



## WRITING FOR THE WEBSITE

People read text on websites differently from reading a printed document. They scan the screen quickly to find what they're looking for and will move on if it's not interesting. Also, text and images on a computer screen are not as sharp as on paper, which can make them harder to read. As a result, clear language and design are even more important when writing for the internet. Use the following tips to make the best of the information you provide.

### Writing Style

- Treat your article like a news story – **put the most important information first and keep it as brief and clear as possible.** Your first few lines must get straight to the point and sum up the topic in a few sentences. If you want to include more detail, include hyperlinks in the body of the text.
- Write tighter and meatier than you would for print. Keep words to a minimum – about half the number you would normally use in a paper document on the same subject. Of course you don't want to economize so much that your prose becomes stilted and humorless.
- Use **short paragraphs and sentences.** Keep sentences to fewer than 20 words, and paragraphs to four sentences or less. Break up large blocks of text with plenty of space.
- **Organize your text in an open, loose format.** Be generous with paragraph breaks and headings - they make pages a little more eye-friendly and easier to scan quickly. Use bulleted lists and tables - anything to make the information jump out at the reader, instead of making them sift through long paragraphs to get at it.
- **Be very cautious with puns and informal expressions.** People whose first language is not English may be confused or misled by them.
- **Punctuation is still important.**
- Don't use phrases like 'today', 'tomorrow' or 'last week'

- Use very specific terms and key words. Use “searchable terms”.
- Refer to the following article for further information.

## **The 10 Commandments of Internet Writing**

By [Garth A. Buchholz](#)

1. Print content is structurally and functionally different from online content. Print is formally written and passively read. It's linear, narrative, dated and presents a continuous view. Online content is informally written, chunked out, non-linear, interactive, dynamic and current. One involves reading paper, the other involves reading light.

2. Don't just "repurpose" documents; write Webitorial content. "Repurposing" means when you repackage a document created for print and simply attach it to a Web site in Word .doc, Acrobat .pdf, Excel .xls or other popular formats. While sometimes this is necessary, it's the laziest, most ineffective way to put content on the Internet. Re-think how the content can be rewritten, laid out and designed in context with its specific online environment.

3. Online content is not just about words; think "presentation" and "interaction." Factor in the other content objects that may be part of it. Analyze the environment where the content will be found. If you were writing for a television ad, for example, you wouldn't simply write text without knowing what audio and visuals will be part of it.

4. Words are graphical images, too. People often notice the font style, the color of the text, the size of the text and how the text appears as a visual block before they actually extract its meaning. Layout and design are critical in a visual medium like the Web.

5. Chunk it out, chunk it down. Even if you're writing an actual content object such as a Word document or a PDF, content on the Internet has to be easily scannable. Thanks to the Internet and broadcast media, people have far less patience and tolerance for large blocks of narrative text. When you create new Web text, make sure it's "chunked out" (broken into smaller blocks of text separated by a break) or "chunked down" (shortened). Remember - if no one reads it, what value will it have?

6. Write strong meta-content (headlines, subheads, cutlines, labels, etc). Internet readers have a "search-and-retrieve" mentality - they prefer to scan for the information or keywords or links they need, while bypassing the rest. Good

headlines and content labels also help the reader to cognitively understand the organization and navigation of the content.

7. Don't reinvent the wheel - just link to it. How much of your copy could be trimmed down if you simply linked to other Web pages that offered the same information? Here's my 100/25 rule of content originality on the Web: 100% of the content is created by 25% of the people. Readers like to interact on the Web, so give them links as non-linear "rabbit holes" they can follow.

8. Use the traditional newspaper structure of "inverted pyramid" writing. Like newspapers, the Internet should be a fast read, involve a lot of content and catch the reader's attention. Make sure your five W's (who, what, when, where, why, and also how) are close to the top. Details of lesser importance should follow, from general to specific (that's why the pyramid is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom). The idea is this: Even if the reader only reads the headline, they should have a good idea of what the article is about. And if they read only the first few lines, they should have a very good idea of the main points in the article.

9. Make the writing compelling, personal and energetic. Active voice writing is always the best. Use consistent style and conventions. Use "you" when appropriate to personalize the text. Take a stand. Give your writing attitude. People like to read writing that feels truthful, creative, positive and individual. You can use "plain writing" style without sounding plain. And most importantly, keep it tight, unpretentious and free of unnecessary verbiage.

10. Know your Internet community. In print, you have to know your readers, and in broadcast, you have to know your audience. On the Internet, it's also crucial to know your "community" of readers. Are you creating content for a portal? An Internet site? An opt-in email newsletter? What are their interests? Education? Age range? Biases? How will they use the information, and how will the other information in that environment be used? When you write for the Internet, the one is the many.

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## Master Gardener Specifics - required

- Keep the focus on the Master Gardeners' involvement in the event rather than on the event itself. Be sure you address the benefit the Master Gardeners are providing.
- Any Master Gardener or participant who is mentioned or quoted in an article should be identified with their first and last name and their town/city. Example: Jane Doe of Bloomington.
- At the end of your article, include the following statement: "For questions or additional information, email [hcmg@umn.edu](mailto:hcmg@umn.edu)"
- According to Julie Weisenhorn, Master Gardeners must be referred to using the following phrase: University of MN Extension Master Gardeners-Hennepin County.

## Guidelines for Photos - required

- Focus on photos that illustrate the Master Gardener Involvement and emphasize the interaction between the Master Gardener and the Community. This doesn't mean that every picture must include a Master Gardener, but the objective is to promote the program
- Action-oriented photos are preferable to posed shots. Action photos show people working together or doing an activity. The best photos show people with emotions and reactions. Photoshare (international institution that helps non profits photograph health issues) has some examples and tips on taking good photos that may help you: <http://www.photoshare.org/phototips.php>. Pictures submitted to the web site must include a caption describing the picture, describing the who, what, where, when how, and why. When individuals are shown, provide the first and last name and hometown and identify from left to right. Group pictures (5 or more people) do not need to identify individuals - but should identify the group.
  - Posting a photo on the Internet exposes your photo to the eyes of the whole world. Most states in the US recognize that individuals have a right of privacy. The right of privacy gives an individual a legal claim against someone who intrudes on the individual's physical solitude or seclusion, and against those who publicly disclose private facts. **Signed photo release forms are required whenever a photo of an individual will be published on the website or distributed. This includes Master Gardeners, if they do not have a signed form on file in the MG County Extension Office.** Release forms may not be required at public events. If you are not sure if a release form is necessary, get it signed. Better to be cautious. **Any photo from a private event that includes children, must have the release form signed by the parent.**

The following statement is from the University of Minnesota Master Gardener Manual:

***“Any photo, video, or film clip you plan to use in your work for University of Minnesota Extension may require a signed photo/media release. Use a release with all identifiable individuals (including other extension employees) who are principal players in any Extension photo, video, or film. Also use the release when private property is recognizable.”***

Release forms are available on the Private website under forms.

- Submit photos in JPEG format.