This document serves as a resource for understanding and applying the WCSU brand into creative writing expression. It outlines tone, voice and key messaging development.

These guidelines are based on a discovery process that took place throughout 2018. Thorough and highly inclusive, this effort drew from a wide cross-section of WCSU constituents.

A living reference, this guide is intended to serve as a resource and a starting point for communications and creative professionals charged with articulating and representing the school brand. It is intended to be a tool to help strengthen the consistency in communications. It is not designed to impose restrictions on creativity.

For information or questions about these guidelines and usage permissions, please contact University Publications & Design.
WCSU WRITING GUIDE

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WCSU WRITING GUIDE
BRAND VOICE

- WCSU is friendly, inclusive and relatable. We don’t talk down to our audience, but we’re clear and to the point.
- We use active, engaging language. We make our communications about the people we’re speaking to, not about us.
- We value accessibility, value and transformation. We highlight these attributes wherever we can.
- Our voice is our community’s voice. Whenever there’s an opportunity to quote, share or pay it forward, we do.
- We’re mindful of our medium. We communicate through a combination of design, typography and language – and we adjust it to suit.
KEY MESSAGING DEVELOPMENT

Primary Audiences
• Current Students
• Prospective Students

They Are
• Residents of the tri-state area
• Diverse
• Seeking a qualification to begin a career or go on to further study

They Need
• To know what WCSU is and offers

They’ll See
• Wide-ranging, highly regarded programs
• An inclusive, welcoming setting
• Our passionate, committed faculty
• Transformational outcomes and success stories
• Real-world professional opportunities

TIP
• Make your messaging about the reader first – and WCSU second
• Use examples, stories and imagery that reflect the WCSU student body
• Connect WCSU offerings to student successes and outcomes
• Be bolder and less formal with student audiences
KEY MESSAGING DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

Primary Audiences
- Alumni
- Donors
- Staff and faculty
- Events/News organizations
- Parents

They Are
- Graduates, former students and individuals connected to WCSU
- Corporate and community supporters committed to our mission
- Local residents, companies, influencers and thought leaders

They Need
- To feel pride in the WCSU experience
- To engage with what WCSU provides

They’ll See
- Opportunities to get involved
- Transformational outcomes and success stories
- Reasons to give back and lend support

TIP
- Make your messaging about the reader first – and WCSU second
- Avoid using internal jargon or acronyms when speaking to these audiences
- Show that we appreciate their engagement, donations or investment
- Highlight our achievements and our plans for the future
- For donors and potential donors, show value and create an emotional connection. Answer the question: “what’s in it for me?”
- Adjust your tone as needed. Speak more formally with donors and corporate organizations than with staff and faculty
KEY MESSAGING DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

Writing Tips

• **Be personable.** Make it about the reader. Talk to them, not at them.
• **Be inclusive.** Use examples and imagery that reflect our community.
• **Be welcoming.** Write accessibly. Avoid “shop talk”, acronyms and academic language.
• **Be transformative.** Connect outcomes with student audiences. Help them aspire.
• **Be true.** Different communications reach different audiences. Vary your voice accordingly – but stay true to our brand qualities, values and mission.

Connect With Your Audience

WCSU exists to deliver an education that transforms lives. When we focus on that transformation we’re highlighting the benefits of a WCSU education – not just its many features.

When we highlight benefits we connect on an emotional level. We create a world that our audience can inhabit. And we make good on our brand promise. **Our brand: your inspiration**

Staying “on brand” is about staying true to our mission, vision, qualities and values. The underlying themes and sentiment of what it means to be a part of WCSU should always shine through in your work.

• Use bold headlines that reflect our core values and messages
• Use the core terms from our qualities and values
• Highlight transformational outcomes and successes

Our branding guidelines are a framework to help you better understand who we are and how to shape your communications.
KEY MESSAGING DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

On the Page

WCSU is welcoming, inclusive and diverse. Our target audience includes high school students and people new to higher education. Our communications should reach them – and speak to them in ways that resonate.

Use headings for readability
  • Headings and subheadings create visual hierarchy and make text scannable
  • Keep headings short, interesting and readable “at a glance”
  • Subheadings can cue the reader or summarize what’s to come
  • Use headings and subheads to communicate the WCSU brand

Avoid long blocks of text
  • Break up long paragraphs to keep readers interested
  • Begin with a “hook” or highlighted summary to engage readers
  • Use quotes – inset or not – to create interest
  • Ensure paragraphs flow from one to the next
  • Punch up your last sentence with a call to action or powerful takeaway

Write for the ear
  • Write sentences that can be easily read aloud. This forces you to be clear and concise
  • Vary your sentence lengths to avoid “flat” writing
  • Avoid jargon, acronyms or language that may be unfamiliar to your reader. Define technical terms if necessary
  • Write active sentences and make it clear who your actors are
  • Speak directly to your audience – and include them with terms like “we” and “us”
The Clear Writing Check-list

Before sending something out, check to see that it meets all of the following:

**On brand**
Is your piece in line with our brand voice, values and goals? Does it sound like us? Your audience has certain expectations about who we are, what we stand for and how we communicate. Don’t disappoint them!

**On campaign**
If your piece is part of a larger campaign, make sure that it’s consistent with the rest. Don’t be afraid to reuse headings, calls-to-action and key takeaways, especially across different channels. It’s not boring. It drives home your point.

**On point**
There’s a lot we could share about WCSU. But for your audience’s sake, aim for one core message per communication. If you’re writing a larger piece, break it up so that there’s a message per section. Define your message and keep it front and center.

**Great headlines**
Headlines make a powerful first impression. They draw readers in – and in many case they’re all someone reads. Use them to your advantage. Make them on brand, engaging and memorable.

**Right medium**
Different formats require different types of writing. Web writing involves short paragraphs and lots of white space. A billboard needs to be read in a second and from afar. Make sure that your writing is suited to your medium.
KEY MESSAGING DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

The Clear Writing Check-list (continued)

Right audience
Who are you writing for? Writing for students is different from writing for faculty. Identify your audience and write for their unique interests, needs and goals. Include them in your writing with relevant examples, case studies and stories.

Clear purpose
Why are you writing? When you know what you’re trying to achieve you’ll be able to write something that suits your goals. Identify your purpose and adjust your language and approach accordingly.

Clear next steps
Every communication should encourage your audience to do something. Maybe it’s enroll in a course, send an email or attend an event. Be clear about what you want them to do. Include a call to action that tells them what to do next. Don’t make them guess.

Contact details
Make those next steps easy for your reader. Provide relevant phone numbers, web addresses or social media details so that they can get in touch if they need to. Don’t make them work to find us.

Extra eyes
Sometimes we write but don’t communicate. Re-read your piece to ensure that whatever you’re trying to say is clear. It never hurts to have another person check that your work is achieving its intended purpose.
PUTTING WORDS INTO ACTION

Every word you write has a purpose. It should make your audience feel something or do something in relation to the WCSU brand.

But don’t feel daunted. In this book we’ve already established the building blocks of message development. We can use these as a foundation for powerful communications that speak of and to our audiences.

When we know our brand’s tone and value, we have a formula for creating effective marketing communications.

TIP
Different audiences need to different things. Speak their language - and to their interests. You can be more informal when talking to students, while parents or alumni expect a more collegiate tone. Students want to see themselves in stories of transformation, while alumni draw pride from others’ success.
HEADLINES WITH IMPACT

Headlines carry the most weight in any communication. They draw the eye and demand engagement. For us, they’re a chance to share the WCSU brand at a glance.

WCSU headlines:
• Are punchy, confident and positive. The shorter the better. Strive to evoke and inspire.
• Use an **opportunity + outcome** formulation. They combine what we offer with what we deliver.
• Draw on our brand values, mission and purpose. They speak to what we stand for.
• Often, but don’t always, use imperatives, especially when targeting a student audience. Think bold, aspirational verbs like: go, dream, live, be, build, chase, seize, sprint.

Some examples:
**Go beyond ordinary.** (Bold, Transformative, Pursuit of Excellence brand value)
**Dream the future.** (Evocative, Positive, Driven by Curiosity brand value)
**Forward into opportunity.** (Confident, forward-looking, Always Furthering Opportunities brand value)
**Break the mold.** (Inspiring, Welcoming, Dialogue & Participation brand value)

Note: this headline formula isn’t prescriptive. Feel free to branch out and explore - just be sure to stay on brand!

TIP
Anglo Saxon vs Latin vocabulary: Anglo Saxon words are strong and impactful, while Latin words are associated with prestige and learning. Use the former for headings targeted at students and the latter for more formal writing.
ADJUSTING HEADLINES FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Targeting our Values. While all of our values are equally important to us, they will resonate differently with different audiences. Consider what matters to your audience and target your headlines (and subject matter) accordingly.

Writing for Action. Imperatives are impactful when we want to encourage action (enrollments, donations). Use imperatives for student audiences and donor requests. Adjust your structure in cases where you want to inform or explain (reports, viewbooks).

Consider:

- Go beyond ordinary > Beyond ordinary
- Make it happen > It happens here

Headlines like Forward into opportunity work for either audience, so consider examples like this when writing for broad appeal.

Marketing vs Communication. Bold, punchy headings aren’t always appropriate. If you’re writing a formal report or external non-marketing communication you can dial back your headlines to make them more straight-forward. You can easily retain the language of our brand values, mission and purpose by opting for a less stylized sentence structure approach.
NEED SOME HELP GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR HEADLINES?

Try building a headline using the rubric below. Add new terms as you come across them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Excellence Value</th>
<th>Curiosity Value</th>
<th>Opportunities Value</th>
<th>Dialogue Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursue</td>
<td>Seek</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>Lift</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seize</td>
<td>Find</td>
<td>Ahead</td>
<td>Share</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach</td>
<td>Know</td>
<td>Look</td>
<td>Grow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve</td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Follow</td>
<td>Show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplish</td>
<td>Explore</td>
<td>Discover</td>
<td>Think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attain</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Uncover</td>
<td>Speak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>Embrace</td>
<td>Thrive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Solve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linking word (preposition, determiner, pronoun, adjective)
beyond, into, every, each, all, your, our, new

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Ambition</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Brilliance</th>
<th>Dream</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Excellence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Yourself</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Amazement</td>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Together</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WCSU Writing Guide
SUBHEADS THAT MATTER

Subheads accompany main headlines and offer additional information or explanation.

**WCSU subheadlines:**
- Are straightforward, purposeful and specific. They further a headline by taking it from the abstract to the concrete.
- Connect headlines back to WCSU and what we offer.
- Are primarily used in longer documents. They offer a window into what’s to come. Use them sparingly on posters, billboards and image-heavy communications.
- Can vary in complexity depending on your audience and purpose. Use less complexity for general, school-wide communications and higher complexity for targeted communications.

**Headline examples are on the following page.**
Go beyond ordinary.
Become exceptional at WCSU.

Dream the future.
At WCSU we’re making tomorrow.

Forward into opportunity.
Shape the world in ways that matter at WCSU.

Break the mold.
At WCSU we’re planning an impactful future together.
Some higher-complexity examples.
(These are examples you might see at the program or initiative level. Note that some headlines have been adjusted into our “descriptive” format to suit external stakeholders.)

Primary audience examples:

**Break the mold.**
With WCSU [program name] you can take your [career] aspirations to the next level.

**Dream the future.**
Shape the world in ways that matter with WCSU’s [name of program or initiative]

Secondary audience examples:

**Beyond ordinary.**
WSCU is shaping tomorrow through [name of initiative or research project].

**Forward into opportunity.**
WSCU is impacting the future through [name of initiative].
KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

**Booklets**
Contrast is key. With things like headings, paragraphs and footnotes, language forms a visual ladder. So be bold with headings. Take risks and create interest. Ask questions and answer them. Make assertions and back them up. Meet your reader’s every thought with an opportunity.

Structurally you have some more room to work with, so create a narrative for your booklet. Figure out your overarching structure, then break up your booklet into “chapters”. These should each focus on a particular concept, idea or offering, while all flowing together. Each “chapter” can be broken down further into “scenes”.

- Figures, visual aids and infographics make excellent visual punctuation.
- Subheadings guide the reader and anchor them on the page.
- Write with a purpose – not to fill a space.

**Posters**
Posters inspire. So be inclusive and make your audience believe. Pull directly from the brand statement, brand personality or brand qualities and aim for impact. Write something that can be read at a glance. Write to be read aloud.

- Use an active voice.
- Use our brand quality terms.
- Use powerful verbs.
- It’s all in the headline.
- Brevity is your friend.
- Remember that words have a look as well as a meaning.
KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE (CONTINUED)

Online
Online ads are interactive, not passive. Give users a reason to click. Simple is key – and so is curiosity. Choose bold verbs, forward-looking promises and transformative questions. Write something that piques interest and demands action.

- Use short phrases.
- Use our brand quality terms.
- Use strong verbs.
- Always use a CTA (call to action)
- Craft headlines that get clicks:
  - numbered lists
  - questions
  - intriguing statements
  - statistics
  - reader-directed

Online writing goes beyond just banner ads. Here’s how to make your message stand out:

- Create a powerful headline and emotional subheading
- Write powerful, search optimized metadata
- Use statistics and data to back up your point
- Balance written information with visual information.
- Keep web forms minimal and simple.
- Make button text informative. (eg “Enroll at WCSU” or “Complete survey”, not “Click here”)

Remember that users are increasingly reading on mobile. Bear in mind the limited screen space and scrolling nature of reading in this format. Write and design accordingly.
KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE (CONTINUED)

Emails
Your subject line is the most essential part of your email. If your emails don’t get opened, they can’t be acted on. Here are some tips:

- Keep subject lines under 65 characters
- Aim for 6-word subject lines
- Make them personal – speak to the reader
- Make them clear and relevant
- Use numbers and attention-grabbing words

Once you’ve got your readers to open your email, ensure that the rest of your email matches the promise of the subject line. Be brief, to-the-point, and include a call to action so that your reader knows what to do. If they need to reply, visit a link, watch a video or fill in a survey, embed these actions into the email so all they need to do is click.

Some more tips:

- Segment your email lists according to your audiences.
- Personalize emails with names and the recipient’s connection to the school (eg, program, donor history, event attendee)
- Be succinct – under 500 words. Use shorter sentences, brief paragraphs and plenty of white space.
- Ensure it’s clear who the email is from. Allow opt-outs to avoid being flagged as spam.

Banners and billboards
Keep it brief. Be bold and aspirational. You have the time and space to convey one idea – in an instant. Ensure your copy can be read at a glance and from afar. Draw from our brand statement, personality or qualities. Focus on WCSU’s core offerings and the things that make us trans-formative. Context matters for billboards. Try connecting your copy to context by calling out local landmarks, proximity or directions.
WRITING AND OTHER WCSU RULES

- First instance of mentioning the university in any writing needs to be fully written out, **Western Connecticut State University**. Second and additional mentions of the school has the university acronym **WCSU**.

  e.g. Welcome to **Western Connecticut State University's** brand guide. This document serves as a resource for understanding and applying the **WCSU** brand identity...

- When referencing or marketing the University, always use **Western Connecticut State University** - DO NOT use **WestConn**. **WestConn** is to be used ONLY in reference to athletics.

- Acceptable social media account names for **Western Connecticut State University**:  
  - Twitter - westconn  
  - Facebook - @WestConn  
  - Youtube - WesternCTState  
  - Instagram - westconn  
  - Flickr - westconn
This brand guide is a tool to help you strengthen the consistency in your communications. However, it isn’t designed to impose restrictions on creativity.

If you have any questions as you help craft our brand, please contact:

The University Publications & Design.