University of West Florida

Writing for the Web

Marketing & Creative Services

University of West Florida

Today we are going to discuss…

- How to identify your audiences and understand them
- How to identify your goals & achieve them
- Ways you can help your audience
- How and why search engines are important
- Basic Guidelines for Writing Web Content

University of West Florida

Identify Your Audience

Ask These Questions:

- Who is sitting behind the screen?
- When are they visiting my website?
- Why are they visiting my website?
- What tone/voice will be most appealing to them?
- How can I help them find what they are looking for?

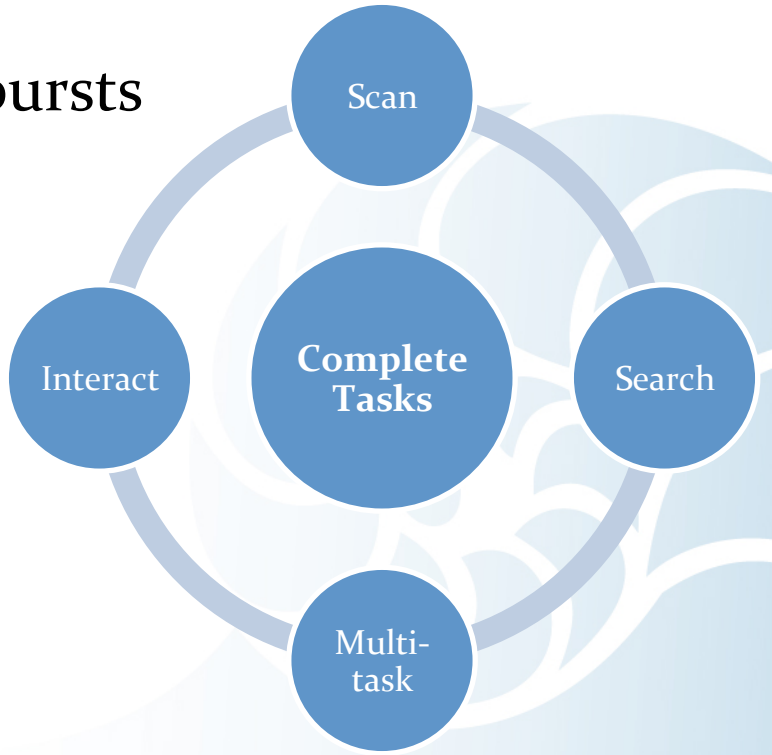
If you don't know the answers to the above questions for each of your audience types, seek them out. *Conduct research*.

In fact, M&CS has a report on our research key findings that may help you get started!

University of West Florida

Understand Your Audience

- Scan pages
- Pick out key words and phrases
- Read in quick, short bursts
- Respond to action oriented info
- Click and forage in search of info
- They multi-task



University of West Florida

Goals: The Most Important Decision

Is your goal to….

- Inform
- Engage
- Action
- Differentiate

In what format should you do that…

- Stories
- Profiles
- Tables of Information
- Videos, etc.

University of West Florida

Help Your Audiences: Formatting

Avoid Large Blocks of Text

- Be concise and to the point
- Use short paragraphs (2-3 sentences)
- Divide text blocks with headlines and subheads
- Write in inverted pyramid format

Other Tools

- Bulleted Lists
- Easy-to-Follow Steps
- Tables
- Infographics
- Blockquotes

University of West Florida

The Web is Different Than Print

In many ways, the web is like a PowerPoint presentation—once you get a chunk of copy going, it doesn't matter how scintillating the prose nor how important the information nor even how witty or on-brand your message is. The designers, alas, are right. It's just a static gray patch in a world of color and motion. If you write for the web in the same way I have written for this slide, you are writing for an audience of one…and that would be YOU because no one else will read this. Face it, no one will ever find their way through this thicket of letters again. Seriously, are you still reading this? I can't stand when people try to write a novel on a poor defenseless little website that never did anything to hurt anyone. You've got to be kidding me. Hopefully you are giggling at this point because really – this is ridiculous and totally unnecessary. However, I will say that we have quite a few sites that look like this and it really does baffle me.

Tip: Break up Blocks of Copy with Substantive Subheads

A scanner will grab that bit of info and someone looking for more info will remain oriented and grounded.

(sources: Joan Benson, senior writer, Stamats)

University of West Florida

Help Your Visitors: Organization

Organization

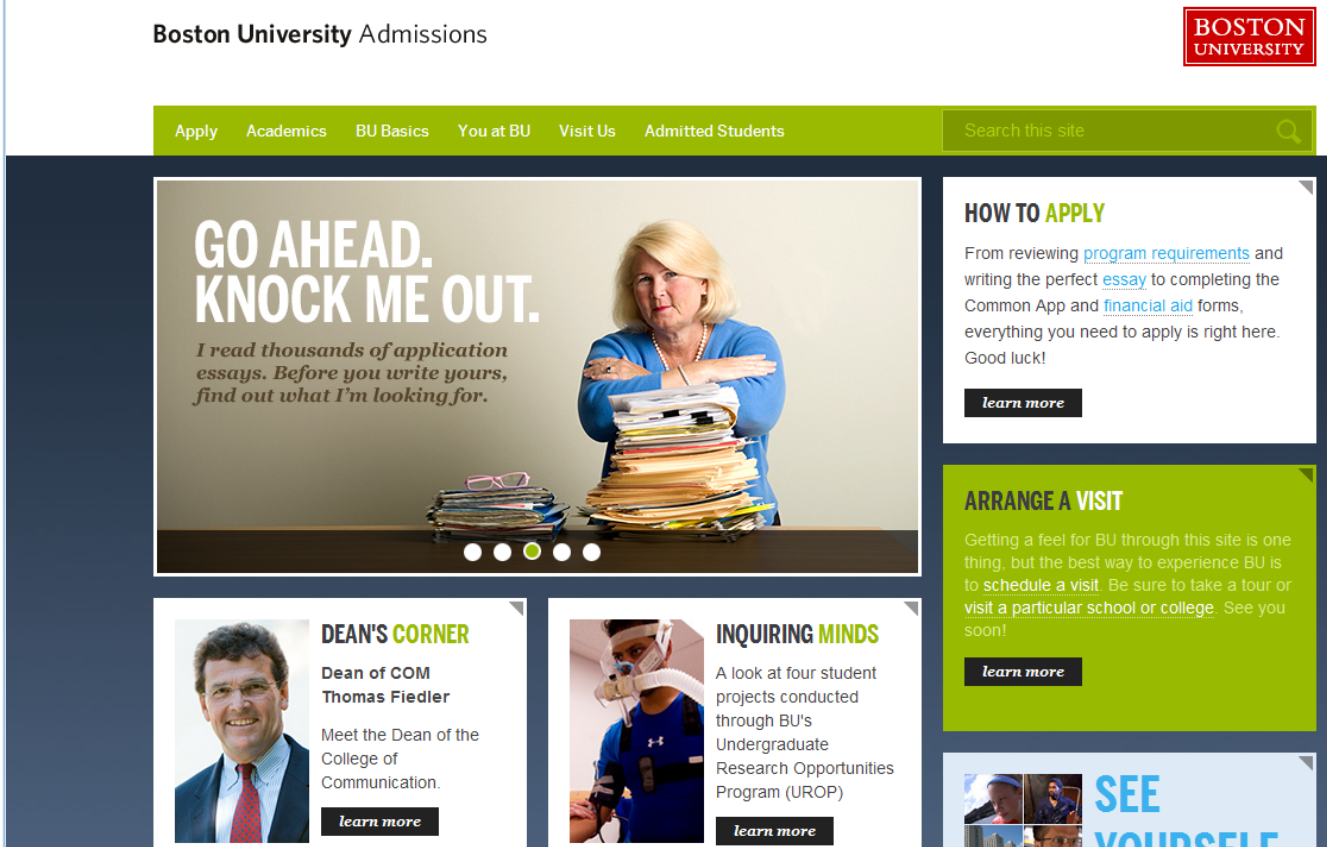
- Organize similar content consistently
- Help visitors know what to expect

University of West Florida

Help Your Visitors: Repetition

Repetition

- If it's important, say it in more than one way
- For action items, use repeated visual cues



University of West Florida

Help Your Visitors: Dynamic Content

- Content that changes automatically
- Content that changes regularly

University of West Florida

Help Your Visitors: Action Items

Action Items

- Should be defined when goals are developed
- Clearly state desired actions and point them out
- Convey energy urgency and/or motion

Click here to apply

vs.

Apply Now!

Take Responsibility for Visual Copy

University of West Florida

Help Your Visitors: Additional Tips

- Use simple language and words
- Use only one space after periods
- Avoid excess punctuation
- Use hyperlinks within text blocks
- Use more descriptive links, not “click here”
- Capitalize words in headlines except prepositions
- Create useful headlines that are visual cues
- Avoid passive voice
- Be credible and factual
- Avoid marketing fluff
- Use humor sparingly
- Proofread and use spell check

University of West Florida

Search Engines: Audience First

Rule #1

Always write for your visitors first.

THEN strategically weave search engine best practices into your overall web content plan.

University of West Florida

Search Engines: SEO

What is search engine optimization?

- Process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a Web site from search engines via “natural” search results
- The higher a site appears in search engine results, the more traffic it will receive
- Search engine “spiders” crawl Web sites indexing sites based on content and following links to other pages and sites
- Search engines then use complex algorithms to weigh other factors into the ultimate ranking

University of West Florida

Search Engines: Referral Links

#1 factor for Google is
high quality referral links

Other Factors

- Keywords used strategically throughout content
- Meaningful page titles
- Meaningful alt tags
- Meaningful link text
- Header tags
- Meta tags
- URL structures
- Site Maps

University of West Florida

Search Engines: Keywords

Keywords

- Consider what words and phrases people search for
- Look at the Web stats to see what words are currently leading users to your site.
- Weave relevant keywords throughout the content of your site. Keywords may be different depending on the particular content of each page.
- Do not stuff keywords. Try to weave them naturally into the content.
- Continually monitor and analyze your web statistics.

University of West Florida

Basic Web Writing Guidelines:

- Write for Your Audience – put their needs first
- Embrace Your Role – you help protect the brand
- Develop Visual Copy – cues that create interest
- Be Action-Oriented – encourage response
- Write Persuasively – connect the dots for them
- Embrace Brevity – be short and concise
- Write for Search Engines – help them help you
- Have a Goal – be strategic and have a purpose

University of West Florida

Group Discussion

Tell me one thing you are going to do this week to improve your department's web content!

University of West Florida

Conclusion

Any Questions?

Marketing & Creative Services