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# Writing and Editing for the Web

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# Who is your audience and how do they use the Web?



## **Who is your audience?** **(Show of hands)**

- Prospective students
- Current students
- Alumni
- Parents
- Faculty
- Staff
- Outside community
- Donors
- Job seekers
- Others?



## How do they use the web?

The same way you do.

So, before you develop content for your website, put yourself in your audience's shoes.

- Why will they come to your site?
- Will they find what they are looking for?
- How much time will they spend *looking for information* versus reading the information they're looking for?
- Will they return to the site?



# Compelling content Where do you start?



## Writing for the Web

- New material: We'll tell you how, this morning.
- Existing printed material: Do I need to rewrite? In general, the answer is YES.
- For both:
  - Write specifically to your audience
  - Summarize first
  - Be concise
  - Offer access to more in-depth material via links, PDFs, sub-sites
  - Above all: write for scanning



***“The more you say, the more people tune out your message.” - Jacob Nielsen***

- Readers search for relevant items and often print pages that contain the lengthier info they need.

*In other words:*

- Readers tend to *scan* text online and *read* text offline.



## Impatient Eyeballs



**RED** indicates where they looked most often followed by **yellow** and **blue**.  
Gray areas were not looked at.



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**Let's get on with the writing  
already!**



## Writing tips

- Keep content short and simple
  - Four-to-eight word headlines – be clear, not clever
  - 25-50 word summary/intro sentences
  - Single-sentence paragraphs; one idea per paragraph
- Follow the inverted pyramid
  - Don't bury important content at the bottom of your Web page
  - Provide a quick summary first; details later
  - Pull the best quotes, showcase the strongest visuals, write tight
  - Use real stories to promote the goal of your site
- Write active content
  - Choose the appropriate voice: institutional or informal?
  - Content should speak directly to the audience
  - Keep your tone consistent



## Wordy/Redundant/Too Long:

Students, faculty, staff, and the University community are all welcome to attend the spring retreat that is being sponsored by the Bannan Center in Los Gatos. All of those who attend the weekend will focus on the theme of vocation and finding meaning in our work.

## Better:

The Bannan Center's spring retreat, held in Los Gatos, will focus on vocation. The entire University community is welcome to attend.



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## Formal or informal?

The event will be held at the Donohoe Alumni Building on Feb. 10. Join the party and hang out with SCU classmates you haven't seen since the good ol' days. Your response is requested before Feb. 8.

## Better

We hope you will join us for this event on Wednesday, Feb. 10 at the Donohoe Alumni Building. It will be a great opportunity to catch up with your classmates and share memories of your time at SCU. Please RSVP by Feb. 8.



## Inconsistent Tone:

You are cordially invited to attend the annual Reunion Weekend Gala Dinner. This is a great chance for you to hang out with your old buddies from college.

## Better:

You are cordially invited to attend the annual Reunion Weekend Gala Dinner. This evening under the stars in the Mission Gardens will be an elegant affair for all.



## Writing tips, continued

- **Hyperlink (it's a promise)**
  - Connect your audience to relevant info
  - Write effective hyperlinks (“click here” doesn’t do it)
  - Remember: links also inform search engines
- **Break it up**
  - Subheads help the flow of the text/advance the story
  - Bullets, boldface and pull quotes give readers reference points
  - Remember not to overdo it
- **Use lists**
  - Limit list items to 10
- **Include call to action**
  - Apply now; check out the visual tour; read more...



## Example 1:

### Before

If disks are swapped with others, or picked up at flea markets, it must be noted that viruses could be a problem on the disks; the same is true if disks are received from people whose game software has been downloaded from the Internet, or if software gets loaded on the disk after being downloaded from unknown sites.

### After

A virus could infect your disk if:

- You swap disks with friends
- You pick up disks at flea markets
- You receive disks from people who download games from the Internet
- You download software from people you don't know



## Example 2

Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors), Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166), Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum (100,000), Carhenge (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).



## This is better

Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were:

- Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors)
- Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166)
- Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum (100,000)
- [Carhenge](#) (86,598)
- Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002)
- Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).



## **This is even better**

In 1996, six of the most-visited places in Nebraska were:

- Fort Robinson State Park
- Scotts Bluff National Monument
- Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum
- Carhenge
- Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer
- Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park



## Writing tips, continued

- Be wary of non-intuitive language
- Avoid jargon and acronyms
- Use proper grammar
- Be specific
- Be accurate
- Abide by University style guidelines (pdf)
- Seek expert help



## Jargon/Acronyms:

In a sense, the EDC helps techies keep on top of their game by offering CEUs in IT management.

## Better:

The Executive Development Center helps high tech professionals stay current with continuing education units in information technology management.



## Grammar Issues:

Available for infant and toddler children of faculty and staff, your child will love the programs at Kids on Campus.

## Better:

Available for infant and toddler children of faculty and staff, Kids on Campus offers an environment that children love.



## Too General:

Professor John Smith is a famous author.

## Better:

John Smith, professor of philosophy, has published several best-selling books of essays. He is also a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker* and has authored two textbooks on neo-classical philosophy.



## Print to Web

- Print readers go from front to back; Web users jump around
  - Use a TOC
  - Reformat, rewrite
  - Use links
  - Give context
  - Group content by topic
  - Images and text should speak to each other
  - Showcase: [\*Santa Clara Magazine\*](#)



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**Finally...**



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**Coming up on the other side of this  
break**



## **Welcome back!**

We're done with the writing.

Now on to the final step.



## Answers to the test

1. Freshmen and sophomores are required to take English, math, and history every quarter.
  - “Freshmen” takes the plural form of the word.
  - The subject “math” is not a proper noun, therefore it shouldn’t be capitalized.
  - The comma after sophomores is unnecessary.



2. The assistant, who ordinarily is highly efficient, was all thumbs in today's experiment.
- Use your spell check!
  - The non-essential phrase "who ordinarily is highly efficient" should be set off by commas.
  - Today's" should be possessive. There's no such thing as "todays."



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3. The School of Law was named one of the 10 most diverse schools in the country.
  - At SCU, it's the School of Law. If we want to say law school, it shouldn't be capitalized.
  - Numbers are spelled out from one to nine. After that, use the numerals.
  - There are exceptions to this rule, including percentages, page numbers, and ages.



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4. Information regarding President Michael E. Engh, S.J., is available online by [visiting the Santa Clara University website](#).
  - President is only capitalized before the name; use a person's full name on first reference and last name (with no title) afterwards.
  - "Father" and "S.J." is pretty redundant. Our style is to use S.J. only.
  - Online is one word. So is website.
  - If you're going to link to a website, why not make the words the link? If you must write out the URL, there's no need to write http://.



5. Despite adverse weather, the cookout begins at 7 p.m. on Sunday.
  - Be sure you're using the right form of the word—spell check wouldn't have known that “whether” is not the right word in this context. Also: “weather conditions” is redundant.
  - Averse means reluctant. Adverse is the right word, meaning unfavorable.
  - Something is not an annual event unless it's been going on for at least two consecutive years—do not use “first annual” or “second annual.”
  - Because it's p.m., “night” is redundant.



## Edit

- Chop
- Refine
- Rewrite
- Always proofread everything
- Double-check hyperlinks



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## **Remove unneeded words:**

He was popular ~~with the~~ people.

He wrote his ~~own~~ autobiography.

He ~~falsely~~ misrepresented the situation.

## **Use more precise words:**

She was ~~very happy~~ elated.

He was ~~very tired~~ exhausted.

## **Remove words that merely repeat the meaning of other words:**

Mike was a member of a ~~small~~ clique of ~~insiders~~ that met after class.

## **Remove words that are implied by the other words:**

The dog circled ~~around~~ the cat.

In my ~~personal~~-opinion, redundancy is unnecessary.



## A sea of red underlining

Run a spell check program, but pay attention to what you do.

Microsoft Office, GroupWise, and CommonSpot all have built-in spell check programs. They are good at catching some typos and easily misspelled words but they won't catch everything, especially if a typo is a word.

**Is your head typing faster than your fingers?**

*Art sand Sciences, on the fist day of school...*



# Before you publish...



## Ask yourself:

- Is it clear?
- Is there a simpler way to say this?
- Is there a shorter way to say this?
- Is it necessary?
- Will your audience leave your page for a Google search?

And then:

- Get a second opinion  
(hint: ask your student workers what they think)



## Other important tips:

- Give context; users other than your target audience will be viewing your website
- Use right-hand elements sparingly
- Consider using thumbnail images with an index of topics
- Make sure content on your site is updated regularly
- Don't let any of your "content rich" pages lead to dead ends
- Linking to documents/e-mail links



## What NOT to do

- Make your Web page text heavy: reading text on the Web is 25% slower than on paper
- Have stale content: make a schedule to update your site and stick to it.
- Make your page graphics heavy: unless it's an image gallery, avoid big images that will obscure your message
- Use bells and whistles just because: if there's no reason to, don't add "glamour" just for the heck of it.
- Fill your page with dancing text/images: there's nothing more distracting than ditsy graphics blinking and bouncing across the screen
- Plagiarize: always attribute quotes and facts. Follow standard publishing copyright rules. Give photo credits where appropriate/required.



## **Bottomline: What you SHOULD do**

- Understand and respect the medium
- Always remember to cater to your audience
- Provide quick, pertinent information that's easy to grasp and is of value
- Make it clutter-free, lucid and engaging

If you put yourself in your readers' shoes, you won't go wrong.



## The End.

For a copy of this presentation, look for a link in your inboxes today.



**Questions?**

**Comments?**