

# **CAMPUS SAFETY WATCH**

Content Strategy for Email Harassment

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# INTRODUCTION

The Centennial Safety Watch app makes a worthy promise: that it will be a reliable resource to help keep students safe on campus. By publishing and promoting the app, Centennial has a responsibility to ensure that it lives up to that promise.

Our audit of the app's content revealed a number of systemic issues preventing the app from effectively informing and empowering Centennial students in safety situations. Currently, the content of the app is centred around the school and its activities, especially in that it takes for granted knowledge of Centennial policies and community resources that the average student may not have.

More than 50% of Centennial students are international students. Many are English language learners. As the app assumes familiarity with detailed college policies, advanced English vocabulary and Canadian law, it erects linguistic, cultural and informational barriers to these students.

The Safety Watch app is an ambitious undertaking with noble intentions, which could be greatly improved by shifting its focus from the school to the students. This report will explore the content of the app from the perspective of one potential user scenario. Based on our findings, we will outline a strategy for Centennial to more effectively use content to meet students' needs.

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## **SAFETY WATCH: AN OVERVIEW**

We became intimately familiar with the content of the app in the process of performing a content audit. A content audit is an exhaustive documentation and analysis of the content of a digital product. Every screen, page and button is given a unique identifier and description in a database. By cataloguing each and every piece of content in the app, we were able to understand what user needs the app is and is not meeting, how it can more effectively use its best content, and what content is redundant or counterproductive to the goals of the app.

Our auditing clearly revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the Centennial Safety Watch app. The app is comprehensive, covering an impressive number of topics and situations. (Not all of these topics are necessarily relevant to safety, and could be better addressed in a general student life app.) Its strong showing in breadth, however, is not matched in depth.

Sections are written sparsely and with an institutional focus—prioritizing the perspective of the school rather than the students who will rely on the app for critical safety information. Instructions are often unclear, unrealistic or written in academic language unsuitable for English language learners. Vague references are made to college policies and procedures without detailing what those entail. Most sections of the app would benefit from attention by a subject matter expert.

In our view, the app has three core features: “Friend Walk,” “Work Alone” and “Walk Safe.” Each of these is a valuable safety feature that all students should know how to use. The first two are found in the main navigation menu. However, the menu does not make clear what these features are or why a user should click on them. The names themselves are not informative enough to prompt further investigation. “Walk Safe” is not found in the main navigation menu, but is buried under the “Safety and Security” section, in a place that is not easy to find. This is symptomatic of the overall difficulty of navigating the app.

Content is found in unexpected places, under unclear or undescriptive headings, which could be rewritten for usefulness and consistency. No contextual navigation is provided to allow the user to keep track of his path or easily go back. The volume of content would lend itself to a mega-menu, an always-accessible pull-out menu showing all pages on the site in hierarchy, so that the user knows where to look for what he wants. This employs the “Exemplar” principle of information architecture,

which states that users are better able to use categories when given examples of what those categories contain.

For an app that relies so heavily on text, it is missing the most important navigation feature of all: a search bar.

A final problem with the app is redundancy. Many topic sections and pages are duplicated between sections, rather than allowing multiple areas of the app to link to the same page. Fully 32% (73 pages) of the app's pages consisted of buttons to call emergency lines or compose an email.

This problem could be solved by employing a bottom-up approach to information architecture, rather than top-down: write the content that will be used in the app, then organize it into its natural categories, linking to a piece of content from more than one category when necessary.

# OUR SCENARIO & METHODOLOGY

Our task was to analyze the usability of the Safety Watch App from the perspective of one potential user scenario: **“My friend is receiving anonymous, harassing emails, and is becoming afraid to attend classes, not knowing where the emails are coming from.”** This exercise in imagination allowed us to reveal the ways in which the app does and does not live up to not only our own needs, but those of other students.

We began by emulating the mindset of a student whose friend is being harassed online. We asked ourselves what he would need to know from the Safety Watch app. Centennial students come from all walks of life and all continents, so we were careful to consider cultural differences in students’ understanding of bullying and harassment that may come from their social class, subculture, belief system or country of origin. Students may not know how to identify bullying, feel comfortable asking for help when they need it, or know exactly whom to talk to.

Several broad categories of information needs emerged:

- What is bullying and harassment?
- When should I reach out for help?
- Whom can I ask for help?
- What do I need to do?
- What will happen next?
- How can I help a friend who is being bullied or harassed?

We opened the app and allowed ourselves to be guided by these questions on an information hunt. We decided where the user would be most likely to look first, then documented what he would see and what steps it would take him to find what he was looking for.

Using our content audit as a guide, we then scoured the app for any other relevant content. The content audit allowed us to see all the app’s content in one easily retrievable table, which was especially important because the app itself does not have a search feature. Once we had located this content in the app, we reviewed it for its clarity and helpfulness.

This allowed us to develop a current state analysis: if a student in this situation opened the Safety Watch app today, what information would he find?

# KEY FINDINGS

## Discoverability

The relevant content in the app is mostly contained in one section: “Stop Bullying Now.” Since bullying is a major safety and security issue, we commend the app designers for devoting a section to it. It is the eighth item in the navigation menu. Most of the items above it are justifiably higher because of importance, but the very large size of the navigation buttons forces this content under the fold.

Because many of the buttons have relatively unresponsive or generic text, the user may be confused about clicking on an irrelevant section. The most likely misclick is “Safety and Security,” which is the hub for information about the Centennial College Security Services, not information about ensuring personal safety and security.

The presence of a section dedicated to bullying implies that all relevant content will be accessible under this heading, so users would be unlikely to look elsewhere to find what they need. But there is some relevant content outside the “Stop Bullying Now” section.

Under the “Safety Toolbox” section (from the front page), the “Safety Online” section contains tips on protecting privacy online and avoiding online harassment. The lack of a search feature makes this content unlikely to surface for users seeking urgent help for bullying.

## Meeting Content Needs

Addressing each of our user's questions, we found that only 20% of the user's information needs were met by the app, as illustrated in the table below. Despite the content that already exists, there are significant content gaps. A user encountering this content would not find information that empowers him to act on a bullying issue.

Question	Answered?	Comments
<i>What is bullying and harassment?</i>		
What is the definition of bullying?	Somewhat	The app tells us what forms of bullying there can be but doesn't give us a concrete definition of what bullying is.
What counts as bullying?	Yes	It does provide what counts as bullying in two different sections. "Bullying at School" and "Bullying in the Workplace". The forms of bullying provided can apply to bullying in general. Examples are not given, however, and the degree of unwanted contact needed to qualify as bullying or harassment is not specified.
What is cyberbullying?	Yes	Provides some brief information on what cyberbullying is, but the information is not in-depth and may not be completely accurate.
Is it still bullying if there's no physical component?	Yes	The app provides forms of bullying, which mostly are non-physical. But there is no explicit distinction between physical and non-physical bullying.
What is the legal definition of harassment?	No	There is no mention of the definition of harassment from a legal perspective or otherwise.
What is the legal	No	There is no mention of the legal definition



definition of stalking?		of stalking.
<b><i>When should I reach out for help?</i></b>		
When is it serious enough to get help?	No	The app offers some examples of bullying behaviour, but does not try to give any guidelines on when help is needed.
Is my situation really worth reporting?	No	The app does not address the issue of bullying victims minimizing their own situations.
Will I be taken seriously and listened to?	Somewhat	In the first page of the "Stop Bullying Now" section, a clear effort is made to show that the school takes bullying seriously. But this is not emphasized in the context of making a report, which may be less than reassuring.
What is my first step?	No	Although some tips are given for dealing with harassment, particularly online harassment, an order of steps or a set of priorities is not introduced.
When should I contact the school?	No	Reporting bullying is encouraged, but no outline is given as to when to report.
When should I contact the police?	No	Reporting bullying or harassment to the police is not discussed in the app.
<b><i>Whom can I ask for help?</i></b>		
What police contacts should I speak to? (Police emergency, non-emergency, specialized line?)	No	Reporting bullying or harassment to the police is not discussed in the app.
What school department should I speak to?	Somewhat	The app does suggest contacting the security office, but also mentions "filing complaints under College policy" without

		explaining what policy is in effect or where to file a complaint.
What methods can I use to contact them? (Phone numbers, email addresses, online forms)	Somewhat	The phone number to the security office is given, but not to other authorities. (Although police phone numbers are included in other sections of the app, they are not linked to reporting bullying.)
What other community or government resources are there to help me?	Somewhat	In "Safety Online" under "Safety Toolbox," two links are provided to websites with further information about cyberbullying specifically. However, this is not the app's own content and it is difficult to discover for the reasons outlined above. It is also of narrow relevance, being specifically focused on cyberbullying.
Who else can I speak to? (Counsellors, friends, etc)	No	The app does not discuss how to get support from others.
<b><i>What do I need to do?</i></b>		
How do I collect evidence for a police or school report?	No	Evidence collection is mentioned under "Safety Toolbox > Safety Tips > Safety Online," but no instructions are given.
What information is needed by the person I'm reporting this to?	No	The "Report Bullying" section does not mention what information is needed by the security department when reporting an incident.
How do I address this subject with my instructors?	No	Discussing one's situation with instructors is not covered.
How do I keep myself safe from my bully or harasser?	Yes	There is some content addressing this issue, but not in detail. It is not in the bullying section, but under "Safety Toolbox > Safety Tips > Safety Online."

Should I speak to or engage with the bully or harasser?	No	This is not addressed one way or another.
<b><i>What will happen next?</i></b>		
What will the relevant authority do? (Investigation procedure, etc.)	No	Provides information on how to report bullying but there is no information on what authority will do about the situation.
How will my safety and anonymity be ensured in the meantime?	No	There is no information on how safety and anonymity will be ensured in the meantime. In the "Safety and Security" section you can request a WalkSafe Escort to ensure safety but this should be mentioned again in the "Stop Bullying" section.
If I contact the school, when might they escalate the issue to the police?	No	There is no information on when the school would bring up the issue with the police.
What information will I learn afterward?	No	No information on what would be learned after.
When will I be contacted for more information?	No	No information on when will someone who made a report could be contacted for more information.
When and how often will I receive an update on my case?	No	No information on how often someone who made a report will receive an update on his case.
What could the consequences be for the person harassing me?	No	No information on the consequences for the person causing the harassment.

<i>How can I help a friend who is being bullied or harassed?</i>		
How do I help a friend stay safe?	No	Doesn't provide any information on how the user can help a friend stay safe.
How do I help a friend contact the authorities or support resources?	No	Doesn't provide any information on how the user can help a friend contact the authorities or support resources.
How do I show a friend my support and reassure them?	No	Has no information on how the user can support and reassure a friend.
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>20.3% (6.5/32)</b>	<b>1 point for Yes (green), 0.5 for Somewhat (yellow), 0 for No (red), out of 32.</b>

### Using the Stop Bullying Now section

The first page of the "Stop Bullying Now" section does not have a clear purpose and is not written with the user in mind. It is written from a bureaucratic perspective, assuming familiarity with the departments and policies of the College. For instance, it mentions Centennial's "Anti-Bullying and Personal Harassment activities" without explaining what those are or how to take advantage of them.

This page is text-heavy, wordy and has grammatical errors. Especially for English language learners, jargon words and grammar mistakes take away from clarity and understanding.

Many victims of bullying blame themselves or are victim-blamed by others. They are unsure whether their situation is serious or if they really need help. Harassment may be downplayed as "just a joke," or recast as a personal conflict in which the victim and the bully are on equal footing.

Because of this, we rate the question "what is bullying?" as the most important information need for our user. He must be able to confidently identify a situation as

bullying before he can proceed to seek help. In this first section, the user is reassured that bullying is not tolerated, but a definition of bullying is not provided.

Most detail in this section is devoted to diversity and inclusion, which can give the mistaken impression that bullying is solely a diversity issue. There are vague statements here such as “We believe in exercising our human rights, not silencing it by bullying.” What it means to “exercise one’s human rights” is unclear.

This section ends by encouraging the user to report bullying, but there is no information on how to recognize bullying or where it should be reported.

### **Subsections of the Bullying section**

The “Bullying at School,” “Bullying in the Workplace” and “Cyber Bullying” sections make some attempt at defining what bullying is. However, these definitions are incomplete and abstract, difficult to connect to real-life situations.

They can also be misleading, such as when the “Cyber Bullying” section says “Cyber bullying involves violent language that can be extremely crude.” Cyberbullying does not always involve these things, and this could cause a victim to believe that his situation is not serious if it does not involve crude or violent language.

Finally, the user would reach the “Report Bullying” section, which addresses one of his major information needs: “whom can I ask for help?” Fortunately, there is a phone number here to reach campus security. But this page is not informative as to when to reach out or what to tell the authorities.

The content here does not specifically relate to bullying. The page refers to “suspicious persons” and “incidents” on campus, rather than situations of personal harassment. It fails to define what qualifies as “suspicious” or a security incident, and tells the user to “take appropriate precautions” without explaining what those precautions might be.

### **Other bullying-related content in the app**

As we mentioned above, some bullying-related content was found outside the Stop Bullying Now section, in the Safety Toolbox. While helpful, these tips are mostly very general and not actionable, e.g. “document cyber bullying or harassment and report it” without explaining how to usefully document these problems.

## **Style and tone of content**

Students facing bullying are in a vulnerable position and need not only information, but reassurance and support. Writing content to help these users is an important and worthwhile task, with the best-case result of creating content that lets the user understand his situation, feel understood, and know what action to take.

Unfortunately, the Safety Watch app does not yet meet this standard. Even when the app does meet information needs, it does so in a way that is not authoritative or reassuring, because it uses jargon, contains errors, or appears to be hastily-written. Beyond not learning what he needs to, our student would also not feel that the app is trustworthy or accommodating of his unique situation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above, our primary recommendation is that bullying content be developed from its current incomplete state by consulting subject matter experts. This may include law enforcement officers, anti-bullying activists, online safety experts and Centennial administrators with knowledge of the relevant college policies.

The new content should be written from a user-centric perspective: it must take into account user context and needs, in language he will understand. This especially includes international students, who have unique contexts that may be unfamiliar to school administrators.

Every piece of content in the app should have a purpose. For bullying-related content, we have identified three primary content goals: **information**, **reassurance** or **empowerment**. All content should meet at least one of these three. After engaging with the app, the student should feel that he knows better what bullying is, understands that he can get support, and knows what actions to take to help himself or a friend. Pages will differ in their content and tone depending on which of these purposes is primarily served.

Content goal	Recommendations
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide comprehensive definitions from reliable sources such as the Criminal Code of Canada, Centennial policies and authoritative anti-bullying organizations.</li><li>• Make use of examples to concretize what kind of situations meet those definitions.</li></ul>
Reassurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a tone of compassion and take the user's perspective. Talk about the user, not the school or its activities.</li><li>• Clearly outline what support resources are available.</li></ul>
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give detailed instructions broken into lists of small, actionable steps.</li><li>• Clarify what the student can do on his own, and what</li></ul>

	<p>requires the authorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure the student understands</li> <li>• Don't give a suggestion without explaining how to act on that suggestion.</li> </ul>
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All content, regardless of its goal, will be trustworthy, informative, supportive and actionable. Content is **trustworthy** when it is clear, authoritative and professionally written. It is **informative** when it is comprehensive and meets all the students' needs. **Supportive** content reassures the student and speaks to him on his own terms. And content that is **actionable** has clear instructions on what to do and what will happen next.

The new content should clearly explain the definition of bullying and harassment, what situations require help, and where help should be sought. It should outline how to respond to bullying or harassment, with advice from experts such as how to collect evidence, how to stay safe online and whether to engage with the harasser.

A tone of trust and authority can be conveyed by carefully proofreading all content for grammatical mistakes, avoiding jargon and being as accurate and consistent as possible. An example of the kind of content that would better address the user needs in this scenario can be found at [ActionAgainstStalking.org](https://www.actionagainststalking.org/)<sup>1</sup>. This page clearly explains, in an authoritative and reassuring way, how to deal with a stalker, what to do and what not to do.

If these recommendations are followed, the amount of content within this section will be much greater than it is now, and the volume of text could become overwhelming or difficult to navigate. We strongly recommend using clear headings to help users find the content they need, which could be phrased in the form of "Who/What/Where/When/Why" questions to maintain the personal and reassuring feeling of the app.

The categories of information outlined above can translate into three main sections to organize the bullying app. For instance, the **Information** category can become a section called "What is bullying?" with a general definition of bullying and subsections related to different kinds of bullying or harassment, such as cyberbullying and stalking. Further user research may be needed to fine-tune the contents of these categories.



To guide users to information most relevant to their personal needs, we recommend using the information architecture technique of progressive disclosure: displaying only the minimum data required for the task at hand, but allowing the user to dig deeper and find more information as needed. This approach is best used with contextual navigation menus and “breadcrumbs,” signals of one’s place in the app and the path one took to get there. The Interaction Design Foundation has a [helpful article](#)<sup>2</sup> on implementing progressive disclosure.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.actionagainststalking.org/dealing-with-your-stalker.html>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/progressive-disclosure>

## CONCLUSION

The Centennial Safety Watch app must serve the needs of some 22 000 students, 50% of whom come from a country other than Canada. This is no easy task, and the app designers have already made great efforts to accommodate a wide variety of safety-related situations within the app, as well as providing useful services such as “Friend Walk,” “Walk Safe” and “Work Alone.” Currently, however, the content of the app is not informative enough, is difficult to navigate, and is written in an unclear style with jargon and grammatical errors.

For students who are being bullied online, fleshing out the available content with the help of subject matter experts would go far to improve the usability of the Safety Watch app. The purpose of each piece of content should be considered, and content should always be grouped into relevant categories. To manage the volume of content, we recommend employing a progressive disclosure approach.

Gaining an understanding of student needs and basic principles of interactive strategy will help develop this app into a vital tool that every student wants to have in his pocket.