

Writing for an online audience

Establish page structure

- Helps to establish “form” of the site
- Users appreciate uniformity
- Makes the site more accessible and cohesive
- Provides a road map for users to follow

One theme per page

- Keeps messages simple and direct
- Keeps page length reasonable to avoid extensive scrolling down
- Helps users to identify clearly pages of interest
- Facilitates users who “print and keep” pages of significant use to them

Positive opening line to each page

- Supports the invitational tone used in web writing
- Makes clear to users why they might want to think about an issue and why they might want to read the rest of the page
- Hooks users in

Make everything as short as possible

- Review pages in totality before starting to reduce text
- Excise words that are not adding anything
- Avoid any repetition of ideas and concepts

Use subheadings to guide the reader

- Users do not read everything on every page when online, but rather scan pages and settle on areas of interest....or move on....
- Use subheadings to guide users quickly to what they need

Break up text

- Use bullet points and symbols to break up the text visually on the page
- Use click and reveal to keep reader engaged, to manage page length and to provide additional optional information
- Establish a menu of symbols so that users attach meaning to them and recognise what they signify

Use images consistently

- Helps to make pages eye-catching and engaging
- Supports the “look” of the site
- Encourages recognition of ideas and concepts in users

Minimise links out of pages

- Links out of pages in the middle of text offer users a way out of pages to which they may never return
- Keep users on the page by grouping links and references at the bottom of the page or keeping them all in one place

Provide a few well researched links and references

- Users will not use long lists of links but will usually try the first few and if not finding something of interest will move on
- Links and references need careful research – think carefully about what users will find useful and interesting
- Consider user testing of links and make definite choices about what to provide

Avoid verbal distractions for the reader

- Language should be clean and clear
- Consider needs of all users and accessibility issues
- Avoid using idiom, “chatty” styles, sarcasm, catchphrases, slang, exclamation marks

Develop an editing guide

- Record style, convention and format decisions as you make them and your reasons why
- Think about tone, style, capitalisation, emphasis, highlighting, use of icons, punctuation, text boxes, bullet points, symbols, video, word use
- Guide gives editor rules to apply when reviewing contributions
- Future contributors have guidelines to help direct and shape their contributions

Consider the need for an editorial role

- Contributors are rarely the target audience and do not have adequate distance to critique
- Editor focuses on site integrity and user needs; makes hard and final decisions
- Writing is different from face to face interventions; there are only words and they need to deliver the message