

Writing Tips

Usable Web sites present information clearly and simply. When writing, try to follow Associated Press (AP) style guidelines. The AP style, used by most American newspapers and other media, allows writers and editors to present information as clearly, concisely and consistently as possible. AP style works well for Web audiences because they, like newspaper readers, tend to "scan" copy.

Readability is essential. According to national literacy statistics, about half of the American population reads at the eighth grade level or lower. This means that a significant number of visitors to your Web page may have difficulty dealing with everyday written material. Some ways that you can improve the readability of your Web page include:

- Summarize first. Put the main points of your document in the first paragraph.
- Grab the reader's attention. The first sentence of each paragraph should quickly get to the point. Then add the details.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Use bulleted lists and subheadings to break up copy.
- Omit needless words. Edit your text, set it aside, then review it again and edit some more.
- Use simple words or phrases to convey meaning. For example, choose the word "use" over "utilize."
- Don't assume that the visitor understands the organization of your agency or department.
- Don't use bureaucratic or technical language that only you or your co-workers will understand.
- Avoid excessive marketing terms and choose down-to-earth language instead.
- Write conversationally. Write the same way you speak to a friend.
- If you use an [acronym](#), spell it out on the first reference.
- Do not abbreviate dates. For example, use December 21, 2000 instead of 12/31/00.
- Punctuation, when used properly, should make your thoughts and expressions clear.
- If your sentence is cluttered with excessive commas and dashes, consider breaking up your clauses into separate sentences.
- Always proofread your copy for clarity, punctuation, content and spelling errors.
- Try reading the content out loud to see if it makes sense.
- Ask someone else to read your copy.

Related Links

[The AP Stylebook](#)
- The Associated Press
[Writing for the Web](#)

- Web Teaching, Dartmouth College

[Writing for the Web](#)

- Sun Microsystems, Inc.

[Writing for the Web: Guidelines for MIT Libraries](#)

- Nicole Hennig, Web Manager, MIT Libraries

[Concise, SCANNABLE, and Objective: How to Write for the Web](#)

- John Morkes and Jakob Nielsen (1997), Useit.com

[Writing Well for the Web](#)

- Catherine Titta, Technical Documentation Consultant

[The Text E-mail Newsletter Standard](#)

- published by Headstar and the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), UK