

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

WRITING FOR THE WEB

People read webpages differently to how they read books and reports. They skim websites looking for quick information to answer questions. This means you need to think carefully about the amount of detail that needs to appear on your page – and how you can signpost further information in other ways. Following these 6 rules will help you communicate the key information effectively.

Consider your reader

- **Consider who you're writing for *above all else*.** Keep your reader firmly in mind and think about what they want to know (and really need to know from your webpage). Doing so will help you define what you want to say and how you want to say it.
- **Keep your content relevant, clear and concise.** Ask yourself, "What is chosen reader interested in?" And "What are they looking for?".
- **Make sure your page title is informative and brief.**

Structure your page carefully

- **Start your page with a 'stand-first' paragraph** which gives a (short) overview of what your reader will find on the page.
- **Put the main point in the first paragraph**, and then expand on it. Think of an inverted pyramid when you write, with the key information (the 5Ws: Who, What, Why, When, Where) in the first couple of paragraphs and the supporting details towards the end.
- **Use sub-headings** to convey both meaning and structure.

Make it easy to scan

- **Keep your writing brief.** Write only one idea per sentence and use only the words you need to get the essential information across.
- **Keep paragraphs short too.** Short, meaty paragraphs are easier to scan than long rambling ones.
- **You can also use lists - but not long ones.** Studies have shown that people can only reliably remember 7 to 10 things at a time.
- **Write link text so that it describes the content of the link target.** Avoid using ambiguous text, such as 'click here' or 'read more'.
- **Keep the layout simple and organised.** Sub-headings and boxes help to keep the text scannable. Note that our website templates don't allow for images and pull quotes.

Write like a human!

- **Avoid jargon.** If you really have to use a technical term, define it or explain it in way that a non-expert would understand.
- **Spell out acronyms the first time they are used.** Even if you're writing for fellow specialists, they still may not be familiar with terms used in your particular niche.
- **Write in plain English.** Use active words – tell your readers what to do. Avoid the passive voice. Keep the flow moving.

Include a clear call for action

- **Provide clear instructions for what you would like people to do next.** Use boxes to signpost people to further information. Options are: 'Find out more', 'Things to do now', 'Contact us'.

Keep accessibility in mind

- Following these rules is a good start, but also refer to the University's guidance on [digital accessibility guidance for creating online content](#). Accessibility is an important aspect of diversity, equity and inclusion – and is also a legal duty for the University.

Presentation

Follow the University [guidance on style and tone of voice](#) where possible. If you need more detailed information for thorny issues it does not cover, refer to the *Guardian* style guide, which is free online.

Spelling: We use British spellings, not American. For example, use -ise not -ize spellings – e.g. organise, recognise, specialise. Other examples: adviser not advisor; analyse not analyze.

- **Headings:** Use sentence case for all headings.
- **Bold:** Use bold text to emphasise words and highlight important facts. However, this should be done sparingly.
- *Italics:* We use italics for titles of works including newspapers, journals, books, plays, TV and radio programmes, video games. We use bold, not italics, for emphasis.
- Underlining: We do not use underlining for emphasis. Hyperlinks can be underlined online or in digital documents such as PDFs, but should be avoided in printed communications.

Abbreviations and acronyms: Always spell out an acronym when first used, followed by the acronym in brackets (unless it is well known, such as BBC, UCAS or NASA). We typically capitalise every letter in an acronym and do not use full stops (e.g. FEC, COP, UKRI). Do not create acronyms of your own – they do not help the reader.

Dates and date ranges: The preferred date format is: 1 January 2025. We do not use superscript or commas when writing dates. For academic and financial years, we use a forward slash after the full year followed by the last two digits of second year. For example, 2024/25. For calendar years, we use an en-dash instead of a forward slash. For example, 2024–25.

Naming files: If you need to upload a file, make sure it has a clear descriptive title (not your working draft title) and a date, e.g. UOR-research-strategy-2024-29. Use dashes not spaces between words.