

# The Suffolk University Web Content Usability Guide



*The main rule here is you are not the audience, you are not the customer. I mean there is a reason that you are the one working on the website, and you are not the average representative outside customer.*

*You are designing for a much broader audience of people who are very different than yourself...and they are busy, and they are also looking at the competition, and so give it to them straight.*

--[Jakob Nielsen, from an interview by Eric Enge](#), Stone Temple Consulting, September 24, 2007

Author: Steven M. Becker  
Prepared by Suffolk University  
ITS Web Services

©Suffolk University 2007-2008

## Table of Contents

<b>I. Web Content Usability: A Conceptual Framework</b> .....	<b>1</b>
The Importance of Web Content Usability .....	1
What this Guide is not about .....	2
What this Guide is all about.....	3
Web content .....	3
The Rules of the Web .....	5
Rule Number One: Don't make me think .....	5
Rule Number Two: The reader rules. ....	5
Recommended Reference Resources.....	6
Getting Started: Define your Audience .....	6
Going one-to-one .....	6
Why it's important to know your audience .....	6
Who is our audience at Suffolk?.....	7
Give them what they want, the way they want it .....	8
Categories of Information .....	8
Putting things in order .....	9
Three Reasons Visitors Leave a Web Site .....	12
They found what they were looking for .....	12
Navigation that makes them think .....	12
The site is annoying .....	12
Talk to me.....	13
Happy Talk and other turn-offs.....	13
Can I start writing now? .....	14
<b>II. What You Need to Know While You Write</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Sweat the details. ....	15
The Ideal Web page.....	15
Words on the Web .....	16
Choose your words carefully.....	16
Use words that help your audience identify properly with your content. ....	17
Use fewer words. ....	18
Sentences on the Web.....	18
Paragraphs on the Web .....	19
Use headers and subheads to guide your reader.....	20
Pictures on the Web .....	20
What makes a good picture? .....	20
Pages on the Web.....	23
After you've finished your page .....	23
Review your page again.....	24
Trust your own judgment.....	24
Navigation on the Web .....	24
<b>III. Putting your Best Foot Forward—Features and Benefits</b> .....	<b>25</b>
The difference between features and benefits.....	25
Be thoughtful about what you say .....	25
Positioning your department .....	26
<b>IV. What to Remember after You've Written</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>V. Venturing into the Blogosphere</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>VI. More Information about Writing for the Web</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>29</b>

# I. Web Content Usability: A Conceptual Framework

The quote on the cover of this guide is presented in print, and, as a quote, is appropriately italicized. If we were to put that quote on the Web, we would not italicize it, because that would make it difficult to read.

Likewise, if we were to cut and paste this document onto the web without considerable reformatting, reorganizing, and editing, it would be difficult to use. Such is the nature of the Web. That's why Web Content Usability has value.

Web Content Usability is more than an adjustment to the technologies of a different medium:

**Web Content Usability is a collection of concepts and practices we can use to provide self-service to impatient readers.**

In fact, the Web has redefined self-service. All Web site visitors are readers. And most of them are impatient.

## The Importance of Web Content Usability

Web Content Usability is a subset of Web Usability. It is determined by

1. The way content is identified for inclusion on a site  
Ideally, content is identified for inclusion on a site based on what the reader is looking for when he or she comes to a site.
2. The way that content is organized or structured on the site  
Ideally, content is organized in a way that makes it easy for a reader to find that information.
3. The way that content is presented in the form of text.  
Ideally, the presentation of that content, in the form of text, is clear, unambiguous, and rewards the reader with the information, knowledge, or other result he or she wants.

Unfortunately, we don't always know what our readers may be looking for, how they might organize their search for that information (or how they might respond to any cues or hints we may give them) or how we should write to help them make the most of the information they find.

Of course, we can make some guesses, but we could easily be unsuccessful, because we're not communicating with a homogeneous class of readers or a statistical norm. We're dealing with one reader at a time, and from one instant to the next that reader may be a very different person. The more we make assumptions and generalize, the more likely we are to not quite fit the needs of each of those individual readers.

That's quite a challenge. Fortunately, millions upon millions of pages of content have been posted on the World Wide Web, and they have functioned as a giant laboratory for people who study Web communications.

Not everyone who studies Web communications agrees. Some authorities will tell you one thing, and some will tell you the opposite. Like Web statistics, you can always find something to support almost any position you'd like. But there is a place we can start.

Edward Tufte, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Professor Emeritus of Computer Science, senior critic in graphic design and Professor Emeritus of Statistics at Yale University, was described by the New York Times as "the Leonardo da Vinci of Data."<sup>1</sup>

He said, "The user is never wrong, and the user is never stupid. In information design, only designs are wrong and stupid."

What does that mean for us?

Let's say that I've put information about a service I offer on my Web page, and three people call me to ask how to sign up for that service, even though I've put that information in plain view on my page. It tells me that I've done something wrong. I could assume that I've taken care of the problem by speaking with each of them. I could assume that they're just three people out of hundreds or thousands who viewed my site and that they don't matter.

Of course, there may be hundreds more like them, who didn't call, and, because they didn't get the information they needed, didn't use my service. I'll never know. I could think I'm being successful when those three people, and maybe a few others, sign up for my service, but if I had provided the right information, maybe that number would have been two hundred.

## What this Guide is not about

- What colors to use on a Web page
- What font to use
- Whether or not to center your text, or keep it left-justified
- How to create the best page layout
- What makes one design better than another

Those considerations are all related to usability, but because The Suffolk University Web Site uses a Content Management System, and because it serves the needs of many different constituencies, those considerations have been addressed by leaders across the University, and are pre-set in the Content Management System.

It's also not about

- When to use bold or italics
- How to make your text stand out using all caps
- What color makes the information in your table more interesting
- Pictures
- Clip Art
- Whether to present a phone number as 617-557-2000 or 617.557.2000 (it's the first one.)

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Tufte, "On Ballots or Web Sites, Poor Design Sends the Wrong Message," The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 20, 2000.

These considerations are also related to usability, but in different ways. Most of them have been discussed and agreed upon by communications directors and other leaders across the University, and you'll find information about them in the Content Provider's Guides.

Web Services provides separate Content Provider's Guides for

- The University
- The College of Arts & Sciences
- The Sawyer Business School
- The New England School of Art & Design

Each Content Provider's Guide also details the procedures for using the Content Management System, and is updated regularly by Web Services.

## What this Guide is all about

This Guide is about organizing and writing your content—which is the most important way you can contribute to our Web site.

Blogs, wikis, podcasts, forms and surveys, even simple photographs, can make a site more attractive and useful. Statistics can tell you how many visitors came to your page, although they can't tell you if the visitor was satisfied or left, annoyed that they wasted their time.

Content, and in particular text content, is the primary reason people visit any Web site. If your site visitors have any difficulty following the way the content is organized, or don't like the way it is presented, they look elsewhere.

By making content more usable and useful, you can increase the probability that your reader will have a positive experience on your site.

## Web content

Writing for the Web is not, by its nature, better or worse than any other form of writing. It's just different. It's different from academic writing, or business writing. It's not like magazine, or newspaper writing. It's different from advertising, direct mail, letters or email. If you want to craft effective Web copy, you'll be able to apply the writing skills you already have, but you'll also need to put aside many of the assumptions you use when doing any other form of writing.

There are a number of reasons for these differences.

### **Pixels can be painful.**

Reading from a computer screen is far more difficult than reading from a printed page. Flickering pixels strain our eyes more than text printed on paper. As a result, readers want to spend less time reading. But reading from a computer screen is slower—by as much as 25%.<sup>1</sup>

So readers want to find what they're looking for and move on. That's why Web readers don't really read most of the time. They scan each page, searching for

---

<sup>1</sup>Neilsen, Jakob, Alertbox, March 15, 1997 <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9703b.html>

specific information. According to one expert source, a full 79% of readers<sup>1</sup> scan the page, without reading every word.

### **The Web is interactive.**

Reading print, whether it's a news story, a book, or a brochure, tends to be an orderly, somewhat passive process: We usually start at the beginning, and we continue until we either come to the end or lose interest.

But reading, which is a linear activity in print, becomes non-linear on the Web. More than half of all web readers find the information they want using search engines. Often, they don't start at the beginning, and they don't read to the end. They use links to move about, seeking information in a way that makes sense to them at that moment in time.

That interactivity creates an important difference: At any moment a reader may click on a link and jump to another page, or even another Web site.

The Web responds to every curiosity, every distraction, and every whim. It moves with the reader's train of thought. It has little or no regard for what the Web writer, the Web architect, and all the content providers might have intended. The reader is in charge. So while a printed document is all about the writer, the Web is all about the reader.

### **There's more competition.**

When you read a newspaper, chances are that you're only holding one newspaper in your hand. When you look at a Web page, there may be dozens of similar, competing pages only a click or two away. If one site doesn't give you what you need, another will.

Fortunately, we can compensate for some of these differences by making it easy to find information on our web site, and by making our Web pages more user-friendly.

This guide is designed to help you help our readers find the information they need, understand it, and use it. We'll also consider how we can provide a positive Web experience to give our readers a positive feeling about Suffolk and a desire to know more about us.

All of this may seem to be a roundabout way of describing what's already pretty obvious at first glance. We all use the Web every day, and we all have opinions about what makes a site informative, entertaining, and enjoyable. But when usability experts test Web sites, they often surprise the creators of the site.

The manner in which information is presented, and even the words used to convey the information, may make sense to us when we create a site, but they may be totally frustrating and confusing to someone who doesn't think the way we do, or is unfamiliar with what we want to say. While we may want to convey one piece of information, the reader may be looking for another. To a reader, what we want to say isn't as important as what they want to hear.

For a large, information-rich site like [suffolk.edu](http://suffolk.edu), effective communication can be a challenging task—and the solutions aren't always obvious.

---

<sup>1</sup>Neilsen, Jakob, Alertbox, October 1, 1997 <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>

**Note:** While these references may appear dated, and not all the information on these pages is widely accepted, Neilson and other authorities continue to reference this data (as recently as 2005).

The more you know about organizing your content and posting it on your site, the more effective your site will be. There are ways to bridge the gap between what you want to say and what your reader wants to know, or between how you want to say it, and how your reader wants to see it presented.

We have already begun with the Tufte's basic supposition:

"The user is never wrong, and the user is never stupid. In information design, only designs are wrong and stupid."

If we accept that, then we can begin with a few simple rules about organizing content and writing for the web. They're called rules because they've been discovered and rediscovered, and they've been tested again and again. They are the basis of everything that follows in this guide, and you can find them, in one form or another, in just about any good book, manual, or web site about creating successful web sites and web pages.

## The Rules of the Web

### Rule Number One: Don't make me think

Steve Krug, a leading Web usability expert, created Krug's first Law of Usability. He even named his book after it: *Don't Make Me Think*<sup>1</sup>.

In it, he explains:

"It means that as far as is humanly possible, when I look at Web page it should be self-evident. Obvious. Self-explanatory.

I should be able to "get it"—what it is and how to use it—without expending any effort to think about it."

### Rule Number Two: The reader rules.

Writing for the Web is all about what your reader wants to know (or will want to know, once they've spent a few moments on your Web site).

Think of it like this:

While you're writing your web page, it belongs to you. It's all about you, and you can say whatever you want, any way you want to say it.

But then, when the page gets published, everything gets turned upside down.

As soon as somebody looks at your page, it belongs exclusively to that person. Suddenly everything on your web site is about an individual who is looking at your page at a precise moment in time, and about what that reader wants.

---

<sup>1</sup> Krug, Steve, *Don't Make Me Think, Second Edition* (Berkeley, CA, New Riders Publishing, 2006)

## Recommended Reference Resources

In writing for the Suffolk Web Site, the Web Steering Committee has recommended the following reference materials. Their use helps assure uniformity of usage throughout the Suffolk University Web Site.

### *The Chicago Manual of Style*

It is available at any bookstore, or online (30-day free trial or by subscription) at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

**Note:** Some accrediting bodies may require that a department use a different style guide for certain types of communications, which may or may not include Web sites.

### *The Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary*

You'll find this at most bookstores. There's also a Merriam Webster Online Dictionary at <http://www.m-w.com/>, and you can subscribe to the Collegiate Dictionary at <http://www.merriam-webstercollegiate.com/noauth/mwlogin.php?return=/>

## Getting Started: Define your Audience

### Going one-to-one

Remember what we said a moment ago about the Web being an interactive medium? Well, that makes it different from other media in another way. Most traditional media are one-to-many—that is, they're directed to everybody who reads a book, watches a TV show, or sees a movie. Each person sees the same thing—they get the same information in the same order.

The Web is different. It's one-to-one<sup>1</sup>. (And always remember that it's one-to-one, not one-on-one.) Each person who visits your Website sees a different view because each selects the pages he will visit and determines—sometimes without any consideration for your best intentions—the order in which he will visit those pages.

To put in the reader's perspective, each time he visits your site, he is in charge. He owns the page he's looking at. When you post content on the Web, you give it up to your readers.

The challenge is that, even though this is a one-to-one experience, you have to define, organize, and present your content before the reader enters comes to your site. You have to do all of your communicating ahead of the interaction.

### Why it's important to know your audience

If you don't know your audience, you can't know how what information to present to them, how to organize your information to make it easy for them to find what they want, or how to present the information. That's made even more challenging by the fact that you may have more than one audience for your information. You might have several. They may be subtly different, or they may be vastly different.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pepper, Don, and Rogers, Martha, PhD., *The One to One Future* (New York, Doubleday, 1993)

A site for the Rocket Science Department may need to address both rocket scientists and high-schoolers who are interested in rocket science. If you talk to rocket scientists as if they were seventeen-year-olds, they'd probably lose interest in what you have to say. The same holds true for the high-schoolers. If you expect them to know everything a rocket scientist should know, you're likely to lose them.

Fortunately, the Web is interactive. So we can organize our information so the rocket scientists can navigate to what they want to know, and the students can find the information they want... quickly, easily, and efficiently.

## Who is our audience at Suffolk?

Our audience at Suffolk includes current and prospective students, current and prospective parents, high school advisors, current and prospective faculty, current and prospective staff, alumni, current and potential donors, grant agencies, college rating services, news media, government offices... and there are many more.

### Who's in the audience for your department or area?

Of course, if you're writing a specific page on the Web site, you may be able to limit your choices to just one, or maybe just a few of these groups. Each of these groups may be composed of many different subgroups, and each subgroup may consist of many different individuals, each of whom may (or may not) have a different agenda, and different needs.

Since the web is a one-to-one medium, you'll write most effectively when you address the audiences that are most important to your purpose, while taking your other potential readers into consideration.

**CASE IN POINT:** Let's take a quick look at just one of the many groups in our audience: prospective students.

That category includes students from big cities, suburbs, small towns and farmland. Commuter and residential students. Rich and poor students. East and west coast students and students from Nebraska. Over-achievers and under-achievers. Students from foreign countries. African American, Caribbean, Hispanic, Asian and Native American (AHANA) and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students.

It includes some who have studied chemistry since the age of three, and others who are undecided about what they want to do when they grow up.

And just as importantly, it includes a substantial number who cut their teeth on computer games, not Captain Kangaroo. They can't imagine doing research without the internet, or writing a paper without spell-check. They are multi-taskers. They have different skill sets, different capabilities, different expectations, and different needs from the generation that came before them.

Published every year, the [Beloit College Mindset List](#) offers an entertaining and highly informative look at the world through the eyes of an incoming class.

Big companies that do huge amounts of business on the web create libraries of what they call personae. Each persona has a detailed biography, a clearly outlined set of tastes, preferences, and so on. Each represents a site visitor, and a writer may pick one or several in focusing a message.

While you don't need to create that kind of highly detailed personae, you'll find that the more directly you focus your writing, the more effective your writing will be.

Let's look at an example of how two personae might look at the same copy.

The first is Bob. He lives in Quincy, Massachusetts, just ten miles from campus, and he's going to be commuting—at least for the time being. As a teenager, he didn't come into Boston very often. He's been to Faneuil Hall a few times; The New England Aquarium (7 years ago) and two rock concerts, one at the Garden and one at the Bank of America Pavilion. He rarely reads the newspaper, getting most of his news on the internet, and he occasionally watches local news on TV. When Bob reads this sentence, it's likely to mean something very specific for him:

“Located in Beacon Hill, Suffolk is known for its academic, cultural and international appeal.”

Whether that appeals to Bob or not is another question. It depends on information we don't know about him.

On the other hand, what does it mean to Jennie, from Atlanta, who has never been to Boston, and never heard of Beacon Hill? (She did, actually. It had something to do with John Kerry's presidential campaign. She was only thirteen years old at the time, and if she remembers it at all, she may only recall that rich people live there.) If we want Jennie to understand what we're talking about, we have to be a little more explicit. We have to help Jennie know what that means, and why it may be appealing to her.

Ultimately, some of these things we can't know about the prospective students who visit our site will determine which college or university they choose to attend.

As a writer, you have numerous choices. You could assume that Jennie, in searching our site, has visited the Campus Life and Boston section of our web site. You can even provide a text link to some specific information there. Or you can put in a bit of description for her that Bob is likely to skim over, because that's what Web readers do with information they don't find useful. Or you can leave Jenny wondering, hoping you've made her curious enough to look it up. All of these are valid choices, but under different circumstances, some are better than others. As a writer, you need to make that decision.

## **Give them what they want, the way they want it**

### **Categories of Information**

People go to the Web because they want something. And the sites they go to tell us something about what they want—provided you know who “they” are. For example, a student who goes to an admissions web site wants to something about getting in. There are many questions or subsets of that information, but lets assume that if they wanted to know about studying philosophy at Suffolk. Instead of going to Admission and Financial Aid, they're more likely to go to the philosophy department.

But once they're in your area, how do you know what they want?

The best place to start is with the obvious—certain major categories of information that you know are relevant to your department or area. If a category is narrow, like “How can I travel to or from the Suffolk Madrid campus,” the information might reside on a single page.

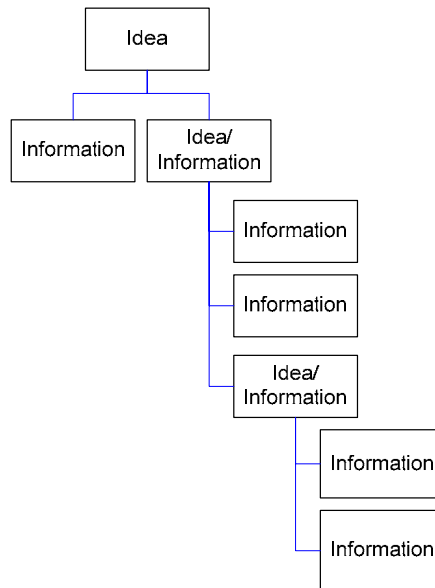
If the category is broad, it might reside on numerous pages. So, if someone is thinking about getting an MBA, they might go to the Sawyer School MBA page. But a simple explanation won't do.

They might want to know about the different types of MBA. So the first page about the MBA has to be somewhat general. It may include critical information about our MBA Program—such as the fact that we’re accredited by AACSB International (You’ll probably want to make that name a link, because readers might not know what it means!), and then it might introduce them to some of the possibilities: Concentrations in the MBA, Joint Degrees, and perhaps even non-degree options, that they might not even know are available. That opens gateways to more pages, each with pages linking from them. As they move further down in the hierarchy—say, starting at MBA, then on to a listing of the ten different concentrations we offer, and then to specifics about those programs, the information they’ll need becomes more specific.

## Putting things in order

When we organize Information on our Web site, we begin with an idea. That idea is a thing we can put on a page. If that’s all there is to it, then our site is just one page. But if that idea leads to other pieces of information, those may appear on other pages. That chain can continue, with one idea having several bits of information on pages below it in the structure. And some of those bits of information can also be ideas that lead to other bits of information.

Ultimately, the ideas and information develop into a tree that we can refer to as the information architecture of the site. That tree can be illustrated as branching horizontally, as in this diagram, or it can be illustrated vertically, as in the next.



On a large site, the information architecture can become very complex. The Suffolk University site, for example, consists of thousands of pages. If everything works well, it should only take a few moments—and a few mouse clicks—for a visitor to our site to find the requirements for admission, the names of faculty members in the English Department, the requirements for a major in Accounting, the Counseling Center, or a map of the campus.

If you plan to add pages to your site, think first about the existing hierarchy of information. Unless you plan to redesign your site, that hierarchy of information, also known as the

information architecture, has already been determined, and you will only be modifying it slightly.

Also, think about how existing material on the site is organized now it may be by

- Subject matter (admission, financial aid, etc.)
- Audience (prospective students, parents, faculty and staff, etc.)
- Tasks (registration, apply for leave of absence, online bill payment, etc.)

Changing the type of organization in mid-stream may make your site difficult to navigate—and your information impossible to find.

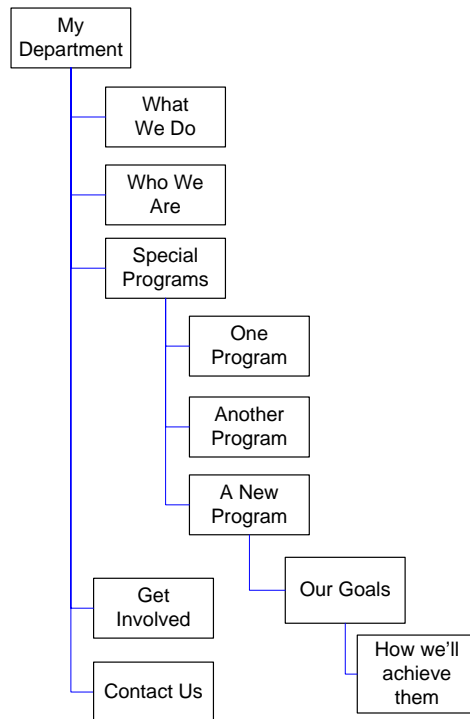
If you opt to change the organization of your site, remember these guidelines:

1. When you're done, everything on your site should be consistent. Move everything as needed. If you leave something out of place, perhaps because "that's where it's always been," you'll be doing a huge disservice to yourself and your readers.
2. Only make major changes when the timing is appropriate. It doesn't make much sense to reorganize your content while many users are in the midst of using it—like in the middle of registration, or a week before an application deadline. Wait until a slow period.
3. If you're planning to make large changes, consult first with Web Services, at [webadmin@suffolk.edu](mailto:webadmin@suffolk.edu), and any other web stakeholders who may be affected by what you do.)

Whenever you do make a change, start with the broadest, most obvious or intuitive category, then work your way down, branching out as you go. If you're adding a complex new category of information to your site, you might want to make a diagram. Here's what it may look like on paper when a department, say a research center, adds a new program to their agenda.

After we determine how much information we wanted to make available to visitors, we can separate it out into a hierarchical structure. Notice that, in this instance, we've drawn our diagram vertically, to represent the left-hand navigation as it will appear on the new site.

Of course, this branch of our tree can continue with many pages of additional information as the program develops.



Once we have a diagram, we need to stop and think:

- Is the new information placed where our audience can find it?
- Is this all the information our audience might need?
- Is it more than they might need?
- Is it relevant to the audience?
- Are there other pieces of information we need to address?

Some visitors may want more information—or different types of information—than others. They may also have different approaches to the task of finding what they want.

- They may be looking for something they know is on the site, although they haven't seen it.
- They may be looking for something they've already seen on your site.
- They may just be exploring.
- They may not have a clear understanding of what information they need, so they don't know exactly what they're looking for.

Your organization should be equally useful in all of these cases. By creating an intuitive, hierarchical organization, you can make it more likely that they get what they want—and even, if you've done a good job, what you want them to have.

Place your material carefully. In the diagram above, Our Goals and How we'll achieve them, apply only to the New Program that you're about to add. Obviously, you wouldn't want to place the goals of your entire organization here. That might be on your home page, or on a page that links directly from that, called Our Goals.

By the way, if you call that page “Aspirations,” or “Good Intentions,” not many people will know what’s on the page, and they won’t bother to open it. Keep it obvious, short, and simple.

Now that you’ve organized your material, you’re just about ready to start writing. For each page, you’ll need to know

- What is the most important idea or piece of information?
- Is it the focus of this page?
- Is the information on the page complete? Does it answer a question for your reader?
- Is everything on the page true, and is it supported by readily available supporting data?
- Who is your target audience?
- How do you want them to respond to the information on this page?
- Is your tone appropriate for this audience?
- Does your page represent your department, and the University, in a positive light?
- Is there anything in what you’re saying that could keep your target audience from hearing what you have to say? Remember, our audience is often global, representing numerous cultures and beliefs.

If you provide the information your visitors want, and you organize it in a way that’s easy for them to find it (Remember, Don’t Make Me Think!), you’ve done well. And chances are they’ll get what they want before they leave your site.

## **Three Reasons Visitors Leave a Web Site**

### **They found what they were looking for**

There is only one good reason for a person to leave a Web site. And that is that they’ve found everything they wanted to know, at least for now. If they found it easily, and it’s what they wanted to hear, they’re likely to come back again to find out more.

But there are two other reasons people leave Web sites.

### **Navigation that makes them think**

The navigation and content haven’t been clear, and they couldn’t find what they were looking for.

They get frustrated, so they go looking somewhere else. Don’t forget that they haven’t paid to visit, and the only investment they have in staying is that we continue to give them gratification—a reason to stay.

### **The site is annoying**

The site is not helpful. It isn’t chock full of interesting facts and details, but instead falls back on clichés and vague statements.

It isn't written clearly and concisely.

It rambles on and on, with long pages that make it difficult to find the information the visitor needs.

It's written for somebody other than the visitor.

It's loaded with happy talk. Let's take a closer look at this one:

**Case in Point:** Steve Krug's primary rule about not annoying the reader is "Happy talk must die." Here are just a few examples of happy talk:

No "Welcome" (They're here for information, and if they used a search engine, they will miss it anyway.)

No "In the following pages, you'll find..." (That's the job of the menu).

No "We're glad you..." (Who cares?)

No "We've tried to..." (Either you did or you didn't and it was your job to do it

No "We hope, strive, or work hard to...."

## Talk to me

It's useful to think of a web visit as a conversation. Your visitor controls the conversation by selective reading on the page, and by navigating from one page to the other. In order to keep up your end of the conversation, you will need to anticipate what your visitors might want to talk about, and how they want to be addressed. A visitor who finds all the answers to his questions on your site has had a successful conversation.

So how should you address your visitor? The best way to do that is to have one or more personas (see section III.) in mind. Then, just write as if you were talking to them. For example, if you're addressing a prospective undergraduate, you want to use a more conversational style than you would if you are a faculty member addressing your peers. And you might make certain assumptions that you wouldn't make for their baby boom parents.

**Hint:** Instant messaging and chat rooms have led today's teens to be far more conversational in their writing than the previous generation. Interestingly, instant messaging shorthand like CU (see you) and lol (laugh out loud) have not carried over to other media.

## Happy Talk and other turn-offs

This is some of the most painful stuff of learning to write for the Web—because each of us cares about what we're doing, and it's natural for us to want to express that. But some things, even things that are perfectly well-intentioned, just don't belong on a web page. Some of those fall into the category defined by Steve Krug as Happy Talk.

Welcome to the Web site of the Rocket Science Department. We're grateful for this opportunity to try to serve you. We've tried to find all the important information you want about our Rocket Science Department. And

we've worked hard to put it into the pages of our Web site.  
We hope you'll enjoy your visit.

Sincerely,

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky

Department Chair

What's wrong with this page? Just about everything:

- Let's start with the Welcome. Remember, most visitors will come to your site from a search engine. So which page is first? But even then, who thinks that welcome is for them? Welcome is personal. And that means in a personal letter, an email, or face to face. Not on the Web. It's better to welcome a visitor by giving them the information they want.
- Speaking of letters, that signature at the end isn't really very appropriate. The information on this page isn't a personal message. Personal messages are best reserved for the individuals at the highest levels of an institution. So even though Konstantin Tsiolkovsky is thought of as the father of astronautics, nobody will care that he wrote this content.
- OK, what about all this caring talk? We're grateful. We hope. Your reader doesn't know you. Better to show you care by getting straight to the point.
- We've tried. We've worked hard. Better to get straight to the product of all that caring. And think about this. What if the first sentence on the home page of the Billing Department says "We really try to be as accurate as we can?"

What's left? Nothing. If the Rocket Science Department wants to create an effective home page, they'll be better off talking about Rocket Science.

## Can I start writing now?

If you feel somewhat comfortable with everything you've read so far—and it's okay if it still seems a bit daunting to write a page that speaks individually to a half-dozen student personas plus three parent personas and a high school advisor (and don't forget that brilliant faculty member your department is trying to lure to Boston).... Then you're 90 percent there.

The rest is all a matter of form, and, while it's critical to the success of your Web pages, none of it is rocket science.

## II. What You Need to Know While You Write

### Sweat the details.

There is a rumor going around that Microsoft was unhappy with the number of visitors to one of the pages on their web site. And according to that rumor, they increased the traffic to that page by a whopping 300% by changing one word.

There's no way to substantiate this rumor, and Microsoft isn't about to tell anyone what page that was. But there are many similar (if less dramatic) stories about little things changing the impact of web pages.

It's worth the effort to pay attention to anything and everything that can improve your Web page.

### The Ideal Web page

First of all, there is no ideal web page. There's no way to compare, for example, a page about the excitement of Boston with one about degree requirements or registration procedures.

But there are certain ideals that a Web page can strive toward.

- It is short and to the point.
- It is useful and informative.
- It sticks to the topic, and, in most cases, there is only one.
- It is easy for the reader to scan.
- It's where it belongs, so it's easy to find in the site's navigation.

Remember that our visitors aren't looking for Dostoevsky here, just information. The more quickly, more easily they find that information, the happier they are. And the better the page is.

The Suffolk University site has many different kinds of Web pages, each with its own purpose. A profile of a successful student, alumnus or faculty member that appears on the home page is meant to tell a story that will help make Suffolk seem appealing to prospective students, parents, and high school advisors. A page about how to fill out a Financial Aid form is meant to be informative, clarifying, and, perhaps even comforting or encouraging.

Even within a sub-site, there can be several different kinds of pages. Let's look at a small site for the Anthropology Department.

The home page of the Anthropology Department might

- Briefly tell any visitor what anthropology is
- Talk about the intrinsic values of studying anthropology
- Demonstrate the quality of our Anthropology program and faculty
- Illustrate unique qualities within the department

- Introduce some of the opportunities available to the Anthropology graduate, which may extend to other fields of further study, jobs in various industries, and so on...

This last item could help the department attract students. It could also help parents answer the question, “Why my child?” It could broaden the understanding of a high school advisor. And it might attract interesting new faculty.

The next few pages would probably address the undergraduate and graduate programs of study, the curriculum, required coursework, faculty, honors programs, and perhaps departmental news or event listings. Those pages will be organized differently. They will be much more straightforward, perhaps even formulaic. Relative to the home page, they might seem downright dull, although they are equally informative, useful and interesting to our audience.

**Hint:** Matter-of-fact pages that just communicate information don't have to be dull. By using active, rather than passive voice, and including interesting information, you can make them interesting to the reader. Remember that the concept of “dull,” or “interesting,” for that matter, has a lot to do with the interests and pursuits of the reader.

And the last page? Contact Us. Don't offer your contact information at the beginning if you want people to read your site.

Of course, on a real department web site, there will be much more information, and perhaps many more pages.

So, what might seem to be a rule on the home page may not apply in the same way—or even at all—on other pages. That's why there are only a few hard and fast rules, but many guidelines. We can't ignore them because they're guidelines, but we have to consider whether they apply given the purpose of the page.

## Words on the Web

### Choose your words carefully

Use obvious, simple words. Our audience ranges from teenagers to highly educated adults. Make every word understandable to every appropriate member of your audience.

Remember that every word you write represents the University. If you think it may sound dumb or offensive, so will a potential applicant, a parent, or faculty member. Count on it. The same thing applies to stuffiness or arrogance, or any other quality we wouldn't want to see associated with Suffolk.

Terminology that might be everyday to a biochemist or a financial analyst is appropriate on some pages, not on others. Decide if your audience consists mostly biochemists or financial analysts, or if you need to speak to a broader group.

Don't use slang. Different expressions may mean different things in different parts of the US, and they may mean very different things—or nothing at all—to prospective students in other countries.

Use humor judiciously, if at all. Chances are, somebody will misinterpret what you meant. And it's certainly not worth the risk of offending anyone.

Don't use hyperbole. "Excellence," "quality," and "exciting" are just a few of the words that can easily be taken as meaningless fluff. They can even create mistrust. But if you back them up with specifics, they can be powerful. Use them judiciously. It's better to demonstrate than to pat yourself on the back.

Avoid exclamatory announcements. And if you've used more than one exclamation point in twenty pages of web copy, you've used too many.

A statement like, "Good News! Now you can sign up Online!" can appear childish or patronizing. At the very least, it lacks the very level of sophistication we expect from our audience.

Always be honest. At the very least, exaggerated or inaccurate statements create mistrust, and they do a disservice to your audience. And in some cases, they can create unwanted liability for the University.

Avoid Web instructions whenever you can. Try not to say "for more information click here." If there is more [information](#) about something, make it a text link. If there's information in the left hand navigation menu, you shouldn't have to tell people to look at the left-hand navigation menu. Web users know how to use the navigation without your help.

Be succinct. Every word counts on the Web. Try to get right to the point, and stay there.

Copy should be easy to read and understand. There should be no language that the visitor might not understand, and it should be presented clearly and plainly. Confusing or vague copy is frustrating to the reader, and makes that person want to go away.

- **CASE IN POINT:** If you make your content exciting, you don't have to say that it is.

How do you know? Ask somebody outside your department to read your copy. Whatever you've written will be new to them. If it's not clear, coherent, informative, interesting, and inviting—maybe even exciting—you might want to go back and try again.

- Here's an example taken from the Northwestern University Philosophy department home page. While the welcome letter format is not recommended, look at the way this content designed to generate excitement:

"The department has maintained its maverick position in American philosophy since the 1950's, being one of the few places in the philosophical landscape that has consistently maintained a first rate program that spans both the European and Anglo-American philosophical traditions."<sup>6</sup>

## Use words that help your audience identify properly with your content.

If you are speaking almost exclusively to a specific audience, such as potential graduate students, for example, feel free to use direct address: "You will find many options...."

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.philosophy.northwestern.edu/> Northwestern

Remember what we said about Happy Talk a little while ago? Well, by talking directly to your audience, you can create some of the same warmth, and the same connection, that the head of the Rocket Science Department wanted.

If your audience is broader, including, perhaps, students, parents, and high school advisors, indirect address might be more appropriate: “Students will find many options....”

## **Use fewer words.**

When writing copy, try to be economical with your use of words.

In your first edit of that copy, cut as many words as possible.

Repeat this exercise until you have as few words as you can manage. You will be surprised how many words you can eliminate while keeping your meaning intact. Try this: Cut out ten percent, cut out ten percent, and cut out ten percent again.

In using fewer words, make sure each word is working as hard as it can. For example, “A beautiful far-away island.” doesn’t say much, while “A pristine tropical island” speaks volumes.

Remember that when your intention is to create an impression or impart a feeling, it will usually be longer and more expressive than straight informational text.

## **Sentences on the Web**

Use full sentences, and punctuate them properly. Sentence fragments may be used occasionally on the Web in marketing copy, but only on primary marketing pages.

Use the active voice. Passive constructions are longer and more complicated. They tend to be more wordy and harder to scan. At the same time, there may be times when a passive construction allows you to front-load the information that will catch a reader’s eye most effectively. Jakob Nielsen, in making this point, notes that, in scanning, readers often see only the first two words of a paragraph.<sup>7</sup>

In general, try to keep your sentences short. Longer sentences are harder to scan, and it takes more effort (remember, don’t make me think) to discern their meaning. (Read that sentence again. “Discern?” On the Web, “determine” would be a better choice.)

Do not include lists of three or more items in sentence form. Use a list, in either numbered or bullet form.

Unless the order must be specific, bullets are preferred. If you are not sure how to punctuate a bulleted list, consult the Chicago Manual of Style. (Note that the bullet points should be grammatically parallel: write, edit, print—not write, editing, print).

Here’s an example of the wrong way:

“Our student body consists of 4,617 undergraduate students, 2,043 graduate students, with 3,628 in the College of Arts & Sciences, 3,032 in the Sawyer Business School, 1,672 in the Law School, for a total of 8,332 students.”

Here’s the same information, presented the right way:

---

<sup>7</sup> Nielsen, Jakob, Alertbox, October 22, 2007 <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/passive-voice.html>

### About our Students:

- 4,617 Undergraduate
- 2,043 Graduate
- 3,628 College of Arts and Sciences
- 3,032 Sawyer Business School
- 1,672 Law School
- 8,332 Total students

## Paragraphs on the Web

Respect the fact that your reader is most likely scanning the page, and sees your copy in chunks.

Paragraphs should be short. These bite-sized chunks of information are easier to digest. Each paragraph should answer one particular question. If there are two ideas, they should be expressed in two paragraphs. If your paragraph is longer than three or four lines, consider breaking it in two.

Help the reader see what the paragraph is about by putting your concluding, or summary sentence first. Remember the advice about sentences, and front-load your paragraph with the content that will catch the reader's eye most effectively. Follow it with the supporting details.

Here's an example of how you might write something for print, building toward a conclusion:

“Our faculty members conduct high-level research, publish books and articles, advise multinational corporations and governments, and serve as expert consultants around the world. More than 90 percent hold a PhD or equivalent. They are outstanding scholars and leaders in their fields.”

Here's how you might write it for the Web.

“Our faculty members are outstanding scholars and leaders in their fields. They conduct high-level research, publish books and articles, advise multinational corporations and governments, and serve as expert consultants around the world. More than 90 percent hold a PhD or equivalent.”

Here, the broad idea comes first, so it's easier for the reader to find by scanning the page. After the claim is made, it is followed—and substantiated—by supporting details. By the way, whenever you make a claim, you should back it up immediately—this maintains the reader's trust in a medium that's all too easy to mistrust.

At the same time, remember Neilsen's advice about sentences, and try to front-load your paragraph with the content that will catch the reader's eye most effectively. At times, you may have to choose between opening with an eye-catching detail or a more generalized summary. If possible, base your choice on your knowledge of your audience, not on your personal preference.

## Use headers and subheads to guide your reader.

Every page must have a header. If the page is referenced in the menu, the header should be the same as the menu reference. If the link to the page is “Academic Requirements,” the page header should not read “Things You Need to Do.” It could, however, read “Academic Requirements for a Degree in Economics.”

In much the same way that you divide up paragraphs to create shorter chunks, use subheads to divide up your page. Again, you’re making easier for the visitor to find the information he or she seeks.

If you have to use sub-sub-heads, you’re probably putting too much information on one page. Go back to “Give them what they want, the way they want it” and review the guidelines for organizing your content.

## Pictures on the Web

We all like to look at pictures. So if you think people are coming to your page to see pictures, use them.

- Pictures are great if you have a group of visitors who want to see themselves on the Web after an alumni gathering, for example.
- One or even a few carefully selected photos can help convey the excitement of an event, such as the Temple Street Fair, the annual 5K Road Race & Family Walk, or an athletic event.
- A student art exhibit can be a great use of images.

But if people will be coming to your page for information, pictures are likely to get in the way. They push information further down from the top of the page, where it’s most likely to be seen. They take emphasis away from content.

But that’s not the biggest stumbling block a picture can pose on your Web page. More often than not, a picture will make the visitor stop and think. And while they’re wondering what that picture means, they’re being taken away from their purpose on that page... and the quest for information they need to make an informed decision about Suffolk University.

- Before you place a picture on your page, always ask yourself:
- Does this photograph provide my readers with significant information about the material on my page?
- Does it enhance the information in the text on that page?
- Is it for the benefit of the people who visit your site?
- Is it a good picture?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then it may be a good idea to use a photograph.

## What makes a good picture?

If you were building your own Web site, you’d have lots of latitude to select any pictures you like. Keep in mind, whenever you post a picture to the Suffolk Web site, that your choices reflect on the professionalism and standards of the institution as a whole. And remember, any pictures, just like the text you put on your pages, should have immediate

value to our site visitors. You may like a picture, or think that it makes your page look better, but remember that, in order to be appropriate for the web, it needs to convey useful, obvious, easily-understood information.

That information should also have real value to the reader.

### **Overall Quality**

Some things are pretty obvious. A good picture is in focus. It's reasonably well-lighted, so there are no deep shadows, and everything is clear and easy to see.

### **Composition**

The Web is a medium of quick impressions. People won't stop to puzzle out what your picture is about. In fact, if they can't see what it's about right away, they may find it annoying. Make sure your subject is the center of attention. And remember that a photo on the Web is usually small. So it's best to keep your pictures simple.

Here is a picture that won't work well on the Web. There's too much going on. What do you think the viewer will look at first? The wall socket? The plant? The student? How long will the viewer spend trying to take it all in—or will the picture just be ignored?

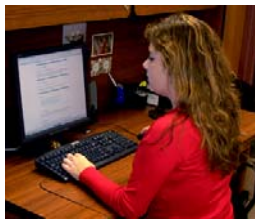


Of course, this picture is actually a bit large for a Web page. It should really be sized more like this:



Here's the same picture, cropped to work on a web page. Notice how

1. We have removed all distractions, so the eye is immediately drawn to the subject of the photo.
2. The subject of the photo is larger and easier to see, even though the image is smaller. This smaller image of the space above the fold, so more text will be visible without scrolling.
3. There are no extraneous details to distract the reader.



## Size

A picture may look great on your Web page, but if it takes even a few seconds to load, most people won't ever see it. In fact, pictures that take too long to load are one of the primary reasons that visitors leave a site.

For more information about recommended image sizes, see the Web Content Provider's Guide.

## Can it be fixed?

Some pictures can't be helped. They just don't work because they're out of focus, or for some other reason. Others can be helped considerably. In many cases, cropping can improve the composition of a photo by removing extraneous material. Sometimes, pictures can be darkened or lightened. Color balance can sometimes be adjusted (is it a little green?) and the contrast can be adjusted. Of course, not everything can be fixed so if you have the option to use a better picture, that's always preferable.

## Logos, Clip Art

Almost without exception, a picture on the Web should be a photograph. Logos, clip art, and other types of images are simply taking up space on your page... they don't provide information to the reader.

Years ago, it seemed that everyone was using clip art on the web. Today, clip art is seen as an annoyance. If you're thinking of using clip art on a page, there's a better, more professional way to accomplish your goal. Your Web Administrator may be able to make a suggestion.

### **Animated Images**

Animated images are distracting. That's why you see them in advertisements on web browsers... they take your attention away from the content you came to see, in an attempt to lure you to another site. In short, they are annoying and counterproductive.

Animated images on the Web can also be harmful. Some visitors to your site may find animations more than distracting: they can trigger serious medical consequences, such as migraines or seizures.

### **Pages on the Web**

Unlike a page in print, a Web page can be infinitely long. That's a very bad idea.

When a visitor opens a Web page in his or her browser (assuming that the browser window is maximized), the part of the page that is visible is called "above the fold." This area may vary on different monitors.

If it's practical, keep everything above the fold. Do this by controlling the amount of text, not by trying to manipulate the formatting.

If you have more information, try to put the most important information above the fold.

Use hypertext links to connect your reader to other useful information.

If you make reference to information that appears elsewhere in the site, and you think that information might be useful to the reader of the information that is on a specific page, use a text link. For example, on the page about the Archeology Program within the Anthropology Department, you should use a text link if you refer to the department: "Archeology is the first program established within the [Anthropology Department](#), and to this day enjoys a leading position..."

Don't use too many text links or your page will be difficult to read. The first text links to go are those that link to pages already provided in the navigation menus.

### **After you've finished your page**

Check to be sure that your page is

- Clean and easy to look at
- Coherent, and covers only the limited topic that page was intended to address
- Broken neatly into chunks

See if your subheads and paragraphs make it easy to know just what's on the page within two or three seconds. More than that, and your reader will probably miss something important.

And it's always a good idea to have someone else look at what you've written.

### **Review your page again.**

Is it as compelling as you can make it? Even basic information, that may seem dull and uninteresting, means something to somebody. If it doesn't, why post it at all?

Does it address the proper audience(s)?

### **Trust your own judgment**

Try to put yourself in the position of the target audience each time you read a page. You'll know if it's really good, if it's okay for now, if it needs some improvement, or if it just doesn't work.

### **Navigation on the Web**

If your visitor can't find your page, they'll never see what you've written. If you're adding pages to your site, be sure they're placed where visitors are most likely to look for them.

Using the "See Also" feature to add links in the right hand column can provide additional navigation, usually outside your sub-site, that may be of interest to the visitor on that page.

Hypertext links can be helpful, but don't overdo it. Too many text links are distracting, and links to items already listed in your left-hand navigation are redundant.

### III. Putting your Best Foot Forward—Features and Benefits

As a university, we want to put our best foot forward. We offer valuable services. Telling our visitors about them, in a manner that is representative of our aspirations and responsibilities as an institution of higher education, is the best way we have let people know what we do.

Of course, with that, we must always be aware of our audience and their needs. We don't want to "sell" a student on coming to Suffolk when Suffolk may, for whatever reason, be a good choice for that student. It's better to think of yourself as presenting rather than selling.

Ideally, nearly every page of the Web site presents something we hope may be of value to our audience, although in many instances, the message may be subtle. For example a Contact Us page may just a practical tool, but it's also one of the ways to tell a visitor that we are accessible—provided, of course, that the page has good information, including live email links, and, if appropriate, and easy-to-use form.

It's equally important that we follow up promptly on their requests.

#### The difference between features and benefits

A feature is a fact that relates to your topic. Suffolk University stands at the heart of Beacon Hill. That's a feature. We're convenient to the State House, the financial and arts districts. All features.

A benefit is a point of value to the reader that amplifies a feature:

Our proximity to the State House gives our students an opportunity for government internships. Our Beacon Hill location gives Suffolk students a safe, convenient opportunity to enjoy the city on many levels.

Even if a feature has a benefit that's obvious to you, it may not be obvious to everyone. If you don't follow a feature immediately with a benefit, your statement may lack impact, or be meaningless to at least some of your readers.

#### Be thoughtful about what you say

Suffolk may not be right for everyone. In recommending Suffolk to potential students, parents, and other audiences, we want to be sure that we're not misleading. If we present the good points of Suffolk—with an emphasis on the features and benefits that are uniquely ours—our readers will make that final decision.

**Case in Point:** A high-school student who comes to our site looking for an idyllic campus in a rural environment should know right away to look elsewhere.

A student looking for an urban campus will want to see the specific features and benefits of our urban campus. Why, among all the urban campuses, would that student choose Suffolk?

## Positioning your department

Marketing experts frequently talk about Positioning<sup>8</sup>. Loosely defined positioning is the process of establishing a product in the user's mind.

With so many university's departments or areas at all the schools on the Web, you can imagine that it might be difficult to position your department in a manner that would be uniquely attractive to students, potential faculty, and all the other audiences you want to address.

Do a little search of your own.

If you're writing about something that's common to most colleges and Universities, like how to fill out an online form, something as simple as a welcoming tone of voice and a clear set of instructions may set you apart, while it also gives a positive impression about the University as a whole.

If you're writing for the Anthropology Department, look at as many anthropology departments as you can. You'll find most of them look pretty much the same. Only a few stand out, because of features that are unique to them:

- A particular specialty
- A great faculty, or even one outstanding faculty member
- A field site
- A relationship to businesses, government agencies, or other complementary organizations
- A slightly different perspective
- A high level of faculty support and individual attention to students
- Every anthropology department is unique, yet how many express that uniqueness that enables a potential student to make the best choice?

Be as specific as possible about your department, your area, or your service. Leave it to other pages on the Suffolk Web site talk about Beacon Hill or other benefits that apply more to the University or the school than they do to your topic.

Of course, if you do make a claim, be sure to substantiate it. Don't overstate, but don't understate either. Write about what you do best as well as you can. The students who want what you offer will find you.

---

<sup>8</sup> Trout, Jack, and Ries, Al, Positioning: *The Battle for Your Mind* (New York, McGraw Hill, 2000)

## IV. What to Remember after You've Written

After you've written your web copy, spell-checked it, proofread it carefully, had it approved and posted it to the Web, you may think you're finished with it, at least for a while.

You're not. The web is a vibrant, interactive medium, and web pages change, sometimes with great frequency. Consider the purpose of your page, and the potential longevity of your content. You might need to update every week, every semester, or every year.

Visit your website frequently, and check to be sure it's up-to-date. While you're there, check any links to outside sites. Those can change at any time, and unless you keep an eye on them, you're likely to end up with dead links after a while.

Finally, listen to your audience. If your department or area receives frequent calls or emails about a particular question, maybe you should answer it—or if you thought you had, maybe you should consider a revision—on your site.

## V. Venturing into the Blogosphere

Blogs have become a popular and important means of Web communication.

Most personal blogs (Web+Log) take the form of online diaries. Entries appear chronologically, with the newest first. Most blogs include text and pictures, and some include other media, such as audio and video files

Other blogs are collections of news stories. Some act as a central resource for political candidates or activist communities. Other blogs are more focused on providing information to a specific user community. The [Mildred F. Sawyer Library Blog](#), created by the Sawyer librarians, is a solid example of this format: an information-rich communication resource providing news, information and updates on library databases and other electronic resources, hints for conducting research, and new library acquisitions to a thoughtfully defined audience.

Because younger, web-savvy (and not-so-savvy) consumers tend to be more trusting of their peers than they are of marketers, some companies and institutions have established links to blogging communities or individual blogs to enhance their credibility. And while this can be effective, it can also be counter-productive. If visitors see the blogs as independent communications, they are more likely to trust the content. If they see the blogs as owned, managed, or manipulated by marketers, they may be likely to mistrust or discredit the marketer or sponsor.

A blog that communicates effectively with students will:

- Be independent, and not directly connected to, or owned, by the sponsor. A link from a site to an independent blog is most effective.
- Use simple, straightforward, colloquial language—in the words of a real student. On the other hand, it shouldn't be dumbed down. It should be age-appropriate without being demeaning.
- Be honest and forthright. Not everything is good anywhere.
- Give real insight into those aspects of school life with which we would expect the student to be familiar.

- Express the personality of the blogger.
- Be more broadly focused than the marketing objective of the sponsor. A student blog, for example, will be more effective as a real student diary, not simply a collection of accolades for an institution.
- Be updated frequently. Many good bloggers post daily.

In addition, a student blog becomes more effective if it includes photos and accepts comments. Bloggers who accept comments should recognize that monitoring comments can take time and energy.

Departments who link to bloggers should list their blog links on a dedicated Web page. This page should tell visitors what the blog is about, clearly indicate that the blog is not a part of the Suffolk University Web Site, and provide a University-approved disclaimer.

Web Services provides a sample page, including a disclaimer,

For more information about blogging, including precautionary measures student bloggers should take to protect themselves, a sample blog and blog link pages, a disclaimer, and University guidelines, visit the Suffolk University ITS Web Services site under [Web 2.0 Tools](#).

## **VI. More Information about Writing for the Web**

If you have any questions or want advice about how to make your web copy as effective as possible, contact your Web Administrator as listed in the Content Provider's Guide, or Web Services at [webadmin@suffolk.edu](mailto:webadmin@suffolk.edu).

## Bibliography

Web design, Web usability, and Web writing are not exact sciences. Web practices are subject, in part, to interpretation, and may vary depending on specific applications. For example, a soft drink marketing site, a government site, and a university site may all follow very different practices that, taken out of context, may appear to be contradictory.

Some of the information in the listings that follow may not be in full agreement with Suffolk University Web policies or recommended practices, and content providers should always defer to the Suffolk University Web Content Provider's Guides, Suffolk University Web Guidelines, and Suffolk University Policies and procedures where applicable.

- Becker, Steven, *Suffolk University Web Content Provider's Guide, Version 4.1* (Boston, Suffolk University, 2007)
- Krug, Steve, *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability, Second Edition* (Berkeley, New Riders Publishing, 2005) <http://www.sensible.com/>
- Leise, Fred, *Executive Brief: Best Practices in Website Content Organization* (Boulder, Intuitect, 2007)
- Lynch, Patrick, and Horton, Sarah, *Web Style Guide, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (New Haven, Yale University, 2001)
- Nielsen, Jakob, *Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity*, (Indianapolis, New Riders Publishing, 2000)
- Nielsen, Jakob, Schemenaur, PJ, and Fox, Jonathan, *Writing for the Web*, (Sun Microsystems, 2007) <http://www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/>
- Neilsen, Jakob, useit.com: Jakob Nielsen's Website: Alertbox <http://www.useit.com/>
- Pepper, Don, and Rogers, Martha, PhD., *The One to One Future* (New York, Doubleday, 1993)
- Price, Jonathan and Lisa, *Hot Text, Web Writing that Works* (Indianapolis, New Riders Publishing, 2002)
- Rockley, Ann, *Managing Enterprise Content: A Unified Content Strategy* (Indianapolis, New Riders Publishing, 2003)
- Trout, Jack, and Ries, Al, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (New York, McGraw Hill, 2000)
- Tufte, Edward, "On Ballots or Web Sites, Poor Design Sends the Wrong Message," *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 20, 2000.