

Writing for the Web—Some Guidelines

Recommended reading: *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works* by Janice (Ginny) Redish

Web content is a conversation. When online, people tend to skim and scan in order to find and understand the information they need.

Answer your site visitors' questions

For every topic on your site, think about what people come wanting to know about that topic. Then think about how to give them that information as clearly and concisely as possible.

Let your site visitors “grab and go”

Here's how:

- Break your text into short sections with clear headings
- Start with key messages (i.e., “front-loading” the content)
- Write short sentences and short paragraphs (a one sentence paragraph is fine)
- Use lists and tables
 - Bulleted lists for items or options
 - Numbered lists for instructions
- Write and insert meaningful links
- Illustrate your content (with photos and captions)

Additional writing tips:

- Write in the active voice (most of the time)
- Use plain language
- Use verbs for action instead of nouns (e.g., “He denied...” instead of “He issued a denial...”)
- Remember parallelism (humans like patterns)
- Cut unnecessary words
- Use the inverted pyramid style (key message should be first)
- Talk to your site visitors by using “you” (and “we,” if appropriate) in the copy to draw the reader into the conversation
- Avoid overly long or clever page titles, section headings, etc.

Encourage further use

What do you want people to be able to do on your site? Apply for a program? Contact faculty? Subscribe to a newsletter? Follow your social media accounts?

Think about the questions your site visitors have. Be sure to answer them, while using tone and style to engage your site visitors.

Remember: Give your site visitors what *they* need. And keep in mind how *they* access your content, from computer screens to mobile devices.