

Writing for the Web Workshop



Writing for the Web

is a

UNIQUE SKILL

Not Your Typical Writing

- It's all about **brevity, simplicity, and accessibility**
- It's not writing for a new article or a journal or an academic paper
- It's not a place to showcase how cute or clever you are or how many big words you know

Don't make it harder, even if they're smarter

- **DON'T** impress people with your knowledge
- **NO ONE** likes reading above the 12th grade level **no matter how educated they are**

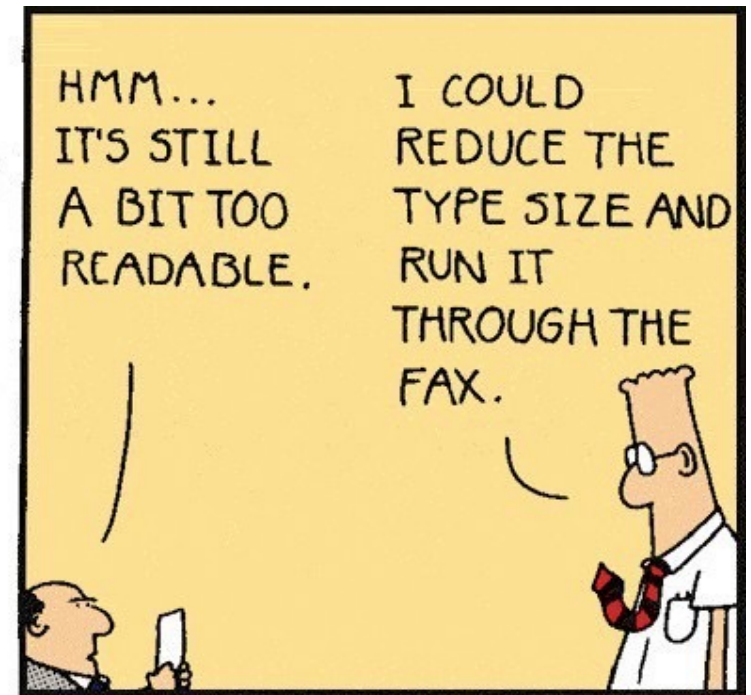
Improving readability isn't “dumbing down”

- People are **overwhelmed by information**
- Improving readability is about **being respectful** of your readers' time

Improving readability isn't “dumbing down”



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Proven Results

- The Army **DOUBLED** same-day action by rewriting memos to make them easier to read
- The Navy **saved \$27-\$37 million per year** in officer time by rewriting business memos

Users DON'T READ. They SCAN!

- Use **HEADERS** to break up content
- Use the keywords your users are looking for
 - If they are looking for financial aid, don't use assistance
- Make key information stand out and easy to find
 - Use buttons, lists, **bold**, stand-alone paragraphs, put it at the start of a sentence or list



BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN
Public Relations

In a complex and shifting business landscape, public relations serves as a crucial hinge connecting people to information, organizations, and each other. Success in any field rests on the ability to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time.

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Public Relations at the SOJC

Do you ask a lot of questions? Are you curious, a great listener, and tuned in to the world around you? If you're passionate about connecting people and building relationships, public relations may be the ideal communication field for you. I bet you didn't read this. You probably didn't read any of this. Otherwise I'm sure you would have noticed the text doesn't really matter.

SEE A SAMPLE SANDWICH

EXPLORE COURSES

Users DON'T READ. They SCAN!

- Did you see what school or college this is?
- Did you see what program this page is about?
- Did you see the “Apply” button? “Visit” button?
- Did you see anything unusual about this page?
- Did the page suddenly make you hungry?

RESOURCES



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SEE A SAMPLE [SANDWICH](#)

EXPLORE COURSES

Users DON'T READ. They SCAN!

- Users scan headlines, lists, and buttons for the keywords associated with the tasks they want to do
- They will miss almost everything else on the page
- Unless a user's specific task is to learn more about your program, they won't read your content unless they can't find it anywhere else

If Google Can't Find It, Nobody Can Find It

- What are your users Googling to find your page?
- Use those keywords in headers on your page
 - Not only helps improve SEO, but also makes it more findable on the page and better for accessibility
- The more important it looks on the page, the more important Google thinks it is

Size Matters!

- 9-Paragraphs: 70% read to the 5th paragraph
- 5-Paragraphs: 80% read to the 5th paragraph
- Extra words hurt meaning
 - Don't tell people **EVERYTHING** you know
 - Only tell them what they **NEED** to know

How Long is Too Long?

- Average reading time \approx 200 words per minute
- How long should someone have to read to get this information and understand it?
- **# of minutes \times 200 \approx word count**
- Limit the length by giving your information a hard word count. **And stick to it!**

Proven Results

Procter & Gamble One Page Memo

- Used since the 1970s
- Every communication has to fit on one page (\approx 400 words)
- Strengthens your ideas
 - If you can't sell it in less than a page, keep working on your idea

How it looks can be as important as what it says

- If it **looks too long**, it is too long
- Because even if it isn't too long, no one will know that because **they won't read it!**

Read It? Or Skip It?

ABOUT US

Paragraph Example

How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb

I am Sam. Sam I am. That Sam I am! That Sam I am! I do not like that Sam I am! Do you like green eggs and ham? I do not like them, Sam I am. I do not like green eggs and ham. Would you like them here or there? I would not like them here or there. I would not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am. Would you like them in a house? Would you like them with a mouse? I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am.

Would you eat them in a box? Would you eat them with a fox? Not in a box. Not with a fox. Not in a house. Not with a mouse. I would not eat them here or there. I would not eat them anywhere. I would not eat green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am. Would you? Could you? In a car? Eat them! Eat them! Here they are. I would not, could not, in a car. You may like them. You will see. You may like them in a tree! I would not, could not in a tree. Not in a car! You let me be. I do not like them in a box. I do not like them with a fox. I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am.

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Would you like them here or there? I would not like them here or there. I would not like them anywhere.

I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am. Would you like them in a house? Would you like them with a mouse?

Step 1

I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am.

Would you eat them in a box? Would you eat them with a fox?

Not in a box. Not with a fox. Not in a house. Not with a mouse. I would not eat them here or there. I would not eat them anywhere. I would not eat green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am.

Step 2

Would you? Could you? In a car? Eat them! Eat them! Here they are. I would not, could not, in a car. You may like them. You will see. You may like them in a tree! I would not, could not in a tree. Not in a car! You let me be.

I do not like them in a box. I do not like them with a fox. I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam I am.

Paragraph Standards

- **1-2 sentences:** Average sentences per paragraph
- **42 words:** Average number of words in a paragraph that people are comfortable reading
- **63 words:** Maximum length of any paragraph

Rule of Thumb

- When you write your content in Word use:
 - Font: Arial
 - Size: 10
 - Margins: 1-inch
- Will closely match the appearance of text on a page with left-hand navigation

Document1

AutoSave Home Save Undo Redo ...

Home Insert Draw Design Layout >> Tell me

Comments Editing Share

Paste Font Paragraph Styles Dictate Sensitivity Add-ins Editor ProWritingAid Create PDF and share link Request Signatures

Eligibility

To be admitted to the University of Oregon for the purpose of seeking an advanced degree or certificate, you must hold a bachelor's degree or higher from a [regionally accredited](#) four-year U.S. college or university **OR** hold an equivalent credential from a qualifying international institution.

This degree must be conferred before your first day of classes at the UO.

Applicants must also meet the Division of Graduate Studies' [English Language Proficiency Requirement](#) and international applicants must verify the availability of [sufficient financial support](#), per U.S. Government regulations.

Students who already hold a graduate degree at the same level and discipline for which they are applying may be admitted to the University of Oregon only by petition to the Division of Graduate Studies. In cases where a student already holds a similar degree, the content of the original degree must be fundamentally different from the degree to be pursued at the UO.

All other admission eligibility requirements, such as GPA and required tests, vary by program. These requirements are determined by the individual schools and academic departments. Check with your prospective program to find out more.

If you are concerned about your eligibility for admission, please [contact the Division of Graduate Studies](#) for information about obtaining a preliminary credential analysis.

Division of Graduate Studies

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ADMISSIONS

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[Fee Waivers and Discounts](#)
[English Language Proficiency Requirement](#)
[Official Transcript Requirement](#)
[Tuition and Costs](#)
[New Students and Orientations](#)

How to Apply

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Home Insert Draw Design Layout >> Tell me

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UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

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1-2-3-4-5 Rule

- **1** thought, expressed in
- **2-3** short sentences, taking up no more than
- **4-5** lines on the page

Break It Up

- 1-sentence paragraphs are **OK!**
 - Just don't get carried away with them. Use them for emphasis.
- Break up your content with bullets and lists
 - If you have more than 3 things in a series, use bulleted lists or numbers
 - People skimming a story are **47% more likely to read** items in lists than almost any other copy on the page

Break It Up

You should break up paragraphs when you:

- Pause
- Elaborate
- Change a topic
- Make an aside
- Shift time or place
- Emphasize a key point
- Move to the next item on your list

Proven Results

ABOUT THE STUDY

Between the ADA, Rehabilitation Act, and state laws, almost all higher education institutions in the U.S. are legally required to provide closed captioning for recorded lectures, online courses, class materials, and other video content used for teaching and learning. In fact, 87% of the institutions surveyed reported that closed captioning is being implemented for at least some videos. However, while the need for accessibility is universal, most colleges and universities approach closed captioning in different ways. This study provides answer to these questions: Are institutions meeting legal requirements? What captioning processes are in place and are they centralized? What are the captioning budgets and how are they determined? Who are the people and departments involved in captioning decisions? How is captioning prioritized and is it being done proactively or reactively? What are the barriers?

Download this free 70-page report to get results from the largest IRB-approved study on institutional implementation of closed captioning. The data was collected from 47 higher education institutions in the U.S., including public and private institutions across 4-year, 2-year, and professional schools. This report sheds light on many critical issues surrounding accessibility and the rapidly growing implementation of closed captioning in higher education.

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Sentence Standards

- **14 words:** Average length of sentences that are easy to understand
 - 14 words: Comprehension is at 90%
 - 43 words: Comprehension is only 10%
- But don't make all of your sentences 14 words. That **sounds boring** to the reader.
- Read your sentence out loud. If you have to pause in the middle, it's too long.

The Period is Your New Best Friend!

- **Good News:** People can't skim for periods, so readers don't skip long sentence
- **Bad News:** If readers get caught up in long sentences, they will just stop reading

Use Simple Sentences

- Go with subject-verb-object structure
 - The closer to the start of a sentence you have the subject and verb, the longer you can make the sentence
- Get rid of introductory dependent clauses
 - They delay your subject and verb and are harder to understand.
 - Usually they just add bragging and fluff. So delete them.

Cut the Complex

Break complex sentences into multiple sentences if you use:

Punctuation

Commas

Colons

Parentheses

Dashes

Semicolons

Conjunctions

And

Or

Also

But

So

Eliminate Passive Voices

- The subject should be "doing" the verb
- Don't use passive voice because:
 - It makes your sentences longer
 - It isn't conversational
 - It feels like you are trying to hide something

Use Powerful Verbs

- Verbs are your most valuable words – they are the task
- Minimize adjectives and adverbs
 - When you use strong nouns and verbs, you don't need as many modifiers
 - Only add adjectives if they change the substance of your noun
 - Using an adverb means you failed to find the right verb
 - Use strolled, meandered, or limped instead of "walked slowly"

Use Powerful Verbs

- Turn your nouns back into verbs - Words ending in -tion or -ment or -ize or -ility
 - Use improve or inform instead of involvement or information.
- Cut out auxiliary words - Words ending in -ing
 - “She stopped in the woods” has more impact than “stopping by the woods on a snowy evening”

Word Standards

- **2-syllable words:** Words with 3 or more syllables are considered hard to read
- If you have to use a longer word:
 - Surround it by shorter words
 - Put it in a short sentence

When Shorter is Better

- Short words express ideas faster and to more people
- You actually sound less intelligent when you use big words
 - If you knew what that big word actually meant, you could use shorter words to explain its meaning so that everyone could understand
- Of the 235 words in the Gettysburg Address, almost 75% have only one syllable

Trim the Fat

Instead of ...

- Prior to
- Terminate
- Subsequent
- Facilitate
- Request
- Purchase
- In terms of
- Is able to
- Is necessary

Use ...

- Before
- End
- Next
- Help
- Ask for
- Buy
- Since
- Can
- Must

Drop the Formality

- Your user is “**you**”
- The School of Law is “**we**” or “**our**”
- Make your users feel like they are part of your organization

Be Conversational

- Write like you speak to your non-work friends
- Read your content out loud to see how it sounds when spoken

Don't Use Jargon

- Just because you think a term is obvious and an industry standard, it doesn't mean everyone knows it
- Always assume your user is new and doesn't speak your office language
- Don't use acronyms – AEC, TRiO, SSS, FAFSA, etc.
 - Never assume your user understands your nicknames

Don't Use Jargon



Final Thoughts

- **> 5 Paragraphs:** Use a **HEADER**
- **> 3 Sentences:** Use a new **PARAGRAPH**
 - Paragraphs: Average 42 words
- **> 20 Words:** Use a new **SENTENCE**
 - Sentences: Average 14 words
- **> 2 Syllables:** Use a new **WORD**

Questions?

More information at:

- digital.uoregon.edu/web-communicators/writing-for-web
- communications.uoregon.edu/editorial-style-guide