

In this issue:

The dangers of misused metaphors, results from Ascribe's 2017 customer survey, how not to lose work when Word crashes and more.

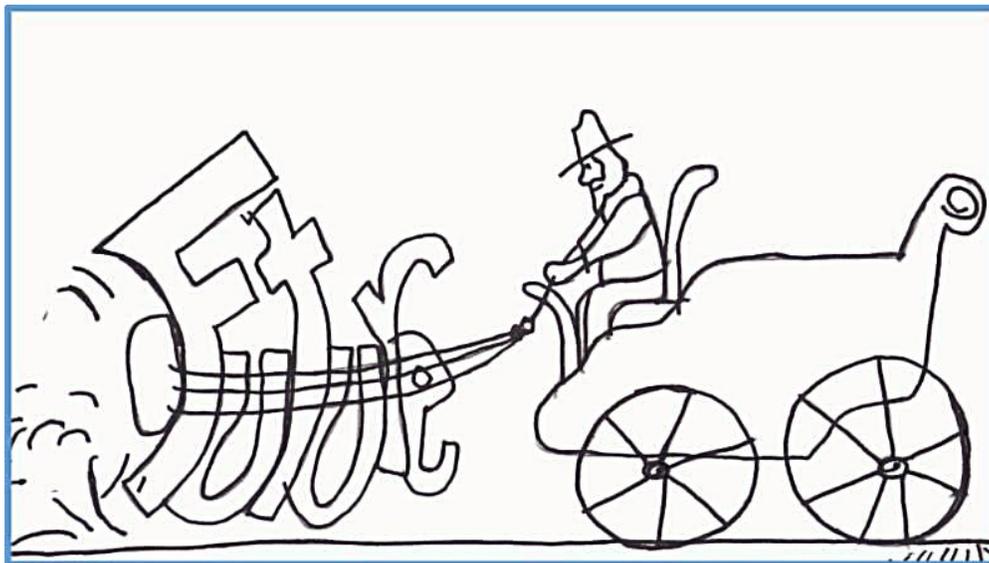
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Insights and smart practices from your content team

Issue No. 15

February 2018



METAPHORICAL MINEFIELDS

Sometimes the best and quickest way to communicate an idea is to paint a picture with words. Metaphors and other evocative language can create 'aha' moments for readers with minimal explanation. But as with any tool, there are some important safety rules to follow -- because evocative language, when misused, can cause confusion or undermine credibility.

THE MALEVOLENT 'MALAPHOR'

A malaphor is a metaphor whose parts don't add up. It may sound like a familiar phrase, but the meaning is jumbled. Consider:

"Harnessing the future"

Things often get "harnessed" in marketing copy, suggesting something powerful brought under control. But not everything is harnessable -- especially not abstract concepts like "the future". If the point is about accelerating progress, an apt alternative might be, "...leaping forward into the future." Or maybe no metaphor is needed, e.g., "...realizing the possibilities of the future."

"Spurring the landscape"

Spurs create drive. Landscapes indicate environments: commercial, technological, political. While you might drive *change* that alters a landscape, the landscape itself isn't going anywhere (one would hope!).

One thing these examples highlight is that when metaphors become commonplace it's easy to forget their metaphorical nature. So a first step to using them correctly is recognizing them for what they are. Verbs like *leverage*, *channel*, *carve*, *drive*, *propel*, *conquer* and *capture* (the list goes on) are all metaphors.

MIXED METAPHOR MASHUPS

Effective metaphors are logically consistent. When two or more get used together, that logic can get tangled:

"As we navigate the coming months, we will forge partnerships and topple barriers."

This certainly conjures up an image: someone clutching a map, stoking a fire and knocking things over all at the same time. With metaphors, less is usually more.

"We push the envelope by leveraging out-of-the-box thinking."

This combination of aspirational engineering phrase, Grade 9 physics term and creativity cliché conjures up an image like a Picasso still life: it might be fun to look at but there's no clear meaning.

WHEN LOGIC BREAKS DOWN

Sometimes when reaching for inspiration, writers inadvertently break the logic of an idea (we have plenty of our own discarded first drafts to prove it). Phrases like "excellence at its best" or "a masterpiece of brilliance" might sound lofty, but since excellence typically *is* "the best" and masterpieces are by nature brilliant, these say little.

To make sure evocative language achieves the impact you intend, take a step back and interrogate the logic of it. Use it carefully. And if you're 'wrestling' with an idea you're unsure of, email us at info@ascribeinc.ca.

punc'd*

WHO INVENTED THE QUESTION MARK?



PUNC'D tells the hidden stories of punctuation marks and how they make writing clearer and more powerful.

What's shaped like a shepherd's crook and sits at the end of interrogative clauses and phrases? The question mark, of course. Though it also goes by other names: interrogation point, query and eroteme.

The origin of this piece of punctuation is a bit of a question mark itself. Some trace it back to the Latin word for question -- *qvaestio*, which was abbreviated to "qo". At some point the "q" was placed above the "o" to form something resembling the symbol used today. Others credit an eighth-century monk, Alcuin of York, who needed a way to signal questions in holy texts when read silently. (When read aloud or sung, rising intonation would signal a question.)

Alcuin seems to be the front-running candidate for creator of the question mark today: his motive aligns with the mark's modern use as a substitute for the upward vocal inflection that accompanies spoken questions.

In the 1800s, it was proposed the question mark could be flipped horizontally and used to punctuate ironic or sarcastic statements, but the idea never caught on.

content matters*

TUQUE REINVENTS INSURANCE

Technology continues to transform many well-established sectors -- from transportation to hospitality to satellite and cable TV. Online insurance broker tuque set its sights on the insurance industry with a website and app that let insurance owners update their policies on-demand as their circumstances change. Ascribe is proud to have supported tuque's launch by writing the copy for its new site, mytuque.ca.



shout-out*

ASCRIBE'S 2017 CLIENT SURVEY RESULTS ARE IN

A shout-out to all our clients who provided feedback through our 2017 customer survey. We were pleased to hear we're delivering to the quality standard we aspire to across all our performance criteria, and that our services continue to be in demand -- in particular, ongoing content development support, editing, event coverage and proofreading. The survey confirmed interest in our Marketer's Toolkit, so we'll be rolling out more of those pieces in the coming months and exploring the prospect of offering Best Practices writing workshops as well.

ASCRIBE 2017 CLIENT SURVEY RESULTS

Quality of work	4.71 / 5
Process	4.65 / 5
Client service	4.65 / 5
Strategic thinking	4.41 / 5
Agility/responsiveness	4.47 / 5
Capacity to deliver	4.65 / 5
Ability to meet deadlines	4.76 / 5

practice point*

PROTECT YOUR WORK FROM CRASHES IN WORD

We've all faced that dreaded pop up: "Microsoft Word has encountered a problem and needs to close." Of course, the program has an auto-recover feature. But wait: you open the recovered file and where is that beautifully written page or perfectly formatted table? Gone.

Sure, you try to recreate what was lost, but your momentum is broken. You miss your deadline, your boss fires you, your mortgage forecloses, and you wind up destitute and penniless because auto-recover failed you.

OK, that might be a *bit* of an exaggeration. But losing any amount of work due to a crash can be a huge productivity drain.

Fortunately, this can be avoided. Word's default setting is to generate auto-recovery files every 10 minutes. This is easy to change:

- 1a. In macOS, open **Word menu > Preferences > Save**.
- 1b. In Windows, open **File menu > Options > Save**.
2. Set Word to auto-save once every minute.

If Word crashes and you haven't saved in a while, the recovered file will be more recent.

It's also good practice to periodically copy your project to the cloud or an external drive to protect against file corruption or system failure.



moments in storytelling*

This is where we look back at some of the big milestones in storytelling history. If you're interested in learning more about our take on stories, check out our [Story Book](#).

2017

The #MeToo hashtag spreads across social media, encouraging women to tell their personal stories of sexual harassment or assault -- empowering through empathy while revealing the magnitude of the issue.

1949

Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* kicks off second-wave feminism by going beyond suffrage to raise issues of sexuality, family and the workplace. The Vatican puts it on its list of prohibited books.

1914

Nellie McClung and other Manitoba suffragettes stage a mock parliament, delivering a witty, humorous rebuttal to the notion that "nice women don't want the vote." Two years later, the province recognizes women's right to vote.



Planning your content program for 2018? We can help.

Would you like support with defining a clear program for strategic content development in the coming year? Ascribe can organize and guide a discussion with your marcom team and executives. We'll help you confirm strategic themes, campaign angles and the right product mix for your sales journey, summarizing the outcomes of the session in an actionable plan. **Email dale@ascribeinc.ca to learn more.**

Questions? Suggestions? Send us an [email](mailto:dale@ascribeinc.ca). To find out more about us, visit www.ascribeinc.ca.

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