

BEST PRACTICES FOR WEB CONTENT

It's About Your Audience, Not You

In many ways, your website is not for you. It is for those who come to visit your site. Thus, present content from the perspective of the site visitor instead of your or your organization's perspective. Ask yourself, if I were coming to my site (or the site I'm writing for), what kind of information would I be looking for?

Keep Content Short

Be frugal and avoid empty chatter (such as instructions on how to use the site—should be intuitive by a site's navigation and design). Studies have shown that most Web readers do not read word for word but scan Web copy. Aim for 600-700 words per page (might be shorter if you have other elements on the page that can also convey content—e.g., a video).

Here is an example of how content can be cut without misrepresentation:

(From the New York Times, January 7, 2001). The first paragraph of the lead story read:

Washington, Jan. 6 – One thing is already clear about how President-elect George W. Bush intends to govern the nation: state and local officials will have far more leeway to shape and operate the full range of federal social, regulatory, and public works programs.

And here's how it can be further condensed:

Washington, Jan. 6 – One thing is clear about how George W. Bush intends to govern: state and local officials will have more leeway to shape and operate federal social, regulatory, and public works programs.

Remember: most, if not all, pieces can use at least one round of revisions after they've been written.

Keep Content Fresh

Not only is it good for [search engine optimization](#) (SEO)—Google loves fresh content—but it also instills confidence in visitors to your site that you are keeping on top of the content. Keeping content fresh doesn't have to entail a complete rewrite of your site. It can be something as simple as reviewing your site periodically and

- Fixing broken links
- Deleting old dates and inserting current ones
- Changing your [meta tags](#)
- Making sure your older content is linking to newest content

Be Direct

The most important points or information should be in the first two paragraphs of your Web page. Avoid using the first paragraph to tell readers what info they will find—just provide it.

Most people on the Web are looking for information. If someone cannot immediately and easily find the information he or she is looking for on your site, this will result in user frustration and the person will most likely give up and search somewhere else.

If you have ever come across a Web piece whose title piqued your interest, but you had to read one, two, maybe even more paragraphs before you actually got to the meat of the piece, then you know how frustrating it can be when information is buried, and it's understandable why many Web readers simply stop reading in such instances and never return to your site.

“Ford to City: Drop Dead!”

This is one of the most memorable tabloid headlines, courtesy of the *New York Daily News*, about then-President Ford’s decision to deny New York City much-need emergency funds. A good headline captures your attention and makes you want to stop what you’re doing and read the article that accompanies it.

Web headlines (as opposed to a newspaper headline) present a unique conundrum. On the Web, headlines are often displayed out of context. The reader is searching for your content usually from a crowded Web page or from a page full of search engine results. So unlike a newspaper where articles are often accompanied by images that can describe an article, a Web header has to make sense standing on its own.

This is one reason why it’s vital to keep your Web headlines short, direct and relevant. Headlines should also contain keywords. “Yeshiva University Admissions” or “Yeshiva University Admissions Criteria” is much more effective than “Come to Us!” or “How to Get into Yeshiva University.”

Avoid cuteness or irony in your headlines. It will not translate in the search engine results you want, and more important, could be lost on your audience.

Tools at Your Disposal: Bullets, Subheads, Etc.

There are a variety of tools in your editorial arsenal to make content on a Web page visually compelling, grab readers' attention (especially those who might otherwise not have been interested), convey salient points immediately, provide visual relief and entice a reader to stay on your page.

- Bullets or lists (it's been proven that these capture a reader's eyes)
- Subheads (create ones that will make someone want to read further)
- Callouts (aka [pull quotes](#))
- Diagrams, photographs (images), screen shots, etc.
- Multimedia: slide shows, audios, interactive features, etc.

This Video Is About?...

When posting a video, audio, etc., include a brief caption or paragraph to describe what readers can expect to see or hear. Don't make the reader guess or work to find this out.

Tell Me a Story

In many ways, websites carry on the great tradition of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc.: they are designed to tell a story. Whether it's your personal blog or the Yeshiva University site, all the pages combined on a website leave readers with definite impressions and images of yourself or the organization you are writing for.

Keep this in mind as you craft your content for a website. Not every page you write could be fascinating or filled with creativity. But where such opportunities exist, use content to create positive impressions that readers will carry with them as they navigate throughout your

site. YU is a living, active hub. Your challenge: to make your content just as dynamic and relevant. If you need help in achieving this, please email webdev@yu.edu.