

Writing for the Web Workshop

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1.0 Preparing to Write

1.1 Audience, Purpose, and Tone

Audience – Who are you writing for?

Make a list of all the various audiences you could (and probably do) have on your site. Which one or ones are primary? What content do you have for the others?

Purpose – Why are you writing this?

From general education to persuasion:

To educate audience

To promote generally

To move to action

Where do you fit? How does your audience influence the purpose?

Tone – How are you going to say it?

Formal, informal? Have you established a tone as part of your style?

Word choice?

How does your audience influence tone?

Once you take all three together—audience, purpose, and tone—it can make a big difference in what you say and how.

Exercise 1.A - Brief Development Worksheet

Answer the following questions to develop a brief for a Web site, section, or page. You may work on this for a site you actually work on or can follow along with the instructor.

Purpose:

1. What is the organizational goal that the web page (section) must achieve?
2. What are the communication objectives?

Audience:

3. Who is the target audience?
4. Describe the audience. What are their interests? Why are they coming to your site? Key target audience insights?
5. Who is the competition? What are their messages?
6. What is the key customer benefit?
7. What points support the key customer benefit?

Tone:

8. Creative Tonality

Other Considerations:

10. Timeline:
11. Length:
12. Mandatories, including specific information that should be included:
13. Medium:
14. Contact Person:

1.0 Preparing to Write (cont.)

1.2 Get the Content

Develop a network.

Help your contacts help you. Build a work flow process that makes it easy for them to communicate changes to you – or even better—make the changes themselves.

Review your brief with them.

Sometimes we just don't ask the right questions. The brief will help.

Spend five minutes talking with them about why they want the site, what they want to do with it, and who they want to communicate with. Ask for previously produced materials. Their previous materials give you some insight into the tone they would assume on the site.

Build a workflow process.

Let the technology work for you. Content Management System? Contribute?

Exercise 1.B – Develop Strategies

Complete the following questions as a start to developing your own strategies for collecting content.

1. Who do I work with on a regular basis to get content for the web?
2. What is the best way to exchange info with each of these people?
3. How can I create a process for this content submittal?
4. What items on the site are updated and changed on a regular basis: by semester, yearly, etc.? Write those items on a web development calendar.
5. Do you regularly review content on the site and invite your content owners to do the same? If so, write that down on your calendar as well.
6. Customize your brief (Exercise 1.A) with additional questions you might need to ask based on this exercise.

2.0 Writing Considerations

2.1 Shorten Your Text

Cut any paper-based text by 50%

This is most helpful when you are taking existing content and converting it to the Web. It is also helpful to do when you are actually writing new content. Cutting text may take more than one swipe. Preserve meaning and cut everything else.

Make each paragraph short

Consider the visual length on the page. A paragraph can be just 1 sentence. On the lower depths, you may require longer paragraphs.

Example

Before:

Each week, the board of directors and lead analysts of each sector compiles a combined report informing the Nittany Lion Fund's development to its investors. It contains a summary of highlights from the previous week plus additional information since the initial buy-in of equity. In these weekly reports, the Nittany Lion Fund benchmarks its performance against the S&P 500 Index. Our YTD (year to date) performance can be seen in the following file.

[Click here](#) to see the report.

79 words

After:

The fund board of directors and lead analysts compile a weekly fund performance report. In addition to a summary from the previous week, the report also reflects performance since the fund started, using the S&P 500 Index as a benchmark.

Review our [year to date performance](#).
(pdf. 190 kb)

46 words

Exercise 2.A – Shorten the following:

Effective and efficient supply chains are a key ingredient for business advantage in today's turbulent global economy. It's difficult for supply chain managers to stay competitive. "Managing Effective Supply Chains: Achieving Supply Chain Transformation" show you how to adapt your supply chain to the changing environment and improve your competitive position.

This program will help understand the critical elements of adaptive supply chain management through the *pico*TM business model. You will learn how to optimize three critical metrics—profit margin, cash to cash cycle time (working capital), and customer response time—and to identify supply chain capabilities for exploitation.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.1 Shorten Your Text (cont.)

Link to supplemental materials

If information is important enough to be included, but may not be information for the casual user, then put it on another page and link to it.

Use tables, charts, or graphs when appropriate

Use tables to display what they should: tabular data. This may mean repeating categories of information, or information that needs to be compared or plotted on X and Y axes.

If moving to web standards compliance, then ask yourself:

Is this table being used for layout and design, or to compare or to visualize data?

After:

Marketing Educator's Consortium Meeting Minutes

All .pdf documents require Adobe Acrobat.

Example

Before:

Business Marketing Educators' Consortium

[Marketing Educators' Consortium \(2/02/05\)](#)

(Word Document): Summarized minutes from the meeting prepared by Bob Donath. *(same document in pdf format)*

[Marketing Educators' Consortium \(8/04/04\)](#)

(Word document): Summarized minutes from the meeting prepared by Bob Donath.

[Marketing Educators' Consortium \(2/10/04\)](#)

(Word document): Summarized minutes from the meeting, prepared by Bob Donath.

[Marketing Educators' Consortium \(8/15/03\)](#)

: Summarized minutes from the meeting, prepared by Bob Donath *(same document in Word)*.

Meeting Date	Meeting Title
2/02/05	Trends in Marketing Executive Education (.pdf 90kb)
8/04/04	Executive Education Best Practices (.pdf 67 kb)
2/10/04	Why We Need Marketing Education (.pdf 110 kb)
8/15/03	Inaugural Meeting: The Future of Marketing (.pdf 120 kb)

Exercise 2.B

Reformat into a table:

Media Coverage – April 2005

Scripps Howard News Service, 04/22/2005—**Albert Vicere**, professor of strategic leadership, writes in his regular column that "The fact is most leaders today manage knowledge workers, people who know more about what they are doing than their boss does. Managing knowledge workers requires interpersonal competence, not just technical expertise." Vicere says an executive coach can help leaders reach that level of confidence (Executive Coaches Can Help Flex Leadership Muscle). The column also appeared in the Detroit News and the Record-Searchlight.

Traffic World, 04/18/2005—**Peter Swan**, assistant professor of supply chain management, discusses the American Trucking Associations' involvement in a chassis safety proposal. Swan believes the measure provides insufficient protection for drivers. "What this tells me is that the existing situation whereby equipment providers will get the drivers to find the bad equipment for them and don't fix it until they have to may continue even after this rule is passed" (Carriers Get Roadable).

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 04/15/2005—**Dan Givoly**, chair of the Department of Accounting, discusses family-focused possibilities in the world of accounting. "The general trend is to accommodate more families and women with family responsibilities," Givoly says. "Many partners for years didn't even go on vacation because of the pressure. This doesn't affect just females. There are men who want to devote more time to their families" (Accounting Firms Earn Plaudits for Providing More Flexible Hours and Schedules for Employees).

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.2 Make Text Scannable

Use meaningful headlines and subheads

Headlines and subheads help the user immediately predict what content follows and whether it is worth reading. If you use two or three levels of headings, they can scan for main ideas and supporting ideas. Make sure to reveal relationships between the information in the headers. Headers of the same size should be equal in relationship.

Highlight key words, phrases, and links

Consider how you will do this when developing your web style. Boldface, links, or a single color all work. Be careful. You can go overboard here.

Turn any series into a bulleted or numbered list

Use lists whenever possible. Scan text for serial lists within paragraphs. Lists really stand out, so make sure the list is important enough to be a main part of content on the page. Be careful – they can become too long.

Example

Before:

Welcome

Our open enrollment offerings in general management, functional management and industry-specific management are designed to develop the core competencies required for success in the current and next step of your executive career life cycle.

We recognize, however, that executive education should not only provide benefit to the individual but must also add value to the organization as the key beneficiary. As such, the three objectives that guide our executive education design are to generate awareness and support for strategic transitions, facilitate organizational change necessary to realize new growth initiatives, and build a depth of leadership talent.

After:

Open Enrollment Programs

The Knowledge You Need

Our programs in general, functional, and industry-specific management can help you **develop the core competencies** you need to succeed throughout your career.

Add Value to the Organization

Executive education should not only benefit the individual, but also add value to the organization. As such, the three objectives guide our executive education design:

1. Generate awareness and support for strategic transitions
2. Facilitate organizational change necessary to realize new growth initiatives.
3. Build a depth of leadership talent.

Exercise 2.C - Revise the following:

The mission of the MBA Marketing Association is to foster a sense of camaraderie and community among its members that creates long-lasting bonds of both personal and professional friendships; to further the interests of the marketing association by creating a community of students with diverse backgrounds and similar interests focused on linking experienced leaders of the business world with the individual growth of the association's members; and to create opportunities within the organization that provide every member full-time employment in an industry that is in alignment with their career interests and aspirations.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.3 Create Clear Meaningful Links

Make a link's content clear.

Let them know what it links to so they can skip it. Sometimes it is better to have a longer link. Make sure you match the link text to the targeted page title.

Make the link the emphatic element in the sentence.

First or last element in a sentence or paragraph.

Shift focus from the links to the subject

Don't use "Click here" or "Follow this Link". Just use the name of the content you are linking to.

Identify media objects appropriately

If link targets a document other than .html, identify the file type and the file size. Establish this as your style. For example:

Survey Results (.pdf, 56 Kb)

Example

Before:

Click [here](#) to read the report.

After:

Read our [2005 Annual Report \(.pdf 250 kb\)](#)

Exercise 2.D - Make these links more web-friendly.

1. The Executive MBA is offered over a number of residence weeks at the University Park campus, and alternating weekends (Friday/Saturday) at the Gregg Conference Center (www.amercoll.edu/gregg_center/default.asp) in the Philadelphia area.

2. [Click here](#) to read our Supply Chain and Information Systems newsletter.

3. If you are interested in applying, please complete our online [Web Application](#), which is available 24 hours a day.

4. Go to www.psu.edu/ur/colleges/index.html to see a list of colleges at Penn State.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.4 Build Chunky Paragraphs

Assign one main idea to each paragraph, and use that first in the paragraph.

This facilitates scanning. It often takes practice and focus to develop this writing style. It may seem rude or bold, but it is helpful to the reader.

Put your conclusion in the first paragraph of any article.

Follow the journalistic style of writing – most important idea first, and then supporting ideas in descending order of importance.

Example

Before:

During several benchmarking meetings, the S & OP Benchmark group divided into two interest groups--demand planning and supply planning--to formulate best practices for supply and demand planning. The companies involved in these discussions included: American Standard, Arkema Group, Brown-Forman, Campbell Soup Company, CertainTeed, ConAgra Foods, ExxonMobil Chemical, The Hershey Company, Kimberly-Clark, Kraft Foods, Pfizer and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals.

The resulting document, [Benchmarking Best Practices](#) (.pdf 58Kb), includes information about meeting participants, challenges, inputs, lessons learned, metrics and outputs for supply planning.

After:

[Benchmarking Best Practices](#) (.pdf 58Kb) includes information about meeting participants, challenges, inputs, lessons learned, metrics and outputs for supply planning.

The S & OP Benchmark group divided into two interest groups--demand planning and supply planning--to formulate these best practices.

The companies involved in these interests groups included:

- American Standard
- Arkema Group
- Brown-Forman
- Campbell Soup Company
- CertainTeed
- ConAgra Foods
- ExxonMobil Chemical
- The Hershey Company
- Kimberly-Clark
- Kraft Foods
- Pfizer
- Wyeth Pharmaceuticals

Exercise 2.E - Reformat this content for the Web:

Entrepreneurship, by its very nature, covers a broad range of topics, from starting a new company to spinning-out new ventures from universities or already existing companies, from research in corporate innovation to translating academic research into corporate opportunities. At Penn State, we do not interpret entrepreneurship purely as starting a new company or inventing a new product; we treat it as a valuable management skill that can be acquired through our unique experiential learning programs and applied to many situations in multiple fields.

Penn State is one of the largest research universities in the world, receiving more than \$500MM from both private sector and government funds to create new ideas, technologies, systems, and teaching methods in many fields. Entrepreneurship cannot but flourish and grow in such a diverse, stimulating environment whether you are an engineer, agronomist, computer scientist, chemist, lawyer, author or businessperson. So come and see what we are doing. Whether you are a prospective student checking out our innovative programs, a corporation looking for out-of-the-box thinkers or new technology, an entrepreneur looking for new opportunities, or a faculty member seeking collaborators we are sure you will find something here that will inspire you to contact one of the persons named on the site and get engaged with Penn State's entrepreneurial spirit.

Exercise 2.F

Use the following brief and information to draft the first two introductory paragraphs on the described web page.

Purpose:

1. What is the organizational goal that the web page (section) must achieve?

This is the home page for Chewie's Bubble Gum Museum, and as such should promote generally the museum.

2. What are the communication objectives?

- communicate mission of museum
- briefly describe collection
- give times of business
- upcoming events

Audience:

3. Who is the target audience?

Bubble gum enthusiasts.

4. Describe the audience. What are their interests? Why are they coming to your site? Key target audience insights?

- This is a select group of people, usually aged 35- 70 who collect bubble gum wrappers, cards, boxes, and premiums issued by bubble gum companies over the years.
- They come to the site to learn about upcoming events, and the collection at the museum.

5. Who is the competition? What are their messages?

Joe Blow's Bubble Gum Emporium and Museum

Message – the biggest collection of bubble gum

6. What is the key customer benefit?

They have the biggest collection, but we have the rarest items in our collection. We specialize in one of a kind and limited run items, while they focus on multiples of the same item.

7. What points support the key consumer benefit?

- We have two of the rarest wrappers - from the 1945 run of Bubble King. A fire destroyed most of the gum and wrappers prior to distribution in 1945, so only 5 known wrappers exist today.
- Our collection has been endorsed by Bubble Collector magazine as the "Must-See Museum" for the last three years.
- We are visited by over 60,000 bubble gum enthusiasts every year.

Tone:

8. Creative Tonality

Fun and informal – we are talking about bubble gum.

Other Considerations:

10. Timeline:

in the next 10 minutes

11. Length:

200 words

12. Mandatories, including specific information that should be included:

- our mission Statement:

- Hours of operation:

10 a.m.- 5 p.m., M-Sat.

A plug for our upcoming exhibition:

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.5 Make Comprehension Easy

Reduce the number of clauses per sentence

Users scan content, which means our sentences need to be shorter. Look to eliminate “that,” “who,” and “which” clauses. If a clause is too important to eliminate, make it its own sentence.

Example

Before:

Of all the areas of uncertainty that an executive encounters in the research literature that has developed over the years, as consultants and academics invest time and money in reviewing the data as to what the best management practices might be, no question that researchers address seems as difficult to resolve as the concern over how deep into a company’s infrastructure should CEO’s should involved.

After:

How deep into a company’s infrastructure should a CEO be involved? We don’t know, despite extensive research by consultants and business professors.

Exercise 2.F**Revise the following:**

1. Various studies that have been funded by both government and private agencies that have an interest in this area have identified that those people who are best prepared for graduate school are those who have a clear understanding of the rigors which academia can impose on a graduate student.

2. Of the many ways to discipline children who are disobedient, the best way is to explain to the children clearly the behavior that you expect that they do and then the consequences that you will impose on them both if they do the behavior that you expect and if they don't do that behavior that is expected of them.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.5 Make Comprehension Easy (cont.)

Eliminate Nominalizations – turning verbs into nouns

English language makes it very possible to turn our verbs into nouns, often through –tion or –ing suffixes. Suggest – suggestion or read – reading

Be very careful to avoid strings of nouns – Prospective Student Application Interpretation Handbook.

Example

Before:

There is a need for annual reevaluations of both treated patients and untreated patients for a determination of the efficacy of the medication. .

After:

Every year we should reevaluate both treated and untreated patients to determine the medication's efficacy.

Exercise 2.G - Improve the following:

1. Driving on the grass is wrong.
2. The cooperation of both sides is necessary for the continuation of the terms of the agreement.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.5 Make Comprehension Easy (cont.)

Avoid Ambiguity

The most prevalent causes of ambiguity are dangling or misplaced modifiers or pronouns that are too far from their antecedents.

Example

Before:

As a new student at Penn State, we will send you weekly e-mail filled with advice to your e-mail address to encourage your contributed success.

After:

As a new student at Penn State, you will receive weekly e-mail filled with advice to encourage your continued success.

Exercise 2.H - Rewrite the following, correcting the misplaced modifier.

1. Riding the bus to school for the first time, the mom blew her daughter kisses.
2. Sitting on the fence, I spotted my cat.
3. It is important to think about a campus and a major where you will attend before you apply to Penn State.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.5 Make Comprehension Easy (cont.)

Use Active Voice

Active voice – verbal constructions in which the noun carries out the action of the verb.

Example - I kicked the ball.

Passive voice – verbal constructions in which the noun receives the action of the verb. They often are accompanied by a “by x” prepositional phrase.

Example – The ball was kicked by me.

Example

Before:

Unauthorized calls may be placed on your cell phone if it is loaned to a friend or stranger. The same is true if your phone is left in accessible locations, such as an unlocked car.

After:

Your cell phone bill may show unauthorized calls if you loan your phone to a friend or a stranger, or leave it in accessible locations such as an unlocked car.

Exercise 2.1 - Change the following to active voice.

1. I will be driven mad by the ringing of that bell.
2. There are 32 student organizations in the Smeal College of Business that students can choose from.
3. These speakers were selected by our advisory committee that will present at the conference.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.5 Make Comprehension Easy (cont.)

Make positive statements

Watch out for double negatives, often formed with words that have negative connotations (deny, disallow, etc.). Sometimes, however, you just have to say “no.”

Example

Before

However often a break-in might occur on campus, it is not advisable to prohibit access to security personnel.

After

Security personnel must always have access to campus buildings, even if there have been break-ins on campus.

Exercise 2.J - Revise the following into positive statements.

1. You should not deny him his due.
2. Although we have limited spaces, you should still try to come.
3. The criteria for admission are extremely high, so students should not expect admission to their first choice campus.

2.0 Writing Considerations (cont.)

2.6 Write for Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization – writing to ensure that your web pages are accessible to search engines and focused in ways that help improve the chances that they will be found via search engines.

Two types of engines:

1. Spider/Crawler-based – Google

Spider-based engines have three parts:

- a. crawler
- b. index
- c. software for ranking

2. Human Powered – Static lists of web-sites

Pick your target keywords or search terms

Do a search on google. Look at the keywords included on your competitors' sites. Talk to your users: focus groups, card sorts, usability testing.

Place these terms appropriately on your web site.

- .html title tag
- Meta tags – keywords and descriptions
- Headers
- Body Copy

Submit your site to the main search engines (if not done by your University)

Factors you cannot control as easily:

- links to your page from other sites
- searchers clicking on your page in the search results

Exercise 2.K – Write for Search Engines

1. Select a web page on the site you maintain.
2. Read over the content on the page.
3. Think about the audience and purpose for this page.
4. Write a list of keywords and possible search terms for this page.
5. Are those terms listed on this page now as keywords?
6. Can you find them in the headers and body text of this page?
7. Write a brief description of the content on this page.

3.0 Develop a Style Guide

Style Guide vs. Style Sheet

CSS's or Cascading Style Sheets are tools used by browsers to display the information in your web site in the correct fashion. A Style Guide is a document outlining all aspects of how you communicate to the outside world. Good Style Guide's consider all types of media, including printed media and electronic. Information about your CSS should be included on your Web Site Style Guide.

Examples:

- [Smeal Style Guide:](https://intranet.smeal.psu.edu/brand/web.html)
<https://intranet.smeal.psu.edu/brand/web.html>
- [Penn College CICR: Penn College Style Guide:](http://www.pct.edu/cicr/styleguide.htm)
<http://www.pct.edu/cicr/styleguide.htm>
- [AIS Web Style Guide:](http://ais.its.psu.edu/online_documentation/web_style_guide.html)
http://ais.its.psu.edu/online_documentation/web_style_guide.html
- [Penn State Libraries : Web Style Guide:](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/pubinfo/webstyle/)
<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/pubinfo/webstyle/>

Exercise 2.L – Develop a Style Guide

Use the following questions to start your style guide.

1. How do you refer to your institution on first reference? On later references?
2. How do you refer to degree programs, majors, or departments?
3. How are faculty names and titles listed on first reference? On later reference?
4. What are some web style “mistakes” that you see occurring on your site?
5. What is the correct way to reference these?
6. What other style conventions should be followed on your site?

4.0 What I Consider When Reviewing Site Content

- All of the Above
- Is the URL spelled out and linked on the page – or do we link TEXT to the URL
- “Click Here’s”
- Date Information that may make info go out of date quickly
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Typos
- Style Guide is followed
- Consistency with other similar pages on the site
- Generally understandable

Resources

On-line Resources

Berstein, Mark – “10 Tips on Writing the Living Web”

<http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writeliving/>

More about the style and flow of your writing, and less about the technicalities of writing.

Kilian, Crawford – “Writing for Websites”

http://crofsblogs.typepad.com/ckbetas/files/writing_for_websites.pdf

This 5-page pdf includes useful information from writing style to navigation and graphics.

Lynch, Patrick J, and Sarah Horton – “Web Style Guide”

http://www.webstyleguide.com/index.html?/pages/editorial_style.html

Helpful information. Also available in book format – see books below.

Nielsen, Jakob – “Writing for the Web”

<http://www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/>

Longish paper, but set up to be web friendly. (Hey, it IS Jakob Nielsen.) I especially recommend the “Writing to be Found” section that talks about maximizing search engine results.

Titta, Catherine – “Writing Well for the Web: Quick and Easy Tips for Non-writers”

<http://www.webreference.com/content/writing/>

This page contains four links to articles on style, common grammatical mistakes, writing good headlines, and a further list of online resources.

“Web Teaching Articles: Writing for the Web”

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~webteach/articles/text.html>

Prepared specifically for faculty preparing course materials for the Web. Many of the same rules are mentioned.

Will-Harris, Daniel – “Writing for the Web”

http://www.efuse.com/Design/web_writing_basics.html

Some basic information about content and formatting – especially focused on taking content prepared for print and moving it to web.

On-line Resource Lists:

<http://www.websitetips.com/writing/>

http://dir.yahoo.com/Social_Science/communications/writing/writing_for_the_web/

Search Engines:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/>

Tips on submitting to search engines, and writing for better search engine placement.

Books:

Brink, Tom, Darren Gergle, and Scott Wood, *Designing Web Sites that Work: Usability for the Web*, Morgan Kauffman Publishers, 2002.

Krug, Steve, *Don't Make Me Think*, 2nd Ed., New Riders, 2005.

Lynch, Patrick and Sarah Horton, *Web Style Guide*, 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2002.

Price, Jonathan and Lisa, *Hot Text: Web Writing that Works*, New Riders, 2002.

Sachs, Tammy and Gary McClain, *Back to the User: Creating User-Focused Web Sites*, New Riders, 2002.

Usborne, Nick, *Net Words: Creating High-Impact Online Copy*, McGraw Hill, 2002.