

# Write Great Web Copy!

by © June Kaminski, MSN PhD(c)

Most would agree that a good web designer has a keen eye for detail and visual appeal, great knowledge of html coding and its parameters and a sense of style, proportion and aesthetics. A final crucial skill is the ability to write interesting and flowing web copy. This final skill is perhaps the most important of all. A skill that is often uncultivated leaving clients with stilted dull web content.

If you want to offer a well-rounded service to clients, it is imperative that you learn to write well. And specifically, to be able to write in specific web-based copy style. Obviously, web copy will vary in style, readability level and length depending on the type of site you are working on. If the sole purpose of a site is to make sales, the web copy will reflect that. Persuasion, clear product descriptions, rationale for buying and so on will all be important. On the other hand, an educational site may well have essay long copy that needs to be extremely well written to keep your viewers interested and willing to click on multiple pages to read what you have to say.



## So, What's the Trick?

Standard advice says - keep it less than one screen full and make it simple for the viewer with the least education. This is fine - in fact, keeping the text short and sweet does make sense when you consider the way the eye reads,.....keeping the text close to eye level causes much less strain which probably keeps your readers reading. But making it grade school simple might suit some, yet turn off many others. The key is to make your writing interesting. Pure and simple. Indeed, attend to your grammar and for heaven's sake, use your spellcheck. Nothing says "careless" quicker than a spelling error. Use an active voice and keep your tone friendly, informative and snappy. Not flippant - snappy. Keep their interest! Make your copy compelling if you want them to keep coming back.

[Marc Alan Holmes](#) offers a clever list to describe wonderful web copy.

- Web copy must pull in and lock visitors.
- Web copy must entertain.
- Web copy must inform.
- Web copy must educate.
- Web copy must offer solutions.
- Web copy must convince visitors to buy from you.

## Attend to Your Audience

Outstanding web copy is the heart of a fantastic heavily-trafficked web site. You owe it to yourself and your clients to attend to the words and text just as much as you do the graphics and layout. A good place to start is to analyze who your target audience is. What do they want to read? What can you offer them? Combine the two using crisp flowing sentences and paragraphs and your copy will dazzle. Make your visitors feel good - this is the key to drawing them back on a regular basis. Convey a notion of caring about your viewers and take the time to write it right for them. You owe it to your viewers to treat them like intelligent discerning people. You want to entice them yet not bombard them with "marketese". Providing effective web copy is a big stride in this direction.

## Make It Usable

In their research on web page reading, [Jakob Nielsen and John Morkes](#) found that most web viewers scan web pages rather than read them word for word. From a result of their findings,

these gentleman suggest that web writers adhere to certain layout and writing principles:

- use highlighted keywords (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others)
- meaningful sub-headings (not "clever" ones)
- bulleted lists (such as this one)
- one idea per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph)
- the inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion.
- half the word count (or less) than conventional writing



If you can master the art of clear concise web writing your demand as a web designer will skyrocket! Your personal pages too will shine. Good writing is indeed an art and a science - it takes careful planning and attention to structure and focus to pull it off. The way you present it is just as important as the form. It takes practice, but well worth the effort.

## Links

- How Users Read On The Web <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>
- Copy Writing for the Web  
<http://www.efuse.com/Design/copy-attacks.html>
- Guide to Grammar and Style <http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/>
- Struck's Elements of Style <http://www.nascent.com/nascent/estyle/toc.html>
- Art & The Zen of Web sites <http://www.tlc-systems.com/webtips.shtml>
- How to Write for the Web  
<http://www.mediainfo.com/epheme/news/newshtm/stop/st061899.htm>

© June Kaminski Published: 2002