Aims and Learning Objectives

The aim of this one-day training workshop is to develop the writing skills to enable you to write effective and accessible content for the University of Bristol website.

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- identify 5 characteristics of effective web content;
- explain how people read on the web and how it differs from print;
- define key messages, goal(s) and audience(s) for your web communications;
- write web copy that makes it easier for readers to find the information they want, and to University standards;
- write web copy that is and more credible, trustworthy and engaging;
- identify potential accessibility issues in your web pages and ensure that they are accessible to all readers, including those with disabilities;
- develop a plan for checking and reviewing the quality of your web copy.
Document information

Course files

This document and any associated practice files (if needed) are available on the web. To find these, go to www.bristol.ac.uk/it-services/learning/resources and in the Keyword box, type the document code given in brackets at the top of this page.

Related documentation

Other related documents are available from the web at:
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/it-services/learning/resources

In addition you should refer to University of Bristol standards when writing content for the University website:

- University web standards and best practice (https://www.bristol.ac.uk/web/guide/bestpractice/)
- University house Style guide (https://www.bristol.ac.uk/visualidentity/house-style.html)
Introduction

Although the web has become a highly visual, multi-media channel, text is still at the core of most information and transaction websites. In other words, people come to a website for its content, either because they have a specific information need, seek entertainment or want to buy something. In the case of a University website, they are most likely to look for information that answers a question (eg What is it like to study in Bristol?) or helps them complete a task (eg I want to visit the University.). They expect this information to be easy to find, to access and to understand, as well as being accurate, up-to-date and credible.

As a result poorly written website copy puts visitors off and ultimately loses business. Yet too many website owners concentrate their efforts on visual impact and design, but pay scant attention to the quality of copy (i.e. the words on a page).

In this workshop you will learn how to write content that is search engine friendly, accessible, and present in an easy to read manner.

Prerequisites

None
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Task 1  Introduction

Objectives  To reflect on the characteristics of effective online content; to explore differences between reading online content and print; to raise awareness of the need to make online content accessible.

Comments  Research has showed that the way people read online text is considerably different from the way they read printed text. Online text presents unique challenges to the reader, due in part to the medium, and to human behaviour.

Good vs. bad web content

Drawing on your own experience of using websites, answer the following questions:

➢ What are the differences between good and bad web content?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good content is</th>
<th>Bad content is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

➢ How does the way content is written affect the reader and the organisation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good content does:</th>
<th>Bad content does:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**What is ‘good’ content?**

Good content **effectively** communicates its **intended message** to its **intended audience**.

In other words, a **message must be appropriate** to:
- its **goal(s)** – i.e. what you want it to achieve
- its **audience(s)** – i.e. who it is intended for
- the **medium** – e.g. the web

In order to create effective content of your own, you need to have a clear understanding of each of these parameters and how they relate to one another.

**The web as medium**

**Task**

➢ What are the distinctive characteristics of on-screen reading compared to print media (e.g. books, newspapers, magazines, etc)?

1.1 How does the web differ from print?

A number of studies have showed that:

1. **Digital text is harder to read:**
   - Computer screens have a lower resolution than printers.
   - Reading on screen increases eye strain due to flicker, luminance, contrast and glare.
   - Readers of online text usually find it more difficult to understand, less interesting, and the authors less credible than those reading the same text in print¹.
   - Reading from a computer screen can feel unnatural because of the landscape format and the reading position.

   As a result, reading online is 10% to 30% slower than reading the same text in print².

2. **Readers not authors control page appearance**
   - Readers can change the font size, type and colours through their browser settings.

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• Readers may use different screen sizes, resolutions and devices to access your website – from traditional desktop monitors to tablet computers (e.g. iPad), smartphones and screen readers.

3. Readers can enter a website via any page, not necessarily the homepage.

Task
➢ What reading strategies do you use when reading a book? A newspaper? A train timetable?

1.2 How do people read on the web compared to print?

We tend to read print media in a linear way, line-by-line and from beginning to end (although there are exceptions to this, for example when reading a train timetable or a television programme among others).

When reading web content we rarely read in this way, instead we tend to adopt a ‘snatch and grab’ approach to finding information.

A landmark study conducted in 1997 made three important findings about the way people read on the web:

• Web readers scan pages, looking for keywords or key phrases to find the information they want.

• [They] “do not like long, scrolling pages: they prefer the text to be short and to the point.”

• [They] “detest anything that seems like marketing fluff or overly hyped language (‘marketese’) and prefer factual information.”

The authors concluded that web writers should strive to make their copy scannable, concise and objective.

Note Scanning or skimming?

Scanning involves moving your eyes quickly down the page in search of specific words or phrases. It is what online readers do, the first time they see a web page, to determine whether it will answer their questions.

If they think that it will, they might then skim the page to extract the actual information or the main ideas.

This and other studies have also showed that:

• The longer the text, the less likely people are to read it – we read at most 28% of the words on a web page; 20% is more likely.

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• Readers **understand more when reading less.**

• Web readers are *relentlessly task-focused*: they want to **solve a problem** (e.g. find specific information, buy a train ticket, etc) and they want to **do it quickly and without fuss.**

• Web readers are **impatient, intolerant** and **critical**. They usually make up their mind about the usefulness of a website in a split second⁶.

• Web readers do **not like scrolling down a page** – they tend to make up their mind after reading what’s visible on the screen.

• Web readers tend to be **task-oriented** (e.g. find an event’s venue) and **goal-oriented** (e.g. get an idea of events).

• Solid, well-written and grammatically correct content is **crucial** to gaining the reader’s trust.

Eye tracking studies also “**show that users often read Web pages in an F-shaped pattern: two horizontal stripes followed by a vertical stripe.**”⁷

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Task 2  Plan your work

Objectives  To identify the purpose and goal(s) of a message, it’s target audience(s); to recognise the different types of pages on a website and understand their characteristics.

Comments  In order to communicate your message effectively, you must know what you want to say and who you want to say it to.

Focus on the message(s) you want to communicate

A message must be appropriate to its goal(s).

2.1 What is the message you want to communicate?

An organisation usually has a few high level key messages that it wants to communicate; these are what it wants to be known for. For example:

- Our students are taught by world-class researchers and clinicians.
- Our research is geared towards turning science into medicine.

However, every constituent part of your website (e.g. sub-sites within your site, individual pages, sections within pages, down to paragraphs) should have a clear purpose and a clear message to communicate.

A good message is:

- Clear and concise: to the point, avoiding jargon and acronyms
- Short: one brief, memorable sentence
- Active: make every sentence active
- Positive: talk about what can be done, not what can’t be done
- Specific: address a particular challenge or issue, and audience

Finally, in order to be credible, a message should be backed up with facts and examples (i.e. evidence) when relevant.

Task

- Open the Innocent Drinks website (www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/) in a browser.

What key messages do you think the homepage tries to communicate?
Now open the [us > being sustainable](http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/being-sustainable) page.

What do you think is the main message of this page?

2.2 What are the goal(s) of this message?

It helps to think of goals in terms of action verbs. For example:

“The goal of this message is to...

- **encourage** people to do daily exercise.
- **showcase** our achievements.”

**Task**

What other goals can you think of for a message?

It may help to think about the goals different types of organisations might have for their messages. For example:

- oil company (e.g. BP, Shell)
- news and media (e.g. BBC, Virgin Media)
- charities and pressure groups (e.g. Oxfam, Amnesty International)
- government (e.g. city council, Environment Agency)
- bank (e.g. Barclays, Co-operative Bank)
- travel agent (e.g. First Choice Holidays)
- mobile phone (e.g. Orange, T-Mobile)
- insurance company (e.g. AXA Insurance)
- online retailer (e.g. Amazon)
- university (e.g. Bristol, UWE)
- international organisation (e.g. World Health Organisation, UNICEF)
Here are some of the goals you may have come up with:

- inform
- reassure
- promote
- remind
- attract
- shock
- give advice
- sell (a product, a service, an idea?)
- entertain
- inspire
- persuade
- educate
- help
- warn
- scare
- instruct

You probably found that a message can often have multiple goals. When this is the case you will need to prioritise them and decide which is the most important.

**Research your target audience(s)**

**A message must be appropriate to its audience(s).**

You cannot write an effective message if you don’t have a clear idea of who you are communicating with.

For this reason it is essential to research your audience in order to gain a better understanding of their characteristics, attitudes and behaviours, as well as what they want and need from your website.

A good starting point is to think of your target audiences in terms of their defining characteristics. Some of the most obvious demographic characteristics in which people differ from one another include gender and age, however there are many more.

**Task**

- Can you think of other ways in which people differ from one another?

Here are some of the factors that can be used to differentiate people:

- income
- location
- occupation
- marital status
- lifestyle
- internet experience
- newspaper they read
- level of education
- social background
- life experience
- language
- culture
- ethnicity
- religion
- disability

Needless to say, websites usually have multiple audiences; again you need to prioritise them.

Ideally, you would want to find out about your target audiences\(^8\) needs directly from them, through surveys, interviews and focus groups.

\(^8\) Your faculty web and marketing officers in the Public Relations Office can help you with this. You can find their contact details at [www.bris.ac.uk/web/contact/](http://www.bris.ac.uk/web/contact/).
Task 3  Make text scannable

Objectives  To write good heading and sub-headings, and to use lists, tables and emphasis effectively to facilitate scanning.

Comments  Web readers tend to scan pages for key words and phrases. Therefore we should strive to make our content easy to scan.

Task
- Open the Liverpool FC website (www.lfconline.com) and go to Club History > History of LFC

How easy is this page to read? Why?

Headings and sub-headings

Writing good headings and sub-headings is one of the most effective ways to make your content easier to read. Think of them as signposts to the information that readers are looking for. In addition they are crucial to gaining greater visibility in search engines.

3.1 Tips for writing headings and sub-headings:
- Use headings for their intended purpose (i.e. as headings and not to emphasise a block of text).
- Use them in their logical order (i.e. start with <h1> followed by <h2> followed by <h3>, etc).
- Use sentence case (i.e. only the first word begins with a capital letter – unless other words in the heading are proper nouns).
- Make them as descriptive as possible of the section they introduce, using keywords: e.g. Activity tips for parents.
- Leave out as many prepositions and adjectives as you can.
- Start with a verb when writing actionable content: e.g. Stay healthy or Staying healthy.
- When appropriate use questions: e.g. What kind of activity is good for my heart?
- They should make sense when taken out of context.
- Use three or four heading levels at most.

The main page heading should:
- Be an <h1> and used only once on each page.
- Quickly and accurately describe the content of the page.

Sub-headings should:
• Appear at the beginning of each new section, whenever the subject-matter changes.
• Start with <h2>s, to introduce each new main section, and if necessary <h3>s to introduce each sub-section, etc.

**Accessibility note**

Headings are helpful to all users, but particularly to screen reader users for two reasons:

1. Screen readers have an option to list all headings on the page and to follow any heading listed, enabling the user to jump directly to the section it introduces.
2. If used in their logical order they give a clear idea of the structure of the page.

**Practice exercise**

Start Microsoft Word and open the ‘Practice Exercises’ document (webwriting-1tx.docx).

**Note**

In the training rooms this document is located in UoB Training Materials \ WWW \ Web writing. Otherwise it can be downloaded from www.bristol.ac.uk/it-services/learning/documentation/webaccess-1/webaccess-1tx.docx

In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 1 Writing headings.

**Lists and tables**

Lists and tables save the reader time because they draw attention to important information and make this information easy to grab. Therefore they should be used whenever possible.

**Task**

When would you use a list or a table to present information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lists</th>
<th>Tables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**3.2**

Tips for using lists:

• Use lists for individual items belonging to the same category of information.
• Use bullet lists (<ul> HTML tag) when list items have no particular order.
• Use numbered lists (<ol> HTML tag) when order matters (e.g. steps in a process, instructions, etc).
• Try to keep unfamiliar lists to 5 to 10 items maximum.
• Longer lists may be ok for familiar topics (e.g. list of countries); however it may be a good idea to group them by topic (e.g. by continent) or A to Z (e.g. www.roughguides.com/travel).

• Use lists as table of contents for long pages and link each list item to its corresponding heading (e.g. www.bris.ac.uk/prospectus/postgraduate/2012/intro/10).

**Note** Refer to www.bristol.ac.uk/visualidentity/house-style.html#bullets for University style guide on appropriate punctuation for lists.

**Practice exercise**

➢ In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 2 Using lists

3.3 Tips for using tables:

• Table should be used to present data, not for layout purposes (e.g. aligning images with text).

• Use tables when there is more than one category of information and at least two items (i.e. at least two columns and rows).

• Use tables to compare numbers.

• Use tables to answer questions when there are several options (e.g. list of costs for different room hire options).

• A two-column table can also be used to display a series of “if..., then...” statements (e.g. “If you are..., Do...").

• Table columns (and if relevant rows) should have clear headings.

• Keep tables simple: not too many columns (most readers are likely to miss information if they have to scroll sideways to find it) and rows (if readers have to scroll down, the column headers are no longer visible) – if necessary break up complex tables into smaller ones.

**Practice exercise**

➢ In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 3 Using tables

**Accessibility note**

Lists are particularly helpful to screen reader users as screen readers announce the number of items in a list before reading them out.

Well designed tables are helpful to most readers as they avoid repetition and present information in a visual way. However they can be problematic for screen reader users if not coded properly (see the section on Data tables at www.bris.ac.uk/web/guide/bestpractice/basics.html for further information)

**Emphasis**

Emphasis is about highlighting key words and important phrases on a page in order to draw the reader’s attention. In print this is done in different ways: **bold**, underline, italics and capitalisation.

3.4 Tips for using emphasis:

• **Bold** is best... but use it sparingly: i.e. no more than 5 words or phrases per paragraph.
• The highlighted terms or phrases on a page should give the reader a good overview of its content.

• Use italics even more sparingly: e.g. foreign words and phrases, titles of works (films, books, etc), scientific taxonomy and for clarity (e.g. the word sepoy means...), but never a whole sentence or paragraph as these are more difficult and slower to read.

• Do not use underline... people will try to click on it!

• Do no use BLOCK CAPITALS other than for abbreviations and acronyms (e.g. UNESCO) – used for whole sentences, THEY REDUCE LEGIBILITY AND LOOK RATHER INELEGANT!

• ... and COMBINING DISPLAY STYLES IS TOTALLY UNNECESSARY!

Practice exercise

➢ In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 4 Using emphasis
Task 4  Make text easy to understand

Objectives  To write simple, clear and concise content, appropriate for a web audience, and meaningful links.

Comments  Making text easy to understand means writing in plain (simple) English, clearly and concisely, in a style that is appropriate for your target audience.

Simplicity

Simplicity is a double-edged sword. The challenge is to harness the benefits while avoiding the potential pitfalls.

Task – Benefits (and potential pitfalls) of simplicity

➢ What are the benefits of expressing yourself in the simplest appropriate manner? What are the potential pitfalls of expressing yourself simply?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Potential pitfalls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4.1  Tips for writing simply

- Use simple everyday words (i.e. Plain English) whenever possible:
  e.g. write end instead of terminate; try not endeavour.

- Avoid wordy expressions such as in view of the fact that... (use as or because instead) and impersonal constructions such as It is generally believed that...
  often found in academic writing.

- Avoid using foreign words: e.g. use dead end instead of cul-de-sac

- Avoid nominalisations (i.e. turning verbs into nouns):
  e.g. use to engage staff instead of to ensure the engagement of staff

- Write simple sentences: i.e. one main idea, avoid subordinate clauses – but do vary the length of your sentences for ‘pace’

- Engage readers by using “you”:
  e.g. use You must send us... rather than Applicants must send us...

- Use the active voice most of the time: e.g. A technician has investigated the incident. (Active) rather than The incident has been investigated by a technician. (Passive)

- ...but use the passive voice:
  ✓ to be tactful:
    e.g. Lessons will be learnt from this debacle.
  ✓ to emphasise the person or thing acted on:
    e.g. Penicillin was first discovered in 1928 by Alexander Fleming.
When the doer of the action is unknown or irrelevant:

*e.g. Five masterpieces have been stolen from the National Gallery.*

**Practice exercise**

- In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 5 **Simplifying text**

**Clarity**

Writing clearly means writing without ambiguity, in a way that removes all potential causes of confusion and misunderstanding in the reader.

4.2 **Tips for writing clearly:**

- Avoid *clichés, buzzwords and metaphors* as they can be misunderstood: *e.g. bone of contention; blue sky research; bring to the table; proven track record.*

- Avoid *jargon* as it can confound people unfamiliar with it. Examples of jargon include *stakeholder, firewall, ballpark, marginal-cost pricing,* etc.

- Provide the full name of acronyms and abbreviations with the acronym or abbreviation in brackets the first time you use them.

- Write instructions in the imperative form and keep them as short as possible: *e.g. Fill in this form to apply.* rather than *If you wish to apply for the position, you are requested to complete this form.*

**Practice exercise**

- In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 6 **Jargon, acronyms and abbreviations**

**Conciseness**

Writing concisely is about choosing the most effective words and omitting unnecessary ones.

4.3 **Tips for writing concisely:**

- Cut *unnecessary adjectives and adverbs:* *e.g. actively consider (think); very high (huge).*

- Use *adjectives and adverbs to be more precise* rather than to increase emphasis (how much of something) *e.g. use dear (price), tall (elevation), piercing (sound), etc* rather than *very high.*

- Use the most *concise prepositions:* *e.g. for instead of in relation to.*

- Replace phrases with *single words of the same meaning* whenever possible: *e.g. now, currently instead of at this moment in time.*

**Practice exercise**

- In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 7 **Be concise**

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**Accessibility note**

All your readers will be grateful to you for writing in plain, clear and concise English. However, screen reader users and those with reading difficulties will be particularly thankful.
Writing effective and accessible web content (webwriting-11)

Links

Task

The following links were found on the University of Bristol website. Can you guess the information they link to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Link</th>
<th>What information do you expect to get?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strong in teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I study?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>networking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up your email for life now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Links are what people use to navigate around the web. As such they have to stand out and give useful clues to readers as to where they take them.

In a similar way to headings, they act as signposts.

4.4 Tips for writing link text:

- The most important rule is to make link text meaningful and as descriptive as possible of their target – for this reason NEVER USE click here, read more, etc.
- Make sure link text matches the target page title – e.g.

![Link text does not match target page title](image)

- Use action phrases for action links – e.g. Get our newsletter rather than Newsletter; Pay online rather than Online payments.
- Questions can also be an effective way of linking – e.g. compare writing a business plan and What makes a good business plan?
- Add a short description if needed – particularly relevant on pathway pages (see section Error! Reference source not found.).
- Don’t embed too many links in each paragraph, they disrupt continuity and understanding.
- Indicate when linking to other file types (e.g. Word documents, PDFs) by specifying the type and size in bracket after the link.

Task

Compare and contrast the links on the following pages:

- info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerandresearch/
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_bristol
- www.bhf.org.uk/research/research-milestones.aspx
Accessibility note

Non-specific links of the click here and read more type are one of the most important accessibility barriers for screen reader users. Just like with headings, screen readers have an option to list all the links on the page and to follow any link listed. It is therefore essential that links to different pages be unique and as descriptive as possible within the context of the page.
Task 5  Structure content for a web audience

Objectives  To present and organise content in a way that facilitates reading.

Comments  Web content should be organised in a way that makes it easy for readers to find what they want.

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Inverted pyramid⁹

Task

➢ Compare the two versions of an article on children living in out-of-work benefit households published by the Department of Works and Pensions (tinyurl.com/6aezolb).

Version 1


These figures show the numbers of children living in households where at least one parent or guardian claimed one or more of the following out-of-work benefits: Job Seeker’s Allowance, Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance, or Pension Credit at 31 May each year from 2008 to 2010.

The key points from the latest release are:

There were 2.63 million children living in an out-of-work benefit household at May 2009 and May 2010.

They represented 1.39 million households.

Figures represent an increase of 229 thousand children or 9.6% across Great Britain since May 2008.

By benefit type:

- 1.77 million children lived in households claiming Income Support at May 2010.
- 429 thousand children lived in households claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance at May 2010.
- 201 thousand children lived in households claiming Employment and Support Allowance at May 2010.
- 550 thousand children lived in households claiming Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance at May 2010.
- 41 thousand children lived in households claiming Pension Credit at May 2010.

Note: Some children were living in households claiming a combination of these benefits.

---

Version 2

Over 2.6 million children lived in 1.39 million out-of-work households receiving benefits at May 2009 and May 2010. This represented a 9.6% increase (229 thousand children) across Great Britain since May 2008.

At least one parent or guardian claimed one or more of the following out-of-work benefits in these households:

- Job Seeker’s Allowance (429 thousand children)
- Income Support (1.77 million children)
- Employment and Support Allowance (201 thousand children)
- Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance (550 thousand children)
- Pension Credit (41 thousand children).

**Note:** Some children were living in households claiming a combination of these benefits.

These figures were released on 18 May 2011 in an update of Official statistics on children living in out-of-work benefit claimant households, produced by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Which one does a better job of drawing you in? Why?
Inverting the pyramid consists in **beginning each page with the page conclusion**, each section with the section conclusion and each paragraph with the paragraph conclusion. This is also known as **front-loading**.

Most of us have been taught to write starting with laying the foundations (e.g. general background, problem statement, develop arguments etc) and gradually building up to the point we are trying to put across (e.g. research findings, conclusion).

Inverting the pyramid essentially **reverses** this process by **front-loading** the page with the **most important information**.

```
Figure 2 – Inverted Pyramid writing model
```

- First, write the **key points** of your message that **readers must read** for your communication to be **successful**.
- Second, write any **supporting information** that is **helpful but not crucial**.
- Third, write any **background information** that it **would be nice** if they had it, but definitely **not essential**.

This technique originates in news reporting and is commonly used by journalists who know all too well that readers are fickle and may stop reading at any time!

Another benefit is that it forces you to focus on the main point and to sum it up in a single, short paragraph.

**Breaking down content in manageable chunks**

**Task**

- Compare the two versions of the same text below. Which is easier to read? Why?

Adapted from ‘Have a heart healthy breakfast’, British Heart Foundation website (http://www.bhf.org.uk/heart-health/prevention/healthy-eating/breakfast.aspx)
Version 1

Eating breakfast helps us to concentrate and gets the day off to a good start. Change4Life is a public health programme organised by the Department of Health. Their research shows that lots of families choose breakfast options that are high in sugar or fat and many don't eat breakfast at all. By encouraging people to eat a healthier breakfast you can help them to move towards all sorts of beneficial changes. A regular pattern of meals which starts with breakfast is important to make sure you get all the nutrients you need during the day. It can also help to stop you from getting overly hungry, which is when you are more likely to make less healthy choices - like reaching for the biscuit tin mid-morning. You don’t have to have a big cooked breakfast – a drink and a piece of fruit or a pot of yoghurt is a good start to help get you into the habit. Or try taking a box of cereal to work to keep on your desk so you can eat something when you’ve had time to wake up a bit.

Version 2

Eating breakfast helps us to concentrate and gets the day off to a good start.

Change4Life is a public health programme organised by the Department of Health.

Their research shows that lots of families choose breakfast options that are high in sugar or fat and many don't eat breakfast at all.

By encouraging people to eat a healthier breakfast you can help them to move towards all sorts of beneficial changes.

A regular pattern of meals which starts with breakfast is important to make sure you get all the nutrients you need during the day. It can also help to stop you from getting overly hungry, which is when you are more likely to make less healthy choices - like reaching for the biscuit tin mid-morning.

You don’t have to have a big cooked breakfast – a drink and a piece of fruit or a pot of yoghurt is a good start to help get you into the habit. Or try taking a box of cereal to work to keep on your desk so you can eat something when you’ve had time to wake up a bit.

Large blocks of text can be difficult to read and off-putting on the web. Shorter paragraphs separated by white space are easier to read.

5.1 Tips for breaking down content

- Make sure each paragraph contains one idea only.
- Summarise that idea in the first sentence (see the inverted pyramid).
- Keep paragraphs short – 2 or 3 sentences per paragraph.
- When the topic is complex, break up information into many paragraphs, sections or pages.
**Lead paragraphs**

The lead paragraph appears at the top of the page. Its role is to provide a summary of the information the page contains, including who, what, when, where, why and how when relevant. It helps the reader decide whether the page meets their information needs at a glance. Lead paragraphs can also be used to ‘tease’ or ‘hook’ the reader and draw them into reading the rest of the page.

The summary is what goes in the top slice of the inverted pyramid, just after the main page heading.

**Note**

Most newspaper and magazine articles have a ‘summary lead’ immediately below the article title whose role is to introduce the article, summarise its content and draw the reader in.

### 5.2 Tips for writing summaries

- **Every content page should have a lead paragraph** – normally this is a short paragraph of text, but a table of content (see section 3.2 about using lists) can also act as a summary.

- The summary should be styled to stand out visually.

- Keep summaries brief and factual.

- For stories with a human angle, anecdotes can sometimes make good introductions to catch the reader’s interest.

**Task**

- Compare and contrast the way the following sites use summaries for their content:
  - www.bbc.co.uk/news
  - www.theguardian.co.uk

**Practice exercise**

- In the ‘Practice Exercises’ document, complete Task 8 Breaking down content into manageable chunks
Task 6  Be credible, trustworthy and engaging

Objectives  To write engaging content and to enhance its credibility and trustworthiness.

Comments  Your Faculty Web and Marketing officers in the Public Relations Office can help with tone of voice.

Accuracy and reliability

Credibility and trustworthiness can take a long time to build, but can be quickly undone through lack of attention to details. Remember that your web page will be seen by thousands of people, so take lots of care over what you write!

6.1 Tips

- Make sure the information on your website is **up-to-date** and **correct**.
- Check **grammar and spelling** – accommodation [✗] or accommodation [✓]? comittee [✗], committee [✗] or committee [✓]?  
- **Be consistent**: make sure your copy complies with the University house style guide (www.bristol.ac.uk/visualidentity/house-style.html).
- **Give credit** where credit is due; when quoting provide a direct link to the source.
- Provide references and links to relevant sources (see section 4.4) to back up your claims.
- Always check your facts and claims.

Annoying and distracting language

We have already mentioned **clichés** and **buzzwords** as a potential source of confusion and misunderstanding (see section 4.2), but another reason for avoiding such words is that they can make your readers cringe and erode your credibility and reputation.

6.2 Tips for avoiding annoying and distraction language:

- **Substance not spin!** – well-written, interesting, useful and accurate information is preferable to boastful, unsubstantiated and potentially inaccurate claims.
- Aside from **clichés** and **buzzwords**, avoid **fashionable words/expressions** (e.g. guestimate; upskill; long tail; empower), **americanisms** (e.g. touch base; 24/7; authored; truck; movie) and **slang** (e.g. botched; take time out; dog’s breakfast) in your web copy.

Task

Read the following extracts taken from the websites of three web design companies. Which company would you be most likely to give your business to? Why?

Company X

**Company X is a full service Web development company** located in the city of [name of city]. We are commited to educating and assisting small and medium businesses (SMB) identify Internet-based, website solutions to enable e-commerce and effective marketing of their business online.

We have over 15 years of expereince working with web projects. We
Writing effective and accessible web content (webwriting-11)

combine innovative design with efficient code structure, resulting in improved search engine results and increased accessibility and Web usability. Using the latest technologies, we specialize in creating clean, simple, fast and effective websites that conform to W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) standards.

**Call us today to learn more - 949-370-0948**

Company X is owned and operated by CompanyQ.com, a Web services innovation company. CompanyQ.com services range from graphic design, architectural graphics (CAD), custom web application development, database design and creation, Flash design and database integration, web marketing (SEO/SEM), to business process automation for small to medium-sized companies.

Company Y

**Company Y** is a web design agency based in [name of city]. Our strength is creating affordable websites for a range of clients, from small and medium sized businesses, to community organisations and individuals, which are also attractive, original and user friendly.

**Company Y Services**

We like to get to know our clients and find out what makes them tick, so that the website we build for them is not just functional but **reflects their business outlook**. Whether you require a static brochure site, a content managed website (CMS) or an increased web presence, we can offer a web solution tailored to your project.

**Professional Designs to Promote your Business**

We listen to our clients and what they want, whilst always trying to offer ideas and solutions that you may not have thought of. We work closely with you to develop a **web site solution that will enhance your business** and generate maximum search engine exposure.

Company Z

**Company Z International** prides itself on helping both small and large businesses to get an attractive online presence by designing great websites. We are professionals who have delivered stellar projects to global clients. We service all business sectors at very competitive rates. Our strength lies in innovation through out-of-the-box thinking and commitment to quality.

Our services are as follows:

- CMS Integration
- eCommerce Solution
- XHTML Conversion
- SEO
- Blog Setup
Tone of voice

Tone of voice refers to how we express what we write and say. Whereas what we say is dictated by what we do, our principles, values and aspirations, how we say it is informed by our personality as well as the impression we want to make and the image we want to project.

6.3 Tips for tone of voice:

- Remember that the focus of every web page should be on the customer (i.e. your target reader), not the University.

- Think of your web pages as a conversation between you (as representing the University) and your reader – use ‘we’ and ‘you’ to refer to the University and the reader whenever appropriate.

- Be friendly (i.e. inclusive, welcoming, supportive and unpretentious) while remaining professional and authoritative.

- Try to include testimonials/comments from internal experts and also customers.

- Work with colleagues to get a uniform style and tone.

Task

- Compare and contrast the tone of voice in the following pages:
  - University of Leeds > Undergraduates > Choosing Leeds (tinyurl.com/cqv5yjv)
  - Brunel University London > Courses > Open Days > Virtual Open Day > Why Choose Brunel? (tinyurl.com/ctc5m76)
The power of stories

“...if a picture is worth a thousand words, a story is worth a thousand pictures.”

Terrence L. Gargiulo

Stories are about relating events from the point of view of people. As such, they don’t seek to relate how things actually happen, but rather how the people involved experience them.

Stories are a powerful way of bringing facts and events to life, and to arouse the interest of readers. We tend to remember stories better than drily presented facts and figures.

Ultimately, they are about change from an existing to a new situation.

Stories usually consist of the following steps:

1. Opening
2. Trigger
3. Development
4. Climax
5. Resolution

Task

➢ Think of a film or play are familiar with and try to identify the 5 steps identified above.

Title: _____________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Climax</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6.4 Tips for using stories:

- Use stories to illustrate a topic or the point you want to make.
- Use stories when you want to create an emotional response in your reader (e.g. inspiring, affecting, reaching out).
- Stories are particularly good for marketing (e.g. student stories) and public engagement (e.g. research stories) activities.
- Get the people concerned to write them – ensuring that you check and edit before publishing.
- Use a blog to write stories.
- Stories can also be told using audio-visual technologies (e.g. videos).

**Task – When drowning does not look like drowning**

Open the page mariovittone.com/2010/05/154/ in a browser. Read it and consider the following questions.

What is the main message? How is the topic introduced? Does it fit the Inverted Pyramid model? How effective do you think it is?
Task 7  Ensuring quality

Objectives  To reflect on how to ensure quality from draft to published states and beyond.

Comments  You haven’t finished writing until you have edited, revised and proofread your work, and made sure that it is fit for publication (within UoB standards and statutory accessibility requirements).

Think of writing as an iterative process

For many of us writing can be a daunting prospect which often results in some form of ‘writer’s block’. One of the main reasons is that we tend to aim for perfection at our first attempt. This in turn causes anxiety, even fear, which prevents us from taking the jump and inevitably leads to procrastination.

The key to breaking this vicious circle is to approach writing as an iterative process; in other words starting small and building on it through a series of iterations. This is similar to the way a painter approaches a new painting: starting with rough sketches which gradually gain in definition, until the application of colours can begin, layer after layer until the painting is deemed finished.

7.1 Tips for writing iteratively:

- Regularly set some quiet time for writing and stick to it, eventually you will overcome your writer’s block.

- Say what you are trying to write as if you were trying to explain it to somebody standing in front of you – record it!

- Don’t be too hard on yourself, accept that you will not produce a perfect draft at your first attempt.

- Start by sketching out your copy and flesh it out as you revise it.

- A good way to start is to think of what you are trying to say (i.e. your message) and think of the questions readers will want answered. Use these questions as the main sub-headers (i.e. <h2>) and fill in the gaps.

- Read your work, revise it, read it again, revise it again and so on until it is fit for purpose (i.e. effectively communicates its intended message to its intended audience) - remember that publishing a web page is sending an email to thousands of people!

Check, review and edit your work

Although you do this throughout the writing process, it is worth having a final, thorough check once you think you have finished. You should be your first own critic, but you should also involve others.

7.2 Tips for checking, reviewing and editing your work:

- Allow your final draft to rest for a day or two, the next time you look at it you will read it with fresh eyes (when we are too close to something we often don’t notice obvious flaws).

- Check for spelling and grammatical errors – spell-checkers are there to be used!

- Check your links – Do they work? Is the link text meaningful?
• **Check your facts** – Where do they come from? Are they accurate, valid and from a reliable source?

• Check that it **complies with University standards and house style guide** (see [www.bristol.ac.uk/visualidentity/house-style.html](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/visualidentity/house-style.html)).

• **Test the readability of your pages** using an automated tool like The Readability Test Tool (see task below).

• **Ask others** (e.g. colleagues, friends and if possible members of the intended audience) to read it and comment – Is the key message clear? Are the style and tone of voice appropriate?

• **Keep a lid on your ego!** – be open to criticism, and when writing on behalf of the University, **readers should hear the University voice**, not yours (however it’s ok to write with your own voice when appropriate, e.g. for a personal blog).

• **Plan future revisions** – your content may be accurate and valid at the time of writing, but will it be in 3, 6 or 12 months time?

**Task – Test the readability of your pages**

1. Open The Readability Test Tool, ([www.read-able.com](http://www.read-able.com)) in a browser.

2. Find a web page you want to test (from a website you maintain or are familiar with – make sure the page is long enough to get meaningful results).

   1. First copy and paste its address (URI) in the **Test by URI** box (default). Make a note of the results.

   2. Next, select and copy the content of the page you just tested, and paste it in the **Test by Direct Input** box. Again make a note of the results.

   Here is an example test for the **Why choose Bristol?** page ([www.bristol.ac.uk/why-bristol](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/why-bristol)):

   ![Figure 3 – Readability results, test by URI](image-url)
Figure 4 - Readability results, test by direct input

Did you get a similar difference (i.e. the direct input showing as more difficult to read)? Why do you think that is?

**Interpreting the results**

As well as giving basic statistical information (e.g. number of words and sentences, average words per sentence, etc), the tool provides more specific measures to assess the readability of the page. The most popular are:

- **Gunning Fog Index**: a rough measure of how many years of schooling it would take someone to understand the content (aim for a score of between 8 and 12).

- **Flesch Reading Ease**: an index number that rates the text on a 100-point scale (aim for a score of between 60 and 70).

- **Flesch-Kincaid Grade**: similar to the Gunning Fog Index, a rough measure of how many years of schooling it would take someone to understand the content (aim for 6 to 7).

For more information on these indices, you may want to read:


- *Gunning Fog Index*, Wikipedia ([bris.ac.uk/slink/t5t6e](http://bris.ac.uk/slink/t5t6e))

- *Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test*, Wikipedia ([bris.ac.uk/slink/ycph](http://bris.ac.uk/slink/ycph))
Appendix A  About web accessibility

Web accessibility is about making sure that everyone can use the web regardless of disability or what browsing technology they are using.

Why web accessibility matters?

7.3 Plain common sense!
Accessible website:
• perform better,
• are more search engine friendly,
• are easier to maintain,
• are easier to use.

7.4 A legal requirement
Making websites accessible is a legal requirement that is covered by the Equality Act 2010\(^\text{11}\).
Although the act does not specifically refer to the World Wide Web, it “imposes a duty to make reasonable adjustments” for disabled persons. It requires that a person with disabilities must not be put at a “substantial disadvantage” compared to a non-disabled person. When this requirement “relates to the provision of information”, reasonable steps consist in ensuring that “the information is provided in an accessible format.”

7.5 Quality standards in Higher Education
The Quality Assurance Agency’s Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality in higher education was integrated into the QAA audit scheme in 2001.
Section 3: Disabled students\(^\text{12}\) states:

“ Websites and any other sources of computer-based information for prospective students, current students and alumni should be designed according to professional standards of accessibility. Gaining knowledge of these standards should be part of the professional development of relevant staff in the institution.”

Accessibility and usability

Too often web accessibility tends to focus on technical aspects and conformance to standards at the expense of the human interaction aspect.

This is why, when we assess the accessibility of a website we also need to assess its usability, in order to achieve “usable accessibility”\(^\text{13}\). In fact, accessibility can be seen as a subset of usability.

7.6 Accessibility

\(^{12}\) [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-3.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-3.aspx)
**Accessibility** means making it possible for people (particularly the disabled) to access and use something (e.g. a public building, a website). It is about enabling people and increasing the number of readers.

An accessibility issue on your website is likely to exclude people in one or more disability group from accessing its content.

### 7.7 Usability

**Usability** means providing a user interface that is effective, efficient, and satisfying. It is about enhancing the user experience and increasing reader satisfaction.

Any usability issue on your website is likely to cause difficulties for all readers, but exponentially more so for those with a disability affecting their access to web content.

**Note** According to Jakob Nielsen, usability is defined by five quality components\(^\text{14}\):

- **learnability** – How easy is the website to use?
- **memorability** – Will visitors remember how to use the site on their next visit?
- **effectiveness** – Can visitors easily navigate through the site, determine what to do next and understand the content?
- **efficiency** – Can visitors find what they want in a reasonable time?
- **satisfaction** – How enjoyable is the site to use?

### Task – The accessible and usable library

- Think of a library:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What makes it accessible?</th>
<th>What makes it usable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- Can you think of examples where this distinction applies to a website?

You probably identified the following characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What makes it accessible?</th>
<th>What makes it usable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The presence of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ramps</td>
<td>• cataloguing system (should be familiar, e.g. by topic, audience, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• automatic doors</td>
<td>• clear organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lifts</td>
<td>• layout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• clear signage (font size/type, location, colours)</td>
<td>• signage (labelling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• wide aisles</td>
<td>• pleasant atmosphere (lighting, seating, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• library assistant (is there one when needed?)</td>
<td>• library assistant (how approachable and knowledgeable are they?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• alternative formats (e.g. audio, braille, large font, etc)</td>
<td>• a good search facility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the purest sense, checking for accessibility tends to be a box-ticking exercise, and it does not tell how easy to use these features are (e.g. a ramp might be too steep, making it difficult to climb for someone who uses a wheelchair).

This is why it is crucial to ensure that they are usable as well as accessible. A good example of this is signage, which can meet the accessibility requirements from a purely visual perspective (i.e. it has large, clear font, good colour contrast, etc) but fail on usability (if the labelling – the text – is ambiguous or confusing). People are also more inclined to come and spend time in a library if it is welcoming and offers a pleasant environment, and if they can find what they want.

Potential accessibility issues on the web include using colour combinations that make it difficult to read for some categories of visually impairments, or using images to present navigational element without providing a textual equivalent (a problem for a blind person using a screen reader). Web readers also rely on good organisation and clear navigation (i.e. signage) to help them find what they want on a website. They are also more likely to revisit the websites that give them a pleasant experience.

**Types of disability**

**Visual impairments**

Visual impairments cover a wide range of disabilities including blindness, low vision and colour blindness.

**Blindness**

Blind web readers access the content of websites through screen reader software, a type of software that reads aloud the textual content of web pages and provides text alternative to visual content (e.g. images). Also, they will be using their keyboard rather than a mouse to navigate around the site.

**Low vision**

Depending on the severity of their condition, people with low vision may rely on screen magnification software (either the one supplied with their operating system or a commercial product) to help them read the content of web pages. Those with less

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severe conditions (including age related vision loss) may simply require the ability to control text size through their browser.

**Colour blindness**
The most common form of colour blindness is the incapacity to distinguish between red and green. However there are many other forms such as blue/yellow deficiency.

**Hearing impairments**
Hearing impairments range from mild hearing loss to profound hearing loss (deafness). The main issue for individuals with hearing losses is that they cannot access content that relies on sound, such as video and audio files (e.g. podcasts).

Also, readers who were born deaf may experience reading difficulties.

**Mobility impairments**
Mobility impairments cover a wide array of disabilities, including those resulting from accidents or injuries (e.g. quadriplegia, loss of limb, Repetitive Strain Injury), and diseases or congenital conditions (e.g. cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc)

People with mobility impairments may have no or limited use of their upper limbs, and lack fine motor control. Consequently they may be unable to use a mouse or a keyboard (although some may be able to press one key at a time).

A whole range of assistive technologies is available to users with mobility impairments, including voice-activation software, mouth sticks, eye-tracking devices, etc.

**Cognitive and learning impairments**
People with cognitive or learning disabilities include those with dyslexia, short-term memory deficit, Asperger's Syndrome, acquired brain injury, etc. What they have in common is difficulty in reading and understanding written text.
Appendix B  University of Bristol web audiences

What are they looking for? And what do they want to do?

Before you start to write, check if this information already exists somewhere on the University’s website. If it does, link to it rather than duplicate it. The Faculty Web and New Media Officer can advise you with this. You can also refer to the personas for more detailed information about how our audiences behave when they come to our website.

External

- **Global research community (researchers, other HEIs, funding councils)**
  Research achievements and breakthroughs, UoB and dept research profiles, news, events, employment opportunities…

- **Home and international prospective students (research postgraduates, taught postgraduates and undergraduates)**
  Why Bristol?; course details; entry requirements; how to apply; student, research and teaching staff profiles; faculty/school profiles; Open days; UCAS fairs; campus life etc.

- **Prospective students' opinion formers/influencers (parents/carers, schools; career advisors)**
  Overlaps with above, plus graduation events.

- **Alumni and friends**
  Ways of keeping in touch, how to help UoB's continued success, latest UoB developments, events, news.

- **Business and industry**
  Collaborative opportunities, research profiles, services, knowledge transfer etc

- **Local and regional community**
  Engagement opportunities, schools outreach, consultancy services and other expert help, local developments, events and activities.

- **Media**
  Achievements, breakthroughs, expertise directory, contacts.

- **General public**
  Engagement opportunities, latest news, events, activities, conference and tourism info, employment opportunities, access to services and facilities like sports centre etc.

- **Government bodies**
  Research achievements and breakthroughs, other??

Internal

Consider options such as an intranet or Blackboard for internal audiences. It creates confusion for external audiences to have this kind of information alongside promotional web pages. It also looks unprofessional.

- **Current students (home and international undergraduates, and taught and research postgraduates)**
  Academic support (IT, library, e-learning), services (health, student help, accomm, finance, counselling, careers, etc), news and events.

- **Staff (academic and non-academic)**
  Key information, holidays, salaries, policies, procedures, internal services. Plus for academics: e-learning, teaching and research support.
Appendix C  Resources

**On the web:**
A regularly updated list of online resources relevant to this course can be found at: www.delicious.com/uobittraining/web writing

**Books**
Krug, Steve (2000) *Don’t make me think*; New Riders
McGovern Gerry (2006) *Killer web content: Make the sale, deliver the service, build the brand*; A&C Black
Redish, Janice (2007) *Letting go of the words: Writing Web Content that Works*; Morgan Kaufmann