WebMaster Tips: Effective Web Publication

Writing:

- **Be succinct**: write no more than 50% of the text you would have used in a hardcopy publication.

- **Write for scan-ability**: don't require users to read long continuous blocks of text.
  - Structure the page to **facilitate scanning** and help users to locate the main ideas presented on the page in a single glance: for example, use grouping and subheadings to break a long list into several smaller units.
  - “Bullet points” or “numbered lists” are useful for information that can be listed or ranked.

- **Break up large amounts of information and place it on separate pages**:
  - Break your information into logical sections
  - Keep sections short (long blocks of type are difficult to read on the computer screen)
  - Determine which modules should contain each type of information you wish to publish
  - Determine whether you have sufficient additional information to warrant the creation of a “Related Organization”—a separate, fully-functional Web site which is subordinate (in your organization hierarchy) to the current site.

Organization:

- **Write straightforward and simple headlines** that clearly explain what the page is about and that will make sense when read out-of-context (e.g., in a search engine results listing).

- Place your **organization name** on every news detail page and make the name a link to that organization’s home page. Unlike event detail pages, news detail pages do not automatically capture the originating organization’s identity.

- Instead of including everything about a service or organization into a single, scrolling page, use **hypertext to structure the content space** into a starting page that provides an overview, and several secondary pages that each focus on a specific topic. The goal is to allow users to avoid wasting time on those sub-topics that don't concern them.
Graphics:

- Use care when preparing small photos and images: instead of simply resizing the original image to a tiny and unreadable thumbnail, zoom in on the most relevant detail and use a combination of cropping and resizing.
- Photos and images should be sharp and clear and “tell the story.”
- Use color for visual interest and effect. Don’t overdo it, though! Too many colors are distracting.
- Charts and graphs are useful for information that can be quantified such as budgets, enrollments, and year-to-year test scores.

Typefaces:

- Use fonts that work well with each other. If you’re not sure about this, consult one of Communications’ graphic artists.
- Don’t use too many fonts. Some variation is good for visual interest – different point sizes, boldfacing, italics, and so on – but too much variation can be distracting to the reader.
- Use tool tip text to provide users with a preview of where each link will take them, before they have clicked on it.
- Centered text should be used only sparingly, as it is difficult to read. As a general rule, use left-justified text instead.

Writing to Be Found:

- Each bulletin, document and form should contain a description within its record—even if very short. Maximum description length is 150 characters
- Descriptions must make sense when read completely out of context within the site (e.g., in a search engine results listing), although you can assume that they will be viewed together with the document title.
- Descriptions should tell users what the document is about, and allow them to judge its relevance.
- Do not fill descriptions with hyperbole or promotional language; concentrate on the facts.