

## Writing for the Web – A Quick Primer

### Typical Web User behavior:

- Scan the page feverishly, ignoring large portions of the page
- Look for the first link that vaguely resembles what the user's trying to find
- As soon as the user finds a half-way decent match, the user will click on the link

### Why don't users read pages and instead scan/skim?

- No time
- Only interested in a fraction of what's on the page (rest is irrelevant)
- Web surfers are good at scanning
- No serious penalty for guessing wrong

### Don't Make Me Think!

- Create a visual hierarchy of information
- Minimize noise
- Omit needless words
- Be ruthless
- Remove happy talk
- Remove unnecessary instructions

### Purposes of navigation:

- Help us find what we're looking for
- Tell us where we are
- Helps us feel grounded (not lost)
- Tells us what is here
- Tells us how to use the site (implicit: where to begin, what are options)
- Good impression

### Page design

- Create a clear (visual) hierarchy of information on each page
- More important is more prominent (use headers)
- Logical relations should be visually related
- Show nesting visually
- Use conventions
- Clearly define areas
- Make clickable obvious
- Minimize noise

### Page names:

- Every page needs a name
- Name should frame content
- Name should be prominent
- Name should match what was clicked

### Trunk test (from a random page), quickly determine (without careful reading):

- What site is this
- What page am I on (page name)
- What are the major sections (sections)
- What are my options at this level (local navigation)
- Where am I in the scheme of things (“You are here” indicators)
- How can I search

### How to plan the content

- To figure out your major sections, you need to put yourself into your customer's shoes. What are the most common things people are looking for (see stats) and is there a logical way to group this information?
- Then, start breaking down that content into logical sub-sections.
- Figure out a "home" for all of your important content and a logical path to get there. Ideally, the user should be able to get your content within two or three clicks.
- Make choices obvious and easy.
- Make it easy to read; avoid jargon if possible.
- Be specific. Explain why important, how to act, etc.
- Save steps wherever possible.
- Know what questions your visitors are likely to have, and answer them.
- Use descriptive and clear headings, subheadings, links.
- Focus on the primary message (rather than just cramming everything you can think of into one page).
- Make sure the information is truly useful before including it (otherwise, it's added clutter, which makes it more difficult to find the truly useful information).
- People should be able to figure out how the page is organized, how to navigate, good places to begin, what is “clickable.”
- Distill longer documents to their most important facts and include a summary with links to the main subheadings.
- Condense important points to bulleted lists rather than long paragraphs – people skim rather than read.
- Break up the text into small, manageable chunks.
- Remember capacity threshold: end users can only absorb so much information. Avoid “drinking from a fire hose” or “daunting staircase.”