



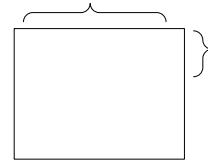
Adding Value to Your Web Content

We all know the three commandments of writing a useful Web content: (1) know thy audience, (2) give purpose to thy content, and (3) orient thy reader. So, once these guidelines have been followed faithfully, how can value be added?

Slice the Content

Work with an editor. Or, if one is unavailable, give yourself enough time to put the content out of mind, then return and reread it as an editor. Ask yourself: “Can I eliminate any superfluous words or descriptions?” and “Is the point clearly conveyed?”

Break content into palatable chunks—especially Web content. Web site users tend to scan text, picking out the important items. Interestingly, some studies suggest that, on the Web, shorter paragraph lengths increase readability¹; while other studies suggest that shorter line lengths decrease readability². The conclusion to these studies imply that users tend to prefer reading content that is 4–5 inches wide and short in length. We typically aim for six or fewer lines high.



Use lists and illustrations to clarify points. Just as a picture is worth 1,000 words, simply saying what you mean is invaluable. Remember: Web readers scan; avoid immaterial details.

Content Emphasis

Work with your designer and builder. Do your supporting graphics clearly tie into the textual message? Is your content coded so that emphasized text (headings, bold, italic, symbols) and images (alt text) are properly read³? Are meta-tags included in the page code to ensure optimal placement by search engines?

Use descriptive links. Consider how cross-references are written in print publications. They tell the user what to expect and where to go (e.g., for more information on deep-sea creatures, go to page 32). Online content allows you to take this one step further by placing the ‘where to go’ in the code, so that users are automatically transported to the reference. Offer your users meaningful previews that act as links. Avoid ‘click here.’

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¹ Morkes J & Nielsen J. “Applying Writing Guidelines to Web Pages.” Published January 6, 1998. Retrieved December 3, 2002 from <http://www.use-it.com>

Morkes J & Nielsen J. “Concise, SCANNABLE, and Objective: How to Write for the Web.” Published 1997. Retrieved December 3, 2002 from <http://www.use-it.com>.

² Bailey B. “What is the optimal line length when reading prose text from a monitor?” *User Interface Design Update*, November 2002. Human Factors International, retrieved December 3, 2002 from <http://www.humanfactors.com/downloads/nov02.asp>.

³ “Section 508 Accessibility Requirements for Web Sites.” Retrieved December 3, 2002 from http://www.webable.com/508_guidelines.html; see also <http://www.section508.gov>.