

## Writing for the Web (continued)

Web Content Design  
for Writers and Editors  
Fall 2004



### Tonight's class

- Home page evaluation
- Making content skimmable
- Web style
- Microcontent



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### Evaluating home pages

Use the Web page evaluation checklist to evaluate these pages of the Syntregy Fitness Center site:

- Home page: <http://www.syntregyfitness.com/>
- Testimonials page:  
<http://www.syntregyfitness.com/testimonials.html>



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## Web development process

**Planning**

- Define site: audience, goals, content

**Design**

- Organize information: create content categories, select page types, design navigation
- Define functionality and layout

**Building**

- Create content: research and write, create illustrations, make text web-ready, create style guide
- Publish and maintain content: proof, archive


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## What is Web style?

- Be concise
- Be clear
- Be conversational
- Be credible
- Be global

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## Be concise

Goal: reduced printed text by 50%

- Eliminate:
  - Empty phrases (“in order to” > “to,” “really”)
  - Redundancies (“large in size”)
  - Transition phrases (“furthermore”)
  - Clichés (“in a nutshell”)
- Use short sentences
  - Break longer sentences in two
- Use verb instead of noun
  - “produce an enhancement” > “enhance”

More info: <http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm>

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## What's wrong?

There may be a necessity on your part of making a clear decision within a 6-month time period.

As a primary aspect of your consideration of the possible purchase of a new PDA handheld device, the first thing to do before you do anything else is to attempt to determine where and in what circumstances you might be utilizing such a device.

More: <http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/eGuideTrim1aChallenges.htm>

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Unnecessary details—need to check w/writer about what's unnecessary

Example: “You need to decide within 6 months.”

Other redundant phrases:


Red in color

Upright position

Hospital facility

But keep “that” & “which”

Change semicolon to period and colon to dash.



## Be clear

- Favor concrete words over abstract ones.
- Use short, pronounceable words.
- Use common words that audience will know.  
It's OK to repeat them.
- Use positives, not negatives.
- Avoid complex sentences

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Based on STC article about what makes text most comprehensible. This assumes people are looking for information—purpose is not to create literature or narrative that’s enjoyable to read. Same guidelines apply to good technical writing in any medium.


Contradicts what I learned in Honors English

**Concrete words**—evoke one of the senses. Not abstract, which are usually too general. “Research with printed text has shown that words that represent concrete concepts re encoded more quickly and accurately, recalled more often, and comprehended better than words that represent abstract concepts.”

### Hot Text

pp. 222-225 (negatives)

pp. 215-16 (repeating)



## Complex vs. simple sentences


Simple sentence = 1 main clause (subject + verb)

Complex sentence = at least 1 main clause and 1 subordinate clause

Subordinate clause = starts with word like “because,” “when,” “if”

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## Start with main clause



If you must include > 1 clause, start with main clause


YES: I ordered tofu because I'm a vegetarian.

NO: Because I'm a vegetarian, I ordered tofu.

NO: Before I decide what to order, I usually ask the waiter about the day's specials.

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## Keep subject & verb together




Don't interrupt main thought; keep subject & verb together

YES: Senior memberships are now available for people age 55 and older.

NO: Senior memberships, open to people age 55 and older, are available now.

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## Make the "doer" the subject



Make the true agent ("doer") the subject.


YES: You can save money by subscribing for more than 1 year.

NO: Multiple-year subscriptions enable you to save money.

NO: Money can be saved by ordering multiple-year subscriptions.

NO: Savings can result from multiple-year subscriptions.

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## What's wrong?

- The obfuscation, the cause of which was determined to be insufficient utilization of training materials, created an interruption of work flow.
- Don't forget to remind customers not to expect to receive their PIN numbers in email until the beginning of next month.

More: <http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/eGuideCOG5aChallenges.htm>

<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/eGuideCOG5bChallenges.htm>

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## Be conversational

Goal: Grab and hold reader's attention  
WITHOUT getting in the way of message

- Pretend you're talking to 1 person
- Objective tone, not promotional
- Use 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun ("you")
- Plain, uninflated language

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Try to sound like friendly advisor, not huffy expert



## Example—wrong voice

There's no magic formula for e-business success. It requires broad vision, tight execution -- and a fully integrated, instantly scalable, totally flexible technology infrastructure base, enterprise-wide. That's why more and more world-class companies are relying on the mySIMP e-business platform. Our industry-leading solution package enables dynamic organizations like yours to reduce the time it takes to bring your products to market. We help you build long-lasting relationships with your most loyal customers. Together, we can achieve long-term, profitable growth.

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## Example—right voice



To succeed in e-business, you need to bring together data from all over your company, building on technology that can handle quick changes, cut time to market, and let you get closer to your most loyal customers. How? Build on the mySIMP e-business platform.

More:

<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/eGuideTrim1eChallenges.htm>

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## Be credible



- Accurate, up-to-date information
- Author qualifications & contact info
- Last updated or posting date
- Only link to other credible sites
- No broken links or other bugs

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## Be global



- Use familiar terms, simple sentences
- Weigh informality vs. understandability
- Watch for US-centrism in:
  - Date and time format
  - Currency
  - Geographic orientation
  - Examples
  - Graphics
  - Address and phone numbers
- Avoid slang, jargon, and idioms
  - Use phrases that most people anywhere would know <sup>18</sup>

Clear language—same guidelines as for Web writing

Time format – add “PST” to times, don’t assume person is in same time zone. Europe uses 24 hr clock for some purposes

Cultural sensitivities – especially humor

### Slang, jargon, idioms



She came on board last week and took the staff by storm.

The students bad-mouthed the new textbook, giving it a big thumbs down.

Yesterday she was at death’s door, but today she’s up and around so we’re sure she’ll pull through.

Look at her, all bling-bling with her new tablet PC.

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List of idioms: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6720/>

Definitions (Dictionary.com)

Idiom: “A speech form or an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in *keep tabs on*.”

Slang: “A kind of language occurring chiefly in casual and playful speech, made up typically of short-lived coinages and figures of speech that are deliberately used in place of standard terms for added raciness, humor, irreverence, or other effect. Language peculiar to a group; argot or jargon”

Jargon: “The specialized or technical language of a trade, profession, or similar group. Speech or writing having unusual or pretentious vocabulary, convoluted phrasing, and vague meaning.”

## Exercise

Revise the paragraph in  
Web writing style exercise.doc



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## Web “microcontent”

Includes:

- Page and article titles
- Headlines on home page, in link lists, in email newsletter
- Headings within a page
- Link text
- Email subject lines



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## Use microcontent to keep users on track

Think of headings, headlines, and other “microcontent” as road signs.

They should tell users exactly what they need to move forward.



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## Guidelines for titles, headlines & headings



- Be descriptive—text should summarize content
- Use plain language; no puns, cuteness
- Be concrete, not abstract
  - "Enhance your appearance" vs. "5 ways to look 10 years younger"
- Include key terms for Search

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## Examples



[Checklist for Selecting a Vendor](#)

[HERE IS A LIST OF USED INSTRUCTION MANUALS & PRODUCT BROCHURES](#)

[Cable modem or DSL: Which is better?](#)

[Blue on Blue](#)

December 20, 2000 - ReI #00-118 - POSTAL SERVICE MOVE TO STRETCH THE ENVELOPE FOR PASSPORT ACCESSABILITY EARNS DISTINGUISHED HAMMER AWARD

[How to Reduce Your Inkjet Refill Costs](#)

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## Heading examples




YES: <http://www.contentious.com/articles/0208-4.htm>

NO: <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writeliving/>

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## Basic rule of linking



No surprises! People should know where they're going *before* they click.

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Every page should have at least 1 link.


Include only most useful, relevant links.

Minimize inline links—use lists instead.

Make links easy to maintain Every page needs a link to avoid dead ends.

By adding a link to your page, you're endorsing the site you're linking to. So your credibility, reputation is at risk.

## Link guidelines



- **Be clear, not cute.**
  - **Yes:** Use Word's AutoSummarize feature to [automatically create summaries](#) of your work.
  - **No:** [Just the gist!](#)
- **Underline the most 3-4 important words.**
  - **Yes:** See The [Cyber-Debate that Wasn't](#) in Salon.com.
  - **No:** See The Cyber-Debate that Wasn't in [Salon.com](#).
  - **No:** [A good place to learn about investing is The Motley Fool](#).

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What if traffic signs were cute?

Usually, quotation marks are unnecessary.

## Link guidelines (cont.)



- Write as if you weren't using links (inline links)
  - No: "[Click here](#) to examples of student work..."
  - Yes: "Examples of [student work](#) show..."
- Indicate links to large files and non-Web file types  
Ex: [Printer-friendly version of this article](#) (Word .DOC, 75 K)

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## Link guidelines (cont.)



- Mention requirements or restrictions  
Ex: [Complete Market Data](#) (members only)  
[View video of award ceremony](#) (requires RealVideo 7.0)
- In lists, identify specific features and content.
  - Yes: [The Motley Fool](#)—Stock tips, financial planning advice, company reports, and other resources for beginning and advanced investors
  - No: [The Motley Fool](#)—Lots of valuable info
  - Ex: [OG Hot Links](#), [Kitchen Gardener Resources](#)

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## What's wrong?




[You can earn a certificate in game animation from the University of Washington Extension.](#)

[Here](#) is a link to the best site on the history of Barbie.  
Did you know that the inventor named her after her own daughter?

More:

<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/eGuideLink3cChallenges.htm>

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## Making a useful link list

- Research each link
- Be selective
- Be descriptive and specific
- Split up large lists of links
- Maintain the links
- Order items in way users will expect or easily guess

Example:  
<http://www.24hourfitness.com/html/community/links/>

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Other lists to evaluate:

<http://www.envirolink.org/topics.html?topic=Food%20Quality&topicsku=2002119144650&topictype=subtopic>

<http://www.prc.dk/user-friendly-manuals/ufm/linklist.htm>



## Exercise

Find the problems with the links on this page:


<http://www.webcontentdesign.com/wcd/resources/linklist.asp>

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More to evaluate:

<http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/westgate/1155/id28.htm>

<http://envirolink.netforchange.com/frame.html?page=search.html%3Fcatid%3D6>




## Web style guides

<i>Web Content Style Guide</i>	By Gerry McGovern, Rob Norton, and Catherine O'Dowd (2002)
Yale Style Guide	<a href="http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/index.html">http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/index.html</a>
<i>E-What?</i>	A Guide to the Quirks of New Media Style and Usage by the Editors of EEI Press (2000)
<i>Wired Style</i>	<a href="http://www.hotwired.com/hardwired/wiredstyle/">http://www.hotwired.com/hardwired/wiredstyle/</a>
Citation Styles	<a href="http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/citex.html">http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/citex.html</a>
Dangerous Words	<a href="http://kbs.cs.tu-berlin.de/~jutta/ht/writing/words.html">http://kbs.cs.tu-berlin.de/~jutta/ht/writing/words.html</a>

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Standard guides (Chicago) are slow to take new medium into account.



## Creating a site style guide

- Text
  - Terminology
  - Capitalization & punctuation
  - Abbreviations, text "shortening"
  - Boilerplate wording
  - Links
- Tone
- Formatting, layout & graphics
  - Length, size restrictions
  - Heading fonts & sizes
  - Alt text
  - Thumbnails
  - Standard page elements
- Functionality
  - New windows
  - Text boxes, drop downs, radio buttons

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## Portfolio article—edit for Web

Edit an existing article for the Web; assume it will be skimmed.

- Injury.doc
- Indexing\_article.doc
- video\_article.doc

<http://www.webcontentdesign.com/wcd/materials/bcc/students/exercises.asp>

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## Portfolio article—write from scratch



Write an article for the Web; assume it will be skimmed, not read.

Potential topics:

- How to write for the Web
- Job hunting in Seattle/Eastside
- Creating an effective resume website
- Tips related to a favorite hobby or area of expertise

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## Reading



Review for this week's class:

- "Writing style" on class Web site ([www.webcontentdesign.com](http://www.webcontentdesign.com))
- *Hot Text*, Ideas 1, 3 & 5 (<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HThumanstyle0.htm>)

For next week:

- Appendix B of *Principles of Web Design*
- Class website ([Maintenance](#), [Technical issues](#), [Email newsletters](#))

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