

  
content  
is KING

# Web Content Training



WEB COMMUNICATION

LAMAR UNIVERSITY™



## CONTENTS:

- Good web writing matters
- The content of your content
- Writing style
- Using metadata
- Formatting
- Sharing your content
- Best practices

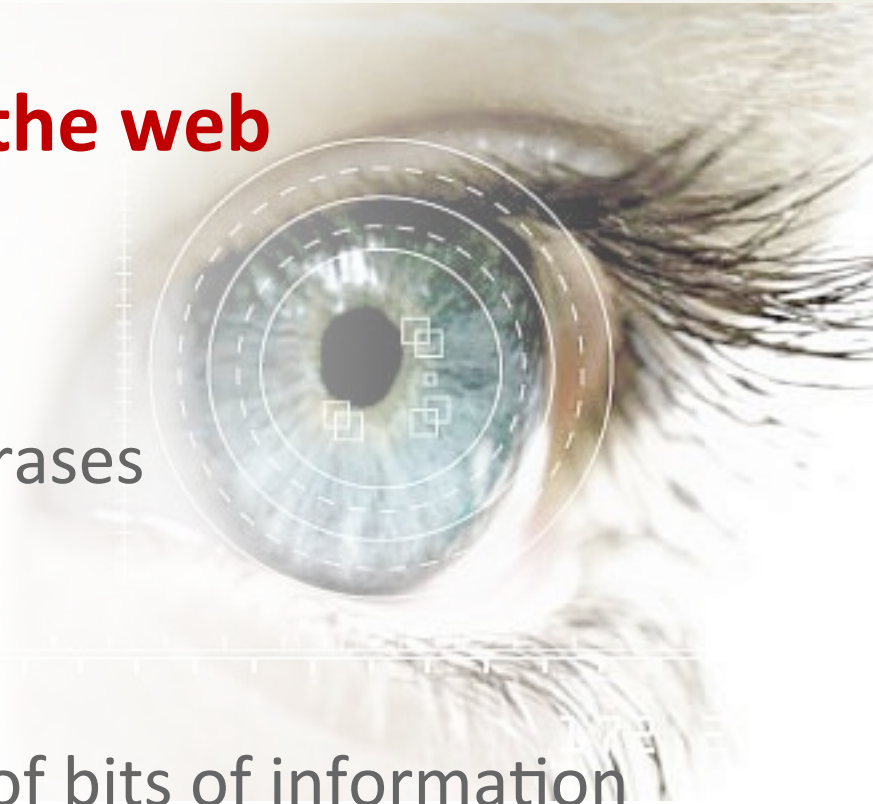


# Good Writing Matters

**People read differently on the web**

## Web users scan pages

- Pick out key words and phrases
- Read in quick, short bursts
- Are action oriented
- Click and forage in search of bits of information that lead them towards a goal





# Good Writing Matters

## People read differently on the web



Scanning text is a common behavior for most users.

Eye tracking studies further validate this finding.

Users read in an F-shaped pattern: Two horizontal stripes followed by a vertical stripe.



# Good Writing Matters

## Know your audience

Who are you trying to serve?  
What is important to them?

### Audiences can be identified by:

- age and gender
- social group (e.g. family with young children, seniors)
- occupation, interest or concern.

### For each audience type consider:

- education and/or reading level
- language abilities
- subject-specific knowledge



## Success =

How well you provide them  
with what they want,  
the way they want it

# The Content of Your Content

ALL  
YOU  
NEED  
IS  
*less*

What's **most important** to your users is what should be **most prominent** on your website.

The ease of publishing has allowed us to put anything and everything on our websites. Designs and technologies have improved and this is no longer a good practice.

A website that may have had 5,000 pages years ago is scaled down to 800 or less today.

If it's not important to your visitor, leave it out!

**Less really is more!**



# The Content of Your Content

## Common Content Mistakes

1. Welcome people to your website and explain what a website is.



A website is a collection of information, no need to tell your readers that.

2. Put your mission statement on your home page.



Unless this is the most important content your users search for when visiting your site, it should not be on your home page.

3. Organize your website and write content to reflect your organization.



Don't require your users to figure out your internal organization to find content on your website. Use language your audiences use, regardless of what you call them internally.

# The Content of Your Content

## Common Content Mistakes

4. Put every piece of printed content you have on your website.



Just because you have it doesn't mean your website visitors need to see it.

5. Fill your pages with marketing "fluff" or needless formalities.



Boastful, exaggerated language reduces the likelihood that your content will be read or believed.

6. Post a PDF version of a document unless necessary.

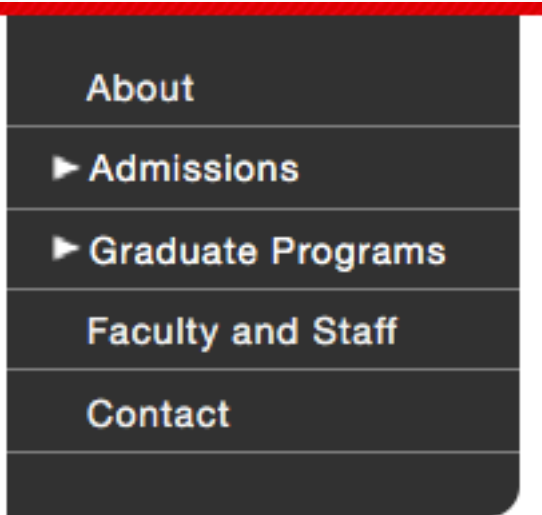


Unless the format and integrity of the original printed document must be maintained, such as a printable form or brochure, do not use PDFs for the web.



# The Content of Your Content

## Keep navigation simple



### Things to avoid:

#### Non-Standard Style

Putting your navigation in standard places makes your site easier to use.

#### Using Generic Labels

Make your navigation descriptive. Save visitors the click (and help reduce your bounce rate)

# The Content of Your Content

## Keep navigation simple

Things to avoid:

### Too Many Menu Items

- Visitors may scan past important items.
- For each item removed, remaining items become more prominent.
- Challenge yourself to limit your navigation to 7 items.

### Getting the Order Wrong

- Items that appear first or last on any list are most effective.
- Put your most important items at the beginning of the navigation and the least important items in the middle.
- “Contact” should be the last item on the list



# Writing Style

**Put important information first**



Web copy is scanned.  
Glanced at. Rarely read.

- When writing essays, the most important point you make is in the conclusion.
- On web pages it's the opposite:  
**your most important points always come first.**



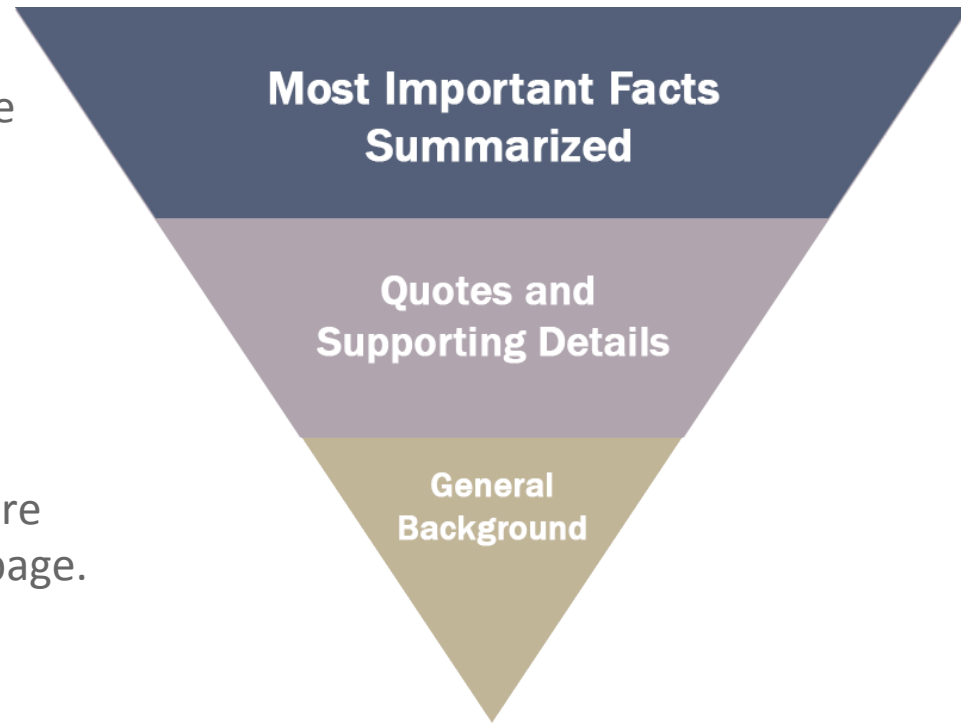
# Writing Style

**This writing style is referred to as the inverted pyramid**

Your visitors want to know the big picture first.

- What do you do?
- What can you do for me?
- Answer my questions!

By front-loading your web content, you are more likely to keep your readers on the page.





# Writing Style

## Inverted Pyramid Style

Most Important Facts  
Summarized

Quotes and  
Supporting Details

General  
Background

## Front-load your content

### PAGE

- Write a brief summary or overview of your page in a few sentences.
- Include your most important keywords in the summary and put it at the beginning of your page.

### HEADINGS

- Start your headings with significant keywords.

The first words help communicate the subject matter, and catch the eye of your reader.

### PARAGRAPHS

- Limit each paragraph to one main point or idea.
- Start each paragraph with the main point or conclusion in the first one or two sentences. Then go on to explain your point.
- This allows readers to skim the entire page and get an overview of it by simply reading the first sentence or two of each paragraph. They can also scan your content, looking for points of interest, without having to read every paragraph to the end.



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# Writing Style

**Be clear, concise and direct**

**Use the active voice**

Active Voice: **subject does the action:**

“The president released a statement.”

Passive Voice: **subject receives the action:**

“A statement was released by the president.”





# Writing Style

## Use Second-Person Language

### Talk to the user.

“You” is the most powerful word on the web. (you, your and yours)  
Pull the reader in and make it more personal!



### EXAMPLES:

#### Do:

Get advice **you** need to write effective web copy  
that gets **your** program noticed.

#### Don't:

**Users** should review **our** suggestions on writing for  
the web to optimize **their** organization's outreach  
efforts.



# Writing Style



## Cut wordy phrases



Make your sentences or phrases as concise and direct as possible.

**Replace wordy, passive phrases  
with concise, active ones.**

In the event that it snows, the parking hotline should be called prior to coming to campus.

✓ **If it snows, call the parking hotline before coming to campus.**

By completing the online application available on this site you can enroll in the program.

✓ **Enroll in “program name” [link to application].**



# Writing Style

## Remove words

Extra text is often wasted. Getting rid of text has three benefits:

It makes what's important stand out.

It reduces the effort it takes to interpret a screen.

It makes people more confident that they've understood what's there.

When you're hunting for text to remove:

- Skip the introductions
- Delete unnecessary instructions
- Simplify explanations
- Cut repetitive words/sentences

### Experts Suggest:

Get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left.



# Writing Style



## Use Simple Words

You don't need to impress your readers with your word choice. People read simpler words faster.

INSTEAD OF:	USE:
Obtain	Get
Prior to	Before
Purchase	Buy
Request	Ask for
Subsequent	Next
Terminate	End
Utilize	Use
Cognizant	Know
Facilitate	Help

Tip:  
When writing, think about how you might say the same thing to someone on the telephone.



# Writing Style

## Provide Context

To help readers scan your page, it is important to provide them with cues that a particular section or instruction applies to them.



**I could not sign into the scholarship application site, what do I do?**

**If you are a prospective student**, be sure that you are using the username and password sent to you after your submission to ApplyTexas. If you need to reset your password, use the **password reset tool**. You may also **Contact Us**.

**If you are a current student**, you may need to **reset your password**.

Tips for sign-in:

- Your username and password are the same as your LEA username and password
- Do not include @lea in your username
- Current students: your username is NOT your L number





# Writing Style

## Use descriptive links

Your users should know what to expect when clicking a link. When providing links in your content (contextual links) use words that are informative.

### Fine Arts Graphic Design Degree

#### Example:

Senior thesis involves a series of your original works, exhibited in the **Dishman Art Museum**, and defended in a formal written thesis.



You may also choose a shorter link to inform your audiences.

#### Examples:

Vague link: **Directory**

Descriptive link:

**Search employee directory**

(email and telephone numbers )



# Writing Style

## Introduction text: good or bad?

Most readers skip the introductory text on web pages and jump directly to the more scan-able information.

The reason for this is two – fold:

- Intro text is usually meaningless (“Welcome to our website”)
- Intro text is usually too long

Intro text may be useful and improve the usability IF it is:

- A summary of what is to be found on the page  
(Focused on: What? Why?)
- Kept to 1-2 sentences




# Using Metadata

**Metadata is information about information.**

Metadata facilitates the searching, sorting and presentation of your content in a website. Keywords are one form of metadata, but not the only one.

## Inline Metadata

Display Name ★	Lamar University – Texas – Carnegie Doctoral Research University
Title ★	Lamar University – Texas – Carnegie Doctoral Research University
Keywords 	houston universities, university in texas, universities near houston
Description	Home to 15,000 students, Lamar University is one of the fastest growing univer



# Using Metadata



Keywords are written into the HTML code and are invisible to the reader when written as metadata.

## **Keywords help connect people to your site!**

Search engines may rank pages higher when the keywords are also used in the visible content on the page.

## **Keywords**

Write keywords from the user's viewpoint

Example keywords for LU admissions:

- college admission
- apply for college
- college application

# Using Metadata

## Page titles and descriptions



The unique title of the page should describe the exact content on that page. The description, usually 15-25 words, is often displayed in search results.

**Titles and descriptions should be brief and very descriptive.**

**Lamar University - Texas - Carnegie Doctoral Research ...**

[www.lamar.edu/](http://www.lamar.edu/) ▾ Lamar University ▾

Home to 15000 students, Lamar University is one of the fastest growing universities in Texas. LU offers more than 100 programs, from bachelor's to doctoral ...

4.3 ★★★★★ 42 Google reviews · [Write a review](#) · [Google+ page](#)



4400 S M L King Jr Pkwy, Beaumont, TX 77710  
(409) 880-8888



# Formatting your content

## Use headlines and headings

### Page Heading

The heading (or display name) at the top of the page should identify the content of the page immediately.

### Sub-Headings

Headings and sub-headings within the page break up the content and make it very easy to scan.

- Headings should provide visual cues
- Headlines should be useful





# Formatting your content

## Ways to write headings

**Questions** are most appropriate for user guides, procedures and policies.

**Phrases and sentences** are good for creating subheadings within a long page of content.

**Nouns** as headings should be used only when the noun clearly identifies something the user is looking for.

### Examples:

**Question** - How do I apply for admission to the college?

**Verb phrase** - Applying for admission to the college

**Imperative** - Apply for admission to the college

**Sentence** - There are three steps to the college admission application.

**Noun** - Application for admission

Headlines can be written as:

- Questions
- Phrases
- Nouns (on occasion)



# Formatting your content

## Use the right header

Search engines use your headings to index the structure and content of your web pages.

- Use HTML headings for headings only.
- Don't use heading tags to make text BIG or BOLD.

Users skim your pages by it's headings.

**This is heading 1 (h1)**

**This is heading 2 (h2)**

**This is heading 3 (h3)**

**This is heading 4 (h4)**

### We recommend:

- H1 for the page title
- H2 for major headings
- H3 for major sub headings.



# Formatting your content

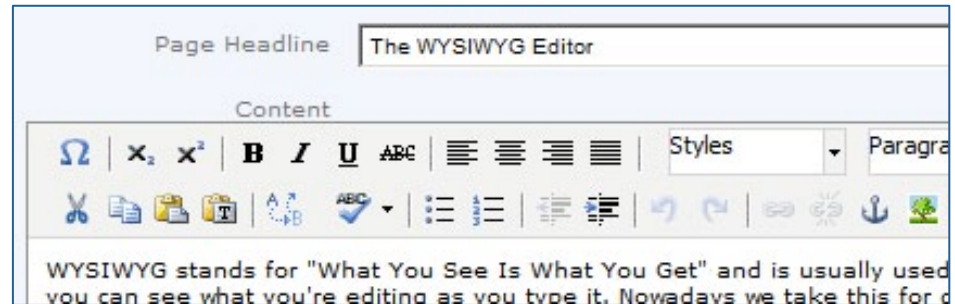
## Highlight keywords in your text

**Bold**

*italics*

**color** and

**links** are all forms of highlighting.



This should be used sparingly — once or twice in each paragraph at the most.

Choosing colors and styles that do not fit the site's styles and color palettes will only lessen the integrity of your site and turn readers off to your content.



# Formatting your content

## Use bulleted or numbered lists

Lists create chunks of content that facilitates scanning.

They can separate ideas and allow for counting.

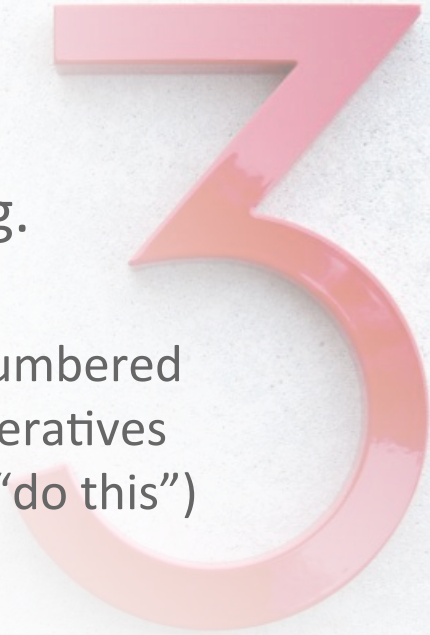
Use lists for:

- Options
- Steps
- Items

For steps in a process, use numbered lists and action oriented imperatives (“open this” or “click on” or “do this”)

Example:

1. Register for a username
2. Log-in to the portal
3. Download the application





# Formatting your content

## Use bulleted or numbered lists

hard to read / wordy / info buried:

Read about how we can help you prepare for the rigors of the job search, with tips for posting your resume on our website, searching our extensive database of job offerings, and registering for upcoming fall semester Career Fairs.



easy to scan / direct / action oriented:

### Starting your job search?

Find out how to:

- Post your resume
- Search our jobs database
- Sign up for Career Fairs



# Formatting your content

## Word count: rules of thumb

To limit your word count when writing for the web, use the following general rules:

Headings: 8-10 words or less

Sentences: 12-18 words

Paragraphs: 40-70 words / 4 sentences max

Pages: 500 words or less







# Point of Entry

## Expect people to arrive anywhere on your website

Most web visitors will not start at your home page.

If every web page can be an entry page, what does that mean?

Each page should:

- ✓ **Be easy to scan**
- ✓ **Clarify to people** where they are; and what your site is about
- ✓ **Have a call to action** telling people where to go next :
  - another blog post/article/page
  - sign up for your email newsletter
  - read a testimonial
  - request information
  - apply now / register for an event, class, etc.



# Share your content

## Use Social Media

Colleges and universities are realizing social media's potential power for marketing and recruitment.

**Use social media to push content to your audience.**

**Sharing creates link backs and traffic**

Google's job is to make sure users are seeing the most valuable, relevant content when they search.



If your social media posts are being shared and linked to, the content may rank higher with Google and considered "valuable".





# Share your content

## Social Media Policy



[facultystaff.lamar.edu](http://facultystaff.lamar.edu)

### 8. Registering your social media site

**8.1** All university owned social media sites are required to register with the University Marketing Department.

Registering your site will allow it to be added to the Lamar University Social Media Directory and allow your site administrators to become members of the LU Social Media Alliance.