

WRITING

for the

WEB

FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS & IMPORTANT TECHNIQUES



Photo: Kevin Mazur/WireImage



WHY ALL THE HATS?

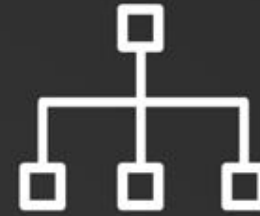
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Copywriter



Editor



Information
Architect

MANY ROLES, MANY RESPONSIBILITIES



UX Strategist



Social
Psychologist



Designer &
Researcher

WRITING BASICS

PURPOSE



AUDIENCE



TONE



WRITING BASICS

PURPOSE



- Why is the content being produced?
- What information or idea are you trying to communicate?
- What goals do you hope to achieve by displaying the content?
- Where is the content going to be displayed/located? (Website, Social Media, Connect/Online Course, Email)

WRITING BASICS

AUDIENCE

- Who are you communicating to?
- Why do you need to communicate this information?
- What are the concerns or motivations of the audience?
- Different TYPES of audiences

All students vs. all M.A. students

All FoE faculty vs. “new” faculty

Academics vs. the “outside world”

Understanding Your Audience

Various tactics:

- Usability testing
- Listening labs
- A/B testing
- Google Analytics
- Readability testing (*Flesch Kincaid, Gunning, Coleman*)
- User personas
- Contextual interviews

<http://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/user-research.html>

SIDEBAR

Understanding Your Audience

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- Usability testing
- Listening labs
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- Contextual interviews

See me if you'd like to learn more about these tactics.

I also have various examples if anyone is interested.

<http://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/user-research.html>

SIDEBAR

WRITING BASICS

TONE

- No tone without knowing your audience
- Creates lasting impressions and develops overall atmosphere
- Conveyed through words, structure, graphics, punctuation

e.g. 1

e.g. 2



DIFFERENCES

To Add More Work...

News & Stories

- Purpose often shifts
- Audience varies
- Tone can be polar-opposite to writing information for the web

Event Posts

- Purpose is varied
- Audience can be specific or broad
- Include clear and prominent CTAs

Information

- Depending on page hierarchy, audience and tone can vary (student FAQ, internal resources, prospective vs. current students)
- Too much information -> much more important to define the PURPOSE



COMMON TECHNIQUES

CAN BE USED - DESPITE DIFFERENT TYPES OF WRITING

TRADITIONAL

- “Fold of the Page”
- Quotes
- Chunking
- Bite, Snack, Meal
- Headlines

NEW *ish*

- “Above the Fold”
- Chunking and Inverted Pyramid
- Bite, Snack, Meal
([Faculty profiles](#), [Canucks](#), [ET Canada](#))
- Headings & Excerpts
- **Reading** for the Web
(F-pattern, Z-pattern, Gutenberg Diagram)

Above the Fold

Photo: oculusrift-blog.com



Above the Fold

Photo: oculusrift-blog.com

- This concept came from newspapers
- Try not to add too much information below
- The most important information goes above the fold
- Common misconception is that more content is better

Chunking



Chunking

- Organizes content within a page into blocks of content (sections)
- Allows for your audience to quickly find what they want
- Can have a title or headline for each chunk (supports scanning efficiency)
- This helps divide information into easily consumable pieces that is focused on one subject

Inverted Pyramid

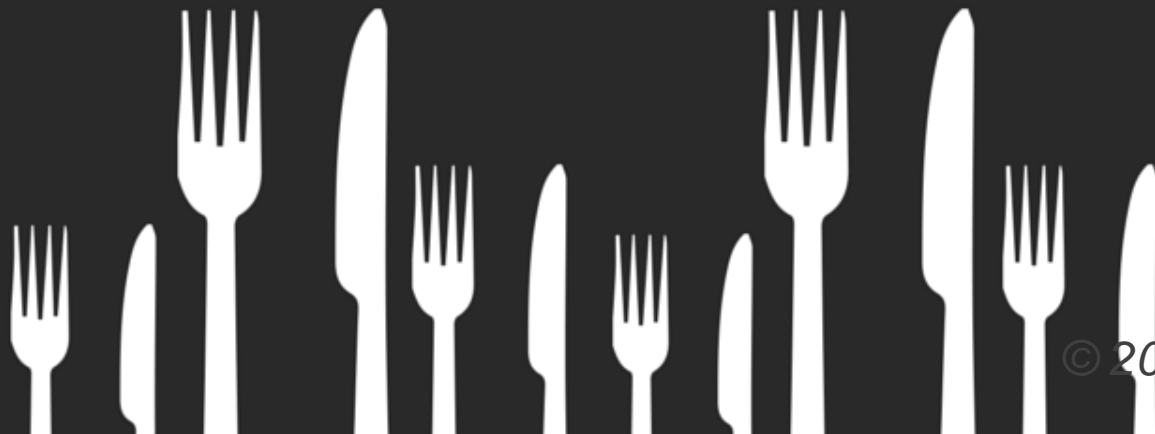
An inverted pyramid diagram divided into three horizontal sections. The top section is the largest and contains the text 'MOST PRESSING INFO'. The middle section is smaller and contains the text 'Important Details'. The bottom section is the smallest and contains the text 'Background Info'. The pyramid is centered on a dark background with a geometric pattern of triangles.

MOST PRESSING INFO

**Important
Details**

Background
Info

BITE SNACK MEAL



THE BITE



THE BITE

- AKA: Headlines / Headers / Titles / Event Name
- Sentence case vs. title case
- May need to change font type to stand out, but keep to two or three – not too excessive
(heading styles, font size, bold)
- Sans-serif fonts are best
- Great way to draw attention to sections + increases scan-ability

HEADLINES

- Call to Action
- Summary *(don't give away the whole story!)*
- Question
- Teaser
- Humour *(use wisely, not often)*

Great Resource: <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/how-to-craft-headlines-that-draw-people-to-your-content/>

HEADLINES

via news.ubc.ca

Get over it! UBC students, community gather to Storm the Wall



Family fun and community camaraderie are on the agenda this weekend as part of Storm the Wall, one of UBC's most iconic experiences.

[Read more...](#)

UBC and Indian government commit nearly \$2 million to support new science and engineering scholarships



The Indian government has committed \$1.92 million to support PhD students in science and engineering research programs at the University of British Columbia.

[Read more...](#)

Time for an oil change?



Gail Hammond, a dietitian and food, nutrition and health lecturer in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems, discusses the coconut oil craze and why mixing it up in the kitchen can be a good thing.

[Read more...](#)

HEADLINES

3 minute exercise

Using these tactics, draft up a snappy headline for [this story](#).

THE SNACK



SNACK

Example via UBC.ca



ZUWENA HAJI MACHANO

Alum from SOS-HGIC in Ghana, developed unique academic programs that relied on the impact of emerging knowledge and services. Active in clubs and organizing events, including the Rejoice fashion show.

SNACKS

via ECPS.educ.ubc.ca

News & Stories

March 20, 2015

How Two Faculty, Working in Distinctly Separate Areas, Can Successfully Collaborate

Drs. Cannon and Hubley discuss how they formed a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship within the same department, despite their different areas of research.

[Read More](#)



March 16, 2015

Distinguished Alumni Award Winner, Shelley Hymel

On March 14, 2015 the College of Education at the University on Illinois presented the Distinguished Alumni Award to Dr. Shelley Hymel.

[Read More](#)



THE MEAL



THE FULL MEAL

- Avoid walls of text
- Less IS more
- Be direct and organized (*ping pong theory*)
- Excessive scrolling = not good

THE FULL STORY

Tell a story

- Most effective way to activate your audience's brain
- UBC News began adopting this style of writing over the last few years – they even built an entirely new website around the idea of sharing the UBC community's stories

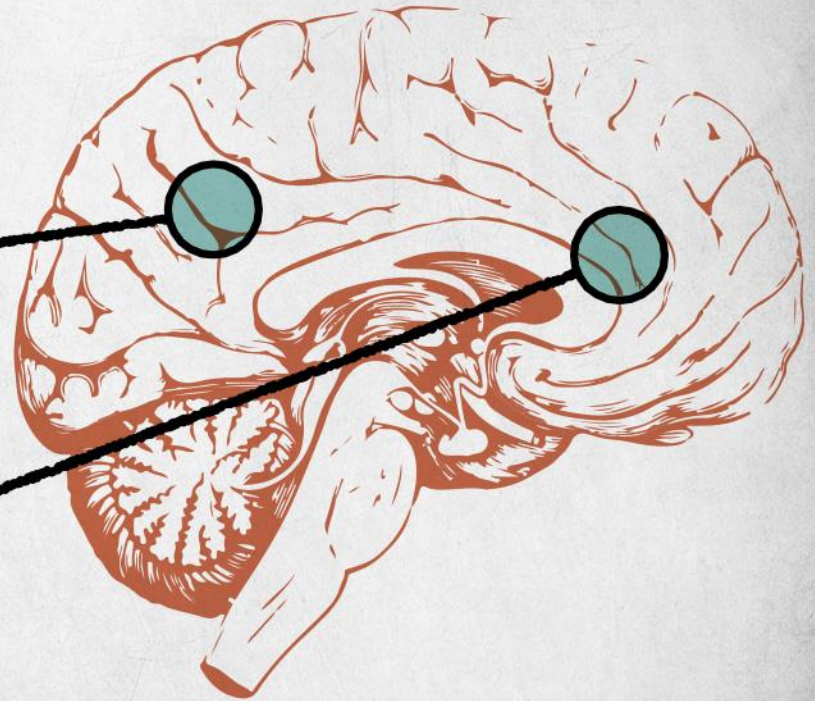
YOUR BRAIN ON DATA

WERNICKE'S AREA

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

BROCA'S AREA

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION



Source: Scott Schwertly, *The Secret to Activating Your Audience's Brain*

YOUR BRAIN ON STORIES

VISUAL CORTEX

COLORS & SHAPES

WERNICKE'S AREA

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

OLFACTORY CORTEX

SCENTS

AUDITORY CORTEX

SOUNDS

BROCA'S AREA

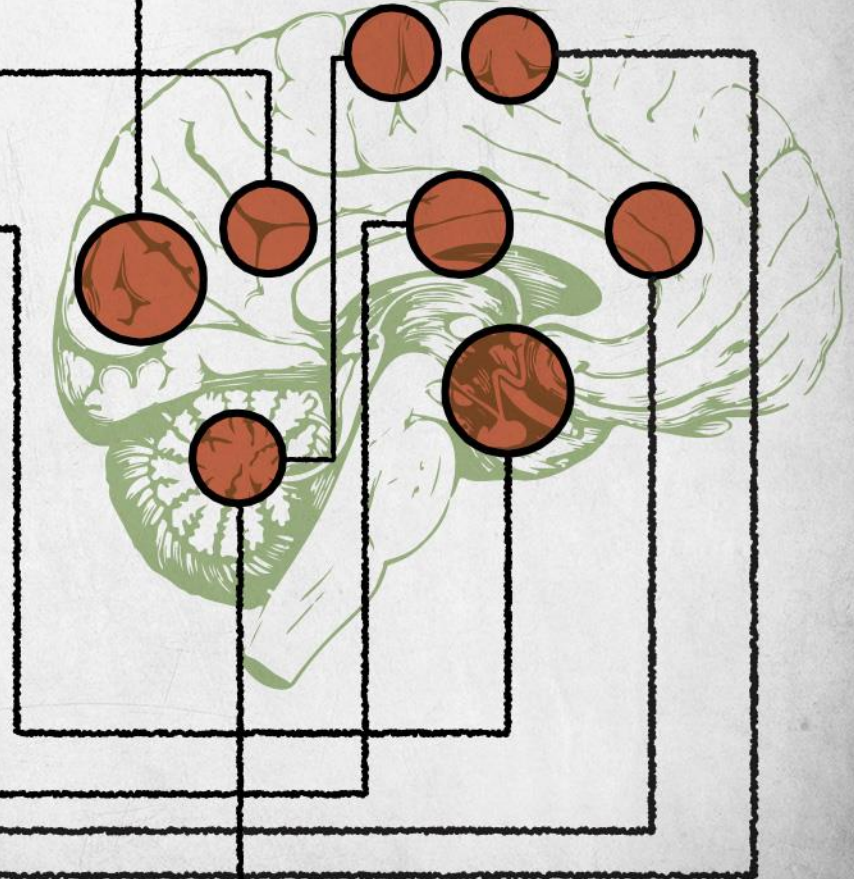
LANGUAGE PROCESSING

MOTOR CORTEX

MOVEMENT

SENSORY COTEXT & CEREBELLUM

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION



Source: Scott Schwertly, *The Secret to Activating Your Audience's Brain*

THE FULL STORY

- Don't be afraid to use emotion
- Emotion fuels stories
 - *The most popular word of 2014 wasn't even a word, but rather the emoji heart!* (via Global Language Monitor)
 - *The Library of Congress recently accepted the first emoji-only book, Emoji Dick – a translation of Herman Melville's classic*

THE FULL STORY

Higher education (academics) use ***synchronous*** style of communication, whereas the rest of the world is having to adapt and accept that ***asynchronous*** communication is now the norm

- synchronous communication = telephone conversations, face-to-face meetings
- asynchronous communication = email, IMing, text messaging, etc.

READING FOR THE WEB

Using technology and science to understand our audience better...



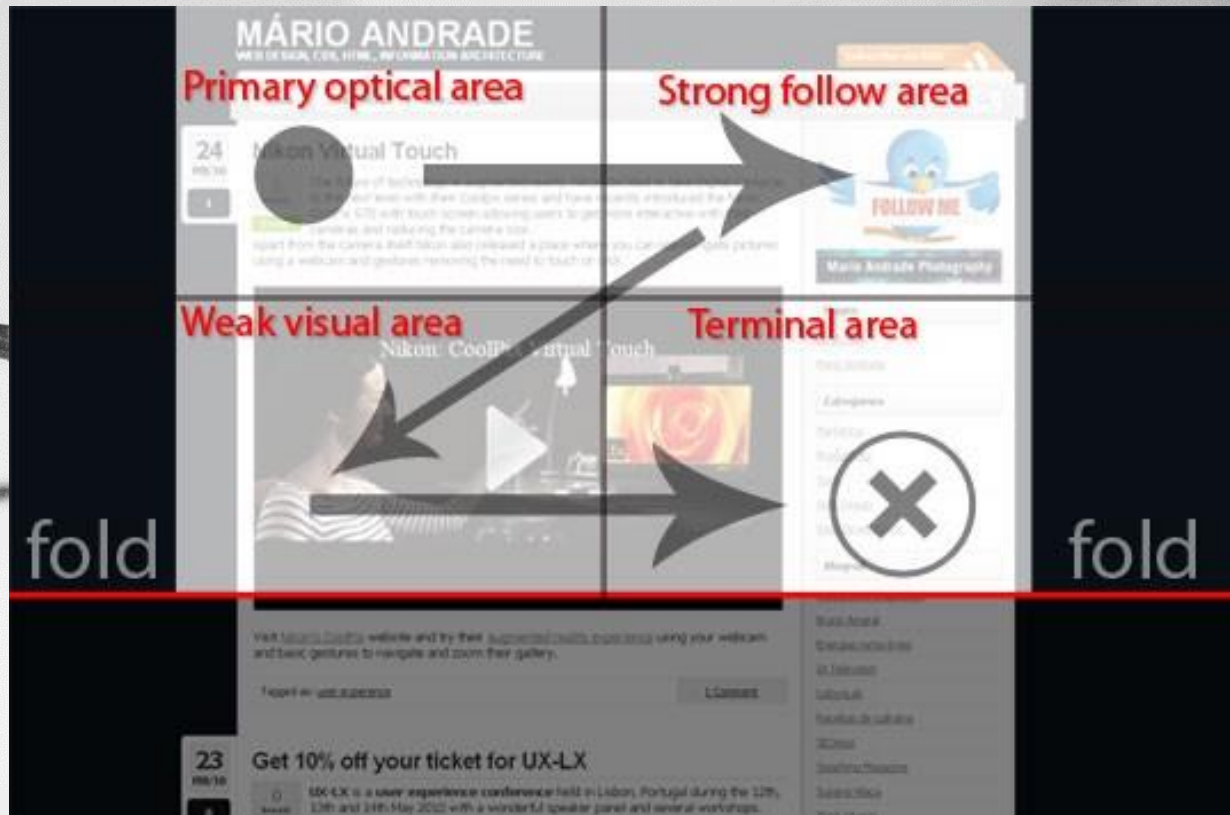
READING FOR THE WEB

Using technology and science to understand our audience better...



READING FOR THE WEB

Using technology and science to understand our audience better...



Source: <https://medium.com/user-experience-3/the-gutenberg-diagram-in-web-design-e5347c172627>

Writing Standards

- **Correct Grammar**

(Subject-verb agreement, “He are going” vs. “He is going”)

- **Contractions**

Use where appropriate

Gives an informal tone

Can help build connection with reader

Keep consistent

- **Strong verbs**

Reduces wordiness

More to the point

EXAMPLE:

Weak Verbs: To test, make a decision, conduct a survey

Strong Verbs: Test, decide, survey

Writing Standards

- **Numbers**

(General rule is that 1 – 9 are written as words and 10+ are represented by numerals)

- **Precision**

Quantify (don't say "many", give an exact number)

This builds credibility with reader

- **Active Voice**

Active voice is: Subject, Verb, Object

Passive is: Object, indirect Verb, Subject

Active voice is easier to read and shorter

Passive voice puts focus on the recipient of an action, rather than the agent

Use active voice in most types of multimedia (depending on the subject)

Passive is more complicated and is common in scientific writing, or where action is more important than the subject

Many use passive voice because it sounds more sophisticated

Writing Standards

- Punctuation!!!
 - Can drastically change the meaning
 - Can create a logic distractor

Let's eat grandma!



Let's eat, grandma!

**Punctuation
Saves Lives.**

Writing Standards

- Punctuation!!!

- Can drastically change the meaning
- Can create a logic distractor

LOGIC DISTRACTORS

- Elements taking your audience's attention away
 - Can confuse your reader and cause frustration
 - Might not be wrong grammatically but makes readers stop and think of meaning = takes away from point you are trying to communicate
- Ex. **Use of double words** (e.g. "...too to...")

Let's eat grandma!



Let's eat, grandma!

**Punctuation
Saves Lives.**

Writing Standards

- Use links
 - Try not to overuse
 - Can be very effective to break up content or to link to products
 - Most effective if part of a sentence (not just “Click here...”)
- Tables
 - Helps break up content and guide reader
 - Best for presenting data
 - Organization and logic are critical

Writing Standards

- **Bullets**

- Good way of reducing content & increasing readability
- Great way to guide readers
- Very popular in recent years especially in reports and other documents
- Can be useful if there's not a lot of space or want to get the point across quickly
- Tends to sound objective
- Easy to skim
- Easy to overuse, should not become a crutch

Writing Standards

- Bullets

- Good way of reducing content & increasing readability
- Great way to guide readers

BASIC RULES:

- Very popular in recent years especially in reports and other documents
 - Keep to one idea per bullet
 - Organize in a logical order (importance, alphabetical, etc.)
- Can be useful if there's not a lot of space or want to get the point across quickly
 - Use bulleted lists if you want to show procedural info, or if order is especially important (instructions, technical writing)
- Tends to sound copy-like
 - Capitalize the first letter of each bullet
- Easy to overuse
 - Keep parallel
 - Limit five to ten bullets
- Easy to overuse and should not become a crutch

Writing Standards

- Short sentences
 - Don't be afraid to use
- One idea per sentence
 - Increases reader comprehension and increased attention

Things to Avoid

- Being wordy
 - Can be difficult within academic settings
- Conditional writing
 - Classically Canadian (e.g. please, thank you, perhaps, try to, maybe)
 - Declare and be firm when possible
 - Confident writing shows you are an expert and gains credibility
- Subjective language
 - Distracts from points you are trying to communicate and creates confusion
 - Especially an issue if your readers (audience) speak English as a second language

Things to Avoid

- Word combinations

Use of double words

EXAMPLES:

“...edit it...”

“...too to...”

Prime example of a logic distractor

Reference: <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/tech/web/5-rules-writing-effective-web-copy>

**If you want to
improve digital
communications,
think humans before
apps and feelings
before words.**



Remember...

**Writing for the Web
is NOT university
discursive writing!**

What's Missing?

- Information architecture
- UX tactics and practices
- Concept development
- Editing tactics
- Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)
- Parasocial relationships
- SEO
- Writing for social media

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YES - All of these points
feed into flawless writing
for the web tendencies
and/or is affected by
tactics used.

Research & Resources

- Writing for the Web by Robert Ashton and Jessica Juby (2013)
- The Canadian Press Stylebook, 17th Edition
- How the Human Eye Reads a Website,
<http://www.creativebloq.com/ux/how-human-eye-reads-website-111413463>
- www.socialmediaexaminer.com
- <https://blog.slideshare.net/2015/03/04/the-secret-to-activating-your-audiences-brain/>
- It's Not Enough To Be Fast: How Emulating Human Interaction Is Key To Improving Digital Communication
<http://www.fastcocreate.com/3042288/its-not-enough-to-be-fast-how-emulating-human-interaction-is-key-to-improving-digital-commun>
- Faculty of Education Web Content Writing Guide
<http://clf-educ.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2013/04/Faculty-of-Education-Web-Writing-Guide-copy.pdf>
- UBC Brand
<http://brand.ubc.ca/about-the-brand/writing-guidelines/>