

CREATE GREAT CONTENT

WITH A LAYERED APPROACH

A WHITE PAPER

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Create Great Content with a Layered Approach



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Executive Summary: Create Great Content with a Layered Approach

A layered approach to content creation breaks your information into more easily digestible chunks.

Developing great content is critical for engaging your audience. You need to convey your message in a way that ensures your audience gets what they need while maintaining their attention. You will have readers with varying interest levels and reading goals attempting to get information from the same content. Using a layered approach to creating content allows for flexibility while encouraging your audience to absorb all of the information you need to convey.

Lure Your Audience into Staying and Reading

More than a simple outline, a layered approach to content creation pulls key information from the overall message and creates an organized structure that is visually easy on the reader. For example, the appropriately-named “skimming layer” allows your audience to skim through your content quickly and find information directly related to their needs. When they find what they are looking for it remains framed within the overall content, giving the reader context about other important information you’re presenting and introducing to them. It is during this skimming that they will decide if it is beneficial for them to invest more time reading at a more comprehensive level.

The Layered Approach is Easy on Readers

A layered approach to content creation breaks your information into more easily digestible chunks. This approach can be used to deliver content in a variety of formats, from informational articles to sales-oriented brochures. When you create content following this approach there are many benefits, including:

- The audience has the flexibility to skim and pick up information as needed
- Reader comprehension increases when information is broken down into logical chunks
- Planning is required, focusing the content creator on the goal of the content
- Once the initial framework is established, the content creation process is simpler

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The Layered Approach: Everything in its Place

A layered approach can be the difference between being read and being ignored.

Writing and cooking are both processes that involve creating content and presenting it to be happily consumed by your audience. How would your dinner guests react if you prepared a meal, but instead of serving things up properly, you put a little of everything into a large bowl and stirred it up? The overall flavor of your meal would be affected, and if someone didn't like your green beans, they wouldn't be able to eat around them easily.

Using a layered approach to creating content is a lot like serving up a meal that's been plated properly. Everything has its place, it is visually appealing, and the person knows what they're getting. If they want to start in one particular place they can, and if there is anything they don't need they can ignore it. This is the way people want to eat meals and take in new information.

So Much Information, So Little Time

Your audience has precious little time in their day and that means you have even less time to grab their attention. Once you finally get your potential readers' eyes on your information, you've got one chance to make a great impression. Your content needs to be clear at a glance, inviting and informational without being overwhelming. The layered approach gives the reader easy access to the information you're communicating, increasing the chance that they will find information they need and decide to read further.

Clean, Clear and to the Point: The Layered Approach

Writing can be challenging, even when you're an experienced writer. Creating content that engages your audience and inspires them to action is even more challenging. When you use the layered approach to create content, you are focused on calling out critical information and easing your audience into a deeper reading of the material at hand. Once the commitment has been made to convey your information, spending a little extra time to incorporate a layered approach can be the difference between being read and being ignored.

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The Layered Approach Benefits All Content Creators

You can keep your content from being lost in a sea of text by using a layered approach to content development. This approach helps the writer by providing a framework that keeps him or her focused, and creates content that is easily distributed in a variety of formats. Still the biggest winner is the reader, who realizes many benefits, including:

- Critical information is called out and highlighted in a variety of ways
- A skim layer provides information at a glance
- Multiple points of entry for the casual reader
- A comprehensive reading layer which provides detailed information and data

What is the Goal of the Layered Approach?

The goal of the layered approach is to appeal to time challenged audiences who wish to invest the minimum amount of time to determine if the content being delivered has value before reading further.

When readers pick up something new they judge, consciously or subconsciously, the information they are receiving. We have all experienced a time when we began reading something that we thought was going to appeal to us, but after a few moments we have decided the item was not worthy of our effort and moved on. When ideas are not properly presented you will lose your audience, even when the information is important or interesting.

Readers are looking for value and assurance that reading your article will be a good use of their time.

Building on the Best Practices of Journalism

When learning to write articles, journalism students learn about the idea of the inverted pyramid. A news story should cover the most newsworthy information first, informing the reader up front about the wide base of the story and drilling down to the point with more information. The layered approach takes this a step further, encouraging us to leave a variety of breadcrumbs to lead our readers down the trail of our story.

The following are the key components of the layered approach and how your audience will interact with each layer to determine the value of the content in front of them.

The Skimming Layer

The Preliminary Reading Layer

The Comprehensive Reading Layer

And this is how they work together...

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LAYERED APPROACH

Skimming

Preliminary

Comprehensive

1

The Skimming Layer

Readers will often skim through a document one page at a time, looking for details that relate to their needs before committing to a comprehensive reading. Readers are looking for value and assurance that this will be a good use of their time. The reader will only spend a few seconds per page as they review the material and decide if they are going to move on to the next layer. Be sure to use those precious few seconds! During this initial review, readers may look at:

- Headlines or Section Break text
- Index or Table of Contents
- Highlighted Quotes
- Illustrations
- Specially formatted text

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The Preliminary Reading Layer

Once a reader has found the information they are looking for in the first layer they will spend an additional amount of time digging in deeper. This is where readers will target specific areas that interest them, look at headlines, and maybe browse the initial few sentences of a section. If they find credible, well presented information that relates to their business needs, this is where the reader will commit to the deepest layer of investment in your content, the comprehensive reading layer.

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The Comprehensive Reading and Recommendation Layer

This is the point where our reader has committed to reading at a comprehensive level, and may recommend the article to others. To get the reader here we need to engage them when they are reviewing the first two layers, showing them that we have information they need and that we respect their time by presenting it in a way that is easy to digest.

Combining this layered approach with a brief writing style that caters to the modern attention span, the writer is able to convey complex concepts in easily digestible pieces.

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Happy Readers Keep Reading!

The layered approach shows readers that we respect their time by presenting information in a way that is easy to digest.

The layered approach lures audiences into reading using a variety of tactics, including:

- **Using a visual design** that avoids burying important information.
- **Adding a Skim Layer** that assists readers who want high-level information before fully committing.
- **Highlighting quotes and graphics** which break up text and drive home criticaling points.
- **Create a Preliminary Reading Layer** hich allows the reader to pick up basics and commit to comprehensive reading.
- **Encouraging brevity** and the use of summaries or graphics to convey information quickly.

The Layered Approach Compliments the Writing Process

From the content creator's perspective, the layered approach establishes a framework and can help them avoid being overly wordy or going off on a tangent. Brainstorming before writing and crafting the overall plan for your article will further bring into focus the most important information to convey to your audience, and can help organize thoughts around these key concepts.

Once an article is written using the layered approach as a guide, there are many publishing options. Information found in the skim layer can be used to create enticing teasers, published in a variety of formats to gain a larger audience. Content developed this way can be used for a single article or reused frequently as part of an ongoing campaign to get your message in front of your audience.

A Tale of Two Stories

To demonstrate the huge difference the layered approach can have on a chunk of text, take a look at the example below. On the next page the information is fundamentally the same as the blurb you see below. The only difference between these two items is the way the information is presented.

Below is an example of unformatted text, free of headlines, pulled quotes or interesting graphics. It is short, so we can read it if we wish and try to figure out the author's point.

Exhibit A: Unformatted Information

Board games played for family fun in the United States have undergone a transformation over the last twenty years, and today the average game buyer has more choices than ever. The board game revolution has increased the range of games available for a family to play, adding games that rely less on luck and more on skill. Sophisticated players may still be willing to spend an evening with friends playing a traditional tabletop game like Monopoly for the social aspects, in spite of game mechanics that favor the player who takes the first turn and rely heavily on a lucky roll of the dice. Modern game designers understand how to create rules that subtly change board games in positive ways. They can adjust for things like the first player advantage, making games about learning on the fly, and forcing players to adjust to opponents' actions. A game like Ticket to Ride by Days of Wonder includes expansions that add depth to the game and build on the foundation of well-constructed rules to extend the enjoyment of a game for years. Ticket to Ride is an example of a modern, balanced game that is fun for children as well as adults.

Board Games Have Changed for the Better

If you read through that dense paragraph you have figured out the main point: board games have changed considerably in the last twenty years. Not too tricky, but if this was more than a short example it would be difficult to quickly ascertain the author's point by glancing at what has been presented. Now contrast that experience to the example (Exhibit B) of text created with a layered approach on the next page, remembering that the information contained is almost identical.

Exhibit B: The Layered Approach to Presenting our Information

The Board Game Revolution is Happening!

Board games played for family fun in the United States have undergone a transformation over the last twenty years, and today the average game buyer has more choices than ever. The board game revolution has increased the range of games available for a family to play, adding games that rely less on luck and more on skill.

Modern game designers understand how to create rules that subtly change board games in positive ways.

Less Luck, More Skill, More Fun!

Sophisticated players may still be willing to spend an evening with friends playing a traditional tabletop game like Monopoly for the social aspects, in spite of game mechanics that favor the player who takes the first turn and rely heavily on a lucky roll of the dice. Modern game designers understand how to create rules that subtly change board games in positive ways. They can adjust for things like the first player advantage, making games about learning on the fly, and forcing players to adjust to opponents' actions.

Better Game Design = More Fun!

Some ways game designers are balancing games to make them more fun:

Play Until the Game is Over

If players will be eliminated, it is toward the end of the game, ensuring a new game soon.

Less Randomization

Minimal randomizing factors like dice. Cards or custom dice are used to ensure more balanced outcomes.

Simple Games can Have Depth

A game like Ticket to Ride by Days of Wonder includes expansions that add depth to the game and build on the foundation of well-constructed rules to extend the enjoyment of a game for years. Ticket to Ride is an example of a modern, balanced game that is fun for children as well as adults.

A Quick Glance is All You Need

Organizing the content in layers allows the reader to breeze past the details without missing the main points. It almost feels like we didn't have to read at all! The goal is to make reading easier on the reader with higher retention, and in this example all we had to do was spend a little time thinking about:

- What is the most important information we need to convey?
- What quote from this page will convey our message quickly while enticing the reader?
- How can we visually convey our message?

When a reader first encounters this page, they have the option to use the layers we have created to determine if the content is going to meet their needs. If they chose to read in layers, they might see the page like this:

The Skimming Layer Reader Looks at the Highlights

The Board Game Revolution is Happening!

Less Luck, More Skill, More Fun!

Modern game designers understand how to create rules that subtly change board games in positive ways.

Better Game Design = More Fun!

Simple Games can Have Depth

The Preliminary Reading Layer Reader Investigates Areas of Interest

The Board Game Revolution is Happening!
Board games played for family fun in the United States have undergone a transformation over the last twenty years.

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Play Until the Game is Over If players will be eliminated, it is toward the end of the game, ensuring a new game soon.	Less Randomization Minimal randomizing factors like dice, cards or custom dice are used to ensure more balanced outcomes.
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A game like Ticket to Ride by Days of Wonder includes expansions that add depth to the game and build on the foundation of well-constructed rules to extend the enjoyment of a game for years.

The Comprehensive Reading Layer The Reader is Ready to Read It All!

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Conclusion: The Layered Approach Makes Content Leap Off of the Page

Using a layered approach to creating content increases reader retention while encouraging your audience to continue reading. Readers have precious little time, and the layered approach gives them quick access to critical information.

The Value of the Layered Approach

As we have reviewed, there are many benefits to this method, including:

- Creates a skim layer, allowing the reader the ability to grasp key concepts easily
- Encourages your audience to dig into the comprehensive reading layer
- Assists the content creator, providing a framework and calling out critical information

Once we've committed to creating content, the small amount of extra time required to use the layered approach will add considerable value. Once you've spent the time making a great meal, spending a few extra moments to present it appropriately can make it amazing. Put another way, presenting your content using the layered approach will add a "wow" factor to your work.

The layered approach will add to the impact of your content.

Help Your Ideas Soar!

Creating great content is a real challenge. The layered approach will add to the impact of your content, encouraging more readers to fully consume your content and ensuring they get your point. We have shown you the difference between an unformatted block of text and the layered approach to presenting that content. No matter the topic, using a layered approach to creating content is the perfect way to call out your mission critical data, encourage readers, and bring your point home.

About Your Sponsor

We've provided this paper about creating great content using a layered approach because we believe your content shouldn't just be good, it should be great! We have used this method effectively on many occasions and want to share our knowledge. In this paper we have shown you how a layered approach to content creation is beneficial to you and your audience, clarifying your critical communication points while allowing your audience to get the information they need.

When you're ready to create great content and get it out to your audience, we're here to help you look great. Communications of all forms are our specialty, and we value the opportunity to assist you with your next big project. Contact us today to find out what we can do to help you get your message heard!

Contact Us

Origo Communications
20-4480 Chesswood Dr
Toronto, ON M3J 2B9

416.398.7678
Origo.ca