

Journalism and Mass Communication Honours Course

Semester 4

Paper CC8 (Introduction to New Media)

Topic: Writing techniques for the web

The consumption of online news is gaining importance around the world, as the potential increases in audience and investment. In the United States, advertising investment in digital media already exceeds traditional media and in Brazil, it is expected that the same will happen by 2015. However, not all professionals who deal with news are prepared to adapt their texts from the paper to the screen or take into account the way in which users read on the internet. In digital environments, the informative content should consider some techniques, grouped in the concept of web writing. In web writing, the 'style' is something that one cares about after the writer manages to produce content that meets all the necessary requirements for viewing and consumption.

There are four basic principles in writing for the web:

1. **Persuasion:** The writer should create mechanisms of interest for the information produced and think much more than a 'well written' text.
2. **Objectivity:** The writer should give users the information elements they want, without filling in unnecessary details;
3. **Visibility:** The writer should try to work with the layers of a website, offering information to the audience little by little, but without creating a too deep structure;
4. **Navigability:** The writer should use information as an orientation resource in a website, helping the user or audiences to cross data and produce knowledge.

When writing for the web, it is also necessary for the writer to be attentive to optimize techniques so that the texts are found more easily by the search engines. For that, the writer should repeat keywords, generate links to relevant words and deliver accurate titles.

To write well for the web, the writer needs to understand what today's Internet users want and expect. Users want web contents that are easy to skim & scan; that are written in a style that is direct, concise and factual; content which are focused around their needs; and has credibility and inspires trust.

1. The webwriter should understand how users read on the web. Users read differently on the web – unlike when they are reading a book from cover to cover. On the web, users don't read word for word. They skim content, trying to get a quick impression of what it's about. They scan for the bits they are interested in and ignore the rest. The writer need to understand how users read on the web, then write content in a style that makes it easy for them.
2. The writer should write content that is easy to skim & scan. The writing should be direct and start with the conclusion – this is called the Inverted Pyramid style of writing. The writer should limit each paragraph to one key concept. The writer should use meaningful headings and bullet points and numbered lists in his writing. The writing should include summaries or overviews.

3. The writer should keep the wordings short & simple. The writer should be brief and concise and reduce the word-count to a minimum. The writer should write clearly and simply. If the writer is writing for an expert audience he should explain the terms. The writer should give the users links to simple background information, so that the most casual visitor can work out what they are talking about.
4. The web writer should know the audience they are writing for. The writer should cater to their needs. The writer should focus the content around the users' needs and tasks, not around the organisation. This is called user-centric content writing.
5. The writer should engage your user with the content. The writer should imagine who the user will be, and keeping that imagined person in mind should write for him or her.
6. The writer should build trust among the readers being factual and accurate. Where appropriate, the writer must prove the verity of the information with links to trusted websites or by quoting trusted authorities.
7. The writer should test and then refine the content of the webpage while imagining how it reads to a new user. Then test it on users to learn what works and what causes difficulties. Test the content on different audience groups with different levels of knowledge.
8. The writer should help people and search engines to find the content. The writer should organize the content so that the website is easy to navigate. The writer should use hyperlinks to the articles on the website and to other helpful sites. The writer should do keyword research to determine what keywords people are likely to use to find the content and then write the content with those keyword phrases, paying particular attention to the article title, headings and the leading paragraph. The writer should also provide the audiences with alternate text descriptions for the images that are attached with the content.
9. When creating web pages, one should aim for a unified tone, look and feel throughout the website to suit the audience group and the subject matter. One should keep the tone of the website unrelentingly positive. The writer should use multi-media cautiously – only to enhance the page, not distract the user.
10. Users value expert knowledge so the writer should be generous with the expert knowledge. It can be a draw-card for visitors to the website and it helps in building credibility because it establishes the writer or the website developer as an authority on the subject. The writer should not give the expert knowledge all at once. The writer must organize the informations into digestible pieces. The summary should be given first, then let the users to drill down for more details.