. Everything we communicate must honestly reflect who we really are.

So who are we? When we developed our Brand Guidelines, we drew inspiration from our mission and vision and conducted extensive research to boil everything we do down to a single sentence that defines what Hope College intends to be and the experience anyone can expect to have when engaging with us:

“Hope College inspires students to be fully alive in mind, body and spirit through an exceptional liberal arts education and a community grounded in a vibrant Christian faith.”

Practically, this means:

- Students are our primary focus
- We're on their side, see their potential and seek to draw out the best in them
- We use education and community to accomplish this

If our work and our words align with these three ideas, we can be confident that our content supports the Hope College brand.

Have additional questions about the Hope College brand? Download a copy of the Brand Guidelines at hope.edu/brand or talk to Public Affairs & Marketing

Brand attributes are key words and phrases that describe Hope College as it is and aspires to be. This language is used to be clear and relevant to the College's key audiences.

RARE COMBINATION

Rigorous academics and vibrant, inviting Christian faith combined to prepare students to live within a global society.

PICTURESQUE AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

A historic campus, located just blocks from award-winning downtown Holland, and part of an engaging and increasingly diverse community that approaches relationships with respect, compassion and support.

CLOSE STUDENT-FACULTY AND STUDENT-STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

Masterful teachers and talented researchers in small classes and one-on-one collaboration, with a strong commitment to students' personal, intellectual, social and career development.

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Offers many voluntary opportunities to grow one's faith in an inviting Christian community, while seeking to engage the whole person through academics and co-curricular programs.

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ACADEMICS

Known for undergraduate research, scholarship, preparation and life-shaping experiences.

These words and phrases originated from a March 2011 brand workshop, with input from January 2011 surveys of staff, faculty, prospective and current students. These attributes were refined through consultation with administrators, alumni, trustees, faculty and staff.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

Liberal arts and pre-professional programs with high academic standards and exceptional career opportunities. Holistic approach has been lauded for character, preparedness, service and life-changing experiences for students.

CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETICS

Nationally competitive tradition with scholar-athletes, quality facilities and a community that supports Hope teams.

REMARKABLE FACILITIES

World-class facilities that support the high caliber research, athletic, social and spiritual opportunities offered throughout the campus experience.

VIBRANT STUDENT LIFE

Commitment to the whole person, in mind, body and spirit, with an emphasis on cultivating relationships through award-winning social activities and unique traditions within a thriving and safe residential community.

Key messages, which are based on the brand attributes, are the most important talking points or copy points when communicating with Hope's constituents. They differ according to the audience, and the nature of their relationship with Hope and what they may value as a result.

CHOOSING MESSAGES

Key messages, which are based on our brand attributes, are the most important talking points in communicating with Hope's constituents. In choosing messages, we must keep in mind the audience and what they value. Think about Hope from their perspective. To be most effective, consider what messages will resonate as important and relevant.

We want our Hope community to understand, "Hope lives in me." Our culture and offering is inspired by an education that propels everyone forward toward a future with purpose. It will be also be important to express the brand and messages in ways that resonate with a more broadly holistic and spiritual expression of the benefits of Hope.

KEY MESSAGES THAT SUPPORT OUR BRAND ATTRIBUTES

- > Hope is a rare combination of nationally recognized academic excellence and a vibrant Christian atmosphere. At Hope, one's personal faith is a choice, and voluntary chapel is full to capacity.
- > Hope is a friendly and welcoming community where faculty, staff and students come to know and care about one another.
- > Our 13:1 student-to-faculty ratio offers close collaboration and mentoring. Masterful teachers and talented researchers are committed to enabling students to achieve their best.
- > With more than 80 majors in liberal arts and pre-professional programs, the college has high academic standards and exceptional placement opportunities. Our holistic approach has been lauded for character, preparedness, service and life-changing experiences for students.

People's engagement with Hope, and therefore their perspective and needs, change over time. They will want more or different things from the College as their relationship evolves. Those of us responsible for communications must understand the dynamic nature of our audiences—prospective students, current students, parents, alumni, donors, faculty, staff, community members—and how to best connect with them.

- > A research powerhouse, Hope's faculty-student collaboration is funded by more than \$5 million in active grants. The college holds more grants for faculty-student research from the National Science Foundation than any other undergraduate college in the country. Research Corporation ranks Hope at the top of their list for institutions receiving funding for undergraduate research.
- > Hope is the first private, liberal arts college to have national accreditation in art, dance, music and theatre. The arts community is active and diverse, including 20-plus performing ensembles.
- > Our 3,200 students come from more than 40 states and territories and 30 different countries. We are a leading college for Fulbright Scholars, and our students can look forward to attending their first choice of graduate and professional schools.
- > We have a time-honored championship athletic tradition with scholar-athletes and a community that supports college teams. Hope has received the Commissioner's Cup of the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association for an unprecedented 12 consecutive years through the 2011–12 school year. Hope also sponsors several club sport opportunities and has an active intramural program.
- > Hope has a beautiful, safe and historic campus, just blocks from the charming town of Holland, Michigan. The college has invested significantly in having the best facilities, and it is an increasingly culturally diverse community.

WHO'S READING, AND WHAT ARE THEY ASKING?

You should always write to a specific audience and with their needs and interests in mind.

Understanding our audiences and their needs is critical to deciding what to write, how much to write and how to write it.

Our website will only be successful if our audiences can:

- Find what they're looking for
- Understand what they find
- Act on that understanding
- Do all of the above within the time and effort that they're willing to spend

Before you or anyone on the team creates or changes content on hope.edu, ask:

“What audience need does this meet?”

Our website is not about us. Just because we have something to say—even if we think it's really important—doesn't mean it should be published. Content worth creating will be: (a) relevant, (b) interesting and/or (c) useful to at least one of our audiences.

If your audience isn't looking for or interested in what you're planning to write, write it differently or don't write it at all.

Meet your audience. See Appendix A for 15 specific user personas. Each individual profile represents a person (i.e., a student, faculty, alumna, etc.) from our audience. Content should respond to their questions and address their needs. If it doesn't, discard or try again.

WHY AM I WRITING THIS?

You should always write with a clear purpose. This means you should have a clear reason for writing and a clear objective—something you want your audience to do as a result of what you write.

Most changes to website copy should be anticipated and planned in advance, but identifying a clear purpose is especially important if the change wasn't originally planned for or anticipated.

Before you or anyone on the team creates or changes content on hope.edu, ask:

“What are we trying to accomplish?”

Answer honestly. Changes worth making will provide something that: (a) our audience wants or values, (b) supports a Hope College goal or objective, or (c) both. If the content change doesn't solve a problem or answer a question for our audience, and it doesn't support Hope's brand, either do it differently or don't do it at all.

GOOD REASONS TO WRITE

THE CONTENT ISN'T WORKING

If the content was carefully and strategically created, you can assume it's working. If specific content isn't working, the only way we'll know is if our audience tells us (e.g., in a support request or contact form submission), we ask them (e.g., in a survey or conversation) or we analyze audience behavior by monitoring Google Analytics or other reports. Keep a record of any feedback you receive; periodically, Hope College will compare everyone's notes and observations with the data and use what we learn to find ways to improve.

THE ORGANIZATION CHANGES

Organizational changes are periodic and can usually be planned for in advance. If Hope College changes (e.g., we begin offering a new major or program, hire a new person, change an application process, etc.), someone on the team will be assigned to revise the appropriate section(s).

AS PART OF PLANNED MAINTENANCE

Certain pieces of content need to be refreshed on a regular schedule to keep them relevant or up-to-date. These sorts of changes should already be on your radar. Similarly, about once a year, even the best content should be reviewed to ensure everything is still clear, on-message, up-to-date and accurate.

SOMEONE FINDS AN ERROR

New errors will usually be caught by Editors and Publishers as they're reviewing and approving changes, but keep an eye out as you use the site for anything outdated, inaccurate or broken. If the error is in a section of the site you're not responsible for, let the appropriate people know so that they can take care of it.

BAD REASONS TO WRITE

JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN

Access to the CMS isn't a license to make changes whenever you please.

YOU FEEL LIKE TINKERING

Extra time on your hands? Refrain from poking around and tweaking content for the fun of it. It may seem harmless, but it usually isn't. If you think there may be an opportunity to improve something, talk to your content team about it first.

VOICE AND TONE

- The Hope College voice
- The Hope College tone



4

Our voice is part of our brand. When we talk about our voice, we're talking about Hope's personality or character. These attributes do not change and should be recognizably present in everything we say and write.

Hope's voice is human. We don't speak or write as if we're some disembodied, impersonal entity, because you can't have a conversation with a disembodied, impersonal entity. Hope isn't an "it" or a thing; we're a "we"—a group of individuals with a shared set of values who actually care about actual people.

Hope College is:

- Confident
- Enthusiastic
- Encouraging
- Inviting
- Straightforward

CONFIDENT

WRITE LIKE THIS:	NOT LIKE THIS:	WHY?
<p>Ranked 4th in the U.S. for research and creative activity, Hope College receives more National Science Foundation grants for undergraduate research than any other liberal arts college in the country.</p>	<p>When it comes to research, we're one of the very best colleges in the country, right up there with MIT and Stanford.</p>	<p>Hope College is proud of who we are, but we're never cocky or arrogant. We let facts speak for themselves and are not driven by insecurity to over-explain, hide our shortcomings or exaggerate our strengths. We're steady and self-assured, and our confidence inspires trust.</p>

ENTHUSIASTIC

WRITE LIKE THIS:	NOT LIKE THIS:	WHY?
<p>Students at Hope are unusually happy with their education, and Holland ranks as one of the happiest cities in the U.S. All in all, Hope is a great place to be.</p>	<p>Surveys and polls consistently rank the satisfaction of Hope students and Holland residents as higher than the national average.</p>	<p>Hope is fully alive and everything we do flows from our desire for students to experience that same life. We not only care about what we do—we enjoy doing it. We approach things with interest, energy and a positive attitude that's irresistible to others.</p>

ENCOURAGING

WRITE LIKE THIS:	NOT LIKE THIS:	WHY?
<p>If you're already proficient in one of the subject areas below, you may be able to test out of certain classes and earn college credit.</p>	<p>Students who have had excellent preparation in one of the subject areas below may wish to register for the exam. Students who score at or above the cut-off level indicated on the chart will be granted credit toward their degree.</p>	<p>We're here for others, not ourselves, so we naturally lean in to build others up and help them develop. We emphasize the good in every situation and look to the future with optimism.</p>

INVITING

WRITE LIKE THIS:	NOT LIKE THIS:	WHY?
<p>As a student of biology, you'll get to apply what you learn through labs and research. This gives you the hands-on experience you need to thrive in grad school and later in your career.</p>	<p>The Biology Department combines lectures, labs and research opportunities to give students a comprehensive education that prepares them for graduate school and careers related to their chosen field.</p>	<p>Hope College is friendly, welcoming and likable. We speak directly to and with our audience, not about them, and draw them in to an experience we believe they'll truly enjoy.</p>

STRAIGHTFORWARD

WRITE LIKE THIS:	NOT LIKE THIS:	WHY?
<p>If you're an international student, here's how to apply for admission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete the Common Application ▪ Pay the \$35 application fee ▪ ... 	<p>In order to apply for admission as an international student, you must provide the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completed Common Application ▪ \$35 application fee ▪ ... 	<p>Hope is sincere, honest and to the point. We're educators, so we seek to make things clear, uncomplicated, accessible and easy to understand. If we can explain ourselves clearly in one sentence, we never use two.</p>

There's a difference between voice and tone. The Hope College voice doesn't change, but our tone should adapt to who we're talking to and where the conversation is taking place.

Think of it this way: You speak in a different tone to a child than to your boss, and probably wouldn't use the same tone at a sporting event that you'd use in an art gallery. Your tone also changes depending on the emotional state of the person you're talking to. You wouldn't talk the same way to someone who is overwhelmed or upset as you would to someone who's excited or laughing. Hope communicates the same way.

Our voice doesn't change, but our tone changes all the time.

Tone is:

- Audience-specific
- Context aware

TONE IS AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC

Remember, students—past, present and future—are our primary focus, which means our secondary audiences are the various people that surround and support students: parents, faculty, staff and community members, many of whom are also donors.

Here are some general guidelines for each of our audiences:

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

Be helpful, friendly and calm. They're on a mission, and they're looking for specific details. Answer their questions quickly and clearly. While they're curious and at least moderately interested in learning more about Hope, they're also skeptical and looking for reasons to rule the college out of their search. Some may be familiar with the college; others may have just heard about us for the first time. Emotionally, they're likely experiencing an intense mix of anticipation and/or dread, and they may be uncertain about their futures, confused, or stressed about any or all aspects of applying to and enrolling in college.

CURRENT STUDENTS

Be casual, clear and direct. They're incredibly busy, have precious little brain space to spare for non-essential details and are using the site to accomplish something specific. Help them get the information they need and get on with their tasks. Most are primarily concerned with their studies and their social lives. Some are feeling confident and secure, while others are struggling or still settling into life at Hope.

PARENTS

Be kind and reassuring. Whether they're the parent of a prospective student or a current student, they're concerned and a little anxious—about their child's future, health, safety, opportunities, grades and more. Many are deeply invested in their child's education (financially and emotionally) and want assurance that Hope is providing an enjoyable and valuable experience. Others are simply looking for ways to feel connected.

ALUMNI

Be celebratory. Alumni are Hope insiders—former students who've invested significant time and money with the college and naturally feel a certain amount of loyalty and pride. Keep things light and shoot straight. Treat them like friends. Some of them feel some nostalgia; others, freshly graduated, may be feeling a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Many, caught up in the demands of life, don't think of Hope very often at all, and we want to engage them now that they've reconnected with a website visit.

FACULTY & STAFF

Be clear and concise. Faculty and staff have a lot of details to manage and a lot riding on getting those details right. They need to feel confident. They're using the site to help get things done and need things to be simple so they can focus on doing their jobs.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Be friendly and welcoming. These are our neighbors, and we want to continue to foster goodwill. Many are excited by the energy, culture and opportunities that Hope College brings to the community and are looking for ways to get involved on campus.

PROSPECTIVE FACULTY & STAFF

Be transparent and professional. They're evaluating everything about us to determine whether Hope would be a good work environment for them. Some will know Hope, Holland and West Michigan well, but others won't. We need to be ourselves so they can make well-informed decisions.

Meet your audience. See Appendix A for 15 specific user personas. Each individual profile represents a person (i.e., a student, faculty, alumna, etc.) from our audience. These people (and people like them) are the reason you're writing. Write with them in mind, and you're likely to hit the right tone.

TONE IS CONTEXT-AWARE

The tone you use should also vary based on the context of what you're writing—not just who you're talking to, but where the conversation is taking place and how your audience may be feeling in this particular setting. This is really about empathy—putting yourself in your audience's shoes.

Even if we know that our primary audience is, say, current students, we can't use the same tone on every page. A current student browsing the calendar for something fun to do on a Thursday night is in a vastly different state of mind than a current student trying to pay her tuition bill or figure out if she's going to be able to take the classes she needs to graduate on time.

Page by page, there is no substitute for taking the time to think about why someone might need the content you're writing and how they're likely to be feeling when they see it.

Here are a few examples to get you thinking about context:

TOP-LEVEL LANDING PAGES

If our website were a house, the top-level landing pages are the foyers and entryways.¹ People are trying to figure out where they are and where to go next to accomplish what they came for. On these pages, we're hosts helping our guests feel at home and find what they need. Be welcoming and concise.

INFORMATION PAGES

Aim to be easily understood. People are on these pages to get answers, and they don't want to read through a lot of dense text. Lead with your key message and keep it concise so they can tell right away if they're on the right page and if what they're looking for is likely to be there. Break large amounts of text up into short paragraphs, organize content with clear headlines and cut anything that isn't relevant to your audience.

FORMS AND TRANSACTIONAL PAGES

People are on these pages to get something done, and that something may be incredibly stressful to them—like applying for a job or paying a tuition bill. In either case, keep calm, ruthlessly cut unnecessary words and don't over-explain.

BLOGS

People read blogs for fun—to learn and think or simply be entertained. They're not in a hurry and may not have a specific agenda. Still, they won't read what you write or think to come back if it isn't interesting or useful. Reward their curiosity by treating them like insiders. The tone of your blog should be relaxed and casual, even if the subject matter is highly academic.

¹ On the web, of course, people can magically appear in any room of our house without going through the front door at all, thanks to search engines, bookmarks and links. Which is why it's important to ask ourselves, "Who needs this content, how will they get here and what will they be looking for?"

WRITING FOR THE WEB

- Reading on the web
- Good web writing is easy to scan
- Good web writing is easy to act on
- Including photos, images, and other files
- What you need to know about SEO



5

The first thing to know about writing for the web is that reading on the web is different. A website isn't a book, brochure or filing cabinet—something you peruse, leaf through or rummage about in. It has more in common with a help desk or customer service line.

People use the web to get answers to questions and get things done. Web users are mission-minded, and they're in a hurry.

We don't read pages. We scan them. Why? Because we're hunting for something specific. We don't like to waste time, and scanning is easy.

We don't weigh all of our options. We jump to act. Why? Because it's faster, and we trust our gut. We tend to choose the first option that seems reasonable to us.

Every principle of writing for the web is based on these simple facts and can be boiled down to a single sentence:

Don't make people think.

Web content (what is there and what can be done with it) should be self-evident. People should "get it" at a glance without expending any effort thinking about it.

This isn't about dumbing things down. It's about respecting our audience enough to make everything easy to understand.

In other words, writing for the web is about making things easy for our audience to find what they need and understand what they've found.

Good web writing is:

- Easy to scan
- Easy to act on

START WITH A CLEAR PAGE TITLE

The page's title should reveal exactly what the page is about and reassure users that they're in the right place.

LEAD WITH YOUR BEST MATERIAL

Get straight to the point. Readers should know the most important information on the page after reading the first two sentences.

KEEP IT SHORT

Users don't want to sift through too much information, especially if it's unnecessary or overly wordy. Do your best to keep your content—words, sentences, paragraphs, pages—as short as possible.

BREAK UP AND ORGANIZE TEXT INTO DIGESTIBLE SECTIONS

Try to limit paragraphs to 70 words and make sure they contain only one idea. One-sentence paragraphs are okay. Use (short) lists whenever possible and (simple) tables where appropriate.

USE HEADINGS TO LABEL THOSE SECTIONS

Each block of text should be introduced by a clear heading. Readers should be able to get the gist of the whole page just by reading these headings. Make sure sections are ordered logically.

WRITE SIMPLE SENTENCES

Use active voice and common, conversational language. In developed countries, the average adult reads at a 9th grade level, so write bold, clear sentences. Avoid jargon and cleverness. Don't use long or confusing words unless it's absolutely necessary.

CUT UNNECESSARY WORDS

Remove anything trivial, irrelevant, or redundant (e.g., "His ~~past~~ history...", "This is ~~the reason~~ why...", "Each ~~and every~~...", "Whether ~~or not~~...").

WRITE TO YOUR READERS

Whenever possible, write directly to your audience, not about them. Never write “our students” when “you” will do instead. This does three things:

1. Keeps writing conversational
2. Keeps the conversation focused on others and their needs
3. Helps people figure out what applies to them and what to do with it

USE LISTS FOR INSTRUCTIONS

Use numbered lists when the order matters.

WRITE MEANINGFUL LINKS

People use links to navigate the site. This has two important implications:

Links should say where they’ll take you. Links should be unique, descriptive, and easy to understand. Never use an entire URL as a link (e.g., “<http://hope.edu/academics/natural-and-applied-sciences/chemistry>”). Links should always be text. Avoid writing links that use words, terms or names that may be unfamiliar to our audience (e.g., “SHARP,” “myHope”) unless they’ve already been clearly defined in context. Never link words like “click here” or “learn more” on their own, since they give users no clue about what will appear if they click them. Instead of writing, “To learn more about our philosophy honors program, [click here](#),” cut words and add clarity by writing, “Learn about our [philosophy honors program](#).”

Links should take you where they say they will.

The linked words should match the title or headline of the page you linked to, so people know they got where they thought they were going.

Keep in mind that links are invitations to leave a page. Also, because people scan pages and jump to act, links stand out. People will often read links first and, if they see something interesting, click on one without reading further.

If you want people to read your entire sentence or paragraph, don’t invite them to leave by embedding a link into the text. Doing so essentially gives them two tasks at once: reading and moving on. People may not come back once they’ve been enticed away by a link. That may be okay, but make the decision intentionally.

Photos, images and other files are content, too, so the same guidelines about brand, voice, tone, strategy and ease of understanding apply. If an image or file isn't easy to understand or doesn't add meaning, don't use it.

WHICH FILES TO USE

As with everything we produce and publish, quality matters. Don't create your own photos, images or files for upload unless doing so is part of your role within the content production process and workflow.

Always look for photos and images within Hope's digital asset management library (WebDAM) first. You can be confident that these files meet all quality standards and formatting requirements. Before you include an image, check to make sure that the image isn't already in use.

If you can't find an image you need, contact Public Affairs & Marketing for assistance.

HOW TO MAKE FILES EASIER TO UNDERSTAND

ALL FILE TYPES

Write intelligible file names. Instead of "FH03006.jpg," use something like "phelps-dining-hall-construction-2014-05-08.jpg." Similar to titles or headlines, file names should use words that clearly and uniquely identify the content the file contains (e.g., subject, topic, department, building, people) and/or notable attributes of the file (e.g., date created or modified). Separate words in file names with dashes, not underscores.

PHOTOS AND IMAGES

Always include alt text. Alt text is a short sentence or phrase that describes an image. It's hidden from the average user, but is critically important for search engines and for users with vision impairments. Alt text should meaningfully describe the photo or image as if to a blind person in 100 characters or less.

Include a caption. Captions are content. All rules apply.

AUDIO AND VIDEO

Include a text alternative. Provide a text transcript for those who are hearing impaired.

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, and it isn't as scary as it sounds. It's the practice of making content easy to find online. If you're creating a new page, there are two things you should do to help people find your content through search.

Make sure the page has a unique page title. The page title is the actionable link that appears in search results. It should reveal exactly what the page is about. Keep it under 70 characters.

Write a unique meta description. A meta description is the marketing copy that may display in search results beneath the page title. It should be a one- or two-sentence summary of your page content that helps searchers decide whether or not to visit the page. Make sure it uses words that are relevant to the questions people are asking. Keep it under 156 characters.

Google

www.google.com/ ▾ Google ▾

Search the world's information, including webpages, images, videos and more. **Google** has many special features to help you find exactly what you're looking ...

Otherwise, don't worry about SEO. Focus relentlessly on writing good content for our audience and SEO will take care of itself.

STYLE AND GRAMMAR

- Style guide
- House rules
- 7 tips for effective proofreading
- Styling text in the CMS



6

We defer to the *Associated Press (AP) Stylebook* for general web and grammar guidelines.

It's important to spell words correctly, use proper punctuation and follow consistent conventions. Good web writing is never careless or sloppy.

However, don't get too hung up on the technicalities of "proper" writing. Knowing all the rules of grammar won't make you a good writer. Instead, focus relentlessly on your reader. We'd rather you write simply and clearly to address your audience's questions in ways they easily understand than construct a flawless sentence.

If you're unsure about the best way to communicate something, talk to your fellow Authors, Editors and Publishers. They are an invaluable resource.

While we generally follow the *AP Stylebook*, there are a few exceptions.

For example, we use periods instead of hyphens to format phone numbers (e.g., 616.395.7000), and we never include “www.” at the front of a web address (e.g., hope.edu).

We’ll add to this list of exceptions in a Hope College Web Style Guide. In the meantime, ask Public Affairs & Marketing if you have any specific questions about how Hope handles certain styles.

1. WALK AWAY

Take a break or switch tasks for a while and come back to your writing later with fresh eyes. Does everything still make sense?

2. DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR FACTS AND LINKS

Make sure links, numbers, dates, names and other claims are accurate.

3. READ IT OUT LOUD

When you read something out loud, you get a better sense of how your words and tone will come across to someone else. As you read, pay attention. Does your tongue trip over any words? Replace difficult words or rephrase. Do you feel impatient or bored in certain places, or hear a little voice in the back of your head going “blah, blah, blah”? Cut words to get to the point more quickly.

4. USE A DICTIONARY

Make sure you've used the right words. If you're unsure, look it up. If it's a word a lot of people could be confused by, consider picking a different word. Pay special attention to homophones—words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings (e.g., “compliment” vs. “complement”).

5. PRINT IT OUT

Reviewing what you've written in a different format can open your eyes to things you previously missed.

6. READ IT BACKWARDS

When we're reading normally, our brains tend to automatically correct mistakes and fill in gaps to help us make sense of what we're seeing. This can make it tricky to catch typos and missing words. One way to break this pattern and catch errors is to “read” backwards, right to left, starting with the last word you've written. This will allow you to focus on individual words rather than on sentences and paragraphs.

7. ASK FOR HELP

The beauty of working as part of a content team with other Authors, Editors and Publishers is that you don't have to figure everything out yourself. In fact, you should never publish something that no one else has looked at. A new set of eyes can often immediately spot errors you've overlooked. Our content is better when we work together.

The website was designed and developed with careful consideration for typography and text styling. By entering appropriate content in the correct fields within the CMS, the correct text styles will be applied automatically.

HOW TO STYLE TEXT

DO:

- Use italics to indicate book titles and the like.
- Use the predefined heading and subheading styles to break up content.
- Use the predefined blockquote style to indicate a quote or testimonial.

DON'T:

- Do not use italics for emphasis.
- Do not use underlines (users think they're links).
- Do not use bold for emphasis. Emphasis should be communicated through how you write and organize your content.
- Do not manually change the color of text.
- Do not manually adjust font size.
- Do not use UPPERCASE for anything except acronyms.
- Do not double-space between sentences.
- Do not hit Enter/Return to add additional spacing between paragraphs. The site will automatically apply the correct amount of whitespace.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: User personas
- Appendix B: Technology overview
- Appendix C: Who to ask about...



7

Robbie

Prospective Student: A 17-year-old high school junior from Rockford, MI.

"If I do go to college, I want to go somewhere that lets me learn and do all the things I love and helps prepare me for the future."



SITUATION

Robbie's parents are Hope alumni, and he attends a small private Christian high school. He's a good student with an aptitude for the sciences, but he's most passionate about the performing arts.

CONCERNS

He's not sure college is worth the cost, especially since he doesn't know what he wants to study yet. He's also worried that he'll miss the community he has in high school.

INVOLVED • SOCIAL • ASPIRING • UNCERTAIN



Rachel

Prospective student: A 20-year-old transfer student from GRCC in Grand Rapids, MI.

"If I'm going to pay for this, I have to be absolutely sure it's worth it."

SITUATION

A good student and works really hard for her grades. She wants to be an athletic trainer or physical therapist and has already completed 30 credits of general education at GRCC to try to save money.

CONCERNS

She's paying her own way through school, and isn't convinced she can afford the education she wants. She's worried about getting a job after college and paying off her loans. Raised outside the church, she's a little hesitant about Hope's Christian affiliation.

ACTIVE • HARD-WORKING • ENTREPRENEURIAL

 **Hope** COLLEGE



Sophia

Prospective student: An 18-year-old high school senior from Pasadena, CA.

"I want the best education available to prepare me for grad school, and I want to play volleyball competitively. Can I have both?"

SITUATION

Sophia is a 4.0 student and a star volleyball player at a large public high school. She wants to study psychology and plans to attend grad school and pursue a counseling licensure.

CONCERNS

As a West Coast girl who has never been to Michigan, she has reservations about the location. She's unsure if she can successfully balance athletics and academics. A vegetarian by choice, she's also lactose intolerant.

POPULAR • COMPETITIVE • OUTGOING • DRIVEN



Asami

Prospective student: A 17-year-old high school senior from Osaka, Japan.

"I want to study in the United States, but I'm worried I won't fit in or that it will be harder than I think."

SITUATION

Raised in the Buddhist faith, Asami is a bright student with plans to study biochemical engineering in preparation for future graduate studies. She needs to find work to help offset education costs and living expenses.

CONCERNS

She's scared to commit to living somewhere so foreign, and worried about feeling isolated and out of place, especially at a "Christian" school. English is not her first language, and she's afraid of failing her studies.

KIND • INTROVERTED • STUDIOUS • INQUISITIVE • FOCUSED

 **Hope** COLLEGE



Adam

Current Student: An 18-year-old college freshman from Ada, MI.

"I'm excited to be here and play on the soccer team. I'll figure out the rest as I go."

SITUATION

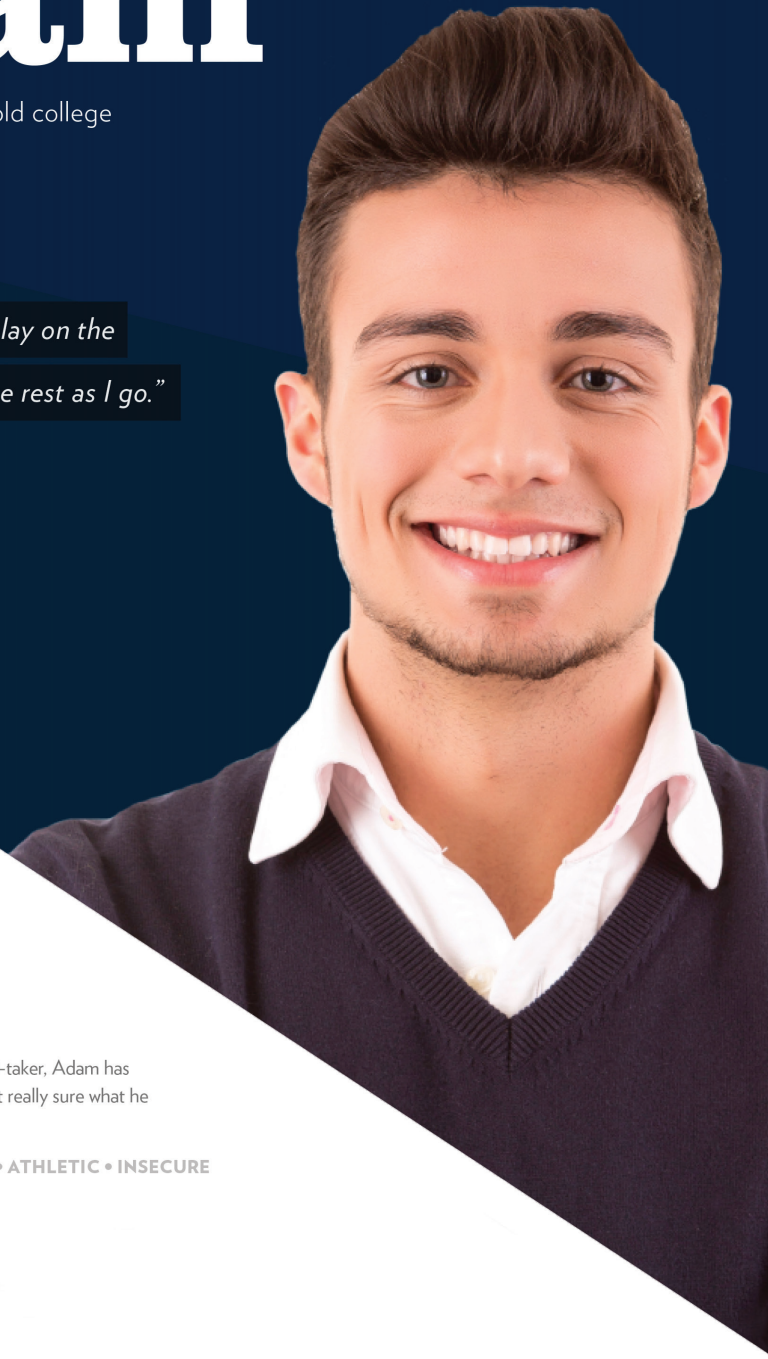
A natural athlete and skilled soccer player, Adam was recruited to the soccer team. He hasn't declared a major, but wants to get involved on campus. Vaguely interested in business, politics, or ministry.

CONCERNS

Diagnosed with ADD as a kid and a poor test-taker, Adam has never felt confident academically. He's still not really sure what he wants to do with his life.

FRIENDLY • OPTIMISTIC • IMPATIENT • ATHLETIC • INSECURE

 **Hope** COLLEGE



Beth

Current Student: A 20-year-old college junior from rural Indiana.

"I'm trying to make the most of my time here and loving every minute, but it's a challenge to keep up with everything."

SITUATION

Beth grew up in the church and takes her faith pretty seriously. Studying art education with a minor in dance, she's an RA, tour guide, academic tutor, and student group leader. She's on the chapel worship team.

CONCERNS

Beth struggles to balance all of her responsibilities and keep on top of her schedule. She wants to study abroad this summer.

TALENTED • CONFIDENT • ARTISTIC • EMPATHETIC • OVERCOMMITTED



Mark

Parent: A father of two from Cleveland, OH, his youngest daughter is a sophomore at Hope.

"She'll be alright. I just want her to know I believe in her and that I'm here to help if she needs anything."



SITUATION

Mark's daughter plays on the basketball team and is studying management, but she's having second thoughts about her major.

CONCERNS

His daughter has minor dyslexia and has sometimes struggled as a result. He's worried she's stressed and isn't getting the support she needs.

ENCOURAGING • SUPPORTIVE • CONNECTED



Susan

Parent: A mother of three from Edison, NJ, her eldest son is considering Hope College.

*“Where he goes to college is his choice,
but my son deserves the best.”*

SITUATION

Her son is an honors student and talented musician at a Catholic high school who thinks he wants to study English or communications. She heard about Hope through a friend.

CONCERNS

Susan has never been to Michigan and has never heard of Hope College before. She wants assurance that it's a top school and that her son will thrive there.

PROTECTIVE • PROUD • HANDS-ON

 **Hope** COLLEGE



Dennis

Faculty: Has been a professor of history at Hope College for 13 years.

"I'm proud to be part of the academic community at Hope. There's a lot of talent here, and nobody cares about students like we do."



SITUATION

A Hope alumnus, Dennis received his MA and Ph.D degrees from the University of Chicago. An active scholar himself, he's invested in his students and their success.

CONCERNS

He cares about the perceptions of his academic peers, and wants prospective students and other outsiders to know about the quality of the program.

BOOKISH • CURIOUS • CARING • PERSONABLE



Bala

Prospective Faculty: Current research associate at CalTech with a Ph.D in geophysics.

"If I'm going to teach, I want to teach somewhere that's committed to excellence and takes academics—and my scholarship—seriously."

SITUATION

Bala recently started exploring teaching opportunities. With her credentials, she feels like she could probably find a job anywhere. She and her husband have a young son.

CONCERNS

She wants to be part of a vibrant, progressive, and respected academic community and continue contributing meaningfully to her field. She also needs to feel comfortable relocating her family.

ANALYTICAL • TECH-SAVVY • ADVENTUROUS • OUTDOORSY • CAREER-MINDED



Jenny

Staff: The officer manager for the Chemistry department.

"I'm just trying to keep everything running smoothly the best I can."



SITUATION

Jenny's been working at Hope for nearly a decade and loves to interact with students. She's always answering questions about how to find people, forms, or resources.

CONCERNS

It's a general struggle to keep track of everything that's happening on campus and within the department. Needs to be able to communicate with students easily and reliably about announcements and events.

HELPFUL • OVERWORKED



Sarah

Alumna: Graduated from Hope three years ago. Pursuing a graduate degree in social policy at University of Michigan.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without the experiences and opportunities I had at Hope."

SITUATION

A social work grad with a minor in women's studies, Sarah was an outstanding student athlete at Hope. She worked for the Carl Frost Center as a student and participated in collaborative research during her junior year.

CONCERNS

While she's grateful for her time at Hope and still has connections among the faculty, staff, and athletic department, she's mostly focused on her current studies and future career.

CHARMING • COMPASSIONATE • INSIGHTFUL • ACCOMPLISHED



Charlie

Alumnus: Graduated from Hope 26 years ago with a degree in management. Lives in Zeeland, MI.

“Hope College has been a significant part of my life for more than three decades, and I want to see it continue to do well.”



SITUATION

An average student during his time at Hope, Charlie never stood out, but went on to start his own business. He met his wife at Hope and his son graduated from Hope last year.

CONCERNS

He cares deeply about the school and has given the college a lot of money over the years. As a businessperson, he wants assurance that the money is used wisely and sustainably.

SUCCESSFUL • INVESTED



Steve

Community Member: A 41-year-old local business owner and Holland native.

"It's great to have Hope College as a neighbor. It's good for the local economy, and they're such a resource for the community."

SITUATION

Steve grew up in Holland. A recreational tennis player and college sports fan, he owns a local business and belongs to the local Chamber of Commerce. His wife works in the public school system.

CONCERNS

Steve and his wife keep an eye on Hope concerts, games, and other performances and often take their junior high kids to events. He's always on the lookout for interns and the occasional new hire.

WELL-CONNECTED • RESOURCEFUL • SPORTS FAN • FAMILY MAN



Connie

Community Member: A 73-year-old retired nurse living with her husband at The Warm Friend in Holland, MI.

"I so enjoy being part of the Holland community. It's wonderful to be so close to Hope College and so many kind and talented young people. There's always something to do."



SITUATION

Connie and her husband retired in Holland several years ago and are active in the community. They're members of the Hope Academy of Senior Professionals and enjoy attending athletic and cultural events on campus.

CONCERNS

Although they're both in good health, Connie's husband has difficulty walking these days and has begun to rely on a wheelchair. She's fearful of losing her memory and independence.

KINDHEARTED • ENERGETIC • GIVING • AVAILABLE



During the content creation and maintenance process, you may interact with a handful of different systems and platforms.

CAMPUSBIRD

CampusBird powers the Hope College campus map.

ELLUCIAN BANNER

Banner is Hope's core database. In terms of creating and maintaining website content, Banner is used primarily by Admissions and HR to manage employee and student information.

EMS

A portion of the calendar and events, particularly room scheduling and availability and A/V requests, is managed through EMS (Event Management Services).

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Google Analytics is a tool we use to help us understand how our audiences are finding and using our website. Depending on your role, you may have access to certain reports.

IMODULES

Portions of the alumni site, directory, events and giving are powered by the iModules CMS.

LOCALIST

The calendar and events are managed through Localist.

NEOGOV

NeoGov is the service that Hope uses to post job listings and internships for faculty and students.

OU CAMPUS

Hope's primary content management system (CMS).

PRESTOSPORTS

The Athletics portion of the Hope website is managed using PrestoSports.

RADIUS

Radius is the customer relationship management tool used by the Admissions office to keep track of data on prospective students.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Hope has several official social media accounts, and certain departments manage additional accounts of their own.

WEBDAM

WebDAM is the digital asset management system Hope uses to organize our vast library of photos, images and other digital resources.

WORDPRESS

All blogs are managed through WordPress. If you write for or manage a blog, you'll be using WordPress.

PROCESS, ROLES AND WORKFLOWS

If you have any questions about how the content creation and maintenance process works, ask Public Affairs & Marketing.

USING THE CMS

CIT/Public Affairs & Marketing can help answer any questions about how to use the CMS to manage content on the site.

CONTENT STRATEGY (BRAND, AUDIENCE, VOICE AND TONE)

For help understanding the Hope brand or applying brand, voice and tone guidelines to a specific situation, talk to Public Affairs & Marketing.

STYLE AND GRAMMAR

If you have a style or grammar question that isn't specifically addressed in this guide or the *Hope College Web Style Guide*, refer to the *AP Stylebook*. If you're still not sure, talk to one of your peers on the content team, even if they're in a different department. Other Authors, Editors and Publishers are there to help. Finally, if an issue continues to cause a lot of confusion or debate, ask someone from Public Affairs & Marketing to weigh in.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

If there's something on the site or within the system that doesn't appear to be working correctly, talk to CIT.

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