

**This isn't a technical talk
about creating photos and
videos.**

This talk is about

- What kinds of visuals work on a website
- How to get those visuals
- How to keep getting them

in other words, **visual content strategy**

“Content strategy is the practice of planning for the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable content.”

—Kristina Halvorson

Visual content strategy is the practice of planning for the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable **photos and videos**.

—— Why do we even need visuals?

**It's the 21st century.
Of course your site
will have visuals.**

event calendar

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

help, faq, abuse, legal
avoid scams & fraud
personal safety tips

about craigslist
best-of-craigslist
craigslist is hiring
what's new
system status

craigslist charitable



craig newmark
philanthropies

community

activities lost+found
artists missed
childcare connections
classes musicians
events pets
general politics
groups rants & raves
local news rideshare
volunteers

services

automotive labor/move
beauty legal
cell/mobile lessons
computer marine
creative pet
cycle real estate
event skilled trade
farm+garden sm biz ads
financial travel/vac
health/well write/ed/tran
household

discussion forums

apple	frugal	philos
arts	gaming	photo
atheist	garden	politics
autos	haiku	psych
beauty	help	recover
bikes	history	religion
celebs	housing	rofo
comp	jobs	science
cosmos	jokes	spirit
diet	legal	sports
divorce	manners	super
dying	marriage	tax
eco	money	travel
feedback	music	tv
film	open	vegan
fixit	parent	words
food	pets	writing

housing

apts / housing
housing swap
housing wanted
office / commercial
parking / storage
real estate for sale
rooms / shared
rooms wanted
sublets / temporary
vacation rentals

for sale

antiques	farm+garden
appliances	free
arts+crafts	furniture
atv/utv/sno	garage sale
auto parts	general
aviation	heavy equip
baby+kid	household
barter	jewelry
beauty+hlth	materials
bike parts	motorcycle parts
bikes	motorcycles
boat parts	music instr
boats	photo+video
books	rvs+camp
business	sporting
cars+trucks	tickets
cds/dvd/vhs	tools
cell phones	toys+games
clothes+acc	trailers
collectibles	video gaming
computer parts	wanted
computers	wheels+tires
electronics	

jobs

accounting+finance
admin / office
arch / engineering
art / media / design
biotech / science
business / mgmt
customer service
education
etc / misc
food / bev / hosp
general labor
government
human resources
legal / paralegal
manufacturing
marketing / pr / ad
medical / health
nonprofit sector
real estate
retail / wholesale
sales / biz dev
salon / spa / fitness
security
skilled trade / craft
software / qa / dba
systems / network
technical support
transport
tv / film / video
web / info design
writing / editing

gigs

computer	event
creative	labor
crew	talent
domestic	writing

resumes

nearby ci

akron-canton
altoona
ashtabula
athens
charleston
chautauqua
cleveland
columbus
cumberland val
eastern wv
erie
frederick
harrisburg
harrisonburg
mansfield
meadville
morgantown
northern wv
parkersburg
sandusky
state college
tuscarawas co
twin tiers
western md
west virginia
williamsport
winchester
york
youngstown
zanesville

us cities

us states

canada

ci worldwide

**It's the 21st century.
Of course your site
will (probably) have visuals.**

**The most effective visuals
do more than decorate.**

Diagramming



Image: [Santa Clara University](#)

What's more effective?

- A. Describing the room layout with words?
- B. Showing the room layout in a diagram?

Conveying emotions



Image: [University of Louisiana Lafayette](#)

What's more effective?

- A. Saying your students love it here
- B. Showing your students loving it here

Providing proof points



Image: [St. Lawrence University](#)

What's more effective?

- A. Saying your university is outdoorsy
- B. Showing your students in canoes

Telling stories



Image: [Pitzer College](#)

What's more effective?

- A. **Talking** about the student-run organic garden on campus
- B. **Showing** students working in the organic garden on campus



Videos can do the same thing (but slower)

Videos: [St. Lawrence U](#), [Pitzer College](#), [U of Louisiana at Lafayette](#)

**It's about showing ,
not just telling .**


**It's about showing ,
not just decorating .**

~~**Diagramming**~~

Conveying emotions

Providing proof points

Telling stories



**We'll concentrate
on images and
videos that do
these things**

— **Some ways higher ed
visuals go wrong**

What you're saying

"You'll love being a part of our vibrant campus community."



Image: [SK](#)

What you're showing



What you're saying

"You'll love being a part of
our vibrant campus
community."



Image: [Elvis Ripley](#)

What you're showing



What you're saying

"You'll love being a part of our vibrant campus community."



Image: iStock

What you're showing



iStock™

Credit: Prostock-Studio

Refine

All Color & Mood

Orientation

Number of people

Age

Ethnicity



What you're saying

"You'll love being a part of
our vibrant campus
community."



Image: [Pitzer College](#)

What you're showing



What you're saying

"As a student here, you will be able to participate in our groundbreaking research."



What you're showing



What you're saying

"As a student here, you will be able to participate in our groundbreaking research."



Image: [University of Louisiana at Lafayette](#)

What you're showing



What you're saying

"At our university you will benefit from hands-on learning."



What you're showing



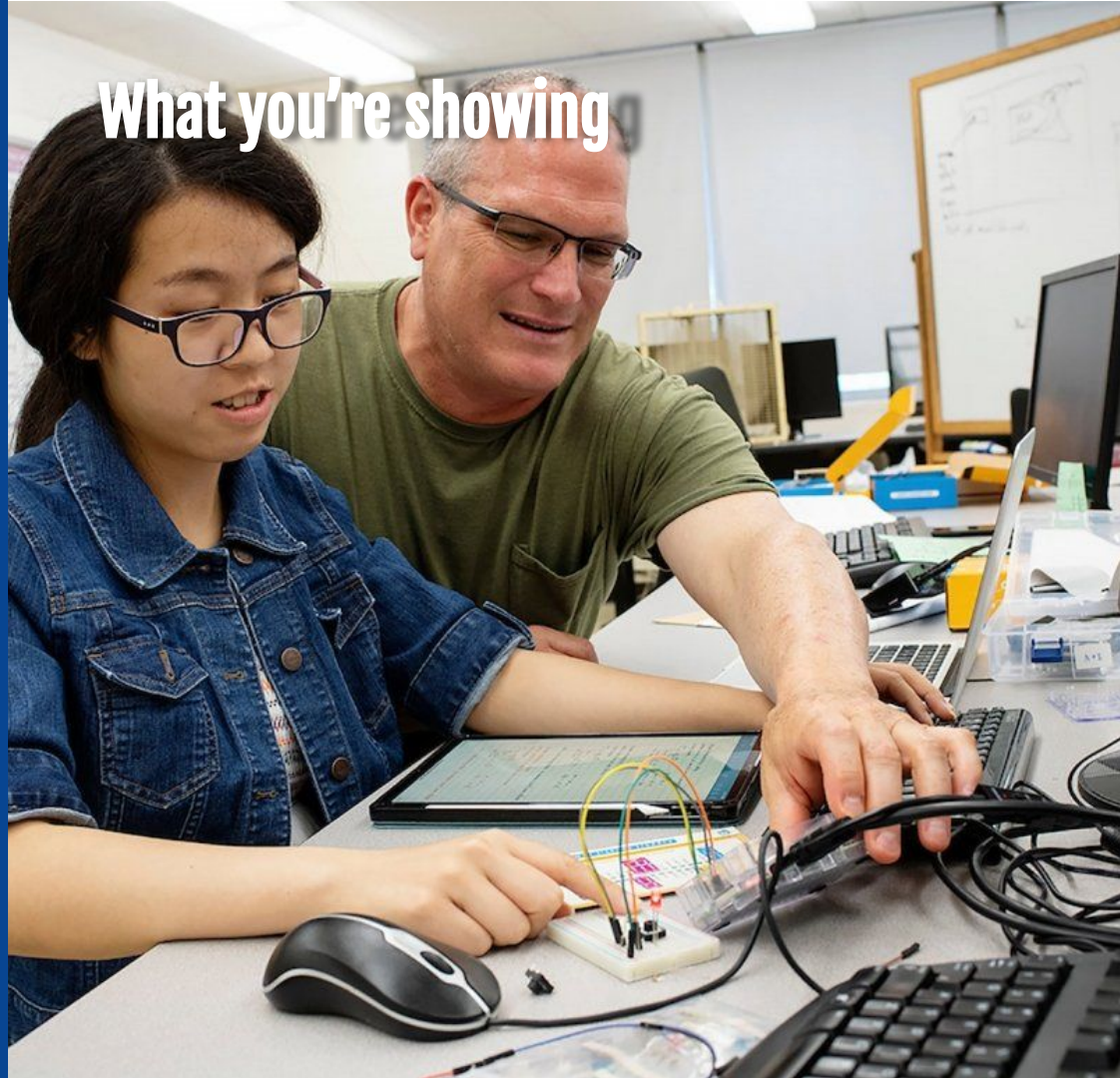
What you're saying

"At our university you will benefit from hands-on learning."



Image: [St. Lawrence University](#)

What you're showing



What you're saying

“At our university you will benefit from hands-on learning.”



Image: [Pitzer College](#)

What you're showing



Visuals that work...

...depend on what
you're saying

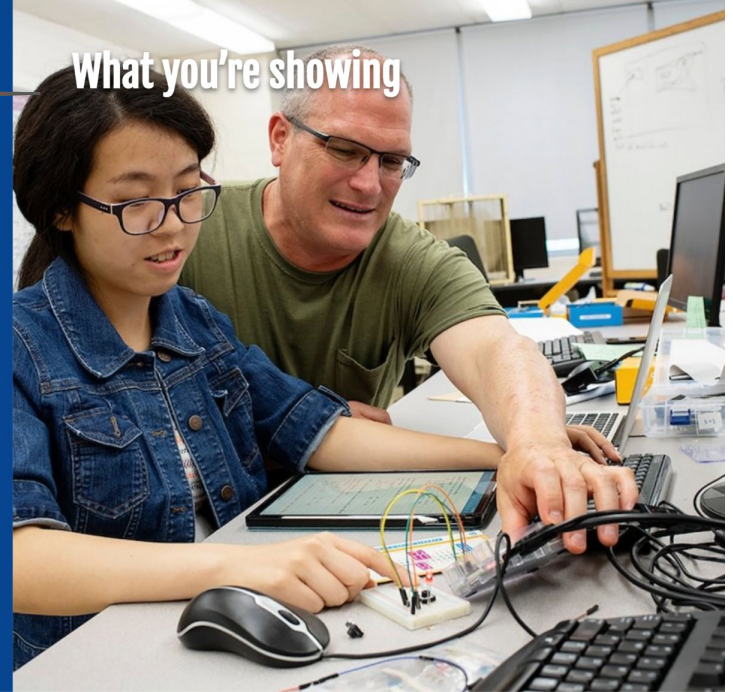
What you're saving

"At our university you will
benefit from hands-on
learning."



Image: [St. Lawrence University](#)

What you're showing



— **Let's take a short break to go on a
journey of (institutional)
self-discovery**

**To create and choose good
visuals, you need to know
who your institution is.**

**You should have it written
down.**

**It's your messaging
architecture .**

What's a messaging architecture?

- 3 to 5 key things (messages) that
 - Your audiences need to know about your institution
 - To differentiate you from other schools, colleges, and universities
- Those messages serve as guideposts when you're developing *any* kind of content—including visuals

A strong messaging architecture...

- Helps you create content that sets your school apart, which helps you...
- Communicate those 3 to 5 things everyone needs to know about your school

Source: [St. Lawrence University](#)



1:1

Tree-To-Student Ratio

At St. Lawrence, there's a tree with your name on it (at least for four years).

12

Residence Halls

20

**miles from the
Adirondack Park and
Canadian Border**

1,000

**acre campus with
plenty of green space**

80 acres of our campus are designated as "low-mow zones," intended to preserve natural wildlife habitats like bees, wildflowers, and birds.



#24

Friendliest Students

Princeton Review, 2024

98%

live on campus

150+

clubs and organizations



17

Theme Houses

Live within a close-knit community of students with passions ranging from artistic expression and advocacy, to substance-free living, outdoor adventures, music, and more.

6

Campus Eateries

35

varsity athletic teams

At St. Lawrence University...

Students have a close-knit community, enjoy outdoor activities, and care about the environment.



1:1
Tree-To-Student Ratio

At St. Lawrence, there's a tree with your name on it (at least for four years).

1,000
acre campus with plenty of green space

80 acres of our campus are designated as "low-mow zones," intended to preserve natural wildlife habitats like bees, wildflowers, and birds.



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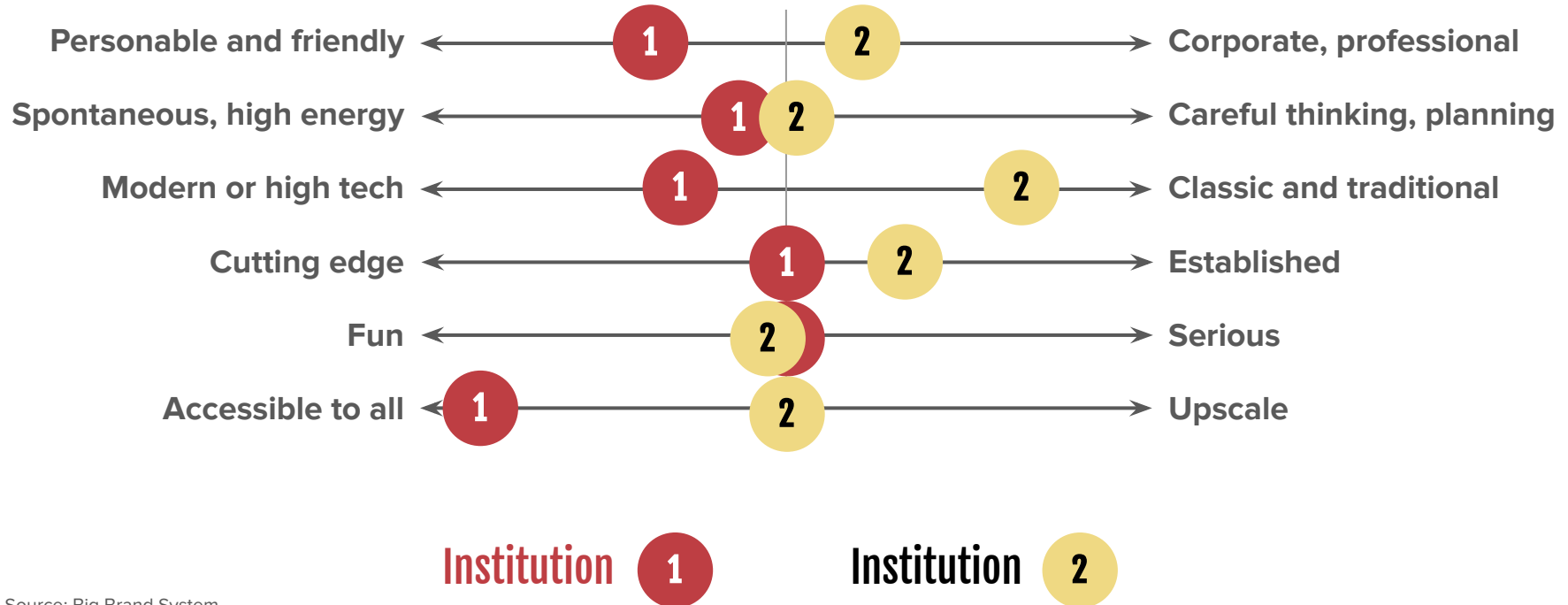
6
Campus Eateries

35
varsity athletic teams

**Developing a messaging
architecture is worthwhile,
but it's a journey.**

A tale of two institutions

BRAND PERSONALITY SPECTRUM



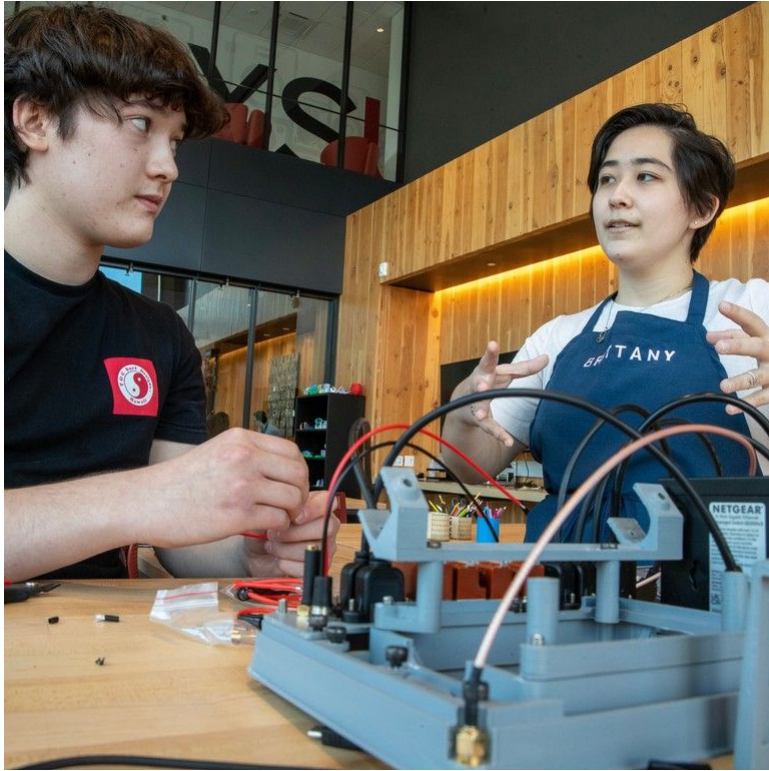
A tale of two institutions

Institution 1

- Institution 1 is a forward-thinking university, with programs in the most in-demand fields and modern facilities.
- We welcome people of all backgrounds to our community. You'll fit in here.

Institution 2

- Institution 2 is a traditional, residential institution featuring a classic liberal arts education.
- We have an unparalleled record at placing our grads in high-paying jobs at major corporations.



Institution 1 is a forward-thinking university, with programs in the most in-demand fields and modern facilities.

Source: [Seattle University](#)



Institution 2 is a traditional, residential institution featuring a classic liberal arts education.

— **Some ways higher ed
videos go wrong**

Video mistake #1

Videos are great for showing, but only showing a speaker is really just telling

Holding a viewer's attention as a talking head is a skill most people don't have

Source: TED

Not visual



**This meeting
could have been
an email.**

**This lecture video
could have been
a podcast .**

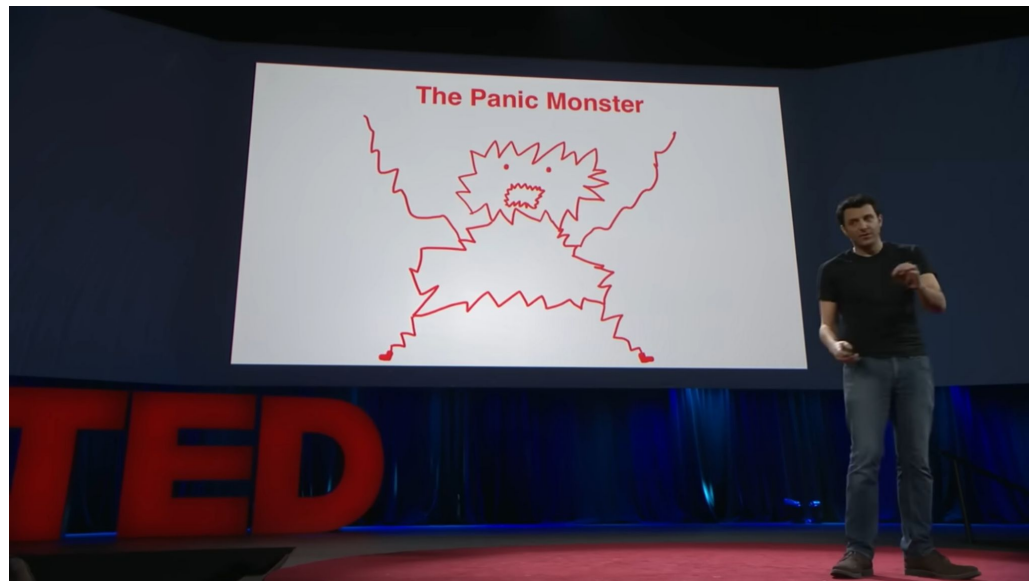
Video mistake #2

Viewers can deal with
poor-quality video better
than they can deal with
poor-quality sound

Wireless mics are aces

Source: [TED](#)

Poor sound



*the sound on this video is actually fine

**the Mikes of the world want you
to know it's spelled m-i-c-s

Video mistake #3

A study of 30- to 60-second movie trailer video ads displayed on Facebook found that 70% of viewers abandoned the ad within within the first half.

Too long

“The video durations ranged from 30 to 60 seconds, and the data showed that 90 percent of those who watched the first three seconds of the video did not watch the entire ad. Consumers abandoned the ads at different times, but 70 percent of them tuned out within the first half.”



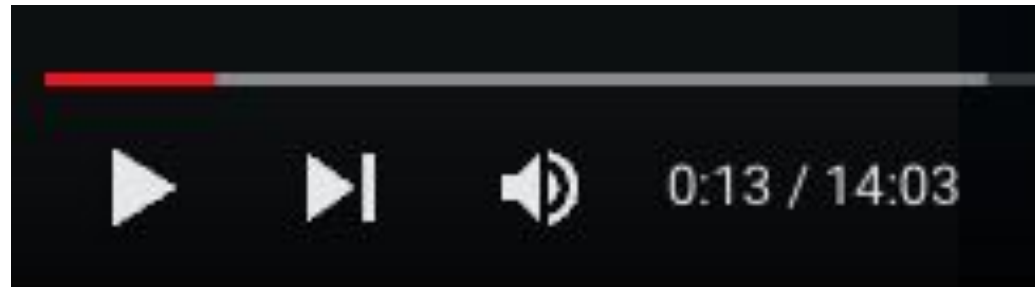
Video mistake #3

Viewers will stay with videos they choose to watch for longer.

But don't expect viewers to watch a 14-minute video unless they are already pretty interested in the topic.

Too long

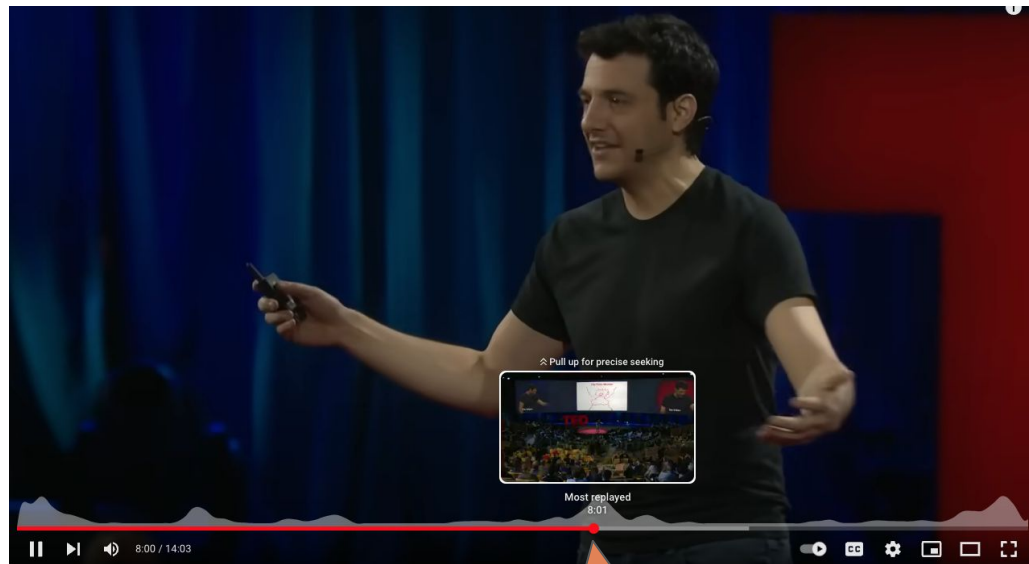
“The video durations ranged from 30 to 60 seconds, and the data showed that 90 percent of those who watched the first three seconds of the video did not watch the entire ad. Consumers abandoned the ads at different times, but 70 percent of them tuned out within the first half.”



Video mistake #4

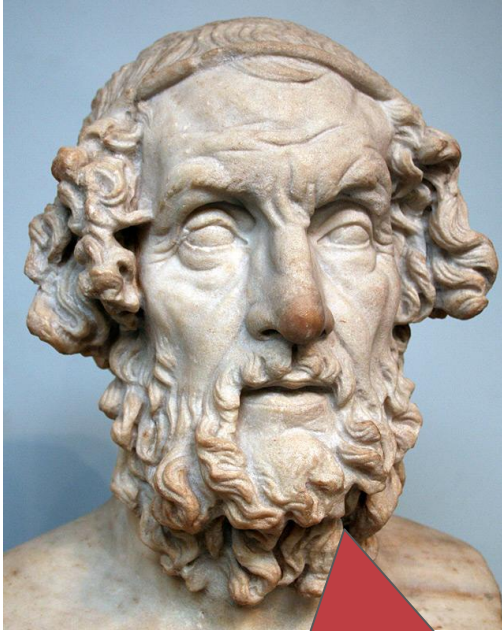
Given how high abandonment rates are, if your main point comes past the halfway mark, most viewers will never see it.

Too linear



Main point at
8 minutes in

Non-linear storytelling



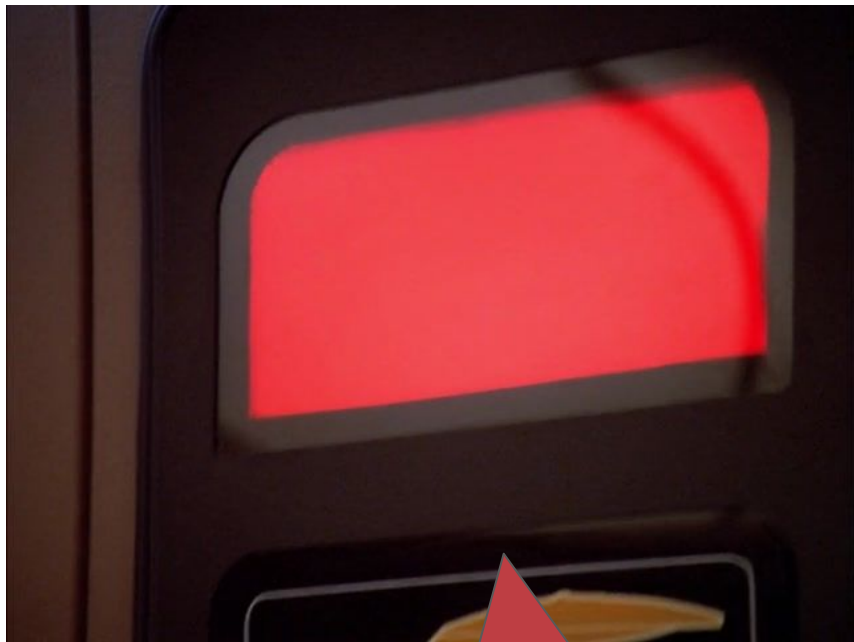
Started the *Odyssey*
in the middle of the story

Public domain

Stories don't need to be told
in order.

Just ask Homer.

Non-linear storytelling



**3 seconds in and
we're at red alert**

Or Star Trek.

**Put the main point of the
video first. Fill in details later.**

**Give viewers the point
quickly, entice some to watch
for longer.**



Designing a Business

Dan Rugh '95



Designing a Business

Dan Rugh '95

— **Handing common higher ed
video genres**

Campus tour videos

Campus tour videos aren't about your campus buildings.

They're about your institution's story and your prospective students stories.

**We have
buildings.**



**This one was
built in 1953
and has 80
classrooms.**

Campus tour videos

While showing the campus, the buildings, and (especially) the dorms, put things in context of those stories.

So. Many. Books.

**Paint-splattered
overalls**



Campus tour videos

How does the campus contribute to the sense of community?

How does a facility provide hands-on experiences and great outcomes?



Testimonials

Keep them short. A video testimonial embedded on a web page might be just 15–30 seconds.

And it would probably get more views than a longer testimonial on your YouTube channel.



Testimonials

Use b-roll or photographs to illustrate what the speakers says.

These could be phone pictures from the speaker.



Testimonials

When interviewing for testimonials, ask questions related to your brand story, so you get brand-related answers.

“What kinds of people have you met since coming to Institution 1?”

“How do you see your Institution 2 liberal arts education helping with your career?”

Davidson College



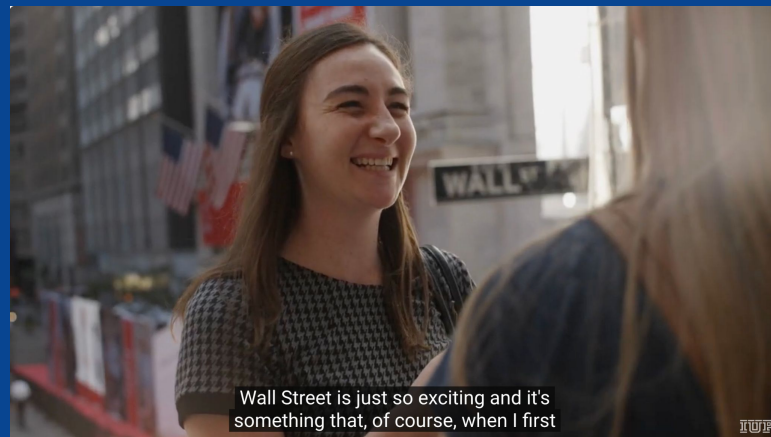
Testimonials

Split up longer interviews into smaller pieces that can be used in context on your website.



Alumni success stories

Use a similar approach as with testimonials and avoid long periods of talking head footage.



Alumni success stories

Try interviewing alumni in situ, at their workplace.

Get b-roll of them pursuing their careers, doing their jobs.

Consider using photographs they provide when appropriate.



Research highlights

Faculty researchers have a tendency to be too detail-oriented during interviews.

Cut down interviews to the best moments.

Show the effects of the research.



WHY DO YOU STUDY THAT? CEMENT

Duke

CLIMATE
COMMITMENT
in a nutshell



Climate change • Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and...

WHY DO YOU STUDY THAT? CEMENT



Duke
CLIMATE
COMMITMENT
In it for life

Day-in-the-life videos

Can provide highly authentic social proof for claims about your institution.

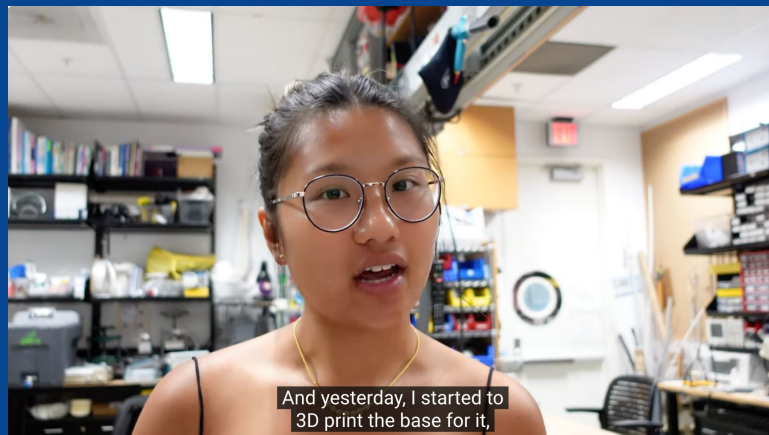
Keeping them on brand is the challenge.



Day-in-the-life videos

Student selection is key. Consider students who already have a strong social media presence.

Then give them a list of situations you'd like to see.

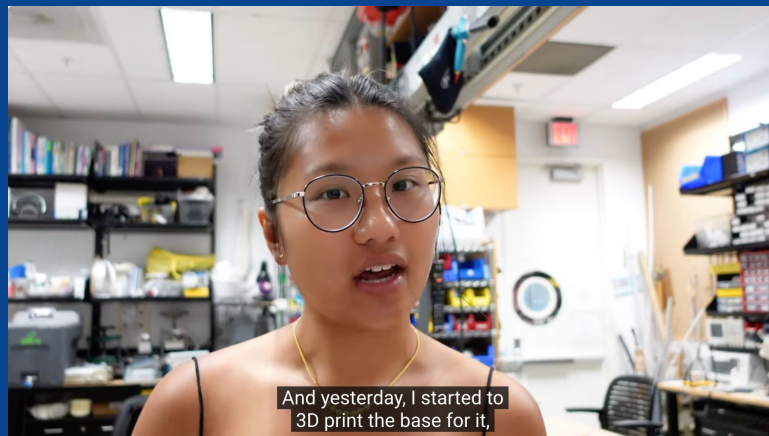


Day-in-the-life videos

Options:

- They shoot, they edit
- They shoot, you edit
- You shoot and edit
- Or a combination

The more you do, the less authentic the video may seem.



— Planning for good visuals

**Keep a running list of of
images and videos you need
but don't have.**

Things you might need

A faculty member listening to a student

Students working in a lab or other special learning environment

More pictures of students from different groups and backgrounds

Video of student engaged in hands-on learning activities



**Shot list for your
photographer and
videographer**

**You need a plan to use your
production capacity for the
photos and videos you need**

Photo and video planning

Strategic / Proactive 75% of capacity

- Look ahead at next semester or academic year and schedule time for must-cover events like move in and commencement.
- Schedule time to get the photos from your list. Align your photo and video decisions to institutional priorities, audience needs, communications and brand objectives.
- Socialize photo and video strategy across campus. Provide content criteria and set publishing expectations.

Reactive 25% of capacity

- Create a standard procedure for photo and videos requests, like a request form.
- Set expectation that you don't have the capacity to cover all requests.

**Be ready to evaluate
photo and video
opportunities**

Evaluating photo opportunities

- Usable in many situations
- Looks authentic
- Shows brand pillars visually
- Could only be taken at your institution
- Only usable once, like a grip and grin in a news release
- Looks like a stock photo; could be taken at any college
- Could be about any topic, like a photograph of a lecturer



Evaluating video opportunities

- Shows brand messages visually
- Works with no sound as ambient video or b-roll
- Short; user can get the point within the first 15-30 seconds
- Visually uninteresting (like a lecturer or talking head)
- Needs sound to make its relevance clear
- Long; viewer needs to watch for a few minutes to get the point



**Know how to
turn down a request**

When you need to turn down a request...

- Can the request be handled in a smaller scope? A few pictures at the start or end instead of the whole event?
- Can you divert the request to get something more valuable? Like agreeing to photograph the work getting done in the lab or field instead of the poster session?

When you need to turn down a request...

- Can it be assigned to a student?
- Can someone involved with the event get a grip and grin with their cell phone?
- Be up front about the photo and video needs for the website and find ways to involve the requester in that work.
- Keep lines of communication open.

Selfies can work great,
in the right context.



Review

Review

- Higher ed has a whole bunch of visual habits that tend to use images as decoration instead of communication
- Effective visuals tell your institution's story by supporting key messages
- You need to know your key messages to create, choose, and use effective visuals
- Planning is the key to make sure you've got the visuals you need