Framing and narratives – how to support your messaging

Including framing and narrative techniques in your content can help to engage your audience and make your messages more memorable. Framing and narrative are especially helpful to build engagement with complex or technical content.

Creating a framing concept

A framing concept is an underpinning narrative and organising structure that guides user understanding and supports messaging.

Consider potential categories for your content, and how they could present or support a narrative.

For example, if you are presenting program results, you could simply use each program as a heading in alphabetical order (categories). But if you want to support the messaging of the impact of programs, you might instead group them under specific aims or results (narrative).

- Batemans Bay bitou bush project
- Bitou bush information brochure
- Narooma wetland rehabilitation
- NSW land management surveys
- Weed management in the Illawarra
- Wollongong community research

becomes

Gathering and sharing information

- Bitou bush information brochure
- NSW land management surveys
- Wollongong community research

Improving local environmental values

- Batemans Bay bitou bush project
- Narooma wetland rehabilitation
- Weed management in the Illawarra

Framing concepts can be simple or complex. If your content and messaging is multidimensional, you might need a matrix to cut the material in several directions. For example, a framing concept for strategic policies may have crosslinked aims and programs and underpinning principles.

Caution

Framing concepts sometimes aim to support user engagement as well as messaging. For example, the key stages of a task can be given alliterative categories or titles. These can be effective if they are accurate, but can hamper user understanding if content doesn't quite fit and has to be 'shoehorned' into the structure.

Make sure your framing concept is robust as well as useful – test it with the full range of your content to see if it works. Also test it with users to get feedback.

Curating information

There can be a temptation to include information just because you have it.

Consider what you are trying to achieve and what your audience wants to know, and only include the information that builds or supports that message. For example, if your aim is to explain the process for making a noise complaint, you don't need to include descriptions of relevant legislation and management.

Adding flow and links

Make links between your pieces of information, so that they turn into a story rather than a list of facts. For example:

> Mercury was used in various applications such as batteries and fluorescent lighting. Mercury poisoning causes severe neurological problems. Many uses of mercury are now being phased out.
>
> becomes
>
> Mercury was used in various applications such as batteries and fluorescent lighting. **However,** mercury poisoning causes severe neurological problems. **This is why** many uses of mercury are now being phased out.

Think about how each fact leads to the next, and use words to join concepts:

- Does the next fact add to the evidence? Use *and*, *also*, *further*.
- Is the next fact in opposition to the evidence? Use *however*, *but*, *although*, *even so*.
- Does the next fact provide a reason for the evidence? Use *because*, *since*, *due to*.
- Does the next fact conclude or bring together the previous 2 facts? Use *this is why*, *this means*, *therefore*, *and so*.

Scenarios and case studies

Use scenarios to help bring content to life. A scenario is an imaginary example of the information or process you are describing. It presents a situation and characters, and describes what happens. For example, if your content is about starting school, you might describe a family and their experience of enrolment and getting ready for school.

Case studies of actual events or projects can also be used to provide real-world examples of the information.

Including comparisons

Use comparisons to illustrate and strengthen your message. For example:

> 1 in 250,000 people treated with medicine X will develop blood clots.
>
> or
>
> 1 in 250,000 people treated with medicine X will develop blood clots. This is very low compared with other common medicines and activities: 1 in 2,000 women each year will develop a blood clot from taking the combined oral contraceptive pill, and 1 in 1,000 people a year will develop a blood clot from air travel.

The second point gives the same information, but it also gives context and allows people to compare the risk of medicine X with those of well-known medicines and activities.

User-focused language

Simply focusing on the user can make information into a story that relates to them. Take the audience on the journey by including them in the story. For example:

> Application process:
>
> 1 Application submitted
>
> 2 Application reviewed
>
> 3 Application accepted or rejected
>
> becomes
>
> About the application process:
>
> 1 Submit your application online
>
> 2 We will review your application
>
> 3 We will contact you to tell you whether your application has been accepted

User-focused language will also help to make your content more likely to be seen and picked up by AI models to answer user questions or searches.