Concision Decisions

Make communications more memorable

Presenters

Jules Bernstein

Sr. Science Communications Manager

jules.bernstein@ucr.edu

Iqbal Pittalwala

Senior Public Information Officer

iqbal@ucr.edu


re-do
dreamstime

Editing through the chaos

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Syndicated content in Sun-Times special section included AI-generated misinformation

A Chicago freelance journalist said he did not fact-check information he compiled using AI before including it in stories for media clients.

By Dan Mihalopoulos | Updated May 20, 2025, 7:17pm PDT

One story, two ways

Electrifying Safety: New Method Makes Inert Liquids Flammable on Demand

Prithwish has pioneered a way to rethink fuel security. Using electrochemical techniques, he's converted stable, non-combustible fluids into high-density energy sources that only ignite when triggered. This shift could fundamentally change how we transport and store volatile materials, significantly lowering the chance of disasters.

Scientists unveil fire-safe fuel

UC Riverside chemical engineers have designed a fuel that ignites only with the application of electric current. Since it doesn't react to flames and cannot start accidental fires during storage or transport, it is a "safe" liquid fuel.

The tell-tale AI signs

- **The "Not only... but also" habit:** Constant use of *predictable parallel structures.*
- **The Power of Threes:** A fixation on organizing every point into neat trios.
- **Abstract Jargon:** Reliance on hollow terms like *elevate*, *journey*, *breakthrough*, and *limitless*.
- **Em-Dash Overload:** Excessive deployment of the "—" to link phrases.


How, then, can we be memorable without AI?

Editing best practices

Oppenheimer, D.M. (2006). Consequences of erudite vernacular utilized irrespective of necessity: problems with using long words needlessly. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Element to Cut / Edit	Why It Hurts	Replacement / Strategy
Needlessly complex words ("utilize", "ameliorate")	Increases cognitive load; perceived as posturing	Short, concrete verbs (e.g., "use", "improve")
Nominalizations ("Zombie Nouns") ("conduct an evaluation of")	Drains energy and action from verbs	Active verbs ("evaluate")
Prepositional sprawl / fillers ("in order to", "due to the fact that")	Dilutes core signal	Direct connectors ("to", "because")
Preamble ("I'd like to talk today about...")	Wastes peak audience attention in opening seconds	Immediate thesis or hook

Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die

- What makes spoken and written ideas stick?
- Chip Heath and Dan Heath (2007)
- ***Takeaways***: Ditch the statistic-heavy opening. Replace with an unexpected, concrete story highlighting your core message.

Evaluating engagement with multimedia lectures

- What features of multimedia lectures keep students watching?
- Cailbhe Doherty, University College, Dublin, PLOS (2023)
- ***Takeaways***: Divide material into sections, ***visually highlight*** *key* info, periodically show expressive instructor, put the most important material early.

Say, what? Our decreasing ability to remember

- The “Google Effect” or digital amnesia
- Sparrow et al., *Science* (2011)
- ***Takeaways***: Our brains are adaptively adjusting what they choose to encode. Instead of committing content to memory (“what”), we are remembering how to find this content (“where”).

7 things… no wait!

1956	2001
We can remember 7 chunks of information*! *+/-2 Miller, George, Harvard University	Actually, it's only 4. Cowan, Nelson, University of Missouri

What to include

- Main points, early & in plain language, in short chunks
- Examples illustrating your main points
- Hand gestures and body language or ↖visual signals↖ to emphasize points
- Pauses after crucial points so audiences have time to consider
- Anecdotes or references to pop culture

What to avoid

- Jargon
- Excessive verbiage / going on too long
- Reading word for word
- Filler words
- Neglecting/losing your audience

Consciousness likely not unique to earthlings, paper says

Drawing on Copernican tradition, philosophers argue for plausibility of other kinds of sentient life

AUTHOR:
JOHN SANFORD

June 10, 2026

Does consciousness depend on flesh and blood?

The answer is almost certainly no, according to Eric Schwitzgebel, a distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of California, Riverside.

In a new working paper, Schwitzgebel and Jeremy Pober, a former UCR graduate student who is now a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Lisbon, assert that consciousness is likely possible in life forms made of much different stuff. Think of the five-limbed alien with a rock-like exterior in the recent blockbuster movie "Project Hail Mary."

"It is important to remember that at this point in time, the primary objective of our initiative is the operationalization and implementation of new safety protocols in order to effectuate a significant reduction in workplace risk."

Putting it all into practice

U.S. national parks protect a natural heritage of global significance; those parks, especially those in the arid southwest, are threatened by climate change. Identifying climate refugia within our national parks using not only statistical models, but also validating predictions using robust field data should provide focus for managers in their stewardship of parks' biological resources. In the region surrounding Joshua Tree National Park (JTNP), which straddles the Colorado and Mojave deserts in southern California, previous research has predicted the widespread demise of its namesake iconic species, the Joshua tree (Yucca brevifolia) due to climate change. In order to assess whether climate refugia exist for Joshua trees in the future at JTNP, we employed both field measurements and statistical models. We used current distribution point data together with historic climate data, to match conditions when the existing Joshua trees established, in order to predict the distribution of continuously suitable conditions (refugia) at the end-of-century. While the high and moderate mitigation could result in refugia for approximately 19% and 14% of the original area within JTNP, respectively, the business-as-usual scenario indicated an almost complete elimination of Joshua trees from the park.

Write 2 or 3 sentences describing the most important points from this paper abstract. What is truly important here? What do you think people need to remember from this?

Thank you!

- Questions?
- Our emails: jules.bernstein@ucr.edu and iqbal@ucr.edu

What will you remember from today's session?

Your own project

Think of a project you’re working on right now. How would you explain it to a friend who may be able to assist you with it in 60 seconds?