

D69 Website Help

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Part 3

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Introduction

You want to know the two inventions that are causing the death of our profession? The word processor and the digital camera... everyone thinks they can do it...

Unemployed (retired) journalist

While I find a certain irony in the statement, I must admit that there is more than a grain of truth in the alcohol-fueled ranting of the ancient scribe.

He grew up in a world that moved from slates and copybooks to hand held document creation devices that have the capacity to capture moving images in high definition.

Let me offer a comparison.

In November 1963 President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in Daley Plaza, Dallas. The Warren Commission collected hundreds of photographs of the events leading up to and including the actual shooting.

This was a most comprehensive data collection they could gather, assembled with the help of every federal body the United States Government could muster, a plethora of acronyms from the SS, the NSC, the FBI on down.

These snaps came from Box Brownies, Instamatics, polaroids, twin lens reflex and the odd and rare, in those days, Single Lens Reflex cameras.

Agents collected images from everyone they could, taken by citizens who had no idea their snaps would play such an important part of history.

These images were subjected to the highest levels of enhancement and scrutiny that was available at the time.

They even called in NASA to use their imaging enhancement skills on these snaps.

Many of the photos are black and white a few in colour.



Altgens Photograph from Warren Commission

One of the most informative was from a Bell & Howell Zoomatic, a high-end amateur super 8 motion picture camera that belong to Abraham Zapruder. This is believed to be the most complete and accurate record of the assassination.



Frame from film by Abraham Zapruder

Absolutely no one in his or her right mind would ever claim that the film is high quality. Every frame has been worked on by the highest quality image enhancers technology could and can provide.

Today, your phone can take a better motion picture.

If Kennedy had been assassinated 50 years later, there is a fair chance that there would have been hundreds if not thousands of high definition images as a record of the event complete with a full high fidelity digital sound track.

Not only that but most of it would have been on YouTube and the net within a couple of hours, if not minutes.

Whenever there is an “event” everyone pulls out their camera/phone and produces images that go round the world.

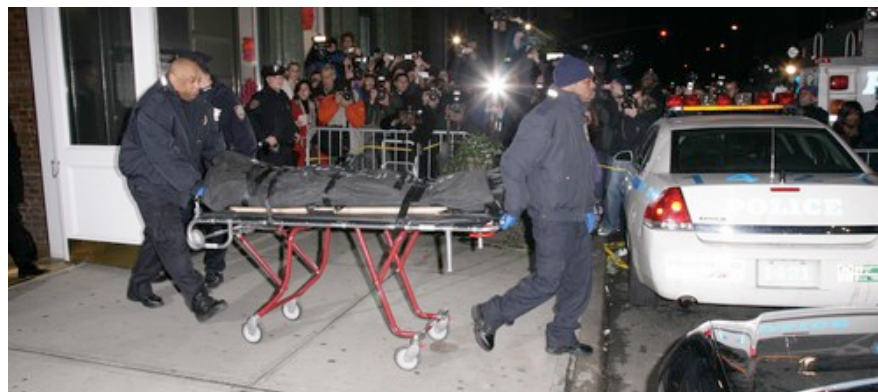


photo credit "in case you didn't know"

The same goes for the story that accompanies the image.

Everyone seems to think they can write copy... but the fact is most of cannot. However, with the avalanche of information needed to feed the voracious appetite of the net...

There is an old adage that if you sit an infinite number of monkeys at an infinite number of typewriters, one will eventually type the complete works of Shakespeare...

Welcome to the world of an infinite number of monkeys.

Copy

I am not going to restrict the discussion to copy for web pages.

If you are the person in your club who is charged with the construction and maintenance of the club website, there is a fair chance that you also have to create an occasional press release or club newsletter.

The rules that apply to web site copy, generally apply to most types of written communications. It must be understandable and that is what communication is about... true???

That is unless you are in the business of writing tomes that are not meant to be understood... and who would do that?

Read some legislation and marvel at the use of obfuscation.

First and foremost what is copy and what does it mean?

Copy has come to mean the words that go into basically any type of printed communication. The derivation started when journalists submitted copy of an article they had written to the sub editor. In theory, I am told, they should keep the original for the file and the "copy" made with a sheet of "carbon paper" was sent to the sub-editor.

The journalist was also supposed to submit a layout, or how it was meant to appear on the page with the copy. In practice, from the 1950s on, this rarely happened.

The sub editor would decide if the story went onto the front page, above the fold, into general news, or a "news hole", the space in the paper between the advertisements.

The copy would be reviewed, revised and "marked up". This is when a sub-editor highlights what is to be a headline and in what point size and type style or font it will be set. He or she also specifies the body and sub-heads before sending it off for type setting.

Setting is where incredibly talented people would look at a story on a piece of paper and turn it into metal.

They worked some of the most amazing contraptions called Linotype machines. They made rows of reversed metal letters that were assembled into a page where a pull or proof was made, to check for spelling and spacing,

Then and only then would it become a plate that would put ink on paper.

Why talk about all this?

Because you are a few keystrokes away from bypassing this entire process and being able to publish to the web, without, dare I say, the years of experience and cross checking that used to exist before anything went public.

The checks and balances inherent in the black arts of journalism and millions of dollars invested in the publishing industry, can be bypassed by a \$399 computer and an internet connection.

Web copy and Press release copy, news stories and feature articles have a lot in common...

BUT THEY ARE DIFFERENT.

Here we are interested in web writing. If you want to see the techniques of a good press release, go to appendix 1. I have included a guide there.

Writing for a newspaper or a journal are completely different crafts and if you want to investigate that pursuit ... this is not the place.

So lets look at web copy.

Copy for the w.w.w.

The absolute first piece of advice that I can pass on to you, was given to me by someone very smart in these things...

“when ever you have written something for a blog or a website and you are about to hit enter or submit...”

DON'T DO IT!!!

Once you have committed it... it is gone and as much as you would like to get it back or edit it ... you can't ...

You can come back and change it but the original one you sent is always out there somewhere...and it will come back to bite you”

He worked in a government office and he knows these things.

Be very sure what you are writing and to whom and why ...

A frivolous comment WILL come back to haunt you. A throw away remark that may seem funny at the time WILL be taken the wrong way by someone, somewhere.

So now we have stopped you making your first mistake... lets work out what you can say.

Like any piece of communications, the very first thing that you must do is identifying “who” you want to talk to.

Yes I know... in correct English it should be “whom” but this is another lesson.

Sometimes the copy has to sound right and general usage overrides correct English. Being absolutely pedantic about the language can make you sound pompous and can drive away potential members.

Look around your club.

If it is at all like mine it will be a very diverse demographic.

Toastmasters is an incredibly inclusive organization... possibly more than most other clubs or associations.

There will be a range of ages, professions, skills, abilities and education.

Again like mine there will be a gender race and backgrounds divergence.

There is a fair chance that there are members of your club whose first language is not English.

So with all this diversity, look for what is the common denominator.

Well for starters they are all members of Toastmasters.

Why?

There is a fair chance that every member of my or your club wants to improve themselves... they want to improve their communication skills.

Earlier we spoke of the two areas of your club web site. The first section is where potential members will land. This part is really for the world in general.

The second section is a "members" only area.

Can the language be different in the two sections?

The answer is a tentative yes BUT with a huge proviso...

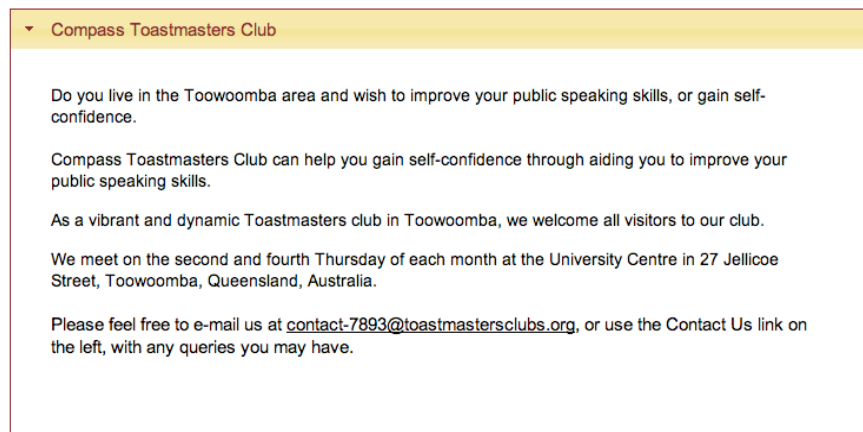
Think of the first part as a communication with a stranger and the second with a friend. You naturally speak to a stranger in a different tone than with friends.

The second part of your site is for your club members and although they may be “friends” at the club once every two weeks be aware that you still have to ensure that you communicate with clarity and respect. Remember that diversity?

The Non-member

This area is where you get the opportunity to make a first impression... and you don't get a second chance.

Lets go to the Compass Toastmasters site.



▼ Compass Toastmasters Club

Do you live in the Toowoomba area and wish to improve your public speaking skills, or gain self-confidence.

Compass Toastmasters Club can help you gain self-confidence through aiding you to improve your public speaking skills.

As a vibrant and dynamic Toastmasters club in Toowoomba, we welcome all visitors to our club.

We meet on the second and fourth Thursday of each month at the University Centre in 27 Jellicoe Street, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia.

Please feel free to e-mail us at contact-7893@toastmastersclubs.org, or use the Contact Us link on the left, with any queries you may have.

Compass has taken a proactive approach.

The first line...

“Do you live in the Toowoomba area and wish to improve your public speaking skills or gain self confidence”

This is a confirmation of why the person arrived at the site. The pedant would say that it needs a question mark at the end but lets not argue about that just at the moment.

Time to talk about the inverted pyramid.

The Inverted Pyramid

This is where writing for the web is similar to writing a press release, but slightly different.

Think of all the sentences or paragraphs you want to put in your website.

Give each of them a value... not to you, but the person who is reading the site for the first time

Put the most important one on top the second under it then down and down to the least important.

In a press release there may be 10 or 12 statements that you have cascading down the page...

Now the difference...

If your writing for the web, get it all said in 5 or 6... why?

We are all trained to start reading on the web with a short attention span... so a website that starts with

“Nora is the VPE of the Cheeky Persons Toastmasters and she is a ATS/CLS and will help you get them.”

Ok you're a Toastmaster and it may be pretty impressive that Nora is an ATS/CLS but if I am a civilian ... un-educated in the ways of being a TM I am now confused and I am on to the next site.

As a matter of fact the Compass first 19 word sentence...

“Do you live in the Toowoomba area and wish to improve your public speaking skills or gain self confidence”

I would break up so it read...

“Do you live in the Toowoomba area and wish to improve your public speaking skills?”

“Would you like to improve your self confidence?”

Many years ago I learned a “rule” from a sub-editor... it went like this...

“never put more than ten words in a sentence and never more than three sentences in a paragraph”

The reason?

Most of the time people are reading for entertainment as well as education. If your sentence is long and convoluted, people wont get it. If it takes a second readings to glean the meaning.

THEY WILL NOT INVEST THE TIME OR ENERGY...

In a newspaper, it is too easy to move on to the next article or story, but they still have the paper in their hand.

On the web... they are gone.

Today we live in a world of instant gratification... People want the returns for the investment ... NOW.

Don't believe me?...

In a world where a person, whether they be male or female spend a period of time, and we all know how little of that we have in this world of limitations and expectations, in which they wish to achieve, rightly or wrongly, a high return, not necessarily fiscal but in the long run associated with that aim, on the moments that they have allotted to that... blah blah blah...

STOP.... I could have continued for another half page but by the third line I'll bet you were getting tired of reading.

What I wanted to say was...

If you want anyone to read what you write... make it concise and easy to understand.

This brings me to something that most people find very boring.

Punctuation

At some stage we all learned it in fact there are at least 14 punctuation marks.

They are :

.	Full Stop .
,	Comma
?	Question Mark
!	Exclamation Mark
:	Colon
;	Semi-Colon
-	Hyphen
_	Dash
()	Parenthesis
[]	Brackets
...	Ellipsis
'	Apostrophe
“ ”	Quotation Marks
/	Slash or Virgule

It is a fact that most people don't know when to use what. We're pretty good with first four but from then on, well it gets a bit vague.

Don't believe me? I had a heated discussion with the owner/ editors of two local papers about where an apostrophe went in a place name. They couldn't agree with each other and would not be convinced even with proof... so what chance do us mere mortals have if the holders of the language cannot agree.

I am a great fan of the ellipse... that is obvious.

As a rule of thumb, if in doubt leave it out.

If you keep your sentences short the need for colons and semi-colons vanishes.

Call to Action

Remember the main aim of web site copy is to quickly and accurately inform and entice.

There is a well-known advertising catch cry along the lines of...

Always include a call to action!!!

This means that every advertisement should have a phrase that makes the customer do something positive such as purchase, call, enquire, go to...

You think your not in advertising... don't kid yourself. To the general public you want them to contact you... to your members you want them to use the site to get agendas for meetings... to other Toastmasters you want them to visit your club... your website is a great selling tool... use it.

K.I.S.S.

Boy, if there is anyone on the planet who hates acronyms more than me... I am yet to meet them... but one comes to mind

KISS...Keep It Simple Stupid

If I can pass on another rule about copy it is this

It may be writing... but what does it sound like

Look at the copy you have written and read it out loud... if you stumble on what you have written, change it!

Then get someone else to read it... what obvious to you may not be to someone else.

Spelling

Or should I say Spulling...

I am Dyslexic so I claim to have an excuse but realistically there are no excuses.

We are an organization heavily involved in the art of communicating so our communications should be accurate.

Do not rely on your spell checker... the Americanisation of our language is not complete so be aware that some regional variations exist.

For example, my spell checker desperately want me to change Americanisation to Americanization... not much of a difference an "s" to a "z" but I can regularly spell words so wrong that the spell checker will insert a completely different word with a totally different meaning.

Get someone else to check your copy before you hit submit.

Fonts

This is a subject close to my heart...

In real life, I am a designer and as such I create a lot of brochures and presentation documents and so I regularly scan the pallet of fonts I have available and new ones arriving almost daily.

I have over 500 typefaces... In a year I use maybe 10...

Just because you've got them don't use them...

This document is written in Helvetica.

I think that Helvetica is the most popular typeface in the world and there is a good reason for that... It is readable and conservative.

In my industry (and I use that term with reservation) there is a disease (?) known as the “Nissan Cedric Syndrome”.

There was a car in the 60s called a Nissan Cedric. On the boot of the top of the line model, there were 7 different typefaces...



You would not believe how many people think great design and layout has to include several /many typefaces.

Here is a rule...

Unless there is a good reason use one font for everything.

I would suggest one of these...

Helvetica
Arial
Helvetica Neue

There are enough variations like bold and italic to make these usable.

There are some new and older typefaces that are joining the standards. These new faces include

Lucinda Grande
Myriad
Avenir
Trebuchet (MS)

If they are good enough for Apple and Microsoft they should be good enough for us

Do not use brush scripts of any type particularly in body copy as they are unreadable

There is a huge temptation to use *Comic Sans* as it is a "happy" type, but is this the professional image you want to present to the world?

Please stick with simple sans-serif faces.

There is an exception to this and that is in old school press release.

The press agencies have asked for Times New Roman...

This is a serif face but it is clean... very clean.

One of the reasons was that Times New Roman was one of the classic Linotype faces but in today's digital world, more and more papers and periodicals are being printed in sans-serif face.

Serif Times New Roman

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh

Sans-Serif Helvetica

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh

One final thing about fonts.

Be careful about using all capitals as this is considered as shouting on the web... use it sparingly if at all.

Pictures

With the advent of mobile phones with cameras that produce pictures with a higher resolution than professional digital cameras of a decade ago, everyone seems to be an expert.

With over 45 years experience in the photographic industry I can only comment that the three basics that were drummed into me in the 60s still hold fast today no matter how much digital manipulation you can induce.

They are

Composition

Focus

Exposure

Composition

There are a myriad of books and internet articles that will, happily, spend days debating what is good composition and what is artistic and acceptable.

Lets go back to basics. If you are going to replace the shots that Toastmasters have supplied they better be better.

Maximum width of a shot is going to be about 300 pixels wide... That means your shot is made up of 300 dots from left to right. A photo of all the members of the club will be grainy, poor quality and not very good.

The best option is a medium close up similar to the ones that are on the site.

You should follow the rule of thirds still holds with the focal point of the image being 1/3 from the right or left looking into the shot.

I have seen a site with two members holding up a Toastmasters Magazine while they were on a trip to the Great wall of China.

Great shot?

Maybe, but what has it got to do with generating interest for your club.

Make your shots relevant to the market you are aiming at.

Focus

Most cameras today are auto focus, but make sure that your camera is focusing on the subject you want to highlight in the picture.

Again I have seen pictures that had the club banner in the background sharp as a tack but the person in front... well to say they were a bit of a blur would be kind.

Also be aware that cameras can take photos in very low light but they take it at a longer exposure. That means that the effective shutter speed is longer than 1/60 of a second and therefor the shooter moved, just a little... subject blurred.

If in doubt activate the built-in flash.

Now if the flash is close to the lens, and most of them are, you get the dreaded red eye... Looks like the vampires are in town.

There are many Photo Retouching programs that can fix Red Eye but why not alleviate the problem in the beginning.

If you can separate the flash from the camera, or bounce the flash off the ceiling you will get a better pic.

Exposure

Again, we have come to rely on the automation built into the camera. A camera can correctly expose the background and the subject can be black.

Be aware that trophies can flare and make the whole picture dark except the well lit trophy...

To get the best shot take the subject to a well lit place and get in a bit close. Or crop the photo after you shoot it

If all this is a bit foreign to you, the very best place to start is the instruction book that came with your camera. Failing that there are hundreds and hundreds of sites on the web dozens most likely devoted to your camera.

The best advice I can offer is practice.

Work out how to take a shot so when you step up at a meeting or competition, you know exactly what you are going to get when you push the button.

The best automatic camera in the world will not make you a good photographer.

My personal camera is a Canon 5DII and I shoot most of the time on manual, overriding a lot of the automation

Look at good shots by other people and work out how to replicate what they did.

When shooting, look at what you just shot.

Most cameras have a built in screen to post view your shots...

If in any doubt take another but change things, your position, your exposure, so you have options.

Just because you shot it doesn't make it great and interesting. Be hyper critical of your work and only if you are comfortable for the world to see it, upload it to your site.

If the shot has any flaws, discard it. I discard at least 80% of what I shoot

Equipment Care

How many times have you seen a Toastmaster pick up a camera that has been lying on a table or buried in a handbag and take a shot.

It's even worse if they are using a phone camera. It has had greasy sweaty hands all over it. Now the lens that takes the shot is on the usually right at the point where you rest your index finger when you're on the phone.

What about dust, grime fluff and general grunge?

Many shots I see have specks and smears caused by dirt.

I know the competition was exciting and you want the shot but that camera needs as much care and attention as you can lavish on it if you want it to perform as well as you hope.

Get a bag, get a case, at least get a lens cover.

Even those camera where the lenses come out from behind a slider in the case, get dirt on the lens.

Finally if you have a Single lens reflex get a skylight or a UV filter to protect the main element of the lens.

Don't up load unless it's better than what's there.

Appendix 1

How to Lay Out Your Press Release *Press Release Formatting Guidelines*

Don't use a letterhead. It's cleaner and emails easier.

Use 1 inch margins and Times New Roman 12 point font.

Standard Parts of a Release

Release Timing & Contact Information

Usually it's:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Contact Persons Name

Note its all caps.

Mobile Phone

Other phones

Email address

Headline

WORLD CHAMP COMES TO TOWN

Be creative, but keep it all one line and grab their attention. I recommend using a slightly larger font, 14 or 16 point, in bold and all caps. Some recommend only capitalize the first letter of every word.. Note the use of an action verb to make it stronger.

Sub-Heading or Caption

Jock Elliot, World Champ of Public Speaking is coming to town on the 22 August, to offer his expertise to local business people for free .

Frankly, I like to use a sub-heading or caption. Note it's centered in 12 pt, bold and underlined. It's a simplified first paragraph with critical information.

Body of Press Release

Paragraph 1

The most important paragraph!

CITY, STATE, Month, Day, Year – (standard formatting used every time, note caps)

Begin with a strong attention-getting paragraph that contains the most important information relevant to the 5 W's (Who, What, When, Where, Why). This paragraph summarizes the press release and provides the hook to keep reading.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4...

These paragraphs contain more detailed information. Be sure of your factual accuracy and get permission to use any quotes. What is the angle you are using to sell a journalist on the story?

Effective releases often use the inverted pyramid strategy. The most important information and quotes come first.

You may use 2 kinds of quotes. The first is from the expert – the guest speaker or event director. It's also attention getting or controversial. It's first person. The second quote may be from a member or club president. It puts the local, human interest into the story.

ALWAYS attribute the quotes...

Final Paragraph

Summarizes the release and repeats the 5 W's.

Final symbol or end

Either oOo or END but not both

Note that they are both centered.

At the bottom of the release, I frequently use a special notice (Media Notes) to help reporters make note of a special time to get good photos or interviews, more detailed street directions or websites and on-line newsrooms for additional information and repeat contact information.

Media Notes:

- **Contact Fred Blogs 0440 555 666 or Ken Miller 04 04 777 888 to schedule interviews or photo opportunities.**

- **Great Photo Op Thursday night before Sat seminar... Jock is at a Club meeting at the Pink Room in Little Street**
- **Visit www.toastmasters.org for World Championship background**

If you are attaching a photo make it an action shot of good quality and SHARP and correctly exposed