

Website Writing Guide

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Writing for the web – i.e. for computer screens – is very different from writing for print publication.

Here are 10 of the best tips we have found for writing web content.

We have tried to follow these same tips in writing the article – so we hope it will also be helpful for you as an example of good web copy. 😊

Tip#1: Get to the point – fast!

Web readers are impatient and will not stay to read more unless they can find the information they want very quickly. Research has shown that you have *3 seconds to grab a browser's attention!* If you engage the reader's interest, you have *only another 15 seconds* to increase interest on the first page so the reader may stay on your site long enough to look at another page.

Tip #2: Use a clear and catchy headline

Keep your headline short, catchy and *to the point*. Do not try to be too 'clever' or it is possible your website visitors will not stay to read more. Make it clear exactly what your article is about in as few words as possible. Think about the headlines on supermarket magazines. These always catch your eye, even though you do not want to see them. These are usually no more than 5 words!

Tip #3: Tease the reader!

Write an opening line that seduces the reader.

Example:

"Give up Threats and Weaknesses. Embrace Aspirations and Results! The SOAR strategic planning process energizes your organization beyond the expected."

Tip #4: Break it up

People reading on screen do not read every word. Instead, they rely on scanning to pick up the meaning of the text. It is therefore important to make your web copy 'screen-scannable' by using:

- Short paragraphs
- Sub-headings
- Lists or bullet points
- Italics for emphasis

Tip #5: Keep it simple

Keep each sentence simple. Complex sentences or words are even harder to understand online.

The web is also an international medium, so limit your use of metaphors and avoid idioms and puns. Otherwise readers whose native language is not English may not understand your meaning!

With acronyms or abbreviations, spell them out in full the first time they are used.

A good idea is to limit the number of words to about 50% of the number you would use for a printed publication.

Tip #6: Each word is worth a \$1 million. Make each one count.

Not only is it important to keep your language simple and to be concise, but it's also essential to write in a vibrant and engaging style. Avoid passive tense wherever possible! Use the active tense. Use actionable verbs to create a mental image.

Tip #7: Write conversationally

Write as if you are speaking to an individual person – as if your readers are actually face-to-face with you as they read. Try to communicate *with* them, not *to* them. A conversational style will help you make that connection. Your readers need to ‘hear your voice’! Test your copy by reading it out loud. If it sounds like you want it to read, you are OK.

Tip #8: Be positive. Spread your excitement!

Also, let your readers ‘hear’ your passion and excitement.

You have to avoid too much ‘hype’ of course! 😊

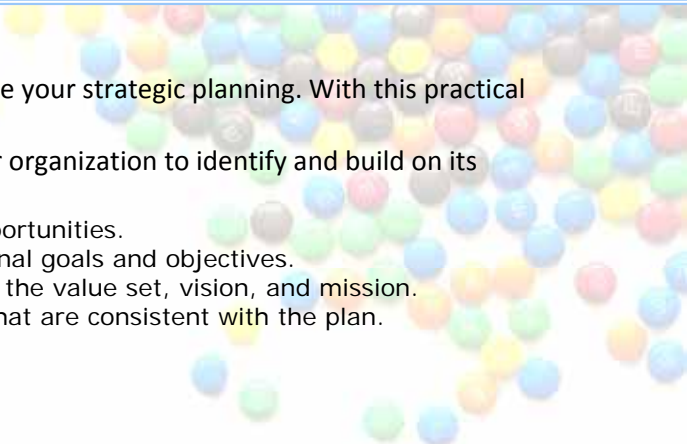
Your copy should inspire your readers to continue reading and to take the action you want them to take. What do you want the reader to do because of reading your page? There should be a clear and distinct ‘ask’ or invitation:

- *“Be a part of global change to enrich public education. Contribute to the PCC conversation today!”*
- *“Enrich your public school community. Register for a Lead Learners workshop.”*
- *“Are you ready to SOAR? Purchase the Thin Book of SOAR!”*

Here is an example of text appearing on a website:

After reading the Thin Book of SOAR – we do not think anyone can be an expert on strategy or strategic change using SOAR. You want to be effective, quickly. However in this book, as the reader comments echoed, there is a lot to think about, new ways to approach strategy, and enough information for you to lead a successful strategic planning effort. The greater your previous experience, the more you can do!

Here is the same information, revised to reflect more passion and excitement and ‘broken up’ into bullet points to make it easier to read on screen:



Read the **Thin Book of SOAR!** Energize your strategic planning. With this practical guide, you will:

- Engage groups interested in your organization to identify and build on its strengths.
- Discover potential profitable opportunities.
- Determine and align organizational goals and objectives.
- Enable individual connections to the value set, vision, and mission.
- Promote decisions and actions that are consistent with the plan.

Tip #9: Think ‘newsworthy’ and keep it short!

On the web, your readers have a short attention span. Because of this, writing for the web is similar in some ways to writing an article for a newspaper. Start with your most important information first and provide additional information in decreasing order of importance. That way, if your site visitors do not stay to read the rest, at least you will know you have shared your *main* message with them! 😊

So keep it brief and give them just the bare bones. Provide your ‘fleshier’ copy – your longer, richer, and more thoughtful article – *as a downloadable pdf file*.

If your web copy grabs the reader’s attention and inspires a thirst for more information, they will certainly click that download link!

Tip #10: Answer these questions in your copy

And just like when you’re writing for a newspaper article, when you’re writing an article for the web make sure you answer the 6 most critical questions in the English language:

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| 1. Who | 4. What |
| 2. Where | 5. Why |
| 3. When | 6. How |

Bonus Tip

And finally, as a ‘bonus tip’, here are six rules of writing from George Orwell, author of *1984*, *Animal Farm* and other classics. Orwell died in 1950, but these are all gems of wisdom in relation to writing for the web too – so in that respect he was way ahead of his time! 😊

1. *Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech that you are used to seeing in print.*
2. *Never use a long word where a short one will do.*
3. *If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.*
4. *Never use the passive voice when you can use the active*
5. *Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday equivalent.*
6. *Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous!*