



Tick Sheet: Distilling a Core

Message into a Single Page

Use this checklist each time you're creating or refining a one-page core message.

Phase 1 – Clarify Purpose & Constraints

- I've defined *why* I need this one-page message (e.g., pitch, landing page, internal vision).
- I've specified the primary audience (one main group, not "everyone").
- I've chosen one *primary* outcome I want (e.g., schedule a call, sign up, understand the mission).
- I've listed non-negotiable constraints (tone, ethical boundaries, what I will *not* promise).

Phase 2 – Gather Raw Material

- I've captured the "messy" version of the story: background, goals, problems, offers, emotions.
- I've identified the key problem/tension my audience is living with.
- I've listed 3–5 concrete outcomes or transformations I can reliably help create.
- I've collected 2–3 real examples, stories, or proof points (in good faith, no exaggeration).

Phase 3 – Define the Core Message

- I've written a one-sentence core message (no commas if possible).

- I can explain the core message in a way that feels honest and grounded.
- I've checked the message for emotional resonance *and* realistic expectations.
- I've ensured the message respects community, dignity, and psychological safety.

Phase 4 – Design the One-Page Structure

- I've chosen a clear structure for the page (e.g., Problem → Vision → Solution → Proof → Next Step).
- I've decided what goes above the fold (top ~1/3) as the “must see” content.
- I've clearly marked the action I want the reader to take.
- I've kept the page scannable: short sections, clear headings, minimal jargon.

Phase 5 – Distill & Refine Language

- I've removed fluff, buzzwords, and vague claims.
- I've made each sentence earn its place on the page.
- I've tested a shorter version (e.g., 3–4 bullet “essence”) inside the page.
- I've checked that language is accessible, inclusive, and non-manipulative.

Phase 6 – Test with Real People

- I've shown the page to at least 2–3 people from (or close to) my intended audience.
- I've asked them to repeat back what they think the message is *in their own words*.

- I've noted where they felt confused, skeptical, or emotionally moved.
- I've logged changes and decided what I'll test next.

Phase 7 – Maintain a Learning Log

- I've named the version of this one-pager (e.g., “Core Message v1.1 – Community Pilot”).
 - I've logged where and how I used it (presentation, website, email, etc.).
 - I've recorded any measurable signals (responses, sign-ups, comments, questions).
 - I've scheduled a date to revisit and refine based on real-world feedback.
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1. What Is a One-Page Core Message (and Why It Matters)?

A **one-page core message** is a single, self-contained page that answers:

“What are we really about, for whom, and what happens when they say yes?”

It's not just a summary. It's a **designed distillation**:

- It forces *focus*: you can't say everything, so you must choose what truly matters.
- It reveals *trade-offs*: what you leave out says as much as what you keep.
- It creates *alignment*: team members, partners, or community can all “point to the same page.”
- It respects *human attention*: people skim, not study; one page meets them where they are.

In mission-driven or emotionally resonant work, a one-page message helps you:

- Avoid “mission soup” where everything sounds inspiring but nothing is actionable.
- Translate big ideals into **specific outcomes** people can feel and understand.
- Stay honest and grounded when money, growth, or pressure try to pull you off center.

Think of it as your **portable truth snapshot**: if someone only spends 2–3 minutes with you or your project, this is what you want them to see.

2. Principles: Good Faith, Community, and Health in Your Message

When we distill a message, it's easy to slip into hype or manipulation. This framework is built on a few grounding principles:

Good Faith

- **Honesty about what you can and cannot do.**
 - Avoid overpromising outcomes you can't reasonably influence.
 - Be clear about uncertainties and what depends on the participant.
- **Respect for autonomy.**
 - Your core message should help people make *better decisions*, not trap them.
 - Call-to-action is an invitation, not pressure.

Community

- **We-centric, not just I-centric.**
 - Show how the work contributes to something larger than one person.
 - Acknowledge partners, collaborators, and beneficiaries.
- **Inclusive language.**

- Avoid shaming, exclusion, or “if you’re not doing X you’re failing” rhetoric.
- Make it clear people are welcome to engage at different levels.

Health (Emotional & Practical)

- **Psychological safety.**
 - Don’t poke at pain you can’t hold or address responsibly.
 - Avoid triggering language, especially in sensitive areas (money, trauma, mental health).
- **Sustainable expectations.**
 - Communicate pace and scope realistically.
 - Don’t imply overnight transformation where you know the real work takes time.

These principles sit behind the process you’ll use. The exercises will intentionally keep pulling you back to them.

3. The 7-Step Process Guide (With Exercises)

Step 1 – Clarify Purpose & Constraints

Goal: Decide what this one-page message is *for* and what constraints you’ll honor.

Exercise 1.1 – The “One Job” Statement

Write:

“This one-page exists so that **[audience]** can quickly understand **[what]**, and decide whether to **[action]**.”

Example:

“This one-page exists so that *potential collaborators* can quickly understand *the mission and model of our community project*, and decide whether to *book a 30-minute call to explore partnership*.”

Checklist:

- Audience is specific.
- “What” is about understanding, not impressing.
- Action is concrete and simple.

Exercise 1.2 – Non-Negotiables List

Split a page into two columns:

- **Left: “We will always...”**
- **Right: “We will not...”**

Examples:

- We will always...
 - Speak truthfully about what’s possible.
 - Center the dignity of people we serve.
- We will not...
 - Use guilt or shame to drive action.
 - Promise results that depend on factors beyond our control.

You’ll refer back to this when wording your page.

Step 2 – Gather Raw Material

Goal: Capture everything before you compress.

Exercise 2.1 – The Brain Dump

Set a timer for 10–15 minutes and free-write on:

- Why this exists.
- Who it's for.
- What's broken or painful in their world.
- What changes for them when this works.
- What specifically you *do* (services, products, experiences).
- Stories or moments that feel like “this is it—this is why we’re doing this.”

No editing. Just capture.

Exercise 2.2 – Audience Snapshot

Create a short profile (just 3–5 bullet points):

- What are they trying to do or become?
- What frustrates them about current options?
- What's at stake emotionally if nothing changes?
- What boundaries or limits do they have (time, money, attention)?

This keeps the one-page grounded in real people, not abstract avatars.

Step 3 – Define the Core Message

Goal: Articulate the beating heart of the message in one sentence.

Exercise 3.1 – The One-Sentence Message

Template options:

1. **For [audience] who [core tension], we [what you do] so that they can [specific outcome].**
2. **We exist to [primary purpose] by [unique way] for [audience].**

Example:

“For neighbors who feel disconnected and overwhelmed, we create small, in-person gatherings where they can build genuine relationships and feel rooted in their community.”

Write 3–5 versions. Then choose the *most honest and concrete*, not the fanciest.

Exercise 3.2 – The “Friend Test”

Imagine a good friend asks, “So what is this really?”

Speak your one-sentence message out loud as if you’re talking to them. Notice:

- Where your body tenses or your voice feels off (maybe it’s too hyped).
- Where it feels simple, true, and relieving.

Adjust your sentence until it passes the “I’d actually say this to someone I care about” test.

Step 4 – Design the One-Page Structure

Goal: Give your message a backbone so the reader can move through it easily.

A simple structure:

1. **Headline & Subheadline** – The core message and who it’s for.
2. **The Problem / Tension** – What your audience is living with now.
3. **The Vision / Better World** – What becomes possible.
4. **The Approach / How** – How you actually do this.
5. **Proof / Credibility** – Stories, examples, or evidence.

6. **Clear Next Step** – What they can do *now*.

Exercise 4.1 – Outline on One Sticky Note

Force yourself to outline your page in 6 short lines:

1. **Headline:**
2. **Problem:**
3. **Vision:**
4. **How we do it:**
5. **Proof:**
6. **Call-to-action:**

If it doesn't fit on a single sticky note (physically or metaphorically), it's too complex.

Exercise 4.2 – Above-the-Fold Focus

Ask: **If the reader only saw the top 1/3 of this page, what must they get?**

Decide:

- One main idea they should walk away with.
- One main feeling (e.g., hope, clarity, relief).
- One clear next step.

Design your top section to deliver these three things.

Step 5 – Distill & Refine Language

Goal: Make every word earn its place.

Exercise 5.1 – The 30% Cut

Print or view your draft and challenge yourself to cut ~30% of the words **without losing meaning**.

- Remove repeated ideas.
- Swap phrases for precise words.
- Trim adverbs and buzzwords.

Ask, If I had to pay money for each word, would I keep this one?

Exercise 5.2 – The 3-Bullet Essence

Summarize your page in **three bullets**:

- Who this is for.
- What changes for them.
- What they do next.

Check that each of those bullets is obviously visible on the one-page itself (through headings or emphasized lines).

Step 6 – Test with Real People

Goal: See whether your message lands in the world as you intend.

Exercise 6.1 – The Mirror-Back Test

Show the one-page (or read it) to 2–3 people. Ask only: “Can you tell me, in your own words, what this is about and who it’s for?”

Write down exactly what they say. Compare it to your intent:

- Did they understand the right audience?
- Did they catch the main outcome or transformation?
- Did they feel what you hoped they’d feel?

Exercise 6.2 – Emotional Signal Check

Ask them:

- “Where did you feel something?” (Interest, hope, confusion, skepticism.)
- “Where did you tune out?”

Mark those spots on the page. Those are your **refinement hotspots**.

Step 7 – Maintain a Learning Log

Goal: Turn this into a living, evolving asset, not a one-off.

Exercise 7.1 – Version Naming

Give each version a name and date:

- “Core Message v1.0 – Early Explorers”
- “Core Message v1.1 – Community Feedback Incorporated”

This avoids confusion later when your team or collaborators refer to “the latest version.”

Exercise 7.2 – Message Refinement Log

Use the template in section 5. Each time you change something, log:

- What you changed.
 - Why you changed it.
 - What you’ll watch for next (signals, questions, responses).
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4. Case Studies: From Messy Ideas to Single-Page Clarity

Case Study A – Community Wellbeing Project

Initial situation:

A small group is running informal meetups to reduce loneliness. Their “about” page is long, emotional, and unfocused: it mentions healing, transformation,

mindfulness, social change, etc. People like the vibe but don't understand what actually happens.

Using the process:

- **Step 1–2:** They clarify the one-page is for *potential participants* deciding whether to attend their first gathering. In the brain dump, they list all activities but also the deeper aim: people leaving feeling “less alone and more seen.”
- **Step 3:** Their one-sentence core message becomes:

“We host small, guided gatherings where neighbors can show up as they are, feel seen, and leave with at least one real connection.”

- **Step 4:** The structure highlights:
 - Problem: “It’s possible to feel lonely even when you’re surrounded by people.”
 - Vision: “Imagine leaving a Tuesday night with one new person who really gets you.”
 - Approach: “90-minute gatherings, 8–12 people, simple prompts, no forced sharing.”
 - Call-to-action: “Reserve a seat at the next gathering.”
- **Step 5–6:** After testing, they cut some spiritual jargon that felt exclusionary and clarified that people can choose how much to share. Attendance and retention improve because expectations are clear and safe.

Principles in action:

- Good faith: No big claims about “healing trauma,” just honest promises.
 - Community: Emphasis on neighbors and mutual support.
 - Health: Clear boundaries about what the gathering is and is not (not therapy).
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Case Study B – Solo Creator with a Mission-Driven Offer

Initial situation:

A solo creator offers workshops and content about meaningful work. Their copy is full of big language—purpose, alignment, impact—but people don’t know what they’d actually get.

Process:

- **Step 1:** One-page is aimed at “first-time visitors” to their website, whose *one job* is to decide whether to join a free intro session.
- **Step 2–3:** Through brain dump and audience snapshot, they identify their people as “mid-career professionals who feel stuck in jobs that look successful but feel deadening.” Their core message:

“I help mid-career professionals redesign their work life so it feels alive and aligned, without burning everything down overnight.”

- **Step 4:** Page structure: problem (emotional), vision (specific, grounded), how (a 6-week

process), proof (3 short stories), CTA (free intro call).

- **Step 5:** They cut claims like “find your true calling once and for all” and replace with “experiment with better ways of working in your real life.”
- **Step 6–7:** Using a log, they notice people repeat back “small experiments” and “not burning everything down” as the most relieving parts. They lean into that language more.

Result:

The one-page becomes a stable hub: every talk, short video, or social post points back to it. It’s their “mission, on one screen.”

5. Templates & Logs for Continuous Learning

A. One-Page Core Message Skeleton

You can paste this into a doc and fill it in:

Headline (Core Promise):

Subheadline (Who & How):

1. The Problem / Tension

3–4 short lines that describe what your audience is living with now.

- ---
- ---
- ---

2. The Vision / What Could Be Different

Paint a concrete, believable “after.”

- _____
- _____

3. How We Do It (Approach)

3–5 bullets that explain what you actually do.

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Proof / Credibility

1–3 short stories or proof points.

- “Story or result” – what happened, for whom.
- “Story or result” – what happened, for whom.

5. What Happens Next (Call-to-Action)

If this resonates, your next step is to:

B. Message Refinement Log (for ongoing learning)

You can track this in a table:

Date	Version Name	Context Used In (where)	Key Change Made	Reason / Insight	What I'll Watch For Next
2026-03-23	Core Message v1.0 –	Shared with 3 peers	Simplified headline; removed	Felt overpromising, peers	Do people now restate

Date	Version Name	Context Used In (where)	Key Change Made	Reason / Insight	What I'll Watch For Next
	Initial Draft		“transformative”	reflected confusion	e it more clearly?

This log keeps you honest, adaptive, and focused on real-world feedback, not just vibes.

6. How to Use This with a Team or Community

If you're not working alone, you can turn this into a collaborative process:

- **Workshop style:**
 - Everyone does the brain dump and audience snapshot individually.
 - Then you compare: where are you aligned? Where is there surprising disagreement?
- **Principles check-in:**
 - Review your “We will always / We will not” list together.

- Invite people to add health and community safeguards (e.g., “We will not center urgency over wellbeing”).
- **Shared ownership:**
 - Treat the one-page as a living document that belongs to the group, not a static decree.
 - Rotate who leads the next round of refinement, so the message isn’t locked in one person’s head.

This turns the one-page into a **shared agreement** about what you’re doing together.