cyberwoven

SC GOVERNOR'S SCHOOL FOR SCIENCE & MATHEMATICS

Content Guidelines

scgssm.org

Audiences

Effective content is succinct, engaging, and aware of its target audiences.

Before you develop content on behalf of the South Carolina Governor's School for Science & Mathematics (referred to in this document as SCGSSM), ask yourself: which SCGSSM audience am I writing for?

SCGSSM's target audiences include:
- **Primary Audiences**
  - Students (elementary, middle, & high school)
  - Parents
  - Partners (administrators, educators, etc.)
- **Secondary Audiences**
  - Foundation donors (charitable organizations, foundations, corporations, small businesses, individuals, etc.)
  - Alumni

Once you have identified your primary or secondary audience, write with them in mind, tailoring your content—as well as the information that you're sharing—to the needs and desires that you perceive in that audience.

Above all, articulate as clearly as possible what makes your brand unique. What sets SCGSSM apart from other schools in South Carolina? What does SCGSSM offer its stakeholders that they cannot get anywhere else?

A Note on Diversity & Inclusion

Take care to emphasize, wherever appropriate and natural, that GSSM is a welcoming environment for learners of *all* backgrounds—regardless of race, gender identity, or other factors. But bear in mind that overly sentimental proclamations regarding diversity can come off as hollow and performative.

Speak honestly and without exaggeration about how the Governor's School is an inclusive and uncommonly supportive environment—citing specific examples and bringing in student or alumni voices whenever possible to reinforce these claims.

The primary message you want to impart through diversity and inclusion focused content is this: anyone with the drive necessary to gain entry can expect to find a home here.

Tone & Voice

Consistency of tone and voice are central to developing effective content.

Tone is the general character or attitude toward a subject conveyed by a piece of writing. **Voice** is the distinctive style of the writing itself—the vocabulary choices, syntactical choices, and other creative decisions that the content developer makes to ensure that their work is unique and compelling.

Cyberwoven developed four brand pillars to support future content development efforts at SCGSSM. Brand pillars are the feelings and attributes that all content should convey; as such, they should inform (but not dictate) the choices that content developers make regarding tone and voice.

SCGSSM brand pillars include:
- **Rigorous** – Fast-paced and challenging, our unique approach to education pushes motivated students beyond their perceived levels of academic ability, maximizing their potential.
- **Supportive** – Our inclusive, tightly knit community prioritizes collaboration ahead of competition. Here, we connect all of our students with the resources they need to thrive.
- **Impactful** – We raise the bar for STEM education in South Carolina, empowering middle school students, high school students, and educators across the state to pursue their objectives and contribute to their communities.
- **Immersive** – Whether we're working with outreach program participants, summer campers, or high schoolers, we believe in comprehension—in thoughtful explorations and deep dives that alter our perspectives and our abilities for the better.

Tone Guidelines

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to tone. Circumstance and subject matter determine what sort of character or attitude your content should take. However, in order to be in line with SCGSSM's brand pillars, content ***should*** generally feel:
- Authoritative
- Concerned
- Empowering
- Encouraging
- Matter of fact
- Reassuring

SCGSSM content ***should never*** feel apathetic, disengaged, lackadaisical, patronizing, or overly sentimental.

Let's explore how tone works in practice.

Below you'll find two examples, one that is on brand and one that is off brand. Each example demonstrates just how important tone can be in capturing target audience members. In this case, the target audience is prospective residential high school students.

On Brand

"Attending SCGSSM is no cakewalk. At our residential program, you're going to work hard. But trust us when we say that, on the other side of this challenge, you'll be better equipped for college and all that comes after."

Why is this on brand? A few reasons.

It's not only **authoritative**—notice the terse, declarative statements and forceful phrasing of "no cakewalk"—it's also **reassuring**. It states concretely for this audience that all of the challenges in store for them at SCGSSM will not be in vain. This statement clearly communicates the value of this experience—namely, increased college readiness.

Off Brand

"The residential program at SCGSSM is incredibly difficult. If you're not ready to be challenged then this probably isn't the place for you."

This is off brand for a couple of reasons.

The first is that it's actively **discouraging** and negative in tone. It acknowledges the rigor of the SCGSSM brand, but doesn't elaborate on that rigor any further; it doesn't articulate the value that embracing such a challenge would bring for this audience of prospective applicants.

Unenthusiastic, **disengaged**, **apathetic**—the monotonous sentence structure (the statement is comprised of two flat, uninspired statements) combined with the negative position that the writer takes only serves to alienate the target audience.

Voice Guidelines

There are simple stylistic choices that content developers can make to ensure that the voice of their written work is consistently engaging.

Keep Things Concise

Assume that every reader has a limited attention span—because, more often than not, they do. That means you should lead with, and consistently emphasize, the value that your brand is bringing to their lives.

Whether it's increased college readiness, a network of likeminded peers, a unique summer camp experience, or some other SCGSSM benefit, make sure that your content underscores—quickly and succinctly—what readers stand to gain through the school.

Vary Sentence Length

When sentences of similar length appear one after another, the reader's attention starts to flag.

Vary the length and rhythm of your content to stimulate reader interest. If you open with a short, concise sentence, follow up with a longer one, like this:

"We don't believe in busywork. We believe in exploration—in hands-on classroom experiences that not only deepen your understanding of a subject, but push you in unexpected directions with your studies."

Note: Commas and em dashes are incredibly effective tools when it comes to breaking up long sentences.

Keep Word Choices Simple
The vocabulary choices that you make should be instantly accessible for the layperson. That means no jargon or other words that would require the reader to consult a dictionary in order to understand them. The more conversational and legible your language choices are, the easier it will be to comprehend what you're saying.

Conclusion

Developing on-brand content is not nearly as challenging as it seems—particularly when you approach the task with all of the principles outlined here in mind.

As long as you're aware of your target audience (or target *audiences*, as the case may be), and can succinctly demonstrate the value of your brand in accessible language, then your content development efforts will be a success.

Remember, consistency is key.

Pay close attention to tone and voice with each external-facing communications project you embark on, and make sure that the creative decisions you make in this arena are in line with the brand pillars— **Rigorous**, **Supportive**, **Impactful**, and **Immersive**.

This will ensure brand unity and earn a deeper sense of trust, as well as a greater level of engagement, from your target audiences.