

Writing web content

It might be tempting to take the blurb from your brochures or mailouts and copy and paste it into your website (it's certainly the quick and easy option) but don't give in to that temptation - it will turn your users off and undermine all the other hard work you've done.

Before we go any further, let's look at some facts about online content:

- **Less reading makes for a happier user**

It's not nice to read from a computer screen for too long – it causes eye strain and headaches.

- **The text on each page needs to be able to stand alone**

The text on a website has to function without context. A user can arrive at one of your webpages through a search engine or a link. There is no guarantee they've read the information on the other pages leading up to this one, and no guarantee they ever will.

- **Get the important information across quickly and simply**

Internet users are impatient. If they can't immediately find the information they want, they'll click away to your competitors.

The way you *write* content for the web has to be different, because the way we *read* content on the web is different.

Just think about your average user for a moment – They're unaware of the context of the information you're throwing at them, they're impatient, and their eyes are feeling tired from staring at a computer screen. To compensate, they've developed a coping strategy – they don't read the text on your website, they *scan* it. Their eyes flick across the page, searching out the most relevant material.

Your content needs to be written in a way that will give those scanning users the most important information, quickly and simply.

There's a lesson to be learnt here from newspapers, where pretty much any page will contain a mix of:

- Headlines and headings.
- Bullet points.
- Areas of bold text.
- Highlighted quotes.
- Imagery.

Using these stylistic devices, you'll break up the text on your page, and direct the user's attention to the most important information.



In addition to this, newspapers use a technique called 'front-loading'. This means that the first paragraph in an article will be a summary of the content of that article.

This is handy for the reader – they can scan the first paragraph, and then decide whether the content in the article is of interest to them. Try front-loading the information on your website – it will definitely make life easier for your users.

Those tips should be really useful when you're writing for the web, but there's one more thing you need to do. **Keep it short.** This is vitally important.

Be ruthless. Cut your copy down as much as you can, then cut it down some more – people won't read it, and they'll go elsewhere if you present them with too much text.

Now you've started to get to grips with how to write, you need to think about what you're writing. In particular, you need to think about the tone of your text.

Different audiences require different tones. The tone (word choice, familiarity of delivery, etc.) we use when chatting to a friend is very different to the tone we'd use when addressing a formal gathering.

You need to decide on a personality for your website – Is it going to be formal, or familiar? Fun, or serious? To help you do this, look back to your target audience – what will they respond to most positively?

Finally, whatever you do make sure you **keep it simple.**

Avoid jargon, and avoid long, complicated words. You want your audience to understand your content – don't alienate them or make them feel stupid. Some of your users might be reading English as a second language, some might have reading difficulties. Some might have a personal hatred for jargon.

Keep your copy simple, and you'll keep everyone happy.

Relevant Guides:

Writing good websites - <http://www.businessitguide.com/guides/view-guide/90/>

