

# Quality Content: The Life Blood of Your Site!

by © June Kaminski, MSN PhD(c)

Great websites have common components. The design, layout, graphics and CONTENT are all carefully created and coordinated. You may have noticed the emphasis on content. You can have a clever design and layout with eye-candy graphics and draw lots of visitors. But will they keep coming back? Maybe. Without great content though, the chances are slim.

Basically, content is presented through one vehicle: writing. Of course, for art, music, and film related sites, often the content IS the graphics or the music. But for the majority of sites, graphics are fillers or illustrators of the content's focus. What this means is that to create the best site possible, you need to learn to write for the web. Or hire someone who can.

Not an English major? Can't spell worth a darn? Don't feel bad - you're not alone. Being able to write effectively, clearly and enticingly takes lots of practice and know-how. There is hope though. You do not have to be a literary genius to write good web copy. You do need to learn the basics though.

## **The Basics**

One trick to writing clearly and accurately is to always use a wordprocessing program like Word or Wordperfect to write your content. Built in helpers can make the whole process much less painful. Spellcheckers, thesauruses, paragraph checkers can all help you to get the grammar and syntax in shape. It also gives you a backup file of your writing, in case of data loss. Once satisfied, you can copy and paste your writing into your website code, confident that it is polished.

Unless you are making an academic website, there is a general "voice" that works best in web writing. Keep your language simple, conversational and upbeat. Use an active voice, not a passive one. It might help you at first to write like you are talking to someone animatedly about something you love. Use terms that most people you know would understand. It's smart to target your writing style to about a mid high school level. You don't want to turn people away just because they need a dictionary to understand your point. Think about who your target audience is, and write accordingly.

## **Help is at Hand**

There are lots of online aids to help you design great content. Josh Smith offers excellent advice for writing for the web at [WebReview.com](http://WebReview.com). Tips on how to present your content so the important stuff stands out are provided by [Jakob Nielsen](#) in his article *Prioritize: Good Content Bubbles to the Top*. A whole section on writing good content is offered at [Usable Web](#). Jennifer Stewart of [Write101.com](http://Write101.com) offers articles and home study tutorials to help unleash the writer in you. She devotes one section of her site to *Writing for your Web Site*.

It takes lots of practice, but you too can become a good content developer. The best way to see what people like is to visit top sites and read their copy. What tone do they use? What audience do they target? How is their content presented? In nice organized columns, or does the text run from one edge of the screen to the other? (A big no-no, by the way. A sure sign of an amateur designer). Learn from them, then develop your own style. You too can become a top contributor to the world wide web.