

# Writing for the Web

**Short and Sweet** – Most users just scan Web pages because reading on computer screens is so difficult. So, write half of what you would for a printed brochure. Also, users don't like to scroll down a long page of text, so try to keep everything no more than a couple of screens deep.

**Organizing Your Information** – Start your text with the conclusion or place the most vital information first. In journalism this is called the "Inverted Pyramid" style. Break text up with subheads and bulleted lists. Provide summary information and link to more detailed, background information if it's needed.

**Content Style** – Draw the reader in by writing with a conversational tone, but use humor only if you think that most people will understand the idea. Paragraphs must be short and present one idea each. Write with a "news you can use" approach. Use a simple sentence structure. Avoid superficial hyperbole or meaningless slogans. Use factual statements and avoid words that directly relate to the Web, such as "follow this link" or "at the bottom of this Web page, you'll find...."

**Write Like You Talk** – People pay more attention to material on the Web that sounds like somebody is speaking to them personally.

**Please Don't Overuse "Please"** – When telling your reader what they should do, don't say "please" too often. Just tell them: "To talk with an advisor, call xxxx." Not: "To talk with an advisor, please call xxxx."

**Use Active Sentences** – Strong, active verbs that focus on the reader are best. For example, the phrase, "Here are 10 related resources..." is passive and dull. Much better would be to phrase it like, "You can get more information...." This focuses on the reader with you, and they are invited to take strong action with the verb get.

**Headlines** – Users read the headline first and then (maybe) the text. So, make the headline direct and compelling. A headline should state what the page is about by clearly presenting its content. Headlines should be no deeper than three levels of hierarchy and the first word is always the most important. So, use name of subject first, like a company, the college or featured individual. Don't – Avoid useless headers or headlines like, "Welcome!" Don't be clever in headlines and avoid teaser headlines or page headers. Be concise and direct. Don't waste the reader's time or they'll never come back to your page.

**Highlight Important Words or Phrases** – Occasionally put words that highlight key ideas in bold text. This makes it easier for readers to scan the page. However, don't highlight long sentences.

**Links** – Use links to send the reader to more detailed information on other pages. In a list of links, put the most important ones first. The link name should clearly indicate

what the user will find if they follow the link. Don't use too many links or the reader will get lost and confused. Don't use links if information can be presented on the page itself. Never mention on the page that you are providing links, because it's obvious it's a link.

**Page Headings** – Use meaningful page headings for effective searches. Web search engines usually index your Level 1 Heading—the one at the top of your page. Keep your headers as short as possible. Avoid starting headings with words like A, An and The, which convey no meaning.

**Proofreading** – Have your text and your entire Web page edited on paper before it's published on the Internet. This will decrease the likelihood of mistakes and will provide a hardcopy record of the changes. Eliminate grammar errors. Polish copy by having several people check it for grammar, punctuation and consistency.

**PCC/WebEasy Page Title** – Limit the title to no more than 50 characters. The first 40 characters should sufficiently describe the page, because search engines often truncate this area in their navigation menus. The first word of a title tag is most important and should best describe the page. On a title tag, don't start with a generic term (i.e. Welcome or The). When viewed out of context the title should make sense. The title should be different for each page.

It's a good idea to end each title tag with (PCC), since "bookmarks" and "favorites" take the name of this tag, as in: Admissions (PCC).

**PCC/WebEasy Description** – When one of your pages is listed in search engine results, the page title is usually followed by the description. Take advantage of this by supplementing the title with additional information. For example:

Page Title: Favorite Links

Description: Web sites with additional study resources and information on careers in chemistry. (Rock Creek Chemistry Department)

It's a good idea to end the description with the name of your campus and department, so if the title is "Favorite Links" the user would know it's from the Rock Creek Chemistry Department.

The description should be 150 characters or less. Make sure it makes sense if viewed out of context and avoid hyperbole and promotional language.

**Lists** – Use numbered lists only if the order of the subjects is important. Otherwise, use bulleted lists. Limit any list to around 10 items.

Sources: Jakob Nielson; Sun Microsystems (<http://www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/>); Holtz Communication & Technology.

