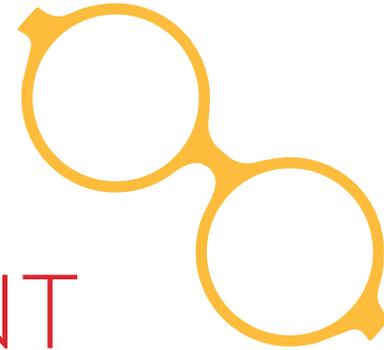




WRITING

FOR THE WEB

READING ONLINE VS. READING IN PRINT



Reading text online is a different experience than reading text in print. For starters, it's 25 - 30% slower. Most readers scan first starting at the top of the page (above the fold). They **scan** through headings, images, and bulleted lists, etc. looking for relevant content.

Online readers are more action-orientated. They're quick to “move on” when they don't find what they are looking for. Your content has as little as two or three seconds to capture visitor's attention—to entice them to read more, take action, or navigate to another page.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

The classic pyramid style of writing may be appropriate for academic purposes. But the **inverted pyramid** favored by journalists puts the most essential information first.

- Get to the point and make it easy for visitors to find the information they want.
- Start with a punchy and factual summary (who, what, where, when, how). Get the facts across in 50 words or less.
- Lead off each paragraph with a factual sentence and relevant words.

This lets the reader decide quickly whether to read on for more detail.



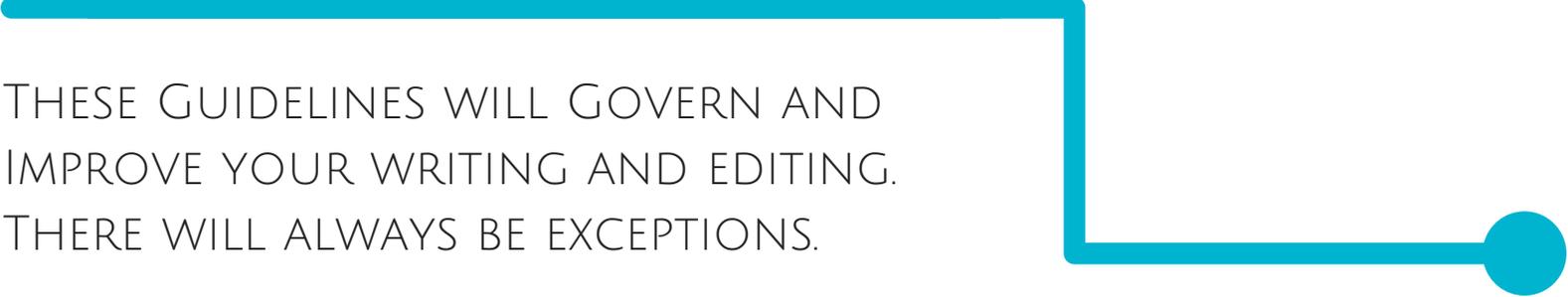
KEYWORDS

There may be a high-level group of words and terms that you would like your website to rank for. But each page should focus on three to five words or terms *specific to the content of that page*.

Put yourself in the shoes of the people you want to attract. Ask yourself what words they would use to search for the content you are trying to rank for.



GUIDELINES



THESE GUIDELINES WILL GOVERN AND
IMPROVE YOUR WRITING AND EDITING.
THERE WILL ALWAYS BE EXCEPTIONS.

Adapted from Gerry McGovern and eBay's Content Strategy team.

1

UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE YOU WANT TO REACH

Learn about the goals and needs of the people you want to reach. **What do they care about?** What motivates them to action? What key messages will resonate with them? Consider the language they use (keywords), and incorporate that in your content.



2

INCLUDE THE RIGHT KEYWORDS IN YOUR CONTENT

Include keywords in headings, body copy, metadata etc. to **make your content findable**. If people don't find what they're searching for quickly and easily, they may leave.



3



CONSIDER THE PURPOSE OF YOUR CONTENT

Be clear about your goals. Be clear about the desired action you hope visitors will take when they read your content. Make it easy for people to take action that will move you closer to your goals. Begin each call-to-action with an imperative or directive. **Subscribe, register, buy, go to, read, download**, etc. Every piece of content needs a purpose. One that connects visitors with your goals and objectives.

4



WRITE GREAT METADATA

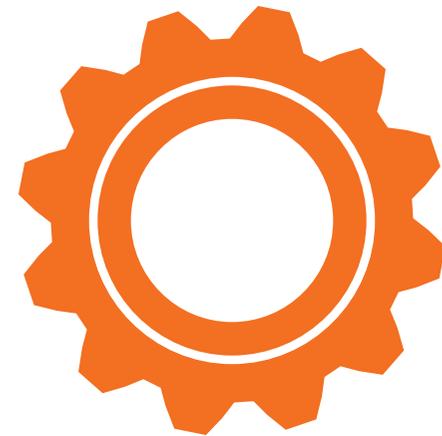
What are the right terms? Metadata should include **words and phrases your audience uses** to search for your content.

- Meta titles display as a link in search engine results.
- Meta descriptions display as teaser text in search engine result pages (SERP).
- Tags and categories (taxonomy) organize your information.

5

WRITE IN AN ACTIVE VOICE

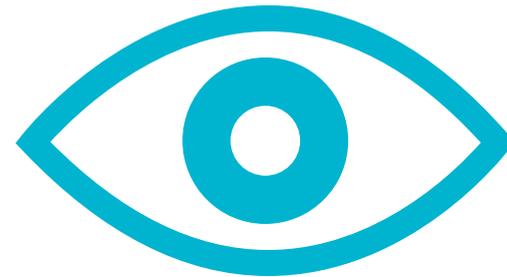
Write from the **point of view of the reader**. People come to your website looking for something. Write in a conversational style that meets their needs. Encourage action that will help you meet your objectives. An active voice usually results in stronger, shorter and easier to understand copy.

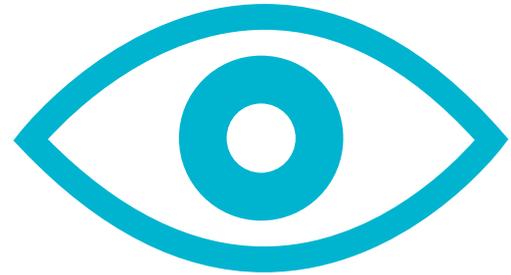


6

FORMAT CONTENT TO SUPPORT SCANNING

Use formatting that makes it easy for readers to grasp the content when they scan the page. **Long blocks of unbroken text are often ignored.**





- Begin with a summary.
- Write short paragraphs (one thought per paragraph).
- Front-load paragraphs with the most important words.
- Add sub-headings every few paragraphs.
- Use lists to simplify and organize compound sentences or complicated text.
- Include internal and external links in the body copy, but not too many.
- Include images, videos, tables or charts to simplify complex topics.

7



WRITE MEANINGFUL HEADINGS

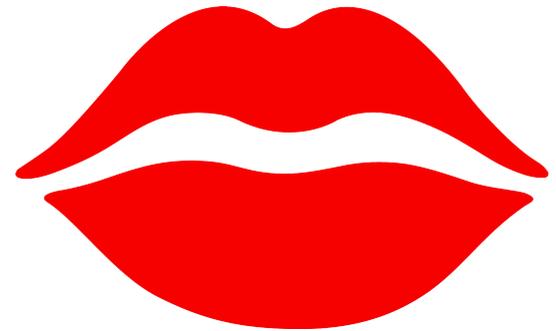
Strong headings **break up text into readable chunks**. This makes it easier for people to scan for keywords that catch their attention. Write headings that help people understand the nature of the content to follow. Headings also describe the hierarchy of the information on the page.

- Be clear, precise, and engaging.
- Include keywords, preferably at the beginning.
- Avoid being clever or subtle.
- Include headings after every few paragraphs.

KEEP IT SHORT & SIMPLE (KISS)

"A SENTENCE SHOULD CONTAIN NO UNNECESSARY WORDS, A PARAGRAPH NO UNNECESSARY SENTENCES, FOR THE SAME REASON THAT A DRAWING SHOULD HAVE NO UNNECESSARY LINES AND A MACHINE NO UNNECESSARY PARTS."

—EB STRUNK

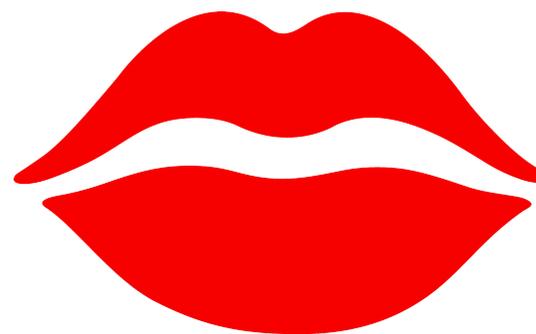


Concise content is easier to scan. Start with the key idea/main topic and then elaborate (inverted pyramid). This ensures your readers grasp the main idea when they scan the first paragraph. Begin with the conclusion so readers know what to expect.

Write simply and directly in plain English. Edit ruthlessly. And then edit some more. Shorten and strengthen sentences. Remove paragraphs, words and sentences that don't add value or meaning. Never use a long word when a short one will do. Get to the point.

- Keep headings to eight words or less.
- Keep sentences to 15-20 words.
- Keep paragraphs to 40-70 words.
- Keep documents to 500 words or less.

If the content is long, consider including anchor links at the top. Use keywords that link to the sub-headings (H2 - H6) below.



USE PICTURES TO EXPLAIN COMPLEXITY

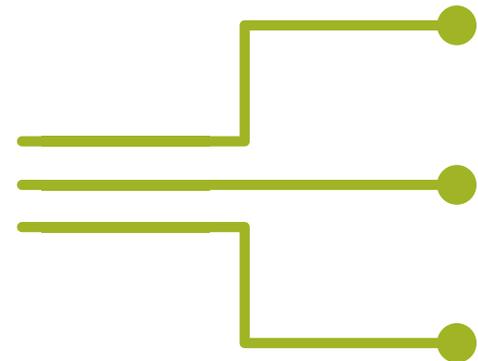
Text is not the best way to convey all types of information. Use **pictures, numbers, models, statistical diagrams** or the like to convey complex concepts.



USE A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH TO CONVEY COMPLEX TOPICS

Convey complex topics by **spreading the content over more than a single web page.**

Create a summary page which explains the key facts. Create sub-pages that go into more detail. Include a (PDF) version for those who want to download, print and read offline.



PRACTICE ON-PAGE SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Take advantage of the benefits of **organic SEO** to improve search engine rankings. Most people still begin their hunt for relevant content with search engines. If search engines can't find your content, it may as well not exist. Use best practices to make it easy for search engines and humans find your content.



- Create a keyword rich page title (Meta title) for every page.
- Create a keyword rich description (Meta description) for every page.
- Create URLs that are readable by humans and include keywords.
- Include strong, meaningful headings with keywords, especially H1 - H3.
- Optimize link titles, images titles and alt text with keywords.
- Optimize body copy with keyword density not to exceed 1% - 2%.
- Tag and categorize content in a meaningful way.

Search



12



REVIEW YOUR WORK FOR TYPOS

It's hard to catch your own mistakes. Ask someone to double-check your work, if possible. A misspelled word not only **looks bad**, but can also confuse a search engine.

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE RESOURCES

[Letting Go of the Words](#) by Ginny Redish

[Don't Make Me Think](#) by Steve Krug

[Content Rules](#) by Ann Handley

[Everybody Writes](#) by Ann Handley

[Clout](#) by Colleen Jones

[Content Strategy for the Web](#) by Kristina Halvorson

[Content Strategy for Mobile](#) by Karen McGrane

[Content Everywhere](#) by Sara Wachter-Boettcher

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