10 Tips on Writing for Social Media

1. Provide Valuable and Sharable Content

When you are deciding what you will write about, try to think of a topic that will offer your readers something that adds value to their lives. Make sure your topic is high quality, and for best effect, you want to make sure it's a sharable topic.

You want to make sure your content is specific, and not too broad, but also not so granular that it's only relevant to a few of your audience members. There is a sweet spot—a balance you want to achieve with this—and it takes practice and trial-and-error.

So, instead of making a general post about Arkansas native plants, for example, you may want to make a post about one specific Arkansas native plant, or perhaps even more specific like common pests on that native plant.

Another tip is be location-specific to your audience. This helps make the content relevant to your followers, giving them more reason to share your post. Remember, if they can find your same content in a quick Google Search, folks will likely not share it.

2. Write in Plain Language

Using plain language can be easy to forget when we are reading academic or highly-technical texts—or, perhaps, if you have recently graduated from college—but it is very important to write in plain language when writing for diverse audiences on social media.

"Plain Language" or "Plain Writing" refers to the Plain Writing Act of 2010 which is "an act to enhance citizen access to Government information and services by establishing that Government documents issued to the public must be written clearly, and for other purposes."

A good rule of thumb is to write to an 8th grade reading-level. This is not to insult anyone's intelligence, and it is not to "dumb down" or over-simplify what we are saying.

The reason we do this is that, as communicators, it is our job it be clear, concise, and reach as many people with our message as possible.

By writing to an 8th grade reading-level, we are more likely to include younger audiences, individuals who may be new to the subject about which we are writing, people who may speak English as a second language, etc. Writing in plain language is also respectful of your reader's time by cutting out much of the "figuring out" of what you mean.

The idea with writing on social media is inclusivity, accessibility, and usability. Our goal is to get our messages across to the people who need to hear them, so we don't want to unnecessarily complicate what we are trying to say which extremely technical words or phrases, initialisms or acronyms, or other jargon.

3. Avoid Misinformation

If you are writing a post, always make sure to fact check yourself. There are plenty of reasons that we may not do this, the main one likely being that we simply get busy with our lives and with our work. But don't let that be an excuse for you to put out misinformation on your page.

Our organization's identity is one of credibility. If even one post gets created sharing misinformation, we can lose that credibility. Fact check by doing your own research or by sharing the post with a co-worker to make sure it is as credible as possible.

And a side note: if you ever accidentally post misinformation (say, you misunderstood something and shared it, or perhaps you were misinformed) please either delete the post or edit it to fix the error with an acknowledgment that the post was previously incorrect but that it has now been corrected. Transparency is appreciated on social media.

4. Consider Your Audience

Did you know that you actually have two main audiences on your social media page?

The first audience is the audience of people who are already following the page. Most of your content should be directed at those people. I would say about 75% of your content needs to be specifically targetted at the audience you already have.

The second audience is the people who you want to be following you, but who are not yet. 10-25% of your content needs to be directed specifically at these people. This is how you grow your audience. Try sharing introductory content, such as explaining how someone may be able to use your services, for example. Or, perhaps make a post that simply says "Questions about [relevant topic]? Call Us Today!" with the phone number you'd like for them to call. To learn more about audience, check out 10 Tips on Writing for Your Audience.

5. Incorporate Keywords for Search Engine Optimization

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is the improvement of a search engine's ability to find your content using strategic keywords and commonly searched phrases to help others find your content in a search.

Here are a couple quick tips for improving your page's SEO:

Keep a list of keywords—or commonly searched words for a topic—handy for when you are ready write some content. Try incorporating some of these keywords into your your captions and/or alt text. Make sure to do this appropriately and avoid simply "keyword stuffing."

Look in Facebook Groups that share content related to the kinds of content you share on your page and use topics and questions they are discussing as inspiration for your content.

6. Format for Easy Readability

Would you rather read a wall of text? Or, would you rather read 5 paragraphs that contain 1-3 sentences? Most of us, I think, would say the 5 paragraphs of 1-3 sentences. This is much more digestible than long chunks of text, and studies show that it is preferred by the reader.

Formatting captions on social media isn't as easy as, say, using Microsoft Word. For example, you cannot easily put bullets and margins, etc. into your social media captions. But one thing I like to do is, when I need to write a bulleted list, I like to use a relevant emoji as my bullet points.

This adds a little bit of color, contrast, and shape to our content, and it also makes reading the caption a bit easier for the reader.

When you're writing your captions, always ask yourself, "Is this easy for my reader to understand?"

Another thing to keep in mind is that your caption doesn't have to be extraordinarily long to get your point across. In fact, some studies have shown that the ideal length for a caption is between 40 and 80 characters. Play around with your caption length and see what your audience prefers.

7. "Front-Load" Your Captions

By "front-load," we mean place the most important, or perhaps the most attention-getting parts of the caption at the very beginning. The reason we do this is that your caption will be buried underneath a "Read More" button after the few lines of text. You want to entice your reader to click that "Read More" button.

8. Reiterate Text in an Image in the Caption for Accessibility

This is an extremely important tip, not only from a usability perspective, but also because it is the law.

If you are uploading a graphic as your media for a piece of content, be sure to reiterate the text written on the graphic in either the caption of the post or in the alt text for the image.

This is something we are legally obligated to do to comply with DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility).

9. Use Hashtags Strategically

Find some appropriate and location-specific hashtags to use in your posts (particularly on Twitter and Instagram) and use them. Make sure the hashtags you choose are relevant. If you are making a post about gardening in Arkansas, it is more appropriate to use the hashtag #ArkansasGardening than just #Gardening.

10. Embrace Emojis

😁 Emojis can be a lot of fun! The main reason we use them—or at least, the main reason I use them—is to shake up and break the monotony of black text on a white background. They offer a pop of color for your content, plus they're great for adding a little personality to your post, as well as allowing your content to be a bit more human.

Please note that not every audience is as receptive to emojis as others, so if you try to use emojis and you see that your content is reaching fewer people, or perhaps you get more negative feedback than content that does not use emojis, that is your sign to use fewer of them.

This handout is provided by the UADA Social Media team.
Please contact **Melissa Johnson** at *mjohnson@uada.edu* if you have questions.