

WRITING FOR THE WEB

HOW USERS READ ON THE WEB

- Scan text instead of reading word by word
- Often hurried, looking for something specific or wanting to complete a task
- Enter the site to many different pages so each page must be fairly self-contained
- Distrust web content unless its credibility is made clear
- Expect that information on the web will be more up-to-date than printed information
- Want to be shown rather than told
- Come to your site to do something
- Impatiently

THE BEST USABLE WEBSITES

- Resonate with the target user
- Content-rich, well-written, and up-to-date
- Updated regularly with curated content
- Written in the user's vernacular (rather than acronyms or insider terms)
- Compelling value proposition
- Architected and tested to ensure users find informations and/or complete tasks quickly
- Accessible and 508 compliant
- Fast in terms of page load times

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Identify and use a voice or tone for written copy
- Write to empower users, not impress them
- Attach metadata to your writing to facilitate searching and sorting
- Use images and illustrations (with captions) to enhance and even replace the written copy when you can
- Follow a style guide
 - ◆ The Chicago Manual of Style
 - ◆ AP Style Guide
- Edit, edit, edit

ACTIVE VOICE

Write in an active voice: **subject-verb-object**

Beautiful giraffes roam the savannah. (active)

The savannah is roamed by beautiful giraffes. (passive)

Sue changed the flat tire. (active)

The flat tire was changed by Sue. (passive)

I ran the obstacle course in record time. (active)

The obstacle course was run by me in record time. (passive)

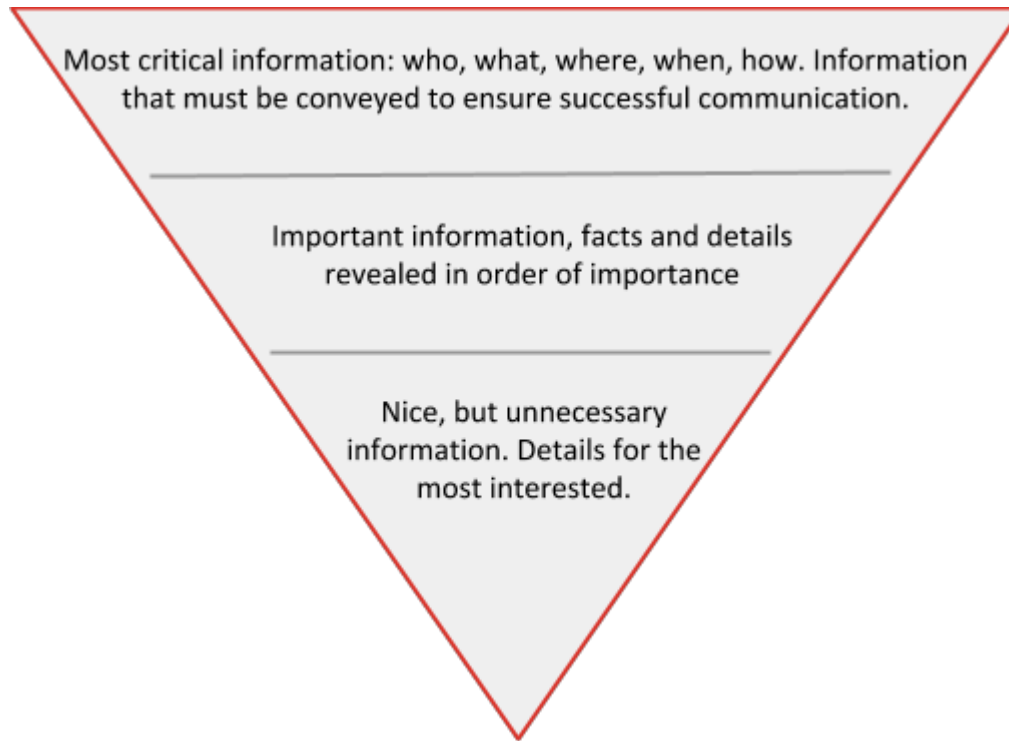
The critic wrote a scathing review. (active)

A scathing review was written by the critic. (passive)

The staff is required to watch a safety video every year. (active)

A safety video will be watched by the staff every year. (passive)

INVERTED PYRAMID



- Put conclusions at the beginning
- Users can quickly learn what they need to know
- Gives predictable structure to the content

GIVEN-NEW PRINCIPLE

Place familiar information before new information

Text A:

¹The application of science to the creation of useful devices to meet the needs of society is called mechanical engineering. ²The design, manufacture, operation and maintenance of a wide variety of machinery are the focus of a mechanical engineer's work. ³Jet engines and minute instruments for use in medicine are amongst the products designed by mechanical engineers. ⁴Engineering drawings of the devices which are to be produced are created by mechanical engineers. ⁵Manual work was the normal means of creating drawings before the late 20th century, but computer-aided design (CAD) programs have been used to create drawings and designs since the use of computers became widespread. ⁶Three-dimensional models can be used directly for manufacturing the devices thanks to modern CAD programs.

Text B:

¹Mechanical engineering is the application of science to the creation of useful devices to meet the needs of society. ²Mechanical engineers focus on the design, manufacture, operation and maintenance of a wide variety of machinery. ³The products of their work range from jet engines to minute instruments for use in medicine. ⁴Mechanical engineers usually create engineering drawings of the devices which are to be produced. ⁵Before the late 20th century, drawings were usually made manually, but the widespread use of computers has now enabled the creation of drawings and designs using computer-aided design (CAD) programs. ⁶Modern CAD programs allow engineers to produce three-dimensional models, which can be used directly in the manufacture of the devices depicted.

Text B shows a good use of the Given-New Principle

RULES TO LIVE BY

- Keep it short
- One idea per paragraph
- Break it up
- Use subheads
- Selectively use bold for emphasis
- Use lists - bulleted and numbered
- Use hyperlinks wisely (NEVER say click here)
 - ◆ “**Commencement information** for graduating students is now available.”
 - ◆ “As you research UAH, make sure to contact your **Admissions Counselor** so they can help you along the way.”

THINK SCANABILITY

- Looks uncluttered; key parts of content are visually distinct
- Related information is grouped; unrelated is separated
- Non-text elements aid scanning and comprehension
- Good quality images, graphics (clear, cropped, resized)
- Tables well designed (clear headers, lines to guide reading, minimal text, appropriate alignment depending on type of data in cells)

THINK CALLS TO ACTION

- Tell the user what to do next
- What does your user want to do?
 - ◆ Get help to solve a problem
 - ◆ Find out what you can do for them
 - ◆ Work with you
- What do you want the user to do?
 - ◆ Call or email you
 - ◆ Apply
 - ◆ Visit campus

USING LISTS

BENEFITS OF USING LISTS

- Quickly scannable
- Create white space on the page
- Make your copy shorter
- Show level of importance or sequencing
- Keep related items chunked together

USING LISTS

- Use numbered lists for items that need a required order
- Use bulleted lists for items that do not require order
- Limit lists to seven items or less
- Make list items parallel in phrasing
- Avoid single-item lists
- Omit articles (a, an, the) when possible from the beginning of a list item
- Use **this list** as the example for spacing, indentation, punctuation and caps style

USING TABLES

- Only when necessary (difficult to maintain)
- Good for showing comparisons
- Supports quick look-up
- Keep these qualities in mind:
 - ◆ Keep the table design simple
 - ◆ Provide grid lines to help guide the eye
 - ◆ Write labels and content concisely

CONSERVE WORDS

→ Avoid unnecessary text

- ◆ In this article, ...
- ◆ Let's get started
- ◆ In conclusion
- ◆ It is safe to say

→ Don't tell us what you're going to say, JUST SAY IT

CONSERVE WORDS

→ Avoid redundant adjectives

- ◆ Final Outcome
- ◆ Free Gift
- ◆ Added Bonus
- ◆ Awful Tragedy
- ◆ Various Differences
- ◆ Personal Beliefs
- ◆ End Result
- ◆ Past Memories
- ◆ Unexpected Surprise
- ◆ True Facts

CONSERVE WORDS

- Replace wordy phrases with single words
 - ◆ At this point in time = **Now**
 - ◆ Due to the fact that = **Because**
 - ◆ In the event that = **If**
 - ◆ Increase in = **More**
 - ◆ In light of = **Because**
- Replace prepositional phrases with adjectives
 - ◆ The article on hepatitis = The hepatitis article

USE STRONG WORDS

→ Avoid wimpy words

- ◆ In my opinion
- ◆ Basically
- ◆ Kind of
- ◆ Sort of
- ◆ Really
- ◆ Virtually
- ◆ Practically
- ◆ Personally
- ◆ As you already know

WIMPY: I think this sentence will be much stronger without those first two words.

STRONG: This sentence is much stronger without those first two words.

WIMPY: I was wondering if you might want to go to dinner and a movie with me this weekend.

STRONG: Would you like to go to dinner and a movie this weekend?

USE PRECISE LANGUAGE

- Use pronouns sparingly to improve both clarity and search optimization
 - ◆ He, she, herself, it, that, they, each, few, many, who, whoever, whose, someone, everybody ... not specific
 - ◆ Using YOU can be very powerful
- Use the same proper noun to describe a person, place, or thing throughout your document
- Use metaphors only when they are simple
- Avoid use of adjectives

MISCELLANY OF RULES

- Write clear, simple headlines or titles
- Direct instructions increase comprehension
- Double negatives lead to confusion or at least to slower comprehension
 - ◆ Example: The evidence is certainly not irrefutable
 - ◆ Example: The price of the car is not insignificant
- Unfamiliar acronyms and abbreviations mean nothing to readers
 - ◆ Expand acronyms at least with the first use
 - ◆ Use this style: Research Information Services and Computing (RISC)
- Do not underline
- Avoid exclamation points (!) and *italics*

QUALITY CHECK

- Use built-in editing tools for spelling and grammar
- Turn on readability statistics (if using Microsoft Word)
 - ◆ Or Readability Test Tool (<http://read-able.com/>)
 - ◆ Flesch Reading Ease Score
- Test all links to make sure they work as planned

RELATED CONTENT

- Encourage users to stay on the site with **good related content**
 - ◆ End articles with links to related content
 - ◆ Make sure related content is relevant
 - ◆ Consider context, match a user's interest
 - ◆ Provide a clear visual pathway to related content

UIUC COE WRITING CONSIDERATIONS

- AUDIENCE: The public site is specifically intended for external audiences
- TONE: Professional yet human and not stuffy
- STYLE: Choose AP or Chicago style guide
- SEO: Ensure each page has a well-constructed title and priority keywords
- NOMENCLATURE: Acronyms should be minimized, first use should be spelled out
- READING LEVEL: Rated at high school (8th to 12th grade)

CONTENT VIOLATIONS

Content should not be published if it:

- Violates copyright laws
- Violates federal, state or local laws
- Violates or does not adhere to university policy
- Is for commercial use or private business purposes
- Is pornographic, obscene, injurious, harassing or defamatory
- Is based on rumors, hearsay or unverified reports about the university or its programs

