

STRATEGY 2 - KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE (BE RELEVANT AND INTERESTING!)

Remember the classic question, “If a tree falls in the woods and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?”

A similar question pertains to our content. If it doesn’t connect with an audience, it doesn’t matter. And our content needs to matter to the audience we’re writing for. We want to produce stuff that is relevant to a particular audience and grabs their attention. After all, we’re a college whose **brand essence is boldness**.

KEEP IT REAL, MY FRIENDS

To go beyond blandness and reach boldness, our content must appeal to our audiences by being relevant and interesting. The only way to do this is to know our audiences, to understand and empathize with them. Remember that an audience is made of real people. Each piece of content gives us a chance to meet them where they are, address real concerns, answer real questions, spark real ideas, and meet real needs.

At every stage of the content process — from choosing what to create and how to craft it, to deciding how to package and publish it — always consider the following questions:

- Who are the people you’re hoping to reach?
- What do they know about NOVA?
- What questions do they have about your topic?
- With what challenges are they grappling?
- What excites them?
- What motivates them?
- What scares them?
- What cultural, political or other external factors are influencing them?
- What do they need from us?
- What decision are you hoping they will make? Where are they in that decision-making process?

Then, in your content work, make sure you’re delivering information and offering an ultimate message that such people would find interesting, useful, helpful or enticing.

PICK YOUR PERSONA

“I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person — a real person you know, or an imagined person — and write to that one.” - John Steinbeck

At NOVA, we have developed a set of personas, fictional characters that represent a subset of our real target audiences. Writing to a particular persona can help prevent navel-gazing, or worse, veering off target. It ensures that even when we’re writing about us, we are ultimately writing to and for our target audience.

Here are some of the personas we often use at the College level for central marketing purposes. Feel free to use these in your own content work. If you’re in a role where you create content often for your area, we’d also recommend sketching your own set of 4-5 personas that, taken together, represent the majority of your audience group. Writing to a specific person (even a fictional one) helps to ensure you stay relevant, interesting and useful. We recommend sketching them as “real” people with layers of depth and detail, including:

- Demographic information like age, race, nationality, socioeconomic status, cultural background, etc.
- Personality.
- Background / backstory.
- Goals and motivators.
- Fears and concerns.
- Tech savviness.

Pro Tip: Before you start even outlining a particular piece of content, alongside the pillar(s) you noted that apply to your topic at hand, also note which persona(s) you are primarily targeting. Then answer three questions: What might s/he find interesting about your topic? What questions does s/he likely have about this topic? Why should s/he care about the pillar(s) you are hoping to emphasize with this topic? Note these answers at the top of your document and refer back to them as you craft.