

Web Writing Guide - Linn-Benton Community College

Web users prefer writing that is concise, easy to scan, and objective in style. Avoid overly hyped promotional writing, or “marketese.” Avoid internal words/language that may not be known outside the college. Don’t use LB. Spell out or use LBCC.

What web users do:

- Skim, scan, & select
- Browse - quick glances, occasional very brief stops
- Read a little at a time, mostly in short bursts

Guidelines:

- Be concise (simple words, short phrases)
- Make text scannable (call attention to key information)
- Don’t put text in ALL CAPS (slows down reading)
- Left-align text (centering text is harder to read)
- Be consistent: Terminology, tone & style should be the same throughout
- Pod teasers: No more than three lines of text on a computer monitor
- Pod Link Labels: Never use the link "Read More." Use an imperative (i.e., "do something") - no more than one line of text
- Carousel teaser: Prefer single line of text, never more than two

Layer the details:

- Put brief, most important info at top, or on higher level
- Link to details on a deeper level

Less is more! Include only what users want and need:

- With each sentence, ask: Do users want or need that?
- Then ask: Do they REALLY want or need that?
- Cut! Cut! Cut! Find the essence.

Chunking the content

- Keep sentences to one or two points
- Don't write prose
- Keep paragraphs short - a one-sentence paragraph is OK
- Use lists (limit to 7 items)
- Use fragments and phrases

Text Writing Suggestions:

1. Call attention with [useful headings](#)
2. Use [active voice](#) (who does what to whom)
3. [Set the context](#) for users: start with what they know or what applies, then give new information
4. [Use lists](#) (numbered lists for instructions)
5. Give instructions with [imperatives](#) (i.e., click on Financial Aid)
6. Use [parallelisms](#) (If you are admitted, do this. If you are not, do this.)
7. Use words users know ([simpler words – avoid internal college language](#))
8. Try [fragments](#) (Smaller classes! More bang for your buck!)
9. Make links [descriptive](#) (i.e., Search our scholarships.)

Headline in form of a question are good for:

- policies
- regulations
- user guides ("how do I ...?")

Do users ever read whole passages on the web?

Yes, but only when:

- They are highly motivated to get information
- The goal is to get extended information, like a report

If text is too long, they are likely to print it out to read it because:

- It is easier to read from paper than from the screen
- We see much less at a time on the screen than on paper

Don't do this:

P-cards

P-cards are not transferable and they are issued to individuals, not to organizations. P-card holders may borrow materials for a maximum of FOUR WEEKS, with no renewals. Interlibrary loan services are not available to P-card holders.

Do this:

P-cards

- are not transferable
- are issued to individuals, not to organizations
- allow borrowing of materials for a maximum of **4 weeks**, with no renewals
- do not include access to Interlibrary loan services

Think journalism (not academic writing) table source: MIT Libraries Web Writing Guide

- Who, what, where, when, why and how
- Start with the conclusion, then give the details

Yes:	No:
<p>MIT community members may now access many of our electronic resources from off-campus! To find out more about who is eligible for this service, how to set up certificates on your computer, and which vendors allow off-campus access, read our off-campus FAQ.</p>	<p>Current MIT students, faculty, staff, (Athena-account holders) with Netscape certificates enabled, may access many of our electronic resources from off-campus. We are working with the vendors of these resources to renegotiate contracts so off-campus access will be allowed. To find out more, read our off-campus FAQ.</p>

1. Write relevant content

Web readers want information, not fluff or irrelevance.

2. Put conclusions at the beginning

Think of an inverted pyramid when you write. Get to the point in the first paragraph, and then expand upon it.

3. Write only one idea per paragraph

Web pages need to be concise and to-the-point. People don't read Web pages, they scan them, and so having short, meaty paragraphs is better than long rambling ones.

4. Use action words

Tell your readers what to do. Avoid the passive voice.

5. Limit list items to 7 words

Studies have shown that people can only reliably remember 7-10 things at a time.

6. Write short sentences

Sentences should be as concise as you can make them. Use only the words you need to get the essential information across.

7. Include internal sub-headings

Sub-headings make the text more scannable. Readers will move to the section of the document most useful for them, and internal cues make it easier for them to do this.

8. Make your links part of the copy

Links are another way Web readers scan pages. They stand out from normal text, and provide more cues as to what the page is about.

9. Proofread your work

Typos and spelling errors will send people away from your pages. Make sure you proofread everything you post to the Web. Have someone else proof as well.

10. Clarity

No matter how clear your words seem to you, never assume they're clear to your readers. Talk *to* your readers, not *at* them. Never sacrifice clarity for brevity.

Additional Resources

MIT Libraries - Writing for the Web Guidelines:

<http://libstaff.mit.edu/webgroup/writing/writing.html>

[How Users Read on the Web](#)

[Applying Writing Guidelines to Web Pages](#)

[Effective Writing for the Web](#)