

National Journal Communications Council

**Media
University**

AMU 401: Narrative Storytelling in the Digital Age

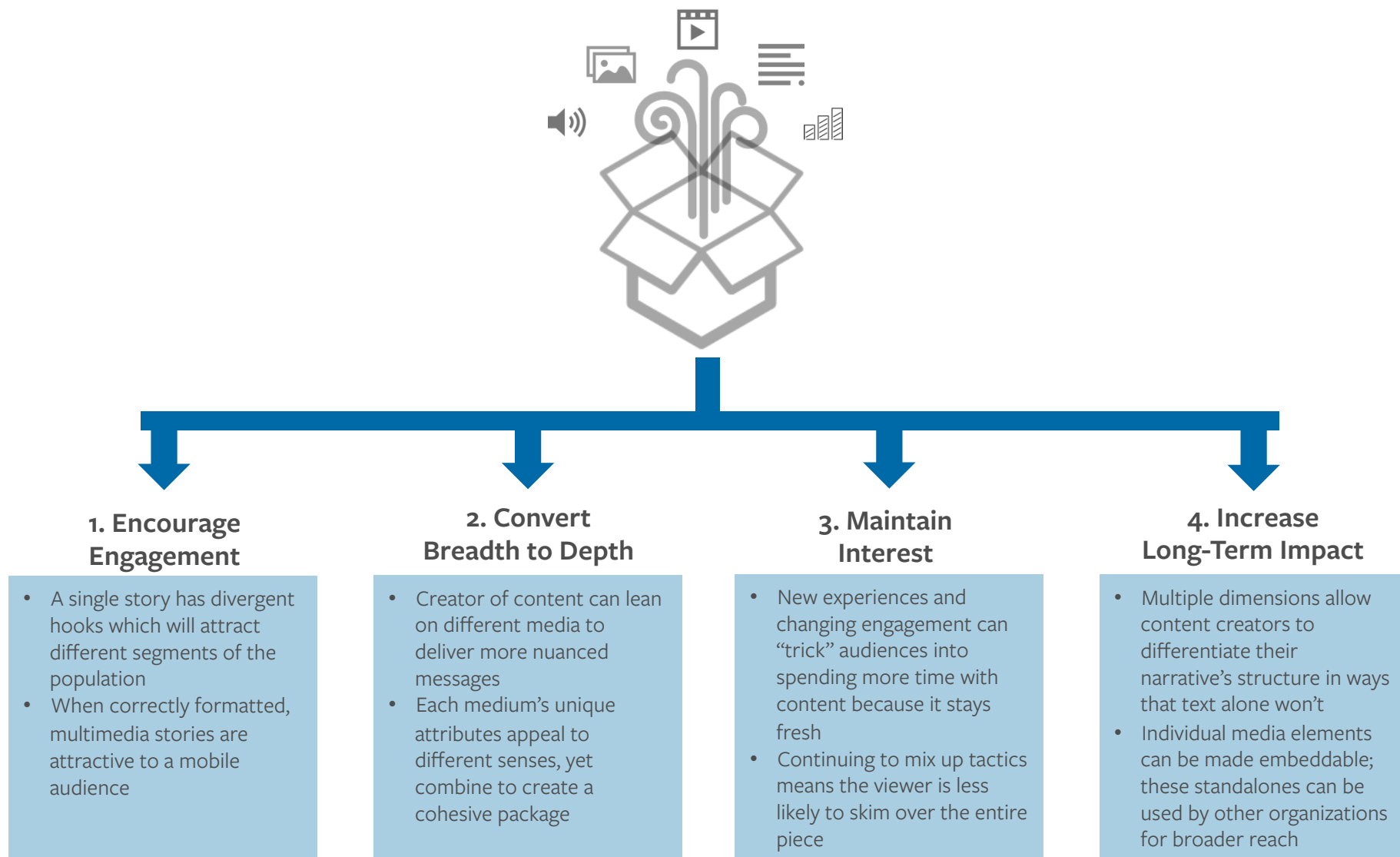
Matching Content to Media

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February 27, 2015

Reviewing the Benefits of Multimedia Story Treatments

Diversifying A Story's Elements Can Increase Its Reach and Staying Power



Allowing the Story to Dictate the Media

Distinct Use Cases for Media Types Can Help Avoid the “Kitchen Sink” Approach

Most Commonly
Utilized

When to Use

Intended Effects

Text



- To tell the “meat of the story” (e.g., background, analysis, summaries)
- Note: Virtually all multimedia stories will have some form and amount of text

- Sets tone and style of piece, and acts as backbone for all other forms of media
- Depending on content, can either act as “bridge” between other forms of media or play a central role

Photograph



- To put the focus squarely on a single moment in time
- To illuminate who a person is rather than how they act

- Allows audience to reflect
- Conveys rich emotion
- Provides a strong sense of character or place

Data Visualization



- To make complex data more digestible and encourage action (e.g., compare, share)
- To easily show processes, sequences of events, and other explanatory information

- Introduces a quantitative complement to narrative
- Personalizes complex issues by making them relevant
- Makes otherwise dry-sounding data come to life

Video



- To show action (e.g., natural disasters, live performances, processes)
- To convey intense humor or drama as part of larger narrative

- Provides viewer with the closest approximation of being in the actual environment
- Brings characters to life by giving viewers combined cues of body language and tone

Audio



- To add color or personality to a written or pictured character
- To orient audience to location quickly with widely known background sounds

- Sets emotional tone or mood of story
- Calcifies a “place” for listener when common sounds are invoked (e.g., waves, falling tree)

Least Commonly
Utilized

Finding a (Flexible) Formula That Works

Templates Ideally Allow for Streamlined Assembly Without Forcing Format to Come First

From Initial Vision...

“From the start we build and view stories like this as existing in a multimedia format, and work forward with this in mind.”

...To the Execution...



Sample of a typical visual hook used across CFR's interactives

...Using Appropriate Media



Text and pull quotes



Video and still images



Infographics, interactive maps and timelines

(Individual elements detailed on the following pages)

Case in Brief

**COUNCIL on
FOREIGN
RELATIONS**

Profiled Story: China's Maritime Disputes, by Council on Foreign Relations

Organization Type: Think Tank

Format: Web-based interactive

- Each interactive InfoGuide takes approximately 3-4 months for a team of 5-6 staff members to produce
- Treatments feature a mobile responsive, scrolling design that “unpacks” stories into component parts



When Text is the Central Informer

Smart Text Design Can Appease Both the Skimmers, and the Bingers

Resource Sharing

Claimants in both the South China Sea and East China Sea could cooperate on the [development of resources \(PDF\)](#), including fisheries, petroleum, and gas. A resource-sharing agreement could include bilateral patrolling mechanisms, which would deter potential sources of conflict like illegal fishing and skirmishes arising from oil and gas exploration. More collaborations in the mold of joint fishery deals like those between China and Vietnam and [Japan and Taiwan](#) could mitigate risk by sharing economic benefits.

Military-to-Military Communication

Increased dialogue between military forces has the potential to reduce the risk of [conflict escalation](#). Communication mechanisms like [military hotlines](#) to manage maritime emergencies, similar to the one [set up by China and Japan](#) and the one that [China and Vietnam agreed to institute](#) in June 2013, could be established among all claimants. These hotline systems would connect leaders in the event of a crisis that could arise from such mishaps as naval maneuvers misinterpreted by captains of merchant vessels or fishermen. Lastly, joint naval exercises could support greater military transparency and help develop shared rules of the road.

Building a Multilateral Framework

The development of a multilateral, binding code of conduct between China and ASEAN countries is often cited as a way of easing territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The parties have already agreed upon multilateral risk reduction and confidence-building measures in the 2002 [Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea](#), but none have adhered to its provisions or implemented its trust-building proposals. While China has historically preferred to handle all disputes bilaterally, the resumption of negotiations between Beijing and ASEAN still holds promise for reinvigorating a multilateral framework toward greater cooperation and conflict resolution.

International Arbitration

Bringing territorial disputes to an international legal body presents another means of conflict mitigation. The [International Court of Justice](#) and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea are two forums where claimants can file submissions for settlement. In July 2013, a UN tribunal was convened in The Hague to discuss an arbitration case filed by the Philippine government contesting the legality of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. An outside organization or mediator could also be called upon to resolve the disagreement, although the prospect for success in these cases is slim given China's likely opposition to such options.

Content Extensions

Hyperlinks to internal and external articles are provided for those who want a deeper dive

Digestible Subsections

Simple layout choices make denser policy information easier to skim and absorb

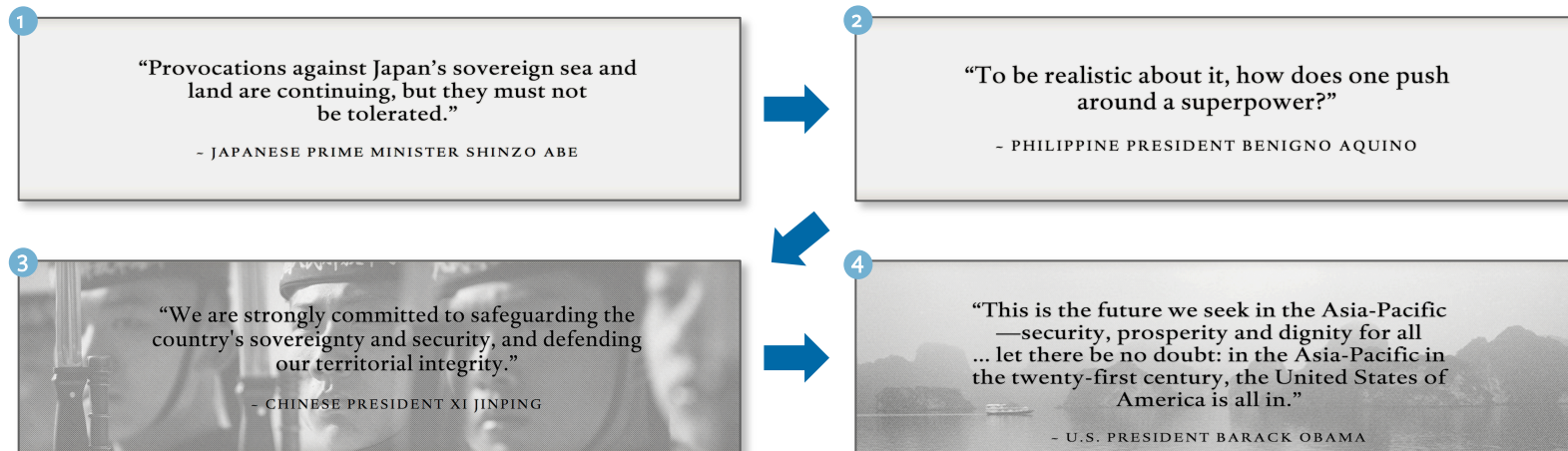
Thinking of Text Beyond the Paragraph

- ✓ Layout of text signals the important takeaways for the reader by breaking down the key points into discrete sections
- ✓ Design dictates how long a person will spend with each block of information
- ✓ Story package relies primarily on other forms of media to grab initial attention and maintain interest while using text to inform reader of primary policy points

When the Line Is Blurred Between Informing and Engaging

Giving Text a Visual Treatment Can Add Drama and Infuse Perspective

Strategic Placement of Pull Quotes Tells A Story Within A Story



Selected Design Cues Stem from Strategic Narrative Ambitions

What the CFR Team Did...

- Quotations were pulled from external sources to augment the story package throughout the production process; it was among the first and last content to be gathered

- Choice quotes were then laid out to be visually divergent from the rest of presentation’s text
- Quotes were ordered to build a common theme (e.g., how Pacific leaders view territorial claims), complementing the piece’s subject matter

...and Why

- Standalone quotes represent information that transcends the narrative format and is not part of the linear text sequence which runs through the story

- Text-based visuals are a hybrid form of media that combine the explanatory power of text with the engagement of images



When the Real Action is a World Away

Myriad Ways to Combine Still Images and Video Footage to Achieve Intended Effects

Sample Image or Clip



How it Was Used...

- ✓ Captivating photo “cover” invites viewer to begin video
- ✓ Caption doesn’t provide context for photo, but rather summarizes the video’s information—creating a curiosity gap

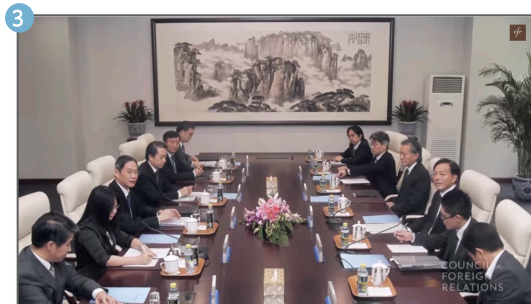
...and Alternative Techniques to Consider

- 💡 Embed “image” that automatically starts a video clip with ambient audio when user scrolls down



- ✓ Policy experts appear in “talking head” video format
- ✓ Voiceovers allow for cutaways from experts and apply their narration over still images and B roll

- 💡 Never introduce a face with audio analysis
- 💡 Capture expert footage onsite, allowing them to interact in a native environment



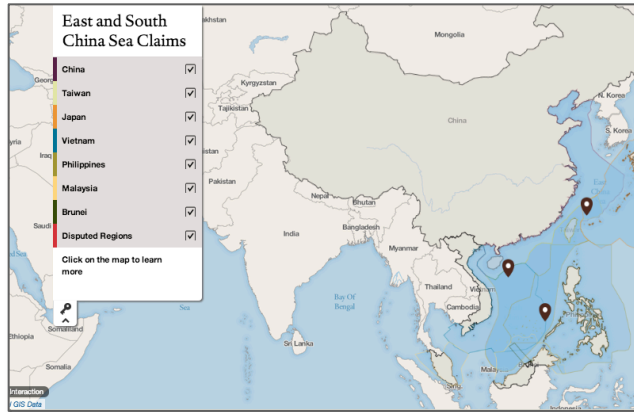
- ✓ Video of an expert recounting events is accompanied by photos and videos of topics being described

- 💡 Use clips of experts outside your organization (e.g., a world leader making a policy speech) to lend credibility to your positions



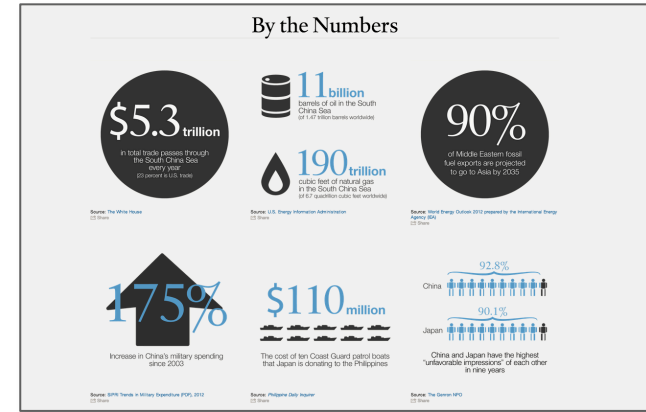
When It's Better to Show Than Tell

Maps and Infographics Add Quantitative Depth (And Shareability) to a Narrative



Interactive Map

- ✓ Provides context to story and sense of geographical setting
- ✓ Offers political and geographic toggles not available in standard maps
- ✓ Allows user to build a customized comparative analysis of topic using spatial tools



Infographic

- ✓ Makes strong visual comparisons with minimal text
- ✓ Creates talking points viewers will remember, and use offline
- ✓ Translates more academic material to the general population in a reader-friendly format

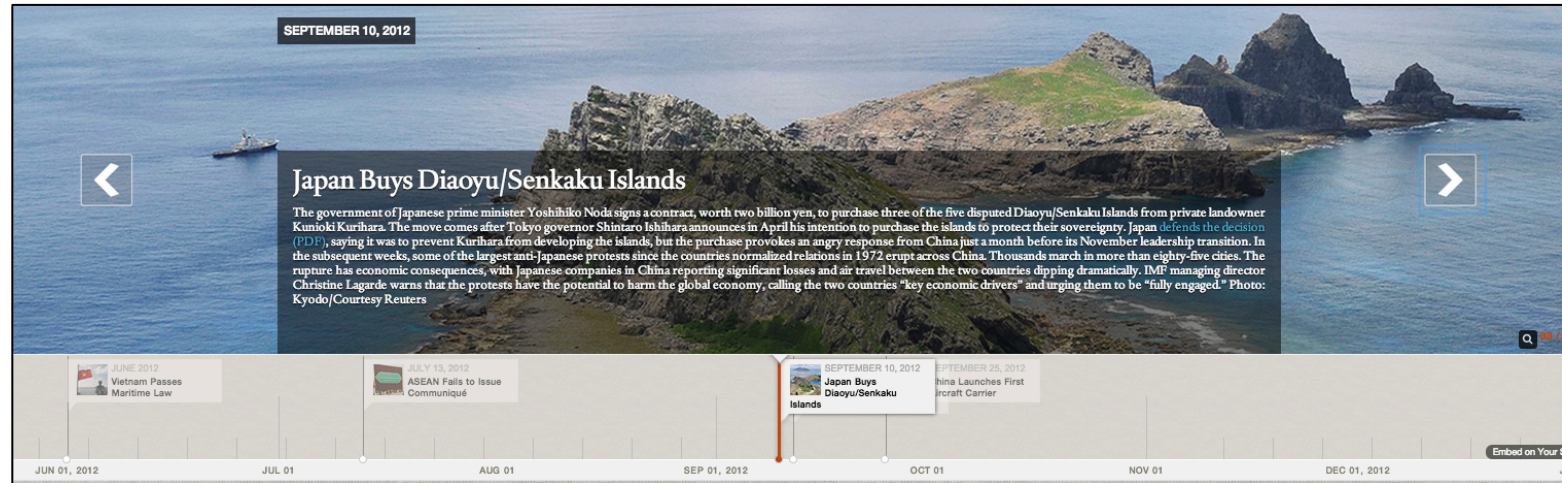
Both Formats

- ✓ Can be embedded on other sites, increasing the likelihood content will go viral
- ✓ Attract individuals who do not have the time to read or view the larger narrative



When Time is of the Essence

Interactive Timelines Can Create Powerful Visual Recognition of the Frequency, Magnitude of Related Events

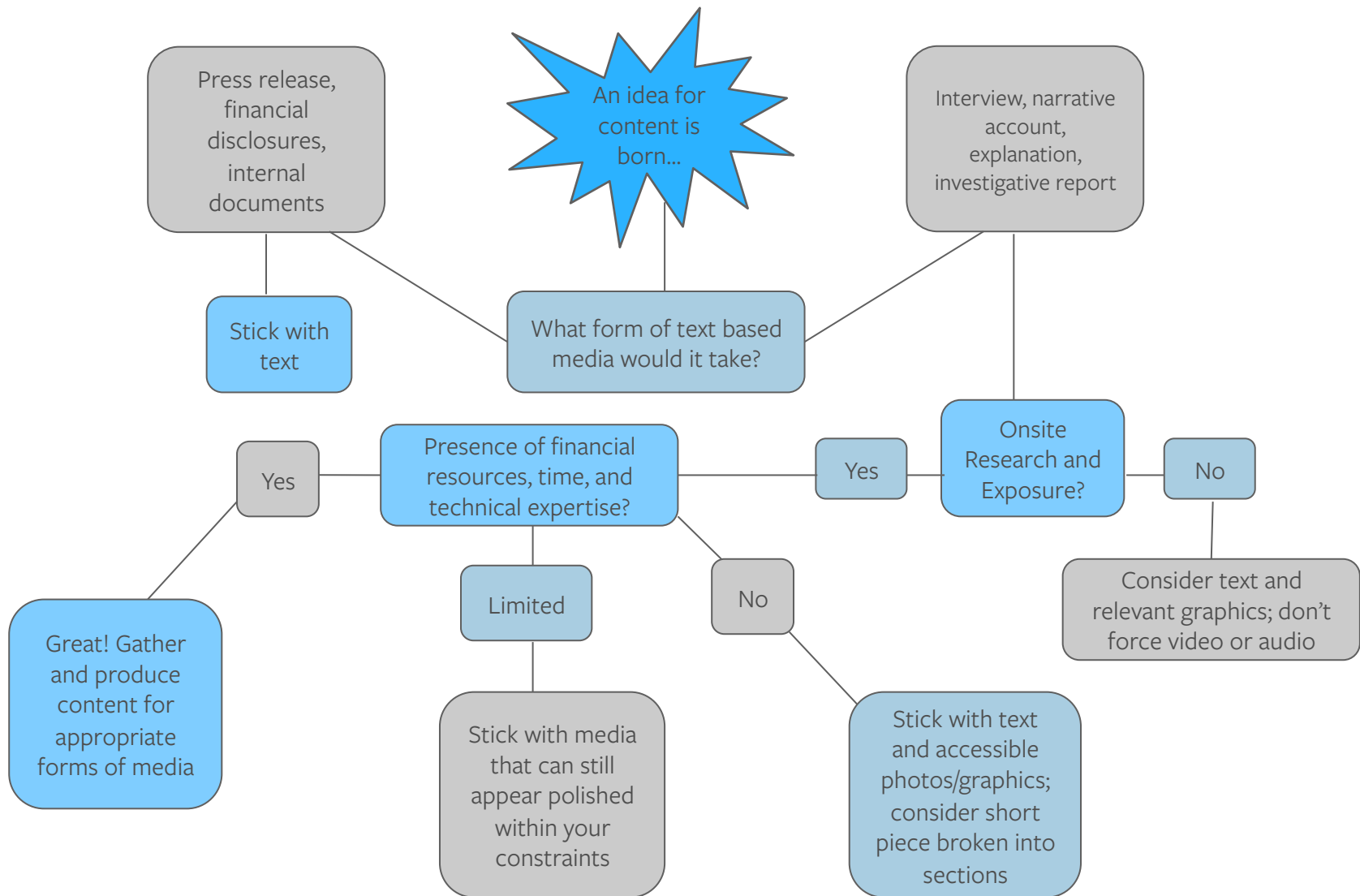


Telling a Historical Story by Layering Multimedia Inside Multimedia

- ✓ Visually demonstrates the absolute time difference and sequence between important events
- ✓ Lends itself to sound bites or facts the viewer is more likely to retain
- ✓ Builds a sequential narrative outside of the project's text
- ✓ Provides opportunities to link to outside content related to specific events in the timeline
- ✓ Can blend audio, photos, text, and data into a seamless progression

A Question of Ideas, Access, and Resources

Keys to Determining the Appropriateness of a Potential Multimedia Treatment



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