

Writing for the Web

The web is normally scanned. Not read.

Reading on the web isn't as relaxing as reading a book and people tend to read slower on the web too. On the average web page, users have time to read at most 28% of the words during an average visit.

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Put your most important information first

Most online readers want to find out information quickly – they don't want to wade through lots of text to get to what they need.

Make your point upfront and be clear and direct. Remove words or descriptions that don't add value to the content.

Aim to write at a 10-12 year old level

Forty-six percent of Australians aged 15 years and above, have a reading level below that of someone currently in Grade 9 of High School.

This ultimately means that when writing content for the web, the vocabulary and language used must be written so that it can be understood by a 10-year-old.

This can also aid individuals whose English is not their dominant language, as well as anyone who has a cognitive disability.

Use the readability feature within Microsoft Word to review your work before you publish it.

Microsoft Word Readability

1. Click the File tab, and then click Options.
2. Click Proofing.
3. Under 'When correcting spelling and grammar in Word', make sure the 'Check grammar with spelling' check box is selected.
4. Select Show readability statistics.
5. Use the test via Review then Spelling and Grammar 'Understand readability scores'

Flesch Reading Ease test

On a 100-point scale, the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. Aim for a score between 60 and 70.

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test

A score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader can understand the document. Aim for a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0.



Use simple, consistent, inclusive language

Figurative language, idioms and jargon, can be difficult to understand for members of your audience. It is recommended that you avoid, where possible, all unusual words, jargon and/or phrases.

If you need to use an unusual word or phrase, explain it to your users by showing the meaning in brackets (e.g. Rally the troops (motivate people) or linking the word to a definition.

It is important that you use inclusive language that is respectful of all people regardless of age, gender identity, sexuality, race, religion, culture, ability, appearance or dress code.

When writing, be sure to use an active voice that is more clear, conversational and engaging than the passive voice. (E.g. Active: The coach was helping the athlete. Passive: Athletes were helped by the coach.)

Be conscious also of using too many words to express an idea. Adjectives are often overused. E.g. 'A **strong** focus on grassroots development'. Ask yourself if this word is needed.

Use clear, short, descriptive headings

Screen readers rely on headers to navigate on-page content. Choose words for headers and sub-headers that clearly describe the content they introduce.

Boring, useful words are better than clever, obtuse words, as they get straight to the point. If you make the heading too long, people are less likely to read it. Your goal should aim for 8 words or less.

Put keywords at the start of the sub-heading and/or article. Scanners tend to notice only the first few words.

Separate your content into easily digestible "chunks" using images or bullet points to break up heavy text

- Keep paragraphs tight – large chunks of text can be intimidating.
- Write short sentences – aim for fewer than 25 words.
- Bulleted lists are easier to scan and read than full paragraphs. If you are listing three or more items, consider using a bulleted list.
- Underline should only be used for links.
- Italics should only be used for references or quotations.
- Bold should only be used for headings or to highlight specific words.
- CAPS should be avoided as it gives off the sense that you are yelling at your user.
- If you are using images and they are not decorative, describe the information in each image. This ensures readers do not miss out on information if the image does not load or the image is too small to read on a mobile device.

