

Slide 1

Hello, and welcome to the Writing for the Web workshop.

Slide 2

There are many existing resources and courses taught about overall writing skills. Why, then, do we have a class devoted to writing specifically as it pertains to the Web?

Web writing is very different from print writing, and so we need to retrain the way we think about writing when creating, editing, and maintaining Web content.

The main differences between Web writing and print writing are: paragraph division, word count, the way you establish context, the ability to read through the content quickly, and the tone of voice.

Slide 3

By the end of this workshop, we want you to be better equipped to write for the Web by understanding some key Web writing tactics.

These tactics include: streamlining your content for the typical Web user, properly using titles, headings, and subheadings, creating effective lists, using links efficiently, and understanding how to better serve the needs of your audience.

Slide 4

We're going to do a writing exercise that demonstrates the key differences between writing for the Web and writing for print. Take some time to jot down a paragraph about your day yesterday. We'll come back to these paragraphs later.

Slide 5

Often, the content you want to develop for the Web already exists in print format.

It's important to understand that the way someone wants to read a printed document is very different from the way they want to read content on the Web. Therefore, you cannot simply dump printed material onto a Web page. Often, developing Web content requires writing completely new material.

We also recognize that you may not be creating Web content from scratch, but may have inherited existing content from another staff person. In this case, you might also want to start from scratch if the content had not been written appropriately for the Web.

Slide 6

Writing for the Web is not always an easy task. There are many considerations that need to be taken into account.

For one, your audience resists reading. They really just want to scan the content quickly to find what they are looking for. They usually won't be reading word for word.

You also need to consider how to structure your content to optimize the page for search. Since so many Web users search for content, you need to make sure the page is findable.

You also need to consider that the content may be seen out of context. Whereas in print there is a logical progression and structure where the reader follows a certain order, a page can be viewed from search or from a link sent by another user. Therefore, you need to provide context on every single page, otherwise you will lose the user.

And finally, Web content represents the organization, so it needs to be credible. For most users, the first interaction they have with an organization is through its Web site. And as we all know, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

Slide 7

Let's look at an example of how we can write more effectively on the Web. Without reading the text in A or B, which one is your eye automatically drawn to? :pause:

We suspect you were drawn to B. There's less text, and it seems like you can quickly scan through it to get the information needed.

Slide 8

This is actual text from a bank's Web site, where the site owners improved their Web content.

By making changes to this text alone, the site significantly increased traffic that resulted in profit for the organization.

Slide 9

Examples such as these remind us of why Writing for the Web is so important. It significantly impacts the organization's bottom line.

A study was done to investigate the impact for poor content and page layout on a Web site's operational outcomes. Poor Web writing and page layout have a severe impact on operations.

Slide 10

This is why it's so important to write content that's user-centric. Users want to scan sites as quickly as possible in order to accomplish their tasks efficiently.

Do not overload your readers with too much content. You will quickly lose them if you do. Make sure the user's tasks come first and foremost; prioritize anything that meets the user's needs.

We'll talk more specifically about how to do this a little later.

Slide 11

One important fact to remember about users is that when they are interacting with a Web site, they are self-absorbed.

Of course this doesn't mean that users may not be generous, selfless people in other aspects of life, but when interacting with the Web, they aren't interested in hearing what YOU have to say first. They want to complete their intended task before hearing about anything else. Therefore, focus on user-centric terms, not maker-centric terms.

For example, the term "benefits" speaks more to what the user will get out of the content. "Features," on the other hand, implies something that the organization wants to show the user.

It's crucial to answer the user's key questions quickly.

Slide 12

Here's an exercise that focuses on turning maker-centric content into user-centric content.

Reword each "feature" and make it a "benefit". Think about how the specs of the feature translate into a benefit for the user. Take a few minutes to jot down some possible options. ::pause::

Slide 13

Here are some examples of how "features" could be shaped as "benefits" that focus on user needs. You can see the why and how these features matter to the user when they are presented as benefits. ::pause::

Slide 14

Now we'll talk about how to carefully choose your words to make sure that users can consume information as quickly as possible.

For one, you want to make sure you use the least amount of words possible in order to accurately convey your point. Simply put, the less words you use on a page, the easier it is for a user to scan.

You also want to use the simplest word possible that accurately conveys your meaning. This doesn't mean you're "dumbing down" your content or that your audience wouldn't understand the meaning of more complex words. But in order for the user to digest the content quickly, research shows that you should be writing at an 8th grade reading level.

For each complex word you use, the user will need to translate to the more simple term.

Slide 15

Let's try an exercise that illustrates how this concept works. For each complex word, say the word that first comes to mind to describe the word's meaning.

Obtain.....prior to.....purchase.....request.....terminate.....utilize
::pause::

Were these the answers you came up with? We all translate to the simple version of the word as we're reading in order to decipher meaning. In order to avoid such translations, use the simplest word possible when you write for the Web.

Slide 16

As we've learned, Writing for the Web centers around the audience and the tasks they are looking to complete. Usability expert Gerry McGovern says that when you combine the audience and tasks, you can develop carewords.

Carewords take into account the audience's language in describing their intended tasks. You can see how carewords may vary geographically and demographically.

Try going to www.google.com/trends and typing in two similar carewords to see a comparison of how users from different countries search on the Web. Type in the two terms with a comma to separate them.

Two interesting terms try are "holiday and vacation". You can see how the US differs from other nations, who tend to call their time away from work "holidays" instead of "vacations". In December, though, "holiday" spikes in the US because we use the term "holiday" differently.

This is something to think about in terms of the language our users use when describing their tasks.

Slide 17

How do you figure out which carewords to use? There are a number of options that might be helpful.

- Research existing domains of knowledge to determine predetermined sets of words/terms.
- Check competitor sites to see what terms they are using.
- Listen to your customers in phone conversation; pay attention to the words they use in e-mails.
- Connect with the IEEE Research group to come up with a list of terms used by a sample group. They can be contacted through ieeersearch@ieee.org.

Slide 18

Now it's time to walk through the 6 elements of good Web writing. We'll go through each of these six steps.

Slide 19

The first step is to write in newspaper style. To do this, you want to plan your content as an inverted pyramid. The basic facts and conclusion should be upfront; then provide more details as you continue if the user is interested.

Slide 20

Titles, section headers, and subheaders draw the user's eye and can help them quickly summarize a page or section's content. If they aren't interested in the content, they can continue scanning until they find what they needed without wasting a lot of time.

As soon as a user reaches the page, he or she should be able to read the brief introduction and understand what the entire page is about.

Slide 21

Without reading the articles, which of these two pages draws your eye? ::pause::

This is an interesting example, because each of these pages have pros and cons.

In A, The page title and section headers stand out and draw your eye to the content in each section. The paragraphs are also much more easily scannable because there are shorter clips of text.

But on the other hand, B has one positive element. The left navigation has clearly organized headings.

Slide 22

Bulleted lists are a very effective way of making bulky content more scannable. They allow the user to quickly read each item and move onto the next.

Slide 23

Web content should be short and concise. Give only necessary information related to the page topic; if you think a user MAY want to learn about background information or greater details, you can link to a page that gives those details. Don't slow other users down by cramming in details that some may not be interested in.

Generally, you should include only one point per paragraph to keep your paragraphs short and concise.

Slide 24

This is an example of text for a Web survey provided by usability expert Steve Krug. The BEFORE text is how the survey introduction was originally written. Steve points out that if this text was any indication of how long and unnecessary the survey would be, no one would ever take it.

Steve paired down 103 words to just 41 words. When writing Web content, cut as much unnecessary wording as possible to include only the most important, relevant information.

Slide 25

Linking can be a very effective way to direct users to related information. That said, you need to write your links very clearly so that the user will completely understand the link destination.

Avoid teaser links like “Click here” or “Follow this link”. Users will not click on a link if they don’t know where they’re going.

Slide 26

Links also provide guidance to users, since Web pages don’t have page numbers like print content. You need to lead your users through a logical progression through links.

Don’t make your users think about where they should go next. Provide links to the next logical destination in order to help them complete their tasks.

Slide 27

Let’s revisit those paragraphs you wrote earlier. Take some time to rewrite these paragraphs for a Web page. How would you do that? ::pause::

Let’s talk about how you could have turned your print content into Web content. Some of the ways you could have scaled down your paragraphs include bulleted lists, shortening the paragraphs, using simpler words, linking to more detailed information regarding a particular detail of your day, or pulling out irrelevant or uninteresting details.

Slide 28

The Web is this century’s version of the telephone. IEEE Web sites are usually the first way that users interact with IEEE. Therefore, these initial “conversations” reflect on IEEE as an organization.

Slide 29

With this in mind, think about the following:

- Every visit to the site is made by a busy user.
- Don’t hog the conversation with organizational promotions. Find out what they user needs first.
- Respect the user’s time. Help them accomplish their tasks quickly.
- Don’t give the user fluff. They will quickly get annoyed as they try to complete their task, and may leave frustrated. Only market when users are ready to hear the message after they complete their tasks.
- Never end the conversation. Allow users to go somewhere else to accomplish more on your site, if they want to.

Slide 30

The Web Team has a Web usability library located in the Web Team area that we invite you to explore. Feel free to borrow anything of interest.

Slide 31

These are some more examples of the library book options.

Slide 32

Please visit the IEEE style guide for more information about Web best practice, IEEE style, and governance.

Slide 33

Here are some additional resources for Web writing that we invite you to read if you are interested in more information.

Slide 34

As always, contact the Web Team with questions. If you aren't sure who to direct your question to, you can contact the web team alias.

Slide 35

Thank you for attending Writing for the Web. We hope you've learned about how to create and maintain better Web content, and please feel free to follow up with us if you have any further questions.