#pelc11

Writing for the Web

Matt Lingard,
LSE Centre for Learning Technology

Focus

- Words & Writing
- Page Layout
- Emphasis & Links
- ~~Design~~
- ~~Site Structure~~

Topics

- General Web Writing Guidelines
- Writing for Blogs
- VLE

- Best practice guidelines not hard-and-fast rules

Types of Web page

- Information giving
- "Reading" material
  - News
  - Educational resources
- Navigation
- Interaction

Print vs Web?

- Groups
- 3-mins
- Differences between print and web
  - Physical
  - Our Behaviour
  - Advantages / Disadvantages

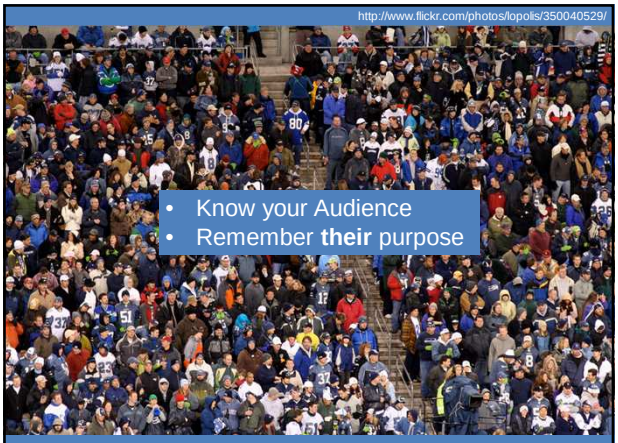
Some Key Differences

- Physical
  - Control
  - Navigation
- Behaviour
  - Users not readers
  - Scan first; sometimes read
  - Impatient

http://www.flickr.com/photos/plenty/3360322975/

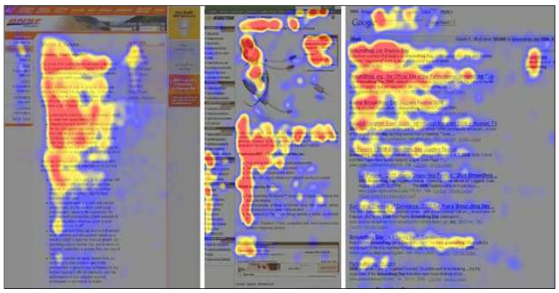
Wrong Comparison?

http://www.flickr.com/photos/lopolis/350040529/



- Know your Audience
- Remember **their** purpose

F-Shaped Reading Pattern



http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html

Scannability

- Headings
  - Sub-headings
- Short paragraphs
- Lists – numbered or bulleted
- Start with information-carrying words
  - In headings, paragraphs, links
  - **First 2 wor**ds (or 11-ish characters) count most

Emphasis (in main text)

- Useful for scanning
  - But too much is distracting
- Which ones are best?
  - CAPITALS
  - **Bold**
  - *Italic*
  - Underline
  - Colour

Links

- Structural (navigation)
- Within main text (inline)
  - Related material, evidence etc
  - Don't over link, it's distracting

*Great book by Steve Krug

Writing Links

- Link with page titles or similar text
  - No surprises!
- Unambiguous
  - Be consistent; differentiate
  - Don't make me think!*

X Click here to view the student video diary

X View the student video diary here

✓ View the student video diary

Language

- Use plain language
  - Avoid jargon, slang and clichés
  - Expand acronyms
  - Limit humour
- Conversational
- Active vs passive voice
- Eliminate redundancy
- Proof read

Active Voice

- Use **active voice**, not passive voice
  - Start with who; then what
- Passive: Social security taxes must be paid monthly by employers
- Active: Employers must pay social security taxes monthly

Conversational

- Answer Questions
- Talk to your readers
  - You & Your
  - We & Our (or I / My)
- Use imperatives for instructions
  - Read…
  - Submit…
  - Print…

Example adapted from Ross (2007) Writing for the Web

Keep it brief

- Remove redundancy
- Use single words where possible
- Short words, sentences and paragraphs!

Setting up your website involves co-operative collaboration between the various members of a team, such as the designer and the commissioner, for example. The method is a simple one. 29 words

Creating your website involves collaboration between team members, such as the designer and the commissioner. The method is simple.

19 words

Example: Before

Sending Food to the US

The new ruling requires the person sending the food to electronically file a “prior notice” with the US Food & Drug Administration. A confirmation of the FDA receipt of “prior notice” must be presented to Australia Post along with the parcel. The prior notice form is available at http://www.access.fda.gov

From: www.auspost.com.au

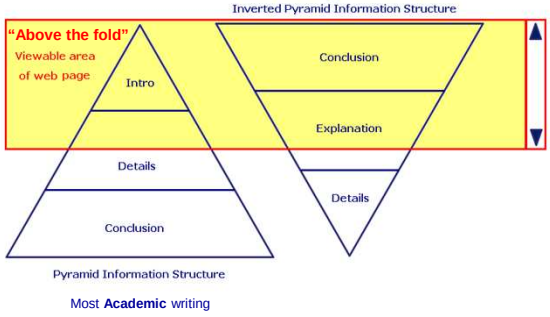
Example: After

Sending Food to the US

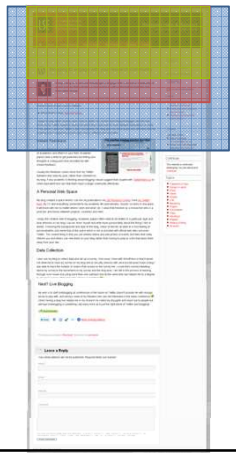
1. Go to the US Food and Drug Administration Prior Notice
2. Fill out the form about the food you are sending
3. Print your confirmation page
4. Take the confirmation & your package to Australia Post

Adapted from: Redish (2007) Letting Go of the Words

Journalist’s Inverted Pyramid

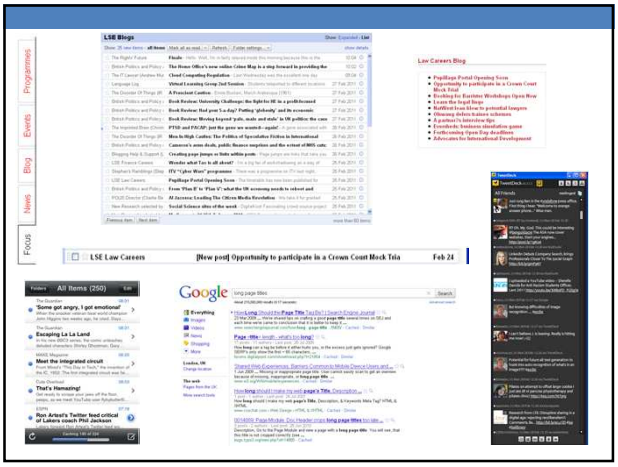


Most **Academic** writing



PICTURE A BLOG

What do your readers see **first**?



Post Titles

- Appeal to your audience
- Simple. Specific. Short?
- Easy to understand
- Tell as much of the story as you can
- Entice, don't tease

- Spend time writing them

Post Titles that work

- Strong Opinion
- Meet a need, express a benefit
  - How-to, 7 Things…, 5 Tips…
- News / Announcements
- Conversational: "You"

Post Summaries

- Always start with a summary
  - Keep it short (1-3 sentences)
  - Highlight key points
- Purpose
  - Ideally: Get your reader to the next paragraph!
  - If not: they have a summary to take away

Writing for VLEs

- Keep homepages & 'pathway' pages for navigation not content
- Group related information together
- Consistent, unambiguous language
- Differentiate link text
- Add structure: sub-headings, bullets, space…
- Give clear instructions

Summary

- Scan first, read later (maybe)
- Know your audience and their purpose
- Lead with key information
- Scannability
- Plain language
- Conversational
- Remove redundancy