

Writing for the Web

By Rebecca L. Wells

There are a few basic rules to follow when you're writing for the web. Like copywriting, the goal is to make things short, punchy, and action-oriented. Unless you are a long-form journalist working for *The New Yorker*, you should assume your reader is not interested in scrolling through a lengthy article.

As with all good business writing, you should:

- Use **simple, clear sentence structure** and avoid overly long or complex sentences.
- **Use active voice.** You can avoid passive voice in most instances.
- Introduce your main point(s) as soon as possible.
- Always, always, always **put the reader first.**

The shorter, the better

Your readers are busy and they have short attention spans. One survey found that more than 75% of web users are scanning, not reading, the web pages they visit. Users want to find information quickly and not read in detail.

If you have to use disclaimers or legal language, put these in a footer or on a separate page that you link to. Or, if the disclaimer is short, you can put it in a rollover or other interactive element so it won't require any clicks.

Make every page scannable

- Break up related chunks of text with headers, sub-headers, etc.
- Use bold to help users pick out the key message(s).
- Use bullets and numbered lists.
- Use visuals to help present information or to break up text.

Don't click here

Some writers out there are still using the phrase "[click here](#)" for their links. People's eyes are drawn to links first, and "click here" doesn't tell them where that link will take them. Use descriptive language for your links, like "[visit our HR website](#)" or "[read more about The Dodgers](#)."

Keep search terms in mind

Many users are coming to your site via search engines. Make sure that key words they may search on are used in prominent places (in titles, headers and sub-headers) on your page. And make sure the keywords are as specific as possible.

Do not, however, "stuff" your article or web page with keywords. If you write good content, the key words will naturally be in your text. And the better your content,

the better it will perform in search results over time, even if you haven't packed in every possible keyword.

It's the web – you're supposed to link to stuff

When it makes sense, point your reader to other writers or websites who have already said what you want to say. Or if there is information elsewhere on your site that is related to what you're writing about, link to it rather than having repetitive content.

More tips

- Don't make links longer than 5-6 words
- Be sparing with bold – if you use bold too much, it defeats the purpose of providing emphasis
- Don't overuse italics. Italics are harder for people to read, especially online
- Use a sans-serif font for the body of your text. Sans-serif is easier to read online.
- Don't use too many in-line links. It distracts from the points that your text is trying to make.
- The shorter your text, the less users have to scroll.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Keep web text at about 50% of the length of print text.