



UNIT-12

Writing for the Web

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Apply engaging techniques that draw readers to web pages
- ✓ Plan what to write
- ✓ Create engaging content, including catchy headlines
- ✓ Enhance your writing with other forms of media
- ✓ Make your writing accessible to a variety of readers

Unit 12

Writing for the Web

Getting to Know the Web

You've probably already realized that there are differences in writing for the web. People do not read web pages and blogs in the same way they used to approach a newsletter or a brochure, and our approach needs to reflect these changes.

In this session, you'll learn how web writing is different, aspects of design and structure, and extending influence through your writing.

WEB WRITING IS NOT THE SAME!

You may have already heard this, and it may be what prompted you to take this course: **writing for the web is not the same as writing for print materials.**

People do not read information on a website in the same way that they read a newspaper or other print media. They tend to scan for keywords, phrases, or sentences that catch their eye. This does not mean that you are going to write using large fonts and red-colored letters like poorly written sales or marketing ads. It means that you have to write content that is engaging, catches people's attention, and gets picked up in search engines. If you think of the social nature of media, and the way that people will interact with you (or your company) through social sites, and using their mobile devices (which have small reading spaces), it gets easier to see how writing for the web is different.



Whether you are writing to inform or writing to sell, the goal of your writing must be to catch the attention of a reader. Catching their attention means that your content is engaging. When they engage with you, they get to know you (and the company you write for), which gives you the opportunity to get involved in dialogue, and if your goal is to sell them something, to convert them to paying customers at some point.

Writing for the web means that you need to write information that your readers want and need. This is not

the same as writing about what YOU want and approaching writing as though you are a marketer of bygone days who is replicating print ads by adding a little flash and placing them strategically on a webpage. Instead of building awareness for your company, your products, or your services, you need to be influencing reader behavior. This means you must work on gaining trust, and building trust means that you have to be credible.

Some writers are so focused on creating copy for web pages, publishing their blog articles, putting six new statuses on Twitter, posting on Facebook, etc., that they lose sight of what is important: the message. If you want to engage your readers in dialogue, you do not need to flood your pages with desperate “LOOK AT ME” messages. You need to create a compelling message that people want to read.

WORKING WITH A DESIGNER

While writing and design are most certainly different activities, design is extremely important in terms of getting your writing read, and in engaging in dialogue with your readers. It is the designer who creates the experience (through a user-friendly interface) that your reader navigates through, and its importance cannot be understated. The design of your site must focus on usability, so that readers can easily read what you have to say.

Designers can help you lay out your pages, use metrics to understand what visitors are reading, and to help you figure out where to place links and a search bar on every page of your site. They can set up your pages so that they reflect your brand whether someone is visiting your site from their computer, tablet, or the small screen of a smartphone. They can also create forms so that visitors can sign up to read your site, receive e-mails, or whatever you choose.

Keep in mind that even a top designer cannot fix any shortcomings you have as a writer, and that you are still responsible for creating great writing and content.

IT'S WORK TO INFLUENCE OTHERS

You may already be thinking that writing for the web is going to be tough work, and we will agree with you that it is work. However, although writing for the web is a different style of writing than you may be used to, it is all writing just the same. If you can write persuasively, and you can be concise, you can learn to write for the web.

In writing for the web, creating dialogue, and building trust, we must make a conscious effort to write persuasively without being pushy. While there are lots of techniques to choose from in being persuasive, we like the research basis behind Robert Cialdini's work in “Influence: The Psychology of Influence and Persuasion”. He focuses on these concepts:

Predictability

People respond to things that they expect. If I purchase hangers at a discount store, I expect that they will work out to be cheaper than a big department chain, even though sometimes they are not any cheaper at all. This principle is also reflected by the idea of high-priced items being of better quality than lower-priced items, even though the product may not change at all.

Reciprocation

This describes the way that people respond when given something, especially a gift. Reciprocation is the reason behind sending a thank-you note after we receive a gift. It's also the reason that we can take a new car for a test drive: the sales person arranges a test drive as a gift, and so the customer might be more likely to purchase the car.

Consistency and Commitment

Once we have made a decision, our actions will support the choice we made, even if we later learn that we could have made a different (or even better) decision. Thus, gaming manufacturers and smartphone developers know that some of their customers will come back to purchase again even if they do not need to replace worn out items; they will come to purchase new items because they know what they get from a specific company.

Social Evidence

We tend to work with what works. We look at best sellers, best practices, and ideas that are endorsed by other people because if it works for them, it just might work for us. Another incident of social evidence is where you participate in a fundraiser where the television screen lists the names of everyone who donated. This is a way of saying, "Hey, look at what your neighbors are doing. Your name needs to be here too!"

Authority

We tend to believe people who are in positions of authority, whether they have earned our trust or not. We automatically trust doctors, police, and firefighters. But we also sometimes put trust in actors who are dressed up as an authority, because we want to believe that they know what they are talking about.

Likability

Customers will purchase from companies of friendly staff because they are likable, even when prices are higher than the competition, especially where the competition provides poor service.

Scarcity

Companies will use all kinds of excuses to explain why their products are not available, while customers search high and low to get their hands on a prized item to be part of the special group that has the item.

Self-Interest

If you are using influence as a way to support a dialogue, you should understand that everything someone does includes an element of self-interest. People do not always ask "What is in it for me?" but it would be a rare person indeed who does not think about it on some level.

What additional aspects of persuasion do you see in everyday life?

Creating Your Content

It's not enough that people can find your site or your blog: you've got to create information that matches with their needs and respects them as a reader.

In this session, you'll learn about creating headlines and engaging content so that visitors to your site will engage in dialogue with you.

WRITING EYE-CATCHING HEADLINES

Influencing readers is not about using a trick, schmoozing, or a pushy sales tactic. It is about giving people something to think about and influencing how they think and feel about you, while engaging in a dialogue with them. This kind of thinking takes work, just as your headlines do.

Since we know that readers are scanning what we wrote rather than reading it, we typically break the material up and use headlines and headers to catch their attention, or pull them toward you.

This means that instead of doing these things:

Barraging our target market with messages

Telling everyone our message

Repeating the message ad nauseum

Coercing, forcing, or tricking someone

We do these things:

Encourage a dialogue

Build trust by being credible and doing what we say we will do

Show and demonstrate our message (walking the talk)

Share the message and how our customers use our products or services

This shift in thinking means that we focus on content that people can use. Your headings do not have to be wild and crazy, but they do need to be interesting. They do not need to be weird, although that sometimes is a good idea. They do need to draw a reader into the material that follows.

Tabloid editors seem to have a great way with words and can write some catchy headlines. This kind of writing

is what encourages people to pick up those papers in a supermarket checkout line. They play with words and language just enough to catch our eyes as we walk by.

TIPS FOR CREATING GREAT HEADLINES

Keep Them Short and Direct

Often, readers are coming to your writing through a search engine, a link or from an e-mail, or an RSS feed. However, there are also plenty of ways for them to find you without coming to you directly, so you must make your content very easy to find. Keeping headlines short and direct is a good start. Avoid being cute, and use vocabulary that relates to the audience you are appealing to.

Avoid Confusing or Pretentious Language

Remember that even though we know some great vocabulary, headlines are the way for the reader to find you and tuck into your content. Use active language and strong verbs. Do not try to hide unsavory elements in your writing, either. Once you've frustrated or tried to trick a reader, it will be very difficult to get them back to your site.

Use Subheadings

Readers will engage when you catch their eye, and subheadings are a great way to help them scan through your material quickly, and focus on the information they need and want. Select a word or short phrase that describes what is in the section so that they can easily find what they want.

Print media might use a subheading only after five or six paragraphs; that's because when you fold open a newsletter, you can easily see where the subheadings are. They break up a page into digestible pieces. When reading on the web, however, we do not get the same kind of overview, so a good rule of thumb is to have a subheading within the distance of one to one and a half screens, so that readers come across them frequently.

Have a look at some of the sites that publish news or information that you visit from time to time, and assess whether they are using too few headings and subheadings, too many, or seem to get it just right (based on your own preferences).

According to social media management platform Buffer, using these guidelines will lead to great headlines:

- Post lists
- Use 'you' and 'your'
- Help readers imagine a better life
- Customize headlines for each platform
- Keep current events in mind
- Make bold claims
- Stimulate the reader's curiosity
- Sound like a human, not a robot

- Call the reader to action with direct action words
- Create emotionally appealing headlines

WRITING CONTENT

No matter how brilliantly your site is designed, no matter how many hours you devote to search engine optimization, if your writing is poor people are not going to read what you say. Here are some tips to turn your writing into something that can be easily read on the web.

Format Carefully

It seems like you do not really care how your content looks if I go to your page and see that the apostrophes and quotation marks have been replaced by a short string of symbols. You've probably seen these many times, and it is something that happens when you paste your copy directly from a word processing document. The trick to fix this problem is to paste your content into Notepad (on a PC) or TextEdit (if you are working on a Mac), and fix the problems there.

That will stop your 'best work' from looking like %\$#sloppy work#\$%.

Be Concise

Web writing is short. People scan rather than read. Make it easy for them to scan quickly.

Use Bullets

The short nature of online writing makes it ideal for bullets and lists. Write a short sentence and support it with bullet points. Writing for the web requires:

- Concise construction
- Strong editing
- Excellent content

Use Hyperlinks

New visitors spend very little time on any page. Depending on what report or resource you read, they might spend between 20 to 40 seconds on something that you took many hours to write and edit. That's just the way it is, and we need to get used to it. Your goal is to take advantage of their tendency to click on a link to move through the site, so make sure that you provide lots of links, and that the links always work.

Usability studies encourage us to use descriptive links rather than the term, 'click here'. For example, instead of: "To see the new projects we are working on, [click here](#)," try this: "For information about our latest projects, see our [Innovation Page](#)."

Build Trust

The Internet is full of information, and it can be hard to know what is right and what is made up. Develop credibility in your writing by citing your sources and linking to them. Visitors prefer (and search engines also like) when you make links available. You will build credibility by being open about who your sources are, and by sharing them with your visitors.

Use Inverted Pyramid Construction

When we learn to write, we generally follow the format of paragraphs constructed around topic sentences, supporting sentences, and a summary statement or link to the following paragraph. When writing for the web, however, we do the opposite. Remember that readers are scanning, so give them the most important message first, even if it is your conclusion. You will word it nicely, of course, so that the flow and rhythm are there for readability, but you must approach your pages (and the top level of your website) with the most important information. Save lengthy discussions for pages that are more deeply positioned on your site.

Think Rich

You may have heard about rich content; it is a phrase that gets bandied about a lot. It means that you are writing to inform, persuade, or advise about things that your readers need to know (which may not be the same as the things you want to write about). If you have content that stimulates a discussion, encourages dialogue, and provides something people can use, then you are getting the idea of what rich content is all about. You cannot create a website that is peppered with banner ads, messages to ‘buy now’, or ‘look at me’ statements unless you are only focused on creating a digital brochure. You do not encourage readership and engage dialogue with a brochure. Think about rich content, engaging readers in dialogue, and building a tribe (to channel a bit of Seth Godin, an American author, entrepreneur, marketer and public speaker who is considered an expert in this field), and bring readers to your site.

PRESENTING YOUR MESSAGE

You have plenty of options for how to present your message. We know that reading time on a page is short, and that visitors like to click on hyperlinks more than they like to use a back button to return to the menu, so give them places to go. But what about the look of your page? How can a writer prepare good copy that is appealing on a page? And how should we handle more lengthy pieces of information?

The Page

In terms of how a web page gets set up, conventional thinking was that you need to place your important content “above the fold” so that readers can see it without having to scroll far through the text. However, current research shows that this practice may be changing.

The fold is the part of the page that appears on their screen before they have to scroll, and is caught in the view of the reader instantly when the page loads. Keep in mind that the fold is different for every device; you have a larger space on a laptop or PC, but a smaller space if it is being read on a tablet or smartphone.

While it’s still a good idea to include the most important information at the top, people are scrolling more often, especially on mobile devices, and will usually find information placed lower on the page.

Avoid Large Blocks of Text

Paragraphs should be short, and can be as short as one sentence. Other ways to break up big areas of text include using subheadings, lists, graphics and photographs. Instead of having a lot of information on one page, various pages can also be created within a website for different subjects.

Sizing Things Up

When you have lots to say (perhaps in a position paper, opinion piece, annual report, or a research project), you’re probably writing several thousand words. Most blog posts that actually get read are 350-500 words in

length. You do not need to do anything special with a document of up to 1000 words (as long as you realize it is being scanned rather than deeply read), but with longer work, it is better to set up a link to a PDF for readers to download (instead of putting all the material on a web page and having readers scroll and scroll and scroll).

A downloadable PDF is a great tool because:

- We know that readers are scanning on the web. It is possible that with a PDF, they can add it to their reading list and at their leisure they will absorb a greater portion of the material
- A PDF document is easy to print off or transfer to an eReader, allowing your visitor to read in whatever way they prefer, and to keep a copy of that document for later reference

Think about and note some more ideas related to writing content for the web:

WRITING GOALS

Each piece that you write needs to have a purpose. Whether you are writing copy for a website or publishing a blog, you need to know where your writing will appear and what you want the readers to do with what they read. If you do not have a good plan set up, do not expect that your readers will know what to do.

You can set up goals for different parts of your writing. For example, if you are setting up a website for your company and you also have a blog, you might want to create different goals for each major part of it.

If the overall goal of your writing is to persuade, inform, or direct, you need to be very clear about that, and just how you want to get your message out. If you are also writing to develop better writing skills, that makes sense too.

In general, there are two important questions to ask yourself:

- What do you want from the work that you are doing?
- What are your goals for your website, your blog, or additional writing that you are doing on the web?

With a company website, your goals could be to increase the number of people that come to your site and download information or make a purchase. Or you may want to provide them with a free product (such as a partial report or product sample) so that they later come back to purchase the product. Or perhaps you want to get hired as a consultant. Any of these choices requires a reader to take action, and that's a good purpose. But unless you know what you want from the copy you create, you will not know how to position your text.

Professional bloggers often have an overall purpose for their blog, and each post will have a purpose too. Blogs that are widely read and have an active community of people making comments, will be more likely to get picked up in searches. A blogger might ask questions and the advice of their readers to get some answers, and also to get some action from the community. They may want to get people thinking and debating, so they will write about something from a different perspective than usual or present an idea that is contentious. They may want to promote an idea or product that readers would find helpful, or to highlight a company, an individual, or an idea that is interesting. Their purpose may vary, but they always have one.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Are you writing for a website, a newsletter, blog, or something else?

What was the purpose of the last piece that you wrote (or one you are working on now)?

Do you have too many goals? Too few? Feel free to make some changes and detail them here.

What can you do to make your writing stronger, based on what you have learned so far?

DON'T FORGET TO PROOFREAD AND EDIT

Proofreading is a very important part of the process that is often overlooked. When typos and grammatical errors make it onto your website, it reflects badly. Careless writing and poor grammar can damage the credibility of the website and the company, and low quality content can make your business seem unprofessional and unreliable.

Errors can also make the content hard to understand, and misspelled words can affect search rankings.

Do not depend only on spell-check software, which will not pick up usage errors such as 'it's' and 'its' because both words are spelled correctly.

Along with proofreading, fact checking is also important.

Proofreading and editing steps:

- Make sure to explain any reference that will not be easily understood by most readers
- Writers should read over their own work to catch as many mistakes as they can
- Trim unnecessary words (for example, the word 'that' can be eliminated in most cases), and remove any clichés
- Another person (a copy editor if available) should then read over the article, looking for errors such as typos or grammatical mistakes
- If at all possible, each piece should be read and edited by several different people to catch all mistakes

Writing for Different Mediums

While general web writing rules should be followed, including writing concise, compelling content with the most important message first, different mediums - websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn - have their own specific conventions that make writing for each one unique. That's because they each have different purposes, audiences and expectations.

In this session, tips for writing for some major social platforms will be presented.

WRITING FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

In general, try to be engaging while using as few words as possible. Because web readers often scan, do not write lengthy posts. Make sure your copy is mistake-free and that it delivers a clear message. Grab readers' attention with a joke, a story or an interesting fact or statistic, or try to evoke an emotional response.

Social media should have a consistent voice (fun, serious, etc.) and a personality, because using these mediums is about generating conversation and engagement.

TIPS FOR VARIOUS PLATFORMS

Some tips to keep in mind for some of the major platforms:

Facebook

- Keep posts short and positive while offering valuable information
- Give a clear Call to Action
- Ask a question
- Give a link
- Post an image
- Do not be too self-promoting, balance between business posts and those for fun
- Be conversational and listen to your audience

Twitter

- Do more than share other posts
- Tell a story and include visuals and emojis
- Keep it short — it was limited to 140 characters and increased to 280 in 2017, but 140 is still ideal
- Use complete sentences
- Tap into the latest news and events, as well as trending discussions
- Twitter is a conversational platform, so use a personable voice
- Incorporate hashtags directly into copy, not just at the end; use two to three at most and use them correctly
- Tag other relevant accounts

LinkedIn

- Stay professional
- Be clear, do not use language that will not be understood
- Engage with people, do not just post your CV
- Have a strategy
- Never be disrespectful
- Do not write about sensitive topics
- Not too long, not too short (300-500 words)
- Add visuals and a catchy title

Blogs

- Understand your target readers
- Be yourself, be relatable, be different from newspaper articles
- Use links, images
- Do not be negative
- Insert a Call to Action at the end, such as subscribe to a blog, register for a webinar or event, read a related article
- Write in first person, be honest

You may find the following links useful in understanding how to use hashtags correctly:

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/hashtags-twitter-facebook-instagram>

<https://coschedule.com/blog/how-to-use-hashtags/>

Testing the Waters

We can certainly talk about how to write concisely and to make our writing short so that readers get what they need while also encouraging them to engage with us.

In this session, your objective is to walk the talk.

WALK THE TALK

WRITING FOR THE WEB REVIEW

There are plenty of right answers to this activity, which is positioned as a bit of fun about a serious subject.

You could answer in a couple of extremes. Here is one possible answer:

- Write
- Edit
- Read

Or you may get something closer to this:

Writers understand what it means to be clear and concise, and the need for editing.

Sure, there are writers who say that they write without editing, but good writing needs editing. This reflects our ability to produce good work in different styles, and for different audiences.

A very effective approach to writing for the web includes doing a lot of reading.

Go ahead. Write. Edit. Read.

Neither of these suggested answers is more correct than the other. You do not have to create something this brief, but you do need to be able to cut out the extra words to present the essential message.

The writer must determine the right way to get the message across.

Deciding What's Fit to Print

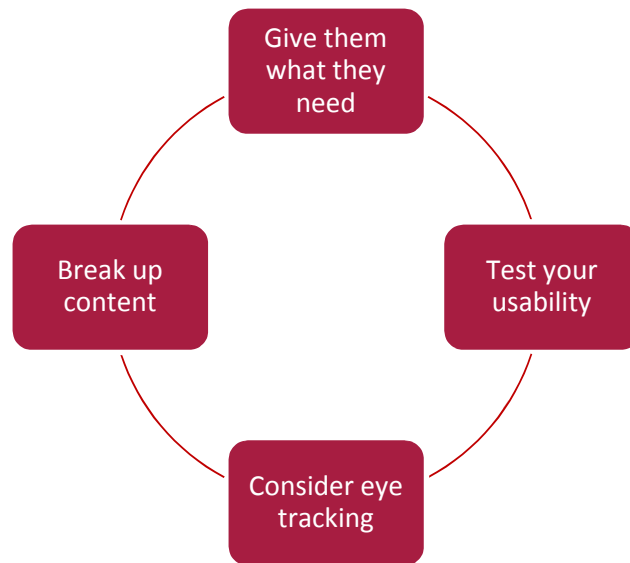
In figuring out how best to reach your readers, there is a lot to consider that takes us beyond what we think we should write, or the things that we are compelled to write.

In this session, you'll consider four elements that help us decide what to print, and start setting up a plan.

WHAT'S GETTING READ?

One of the best ways to decide what you want to print is to measure what people are reading. There are plenty of tools available to help you do that, including the analytics that accompany your website. They can usually tell you where a visitor was before they arrived at your site: did they use a search engine, or did they access a link from another site or an e-mail? They can also show you how long they stayed on a page and

where they went next. (This is where you can assess the effectiveness of your hyperlinks.) We refer to these metrics as **usability**, and they help you decide what is fit to publish and what to forget.



GIVE THEM WHAT THEY NEED

Remember that the design of any online site is about what readers need and want, as opposed to what you want to say. You will get site visitors by drawing them toward you with compelling content, answers to their problems, and engaging dialogue; rather than doing a hard sell or bragging about every accomplishment you make. If you do not know what they want, start the dialogue now. You can use focus groups, interviews, surveys, and even software to collect input and to build on your visitors' demographics and personalities.

TEST YOUR USABILITY

We need to carefully and accurately measure the time it takes to develop your online presence and build your community. One way to help with this is to measure the elements that users interact with, and their satisfaction with what you have. You can use their responses to help make revisions and refine your design.

It is helpful to learn things like:

- How long things take, including image loads, video loads, document download, and/or simple page loads
- If the site functions the same on a laptop as it does on a tablet or smartphone
- The number of links or steps it takes to complete a request or form. If you are still collecting complete demographic details on a clunky form, you need to ask how many people left the site without completing it. Only collect the information that you need, like first name and e-mail address, and then stop yourself from asking more.

- How appealing and engaging the user finds the site, and whether they found what they wanted
- Whether they encountered dead or incorrect links

CONSIDER EYE TRACKING

You do not need to arrange eye tracking measures for your site right now, but you do need to know what they are and how they fit into the science of readership. Eye tracking measures the length of time someone’s eyes rest on a portion of the screen (measured as a fixation), and where their eyes travel. It is fascinating to review this kind of technology!

You might think that your eye-grabbing image and highlighted keywords are drawing someone’s attention, only to find out that they are drawn to a specific color or attribute that you did not expect. If visitors do respond to your site in unexpected ways, and consistently so, you may need to rethink how you manage your layout and design.

BREAK UP CONTENT

We already discussed how important content is and how your readers scan information. If you are writing long pieces of information, what can you do to make sure that people get the message? One helpful technique is to break things into small chunks that can be easily scanned and quickly read. Organizing your material so that related pieces are close together, plenty of links to help visitors move through the material, and pieces being a reasonable length, all contribute to good readability.

Click on the following links to learn more about improving readability:

9 Key Steps to Improve Website Readability

<https://conversionxl.com/blog/9-key-steps-to-improve-website-readability/>

9 Guidelines for Skyrocketing your Web Content’s Readability

<http://nectafy.com/readability-guidelines/>

REVIEWING AND PLANNING

Now that you’re learning how to present your writing and what is fit to print, take a few minutes to write some objectives about your own writing. What are you committed to do to ensure that you are writing the right things, in the best way possible, to engage as many readers as you can?(You might be adjusting a piece you are currently writing, or a piece that is already online.)

What are the cons of audio clips to support the writing that you do?

What are the pros of video clips to support the writing that you do?

What are the cons of video clips to support the writing that you do?

Do you think you would attract more visitors to your site if you had video or audio clips?

Why or why not?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

There is a con to every pro, and a pro to every con.

- Professional audio and video work can get very expensive. (This is very true, although there is some tolerance for poorer quality production if the content is good.)
- People do not want to listen to audio or watch videos if they are on the bus or train. (Are you sure?)
- We are visual: we need color, pictures, and sound! We should be incorporating these elements into our web work.
- We are a company that has little to share; audio and video are not appropriate for the type of sites/blogs/presence that we want. (Are you sure?)

Getting Your Content Noticed

Getting noticed brings visitors to our sites, to engage in dialogue with us, and to get them to do business with us. Are you getting noticed in the right way?

In this session, you will learn about accessibility and search engine optimization to get your content noticed.

STANDING OUT IN CROWDS

If people are unable to read what we write, we might as well give up writing! Accessible content is all about helping people find us on the web. They have plenty of other options, so we want them to read what we have put there for them.

People who are using the web come from a variety of backgrounds, skill levels, and abilities. A big consideration is to think about the tools that readers with disabilities will be using. A visitor who is visually impaired can use a program called a screen reader to have the text on the page read to them. You might already be thinking that your image-filled page will be difficult for them to navigate, and you would be correct. When you design your page, it is important to have **tags** included with images that describe the image for a visually impaired reader. This also has an impact on visitors to your site who have the images turned off to save page upload time.

Keep in mind that these descriptions should be as informative as possible. For example, tagging an image as 'cat playing with toy' is more helpful than simply 'cat'.

Making your website more accessible may help people find it through search engines because they use some of the same signals that screen readers employ to find and understand the content of your website. Equally important for the visually impaired are **descriptive buttons**. Instead of writing something like, "To order a sample of our newest product, click here" and the visually impaired person having a very difficult time finding the right place to click, try something like "Order your complimentary sample".

If you are using **audio clips** that play automatically when a page loads, consider that a hearing-impaired person will not know that something is being read and may miss information that you are presenting.

Incorporate a written passage that includes the information that is being broadcast so that hearing impaired visitors can engage with you. Captions are also useful for users who may access your website in a place where they cannot hear audio, such as a noisy location.

Many accessibility problems can be effectively managed by using **alternative text** (also called ‘alt text’) when you set up your pages. Whenever you place an image on a page, for example, an image tag will be created in the source code (). When you correctly add the alt text to it, the image can be described by reading programs when someone hovers their mouse over it. The alt text needs to say exactly what the image says with no additions. Do not be tempted to create alt text that says ‘your company logo’; it should simply read ‘your company’.

What additional ideas do you have for making your information more accessible?

What is currently working for you?

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a tool that you can use to help people find you online. SEO is not a one-time activity where you focus on creating keyword lists; it is a process to help you get your writing as close as you can to the top of search results (or at least within the first page).

To appear at the top of a search page, you need to select search terms and keywords that people look for, and then optimize your content by writing with those words to make yourself search friendly.

SEO is an ongoing and ever-changing process, as search engines update their rankings algorithm several times a year. Therefore, techniques that worked last year may not work this year. To achieve success with SEO, you must know what works best and avoid using obsolete techniques.

Some key points to keep in mind:

- Results will not be immediate. By following SEO best practices, results will be achieved in time
- Publish exceptional content that is well written and provides value. Search engines often give more recognition to articles and posts that receive the most engagement, such as comments
- Do research about keywords to find what people are searching for

- Publish new content often

Think about the last time you searched for something online.

What words did you use?

Which links did you click on from the search page?

Did you just look at the paid ads at the top of your search or the first few organic links?

Did you go to the second page?

It is worth noting that we rarely (if ever) look at search results on the second page, unless we are really, really desperate. Most people will refine their search terms and search a second time rather than going to a second page.

HOW IT WORKS

Search engines use tools like spiders, crawlers, or bots to trawl the Internet for new information. They are working all the time! Remember, though, that they may work on a different schedule than you do, so you need to prompt them to come look at what is new on your site by sending them a message.

You can update a search engine like Google, Bing, or Yahoo by using their webmaster tools and submitting the URL of the new or updated page. You must submit to each search engine separately, and they do not like it if you send them all the same link.

Instead, you can choose to update one site and wait for the spiders from the other sites to find your new content, or you can stagger things. For example, you could send one site the updates for your website, another blog updates, and the third an update to your social networking page. As you can already tell, this could get to be a big job, so you might find this easier if you use something called **pinging**.

Pinging is a process where you can advise the search engines that a change has been made. You can start

pinging with a third-party service, or you can set up your website, blog, and so on to do it automatically. For example, large blogging sites such as WordPress, Blogger, or TypePad have pingin built in to their service already. For other sites, you simply have to submit the URL (the address of your website, like www.yourcompany.com/blog) of the page you updated, the name of the page or title of your article or information, and then click 'Submit'. The service you are using will respond by broadcasting a message that your URL has been updated.

Are you familiar with these terms? Do they have any to add to the list?

What is your experience with SEO like so far?

OPTIMIZING KEYWORDS

What Do They Want?

When people look for your company or your products, they will put terms in a search box on your site or a search engine page. People are different and live in different parts of our global community. Not only do you need to know what they are searching for, you also need to figure out how they will ask for it.

For example, a knitted cap for winter weather is called a toque in Canada, and in some places, we sit on a sofa, couch, chesterfield, or a settee. Even though everyone is speaking about you in English, they are all using different words to express the same thing. This happens with other items, like soft drinks, pop, soda, and fizzy drinks.

KEYWORDS, SEARCH TERMS, AND TAGS

Keywords, search terms, and **tags** are used all over the web, and are an important part of the design for a website as well as a blog.

When a potential customer is looking for your product, they are only going to type a few words into a search

box. The total number of words can vary by search engine, but as a rule of thumb, the fewer words they need to find you, the larger your profile gets. However, some marketing resources also tell us that longer search queries tend to lead to more conversions (sales), possibly because the searcher already knows exactly what they want.

Search engines ignore certain words, so you can leave them out of your phrases. (You can leave them in, so they make sense to you, but just know that search engines ignore them.) This includes **prepositions** (about, beside, of, than, under, etc.), **conjunctions** (for, and, but, yet, etc.), **articles** (a, an, the, etc.), and **punctuation**.

To keep your keyword list reasonable, words that have the same root when in plural form can be entered as a singular word. You would use the words dog, skunk, or car but you do not have to use dogs, skunks, or cars. However, knives, mice, and companies will need both versions of the root added as a keyword, because they change from knife, mouse, and company.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Here are five tips for getting a solid list of keywords:

1. Brainstorm a list of every potential keyword and phrase that you can think of.
2. Writers, like the marketers they are often writing for, should not isolate themselves. Ask your colleagues, friends, and employees for ideas.
3. Use the names of all your key products and services, company name, subdomains, and nicknames.
4. Include industry and geographic (location) terms and jargon. If you have a popular name, try to secure as many versions of it as possible. For example, London is a community in England, the United States, and Canada (as well as many other countries).
5. Use a search tool like the Google Keyword Search tool (used for Google AdWords) to help identify lots of keywords and phrases.

Remember that searchers may not look at a second page of search results.

DEVELOP A SEARCH TERMS LIST

List words and short phrases that can be used as search terms among the different pages of your website and/or blog. Consider the terms that searchers use to look for your product, and balance that with the goal of showing up on the first page of results.

- Creating frequent posts and adding new content so that search engines pay attention to the site
- Monitoring analytics regularly
- Working with designers and editors to ensure that you are creating a great site or blog where people want to be

SHARING YOUR CONTENT

Once your content is created, you will want to share it with as many people as possible. One way to do this is through social media.

According to Curata content marketing director Mitchell Hall, Twitter had 328 million monthly users in the first quarter of 2017, while Facebook had two billion active monthly users as of June 2017. Pinterest had 175 million monthly users in the first part of 2017.

Other major social media platforms include LinkedIn, Google+ and Instagram.

To get started, first determine which is the right platform for what you are trying to achieve. Each social media network has a different purpose and audience. You need to become familiar with the major platforms used by your target audience. Reaching large numbers is not useful if they are not the people you want to connect with.

Brian Peters of Buffer Social suggests thinking about the different audiences of social media networks when creating a customized post to promote your content.

- **Twitter:** This audience is looking for news, tips, how-to's, interesting articles, and what is trending. Tweets should be quick, witty, and eye-catching.
- **Facebook:** An audience looking for entertainment and value. What will make your audience want to share your post? Aim to stimulate emotions and interest with captions and headlines.
- **Instagram:** Users are looking for striking visuals.
- **LinkedIn:** An audience of professionals. How will your content add value to their professional lives?
- **Pinterest:** This is an audience of creative people looking for attractive images plus how-to's. Infographics are a great way to fit as much content as possible into a visual.

Create multiple headlines for the same content to use when posting on different social networks. Each platform is unique, so each post should be one-of-a-kind as well. Experiment with different headlines for each, as what works best on one medium may not work well on another.

The same content can be posted multiple times, even on the same platforms, using different images and headlines. This will ensure that a greater portion of your intended audience will see it.

Share at the right time. Some platforms have features that assist with this, such as Facebook Insights, which provides analysis to help estimate the best times. The idea is to reach your target audience when they are the most likely to see your post. Key is understanding how users engage on each network. Again, you may need to experiment to find what will be successful for you. Optimal posting times and frequencies are always changing, therefore what works one week may not work the next week.

Engage with others by asking for feedback, asking questions, and including a Call to Action, which will build a human connection and a strong audience.

Additional ways to elevate content include using email, newsletters and promotion tools. These include advocacy tools that enable employers and customers to share content on their own social media profiles, distribution tools such as BrightCove or PR Newswire, paid promotion tools including Gravity or ContentClick, and social media management tools such as Hootsuite, Buffer and Sprout Social that allow scheduling posts on different platforms at the same time.

Write a tweet (limit of 140 characters) about the main things you learned from this course:

Summary

Congratulations! You have completed the course “Writing for the Web”.

In this course, we started out by looking at how writing for the web is not the same as other writing we may do. We learned that people approach web pages differently than print materials.

Next, we learned that influencing readers entails attracting their attention and engaging them in a dialogue. Writing and presenting headlines and content effectively were shown to be essential to achieving our goals as a writer.

Then, we moved on to learn about writing for social media, including how the platforms differ, and specific requirements for each.

The next session provided an opportunity to practice writing concisely. We also covered the importance of reading and editing what we write.

We then moved beyond what we think we should write, to consider what people are reading. We covered

techniques that make reading on the web more attractive, such as giving the readers what they need, testing our usability, eye tracking, and chunking content.

Next, we moved onto the value of using video and audio clips to support and supplement our written materials. There are lots of things to consider when adding pictures, color, tags, and audio to our pages.

Then we learned about how to get all that great content noticed by improving accessibility, applying Search Engine optimization, and using search terms and keywords. We also discussed the temptation to pepper your writing with keywords to get higher rankings with search engines, instead of offering stronger content.

Further Reading:

- ✓ Cialdini, Robert. *Influence: Science and Practice (5th Edition)*. Prentice Hall, 2008.
 - —. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion (2nd Edition)*. Collins, 2006.
- ✓ Cialdini, Robert, Noah Goldstein, and Steve Martin. *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways To Be Persuasive*. Free Press, 2008.
- ✓ Horton, Sarah, and Patrick J. Lynch. *Web Style Guide (3rd Edition)*. Yale University Press, 2009.
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- ✓ Krug, Steve. *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability (2nd Edition)*. New Riders, 2006.
- ✓ Redish, Janice. *Letting Go of the Words (2nd Edition)*. Elsevier, 2012.
- ✓ Yahoo. *The Yahoo! Style Guide: The Ultimate Sourcebook for Writing, Editing, and Creating Content for the Digital World*. Edited by Chris Barr. St. Martin's Griffin, 2010.