

SECTION 2

VOICE AND TONE

Brand Narrative • How Our Platform Extends • Writing Frameworks • Writing Tips

BRAND NARRATIVE

The narrative is an inspirational source for our storytelling. At the highest level, it sets the tone for our brand, and exemplifies a human voice for our messaging. It can help keep us consistent, and make our stories believable, even as we go out and share our personal experiences.

Something draws us to Northern Michigan University.
Calls us up to this point on Lake Superior, like a beacon.

An opportunity, an experience, just waiting for us to arrive.

And so we head North.

Inspired by the beauty and spirit that surrounds us here, we immerse ourselves in the perfect environment to test our minds and try our hands.

Guided by this community of scholars, mentors and friends who show up for us in every way, we set a course of action for our futures. And we stay true.

We explore fields that fill us with wonder.

We find insights and unearth solutions that show us we're on the right track.

We uncover new territory, new ways of thinking and walks of life to push us outside our comfort.

And through it all, we feel it: a constant reminder that this is what moves our lives forward and leads this region onward, Northward.

We take North with us.

Wherever we go, Wildcats always find a way to uplift those around us.

Whatever the journey, we lead out in front and welcome others in.

Working together to weather any storm — with an iron will and an uncommon warmth.

Because at NMU, where we are and who we are, have always been one and the same.

It's in our name — and in our nature.

North never wavers.

—

ALWAYS NORTH

Northern Michigan University

UNPACKING THE NARRATIVE

Our narrative reflects and activates the brand. Here, we examine it in chunks, tying each section back to our positioning, our core value proposition and our personality. We can see how each line has built-in meaning, and provides ways to talk about the expected pieces of our offer in unexpected ways.

Something draws us to Northern Michigan University.
Calls us up to this point on Lake Superior, like a beacon.
An opportunity, an experience, just waiting for us to arrive.
And so we head North.

Regardless of where we come from, NMU is a destination – and an incredible opportunity. It’s an open invitation and door, ready for us to walk through.

Inspired by the beauty and spirit that surrounds us here,
we immerse ourselves in the perfect environment to test
our minds and try our hands.

We can’t run away from our unique location – nor should we. Yes, it offers natural advantages. But where we are gives us things like *sisu*, which gives us a distinct personality.

Guided by this community of scholars, mentors and friends
who show up for us in every way, we set a course of action for
our futures. And we stay true.

The support and guidance at NMU is a hallmark of the experience and what brings it all together. It sustains us and pushes us to reach the next level.

We explore fields that fill us with wonder. We find insights
and unearth solutions that show us we’re on the right
track. We uncover new territory, new ways of thinking
and walks of life to push us outside our comfort.

This is where we achieve. We push past what we know, growing and building confidence as we study, research and belong to this Northern community.

UNPACKING THE NARRATIVE

And through it all, we feel it: a constant reminder that this is what moves our lives forward and leads this region onward, Northward.

Here, we speak to career success on a personal level, as well as what NMU's success means for our people, place and planet.

We take North with us. Wherever we go, Wildcats always find a way to uplift those around us. Whatever the journey, we lead out in front and welcome others in. Working together to weather any storm — with an iron will and an uncommon warmth.

This next chapter of NMU focuses on what it means to always have the Northern experience as a part of us, the effect it has on our futures, and how we can influence wherever we are.

Because at NMU, where we are and who we are, have always been one and the same. It's in our name — and in our nature.

We're being very direct about North meaning more than where we are or just a place on a map. North is everything we've been describing: who we are, why we do what we do, and how we do it.

North never wavers.

ALWAYS NORTH
Northern Michigan University

ALWAYS NORTH is our rallying cry. It's who we are at our biggest, boldest, broadest and most conceptual.

HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

“ALWAYS NORTH” is not a catch-all, end-all, be-all tagline for every communications piece. The narrative should serve as a source of inspiration for storytelling for different audiences and stakeholders, taking on a different meaning for each — yet retaining those universal truths of our brand. Here, we take a look at ways to flex our message for building awareness and reputation, for enrollment marketing and retention, as well as for our alumni and the NMU Foundation.

HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

FOCUS

Awareness and Reputation

Think: Regional and national marketing, rise in rankings, touting the best of the best NMU stories

FLEX

ALWAYS

A strong foundation;
constant and enduring.

An opportunity that's always there;
an open door, waiting for us to walk in.

NORTH

An idea that's bigger than just where we are;
it's who and why and how.

A beacon; direction and momentum;
always moving toward a goal.

Commitment to our region
(Okanagan Charter: people, place
and planet).

HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

FOCUS

Awareness and Reputation

Think: Regional and national marketing, rise in rankings, touting the best of the best NMU stories

ELEVATOR PITCH

Always North is our ethos. It’s how we tell the world who we are and why Northern Michigan University is here. Our unique location allows us to push beyond what’s expected and work in pursuit of greater opportunities — whether it’s student success, sustainable solutions, unprecedented research or well-being initiatives that brighten our futures. Always North is how we serve our people, this place and the planet, like only Wildcats can. We ensure that higher education is within reach — so that the UP, Michigan and beyond always look North.

SAMPLE HEADLINES

Always North goes beyond where we are. It’s who we are.

Always North is a way of doing and learning and being that only happens here.

Always North is a call to adventure, and an opportunity to pursue.

Always North elevates every story of success and impact and collaboration.

Always North never wavers, and always shows up for our people, our region and the world.



HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

FOCUS

Admissions and Enrollment

Think: Attracting students, retaining students, health and wellness

FLEX

ALWAYS

Constant community and support.

A strong foundation; the confidence of belonging to something tested and true.

NORTH

A North Star; something to aim for, strive for and be guided by.

An exciting place and a sense of adventure.

HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

FOCUS

Admissions and Enrollment

Think: Attracting students, retaining students, health and wellness

ELEVATOR PITCH

Always North is the opportunity for students to come to this one-of-a-kind environment and become part of this constant community. To take part in an experience and education that are always and in all ways Northern. People here genuinely care, and are always here for you — to uplift you as you explore and live out personal passions, to push you as you achieve your personal bests. Always North is the confidence and support that students need to know that they're in the right place — and that they're on the right track to a successful, rewarding future, wherever North takes them.

SAMPLE HEADLINES

Always North is a warm welcome and guidance along the way.

Always North means we walk, hike, climb and mush together; as Wildcats, we're never alone.

Always North is an unmatched hunger to learn, being surrounded by inspiring faculty and mentors.

Always North makes the most of every opportunity.

Always North is always here. We've got you. You've got this.

PERSONALITY



HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

FOCUS

Alumni and Foundation

Think: Fundraising, building relationships, alumni support, supporting the strategic goals of NMU, impact and proof

FLEX

ALWAYS

Forever a Wildcat; constant connection to something lifelong.

A strong foundation; a pillar of the community and the region.

NORTH

Growth; elevating the university experience for all.

Success; achieving upward mobility, connecting and extending networks.

A place where alumni can always return with a sense of pride.

HOW OUR PLATFORM EXTENDS

FOCUS

Alumni and Foundation

Think: Fundraising, building relationships, alumni support, supporting the strategic goals of NMU, impact and proof

ELEVATOR PITCH

Always North is why people believe and invest in the future of NMU. It's a feeling of pride: the experience our alumni cherish and want to share with generations to come. While our graduates continue to connect and extend their network wherever they go, Wildcats always find their way back North. The people of Marquette invest in the opportunity and the value NMU provides because its impact is undeniable. We advance, together, making the most of our potential, our time, our talent and our treasure. Because Always North is how we accomplish all that we're capable of — and fulfill our promise to this region and the world.

SAMPLE HEADLINES

Always North is what it feels like to forever be a Wildcat, memories made and futures created.

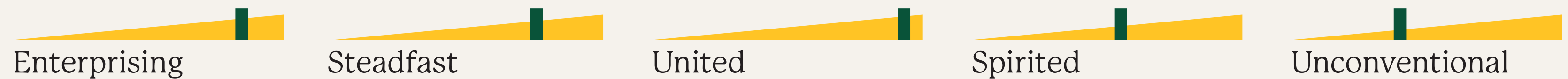
Always North takes NMU with us; we show up for each other, and uplift wherever we go.

Always North connects, reaches out and gives back.

Always North is a never-ending commitment to what NMU can do.

Always North is how we advance and move forward, together, to reach the next level.

PERSONALITY



WRITING FRAMEWORKS

Our narrative helps set the tone, but it doesn't stop there. Here are some sample headline constructions to lean on within the Always North brand language, so we aren't always starting from scratch. Once you feel comfortable, experiment with your own to keep the brand fresh.

ALWAYS

"Always" is our constant. It can be persevering and determined. It can (and should) be used to instill confidence.

Examples

Always up to the challenge.

North shows up. Always.

Northern. Always and in all ways.

ELEVATION

Above all else, our language authentically raises our profile and paints us in the best light. It isn't stuffy – it's elevated.

Examples

Up here, we dig deeper.

Elevating higher education and opening up opportunities, for all.

Going above and beyond for this place and its people.

NORTH

"North" gives us more than a sense of where we are. It's also our who, what, why and how.

Examples

North is a matter of latitude attitude.

North weathers any storm with uncommon warmth.

All roads lead North.

DIRECTION

Whether we're a beacon, a compass or a North Star, our language helps guide our audiences.

Examples

To expand our minds, we head North.

Look North for the kinds of solutions we all need.

We set our course, and we stay true.

LOCATION

Our campus, our city and our region serve as a physical location and rallying point. But they can also convey a lot about life up North.

Examples

North is where determination meets opportunity.

Wildcats always find their way back North.

A degree just north of your wildest dreams.

PROGRESS

Wherever we start, and whatever comes next, North will help us get there.

Examples

Careers that lead us onward and Northward.

North always finds the next level.

The next step in our lives is Always North.

EMOTIVE STORYTELLING: HOW TO INSPIRE OUR AUDIENCES

Emotive storytelling helps us bridge the gap between facts and feelings, connecting our narrative to what our audience wants and needs to hear. Here are a few tips to help inspire action, change perceptions, and leave a lasting impact when we write. You may not use all of them at once, but you should always use at least one of them when crafting your message.

CONNECT WITH THEIR VALUES.

Always demonstrate that our values align with the sorts of things that our audiences believe in and feel passionately about. We know our audiences' interests are varied, but the more we can show that our work is relevant to their lives and those of our students, the more our stories will feel like they could only come from one place.

GIVE THEM MOTIVATION TO ACT.

Always give your reader a clear indication of what they should do next, whether it's to seek out more information, gain a fuller understanding of what we do, or apply to NMU.

MAKE IT REAL FOR THEM.

Always connect our brand story to actual stories of the work that students, faculty, staff and alumni are doing. This not only makes our work more specific; it invites our reader into our stories and allows them to see themselves there.

SURPRISE THEM.

Always (as often as you can) reveal surprising information, facts or stories about our work that support our position and mission.

TIPS FOR WRITING

Here are some general reminders — tips when writing in the voice and tone of our brand, and good checks to ensure our writing is at its best.

MAKE IT PERSONAL AND HUMAN.

Breathe life into every word.

Our voice is personal — we write like we talk. Read it out loud to test.

Be real. Use cleverness sparingly.

The best writing doesn't call much attention to itself. But when we do, let's make it count.

Speak to people.

Avoid jargon and hyperbole. Even if it's what everybody says. (Especially if it's what everybody says.)

MAKE IT CLEAR AND POWERFUL.

Find an angle.

A story should be about one thing, like place, process, purpose or people.

Open with a hook.

Give them a reason to care right away. Lead with a benefit.

Make an emotional connection.

Decide how you want your audience to feel, and write accordingly.

Show the impact of our work.

Every story should reveal why we do the things we do.

MAKE IT SUCCINCT.

Cut out excess.

Say only what you need to say. Get to the point without unnecessary words.

Say one thing well.

Don't overwhelm your audience with too much information or tiresome lists.