

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**. 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 99% of the time.
- Introduce your main point(s) as soon as possible.
- Always, always, always put the reader first.

The shorter, the better

People 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 it in a footer or on a separate page that you link to. Or, if the disclaimer is short, you can use a rollover that won't require any clicks.

- Introduce your subject as quickly as possible.
- The shorter your text, the less users have to scroll.
- Keep paragraphs short. Keep web text at about 50% the length of print text.

Make every page scannable

- Make the page easy to scan by using headers, sub-headers, etc.
- Use bold (sparingly) 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." People tend to read links before anything else, and reading "click here" doesn't tell them where that link will take them. Use descriptive links, like "visit our HR website" or "read 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.

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

Don't be afraid to break up your text into more than one page and link to a second page, if your content really must be long. While you should relegate less important information to pages deeper in the navigation, give readers the option to go directly where they need to go whenever possible.

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.