



# Hello, I'm Leila Johnston

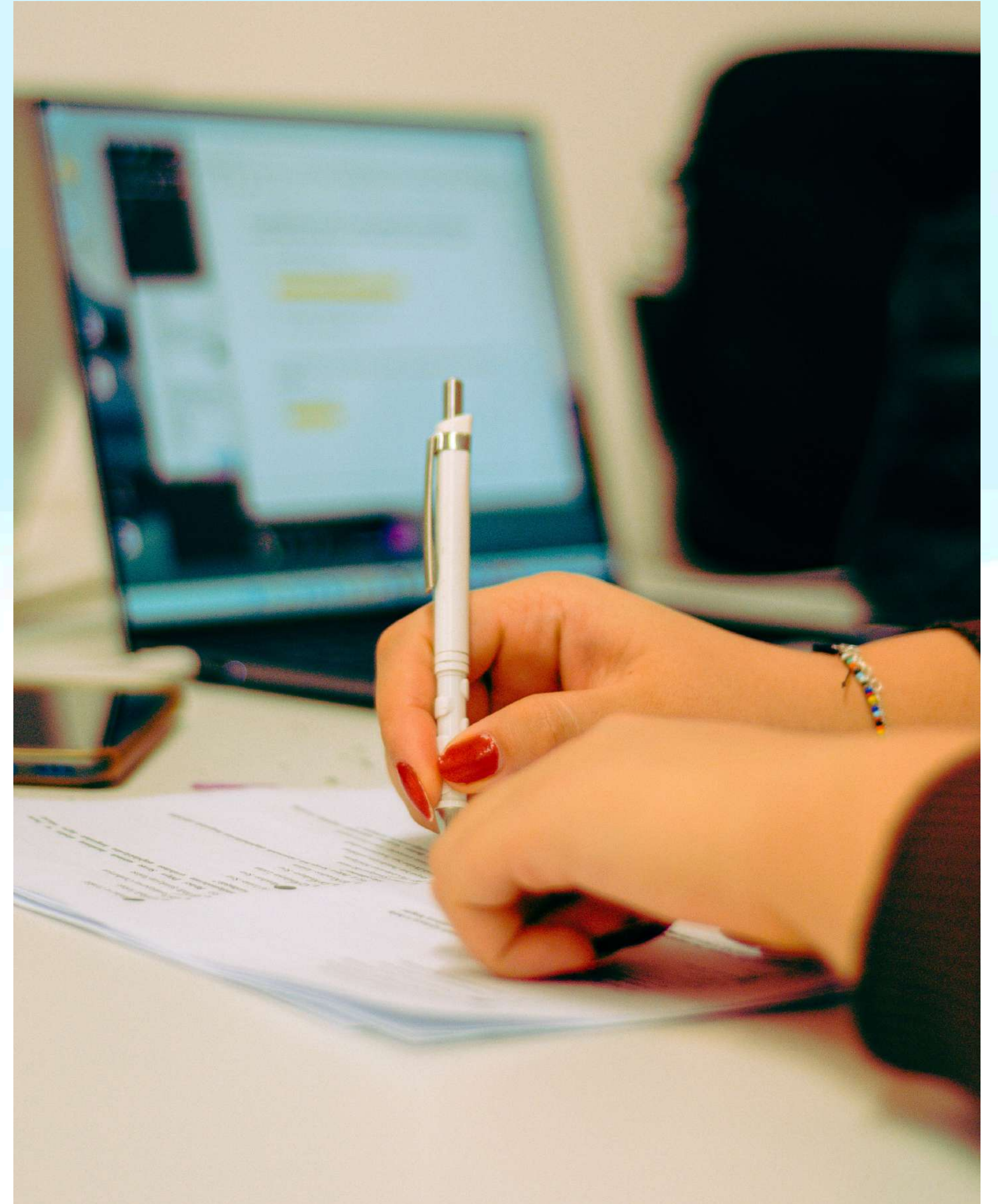
**I write about tech, business and finance, and clarify difficult ideas.**

**I often help clients to make podcasts.**

**[whosthesuit.com](http://whosthesuit.com)**

# What kind of writing do I do?

- Customer-facing, business-facing and internal, staff-only projects.
- Tone of voice guides and help with mission/vision/values.
- Writing and editing documents, emails and websites of all kinds.
- Creating newsletters and other projects that require moderately skilled visual design.
- Journalistic longform.
- Social media posts and strategy.
- Radio and podcast scripts and other 'creative' projects.





# Some of the clients I have created work for in recent years

- Nokia – copy and infographic design for their 6G launch site.
- Mozilla – concept copy for a new product.
- Mensa – regular longform features for their membership magazine.
- The Library of Mistakes (financial history library in Edinburgh). Content strategy and social media work.
- Wood MacKenzie – turning energy reports into articles for their site.
- The University of Brighton – training and consulting on podcasting and producing a new podcast series with the dress histories department.
- Raw Fury – creating a podcast series to support their doctrine that ‘video games are art’.



# Playbooks and tone of voice

From time to time, I am called upon to develop voice guidelines, principles and values and general references to help new products or businesses to understand who they are and how they want to come across.

These documents are generally in-house and private, but I have anonymised some extracts from a recent one.



“Flowstate aims to dial down the noise of the web. It’s a calming, supportive influence that allows you to feel more productive and work to your best.”

**Our values:** respectful, empathic, trustworthy  
**Our personality:** focused, relaxed, secure

## Our Story

Copy Playbook

**While our online behaviour has completely transformed over the last few decades, browsers haven’t kept pace.**

Our online use has changed so slowly and incrementally that we’ve hardly noticed ourselves adapting, but now almost all of us regularly deploy unwieldy workarounds as we try to conduct our online lives on software optimised for a very different era.

It’s not unusual to have dozens of tabs open in multiple browsers to separate project tabs, remind ourselves to do something, or just ensure we can remain logged into more than one account at the same time.

## Beyond browsers

The internet has come a long way since the 1990s when it was mostly just a useful, but occasional, research resource. Now it’s a complete virtual world: an online office, social hub and entertainment centre where many of us can easily spend eight hours or more a day. It’s an exciting place, but it’s not optimised for creativity, concentration or a sense of calm. And forcing our workflows into a creaking, antiquated infrastructure is adding to the stress.

Flowstate strips away all the unwanted stuff we inherited from the early years of the web and reimagines online life as a peaceful place with the user in charge.

We turn down the noise of the web.

### We believe

- The internet is not an inherently damaging place to spend time.
- The right digital tools, applied in the right way, can make you feel better.
- It’s time for the web to follow the user; a supportive tool rather than a discovery tool.

## Keepsafe Moments

Copy Playbook

**We keep things safe for our users** – it’s a crucial part of our written and visual character embedded deep in the DNA of Flowstate, so our messaging often takes this notion as its starting point. We respect users, we care about what they care about, and we help them to manage their attention in ways that bring about practical change.

Our users trust us to keep important things out of harm’s way until they’re ready to look at them again. For example, we encourage storing work onto what we call the ‘Riverbed’, where we promise we’ll hold onto them until they’re needed. The Flowstate experience should always be one of lightness – perhaps even an initial sense of relief. We remove the burdens that people didn’t realise they had been carrying as they navigated their online life.

By looking after the bits and pieces our users pick up on their journey around the web, we free up the time, energy and imagination they need to stay in a state of flow and complete the task in hand.

## Our Voice : What Not To Say

Copy Playbook

Moment	Language or term we do not use to talk about it	Why it doesn’t work
Moving a web page or piece of work onto the Riverbed	Autosave Bookmark Favourite Save/star/like Archive  Backburner  Stash Grab	Existing terms from technical apps bring to mind other programmes and lack a human and sensory feel.  Avoid buzzword type language or anything that sounds dismissive.  These kinds of phrases, while physical, border on aggressive and are a little too casual.
Moving away from a page, so it disappears off the visible River	We’ve shelved that for you.  That’s been taken care of.	‘Shelving’ things isn’t usually positive.  Avoid the passive voice. This phrase removes agency from the user, lacks humanity and seems to evade responsibility.
Filing away a memory	That’s out of the way now.	This doesn’t inspire confidence that the user’s treasures are being kept safe. It’s also not very personal or human.
Suggesting you resurface something that seems important	This seems unfinished, how about picking it up now?	Somewhat stressful and bossy.

I put together this 100-page long tone of voice guide for a major global tech brand in 2022. I interviewed staff and prospective customers and looked at numerous examples of similar voice guides before crafting metaphors and language to suit this emerging product.



A handbook  
about us.

Singular isn't  
just an incremental  
improvement,  
it's a completely  
new approach.

### We are revolutionary!

Building another new graphics engine doesn't interest us; we want to revolutionise the industry!

In fact, we don't even say we make graphics – we talk about making overlays. Singular is totally different from traditional graphics software.

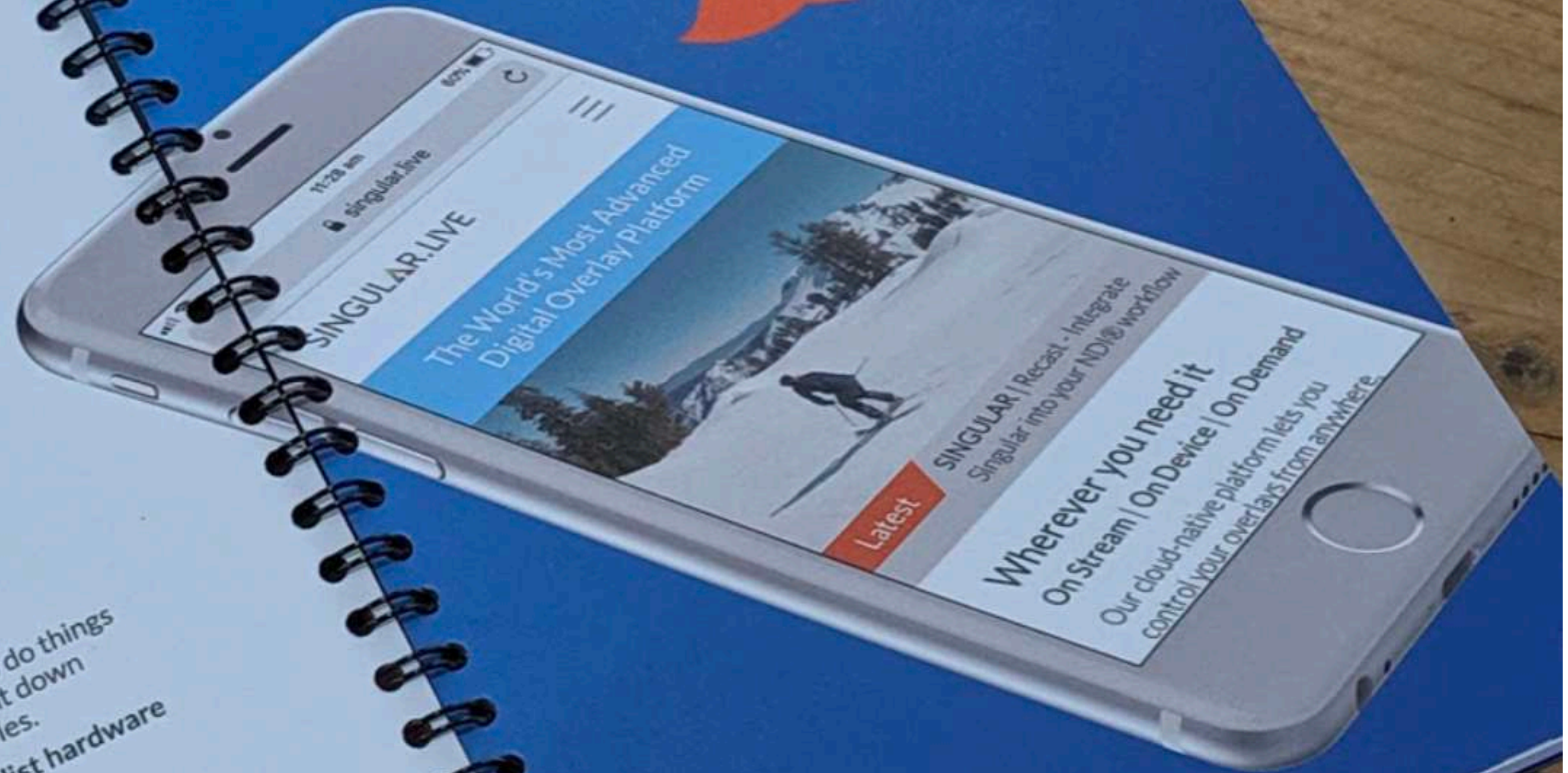
We're really proud of how intuitive our tech is, too. Anyone who wants to add overlays to their content can get going quickly and easily.

We are proud to do things differently, right down to first principles.

- ✓ No specialist hardware
- ✓ No licences
- ✓ No annual support fees
- ✓ No contracts
- ✓ No ties



What's special  
about Singular?  
Everything!



In their early days, I helped digital overlays software company Singular to shape their brand. This included writing a brand handbook, laying out their voice and values to their growing staff.



**“As a tech start-up that was finding its marketing feet, we needed help. Leila brought experience, expertise, candour and charm, and importantly, found the words that we couldn’t.”**

**Mike Ward, Head of Marketing at Singular.live**

# Longform articles and blogs



In addition to working as Deputy Editor of national property glossy ‘Move to the Country’ and the Managing Editor of The Literary Platform, I’ve written for New Scientist, WIRED UK, Brandwatch, Creative Review, Nokia’s blog, Nesta’s magazine “Native”, Period Ideas, East magazine and many more – including numerous websites and blogs.

## Brandwatch columns

I’ve started to see digital as a wealthy but tragic Prince roaming through the Kingdom of the old school arts – a place where things like dance, storytelling, and music have thrived for centuries.

The Prince spins glorious fabrics on a magical loom and is so admired for his finery that no one minds that he doesn’t speak the Kingdom’s language. On the contrary, the smitten subjects beg that he use his magic loom to [yarn bomb](#) absolutely everything.

Virtual Reality is the Prince’s improvement on imagination. After many months of toil he finally manages to weave a little feeling, a little slice of something. The Kingdom rejoices! The Prince is featured on the cover of Ye Wired magazine with his crown rakishly askew.

But one day, the people remember something. Some of them can improve upon the prince’s yarn bomb magic *just by closing their eyes*.

There’s another vr which has never had capital letters, and it is never far away. Some, like designer [Wes West](#), find immersive realities come along quite often. His latest imaginary trip was to a legendary Hollywood hotel, thanks to [a new musical collaboration between Jarvis Cocker and Chilly Gonzalez](#).

“It’s like looking at the world through a tinted lens. It feels good,” he tells me. “Jarvis greets the listener with the words ‘Help yourself to pretzels,’ and as he spoke, a portal to another world opened up and I stepped in for a poke around.”

## New Scientist

The people have spoken... about a lot of things lately. And let’s face it, it has usually happened in the echo chambers of social media. But throughout the political tumult of recent times where tears have been shed, family members blocked and dear pals unfriended, one forum of online expression has remained consistent, fun and quietly confident: videos.

Online video is free speech in every sense. It has happened so steadily we take it for granted, but it would be no exaggeration to view the growth of science “creators” (as YouTube calls them) as a sort of soft revolution – a triumph of defiant goodwill in the face of uncertainty, and of apolitical communication in a world of power games and gangs.

The more the mainstream media reveals of its wolfish agendas, the more charmed we are by the individuals who walk their own path barefoot as the broadcast juggernauts thunder past. The new science educators seem driven purely by raw enthusiasm for their material, and lacking a budget, studio, equipment or experience, find the most extraordinary workarounds.

It’s no secret that the production values on YouTube now regularly outstrip those on broadcast television, and YouTube has even begun facilitating this shift by [investing in creators](#) who want to monetise their videos. Science videos have had their share of success, but the subject matter brings its own challenges. How do you present intangible information? Who’s going to watch? The answers, for some at least, are “highlighter pens” and “millions of people”.

That’s certainly the case for [Vi Hart](#). Across dozens of inky-finger-stained videos, she covers everything from “How to draw a spiral” to “The calculus of bad driving”, visualising abstractions through charming stop-motion papercraft and witty storytelling. Hart has over a million subscribers and her most-watched video (“[Hexaflexagons](#)“, from 2012) has clocked up 7 million views. Quite right too: it’s pure delight.

## Nokia

5G has been heralded by some as a sort of digital second coming, with a mindblowing list of benefits to take us into the next era of edge computing. We’re told that ultra-low latency will bring lag-free connections, improving our efficiency and productivity beyond recognition. Lightning-fast data speeds will make applications such as streaming video, video conferencing, and virtual reality available to anyone and their holo-dog. And the slow burning Internet of Things will finally fulfill its promise, thanks to 5G supporting a huge number of devices without hammering their battery life.

It all sounds wonderful, especially the holo-dog, but with more and more critical functions connected to the network, should we be bracing ourselves for an increase in malicious attacks on the network? How and why might hackers take on 5G systems?

We put these questions to Holly Grace Williams, CEO of security firm Secarma. As ‘ethical hackers’, Williams and her team are hired by clients to find vulnerabilities in their physical and virtual systems. It’s the ‘set a thief to catch a thief’ logic, and their techniques are identical to those with malign intent.

“The easiest way to describe it is: I break into computers and buildings for a living,” says Williams. “Organisations will have a system, and we’ll demonstrate how to break into it.”

To find out how attacks might happen, we first need to know *why* – and ethical hackers are the people to ask, because this is a psychological game as much as a technical one. Behind every break-in is an individual with their own reasons, and Williams cautions against the common mistake of lumping all threat actors together as some sort of coordinated, hoodie-wearing army.

“There’s a wide range of reasons why hackers hack,” she explains, “from national state attackers who want to look into information from governments, to criminals who are financially motivated, groups who want to spread political messages, and people who simply have a lot of time on their hands – the ‘bored teenager in a basement’ stereotype.”



## What happened to learning during lockdown?

The closure of all educational establishments has been a shock to pupils, parents and schools alike. Pupils and teachers have been forced to operate remotely at very short notice, pupils have received [fewer learning hours](#) and had their curriculum cut, and much of the work set has assumed access to devices and home internet. [Study](#), after [study](#), has shown that these changes have disproportionately impacted pupils from lower income homes. Digital Access West Yorkshire's own Claire Garside reflects:

*"Lockdown happened very quickly and at a time when most schools didn't have a school-wide policy for remote teaching and learning. Teachers from all classes or subjects hadn't received any/enough training and support to be able to adapt to the change in circumstances. Digital exclusion and the impact on educational attainment, health and wellbeing needs to be addressed – people/families need to be supported to get online and connect with others."*

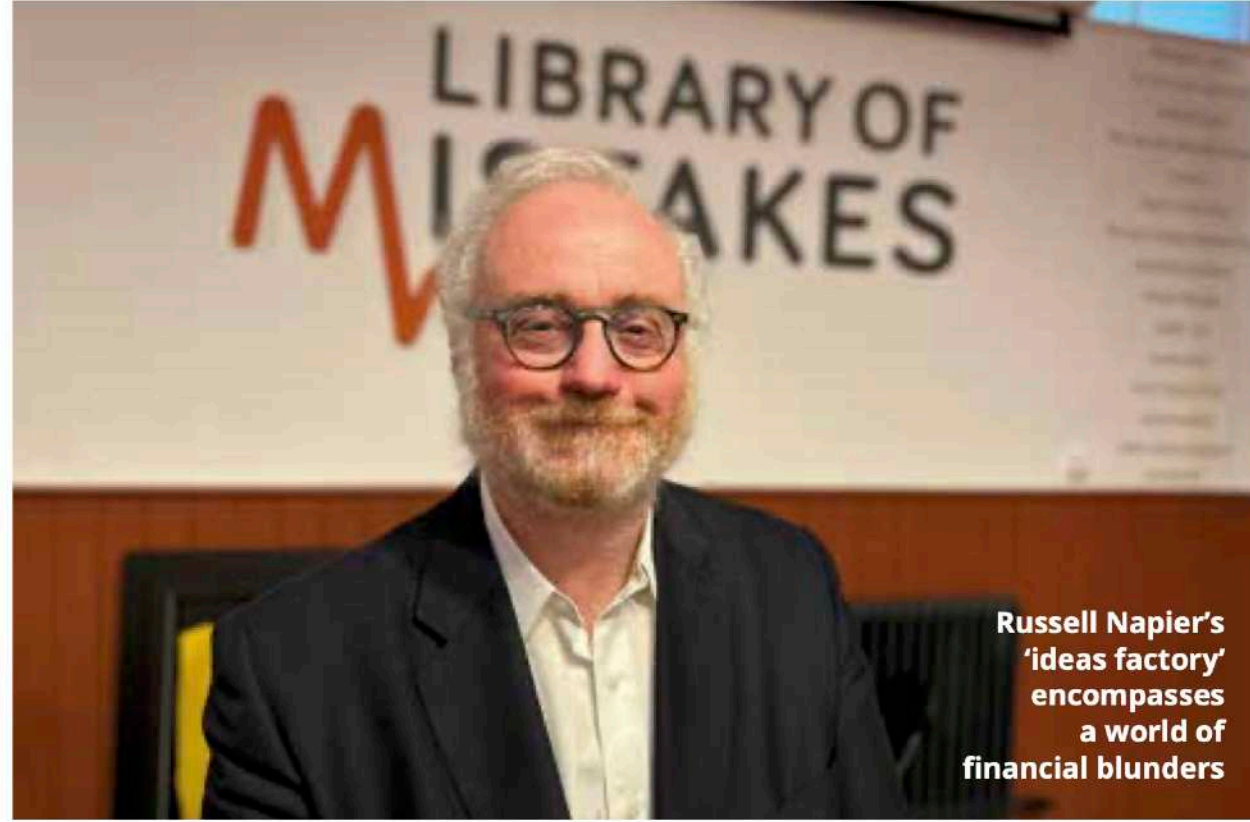
It's easy to forget that digital is neither universal nor free. [22%](#) of the UK's population have lacked basic digital skills since long before the Covid-19 outbreak, and the less you earn, the less likely you are to spend your money on an internet connection. For example, only [51%](#) of households earning between £6000-10,000 have home internet access, compared with 99% of households with an income of over £40,001.

It's clear that throughout this crisis, schools have been working hard to try to give their pupils the best opportunities possible. But tasking children with work to do online assumes a good internet connection and access to appropriate devices. From the stats above, we can see that this approach excludes almost half of low income homes, and, to add insult to injury, those children falling through the cracks are already [less likely](#) to succeed at school. With schools setting learning tasks that require an internet connection at home, the gap is only likely to grow further during this crisis. Teaching staff are of course confronted with the harsh realities of these inequalities every day. As one [head teacher said](#):

I was asked to research and write this heavily stat-based piece for a technology charity based in Leeds, reflecting on the educational impact of lockdown. Read more here:

<https://accesswy.org/what-happened-to-learning-during-lockdown/>





Russell Napier's 'ideas factory' encompasses a world of financial blunders

# WELCOME TO THE LIBRARY OF MISTAKES

It's not easy to find Britain's most unusual library so we asked its founder, Professor Russell Napier, to explain his goal to change the world – one mistake at a time.

WORDS LEILA JOHNSTON

**T**here is a playful, otherworldly charm to everything about the 'Library of Mistakes' (LoM). Even its whereabouts feel like part of the game – no flâneur of Edinburgh's leafy New Town streets would ever stumble across it by chance. Duck through the gap near the coffee booth, persevere down the cobbled back road. Push on past rows of garages hosting luxury vehicles and secret enterprises, and then, just as you're about to give up, you'll see the sign. On

a fresh, white gable end, Einstein's words come at you suddenly, in large red letters: "The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library." Some may question the relevance of a physical library these days, but Einstein's words are a clue: it's about having somewhere to go. Ideas have roots in a time and place, and libraries honour stability and physicality. And for all the knowledge instantly available online, our access to true inspiration is limited. Digital shows us what we want to see 'on demand', and algorithms dutifully reinforce our echo chambers. With



I am a regular feature writer for Mensa's membership magazine, 'IQ'.



# Social media

I have been behind the wheel of twitter and instagram accounts of a number of organisations, and created digital strategies for them, including Balbir Singh Dance company, Carbon Theatre, and currently the Library of Mistakes – Edinburgh’s wonderful financial history reference library. I also ran free workshops in social media and branding throughout the pandemic lockdowns.



# So, what happened?

Given there is no existing Instagram fanbase for the LOM, and everything has come through us following strangers first, engagement has been respectable. Stand-out discoveries after three months...

**FOLLOWER COUNT AFTER 3 MONTHS: 447**  
**HOW MANY WE'RE FOLLOWING: 1683**  
**'FOLLOW BACK' RATIO: 3.7**

For some reason, pictures of multiple books are doing better than pictures of books on their own.

Times of posting don't appear to make much difference but Friday afternoons are surprisingly strong.

Leaving the app open with the account 'watching' all the stories of everyone we follow reliably results in some follows back, as people see our logo in the list of viewers of their stories, and are intrigued.

People are finding the LOM through this. Several friendly people got in touch via DM to enquire about visiting the library.

Hitting very topical themes works. At the moment people are more interested in e.g. inflation than they are in e.g. fashion retailer Boohoo.

People most likely to follow back are involved in investment or finance in some way, and lots of them are local students. This mainly reflects who I've been following. More target audiences are out there.

No one votes in polls or anything on Insta stories or chats in the comments much. However, a few superfans are emerging who will watch and like everything.

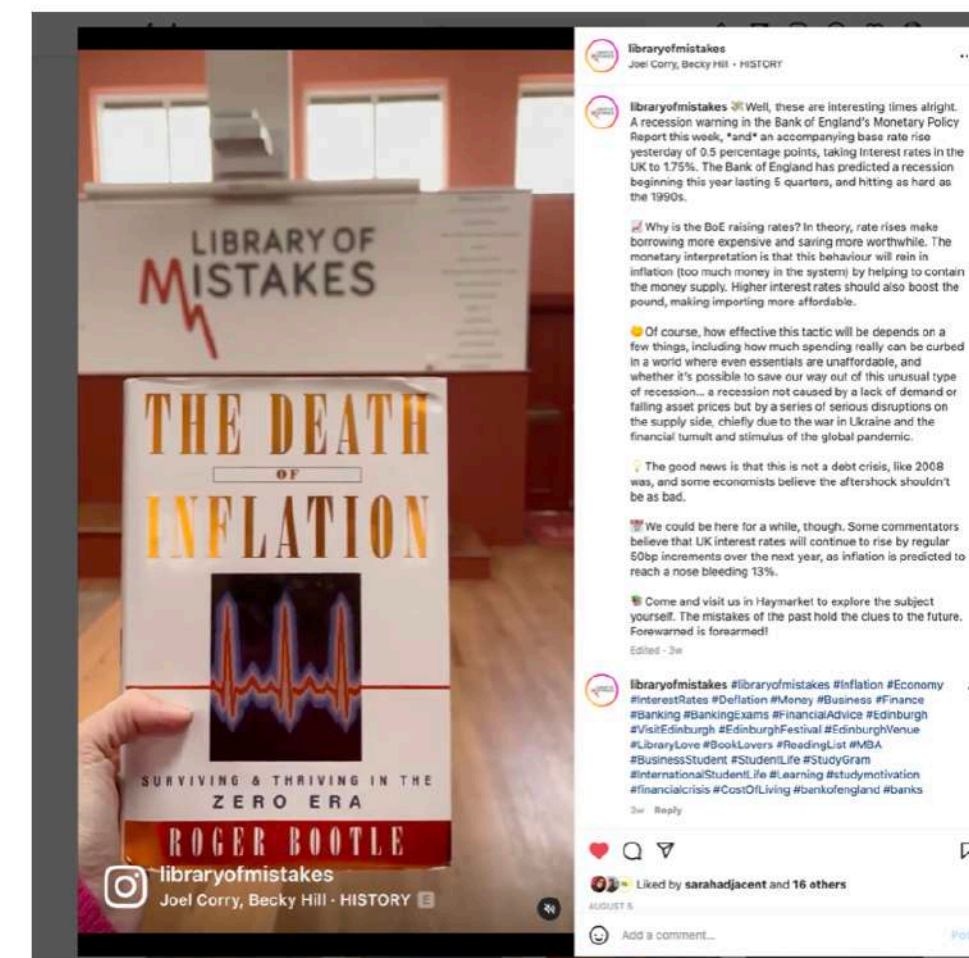
Russell's explainer videos are popular.

In the summer of 2022, I created a 3-month trial strategy for Edinburgh's Library of Mistakes, creating posts inspired by the library and sharing via stories, photos and reels. At the end of the three months I created a report for the client, with advice on how we should proceed. These are some pages from the report.

# Most popular Reels

Books about inflation on the day of a rate rise, with a chart topping soundtrack, with a brief summary of the BoE's thinking.

Views: 1,231 Saves: 9  
Likes: 17 Facebook plays: 5



Just a funny short video of me in different positions in the library, again using a trending soundtrack. Note lack of saves compared to the 'educational' post on the left. But more Fb popularity. Some social media people say that text overlays on Reels increase views.

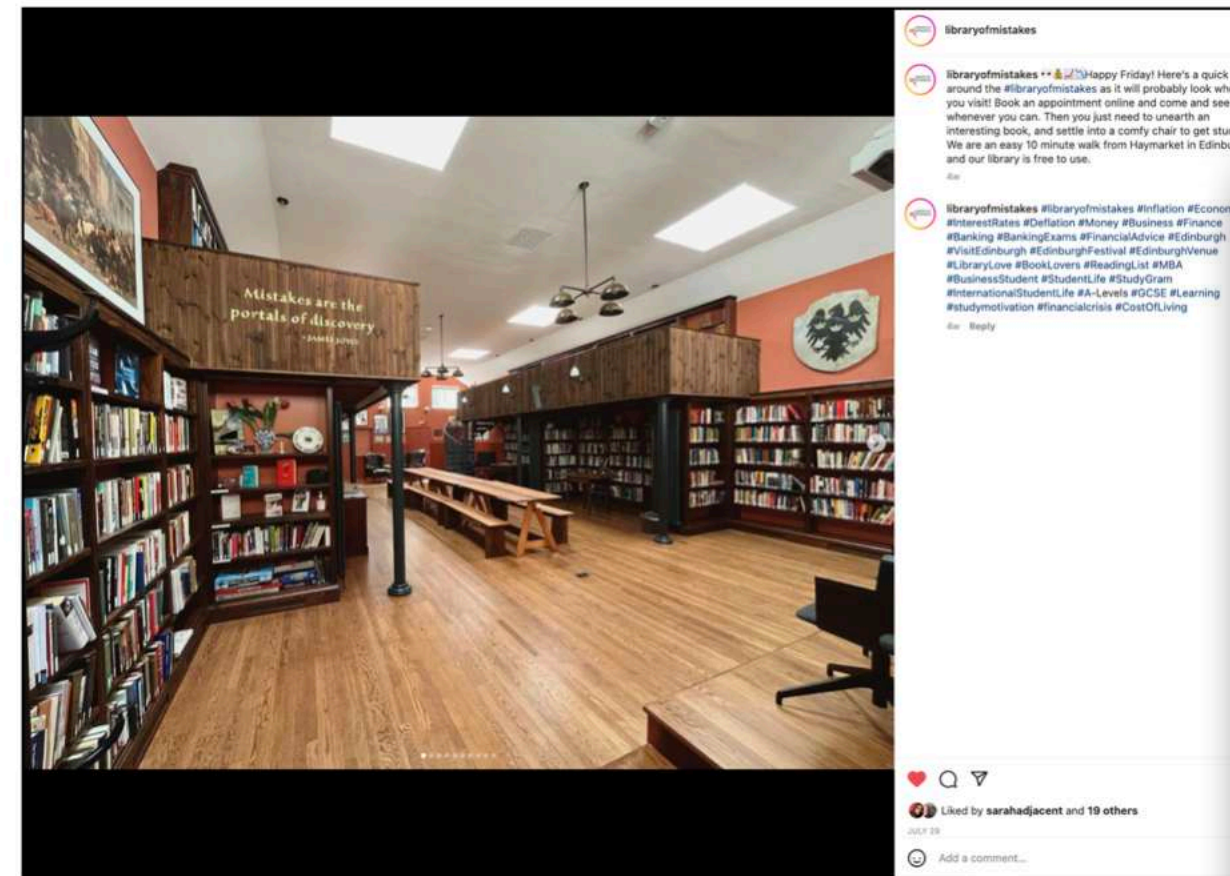
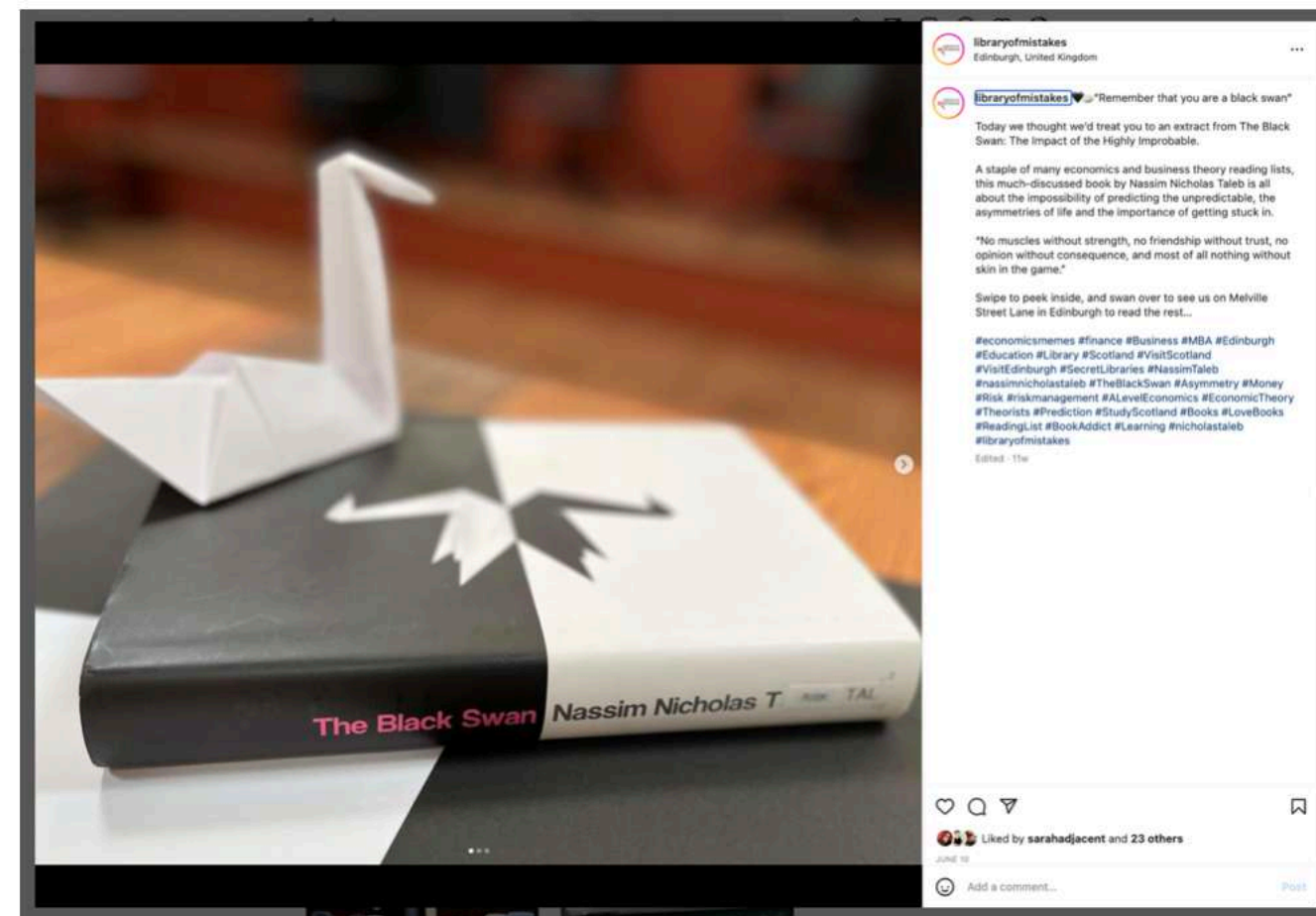
Views: 708 Saves: 0  
Likes: 20 Facebook plays: 16



# Most popular photo posts

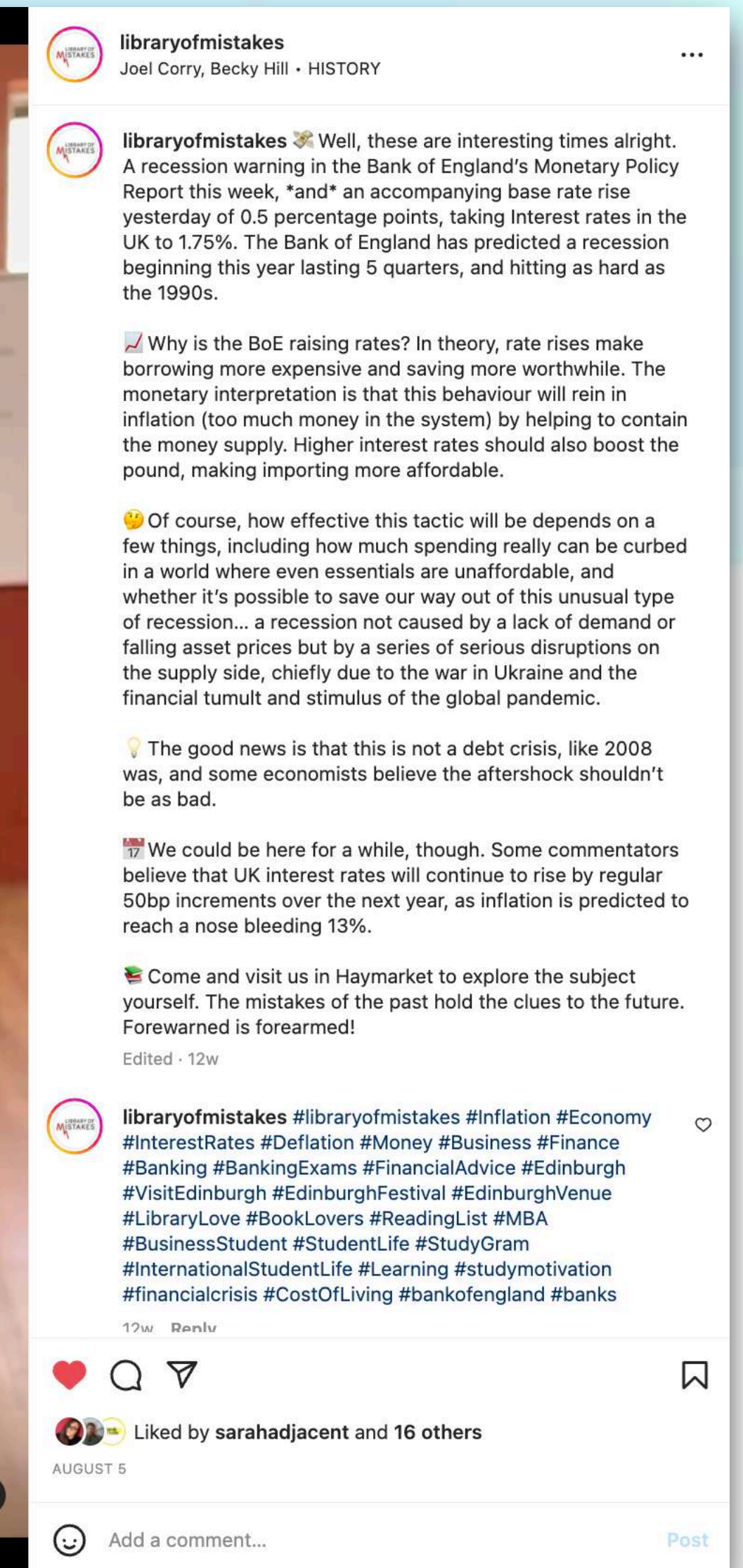
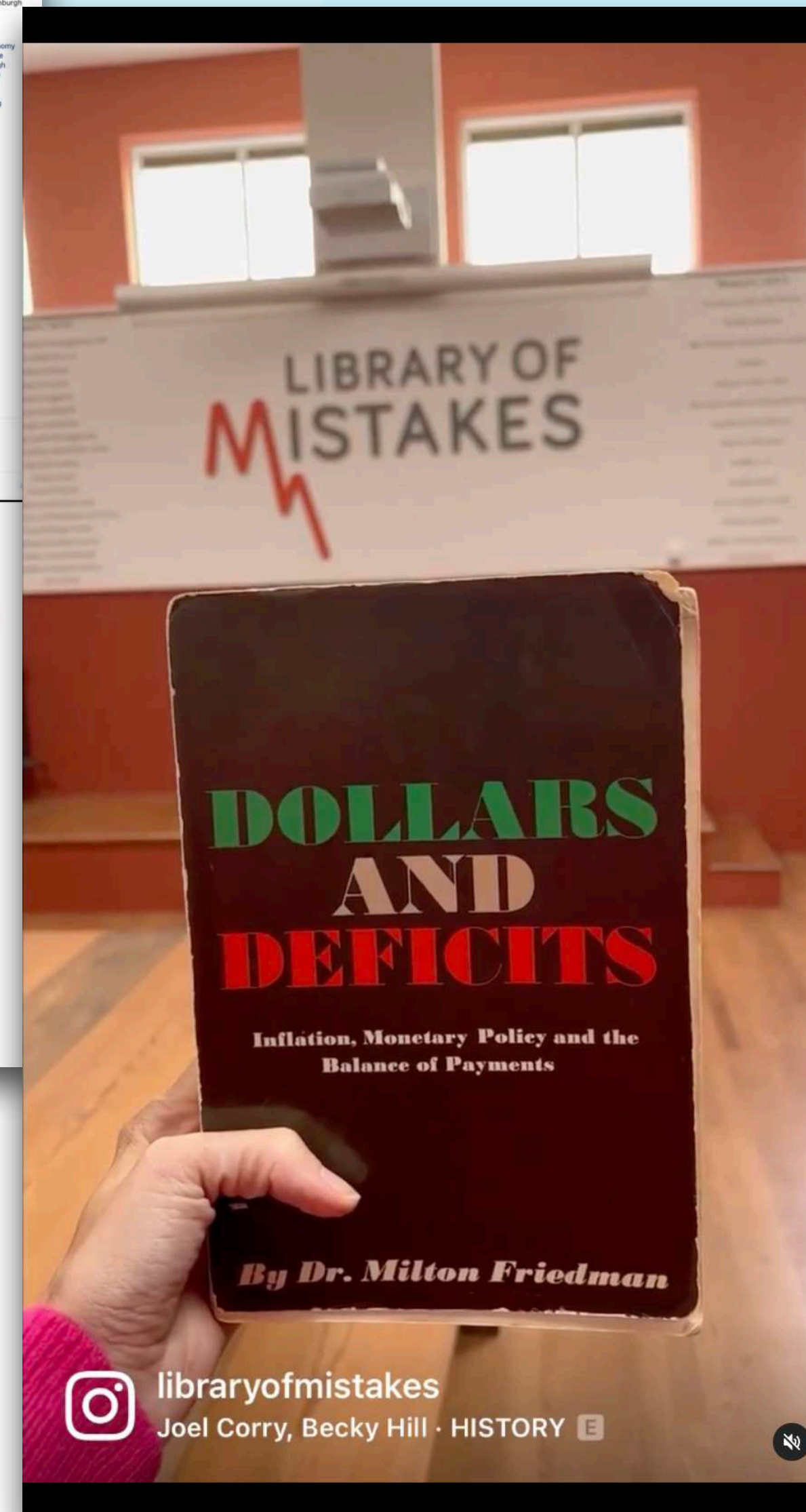
A carousel looking inside *The Black Swan* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb. I learned origami for this! A high percentage of visits came from the hashtag search, suggesting **it's worth tagging popular author names**. People find us through the authors they are looking for.

Likes: 24 Impressions from hashtags: 119  
 Profile visits: 8 Total accounts reached: 267



Another carousel is the second most popular. It's a photo tour of the library, with details of things like chairs, posters and individual books. I have 'pinned' it so it'll always be the first pic people see on our page, which will boost it even more.

Likes: 20 Impressions from hashtags: 28  
 Profile visits: 5 Total accounts reached: 259





**“I work with Leila at the [Library of Mistakes](#), an initiative to educate future generations, particularly in business and finance. Leila is highly knowledgeable about finance and has a great enthusiasm for the subject. She’s highly creative and a brilliant writer who brings a wealth of qualities to projects. Recommended!”**

**Fraser Allen, communications expert**



# **Books, ebooks and booklets**



- I'm the author of three humour books published by Snowbooks: *How To Worry Friends and Inconvenience People* (2007), *Enemy of Chaos* (2009) and *The Inner Head* (2014). I've also contributed chapters to books, for example David Bramwell's *Mysterium*.
- I have created ebooks for the voluntary branding and social media support work I do with Sarah Dobbs, as Sarah & Leila.
- In 2019, I edited Bob Berzin's novel about countryside crime, *Snared*.
- I have written, edited and helped to shape ebooks for tech clients, for example Nokia Bell Labs's high profile 6G ebook and Nokia's Charging as a Service offer.
- I commissioned and edited all 12 editions of my art/tech magazine, *Hack Circus* between 2013-2017.
- As an artist, I produced several booklets to support my residencies, including Hacking Rambert – all about the relationship between dance and digital culture. That's an extract from it, on the right.

## Where two worlds meet

I couldn't care less about getting young people into theatres or promoting the spurious cause of technology in general, or indeed making dance look more futuristic or anything like that. I think what Rambert do is not lacking and they do not need saving. But part of dance is the quest for translators. Dance needs translators to bring itself into existence in the first place – via (often game-like) choreographic techniques. It also needs translators to transmit itself from dancer to dancer. And it needs translators to get from the dancer's body to the audience's brain. Making dance is an ongoing hunt for new translators who can shine light on a fresh part of this dim mystery.

I am not a master technician. I know a little about a lot of things, and if gifted time and resources, will use them to make what I can, within the constraints. But if Rambert wanted someone who is, for example, a highly experienced projection mapping artist, or a game designer, they hired the wrong person.

I am a specialist in boundary-breaking and presenting views in alternative ways, often challenging the status quo. (Note – this is a feature of me, rather than a feature of the technology community, which is by no means generally 'disruptive' by nature.)

I assume I was selected as someone who can help to show how technology might help dance, but it occurs to me I could have played this differently. I could've set my mind on producing a specific piece of work prior to meeting Rambert. I could've turned up, done my hours and made that thing.

And in doing so, I could've been anyone, and Rambert could have been any company. Hopefully it's clear why I've made the choices I have.

**“Making dance is an ongoing hunt for new translators who can shine light on a fresh part of this dim mystery.”**





# Thanks!

For more about me, my principles and projects, please see [whosthesuit.com](https://whosthesuit.com)