

Journalism and Mass Communication Honours Course

Semester 4

Course code: JORACOR08T

CC8: Introduction to New Media

Overview of web writing:

The term web writing is pretty self-explanatory. As a web content writer, one has to write content for websites. Depending on the site owner or consultant that a web writer works for, this might take the form of blog posts, ebooks, reports, manifestos, white papers, email newsletters, sales copy, product descriptions and more. Web content writers can work with clients on either a freelance or a salaried basis.

Writing for the web needs to be approached differently than writing for a printed medium. The constraints imposed by having to read on-screen and navigate between windows means both the content and the structure of the writing has to be reconsidered.

There are three main points to keep in mind:

1. Writing should be kept short and avoid unnecessary detail and get the information across clearly
2. The text should be made easy to scan through and avoid long continuous blocks of text.
3. The hypertext links should be used to split up information into multiple pages.

Because users are likely to be on a specific mission, web content must get to the point quickly. According to studies conducted by the Nielsen Norman Group, only 16% of website visitors read word-by-word. An overwhelming 79% scan new pages in an F-shaped pattern. In short, people don't actually read much online, and when they do, they skim. So when writing for the Web, one should keep the information as simple and concise as possible.

When writing for the web, using plain language allows users to find what they need, understand what they have found, and then use it to meet their needs. Thus the write-up should also be actionable, findable, and shareable.

People read differently online than they do when they read print materials -- web users typically scan for information. In a study of online reading behavior Jakob Nielsen found that on the average webpage, users have time to read at most 28% of the words during an average visit; 20% is more likely read full article.

It's important to target the audience when writing for the web. By knowing the audience one can write at a level that will be meaningful for them. There are different ways a web content writer can make their writing user friendly:

1. To use the words that the users use. By using keywords that are used by the users, one can help them understand the copy and will help optimize it for search engines.
2. To chunk the content. Chunking makes the content more scannable by breaking it into manageable sections.
3. The important information must be loaded in the front. One should use the "inverted pyramid" style of writing and start with the content that is most important to your audience, and then provide the other additional details.
4. Pronouns should be used in the writing. The user or the audience should be addressed as "you" whereas the organization or government agency is "we." This can create cleaner sentence structure and more approachable content.
5. Active voice should be used.
6. It is better to use short sentences and paragraphs. The ideal standard is not more than 20 words per sentence and five sentences per paragraph. Dashes instead of semi-colons and breaking the long sentences into two is better.
7. Use bullets and numbered lists is better. For example, one sentence and two bullets is easier to read than three sentences.
8. Use clear headlines and subheads are necessary. Whereas questions, especially those with pronouns, are particularly effective.
9. Use of images, diagrams, or multimedia can visually represent ideas in the content. Videos and images should reinforce the text on the page.
10. Use of white space allows reduction of noise by visually separating information.

The structuring of your text should include the general information and progress towards the detail. General or introductory pages that link to more detailed information on separate pages are best. Each page should start with a short summary so that users can tell what is on the page even if they don't read all of it. Long and detailed background information in separate pages can be provided separately through a link to catch the interest of the audience. Linking to new pages add interest and the reader is less likely to become bored or miss any information even if they have to scroll through paragraph after paragraph of the text. In other words, it is also easier for them to find the necessary information.