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ready-to-use NEWS

Resource round-up: References for text and image content

Effective communication requires so many skills — writing, editing, editorial content planning, social media, photography, videography, web content expertise, public speaking, media relations. It's a big list, especially if you are a sole practitioner or part of a very small staff. You need to know what to share, when to share it and how to maximize the impact through the various communication channels that you manage.

Information moves fast and demand is high for good content. It isn't always what you say but how well you say it. Ensure that you are building your skills and your toolbox to ensure that your content is high quality, engaging and error-free.

Here is a round-up of tools to help you produce great images and high-quality error-free copy.

Writing and editing

There are many helpful free online tools to help you write faster, better and more relevant content. The first priority is to ensure that it is clean. Your readers may not notice that your writing is error-free, but they will likely notice and criticize spelling and grammar errors.

Word processing tools

Microsoft Office, Google Docs, Apple Pages all have built-in spell checkers, grammar review tools, word counters and reading level tools. These features may provide all the help you need to review your text.

Grammarly.com

Add a web browser extension and sign up for a free account to check spelling, grammar, punctuation. For a monthly fee, you can check ineffective vocabulary, overused words, passive voice issues, formality levels, plagiarism and more.

Hemingwayapp.com

Copy and paste your text to check for readability, simpler word choices and passive voice. The color-coded suggestions are easy to read and come with clear recommendations.

SmartEdit.com

This tool has similar features as other writing and editing tools (misspellings, repeated phrases, misused words, clichés, etc.). Its difference is that it is downloadable for use in MS Word or as a standalone version. It does 20 different content checks and does not automatically change your text. It highlights problem areas for your review and better self-editing.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

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Social platforms

There are so many tools for social media content and online marketing. While some of them are platform-specific to help you reach your followers or expand your reach, others are general platform tools for security, analytics, content creation or monitoring.

A good list of current recommendations is published by OptinMonster.com, <http://bit.ly/2rRGfCK>.

Social media management: Hootsuite.com

Schedule your posts, ensure message consistency among your team, curate content through tags, measure your engagement.

BuzzSumo.com

This online tool will tell you about trending topics to help you shape your content. Enter a word or phrase to check total engagement or platform-specific engagement for Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Reddit.

Visage.com

An image tool for social platforms. This tool is for creating graphics and optimizing images for different platforms. The fee-based product allows adding your style guide as a reference, resizing images, easy reordering and adding live links to graphics.

Images

When it comes to getting attention, images are everything, and it isn't that hard to find resources to make your content more noticeable. There are free image sites with copyright-free photos and graphics that you can use as is or customize to make them original. There are also many sites that include tutorials to help you improve your design skills.

A word of caution: be sure to check copyright restrictions. The owner can do a simple image search to see if their content is being used without prior permission, which could result in legal action or a fine.

Adobe Creative Suite

This is the gold standard for graphic design tools, and most districts have licenses to use it. The key apps are Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Spark and Premiere, but there are many others in the suite. There is a learning curve, so take some time to learn the basics. Tutorials are included on the Adobe site, www.helpx.adobe.com. There are also dozens of free videos and tutorials for specific tasks and many low-cost online courses that help you build your skills.

Canva.com

Canva is a free online design tool to help you design content from scratch or templates. It's easy to use and can be built to size for print or social platforms. It also hosts design tips and tutorials. The pro fee-based membership allows you to build a brand kit or guide.

Pixlr.com

"Pixlr is a cloud-based photo editing app that allows quick image adjustments, resizing, filters, drawing and more. It's a simpler interface than Photoshop and includes access to free resources like backgrounds, images and vector graphics. The app allows beginners to make simple edits or advanced users to create complex layered artwork.

Be sure to learn the basics of photo editing on your favorite image app. Photo edits are commonplace and can result in attention-getting images with better audience engagement. For a good overview of common photo edits, including cropping, resizing, contrast, brightness, temperature or white balance, and saturation, read a tip sheet published by the Multnomah Education Service District for its staff: [How to fix your photos using free websites or just your phone!](http://www.multnomahesd.org/photos.html) (www.multnomahesd.org/photos.html)

Stock images

Free image sites make it easy to follow copyright rules. Stock image sites provide images to support your messages on your website or social channels. Try to use your own authentic images, or your own students and staff, but the stock photos can fill in or expand your image library. A few good sites include:

www.pexels.com (photos)

www.pixabay.com (photos, vector graphics, illustrations and video)

www.vecteezy.com (vector graphics, including backgrounds, icons, elements, patterns, shapes and illustrations)

www.videezy.com (like Vecteezy but for video. Also includes After Effects templates for title and credit frames)

MESD has compiled a list of public domain photo sites for staff use: www.multnomahesd.org/stock-images.html. The resource list includes a helpful overview of allowable uses of images and attribution requirements.

For a bigger list of tools, see **23 Tools and Resources to Create Images for Social Media:** <https://buffer.com/library/tools-create-images-for-social-media>