Writing for the Web

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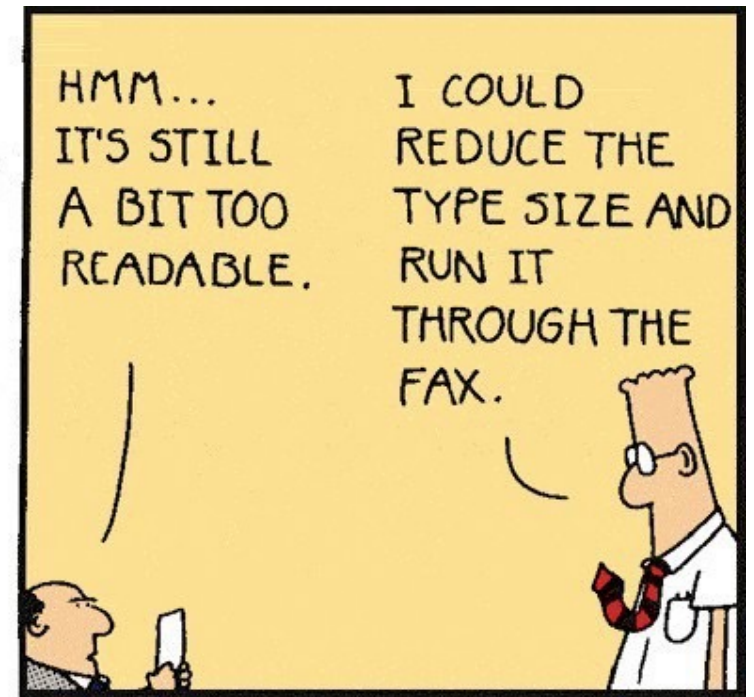
Writing for the Web…

… is good writing

Writing for the web is about…

- Brevity, simplicity, accessibility

- Helping the reader find what they're looking for as quickly as possible

- Being respectful of your reader's time

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Improving readability isn't "dumbing it down"

Make your content easy to 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, and put it at the start of a sentence or list.

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RESOURCES

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 |

Did you scan? Did you see…

- What school or college this is?

- What program this page is about?

- The "Visit" button? "Apply" button?

- Anything unusual about this page?

- Anything that made you hungry?

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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

- Plan what users need to get from the page, and provide it in a way that's easy to find

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If Google can't find it, nobody can

- What are your users Googling to find your page? Use those keywords in headings.

- Prominent keywords improve SEO, accessibility, and makes the most-searched info more findable

- The more important it looks on the page, the more important Google thinks it is

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Length vs. comprehension

- Nine paragraphs: 70% read to the fifth paragraph

- Five paragraphs: 80% read to the fifth paragraph

- Don't tell people everything YOU know

- Only tell them what THEY NEED to know

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Does it look friendly? Or off-putting?

- If it looks too long, it is too long

- Break up content with sections, headings, shorter paragraphs

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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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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

- Average 1-2 sentences per paragraph

- People are comfortable reading an average of 42 words per paragraph

- Maximum length of any paragraph = 63 words

Paragraph structure for web pages

- 1 thought, expressed in

- 2-3 short sentences, taking up no more than

- 4-5 lines on the page

Ways to break it up

- Vary lengths of paragraphs (OK to sprinkle in one-sentence paragraphs)
- Bullets and numbered lists (for more than three items in a series)
- People skimming a story are 47% more likely to read items in lists than almost any other copy on the page

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Break paragraphs when you…

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

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Which would you read?

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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Consider sentence length

- Read your sentence out loud. If you have to pause in the middle, it's too long.

- Vary sentence length, but shorten or divide if too long

- 14 words: Average length of sentences that are easy to understand
  - 14 words: Comprehension is 90 percent
  - 43 words: Comprehension is 10 percent

Use simple structure

- Follow subject-verb-object structure
  "The player hit the ball"
  - Clarifies action
  - Eases understanding
  - Avoids passive voice

- Avoid introductory dependent clauses
  Example: "When it comes to using introductory clauses, they delay your subject and verb and complicate understanding."

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Active voice vs. passive voice

- Online content requires action-focused, concise language

- Focusing on the action, and using action verbs, tells stories more effectively

- Active voice more quickly conveys who or what is doing the action

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Subject – verb relationship

The difference between active voice and passive voice involves the relationship of the subject to the verb.

The researchers wrote the paper. (active)

The paper was written by the researchers. (passive)

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Active voice is…

- More direct

- Easier to understand

- More descriptive

- Action-focused

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Three uses for passive voice

1. To avoid the first person

   I will scold you about passive voice today. (active)

   You will be scolded about passive voice today. (passive)

2. To emphasize what's being acted on

   Scientists added reagent to the sample. (active)

   Reagent was added to the sample. (passive)

3. When the person/thing carrying out the action is not known or unclear

   Someone ambushed the troops at night. (active)

   The troops were ambushed at night. (passive)

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Use powerful verbs

- Turn your nouns back into verbs
  - Scan for words ending in -tion, -ment, -ize, or –ility
  - Example: use "improve" or "inform" instead of "involvement" or "information"

- Convert auxiliary words
  - Words ending in –ing
  - Example: "She was hitting the ball with max exit velo" has less impact than "she hit the ball hard."

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Shorter is usually better

- Short words express ideas faster and to more people

- Of the 235 words in the Gettysburg Address, almost 75% have only one syllable

- If you must use a word longer than two syllables, surround it with shorter words or place in a short sentence

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Instead of:	**Use:**
prior to…	before
terminate…	end
subsequent…	next
facilitate…	help
request…	ask
purchase…	buy
in terms of…	since
is able to…	can
is necessary…	must
passed away…	died

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Be conversational

- Write like you speak to your friends

- Read your content out loud to see how it sounds

- Use grammar tools to increase "ease of reading" scores

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Grammar Analytics

Analyze text with grammar tools in Word or a site such as Storytoolz

Aim for lower grade levels (12 or below) and higher "reading ease" scores to boost comprehension

Readability Results

PRINT | COPY | PDF | EXCEL

What	Result
Reading Levels	
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Grade 11.2
Automated Readability Index	Grade 13.5
Coleman-Liau	Grade 12.9
Flesch Reading Ease	53.5/100
Gunning fog index	Grade 14.7
Laesbarhedsindex (LIX) Formula	48.2 = school year 9
SMOG Index	Grade 12.9
Average grade level	Grade 13 (mean of above)

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Defy the curse of familiarity

- The common reader might not know jargon or terms used within the field. Simplify.
- Assume your reader doesn't speak your office's language – and might not care enough to look up meanings. Use common words.
- Avoid acronyms. On second reference to an entity use general terms, in lower case: *The center, the project, the program, etc.*

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Sound familiar?
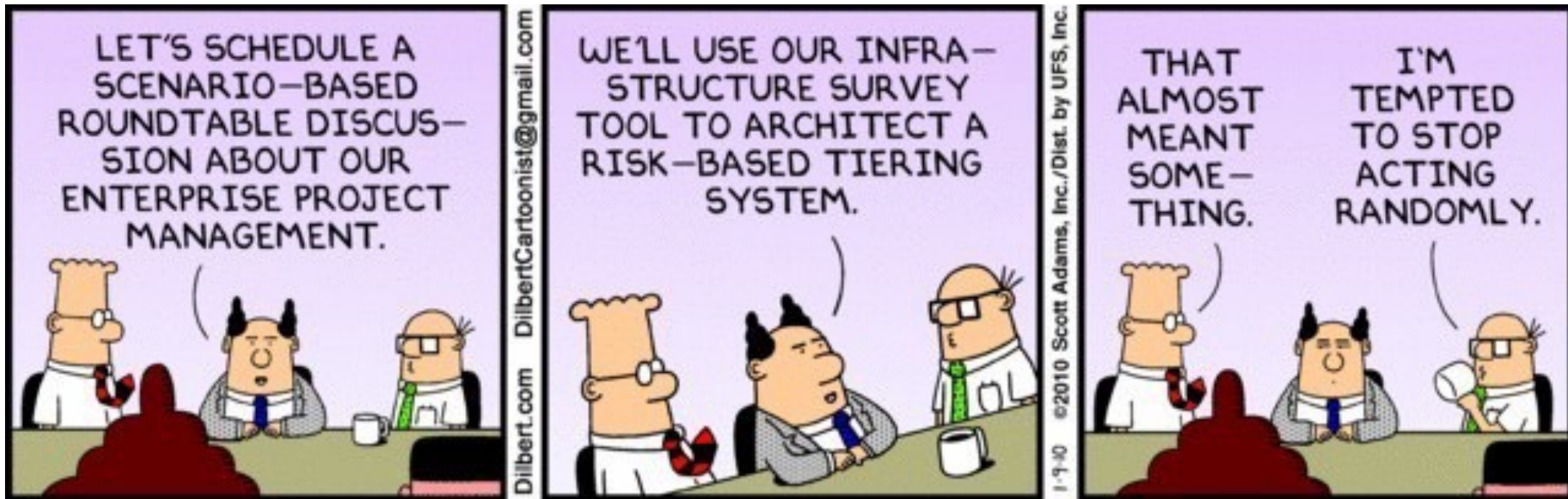
Helpful resources

- **digital.uoregon.edu/web-communicators/writing-for-web**

- **communications.uoregon.edu/editorial-style-guide**

- **Strunk and White, *[The Elements of Style](#)***

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