



Creating Belonging by Honoring Context

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MY PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVE



Facilitated transformational change in work with dozens of mission-driven organizations.

SOCIETAL WORK

15+ years creating multimedia content for print and web.

**CONTENT +
STRATEGY**

Currently working in civic tech, committed to trauma-informed, inclusive design practice.

**UX DESIGN +
RESEARCH**

TODAY



01

WHY CONTEXT

Context is what creates inclusion and belonging.

02

CONTEXT IN UX

UX writing (and more) creates belonging.

03

PRACTICES

Where to start and examples.

01



WHY CONTEXT

Context is what creates inclusion and belonging.

WE KNOW LANGUAGE IS PERSONAL/PARTICULAR (CONTENT)

WE CAN LISTEN TO WHAT USERS SAY “This is how I’d put it...”

WE CAN REVIEW INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE STYLE GUIDES

- <https://languageplease.org/style-guide>
- https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Preferred_Terms.html
- <https://content-guide.18f.gov/our-style/inclusive-language/>
- <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>
- <https://lib.arizona.edu/employees/anti-racist-guide>
- <https://dartcenter.org/resources/dart-center-style-guide>
- <https://diversity.uiowa.edu/resources/dei-style-guide>
- <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/>
- <https://transjournalists.org/style-guide/>
- <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/>
- <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>
- <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/tips-responsible-media-coverage>
- <https://www.self.com/story/self-weight-health-style-guide>

A low-angle shot of a person's hands hugging a tree trunk in a forest. The background is filled with out-of-focus tree branches and leaves, creating a bokeh effect. The text is centered over the tree trunk.

**RECALL A
FEELING OF
INCLUSION +
BELONGING**



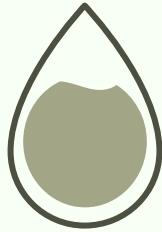
LANGUAGE IS LARGELY CULTURAL, AN EXPRESSION OF POWER

Social systems of domination
(patriarchy, colonization, racialization,
segregation, etc.) are what create
othering and exclusion.

Culture shapes our use of language

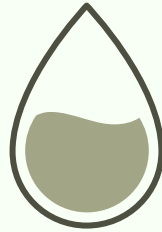


FOR EXAMPLES...



[]

97% of the world's population speaks 4% of its languages. UNESCO believes half of the world's languages will be extinct by 2100.




“HUMAN”/ “PERSON”

American (written) laws have shaped personhood, from transatlantic enslavement to Citizens United.



“QUEER”

Transformed from a derogatory slur into a word meant to convey pride and solidarity.

A landscape photograph featuring a stone castle on a small island in a fjord. The foreground is a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The background shows dark, misty mountains under a cloudy sky. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

If “content is king”, then context is *land*.

02

CONTEXT IN UX

UX writing (and more) creates belonging.



UX WRITERS CREATE SHARED REALITIES



(REALLY) CLEAR

Clarity often requires that writers be descriptive. Partial pictures leave people guessing and/or dominant norms unquestioned.



CONCISE PRECISE

Precision inspires us to keep language accessible and actionable. Alternatively, distraction and/or deception create disconnection.



USEFUL COMPASSIONATE

There's a difference between saying you care and acting as if people matter. Create belonging by being adaptive to needs.

03



PRACTICES

Where to start and examples.

BE CLEAR AND DESCRIPTIVE

EMBRACE COMPLEXITY

Complexity is not “bad”, it’s real. Instead of simple or vague, strive for honest and thoughtful.



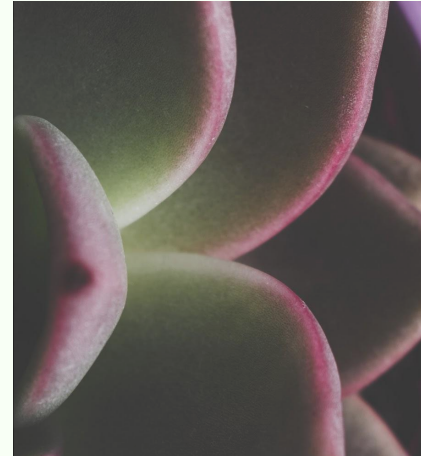
ATTEND TO STORY

Stories/framing influences understanding. What attitudes/beliefs does your writing support/imply?



BE MULTI-MODAL

Writing alone cannot create context or belonging. Accompany with visuals, audio, etc.



“We can write a story where we all belong. Sometimes, people say, ‘We have to create a space where we are interconnected.’ I say, ‘actually we don’t; we have to create an awareness.’ The interconnection is already there.”

— john a. Powell, Director of the Othering + Belonging Institute

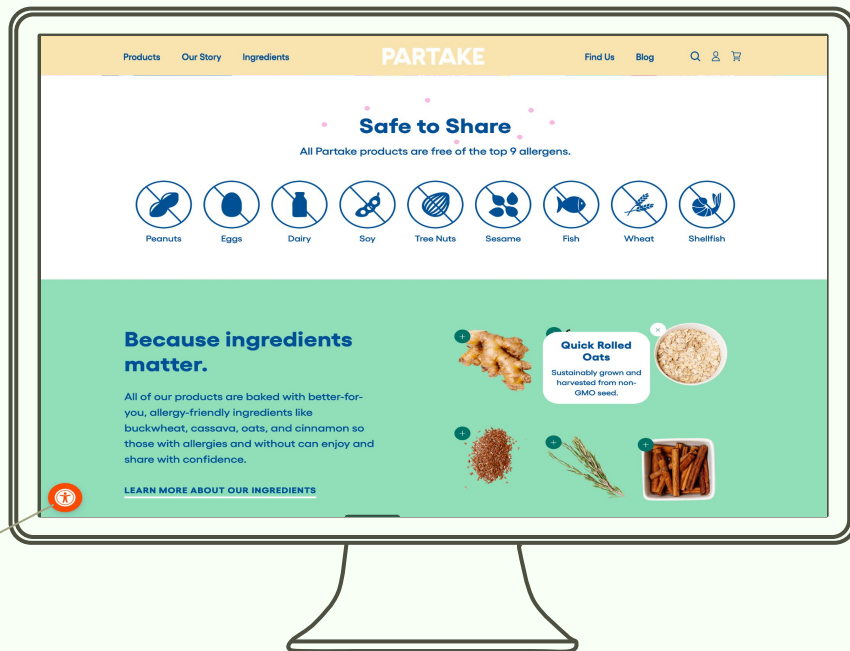




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CLEAR AND
DESCRIPTIVE

BE PRECISE AND ACTIONABLE



TRANSPARENCY

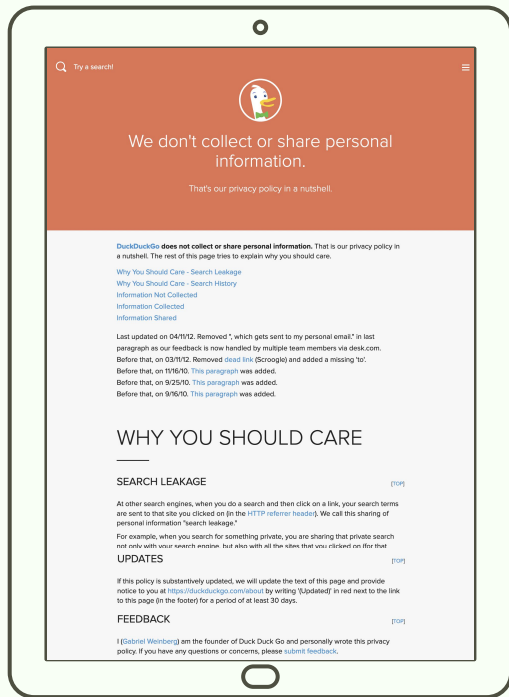
Explain fully. Avoid euphemisms. “Own” system errors. Admit unknowns.



PLAIN LANGUAGE

Know what is considered plain to your users. They should be able to understand your writing the first time they read or hear it, and be able to use it to meet their needs.

This includes terms and conditions!



PRECISE AND ACTIONABLE

(See tosdr.org to read
TOS in plain language)



BE COMPASSIONATE AND ADAPTIVE BY LISTENING!

Honoring context is about acknowledging that language is inherently living and emergent.



COMPASSIONATE
AND ADAPTIVE



**Honoring context isn't
about following dos/don'ts.**

**It isn't about merely
doing methods.**

**It's about practicing being
consistently conscientious.**



Teachers + Recommendations

- Endangered Languages Project
- Critical Alphabet by Lesley-Ann Noel PhD
- (divorcing) White Supremacy Culture by Tema Okun
- “How to Be Accountable With Your Words” and “We Will Not Cancel Us” by adrienne maree brown
- “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” by Paolo Freire
- “The Alphabet Versus the Goddess” by Leonard Shlain
- “The Spell of the Sensuous” by David Abram
- “Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life” by Marshall B. Rosenberg
- “Figure It Out: Getting from Information to Understanding” by Stephen P. Anderson and Karl Fast
- “Design for Belonging” by Dr. Susie Wise



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