
Writing for
the Web

Module 4:

Structure Content



Info.Design
1725 Q Street NW, #201
Washington, DC
20009-2498

www.infodotdesign.com

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Module 4: Structure Content

The motivation behind all communication is to transfer information from one mind into another who will receive it as new information.

Richard Saul Wurman, *Information Anxiety 2*, 2001

Objectives:

- 4.1 → Gather in-depth information
- 4.2 → Evaluate content
- 4.3 → Chunk content
- 4.4 → Organize content

Introduction

We'll address the question, "What can I do as a writer to frame this information for the user?"


Up to this point, you've had the opportunity to think like a user and to frame a perspective for what you leave in and what you take out.

We now know that as Web writers, we have the opportunity to structure text so people can find and use it. This challenge differs from our traditional academic experience. In school, we know exactly what we are going to give the teacher: content. We never step back and ask, "How will the audience use this information?"

In this module, we'll further explore that challenge. We'll build on the rhetorical questions we asked in Module 2: Who is this audience? Why are they looking at this information? In what context will they view this information?

To travel there, we'll address the question, "What can I do as a writer to frame this information for my users?" Specifically, we'll ask:

- How can we get information out of our own heads?
- How can we gather information from our users' heads?
- How can we get information from the work environment?
- How can we evaluate the content we find?
- How can we chunk content?
- How can we organize content?

4.1 

Gather in-depth information

The conversation between the customer and interviewer about the customer's work (rather than about the system design) creates a shared understanding and commitment between groups.

Hugh Beyer and Karen Holtzblatt, *Contextual Design: Designing Customer-Centered Systems*, 1998



Individual
Exercise

Exercise: Gathering content

Discuss how we can gather the content to include on a website.

How do we get information out of our heads?

How do we get information out of our users' heads?

How do we get information out of the work environment?

Getting information out of our heads

In your work environment, you may be called on to write about information you understand or about which you have first-hand knowledge. Many writers use the acts of writing (drafting) and rewriting (revising) to think through what they want to say.

You may want to put words on paper and push them around—similar to how you might organize furniture in a room. Often, by seeing the words in front of you, you are able to see relationships and structure more easily. As a writer, don't think about your task the same way you might consider an essay question in school. Instead, respect the complexity of the task ahead and leave time for revision.

Understanding the writing process

...[The] first goal of writing, like reading, is to understand; only then can one make that understanding available to others in writing.

V.A. Howard and J.H.Barton, *Thinking on Paper*, 1986

Respecting the complexity of the task

Writers do not expect to churn out a finished product in one smooth, uninterrupted flow of writing effort. Rather, experienced writers know that they will inevitably discover something new during the writing process that causes them to rethink their projects.

I don't know anyone who can write a clean first draft...actually I do know a woman, but we don't like her very much.

Annie Lamott, *Bird* by *Bird: Some Instructions on Writing & Life*, 1995

Leaving time for revision

Experienced writers know that much of their early writing ends up in a file drawer or wastebasket, so they start early enough to leave time for dead ends, restarts, new ideas, further research, and revisions. Writers know that really productive work begins after they see not what they think they know, but what they are finally able to say.

We write and revise our earliest drafts to discover and express what we mean, but in the drafts thereafter, we write and revise to make it clear to our readers. At the heart of that process is a principle whose model you probably recall: Write for others as you would have others write for you.

Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 2000



**Workworld
Consideration**

When writing your Web text, create your layout with a word processor or text editor, allowing only four inches of type across the page. You can avoid lengthy pages by planning ahead and preparing your content to fit within a small visual space.

How We Write

Bill Wallace, Ph.D, J.D.

Writing involves three events, stages, or periods of intervention, whatever you call them.

First, you create. You idealize or visualize (whatever works) the completed work. What will it say? What's its tone? What are the arguments? What is the reader going to get from it? Depending on the type of work, I start this process while I'm doing any research that needs to be done, reading other writings for inspiration, or just taking a shower, falling asleep, driving, exercising, whenever the brain has some time to think thoughtfully.

Second, you write something, call it an outline, a first draft, a rough cut, a treatment. Just get your ideas down on paper. Write as much as you can. Maybe there were a few good lines you thought up in the first stage, or some categories or themes that you want to remember—get those down, so you'll have them.

Third, you edit, you refine, you polish. You add, subtract, move around. Start over. Until it's ready.

How much time you spend in each of these stages depends entirely on you and the piece you're writing. Some pieces may change entirely from the outline to the edited version. Some

pieces may spring out fully formed and require little or no editing. Then again, various writers approach writing differently, because they're creating different pieces and styles. But don't think you can avoid any one of the stages. That's why you really shouldn't worry if the first draft sounds terrible. It's the pre-edited version.

Think of writing like sculpture. When Michaelangelo chipped the first piece off the world's most famous block of marble, "David" did not stare out. No, Mike had to have an idea of where he was going with it, did some chipping around, then did a lot of editing. His first cut probably looked like a Rodin and might have required less "editing" had Michaelangelo lived 300 years later. And, of course, Henry Moore would have thought a long time about where the first chip should be, and then would have been done.

So I'm a Michaelangelo. I love to edit. But it took me a long time to get over the fact that I'm no Rodin. I can't make a rough cut look good. My first drafts are terrible. That's just not where my creative juices really start to flow. It's having something down on paper that inspires me. So now I think, I write, and then I really start to write by editing without pain, guilt, or shame. And that makes writing fun.

Getting information out of our users' heads

As a writer for the Web, you are often required to interact with information that is unfamiliar to you. You will need to depend on others to provide you with the findings, trends, facts, stories, and/or images you need to help the user discover something new.

Follow these two steps to gather information:

- **Decide the type of information you want to get**
- **Select strategies to get it out of users' heads**

Decide the type of information you want to get

As you begin to gather information from others, you will have the opportunity to learn about the work they do on the job and how it relates to the overall work environment. Because there are so many questions you might ask, it's helpful to decide what type of information you want to gather. Specifically, you must decide if you want to find out:

- How information flows across the organization in order to relate your work to specific measures of success
- What everybody in the organization does in order to see overall relationships for the information architecture of a website
- How individuals do their work
- The order in which people perform tasks
- Detailed information about subtasks and decision points

Select strategies

As your second step in getting information out of users' heads, you have the opportunity to watch them work and get them to talk out loud as they make decisions. Asking specific questions you will learn more about audiences, their purposes, and their contexts.

Sometimes we downplay the importance of actually talking to users. Managers might tell us, "Oh, we know our users." Or we might be challenged with time constraints. When opportunities do arise to gather feedback from others, we often fall back on focus groups, rather than sitting down with users one-on-one or within the context of their work environments.

In selecting strategies for gathering information, consider research on how people convey details about their jobs:

- Users often do not know how to articulate what they do—especially if they are very familiar with their work
- Users’ testimonies are often incomplete—they may emphasize only activities that they find exciting or difficult
- Users’ testimonies are often inaccurate—they may report only what they believe to be true, not what is true

Source: Hackos & Redish, 1998

So how can you best select a strategy to get information out of your users’ heads? You certainly need to ask questions about audience, purpose, and context. Your specific strategy will depend on the question you want to find out. Refer to the following synthesis of strategies identified by JoAnn Hackos and Janice Redish in their book *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design*.

If you want want to gather information about organizations		
To find out ↓	Then do this ↓	Specifically ↓
<p>How information flows across the organization (to relate your work to specific measures success)</p>	<p>Build a flowchart of steps (workflow analysis).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note when and how people communicate with each other. • Pay attention to when and how people call or email each other for information/ advice/approvals. • Watch for bottlenecks—where do documents stop and rest? • Note differences between official and unofficial processes.
<p>What everybody in the organization does (to see overall relationships for the information architecture of a website)</p>	<p>Build a task list (task inventory).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name the tasks with the users’ words. • Remember that an inventory of tasks does not tell you HOW users will accomplish the tasks.

If you want want to gather information about people		
<p>To find out</p> <p>↓</p> <p>How individuals do their work</p>	<p>Then do this</p> <p>↓</p> <p>List goals and tasks as you observe each worker (job analysis).</p>	<p>Specifically</p> <p>↓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust what you observe more than what people tell you about their tasks. • Get users to talk aloud—to describe what is going on in their heads as they perform tasks. • Get users to talk right after the task when you can't talk during the task. • Pay attention to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of tasks • Frequency • Criticality • Time constraints • Difficulty • Gather “cheat sheets,” job aids, reference charts, forms, weekly reports, and any other material that helps the specific person accomplish goals and tasks.
<p>The order in which people perform tasks</p>	<p>Build a task sequence list (sequence analysis).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay close attention to sequence variations among people performing the same task. • Ask “Is this flexibility something I want to incorporate into my information product?” • Note that just because users follow a specific sequence it doesn't mean it will be the best sequence for your new information product. • Recall that sometimes a routine, the current version of a product, or management shaped the sequence. • Beware of managers telling you that everyone does something the same way.
<p>Detailed information about subtasks and decision points</p>	<p>Complete a task analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record all the subtasks and decisions a user goes through to complete a task. • Note what kinds of information the user needs throughout the procedure to make decisions and act.

Definition: Task analysis

Task analysis is gathering in-depth information from users to understand goals, tasks, and actions. In the Web environment, you are working with users and collecting content to decide which tasks the website should support and which actions should be built into it to enable users to get jobs done.



Tips

How to gather in-depth information

Use the following guidelines for gathering in-depth information from users:

- ✓ Observe, listen, and talk to users as they work—meet with them one-on-one if possible.
 - Plan—understand the issues and objectives for the visits.
 - Choose a diverse group of users for information-gathering and testing.
 - Treat users as partners.
- ✓ Ask questions about tasks they do on the job.
 - Talk about what users are doing or just did.
- ✓ Ask questions about how information flows.
 - Share your emerging understanding with users.
 - Verify your understanding.
- ✓ Assess findings and diagram processes.

Usability Methods: Think-Aloud Protocols

Joe Dumas, American Institutes for Research¹

Watching a test participant think aloud is probably the signature quality of a usability test. This talking is one of the factors that gives usability testing so much credibility as an evaluation tool.

What do we want participants to do when they think aloud in a usability test?

We must encourage participants to go beyond a play-by-play description. Participants must articulate their rationales, expectations, reactions, and more.

What are the three levels of “thinking aloud?”

- Level 1 verbalization: Just thinking (no explanations)

Participants are asked to talk aloud constantly to express their thoughts. The emphasis at this level is on thoughts, not explanations or rationales for any actions. Research shows that the way participants solve the problem and what they say out loud match each other when they are giving Level 1 verbalizations. The participants are assumed to be saying out loud what they have stored in their short-term memories.

- Level 2 verbalization: Same, but when manipulating non-verbal information

Similar to Level 1, but at this level the problem requires the manipulation of non-verbal information, such as geometric

shapes. The participant must code the results of the problem solution into words to say them out loud. These verbalizations are assumed to mimic internal thought.

- Level 3 verbalization: Thinking plus explanations

This level of verbalization is qualitatively different from the other two levels. Participants are given supplemental instructions to “explain each step as thoroughly as you can” or “say not only what you are thinking, but why.” At Level 3 we are no longer getting a record of what participants read out of their short-term memories. Rather, we are getting the participants’ interpretations of the processes they are using, or the reasons why they have selected a strategy.

How do we get participants to do the right type of think-aloud for a usability test?

Give the participants explicit instructions asking for the types of information we want and demonstrate the technique to participants. Give participants an opportunity to practice Level 3 by thinking aloud before beginning the usability testing.

¹For more information, refer to *Design by People for People: Essays on Usability*, Russell J. Branaghan, Ed., Usability Professionals’ Association: Chicago, 2001.

Getting information out of the work environment

People create, use, and modify things in the course of doing their work. These things are considered artifacts or evidence of how users have manipulated and changed information to accomplish goals and tasks.

Your role as a Web writer—architect of Web information—is to FIND these artifacts and organize them so users can apply this information to getting their jobs done. Examples of artifacts include:

- Documents
- Sticky notes
- Job aids
- Tools
- Forms
- Third-party manuals

To gather knowledge about people and their work environment, you can use techniques such as Contextual Inquiry, a field data-gathering technique to help arrive at a fuller understanding of the work environment. Resources such as Hugh Beyer and Karen Holtzblatt's book, *Contextual Design: A Customer-Centered Approach to Systems Design*, can support your understanding of these processes. The challenge is to observe the work while it happens, to let the conversation between customers and interviewers create a shared understanding and commitment between the groups.

Gathering information

1. Meet with users in a one-on-one environment, if possible.

2. Ask these questions about the work they do on the job:

- What are the primary responsibilities of your job?

(Repeat each responsibility using a verb as a way to better define it ... and see if the verb fits your user's thought process.)

For each responsibility, ask these questions:


- What type of information do you need to help you do your work?
- How often do you do each of these responsibilities?
- How critical is each responsibility to the rest of your work or the purpose of your job?
- How much time do you have to complete each responsibility?
- Do you need more time?
- How does the Web help you complete each responsibility?
- What would help you do your job better?
- What problems do you encounter when you step into each of these responsibilities?
- What solutions have been proposed in the past to help you complete this responsibility?
- Did they work? What happened?
- What other kinds of information would help you do your work better?

3. Ask these questions about *how* users work or transfer information on the job (workflow):

- Where's the information now? Is it in print? Is it electronic?
- How does work flow across the organization?
- How does the information help you meet your organization's goals?
- Are different people involved? Are their jobs different than yours? What do they do?
- When information moves through your organization, does it ever stop at a "bottleneck" (such as a person who always needs to sign off on the work)?
- Are there any official processes for how you get your jobs done?
- Are there any unofficial processes for how you get your jobs done?
- Which process works better? Why?
- Does everyone perform this process in the same way?
- If you were to explain this process, what would you say?
- Does everyone have to do things the same way? What if they don't?
- Is there other information that would help people accomplish goals more effectively?
- Do people need additional information to act?

4. Assess findings

- Identify primary goals.
- Break primary goals down into tasks and actions.
- Represent the hierarchy in an outline or tree diagram and show structure to users.

4.2 

Evaluate content

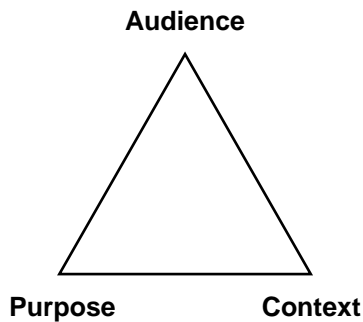
All information has structure. You need to see how the information is arranged into parts, and the relationships between the parts. Then you can see distinctions in the work that users must do. As a writer, you have two choices:

- Decide what to put in
- Decide what to leave out

What to put in and leave out

You can decide what to put in and leave out by:

- Understanding the audience/users
 - Who are they?
 - What do they want?
- Understanding their purpose
 - How does each artifact you are reviewing relate to what your audience needs to know or do?
- Understanding their context
 - Under what circumstance or in what conditions do the users perform?



Analyze and evaluate the information

Analyze and evaluate the information you gather. You will organize the information based on the results of your evaluation.

- How is this information useful to my audience?
 - Users always have a purpose.
 - Users always respond to a trigger word or image.
- How does this information support what my audience wants to know or do?
 - How do users see their tasks?
 - Are there any coherent wholes?
 - Does the information hang together?

Provide evidence. You must provide evidence to support what your users want to know. The results of the task analysis provide that evidence.

Evaluate content. Review the information to be sure all content responds to information the users of the site want to know or do. If it doesn't meet a specific need, it probably shouldn't be on the site.

Consider layering. Layering provides continuing depth of information for users who want it. You must decide on the level of importance—and therefore the layer—by asking:

- How much does the user want to know?



Individual Exercise

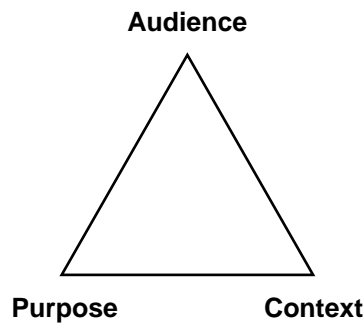
Exercise: Reshaping information for the web

Go to the class website www.infodotdesign.com/class/w4w and download the *Writing for the Web Exercise* (Module Supplement 4A, page 97).


Think about restructuring the information. What questions would you ask?

Evaluate your approach. How does it fit the framework we've been discussing? Did you think about the information within a frame of audience, purpose, and context?

Refer to the following chart to map your thinking.



How does this context support you in deciding what to put in and what to leave out?

4.3 

Chunk content

Finding, winnowing, sorting, organizing, and imprinting the information takes priority over creating it. After all, the Library of Congress wouldn't be of much value if all the books were piled randomly on the floor. The way information is presented and organized becomes as important as the content.

Richard Saul Wurman, *Information Anxiety 2*, 2001

What is chunking?

Chunking is the process of assembling information into similar topics. When we begin the act of chunking, we're reminded of the Sesame Street song, "One of these things is not like the others, one of these things doesn't belong."

The success of chunking depends, in part, on the relevance of the information chunked together. All information in one chunk must relate to one main point, based on the user's purpose.

Rationale for chunking

Research suggests that people can process and remember no more than seven plus or minus two pieces (7 ± 2) of information chunked together at one time. As the complexity of the information increases, the size of the chunk must decrease.

As writers, we can improve users' comprehension and access to information by chunking information into purposeful units. Irrelevant information causes extra cognitive work and slows users down while they figure out what the material is, what to do with it, and where it belongs.

Questions for chunking

As a writer, you organize information to control how users perceive and interact with it. You establish relationships and structure by asking:

- What is similar or parallel?
- What are the relationships between the content chunks?
- What do users want to know or do?



Tips

The following are general guidelines for chunking information:

- ✓ Separate long documents into chunks of related information.
- ✓ Chunk information by content, function, purpose, and audience.
- ✓ Limit the size of each chunk to a manageable unit of information.
- ✓ Use headings and subheadings to convey the chunked relationships.

Ways to chunk information

Here are some general ways to chunk information:

- Facts
- Parts
- Principles
- Procedures
- Processes
- Reference information
- Conceptual information
- Definitions
- Background

Procedure for chunking

As a writer, use the following procedure to shape each chunk of information so users can see the text:

- Look at each piece of information. Ask yourself, “Why does the user want this information?” Does he or she want to share it, consider it, debate it, act on it?
- Determine how this chunk of information relates to the whole
- Assess how this chunk of information relates to other chunks

Now you are ready to organize your chunks of information.



Group
Exercise

Exercise: Chunking

With a partner, look again at the exercise *Writing for the Web*.

Write information on sticky notes:


- Look at each sentence or groups of sentences and write on a sticky note the story for each fact, part, principle, procedure, or background data that you find. Ask:
 - What is the story behind this piece of content?
 - Why does it matter to the user?

For this exercise, look specifically at one paragraph. Name each idea that is in the paragraph and write it on sticky notes.

Sort the notes. Put them in categories/groupings.

Look again at the user purposes for gathering information in *Writing for the Web*.

With these purposes in mind, how do your groups differ?

4.4 

Organize content

When you write for the Web, you organize your content from the bottom up. What this means is that, instead of starting with labels and then trying to smooch information into labels, you group related chunks of information and ask, “Are there similar topics that could fit into the category and label that users will see on the screen?”

Following a bottom-up approach

When you organize information from the bottom up, you are following a process similar to the technique known as affinity diagramming.¹ In this technique, you start with the observation data and watch the content chunks emerge. Follow these steps to organize content:

- Review your notes, highlighting interesting observations and content. You might want to write out lists for your information.
- Review your lists, notes, and observations with your team members.
- Provide each team member with a set of sticky notes or note cards and ask them to write down potential content on each sticky note. Team members can write as many notes as they choose.
- As team members write notes, they stick them on a whiteboard or large wall space. As team members post their notes, they may get new ideas and add new notes based on the notes that others have produced.
- With your team, organize the sticky notes into chunks or groupings. Anyone can move any note as many times as they wish.
- Create labels for the chunks as they occur during the process.
- Discuss with the team any issues noted on the sticky notes. Rearrange as necessary.

[Card techniques and sticky notes]...all have in common the goal of partitioning a large information space into manageable subsections that reflect the intuitive expectations and mental models of the user base.

Michael D. Levi and
Frederick G. Conrad,
*Usability Testing of
World Wide Web Sites*,
1998

¹Source: Hackos and Redish, *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design*, 1998. Hackos and Redish synthesize the work of Beabes and Flanders (1995), Holtzblatt and Beyer (1994).

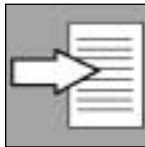
Identifying expectation-driven structure

When you organize information for the web, it's helpful to think of your content as it relates to what users expect to read. You have the opportunity to use this "expectation structure" on almost any page and section. Refer to the next module for details on how you can present information so it predicts what is coming up, controls the order (and what the user is expecting), and obligates you to present information your users expect.

Keeping track of content

How can you keep track of all the information you get from your head and the heads of users? Use a content inventory list to:

- Organize noun information to show available content
- Organize content that flows from your verb information on a goals and information matrix
- Track information required to complete tasks



Module
Supplement

Refer to the Module Supplement 4B on page 99 for a sample Content Inventory List.

Using a database

If you have 300 or more pages of content, you probably want to map your content in a database. Immerse yourself in the content to gain familiarity with the information. Chunk your tasks into groups. Assign content a general category label (for example, "topic," "tip," "news," "resource").

With site survey tools (such as Microsoft Site Server), you can automate the process of identifying each of your current HTML pages. These sophisticated tools will give you the numbers of links to other pages and tell you how many pages internally link to you. They will also tell you the level of each page, the page title, the page author, the date it was created, and the date it was last modified.

Using database tools, you can add new fields to help you structure content. You might add fields for file type (HTML, PowerPoint HTML, Word, SHTML, Cold Fusion, Java Applet, Microsoft Word files). You can also add information on page status (adapt, migrate, delete, hold, or archive).

Use this structure when adding information on page status

Adapt: This content will need to be reorganized and the text will need restructuring.

Migrate: Nothing needs to be done with this content. It can be picked up whole and moved to a new location. It might require some light editing.

Delete: This content will not be moved (initially, perhaps) into the new site—based on established criteria.

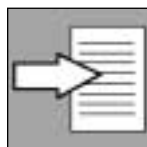
Hold: This content would need management approval to delete, or perhaps an explanation from the owner about its relevance or relationships. (Relate this to audience, purpose, and context.)

Archive: This content can be stored in a database. It might be dated, but you still want to give people access to the information (such as old news releases). Or the content might be large data files (for example, membership records or statistical records) you may want to access via an application such as ColdFusion.

Keeping track of site structure

If you are responsible for maintaining the content for an entire site, we recommend that you use a site structure table. The table allows you to list the primary navigational units for the site and specific content labels for each unit.

The site structure table allows you to see the relationships of all the content on your site. It gives you an opportunity, as well, to see a structure for managing how you collect your content.



Module
Supplement

Refer to the Module Supplement 4C on page 100 for a sample Site Structure Table.



Workworld
Consideration

In the “real world” people develop an ownership about the labels for programs and their topics. To overcome the barriers of people and politics, take your existing content, remove its current labels, and then begin to chunk it. Ask, “What users want to use this information?” “What type of content is this?” “What is this content related to?” Match the content that is similar. You can complete this task by hand or by using a database.



Tips

Guidelines for using a database

- ✓ In your database, add new fields for file type and page status.
- ✓ Assign each page to one of the general labels.
- ✓ Run a “sort” in your database so you have smaller information to chunk.
- ✓ Go into each smaller chunk of information and ask, “What fits together?”
- ✓ Assign working labels to the smaller chunks of information.
- ✓ Compare the chunks to determine their granularity (Are some bigger or smaller?).
- ✓ Run another sort to break this chunk into a smaller group.
- ✓ Take content from each group and look at the writing structure (refer to Modules 5 and 6).

Module Supplement 4A: Writing for the Web

I like to write. I like to write well. That's a problem for a web-author. The reason is that writing for the web is different than writing for print, and habits that work for one are wrong for the other. In this issue we'll look at some of those differences. A webmaster's site is a lot like the cobbler's children who are the last to have shoes. You're too busy working on everyone else's to mind your own. I've known for a long time my site needs work; the writing style is too dense and expository for the Web. It's one of those things I've been meaning to fix any day now.....

I came across a site the other day that actually broke me out of that procrastination and has me grabbing spare moments to try to make improvements. You should look at it too - BEFORE you write the text for your web pages. It's <http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting>. There's also a link to it now on my "Useful Stuff" page at <http://sidereal-designs.com>.

The origin of the material on this site is a research project on how users read on the Web and how authors should write their Web pages. The studies were done in the SunSoft Science Office by John Morkes and Jakob Nielsen. The bottom line is: the medium is different, the format is different, and people read very differently than they do on the printed page. You must write differently for web pages if you want people to read them and to retain what you say.

Even if you are a great print writer, in fact ESPECIALLY if you are a great print writer, you should understand why and how this is true before you try to write copy for your web pages. Let's look at a few facts from this study. * People do not usually READ web pages. They SCAN them. *Web-readers skip all ideas but the first in any paragraph. * Credibility is more important.

Anyone can put up a web page for free. * Readers only tolerate about half the length they will in print. * They will not scroll down unless you have hooked them with what they see at their first glance. * They will never, ever, scroll laterally. * They want quick, straight information. "Marketese" drives them off. * They lose the thought while the next page loads. Some of these things have to do simply with the medium; Web pages have a far smaller "window" on the text than a paper page does.

The eye can't track as smoothly when scrolling. Perception is more work on a self-luminous source. The result is that people read differently to conserve cognitive effort. Other reasons have to do with why the reader is there, how they found your information, and how critically they are viewing it. More often than not web-readers are using the Web more like a reference source than like expository text. More often than not they have no reason to suppose you know what you're talking about. Unlike the web, it usually takes at least some qualifications to get your words into printed material.

Here are some things you can do about these different habits of web-reading: First, organize your page layout to accommodate it. Keep your text narrow so it is easily scanned. (But never use multiple columns for the same writing or they'll need to scroll down and then back up - and they won't.) Organize it to give them visual anchors. Use bold or highlighted keywords liberally. Use visible, useful, sub-headings. Put facts in bulleted lists. Give them visual reference points to help keep track when scrolling. Organization and layout also help credibility. Don't let your page look amateurish or they're much less likely to actually read what you have to say. Use clean, professional design and smart-looking original

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graphics. Don't decorate with little icons everyone has seen before. Don't use gaudy backgrounds that make text hard to read.

Worry a lot about how fast your pages load. People won't wait long, but even if they do there is a limited duration for which they can hold an idea before reading on without losing focus.

For the writing itself, modify your style to grab them early and keep them reading. Your big enemy is length. Pare it down; use half the word-count you would in print. Put your central idea or conclusion first. Then elaborate it in what follows. Don't write an essay leading up to it. If it interests them they'll read on for the details, but they won't read on to find out if it does. Keep your paragraphs much shorter than is normal for print. Use only one idea per paragraph. Clear writing is easier to read. Make it clear, concise, and simple and they will keep reading. Clear writing is also more credible. Above all don't use exaggeration and hyperbole. A list organization helps both clarity and scanning.

Worry a lot about how you divide your material among your pages. On the one hand you don't want them to have to wait in mid-thought while a new page loads, but on the other you don't want to make them scroll to Antarctica on one never-ending page. Liberal use of hyperlinks to elaborations of key thoughts can help - make sure they lead to important and self-contained material. Never have a page without at least a 'home' button. As in all things, there are exceptions. It's perfectly fine to send them to some dense, expository pages at the back of the site for detailed information and discussion of key ideas that have been presented up front, or for auxiliary or reference material. They'll probably want to print it out and read it later anyway if they're interested enough to get that far.

Remember, all the page-hits in the world won't help if they click on without reading. Put as much or more effort into your writing and design as into your site-promotion.

Module Supplement 4C: Site Structure Table

Top level <i>(appears on top nav)</i>	2nd level <i>(appears on left nav)</i>	3rd level <i>(appears on left nav, under 2nd level choices)</i>	Body <i>(appears in main body of the page)</i>	File name	To do
New media					
Training					
	Classes				
		By category			
		By date			
		By instructor			
		By software			
		By location			
		Saturday			
		Evening			
	Institutes				
	Register				
	FAQs				
	Certificate programs				
	Partners				
	Online training				
	Custom training				
	On-site training				
Editorial					
Staffing					