

### 3 Principals of good web writing:

1. It is like a conversation
2. It answers people's questions
3. It lets people "grab and go!"

### 10 Guidelines for writing clear & effective paragraphs, sentences and words:

1. Talk to your site visitors. Use "You."
  - a. Using "You" makes the information more personal. People are more likely to take in your message if you write using "you" because they can see themselves in the text. This applies to legal content like policy and procedure. This also saves you from gender-specific writing.
2. Show that you are a person and your org includes people.
  - a. When writing for an organization, use "we, us, are." This helps the visitor feel more as if you are in a "conversation" with them.
3. Write in active voice, most of the time.
  - a. Active sentences help people grab information quickly and easily.
4. Write simple, short, straightforward sentences.
  - a. Keep sentences to 10-20 words.
    - i. Cut the fluff
    - ii. Say it once clearly
    - iii. Keep sentence to one thought
  - b. Very short sentences are good...even fragments can work.
  - c. This applies to serious writing as well.
5. Cut unnecessary words.
  - a. Sometimes one word will do instead of several.
6. Give extra information its own place.
  - a. Don't put extra stuff between the subject and the verb of your sentence.
7. Keep paragraphs short.
  - a. A one or two sentence paragraph is fine.
  - b. Lists or tables may be even better than a paragraph.
8. Start with the context...first things first.
  - a. Start each paragraph with the topic sentence.
  - b. Get to the point from the get go!
9. Put the action in the verbs, not the nouns
  - a. Don't bury the action in the noun.
10. Use your web visitors words
  - a. **Think about your audience!!!**
  - b. **Plain English...get rid of industry lingo and specific terminology**
  - c. **We read simple, short common words faster**

### Don'ts

- **Don't use web artifacts "click here"**  
Instead of "[Click here for more information.](#)" write "[Get more information here.](#)" or better yet "[More Information.](#)"

[Jakob Nielsen](#) states that "Generally, if the words or phrases are specific to Web use, then they are probably words to avoid."

- **Don't center text!**  
Centered text is more difficult to read. Our eyes don't know how far back to start each new line.
- **Don't let headings float**  
Put space above the heading but not between the heading and the text. For example:
  - **This heading does not float!**  
Headings that float make it difficult for web visitors to see the relationship between the heading and the accompanying text.
- **Don't write in all CAPS**  
On the web and in email, ALL CAPS indicates that you are SHOUTING. In addition, all capitals can take up to 30% more space and take 15% longer to read.
- **Don't underline anything but links**  
On the web, people assume that anything that is underlined is a link, whether it is or not. So keep underlining for links only.
- **Don't try to impress with big words or industry lingo**  
Use plain English. We read common words faster. Don't make your visitor have to look up words just to understand what you are saying. They won't...they will leave your website.

## Do's

- **Do provide good contrast between background and text**

**Good Contrast**

**Bad Contrast**

- **Do break large documents into topics and subtopics**
  - Bullets
  - Hyperlinks
  - Headings
- **Do front load your page content**  
Most important information goes at the top of the page. Think of the old newspaper rule of them for headlines: "Keep it above the fold."
- **Do reduce hard copy content by 50%**
  - Bullets
  - Hyperlinks
  - Headings
- **Do use plain English**

**Influencing Your Visitors:** (all while using the 10 guidelines)

**What do you want to influence your website visitors to do?**

**We influence by**

- **Raise Awareness** –
  - Content that tells the story of who you are and what you're about written in a way that attracts and appeals to your visitors.
- **Become Liked and Trusted** –
  - If your visitor doesn't "like" you, they are not staying, coming back or taking action (enroll in CNU for instance). If your visitor doesn't trust what you're telling them, they are not staying, coming back or taking action. Content here needs to show off your personality (dept. personality), values (not your mission statement!!), expertise and credibility.
- **Motivate, Inspire and Promote Action** –
  - People are not going to act unless they want to and it is easy to do so. Content needs to explain how that action (majoring in Math) will benefit them, how your program has unique opportunities and access (faculty), and how that action will meet their needs (sign up for training).

**So how can you achieve these 3 goals?**

Rhetoric and Psychology:

**For this session, we are only going to discuss Rhetoric**

- Rhetoric – Persuasive appeals (Aristotle)
  - **Credibility** (ethos – a based on character)
    - Experience (your staff and faculty-degrees, certs)
    - Success (your alumni, research grants, awards, publications)
    - Reputation (entire unv. or just your dept.)
    - Endorsements & Associations (accreditation, certs., who says you're good)
  - **Logic** (logos – logical appeal/influence)
    - Claim (80% of our students get masters degrees, we are 90% SWaM)
    - Evidence (prove it!)
    - Is your argument or reasoning well-formed? Is it valid??
  - **Emotion** (pathos – emotional appeal/influence)
    - Tone
    - Style

## Creditability:

- Outbound links - Links to other sites show that the authors have done their homework and are not afraid to let readers visit other sites. This also aligns you with other credible sources.
- Story telling (testimonials) from faculty staff to include educational/professional background/achievements (homepage profiles and SPIFs)
- Endorsement from private and public entities – local business person or parent, national accreditation entity.
- Customer Service – do you provide contact info, policy info, user feedback forms?
- Content is current and accurate – build a website review into your over strategic plan and schedule regular reviews during the semester.
- A reputation as a trusted resource, whether internal or external, will build if you consistently publish accurate, well written content.

## Logic:

- **Look at:** the clarity of the claim, the logic of its reasons, and the effectiveness of its supporting evidence.
- Reports from or links to information from Institutional Research or the overseeing entity for your specific industry (Auditor of Public Accounts)
- Outbound links that prove your claim (commonwealth websites, published academic research)
- Testimonials and case studies
- Simple fact sheet with references

## Emotion:

- It's the "personality" of your department and your attitude toward your visitors.
- Use of images
- Developing a copy tone and style doesn't mean wacky or informal or being too stiff, uptight and throwing around a bunch of industry lingo and terminology. It's about developing a character and distinctiveness that's suitable for the university, your audiences and the nature of your content.
- The tone of your content should never come between your visitor and what they want from your web site - if they find it intrusive, complicated, hard to follow and not in "plain English" then you've lost them and the chance for them to "hear what you have to say."
- Personalize, personalize, personalize!!!
- Don't tell your visitors how great you are....tell them how great they will be when they come to CNU...tell them how much your program will increase their ability to get a job, tell them how cool it is to do undergraduate research...make your visitor the focus of your content!
- Don't be afraid to be energetic! Don't be afraid to display your enthusiasm for your department, program, activity...whatever!

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