



## University of Michigan Social Design Style Guide

### Voice

What is your brand's voice? What tone does it take with your audience?

At U-M we have built a reputation for being world-class educators and researchers, teaching the leaders and best of tomorrow. Beyond that, we feel it is our duty to engage the public with our findings, enriching society and making the world a better place. We strive to convey these very same values through our voice on social, providing expert research on a wide array of topics, conveying world-class research and findings to our audience, and showcasing the value that the university presents to the general public.

But on social you need to have more than just a consistent voice, you need to have a suite of content to back it up. In today's social age the power of your visuals cannot be overstated, and ensuring that just like your written content, your visuals have a consistent style that's in line with your brand voice is imperative.

### Bringing Your Voice To Your Visuals

Branding our visual assets means far more to us than just putting a small Block M in the corner (although that certainly can feel like the cherry on top).

Whether capturing and editing videos, taking photos, or creating graphics for social, we have a number of themes that we try to work into our assets. We want to ensure that our content is:

#### Approachable

For use on social, it's important that our content is easily consumed, with a clear and digestible message and/or call to action.

#### Representative

Reflecting the faculty, staff, and students who make up the university. We want all of our followers to be able to see themselves in our posts, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, and ability.

#### Educational

Our first responsibility speaking on behalf of one of the top research institutions in the world is to deliver knowledge, inspire, and provoke thought.

and of course, **"on brand."**





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### Keeping It On Brand

What's in a brand?

Ours is a bold statement:

We are the leaders and best. We are victors.

**We are Michigan.**

These ideas are embodied by the Block M. It's bold in a way that stands out. It has a powerful body with sharp geometric angles and edges, yet its symmetry across the y-axis makes it pleasing to the eye.



### GRAPHICS

#### Our Principles of Design

These principles, of being bold, adhering to a more geometric style, and creating visual balance, are by no means new concepts in the world of design, but they're principles that we work especially hard to adhere to in our design work for social.

#### Colors

Our fans, friends, and followers bleed maize and blue, and our design standards do, too. In a digital world where people scroll past posts in their feeds at remarkable speeds, we ensure our images stand out even as you scroll by them with a strong branded color scheme that is unmistakably U-M



Of course we don't exclusively use maize and blue. We have a palette of secondary colors that we also institute into designs. You can learn more about those colors on our branding website ([vpcomm.umich.edu/brand/style-guide/design-principles/colors](http://vpcomm.umich.edu/brand/style-guide/design-principles/colors))



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### Fonts

University communications use a number of official fonts including the university-owned Victors font. We also have a number of preferred fonts to use when preparing graphics for video or social use that adhere to some of the basic principles of design we listed above.

We're currently using:

# Gotham, BEBAS, & UniversLT

We may institute one of these fonts into a design based on legibility, spacial consideration, and creative direction. Having a couple of select font families that you can use in your designs can help you create a branded aesthetic.

### Dimensions

Before any creator goes to work on their next piece of content, they need to know what their canvas looks like. Across social channels, graphics and photos need to be properly sized to the optimal dimensions. On Twitter, for instance, in-feed images will show up on mobile at a 2:1 ratio, regardless of their size. In order to keep your image from being cropped in the feed and causing any potential confusion, you'll want to either crop the image yourself or optimize its design to fit within these dimensions.

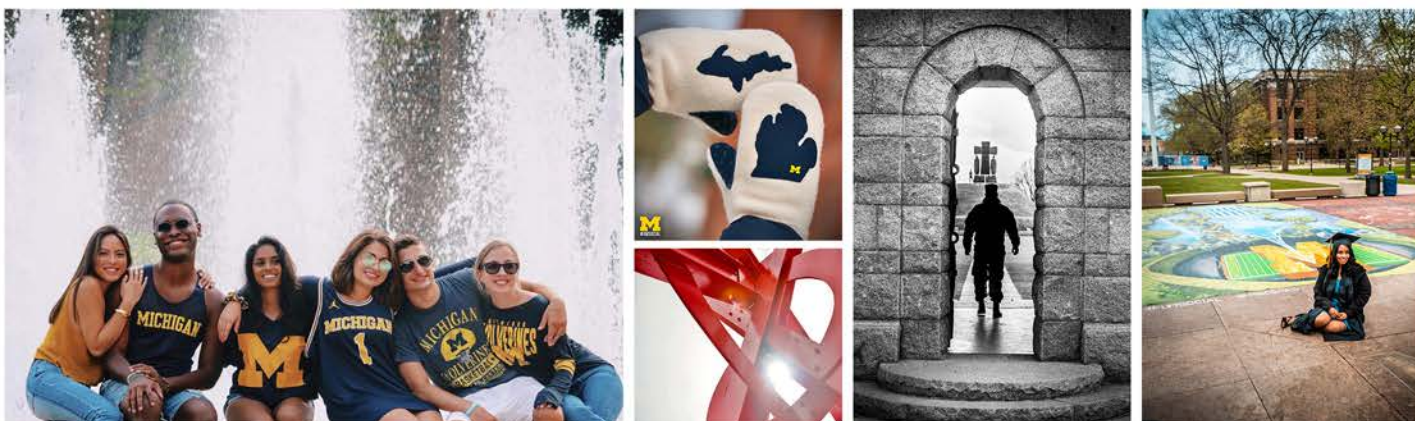


Unfortunately, these dimensions vary some across social platforms, and can change regularly with updates. Luckily, however, there are many resources such as this one from Sprout Social ([sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-image-sizes-guide](https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-image-sizes-guide)) that provide up-to-date information on the proper sizes of social assets. Our best advice is conceptualizing flexible designs that can be easily adapted for crossplatform posting, especially when developing assets for campaigns or crisis comms.





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### Photos

The same principles of voice and design from above also apply to taking and collecting photos to use on social, along with a heavy emphasis placed on the color, lighting, and framing of an image.

### Lighting

We're always cautious about ensuring our images are clear and easy to interpret. Similar to our guidelines above regarding text on graphics and animations, photos should be easy to interpret.

### Framing

We are always looking for dynamic imagery that showcases campus in a new light, or captures our students or faculty in a dramatic new way. There are no shortages of headshots and portraits being taken on campus every day. We encourage an approach to photography more akin to that of an artist or a photojournalist; we have an insatiable appetite for photos that capture the perfect candid moments of friends crossing the Diag or a sweeping landscape taken from a new creative angle.



The one thing we are able to do with photos that we cannot with official graphics or animations, is solicit and share **user-generated content**. Provided imagery meets our standards for being on brand and adhering to our aesthetic, we are always open to reposting images with permission and attributed credit to the original photographer or artist.





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### Video

We have made a heavy shift in the past two years to producing as much high quality video content as possible, as user appetite has grown. As stated above with photos, we always focus on our core design principles when creating videos, and put a heavy emphasis on the importance of framing and lighting as well when producing social videos.

With those concepts in mind we also employ a few more principles when producing videos.



*Michigan Rewind* explored the quintessential U-M experience from graduation all to acceptance, with a focus on capturing cinematic visuals and experimental editing.



Our *2019 Congratulatory Commencement Video* sought to speak to our students in their native tongues as we featured seventeen different languages from students across campus.

### Identifying a Balance of Form and Function

We believe in making videos that we enjoy watching; this means we're regularly looking for creative and cinematic ways to turn a run of the mill talking head style video into a fun experience for our viewers. We accomplish this through cinematic B-roll and cutaway shots, added graphics, slow digital pans and zooms, and thoughtful editing.

### Pace and Length

Capturing your audience's attention on social can be difficult given how conditioned we are to quickly swipe past content on those channels. For this reason we always make sure our videos have a strong opening, with a cinematic or fast paced sequence at the start of the video to immediately engage our audience.

We are aware that the attention span of social audiences is limited and that videos over a minute and a half to two minutes in length tend to see healthy drops in retention rate as they continue on. With that in mind, we attempt to keep our videos as concise as possible, striving to come in at under a minute in length when possible. In cases where we cannot hit that mark we try to use more upbeat music and quicker cuts and transitions to make the video feel as though it runs at a faster pace.





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### Dimensions

There have been many cases made for social video performing best in a vertical 5:4 aspect ratio instead of the traditional 16:9 widescreen. We approach setting the dimensions of our videos on a case by case basis, respecting the reasons for producing 5:4 video (occupying more screen real estate, and presenting your image in a slightly larger format) while making sure we don't compromise our shots by cropping them into vertical pieces.



Cropping a shot such as this with two subjects makes the composition seem cramped, cutting off our experts' shoulders and leaving too much space between them.

This points back to the balance of form and function. Our personal belief at #UMSocial is that if you can produce a piece with a 5:4 ratio, there are plenty of reasons to do so. But if it comes at the cost of losing crucial information in your shots or cutting in uncomfortably close on your subject in an interview, then we would rather opt for a wider frame.

### Animations

We often employ animations for holiday messages or ranking announcements, as these subjects lend themselves well to simple looping motions and kinetic typography. Our animation style hinges on many of the same principles as our video and graphic best practices.



We often develop these assets in a 1080x1080 square because we have direct control over the scale and placement of the subjects and backgrounds that we're creating. Once we've established a message or action that we can loop in the animation we develop a color scheme that fits within our brand guidelines, select a typeface, and ensure that the U-M connection is easily identifiable and comes across as natural. We typically aim for these animations to last no longer than 5-10 seconds so that they can automatically loop on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.