

MSU WRAC Content Strategy

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Prepared for: Les Hutchinson, WRAC

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Strategy Brief

With the understanding that WRAC's mission is to be "committed to preparing excellent communicators in the culturally, technologically, and economically dynamic environments of the early 21st century", this strategy document is designed to best help WRAC create an identity as a department of varied communicators and identities. As WRAC is a broad department with many different kinds of communicators, this document is also designed to assist the WRAC department best serve its primary audiences: first-year writing students, professional writing majors, graduate/PhD students, and faculty.

The approach we have taken centers around accomplishing certain goals that will assist these audiences:

1. Funneling these various audiences into portions of the website that have content directly tailored to specific audiences
2. Creating content that emphasizes stories and narratives that are personalized yet connected to WRAC as a whole
3. Organizing existing content into more specific and defined categories

This document contains the following:

1. A style guide that should be used to guide the creation of new content and the revision of existing content.
2. Templates for desktop, tablet, and mobile versions of the WRAC website
3. An example of an article that could be used on the home page of the WRAC website
4. A strategy for utilizing metadata on each website page and content item
5. A governance plan
6. An appendix consisting of a content inventory and questions from testing/interviews.

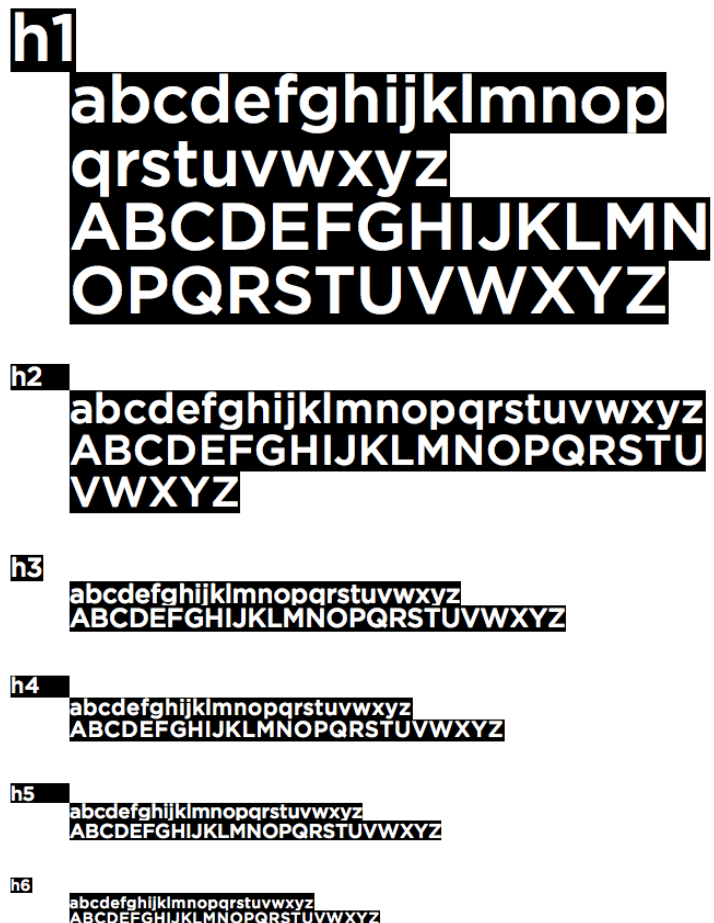
Style Guide

Introduction

This style guide is intended to align the MSU style standards, the CAL style standards, and the WRAC style standards for the wrac.msu.edu website. The goal is to create cohesive content standards that will unify the WRAC brand with other branding elements. This guide is also geared to be useful to the new department chairperson, Dr. Malea Powell, as she assumes leadership of the WRAC department. This guide is geared to provide information for content creators and basic functional requirements for web designers as they improve the design of the website moving forward.

Typography

In general, headings should be used hierarchically. That is, a heading 1 should be used before a heading 2, and a heading 2 should be used before a heading 3 and so on and so forth. H1 should be used for entire page headings. There should only be one <h1> per page, and it should mirror the title of the page for consistency and to follow best practices for accessibility. Typography should use appropriate contrast such that readers can clearly interact with content. Best practices for accessibility suggest that text should have a contrast of 4.5:1 using contrast checkers such as:



<https://www.paciellogroup.com/resources/contrastanalyser/>. In general, use fonts with a light luminosity against dark backgrounds, or vice versa. When choosing a color palette

for a website, you can reach out to webaccess@msu.edu to evaluate the accessibility of a developed color palette and provide recommendations for improvement.

Navigation

Navigation on all pages includes the following items:

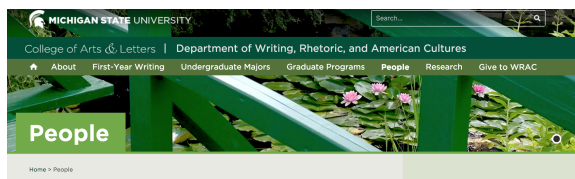
- Home
- About
- First-Year Writing
- Undergraduate Majors
- Graduate Programs
- People
- Research
- Give to WRAC

The navigation should remain at the bottom of the header image on all pages. An additional navigation bar with the alternate color scheme should be applied to the Graduate Programs page.

Do:



Don't:



It's important to keep information consistent across every page on the website, and the navigation is no exception. It is probably the most important aspect of a website to remain consistent because it is the way in which users can find what they are looking for. If your user cannot find the navigation immediately, they run the risk of getting lost in the site and of leaving without finding their information.

Copyright

Make sure that all photos used on the website are photos that the content creator has explicit consent to use in a specific context, or that they are owned by/original creations of Michigan State University.

Content Writing

WRAC has several core programs to align and define to users. Based on the research that was conducted previously, it sounds like a content direction is One of the types of content that should be integrated into this website is video. It is best practice to tell stories on the page through a video medium while still integrating text.

Besides these recommendations, the current form for text content is beneficial. Keeping all types of content consistent is best practice, and this applies to your current text content as well.

Content writing should avoid metaphors that may be lost in translation, and should also avoid expressions that may be overly academic, rely on acronyms, or not be instantly recognizable to individuals with disabilities (through exaggerated metaphors, or text that is intended to be sarcastic). This style will also add to the approachability.

Usability

Our recommendations for usability are in the vein of Information Architecture as the site is redesigned to better accommodate social media, and the story-centric emphasis that WRAC chooses.

We moved the social media widget to the bottom of the page and differentiated Twitter from Facebook to clearly differentiate between the two content types. This is best practice because users sometimes prefer either Facebook or Twitter and do not use the other. Additionally, this will separate content that may be the same in the Social Media section out, when content creators crosspost to Facebook and Twitter. We also recommend adding social media to the banner area of the page to stay consistent with the look and feel of other CAL websites.

Accessibility

The content created by MSU WRAC should follow [MSU's web accessibility policy](#), and move towards following the guidelines in full. In maintaining accessibility, the developed user interface of WRAC moving forward should be accessible and the content created by content creators must be accessible.

User Interfaces & Accessibility

Accessible user interfaces are robustly perceivable, operable, and understandable to users with a variety of disabilities. User interfaces should be accessible within an equal amount of time and with the same degree of independence as users without disabilities.

Content & Accessibility

Content should be structured by headings, created using plain text in HTML where possible, and have text alternatives for non-decorative images.

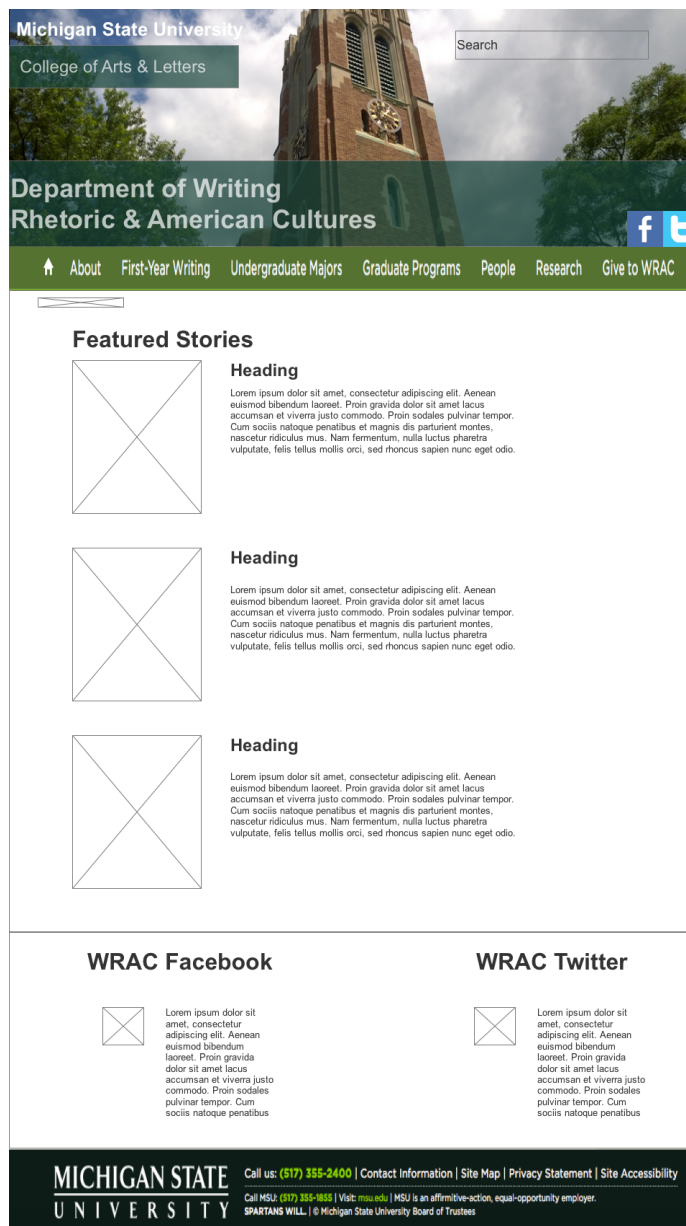
Conclusion

A lot of the current research on the WRAC website/department is accurate and moving forward with current plans to focus on designing stories on students, faculty, and staff in the department is recommended and inline with the brand of WRAC. Adding more video content to the website alongside the text content that exists will engage different types of users and increase visibility of content. Attached are wireframe examples that will help the site showcase video and other media like social media. With the movement of the social media widget, the diverse audience will be able to more easily access social media content and see what content has been created and shared.

Templates

Desktop

The desktop template breaks up the content on the landing page into specific sections in order to structure the content by purpose. The featured stories/news should be used specifically to display news or stories very important to WRAC, content that needs to be viewed by all audiences. The campaign section should be stories very specific to a campaign, such as a “Meet the PW Profs!” campaign that would highlight the faculty in the department. Facebook and Twitter are also separated and are placed at the bottom of the page so that the layout isn't too crowded. Social media icons should also be in the header for easy navigation to those sites. On the mobile and tablet templates, content is vertically stacked so that it isn't too crowded on a smaller screen.



Tablet


Michigan State University



Search

College of Arts & Letters

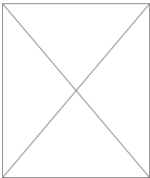
Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures

MENU



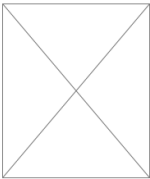


Featured Stories



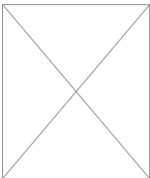
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WRAC Facebook




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WRAC Twitter



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MICHIGAN STATE

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Mobile


Michigan State University

Search

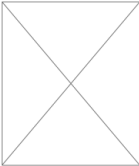
College of Arts & Letters

Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures

MENU

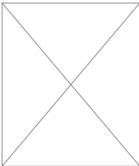


Featured Stories



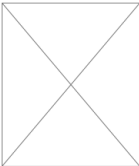
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WRAC Facebook



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WRAC Twitter



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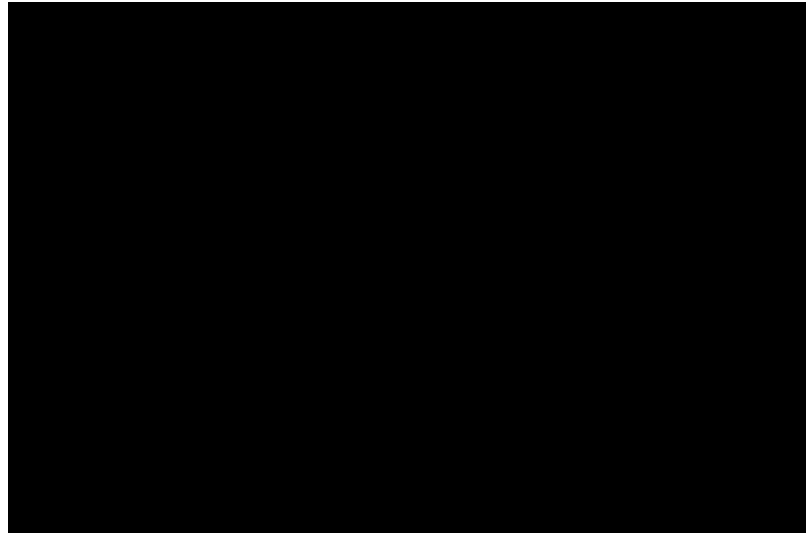
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Campaign Example

Exciting professional writing senior, Quin Hoffman, has done it again!



Quin Hoffman, who you might remember from our article, “The Man Behind the Mic.” has just landed a job with NPR as the director of the very popular radio show. Apparently the show is called “News Show Media,” but we couldn’t actually find the show anywhere. Quin assures us that it is real.

Quin is one of many MSU Professional Writers who is passionate and driven towards his own goals. “I wasn’t really surprised,” said Quin when asked about getting the position, “I knew I was the most qualified person for the job, it was simply a matter of helping my employer to see it.”

He was the only applicant for the job, but insists that it was a very competitive position. When confronted about this, he consistently changed the subject or asked for a glass of water.

The show’s previous director, Phil Deaton, was not aware he was the director. “I got an email from NPR telling me they found someone to replace me?” said Deaton. “I didn’t know I had a job. Were they paying me?”

Although this is a huge feat for someone of Quin’s age, he insists he isn’t done achieving. “Oh no, I’m gonna keep climbing that ladder. Keep watching, I’m going places. Hear that Ira? Watch out!”

Quin was also named director of Season 4 of Serial, which is—incidentally—about Quin.

Recommendations

Articles should be interesting and approachable, and use non-complex sentence structure that can be translated easily. Writers should avoid colloquialisms, metaphors, and expressions which are hard to localize for readers who are not as familiar with English. Part of the goal of the website is to create an inclusive reader experience where users with neurodevelopmental disabilities, ESL students, and all readers have equivalent access.

The tone of the website and each webpage should be consistent throughout. It should maintain proper grammar and writing practices to best represent the department. In our example we use typical reporting quotation format in order to show the department's understanding of grammar, “‘I wasn’t really surprised,’ said Quin” At the same time, a somewhat casual voice is also important in order to maintain readership. Try to avoid sentences that are too formal so that the articles seem more approachable to a wider audience. This story is fictionalized in this case, but stories should be honest and direct. They should also focus on skills that students, faculty, and staff develop as a result of working in the department.

Be sure to include university branding when possible. It is good to associate Professional Writing with MSU in order to increase credibility and the MSU brand. In the example we list Quin as “one of many MSU Professional Writers,” being sure to include “MSU” next to “Professional Writing.”

Metadata Strategy

The WRAC department is interested in telling and collecting stories that unify the department through writing, cultural, and identity studies.

WRAC appears at the top of search engine results when searching for writing department, but also has close competition with the Writing Center with some of the results. With that in mind, we recommend not just using writing as a keyword, but pairing it as described below. Meta-data should always include Michigan State.

Meta-data should also include the spotlighted individuals including faculty and students. The department wants to make it easy for individuals to be recognized for their achievement.

Metadata serves to coincide with the mission of the department. Metadata should strengthen the overlap of the WRAC programs and unify it under WRAC's core.

Use keywords like writing, rhetoric, and experience architecture.

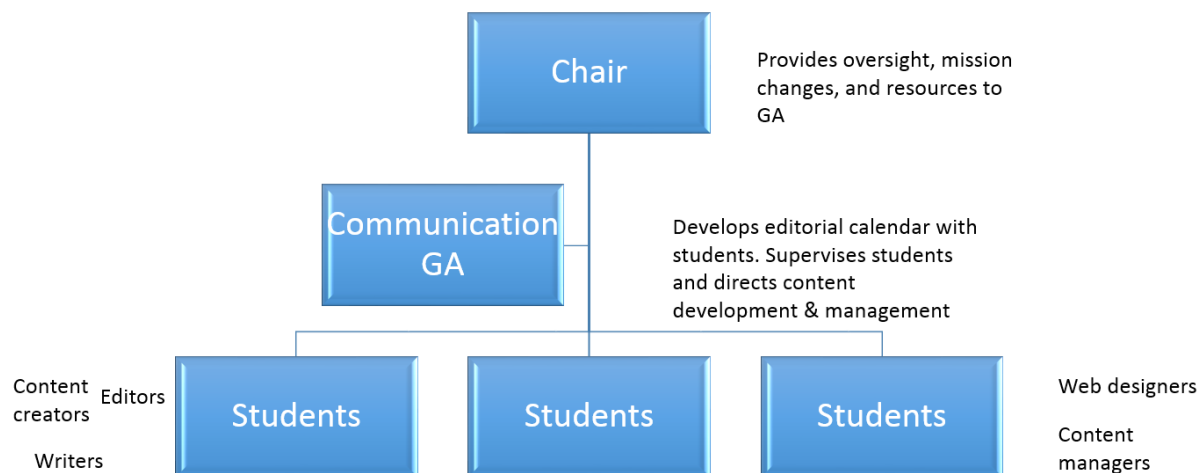
Always use Michigan State University (MSU) with phrases:

- Professional Writing
- Writing
- Rhetoric
- Identity
- Design
- User Experience
- Experience Architecture
- Web authoring

Governance Plan

WRAC Chairperson (Dr. Malea Powell) should manage the editorial calendar by delegating to WRAC Communications Specialist (Howard Fooksman). The Communications Specialist will work with undergraduate students to schedule interviews to be able to create content.

The WRAC interns are the main content creators and editors. Content ideas may come from the Graduate Assistant or the Chairperson, but the students should do first drafts and help to coordinate interviews and research and writing. The Graduate Assistant provides an editorial calendar by expressing the Chairperson's desired schedule and working with the intern's capacity. The Graduate assistant supervises students, manages production, and provides project oversight to the students who manage and create products. The Chairperson provides mission and digital coordination oversight, and allocates resources as necessary.



Conclusions

- WRAC has already done great work creating artifacts that contribute to their overall content strategy. Facebook and Twitter are prominently displayed on their website, and the content that is featured on the website's landing page works to emphasize specific people in the programs under the WRAC department. The content on the landing page also does a great job defining WRAC and the programs within it, and the organization system employed by the nav system splits content up by audience.
- However, artifacts should be levered and moved into an agile framework to work with the changing persons that create and maintain content for WRAC. Students are primarily the content creators for the social media, featured stories, and campaign content, so working to create continuity through an agile development framework would serve to implement WRAC campaigns in a timely, structured fashion. Students need to have a strong understanding of the campaigns and the strategy that comes with employing the campaigns in order to create and launch content that works to accomplish campaign goals.
- Paying attention to accessibility will create more inclusive content for the varied audiences that are a part of WRAC. International students need to be able to understand the content provided for first-year writing students, so using metaphors and other figurative means of communication should be avoided. Overall, content (whether it is purely textual or multimedia) should be tailored to the audience it is meant for. Content for first-year writing students should be constructed differently and with different considerations in mind than content for faculty or PhD students.
- In creating stories, narratives, and features that are attached to more cohesive campaigns, WRAC can better personalize its identity and set it apart from other departments. Cohesive, well-structured campaigns, using videos, audio, and text as a means to deliver, can be used to not only give voice, faces, and names to WRAC, but also to personalize featured content to all WRAC audiences. Campaigns should pinpoint as many audiences as possible while still being sure to keep them separate and distinct. Video content, interviews, and even something like a WRAC podcast would make WRAC more personable and approachable.

Appendix

Client Interview Questions

- What concerns do you have about the content organization on your website?
- Is there any additional content that you are planning to add to your website? If so, any thoughts as to where it would go, how to integrate it into the rest of the content?
- What CMS do you use, and what are your thoughts on how well it works for your website?
- What are some future goals that you have for your website, and how can we help you achieve them?
- Maybe some discussion on the nav bar, it's limitations and strengths, how to adjust it, and the ease or difficulty we will have with doing so?
- How do you feel about the visual appeal of your site? Are you happy with the overall design?
- Social media? Are there any other social media platforms you are considering implementing into your current strategy? How do you feel about your current strategy and its integration into your website?