



Top Tips are a collection of informational handouts from my colleagues in Business Development, Marketing, Business Planning, Web Site Design, Research and more. I provide them as a courtesy and invite you to check out more at www.bancroftinfo.com.
-- Jan Knight, Owner – Bancroft Information Services

Writing for the Web

Stuart and Louise Glogoff, WebPageProduce

When writing for the Web, it is important to keep your audience in mind as well as the basic principles of good Web writing. Ask yourself questions, such as "Who is my audience?" "What is the number one thing I want to communicate to visitors to my website?" Strive for a straightforward sentence structure, tight paragraphs, and appropriate vocabulary.

Web Writing Techniques

Jakob Nielsen, Web usability guru, describes several specific writing techniques employed by successful websites. Some of these include:

Be succinct. Reading from computer screens is 25% slower than reading from paper. Write no more than 50% of the text you would have used in a hardcopy publication.

Write for scanning. Don't require users to read long continuous blocks of text. Facilitate scanning by using meaningful section titles, bulleted lists, and highlighting/emphasis to make important words catch the users eye.

Include one idea per paragraph. Users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught in the first few words of the paragraph.

Use an inverted pyramid style. Start with the conclusion to ensure Web readers will catch the most important point.

Make pages a reasonable length and density. Move detailed content to linked pages so that scanning is preserved. If appropriate, provide separate "print entire document" links so that readability is not sacrificed to printability.

Avoid a promotional writing style. Web users are busy and they normally want facts. "Marketese" can have a negative effect on a site's credibility.

Additional Tips from Daniel Will-Harris:

Ensure that your reader finds your information useful. People visiting your website are there to find information, not be entertained.

Give users the information that they need to act. General overview information is fine, but people are using the Web for a purpose.

Make sure people know what each webpage will do for them. If people can't figure it out from the top of the page, they won't scroll down or wait to figure it out.

Write more casually. To make the Web experience more personal and improve scanning, use a more conversational tone and style in your writing. Many people will skip pages or content that read like a dissertation.

Additional Resources

About Jakob Nielsen <http://www.useit.com/jakob/> See Nielsen's *Alertbox: Current Issues in Web Usability* <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/>

Writing for the Web Daniel Will-Harris
http://www.efuse.com/Design/web_writing_basics.html

Applying Writing Guidelines to Web Pages by John Morkes and Jakob Nielsen (January 6, 1998) <http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/rewriting.html>

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