Writing and Formatting Content for the Web

HOW TO CREATE MORE ENGAGING CONTENT

1. Know your target audience, and know what they're looking for and what they need
   a. Your primary audience is students
   b. Your secondary audiences are parents, alumni, faculty and staff, donors, and the community
2. Less is more!
   a. 60-70 words per paragraph at most
   b. Limit each paragraph to a single idea or topic
   c. Use bullets or numbered lists
   d. The ABC's of writing content: We want accuracy, brevity, and clarity
      i. Get it right, say it concisely, and make it clear
3. No one reads a webpage
   a. Use the inverted pyramid style of writing
      i. Place the most important information at the beginning
   b. Don't create unnecessary content
      i. If you don't have any frequently asked questions, then don't have an FAQ section
   c. Your readers must be able to easily find what they're looking for
      i. Use words that are logical, not clever
4. Talk to (not at) your readers
   a. Engage in a two-way dialogue by using a second person active voice
   b. Avoid buzzwords and clichés
   c. Don't use "Welcome!" and "Hello!" or any "happy talk"
   d. Don't try to impress your audience with your IQ
   e. If the opposite of a statement you're using is ridiculous, don't use it
      i. Ex. "Our campus has excellent professors." For our campus to not have excellent professors is ridiculous. We want our sites to be fluff-free.
5. Make your content more readable
   a. Aim for a 5th-8th grade reading level
      i. Use http://read-able.com/
      ii. This makes your text memorable, so it gets shared more often
6. Don't just copy and paste
   a. Review and refresh your content instead of copying and pasting it from past documents

b. Minimize unnecessary information and update content where necessary

c. Be consistent in your writing style

d. Avoid ROT (Redundant, Outdated, Trivial) information

7. Make it timeless

    a. ALWAYS keep your content up to date

    b. Don't use dates in your content unless it's absolutely necessary

8. The almighty Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

    a. When users search for something, they use common terms. Keep this in mind when you're writing your content, page titles, etc.

    b. Don't use industry jargon or "internal speak" to describe things, people, or processes

    c. Use the full department/program/building name on each page for the first mention, and then you can refer to it by acronym

        i. Example: Use "The Business and Science Building (BSB)," and later you can refer to it as "BSB"

    d. Header elements (H3, H4, H5, H6) designate what content on your page is the most important

        i. H1 is reserved for the website title (for example, "Department of English")

        ii. H2 is reserved for the webpage title (for example, "About Us")

        iii. Use H3 for section titles within your webpage, use H4 for subsections

9. Four eyes are better than two

    a. Always proofread your content, and always have a second (or even third) pair of eyes take a look over it before *and after* it goes live

ACCESSIBILITY ON THE WEB

- Your content should be accessible to visitors using screen readers
  - Use descriptive alt text for images and links
    - The text should be functional and provide an equivalent user experience
  - Use the name of the content, page, or file that you're linking to
    - Example: "Application for Admission" or "Campus Map" not "click here" or "this"
  - Let your users know if the link is a file they have to download (aka PDF File)
    - Example: "List of Advisors (PDF)"

- Don't use Microsoft Word documents on the web
  - They are not universally accessible
- Try not to use PDF Files on the web
  - They are not natively accessible- images need to be tagged

FORMATTING CONTENT ON WORDPRESS

- WordPress is a new way of editing text, so don't treat it like a Word Document
  - The web is NOT a printed document
  - Think of it as fluid- it will resize for whatever device you're using
- Anytime you press enter, it will double-space
- If you want to single-space, click "Shift + Enter"
- Use the Horizontal Ruler to create lines (don't try to put it in manually!)
- You can choose bulleted lists or numbered lists

FORMATTING IMAGES ON WORDPRESS

- You can align your images so they float to the left, float to the right, or are centered by themselves
- There are some edits you can make directly in WordPress, but you should make the majority of your changes in a photo editor (http://pixlr.com/ is a free resource)
- Image size is very important on the web (images are measured in pixels)
  - If you have a huge image, the webpage will take longer to load
  - Mobile users will not use your site if it's too big because it will use too much bandwidth
  - Resize your images to a maximum of 700 pixels wide
- Note: don't take just any image off of the internet. Make sure you have the rights to add the image to our sites.
  - If you need images for your site, please contact Jennifer Pope, jennifer.pope@camden.rutgers.edu

RESOURCES

Rutgers Editorial Style Guide
http://ur.rutgers.edu/about/resources/editorial-style-guide

Web Accessibility Initiative
http://www.w3.org/WAI/

Florida International University Web Communications (http://webcomm.fiu.edu/resources/)
Your Guide to Writing for the Web
http://dl.dropbox.com/u/30588195/Writing_for_the_Web.pdf

Meet Content
Web Writing Guidelines for Content Contributors (http://meetcontent.com/)
http://meetcontent.com/blog/web-writing-guidelines-for-content-contributors/

PDF Accessibility
http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/

Tables Accessibility
http://webaim.org/techniques/tables/data

Mashable's Web Usability Tips
http://mashable.com/2011/09/12/website-usability-tips/