

# Writing for the Web



# THE PROGRAM

## User-centered Design Certificate

### Course I

Principles of User-centered Design

Practices of User-centered Design

**Writing for the Web**

Mastering Usability

### Course II

Planning & Preparing for Testing

Conducting Usability Tests

Measuring the User Experience

Informed Design: Providing Feedback

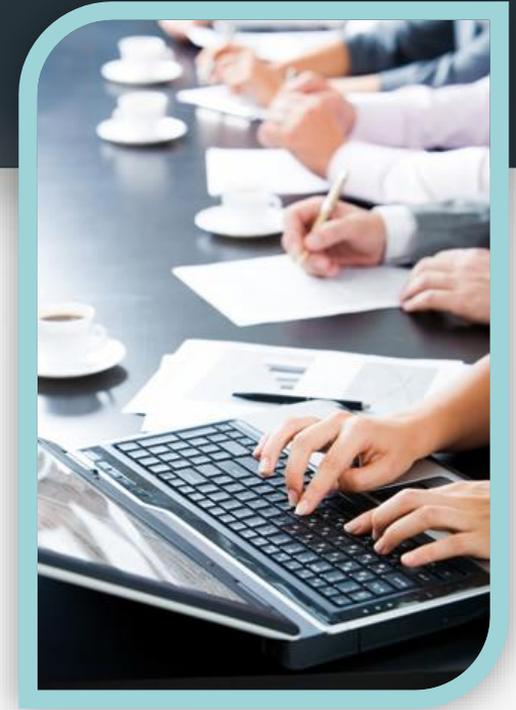
# Topics

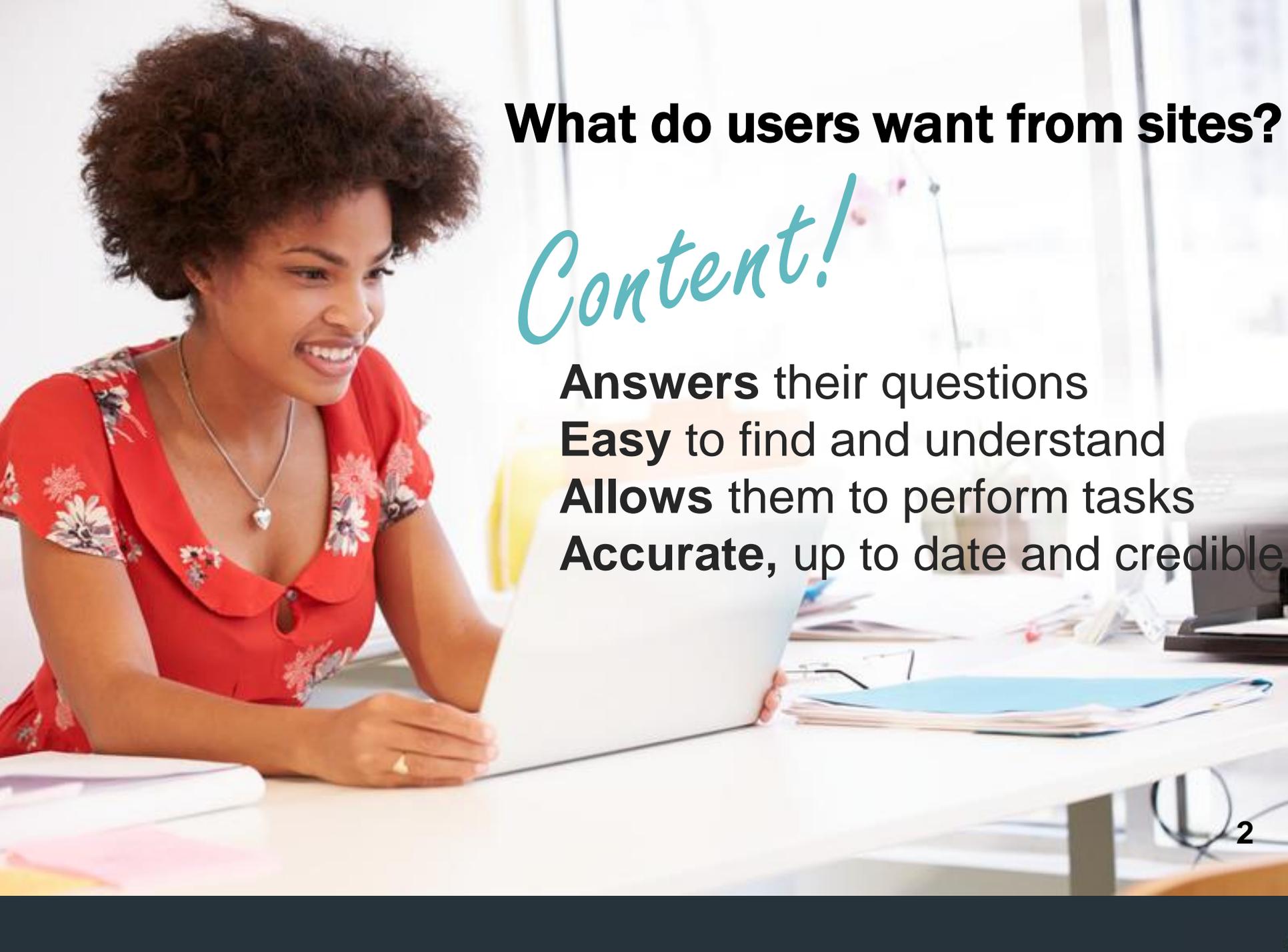
- Intro to Writing for the Web
- Planning
  - Understanding your visitor
  - The purpose of the site and content
- Make content more digestible
- Exploring ways to present large amounts of content
- Using less words
- Adding structure with headings and basic design principles



# Topics

- Design considerations
  - Integrating content and design
  - Building-in flexibility for universal usability
  - Understanding design principles
  - Exploring color and typography
- Tuning up the writing
  - The 4 'Cs' of good writing
  - Link text
  - Learning to layer information
  - Targeting reading levels





**What do users want from sites?**

*Content!*

**Answers** their questions

**Easy** to find and understand

**Allows** them to perform tasks

**Accurate**, up to date and credible

*Myth*

**People don't read on the web.**

(They do.)



# Why they skim and scan

- ✓ They're **busy**.
- ✓ What they find is **not relevant**
- ✓ They are focused on **answering a question**
- ✓ They are focused on **performing a task**
- ✓ Bombarded with **information overload**

# Good web writing

- ✔ is like a conversation
- ✔ answers people's questions
- ✔ lets people grab and go

# Online reading

People read *differently* online.

Attention spans are shorter. People tend to skim and scan until they find what they're looking for. When they sense they're close to what they want, they slow down and *read*.

**How does this affect writing for the web?**



# Online reading

## Non-linear navigation

On the web we cannot know where our users will enter or exit our sites. There is no guarantee the site visitor has arrived through, or will ever see, our home page.

**How does this affect writing for the web?**



# Writing for the audience

Putting the **user** in  
USER-CENTERED DESIGN



# Writing for the audience

Be sure to consider all they may do on your site.

- view
- read
- listen to
- navigate
- search
- order
- download
- submit data

# Exercise

## Creating user-centered content

Writing for the web involves taking what we know about our audience and putting that knowledge to work for us in our copy; thus pleasing and helping our readers.

Describe how each user characteristic listed may affect our writing.  
(see handout)



# Exercise

## Creating user-centered content

Example: Appreciative

End-user might be willing to:

- donate to your organizations charity  
Ask them. Add a DONTATE button.

- provide a testimonial  
Ask them to complete a short form.

- tell a friend  
Offer a way to send 'email a link' or share site on social media.

# 7 steps to understanding audiences

1. List your major audiences
2. Gather information about your audiences
3. List major characteristics for each audience
4. Gather your audiences' questions, tasks and stories
5. Use your information to create personas
6. Include the persona's goals and tasks
7. Use your information to write scenarios for our site

# Create personas

Personas help you think about end-users as real people.

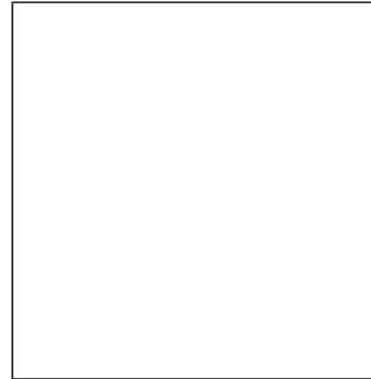
Personas help you:

- identify
- understand
- make predictions
- empathize



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Job/Role \_\_\_\_\_



DAY TO DAY

LIKELY TASKS

- 
- 
- 
- 

PERSONAL DETAILS

# Persona templates

## Resources

- Use a search engine for ideas
- Persona Resource  
<https://wiki.fluidproject.org/display/fluid/Personas>
- Create templates in word processing or design programs
- Use an online persona builder  
<https://xtensio.com/>

# Persona templates

How do personas work with a team?

- Book pages 22 and 23

# The 'Big Ideas' of UCD

Plan, create, and test  
with the end-user in mind

Give users what  
they expect

Don't make  
users think

Provide structure

Be consistent

*Reminder*



# 5 quality components in usability

- ✔ Learnability
- ✔ Efficiency
- ✔ Memorability
- ✔ Errors
- ✔ Satisfaction

Reminder

# Home pages

- ✔ Site identity and mission
- ✔ Site hierarchy
- ✔ Search
- ✔ Teases/promos
- ✔ Timely content
- ✔ Deals
- ✔ Register/login

# Useful home pages

- ✔ A useful home page makes it instantly clear what it's about. (36)
- ✔ A useful home page is mostly links and short descriptions (37)
- ✔ Page examples (38, 39, 40)

# Every page

- Prominent Logo/Site Name
- Global Navigation
- Tag line
- Contact info
- Search

# Putting it all together

Next we'll observe usability flaws in a specific case study.

This example shows and before and after design of a portal site to all the information in all the agencies that make up the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

# Writing information, not documents

- Breaking up large documents
- Deciding how much to put on one web page
- PDF- yes or no?

# Breaking up large documents

- ✔ Remember, websites are non-linear.
- ✔ They are not designed to be read from beginning to end.
- ✔ Users don't want to read them from beginning to end.
- ✔ In fact, for the most part, users don't want to read them at all.

# Breaking up large documents

Best practice

Give the **right information** at the **right time** in the **right amount**.

# Breaking up large documents

Explore the partial sample page at the top of page 70 *Weight Control and Diet*

If you *were* to leave it as one long page, what could you do to alleviate the issues listed at right?

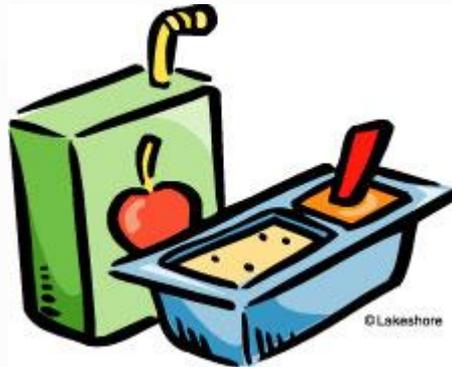


# Breaking up large documents

bite



snack



meal



exercise

# Breaking up large documents

Ideas for dividing up several sections of content with a site

- ✓ Divide content by time or sequence
- ✓ Divide content by task
- ✓ Divide content by people
- ✓ Divide content by type of information
- ✓ Divide content by questions people ask

# Breaking up large documents

Ideas for dividing up several sections of content with a site

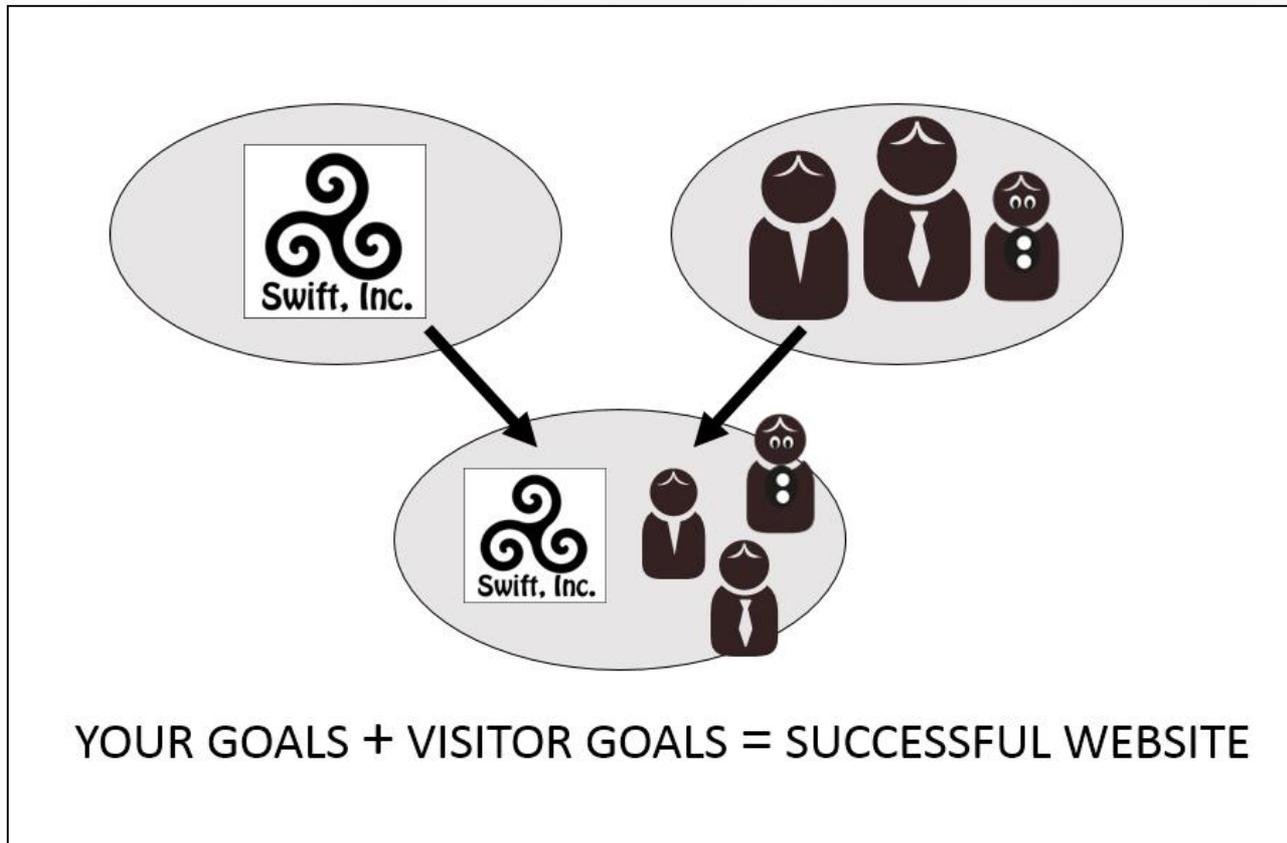
- ✓ Divide content by time or sequence
- ✓ Divide content by task
- ✓ Divide content by people
- ✓ Divide content by type of information
- ✓ Divide content by questions people ask

# PDFs

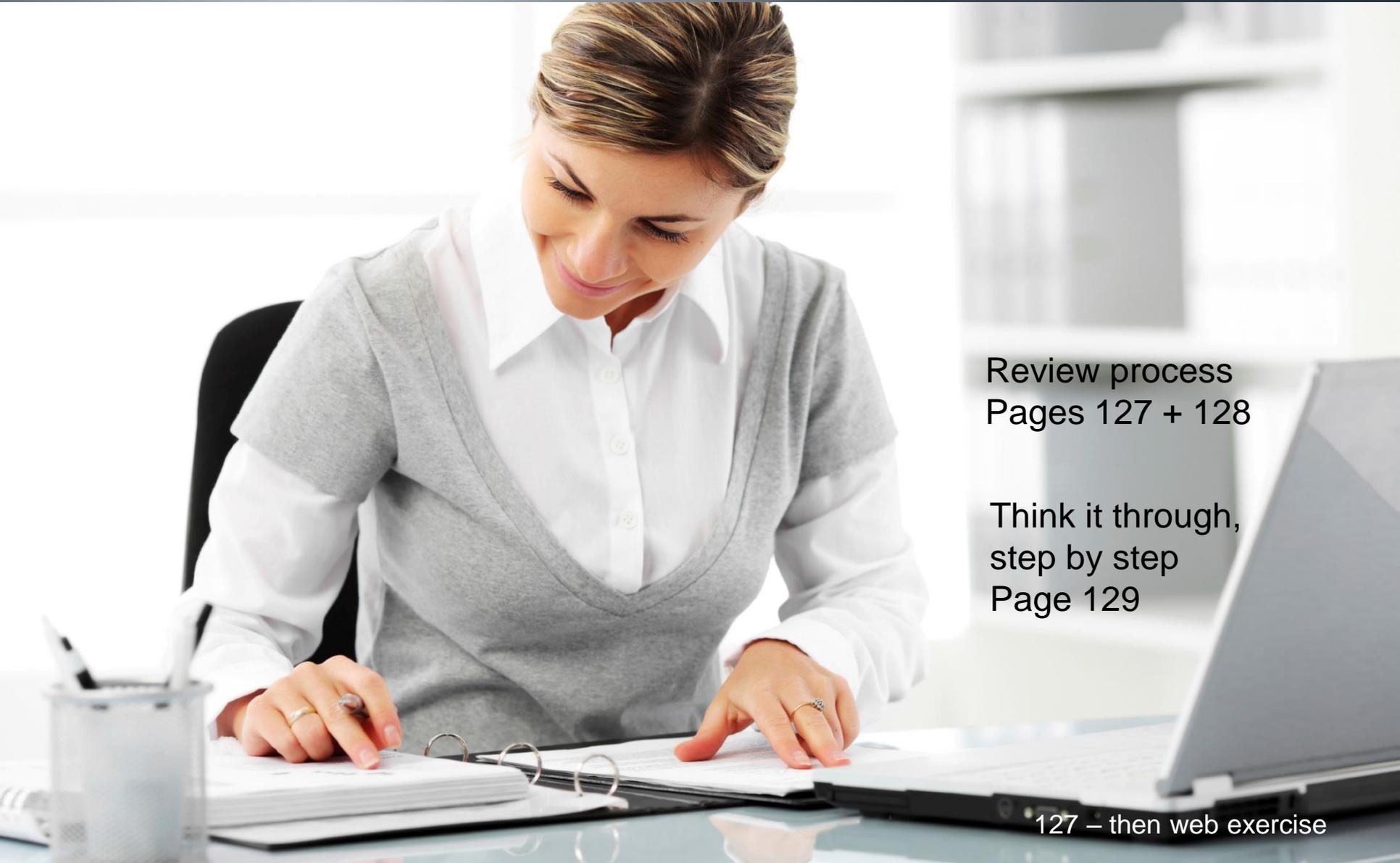
- What does it stand for?
- What company invented this format?
- Benefits?
- Website PROs and CONs



# Conversations



# Revising content you already have



Review process  
Pages 127 + 128

Think it through,  
step by step  
Page 129

# Revising content you already have

127 – web exercise



# Cut! Cut! Cut! ...and cut again!

## Overall

- **Reduce** clauses to phrases, phrases to single words
- **Avoid** adverbs that function as intensifiers  
(*really, very, quite, extremely, severely, etc..*)
- **Omit** important sounding phrases that add nothing to the meaning of a sentence.

# Omit words

Omitting unnecessary words has several beneficial effects:

- reduces the noise level of the page
- makes the useful content more prominent
- makes the pages shorter, allowing user to see more of each page at a glance without scrolling

**HINT: Set a goal for removing half the words!**

# Take 1

There is a common misconception when it comes to writing that is professional in nature that a person must write in a verbose manner to come across as intelligent.

source: LifeHacker.com  
Danny Rubin  
twitter: [@dannyhrubin](https://twitter.com/dannyhrubin)

## Take 2

People often make a mistake in thinking that writing long-winded sentences with big words makes them appear smart.

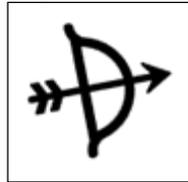
source: LifeHacker.com  
Danny Rubin  
twitter: [@dannyhrubin](https://twitter.com/dannyhrubin)

# Take 3

You don't need to write a lot or use big words to sound smart.

source: LifeHacker.com  
Danny Rubin  
twitter: [@dannyhrubin](https://twitter.com/dannyhrubin)

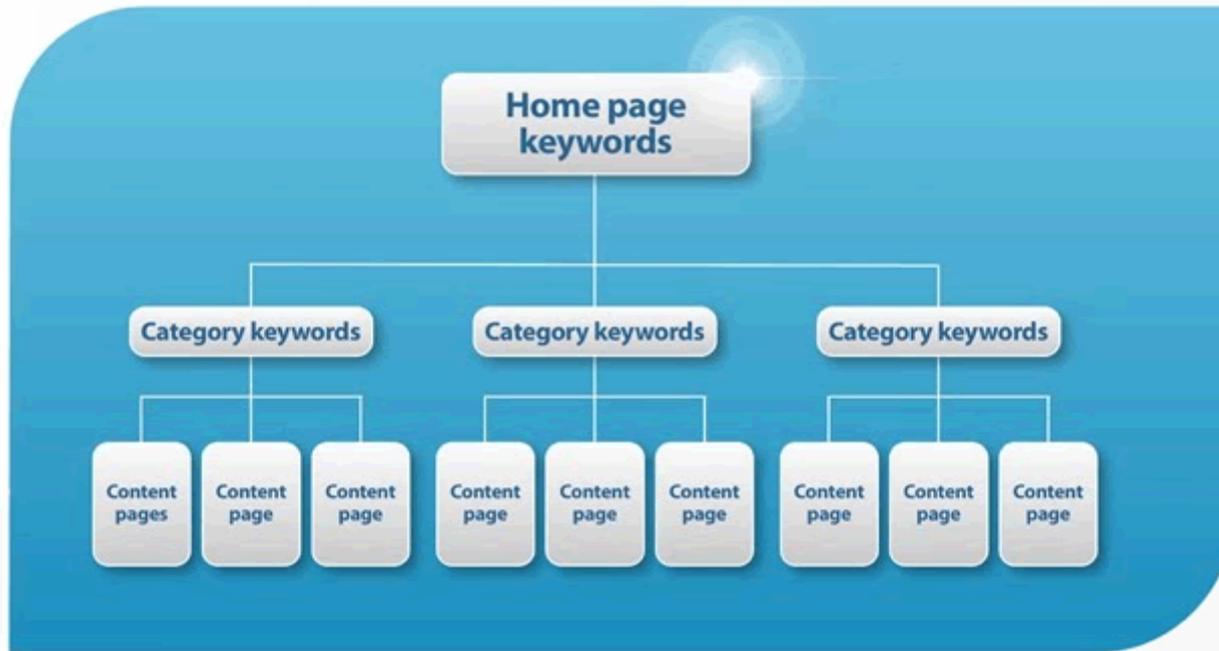
# Writing for the 3 site visitors



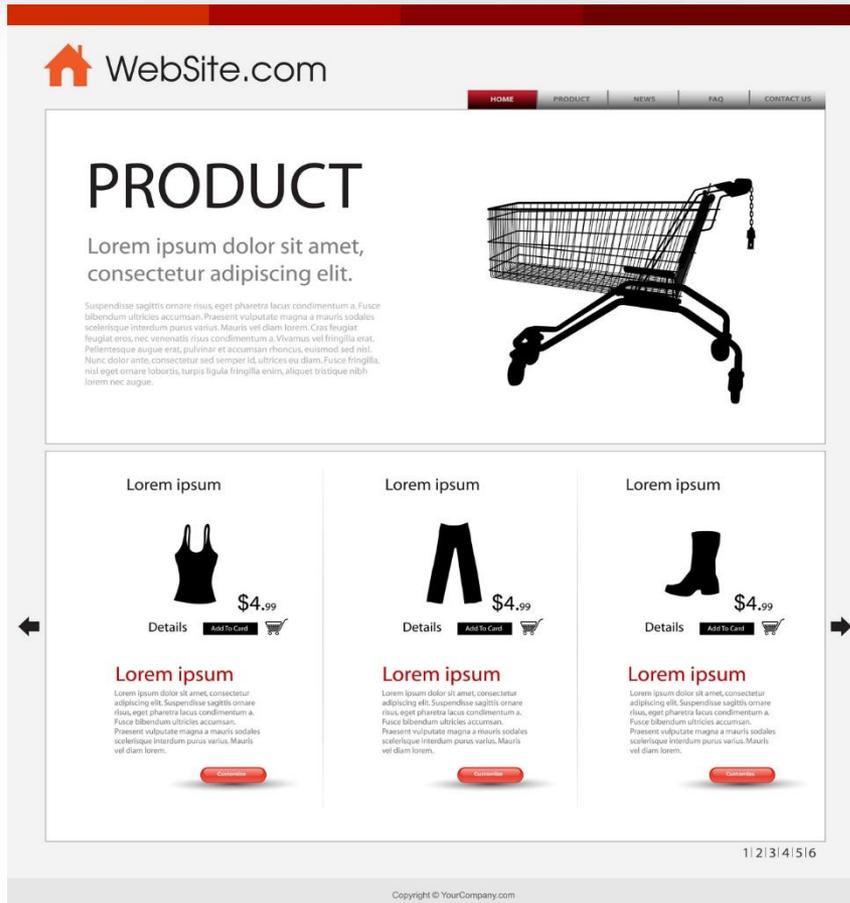
*It's all about*  
**STRUCTURE**

(Well, it's a lot about structure.)

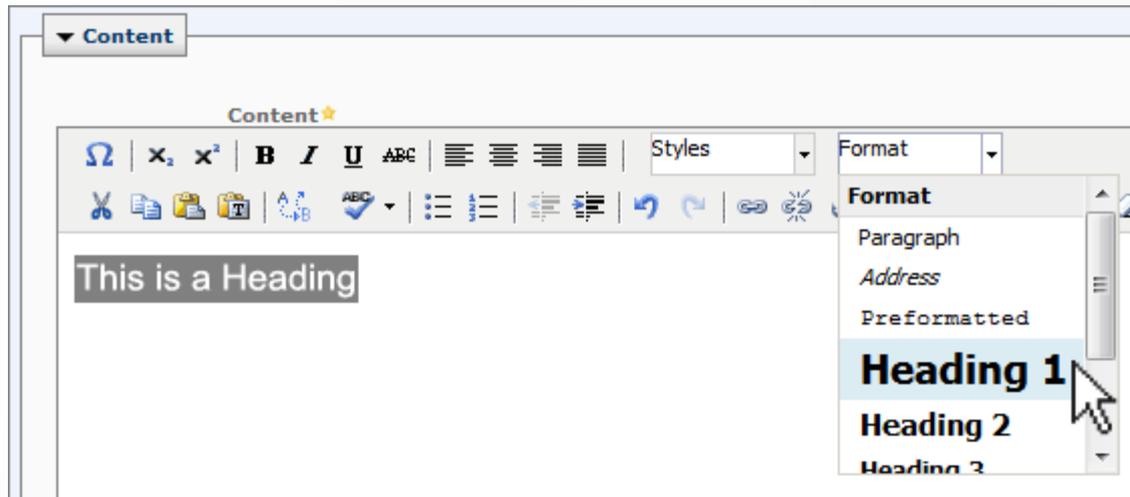
# Prioritize the site



# Prioritize the page



# Prioritize the page



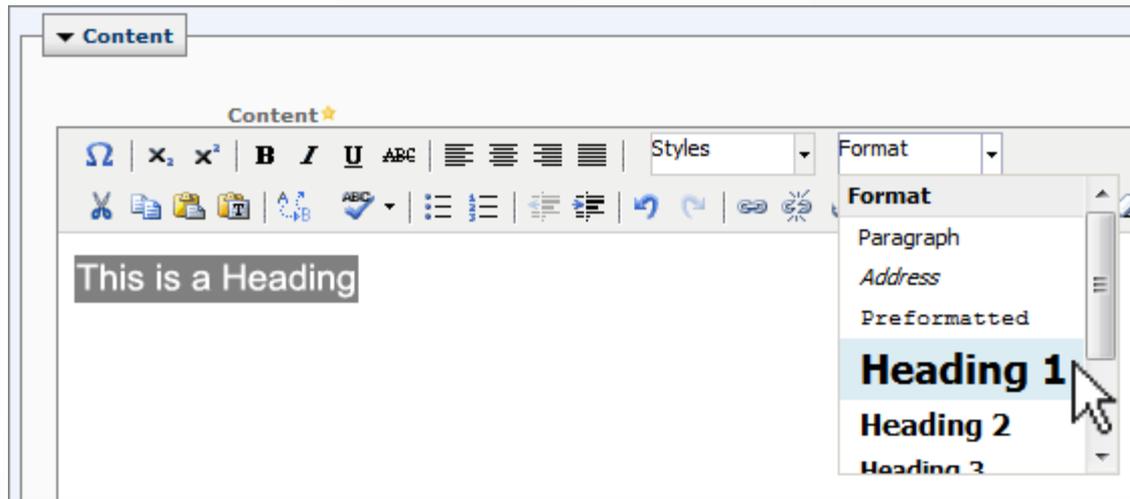
STRUCTURE

[Dryex](#)

[USDA](#)

[SPSCC](#)

# Content has structure



STRUCTURE

[Dryex](#)

[USDA](#)

[SPSCC](#)

# Outlining leads to structure

## **h1** Introduction to Web Accessibility

### **h2** Article Contents

### **h2** Introduction

#### **h3** The Web Offers Unprecedented Opportunities

#### **h3** Falling Short of the Web's Potential

### **h2** People with Disabilities on the Web

### **h2** Implementing Web Accessibility

#### **h3** Commitment and accountability

#### **h3** Training and technical support

#### **h3** Laws and standards

### **h2** Principles of Accessible Design

### **h2** Conclusion

# Help with headings

## *Questions*

Ask questions with headings when visitors arrive with questions.

- *How do I...?*
- *Can I...?*
- *Where can I...?*

# Help with headings

## *Questions*

### Writing good questions

- *Write questions that people ask.*
- *Think conversation. Ask the question from the end-user's point of view.*
- *Keep the questions short.*

# Help with headings

**Q:** Where can I find locations in my area to take the class to get my motorcycle endorsement on my license?

**Better:**

Where can I take the motorcycle endorsement class?

---

**Q:** How can using headings help our site visitors on our web pages?

**Better:**

Why do we use headings?

---

**Q:** What do I need to do to get a permit?

**Better:**

How do I get a permit?

# Help with headings

## *Action Phrases*

Using action phrases as headings help breakup long lists of questions.

Consider using action phrases when you find you have a long list of questions, especially if the questions seem repetitive.

# Help with headings

## *Action Phrases*

Using action phrases as headings help breakup long lists of questions.

How do I reset my password?

Reset my password

---

How do I cancel my account?

---

How do I get help?

---

How do I learn more?

---

How do I find a degree program?

# Help with headings

## *Action Phrases*

Consider ending action phrases with “-ing”

Reset my password



Resetting my password

Cancel my account

Get help

Learn more

Find a degree program

# Help with headings

## *Action Phrases*

Consider using action phrases in the imperative  
(i.e. the “*do this...*” form of the verb.)

Complete the form

Peel the label back slowly

Pull the handle towards you

Use cold water

# Help with headings

## *Statements*

Consider using statement headings for more impact!

**Privacy.** We won't share your information.

**Search now.** You'll find something you love.

**Answers.** *We got 'em.*

**Empowerment.** It starts today.

**Milk.** It does a body good.

# Use Plain Language

## **Studies have shown...**

We read easier, shorter words ***faster*** and retain what we've read for ***longer*** than if more complex words are used.

# Use Plain Language

## Who are we helping?

- lower education levels
- lower reading levels
- learning/reading disabilities
- visual disabilities
- English is not native language
- people in a hurry
- 'The Hungry Hunter'
- *...everyone!*

# Targeting readability levels

## **Flesch-Kincaid Tests**

The Flesch–Kincaid (F-K) readability tests are designed to indicate comprehension difficulty when reading a passage English.

Target your language for no higher than 8th or 9th grade reading level copy.

# Targeting readability levels

## **Flesch-Kincaid Tests**

The commonwealth of Pennsylvania was the first state to require that automobile insurance policies be written at no higher than a 9th grade reading difficulty, as measure by the F-K formula.

This is now a common requirement in many other states and for other legal documents such as insurance policies.

# Targeting readability levels

## **The F-K Grade Level Test**

These readability tests are used extensively in the field of education.

The "Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula" translates the 0–100 score to a U.S. grade level, making it easier for teachers and others to judge the readability level of various books.

# Targeting Readability Levels

## Testing for reading grade level

- Check reading level in Word
- Check reading level online  
<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>

# Focus on action–verbs, not nouns



Upon successful completion of the online renewal transaction, printing the membership card will be an option.



When you finish renewing online, you can print your membership card.



Renew online. Then, print your membership card.

# Writing link text



[Long link text example](#)

['click here' example](#)

[good link text](#)

[Qleap examples](#)

[SBCTC examples](#)

# Writing link text

## When writing link text

- include descriptive key words
- make text meaningful and clear
- keep link text short  
*(but not too short!)*
- add 'title attribute' when appropriate
- use unique beginnings when listing several links
- group related navigation links together on page
- match link text to heading on destination page
- avoid 'view,' 'see,' and 'hear'

# Jargon

- Best to avoid.
- Use it if *you know they know it* and it will help make the message more succinct, and a little more friendly.
- Consider explaining/defining it once and then not again thereafter.

# Word Usage

## Jargon - Examples

- Think outside the box
- Get our ducks in a row
- End-user perspective
- Face-time
- Pick low hanging fruit
- Keep in the loop
- Enterprise system
- CMA
- CMS
- FPS
- ERS
- ERM
- IT
- ASAP

# The 3 'C's of Writing

- Be clear
- Be concise
- Be compelling

# The 3 'C's of Writing

## Be clear

Writing 'clear' does not mean dumbing-down your content, although a nice side effect is that more users (of varying ages, education levels, and language levels) will be able to understand your copy.

- Overall principles of clear writing
- State your purpose up front; sooner rather than later.
- Use shorter words, not longer, more flowery words

# The 3 'C's of Writing

## Be concise

To be concise is to write with precision. Don't worry about word count—just say what needs saying and be done with it. Understandably we want to be clear, but not at the expense of being concise.

- Reduce clauses to phrases, phrases to single words
- Omit important sounding phrases that add nothing the meaning of a sentence

# The 3 'C's of Writing

## Be concise

all things considered  
as a matter of fact  
it seems that  
at the present time  
because of the fact that  
type of  
what I mean to say is  
for the most part

# The 3 'C's of Writing

## Be compelling

Humans are emotional beings. Our emotions connect us with other people. When you write, allow for a little transparency; be willing to share an experience that reveals an emotion. People love great stories. Stories can be extremely compelling and powerful.

# The 3 'C's of Writing

## Be compelling

- Write in the first person.
- Write how you would talk when excited or passionate
- Be specific. If you earned \$1,372.28 in eight days using your strategy, then say so.
- Don't underestimate how much people want to be a part of success, even vicariously.
- Use action words such as *buy, order now, download today, and act now.*
- Create conflict.
- Be controversial.

# Proofreading



## WAIT

Wait at least two hours before proofreading a document you have written. In less time, your mind still remembers the context and will see what it thinks is correct.



## FRESH EYES

Ask someone else to read through for errors. Fresh eyes will find the errors quicker than eyes that have already read the document.



## PRINT

Printing the document and reading through may reveal more errors.