



How to Write for the Web

This is a training tool developed by IDRC

Overview



- The Challenges
- Structure
- Style



Some Challenges

- Information overload
- Users are in control on Web
- Reading on screen is 25% slower than on paper
- Web users scan; few read every word
- Web users are impatient



Structure

- Every page must be independent
- Don't assume your readers know who you are, where they are, or what you're talking about

Structure: Who, What, When, Where, Why



- WHO – whose site is it?
- WHAT – one page, one purpose
- WHEN – how old is data?
- WHERE – location of site owner and dateline of information
- WHY – telling people why it is important to read

Structure: Appropriate Content



Rooting out **ROT** –
Redundant,
Outdated,
Trivial content

Structure: Inverted Pyramid



Most Important Information

Who what when where why

Less important information

Even less important info

Marginal information

Trivial Information

Cut This Out

Structure: "Chunk" into Bite-Size Pieces



- One page = one topic
- Use headings, subheadings
- Use micro-content or brief bits of text
- Highlight important information
- Use bulleted lists



Structure: Keywords

- Help search engines find you
- Don't be vague
- Use clear, descriptive titles and short descriptions



Structure: Graphics

- Don't overuse graphics
- Avoid graphics that are too busy
- Use graphics to reinforce, elaborate, or replace text
- Don't be afraid of white space



A Question of Style

- Shorter is better
- Long documents should:
 - have a table of contents
 - link to specific sections
 - use an overview
 - break into chunks
- Minimize the use of PDFs

Style: Get to the Point



- Don't shovel print online
- Edit, edit, edit – cut word count by half
- Avoid jargon
- Don't be bureaucratic
- Write short sentences
- Use an active voice

Style: Avoid Wordiness



- Eliminate unnecessary modifiers
- Change phrases to one word
- Be direct
- Avoid word redundancies

Style: Write for a Global Audience



- Where are you?
- Avoid slang and regionalisms
- Avoid terms such as “national”
- Identify currencies, measurement units
- Avoid abbreviations
- Think of translation

Style: The Trouble with Acronyms



IDRC

- International Disaster Reduction Conference
- International Dressage Riders Club
- International Dispute Resolution Centre
- International Development Research Centre
- International Data Resource Center
- Import Drag Racing Circuit



Style: Numbers

- Write dates in full
- Write complete phone numbers
- Round off numbers
- Limit statistics



Rules to Remember

- Crisp clear writing
- Proofread - don't trust spellcheckers
- Fact check ALL information
- Cite your sources

Five Tests for Quality Web Content



- The 3 second test
- The ID test
- The “so what” test
- The “yeah right” test
- The serenity test

Summary

Good luck with your web writing!



Checklist