

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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EITHER WRITE
SOMETHING
WORTH READING
OR DO SOMETHING
WORTH WRITING.

– Benjamin Franklin

January 2022, Issue 38



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY

It's a common phrase touted by parents, advisors, and more: "choose your words carefully." These days it's especially fitting, as people everywhere are working toward justice, equity, and diversity goals.

One of those goals should be to get into the habit of using inclusive language. It might seem obvious, but the words we use can make the difference between creating a feeling of connectedness and creating distrust. How the reader interprets your writing is more important than how you intended it to be read.

Luckily, this [Content Guide](#)—created by 18F, an office within the federal government's General Services Administration—has the scoop. Here we'll highlight what we think are the main sections.

The Basics

Understand community preferences. Some communities, including the autism, blind, and deaf communities, prefer identify-first language. For example, "a blind man" or "an autistic woman." Other communities prefer a person-first description, such as "a woman on our engineering team." If you cannot find what the preference is, default to a person-first construction. In all cases, if it's not relevant to the topic, there's no need to include it. Also important: avoid idioms, jargon, and acronyms. All of these can be confusing to people who don't have specialized knowledge or aren't familiar with a specific region or country. Lastly, don't use phrases that suggest victimhood. For example, "confined to a wheelchair" or "afflicted by."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Every person is a whole person—no matter how they interact with the world. When you're writing about someone, focus on what they need to do or what tools they use, and avoid making assumptions. Again, if it's not pertinent to the topic, there's no need to include a person's situation, medical condition, illness, or injury. If you do need to include it, be as specific as possible and avoid inserting value judgements (for example, use "has multiple sclerosis," not "suffers from"). Avoid describing people as "disabled" or "handicapped" and don't use terms that contribute to stigmas, such as "blind spot" or "tone deaf."

Just avoid this one in general, unless it's relevant to what you're writing about. That includes using references to age as novice or beginner (for example, don't say "so easy your grandmother could do it," and while we're at it, don't use women in this way, either). If you do have to reference age, use "older person" or "senior" as opposed to "elderly."



This is where we see the biggest difference. The main point is to make content as gender neutral as possible. If you're writing about a hypothetical person or if you're unsure of the person's pronouns, use they or them instead of he or she. It might feel weird at first, but the impact is more inclusive. Watch out for words and phrases that indicate gender bias, such as descriptions of appearance. Don't use "guys" as a way to refer to mixed-gender groups. Make sure you're using a neutral version of phrases like "man-made climate change" (use human-made) and "unmanned research vessel" (use uncrewed). The [AP Style Book](#) has a great gender-neutral language section. For more detailed guidance on LGBTQ+ issues, see the [National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Style Guide](#) or the [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#).

Overall, if you aren't sure, just ask! Strive to include language that reflects peoples' choices and style in how they talk about themselves. In the end, you'll have happier readers and reach even more folks just like them.

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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured product: NOAA's Tiny Tutorials (#TinyTutorials)

Source: NOAA Education's (@NOAAEducation) Instagram stories, [instagram.com/stories/highlights/18068558398156913](https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/18068558398156913)

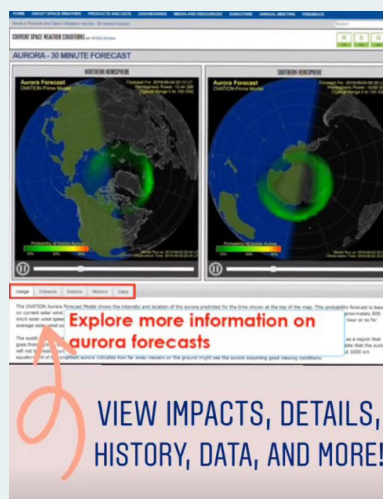
Submitted by: Caitlyn McCrary, Lynker in support of NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

What it is: The NOAA Education program uses the stories feature of their Instagram to highlight a tool (for example, Historical Hurricane Tracks), using three or four graphics, with text, to walk users step-by-step through how to complete one task within that tool.

Why I like it: When you think of a tutorial, you typically think of a long, cumbersome document. These "Tiny Tutorials" combine screenshots or graphics with a small snippet of information on how to complete one key thing. They're quick, straightforward, and easy to digest. Not only do they do a great job of teaching that one thing, they're also a great example of how to accomplish one goal, and not try to check all the boxes or do everything at once. Sometimes (oftentimes, actually) less is more!



(Please note: this is not an endorsement of the designer, website, or any proprietary tools, but simply this writer's opinion on a good communication product.)



FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – DIGITAL COAST TOPIC PAGES

Topics pages on the Digital Coast can help you and your audience find what they need easily, instead of having to search for specific tools or resources. These pages recently got a fresh, new look, including greater context and a more user-friendly design. There's also a new [Coastal Inundation](#) topics page, making it that much easier to access the many NOAA resources—trainings, risk communication publications, even information on funding opportunities—that can lead your audience to exactly what they need to help them do their jobs. Find them here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/topics.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

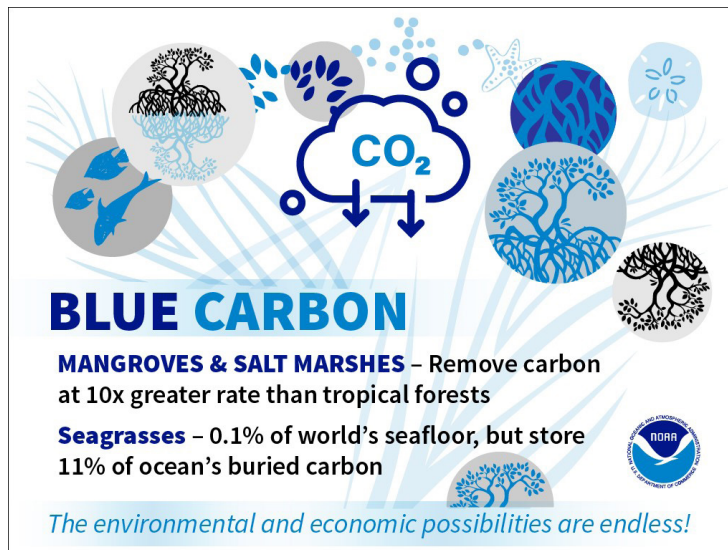
Join us in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Coastal Zone Management Act all year long. Use #OceanandCoast50 and get social each week with the following themes:

- January 12 to 14: Conserve energy
- January 17 to 21: Reduce water use
- January 24 to 28: Reduce paper use
- January 31 to February 4: Reduce carbon footprint

TRAINING VIDEO: WHAT IS STORM SURGE?

The dangers of storm surge are one of the key messages for coastal communicators. But first thing's first: before you can get your audience involved, you need to make sure they know what storm surge is. Share this compelling video—available in both English and Spanish—that starts at the beginning to help audiences understand what it is, the effects it can have on their communities, and why it's important to be vigilant. Access it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/what-is-storm-surge.html.

FAST FACTS – BLUE CARBON



This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/blue-carbon.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

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Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

View past issues at coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html.

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Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.