



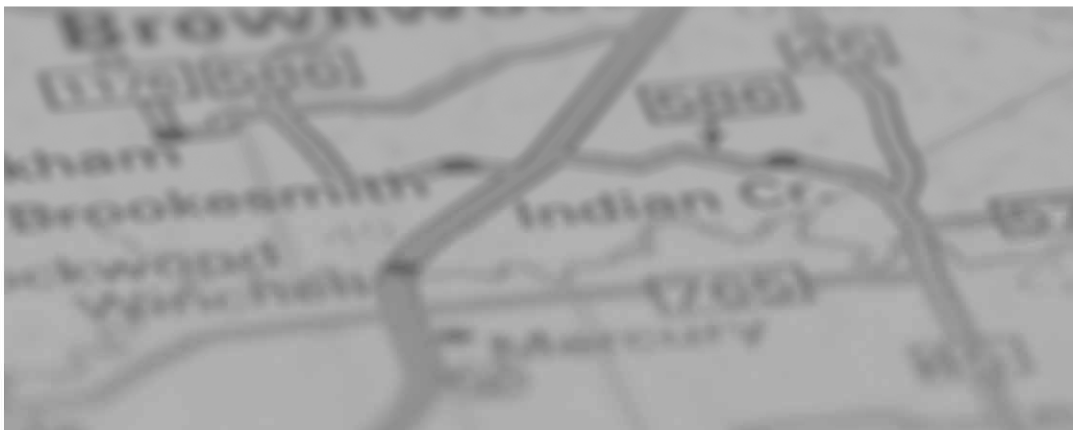
Roadmap Series

Issue 13

Writing Effectively for the Web

Prepared by Anna Robinson

8-10-2009



WEBASSIST[®]
Build better websites, faster.

Recommended Experience Level

1

Beginner

2

Intermediate

3

Advanced

Writing Effectively for the Web

Produced by Anna Robinson

Content is one of the most valuable things you can focus on during development of your website. Consider each page of your website an opportunity to capture or lose your audience. If a web page has paragraph after paragraph of text, many visitors won't bother to begin reading. There are various other things to be weary of when writing for the web. This roadmap covers eight tips to help you succeed when writing content for your website.

Entice with Communicative Headings

Visitors decide whether to invest their precious time reading your content, typically after scanning a heading or two. Consider which headline will receive more attention:

Understanding Project Management

It is also important to keep your headings concise. When headings wrap to multiple lines, they start becoming paragraph-like and readers cannot scan them. Sub-headings are another way to make your

Project Management Tips from Three Industry Leaders

It is also important to keep your headings concise. When headings wrap to multiple lines, they start becoming paragraph-like and readers cannot scan them. Sub-headings are another way to make your

While both could be headings for the same content, the second heading will attract more attention because it clearly denotes what will follow. Additionally, it adds a level of expertise.

It is also important to keep your headings concise. When headings wrap to multiple lines, they start becoming paragraph-like and readers cannot scan them. Sub-headings are another way to make your content easier for visitors to scan. Once readers have decided your heading is worth investing more time in, they often scan the sub-headings to jump to the section that is most applicable to them.

Conclude Before You Expand

Every page of your website should cater to the most impatient reader and clearly state what the page is about in the first few lines. Most readers won't want to read an entire page to get to the point. Write an introductory paragraph that summarizes the most important parts.

Many successful writers outline the points they want to get across, fill in those points and only then do they write their first paragraph. It is not necessary to write from top to bottom and this method can help you write a stronger introduction.

Roadmap Series

Issue 13



Create Effective Lists

It is quicker to scroll down a web page than it is to read from left to right and keep your eyes wrapping from line to line. For this reason, readers appreciate lists. However, it is important not to use overwhelmingly long lists. Studies have shown people can remember 7 things at a time. A list of seven bulleted items is digestible, while a list of 50 is intimidating. If it is crucial for you to list 50 points, break up your lists with sub-headings so readers are able to jump from section to section efficiently.



Write Clearly and Succinctly

Whether your visitors are coming to gain information, make buying decisions or simply be entertained, respect that they don't have all day to read your content. If you are wordy, you can expect your visitors to drift to competitors' websites. However, don't sacrifice clarity for brevity.

Similar to print writing, each paragraph should contain only one idea. The attention span of a web reader is shorter than that of a print reader though, which makes it important to trim your paragraphs to a few sentences each.

Eliminate unnecessary words. For example, there is no need to say, "at this point in time" when you can say "currently." It is useless to say "an awful tragedy" when tragedies are awful by nature. Avoid describing an object as "round in shape" when you can just say round.

Avoid the passive voice. For example, replace, "My life has been made easier by templates" with "Templates simplified my life."

The above paragraph helps illustrate that examples are useful; however, I should specify that repeating yourself is not. Do not say the same thing in three different ways.

Use consistent language. Consider your audience when writing in first, second or third person and be careful transitioning from one to the next. Jumping from a formal paragraph to a first person story sounds like two authors wrote the content.

Finally, read your content aloud and trust your first reaction. If you have to re-read to put the emphasis in the correct part of the sentence or to understand your own point, you can bet that others will too.

More importantly, have someone else read your content – preferably, your target audience, not your business partner. You are too close to the ideas you want to communicate and others may find ambiguities that you will certainly want to clarify.

Roadmap Series

Issue 13



Create Content Relative to Your Audience

Know your audience and speak to them, not at them. Whether your objective is to sell toilet seats or convey a change in the stock market, play to people's emotions. Don't use technical terms for a less than savvy audience.

Don't assume your readers have been to certain pages of your website before others. With a growing dependence on search engines, visitors often arrive at a website two tiers down from the home page. Consider the visitor's point of view: If I knew nothing about this company or website, would I understand this page?

Be cautious of tangents, information and links that will distract a reader from the web page's primary purpose.

Specify Links with Style and Language

Links are another way visitors can scan your web pages as they stand out from normal text – or at least they should. Make sure your links differ in color or style from other text on your website.

Using "click here to learn more" is a waste of space. Instead, use "learn more." Your links should tell readers where they are going, but they shouldn't be reminded they need their mouse to get there.

Be specific with where the link is leading to. There are many websites that break up articles into two or more pages. Readers are more apt to click on a link that says, "Part 2: Mortgage Lending" than they are to click on a link that says "next."

Roadmap Series

Issue 13

Proofread – Forward and Backward

There are some people who are a magnetic force to typos and grammatical blunders. While some will gloss over these errors, the people who do notice are typically repelled. Websites with typos look unprofessional – or worse – like the author didn't care enough about the reader to take the time to proofread.

Tips for proofreading:

- Use spell check and grammar check.
- Read backward. When we read forward, our eyes skip over small words and miss mistakes.
- Have someone else proofread your content.
- If in doubt, look it up!

Trusting copy/paste is a common mistake; be sure to proofread your content after it is on the web page.

Conclude with Action

Although many of your readers won't make it to the end of your content, it's important to summarize for those who do. Include your overall point, as well as where you would like to lead your reader to next. If you are fortunate enough to have your readers want more, don't miss an opportunity to provide it!



Writing Effectively for the Web

For example, I would like to conclude by articulating that web writing has similarities to print writing (entice and be concise!) but differs in that readers are more impatient and can easily “surf” elsewhere. The more you understand how people read on the web in general and what your audience wants to know, the more you will keep visitors coming back for more.

About WebAssist

WebAssist helps you build better websites faster by offering software, solutions, and training needed to succeed on the web. WebAssist.com hosts a thriving community of over 300,000 designers, developers, and business owners. WebAssist's partners include Adobe, Microsoft, and PayPal.

Join our Community

From free software and training, to special offers, there is something for everyone. Come take a look at what is waiting for you and sign up today to gain access to all of the valuable benefits awarded to the members of our community. [Click here to join our community.](#)

Roadmap Series

Issue 13



WebAssist.com Corporation
8899 University Center Lane
San Diego, CA 92122
USA
www.webassist.com