

Writing for the Web

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Your role as a content writer

- To create information that users need
- To make information easily accessible through
 - Logical site organization
 - User-focused navigation (links, navigation bars)
 - Concisely written pages
 - Graphics that help users understand and apply information

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Websites vs. documents

- Documents are **static**—readers follow a page-by-page format
- Websites are **dynamic**—readers create their own “reading” paths following what interests them and using
 - Navigation bars
 - Text links
 - “Back” buttons
 - Related links

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How users “read” sites

- They scan
- They click
- They scroll
- They jump back and forth from page to page
- They get impatient with “busy” pages and impenetrable text!

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Readers’ purpose directs reading

- Understand your readers’ purpose:
 - Searching for quick answers
 - Learning new knowledge
 - Carrying out new tasks

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Informational vs. commercial sites

- Informational sites—typically intranets—focus on organizational issues:
 - The organization’s mission, purpose and how to carry out the mission tasks
 - Focus on providing “information”
- Commercial sites “sell” services and goods and use “marketing” strategies
 - Focus on “selling”

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Ten tips for informational site

1. Put yourself in the user position
2. Use trigger words
3. Write descriptive headings
4. Use reading cues
5. Use simple, direct language
6. Help readers "scroll" down the page
7. Create space on the screen
8. Use graphics
9. Provide clear links
10. Edit your pages!

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Graphics

- What graphics (tables, forms, images, etc.) will help your readers find and use information on your site?

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Let's start with the homepage

- Defines the organization's special character through graphics and text
- Summarizes the organization's mission and role
- Establishes the navigation bar to secondary pages
- Sets the site's style and tone

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Planning/drafting the site content

- Create a profile
- Create a flow diagram
- Determine labels
- Determine content
- Draft content
- Identify content links

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Creating navigation through labeling

- Labeling is "naming" a link so the user knows where she is going
- Labeling (bar navigation, internal links) can either guide or confuse your users
- Labeling must use the user's language
- Labeling must be used consistently throughout the site

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Selecting and organizing the right content are difficult!

- Once you know your audience and the site's purpose, you need to select, categorize, and organize content. You need to know...
 - What are the site's categories?
 - How should the categories be organized?
 - What are subcategories?

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Using card sorting to create a site

- Card sorting is a way to create and test site structure.
 - On a colored index cards write the site topic, purpose, and audience
 - On separate white cards write major categories
 - On another set of white cards, write subcategories
 - Mix up cards and give to testers with colored card on top
 - Testers then will organize the site by major and subcategories
- Review testers results to see how they interpret categories

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Card sorting follow-up

- What did you learn from this exercise?
- How can you apply what you learned?

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What is “chunking”?

- Chunking—a concept developed by Robert Horn—structures writing into quick-reading blocks of text/graphics.
- Each chunk (block) of text
 - Is organized around a single topic/category
 - Contains a single purpose—such as:
 - Defines a term/concept/process
 - Describes an object/concept/task purpose
 - Explains step-by-step procedure
 - Explains a policy or rule

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Chunking example

- Defining a concept:
 - The Master Payroll File
- The Master Payroll File is a group of records that contains all payroll and employee information used in the weekly payroll program.

Label

Definition

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Scannable text

- “Chunked” text groups content into *scannable units*—including listings, graphics, tables.
- “Chunked” text must be labeled.
- Labels must use consistent terms
- Labels are used for headings/ subheadings / table titles/ buttons/etc.

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Web writing style

- Web writing style should be
 - Scannable using “chunking” features
 - Concise
 - Jargon-free
 - Reader-focused
 - Error-free

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How to write scannable pages

- Use a descriptive title previewing contents
- Summarize main point in the opening paragraph
- Use short sentences and paragraphs
- Use listings—as much as possible
- Use active voice
- Proofread for accuracy and correctness