

Web Writing Manual

Remember, Web readers tend to be extremely goal-driven and impatient. They ask:

- What is in this for me?
- How does the Web search help me reach my goal?
- Do I get the facts I am after or do I have to dig through clutter?

If these questions are frustrated, Web readers click away in the blink of an eye. At such a stage a paper-print-reader might put the text aside and return to it later, but with millions of other easily accessible Web sites on offer, a Web reader is less likely to return. To keep the Web reader interested and returning:

- Write far less than you would to express the same idea on paper; 50 percent less is a good rule of thumb.
- Do not 'pour' the text from a paper version into an on-line one, rather re-write it.
- Write for 'scannability' by using short paragraphs i.e. one paragraph one central idea.
- Use meaningful headlines, lists and subheadings.
- Prune your language/style so that the objective is clear and tightly argued.
- Give sentences a simple structure, not a convoluted one.
- Use hyperlinks where appropriate.

Recommended reading: Jacob Nielsen, Designing Web Usability. The Practice of Simplicity, Ch. 3 Content Design, Indianapolis, New Riders, 2000