Writing for the Web

Tip No. 1: Allocate plenty of time

Good website writing is concise and easy to read. When something is easy to read, it is natural to think it was easy to write. The opposite is true. The fewer words you use, the longer it takes. If you underestimate the time it takes to organise and write your content, you could delay the completion of your website. Plan well ahead and allow at least twice the time you think you need.

Tip No. 2: Avoid a content dump

It is tempting to fill your website with all sorts of information that you think is important. The risk is that you will create clutter that gets in the way. Here are just two reasons why that matters:

1. Website visitors are impatient. If you make them work to find what they want, they will leave.
2. Many people have difficulty understanding written communication. Websites are harder to read than printed material. Unnecessary content just makes the problem worse.

Identify what is relevant for the people who will visit your site. Omit the rest.

Tip No. 3: Maintain your content

A sure way to lose credibility is to have outdated or inaccurate information on your website. A good practice is to schedule regular content reviews. Of course, if you know something needs replacing, don’t wait for the next review. Fix it now before a potential customer sees it. As your business

grows and changes, so should your website content. The best sites are always works in progress.

Tip No. 4: Give every page a purpose

People often write website content that has no clear objectives. Your site will be more effective when every page exists for a purpose. Use the answers to these three questions to help you draft and review your content.

1. What are our business goals for this page?
2. Who will read this page?
3. How will this page help people who read it?

Aim to strike a balance between the communication needs of your organisation and the needs of people who visit your website.

Tip No 5: Use simple words and plain English

Your potential customers may be unfamiliar with words that you frequently use in your organisation.
Avoid the following, unless you know that everybody in your target audience will understand them.

- industry jargon
- technical terms
- long words that sound impressive

People will stay on your website longer if you use simple everyday words that they understand.

Tip No 6: Check your spelling

Spelling is important. When people visit your website, they judge your entire organisation. One small mistake might undermine your credibility and cost you a valuable sale. Although spell-checker tools (such as in Microsoft Word and Grammarly) are very useful, don't rely solely on them. The best practice is to have someone else proofread your work. If that is not possible, try to put it aside for a while so you can read it with fresh eyes.
A useful technique when checking your own work is to read it back because that makes you look more closely at each word.

Tip No 7: Write as if only one person reads your site

Using the web is a personal experience. Your website might reach thousands of people, but each of them interacts with it as an individual. This means you are really writing for an audience of one.
Think of the words on your website as a substitute for talking to someone face to face or over the telephone. It's like having a one-sided conversation with a person you cannot see. This tip can also help you overcome "writer's block". If you are trying to write and your mind goes blank, imagine that you are talking to someone. Write down what you would say. It's a great way to get started, although of course, you will need to tidy it up later.

Tip No 8: Use "you", "us" and "we"

Following on from the tip above, you will connect better with your reader if you use "you", "us" and "we" instead of a formal, corporate style. If you were explaining your services to a potential customer, you would say what "we" could do for "you". Because your website replaces that conversation, it

should use those words too. As another example, compare these two statements:

1. This company welcomes enquiries from interested job seekers.
2. If you would like to work for us, please send us your details.

Notice how the second version is much friendlier.

Tip No 9: – Write in the active voice

As you might remember from primary school, when you use a "subject – verb – object" sentence structure you are writing in the active voice. The subject performs the action (the verb) on the object. The active voice creates sentences that are shorter, snappier and livelier. The alternative, the passive voice, generally results in sentences that are more cumbersome. Although there are uses for the passive voice, the active voice is usually preferable. Consider these examples

> *Your order will be shipped by us within 24 hours. (passive voice)*
> *We will ship your order within 24 hours. (active voice)*
>
> *Our products are only installed by qualified technicians. (passive voice)*
> *Only qualified technicians install our products. (active voice)*

Master the art of the active voice and see your web content become stronger and more direct.

Tip No. 10: Break up long sections of text

When people use your website, they want to find things quickly. Don’t expect them to read every line word for word. If you use long blocks of text, there is a good chance that what you are saying will not register with many people. These techniques help them find information quickly

- Bullet point lists, like this one
- Short sentences, with an average length of about 20 words.
- Short paragraphs, about 40 words or less. One-sentence paragraphs are OK.
- Bolding of important words or phrases, in moderation
- Subheadings

The easier it is for your audience to spot the key points, the more effective your website.

Tip No. 11: One main topic per page

Following on from the tip above, another way to make web content easier to understand is to focus on one main topic or idea per page. There are additional benefits in doing this

- It becomes easier to create a logical, customer-friendly site structure.
- Search engines can more easily identify what the page is about.

Think of your website as a series of topics through which people move. People move from one idea to the next and different people will take different paths. Better to have short pages and link them, than to try covering a range of subjects on one long page.

Tip No. 12: Make the important stuff obvious

Do you want your readers to see important information first? Of course. Then forget what you were taught at school about writing essays with an introduction first and a conclusion at the end.
Writing for the web is different from writing an essay. Tell people what you want them to know quickly before they get bored and go elsewhere. For example

- Write a headline that actually says what the page is about.
- Include the main point in the first sentence.
- Make special offers or calls to action stand out.
- The golden rule is that the more important it is, the more prominent it should be.