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## UNIT 4 WRITING FOR NEW MEDIA

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### 4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, we explore how Blogging, Facebook, Twitter and Content Writing can be used effectively by writers. It tells you how you have to arm yourself as a multi-media journalist as you will have to multitask with writing, shooting a video, editing it and broadcasting it.

By the end of this Unit you will know how:

- to manage Facebook smartly and not dismiss it as just another social media vehicle
- to write Content for media which is not difficult if norms are followed to make it interesting
- search engine optimization (SEO) works and what a good web portal is all about, and
- digital ethics need to be followed.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Life without new media cannot be imagined today. New media is an umbrella term for all forms of electronic communication. Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Podcast, Instagram are all platforms which offer opportunities for content writing. People who want to write for the new media have to multitask today. They have to research, write, shoot, edit and deliver the final product which will be carried by

the internet. Many will be saying the same thing, but the story will be told differently over the net.

Content writing is becoming a big industry by itself as scores of institutions and companies want someone to write their content for their websites. It is not just writing that one needs to master as one needs to understand search engine optimization to ensure that searches pick up the content you write. We will take you through the characteristics of a good web portal and teach you how to write a good multimedia story.

Mobile phone connectivity is improving every day with more users signing for it. Smartphones and data packs are easily affordable thereby increasing its reach and use. Many will use their Smartphones like computers, as technology is constantly improving its features. Smartphones are now being used to shoot content even for television channels, while others are even using it to make documentaries and videos for YouTube.

Platforms like Blogging, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram help news producers who use the content on them and make programmes interactive. Audiences can today become producers of content by recording audio-visual content.

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## 4.2 WRITING BLOGS

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A blog is a web page typically run by an individual or small group where they post written content that is usually in an informal or conversational style. It could read like an opinion, a passing thought or just a simple diary-style entry. The post that has been the latest one appears on the page with other entries coming after it. The first blog appears last. A blog can have text, digital images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. So, a reader can have a great choice on what all to read on the subject.

The world of blogs exploded with growth in the late 1990's as easy-to-use web publishing tools came on the scene where users could publish content without knowing complicated technical methods of computer programming that were earlier required.

Over a period of time, bloggers went beyond just posting content. They started to interact with other bloggers building a huge network, where ideas and knowledge were exchanged and produced. Some bloggers wrote commentaries on subjects they were good at, ranging from cooking, adventure sports, politics or fashion. Blogs continue to be a source of information, discussion and entertainment as the number of bloggers increases every day.

Many blogs are run by a single author while many others have many writers. For example, a media outlet or a think tank would have a blog with many authors. These blogs run by institutions are widely read. Companies use blogs to push their brands. One Indian company that deals with automobiles has a blog which does not talk of its vehicles but talks of issues like education, rural empowerment and poverty.

The idea is to engage readers with these alluring subjects which ultimately change the image of the company at a subliminal level as they look at it with more respect than was there earlier. The fact that readers can leave comments on the

blog has also made it very popular. Writers get immediate feedback from readers whom they have never met. Many blogs allow free flow of comments, but many choose to moderate or filter comments to ensure that there is no offensive or hate speech creeping into it.

When writing a Blog think of the classic guidelines you need to follow. Like writing a headline that will be captured by a search engine, short sentences, short paragraphs with one thought in each, a logical structure so that it flows, proper transitions between paragraphs and a good concluding paragraph or line. Blogs that are rambling are hardly read. Keep to your focus. Keep your layouts simple and neat and avoid untidy, garish blog styles and colours.

Write good copy, catchy headlines and ensure there are absolutely no factual or grammatical errors. Provide links to relevant and useful information. It is a good idea to encourage readers to also look at similar blogs by providing links. All this will naturally lead to readers sharing your blog. Write with passion and delve only into topics you are familiar with. Do rewrite your blog as editing always helps sharpen your writing. Do respond to all those who leave comments on your blog or ask for some additional information. It builds a bridge between you and the reader. When you respond, they feel they are an important part of your blog community. They will tell others about you and your blog if they like your content.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- (i) Write a Blog of around 300 words.

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the Unit)

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### **4.3 MANAGING FACEBOOK CONTENT**

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Many Facebook users are careless about writing their posts, dismissing it as an informal platform. Many post senseless stuff like how they just shopped for a new pair of sunglasses or how awesome the pasta tastes at a local restaurant. Use your Facebook wall instead, to post sensible stuff, opinions or observations. Even if you are writing on your informal Facebook wall, it must be good stuff. After all, is not your writing a reflection of your personality?

Remember to give your writing all the attention it deserves. How have you crafted your opening paragraphs? Have you constructed your sentences the way they should? Check your grammar and punctuation.

The danger is that if you post rubbish, readers will judge you on that. Actually, you are telling the world about yourself, your ideas and your attitudes. Many pretend going through an emotion like happiness when they are actually feeling lonely, angry or frustrated. It is an unreal world. Be careful of what you post on

the social media as you are leaving your footprint on the internet. Your post reflects your credibility, honesty and reputation as a writer. Read your post actually before you hit the share button even if it causes some delay. On second reading, you may want to edit, rewrite or even consider junking it. Facebook also can be a source of stories as it has numerous interesting posts and an alert journalist with a nose for news can easily sniff and spot it. But, one needs to be careful while picking up ideas or information from Facebook as it needs to be authenticated.

At another level, Facebook is a powerful marketing tool used by marketers to push their products or ideas. The social media site is often used by businesses to market their goods, develop their brand identity and reach out to millions of Facebook users.

There is also paid content that can be uploaded. A business entity can build a page to showcase itself, its products and services. Businesses interact with users to form relationships hoping that ultimately their goods will be bought by them. Facebook contests, sweepstakes and promotions can also be used to boost sales and brand awareness.

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#### 4.4 CONTENT WRITING FOR NEW MEDIA

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Digital content writing is the process of planning, writing and publishing on the internet. If you write well, you will be offered a lot of content writing assignments. It could be working on an article on depression or a review of a swanky car that has hit the market. It could be a brochure, a leaflet or a television spot for a short video. It could be a speech for your company's CEO. Content writers for the new media work according to the brief provided by a client. Develop your style of writing as it is the most prized possession. It will attract companies to offer you work as good writers are rare.

A good content writer will first research the profile of the audience being catered to. Once that is done, there is a clear perspective on the style and tone of writing that can be adopted. Then, you will be writing for the reader and not shooting in the dark. As you now know the reader, you will empathise better and it will show in your writing as you seem to understand them so well. Research on the subject thoroughly as it is the key for good content that will follow.

Interview experts to get a broader and richer perspective. Start writing only when you feel comfortable with the subject. Imagine the questions the reader would want to ask. Answer them without using jargon or technical terms. An easy to read writing style will only help you to get more readers. Apart from research, develop skills to understand how search engine optimization (SEO) works as you will need to weave it into your content in the form of key words so that search engines sniff it during a search.

Good content writers ensure that they turn in original content. Today, SEO can easily detect plagiarised content so protect your reputation. As you are reading a lot of material on the subject, sometimes you may not realize that you are saying the same thing or using similar sentences and words. So, use an online programme to check plagiarism. Remember that high quality content is always in demand and if you can do this, you will have content developers chasing you all the time.

### 4.4.1 Stories With Bullet Points

Bullet points have one great advantage: Everybody reads them because they are short and specific and persuasive. They stay in your mind as they are easy to remember. A lot of young readers prefer bullet points in online content as they do not have to wade through pages of copy to figure out the issue or subject. Research has indicated that readers look at content with bullets more than ones without it. But bullets have to be written well. It takes a bit of rewriting to get it right as it should be short and sharp.

For example, how can we use bullet points in an article we are writing on how we can reduce our carbon footprint? If you can have bullets like these, see how effective it would be instead of writing loads of copy:

- Switch off lights, fans television sets, air-conditioners and computers when not in use.
- During summers, draw curtains, pull blinds, and close windows during the day to cut out the heat. Get your colony to start rainwater harvesting. This could be used in the summer months when water is scarce for gardening and washing cars instead of using treated water.
- Buy vegetables and fruits that are in season. If you buy peas when they are out of season, frozen ones will be shipped from areas where they are in season, burning a lot of fuel in the process.

### 4.4.2 Digital Content Requires Diverse Skills

When you write for the web, you are not writing for yourself. You are writing for the world. You are blogging because you want to say something to a global audience. Or you are blogging or getting bloggers to write for you so that your business grows. You want Google to show you up on searches so that web traffic can seamlessly flow. So, fashion your writing to ensure that the Google algorithm will help you attract traffic. Initially, you may feel that you do not want to be bothered by search engine optimization (SEO) but there is no way you can ignore it if you want a reach.

It is important to be updated on SEO knowledge as search engine algorithms constantly change. One way of pandering to SEO is to start a blog. The keywords in blogs can help pull in more visitors to your website and once they are hooked, they will come back for more if they find the content interesting. The more keywords you craft, the more visitors you get. As your blog posts get shared, your website will grow.

### 4.4.3 Characteristics of A Good Web Portal

A good website would pay attention to its overall look and will not be carelessly designed.

The website should pay attention to the way the content is spread out with plenty of white space to give relief to the reader. The content generation and the intent of the website should be clearly spelt out and content should be punctuated with still or moving visuals, graphics and blurbs that highlight important quotes or information. One should take care to use fonts that do not strain the eye and it



should be able to support mobile readability. As speed is of vital importance, the setup should ensure that it is friendly to navigate. Visitors to the site must be able to easily find what they are looking for. It must be a secure site. Web visitors are rightly worried about security today and a good website should follow industry standards and guidelines. As it cares for the reader, it should carry a privacy statement.

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## 4.5 WHAT IS A MULTIMEDIA STORY?

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While executing a traditional news story, you would go to the spot, interview principal characters of the story, dig out facts and figures, meet the officials responsible, and click some pictures before rushing back to write the story. The reporter while writing would fix the focus of the story, embellish it with a good introduction, throw in some descriptions, figures, statistics, quotes and round it off with a good conclusion. Needless to say, analysis and perspective would be weaved in.

So, what is different when you do a multimedia story? A multimedia story will incorporate both the elements of print and television. It will be visual as it will dovetail video, sound and the written word. Sometimes, it will be live video streaming on the site of an event or happening. The multimedia journalist caters to the reader, viewer and listener. That is also why you must capture ambient sounds.

As storytellers, the online multimedia journalist must use all the techniques available to tell the story. Nothing is as good as listening to a real voice. It sounds more credible. You can use graphics with great effect. For example, build in a map to indicate where the place that you are talking about, is situated. Use a pie chart or bar chart to show different indicators. Readers love it as it helps them to understand complex ideas faster. For example, nothing works better than a chart that shows the rise and fall of the sensex on a particular day

The multi-media journalists are the winners today as they are in great demand in newspapers, radio or television stations. They are also wanted by organisations who want to use social media to push their messages. Clearly, journalism on the web is the future and will play out in ways we cannot even imagine as technology changes rapidly. It will help disseminate news to wider audiences in interesting ways as it will constantly innovate with changing tastes and audiences.

Today, technology is user friendly and uncomplicated and that is why even children are comfortable with it as they master it with a speed that makes adults envious. The elders take time as they are fearful of it and build a mindset against it. Writers and journalists would do well to embrace technology and keep themselves updated with all the changes and innovations to make sure their work travels all over the world.

### Check Your Progress 2

- (i) If you have to do a multimedia story on how the price of tomatoes has gone up, how will you do it?

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the Unit.)

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## 4.6 DIGITAL ETHICS

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While writing content for the media there is always the temptation to cut and paste somebody's work into your own and then label it as your own work. This is absolutely unethical and unacceptable. With the proliferation of the new media, this has become a sticky issue as a lot of plagiarism flourishes on the internet. With new technological tools that detect even the slightest attempt at plagiarism, it can cost you your job, or worse still, your reputation. The media has enough examples of some top journalists who have lost their jobs as they were party to pushing plagiarised content. Journalists must not misrepresent themselves in chat rooms and other online discussion forums unless they are going undercover in an investigation. But, it must be done with the full knowledge of their editors or seniors.

Whatever appears on the internet cannot be taken for granted. It may not be the truth. So, do not pick up stuff and then peddle it as news, unless you have cross checked and confirmed the facts and sources of that information. Remember, copyright and libel laws also apply to the internet. Social networks lure you to be fast and brief in your communications. Journalism is all about reporting facts. What we say online can drag us into a court case and being careful is after all, the best policy. Do not ever pick up information from a site you do not trust. If you are picking up information from a website, please credit it to that source. Attribution is a must. It gives you credibility and also tells the reader where the information came from. There are a lot of hoaxes on the net. A lot of propaganda is packaged as information. Fake news is all over the place. Whatever you put out in terms of news or opinions, must go through a thorough reality check. If in doubt, cut it out. The social media may be tempting, but one needs to be careful.

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## 4.7 HOW NEW MEDIA IS THE FUTURE

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There are no two opinions about the fact that the new media is the future. One can hardly visualize what shape it will take in the days to come as there are so many innovations that we see on a day to day basis. However, one thing is certain: It will further change our lives in ways we cannot even imagine yet.

Certainly, there is going to be a greater glut of information. In a second, you will get thousands of links to examine, for one piece of information. There will be tips, answers to questions, to-do lists, ideas on how to do the most difficult things and so on. Only those who were born before the internet can appreciate what a boon it is. Culling information was so difficult before. Not anymore—information is freely available today.

However, some sites have started charging money for their information but that is because they need a revenue model to survive. But there are many who provide it free all the time as they have worked out ways to use advertising revenue to compensate. We will also see how revenue models will change with time.

While packaging information, there will be an increased stress on having video dovetailed into the content just to cut through the clutter. Today, ads can be intrusive, but over time, companies will find ways to subtly get to you without irritating you. The net will get more advertising as time rolls by, as it is more affordable and is getting more surfers everyday all over the world.

### 4.7.1 Online Challenges?

Today anyone with a net connection can write anything online. Many websites allow for free comment on their sites without any editorial control. So, in the guise of opinion, there are defamatory statements, fake news, hate speeches and propaganda disguised as opinion or news. Most websites do not take responsibility for content on their sites as it is often copied from other sites or has comments by readers. It often leads to trouble triggered off by irresponsible mobs that can get provoked by a social media message or an online article.

Journalists today can be subjected to not only political oppression, but also to a form of censorship that comes from communities they are trying to address. In the 'old media', where communication was mainly one-way, public opinion was filtered through many channels before it would affect the work of a journalist. Today, the two-way communication of the internet and the direct exposure of journalists to public opinion can have a direct and immediate impact on their careers. In situations where public opinion becomes 'mob opinion', the very lives of journalists can be at stake.

Hate speech is all over the internet. Ljiljana Zurovac, Executive Director, Press Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina says that hate speech is often a mirror of societies' own lack of literacy and inability, due to lack of know-how, to phrase thoughts or frustrations in a coherent and decent manner. "Those who are the least educated and the most economically disadvantaged are the ones most prone to use hate speech, often to defend the very establishment that had put them in such a frustrating position. They tend to direct this frustration on whoever is portrayed as the enemy, be it individuals of other religions, nations or gender. But hate speech is not endemic to social classes of lower education or socio-economic status. Members of the middle and upper social class are prone to it as well, although as the educational level rises, hate speech becomes manipulative speech. This opens the possibility for misinformation, false interpretations and the twisting of facts that can entice the already frustrated and uneducated 'mob' to take certain false information to heart, and to act upon it – often in a violent manner," she said.

The biggest challenge is to ensure quality. A lot of content on the internet is mediocre in terms of writing, information and style of presentation. In the race to stuff content and show that it has a lot of it on the website, many of the sites have plummeted to pathetic depths. The challenge is to raise standards and only post stuff that will stand the test of time and will be respected for its content.

### 4.7.2 Long Form Narratives

As the online medium has no space restrictions like a newspaper or magazine, it can run long form narratives that can come from in-depth reporting, interpretation and analysis. Apart from the written word, the online medium can also carry



long videos that dive deep into the issue, something that television rarely does. Many websites are popular for their long-form narratives as it gives a deep insight no other popular form of reading does.

As long form journalism exits from traditional newspapers and magazines, it is making an entry into the digital media. It has a future as serious readers will always go there.

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## 4.8 TWITTER, E BOOKS AND PODCASTS

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Michael Geheren, an award-winning producer at South Dakota's CBS affiliate, calls Twitter one of the most valuable tools on the Internet. As a journalist, he says he met more powerful people over Twitter than he would ever have met otherwise. The key to networking is using resources around you, and Twitter is one of them.

You will do well to have a Twitter account if you are a creative writer or are into any form of communication as it helps you reach out to a very large audience that is growing every day. It is a great platform to share ideas, collaborate, aggregate and explore new things. You can also tell users what you are working on and if you need some help in terms of information.

Twitter is today used by governments, institutions, politicians, celebrities and journalists to put forward a point of view or share information. Although it is a debatable issue, one cannot entirely disregard how the Arab Spring used Twitter to mobilize support. In numerous countries, tweets are used to influence voters and sway public opinion. Leaders are using it to reach out to younger voters. Newspapers, magazines and news channels today carry or mention tweets from well-known personalities and turn it into a story. Hashtags have often become discussion points in television debates.

Ideally, Twitter is a great platform and an amazing tool that can be used well. Having said that, it is also true that a number of users use the anonymity of the internet to poke fun or ridicule personalities or ideas. Some of it is downright abuse. One solution is to complain to Twitter which will act in blocking the abusive person or cancelling the account. While you need to be serious with Facebook and not take it for granted, posting anything you want, the same applies to Twitter. Maybe, you may want to go back and look at your previous tweets and delete some of them as this is not how you want people to see you.

Pay attention to grammar and punctuation though it might just be a sentence. Read your tweet before you post. It must be a tightly written one with content. Have something to say. Do not tweet for the sake of it.

Make use of hash tags. These # symbols are created to trend a topic. You can use a hash tag to join a discussion. Retweet a tweet which makes sense to you and makes you feel that many others need to read it. Retweeting also helps you get connections and increase the size of your followers. Follow your followers and if you stumble on a link of an article that is worth reading, share it with them. If intelligent tweeting groups get together it will be such fun to intellectually stimulate conversation and evolution of ideas.

Promote your twitter handle as much as you can, but not all the time as it may irritate your friends and followers. Use your sense of judgment.

## **E-BOOKS**

An e-book or an electronic book is the digital form of a book that can be read on your computer or Smartphone. It is essentially a digital file. Now, you can even read a book on your Smartphone while travelling. Many of them are available free and can be downloaded from various internet sites. You can also buy e-books. Many use their tablets to read e-books now. The future will surprise us with new inventions.

## **PODCASTS**

A podcast is a digital media file downloaded from a streaming Internet source. It can be downloaded on to a Smartphone, a computer or a Mac. Simply put, it is a prerecorded program on the internet hosted by a podcaster who might introduce the subject and then interview an expert helping you get a wider perspective on the issue. It could be a celebrity talking about their work or lives. The easiest way to find a podcast is through a dedicated podcasting app. All you need is a Smartphone or a tablet.

It can be spread across a series of episodes. For instance, someone can pick up history as a theme and can make multiple episodes on it for years. All you need is a computer or a Smartphone and an internet connection to make and distribute podcasts. It is slowly picking up in India as podcasters and media organisations elsewhere are using podcasts to tell stories. Podcasts are now also being used by companies to advertise their business and inform customers about their offerings hoping that customers would then be convinced about the need to try out their products.

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## **4.9 SUMMING UP**

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- Blogging has become a common mode of expression. Thanks to the new media, every writer can now be a publisher.
- The multi-media journalist has to multitask. He or she has to research, write, shoot, edit and deliver the multimedia story that will be carried by print, television, radio and the internet. Each of them will have to be written and told differently.
- Facebook should be carefully managed. Do not write carelessly on this social media platform as you are leaving your footprint there.
- Readers on the web like their information delivered fast. Writing a story using bullet points works well on the web.
- Content writing is becoming a big industry by itself. Scores of institutions and companies are looking for content writers to boost content on their websites.
- It is not just writing that one needs to master as one needs to understand search engine optimization to ensure that searches pick up the content you write.

- Digital ethics are paramount as plagiarism is spreading. So is fake news.
- Clearly, new media is the future. However, there are numerous online challenges but it can be tackled with careful planning and strategy.
- One positive aspect is the birth of long form narratives that the web carries today which gives depth to the reader who wishes to have it.
- Twitter is something no writer or journalist can now ignore as the micro-blogging platform has wide impact. It can be effectively used to spread information and views.
- E-Books and Podcasts also open windows of opportunity for writers and it is bound to grow.

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## 4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- (i) The blog must be well-written with short sentences and paragraphs. It must be tightly written and editing and rewriting should ensure that. It can have photographs that tell the story or even have a video that underlines the point you are making. It needs a smart headline that can be picked up by SEO. Use keywords in the blog to ensure search engines find it when someone searches those words. It must have a logical structure. The opening paragraph must persuade the reader to read the piece. Have a good conclusion.

### Check Your Progress 2

- (i) In a multimedia story, a news report will have to be written on how the price of tomatoes has gone up. It will detail the reasons why and what people feel about it. Then, another visual story will be done on the same subject using the same information but it will have to be shot along with interviews and possibly a piece to camera by the reporter. Then, another script will have to be written for the radio and another script for an online story that could have both the written word and the video incorporated into it.