

# Week 1: Principles

---

nfenton1@sva.edu  
strategicwriting.club

## Activities

- Introductions and warm-up exercise.
- Discuss writing's purpose, various forms, and strengths.
- Articulate our goals for the next four weeks.
- Come up with principles and examples of good writing together.

# Introductions

- Your name
- Where you're from
- Something you're hoping to learn in this class

---

# Warm-up

---

## Hopes and fears exercise

- What do you hope to learn in this class?
- What do you hope to accomplish with your thesis?
- What are you afraid of when it comes to writing or this class?
- What about your thesis?

7min to write

5 min to add to board

# A short preamble

---

I'm not going to lecture much in this class, but I need to cover a few things with everyone today.

This class is more about starting points than final drafts.  
It may feel chaotic to you, but a year from now, it should be of immense help.

I'm not here to grade you on your grammar. I want to learn how you think.

This is a relatively new syllabus, so you're my guinea pigs, beta users, whatever term you prefer.

I want to help you develop a point of view and find some clarity about your thesis.

I am not going to tell you what to think or what to work on, but rather teach you how to use writing as a tool in the design process.

## Course objectives

- Investigate how writing shapes and contributes to the design process
- Practice writing and editing collaboratively
- Develop and structure various kinds of text
- Use writing exercises to prepare for your thesis and process book

# Course requirements

We will practice thinking and writing through conversation, writing exercises, and peer editing. Be prepared to:

- Ask questions, take risks, and express yourself
- Share rough ideas and unpolished drafts with the class
- Give candid, considered, and supportive feedback
- Grapple with the subjectivity of language



# Several short sentences about writing

“No other book, old or new, is as well reasoned as this,  
as entertaining or as wise. . . . Best book on writing. Ever.”  
—*New York Journal of Books*

---

Verlyn  
Klinkenborg

Required text

# Writing and content basics

—

# Nicely Said

WRITING FOR THE WEB WITH STYLE AND PURPOSE

Nicole Fenton and Kate Kiefer Lee

Good writing is:

- Clear
  - Friendly
  - Useful
  - Honest
  - Appropriate
- 

Bonus: easy to translate.

# 1. Writing is design.

Language is a system of communication. It changes how we think about ourselves, each other, and the world around us.



Short video: <https://vimeo.com/121072011#t=2107s>

**“For every word we use to describe where we want to go, there’s another word that we’re walking away from.”**

Abby Covert, *How to Make Sense of Any Mess*

Word choices change how we use our time and energy.

“For every word we use to describe where we want to go, there’s another word that we’re walking away from.

For every amusement park you make, you’re not making a video game. When you intend to be fun for kids, you can use stories but not metaphors. When you want something to be relaxing, it’s harder to make it educational.” — Abby Covert, <http://www.howtomakesenseofanymess.com>

The words we choose matter. They represent the ideas we want to bring into the world.

# Content design

- Research
- Planning
- Writing
- Editing
- Standardizing
- Testing



# Things we make

Content and communication audits

Interview scripts

Product and user scenarios

Audience profiles and personas

Strategy documents

Workflow diagrams

Wireframes and sitemaps

Journey maps

Taxonomies

Product, legal, marketing, and interface copy

Blog posts

Presentations

Content variations for testing

Playbooks, guides, and best practices

Technical documentation

Research reports

Content standards

Style guides

# Content is the user experience

Users need words  
to navigate your  
service. Involve  
content designers  
from the start.

Government Digital Service  
[www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design)

<http://govdesign.tumblr.com/post/142396578228/download-the-posters-content-design-posters>

## 2. We have a huge responsibility.

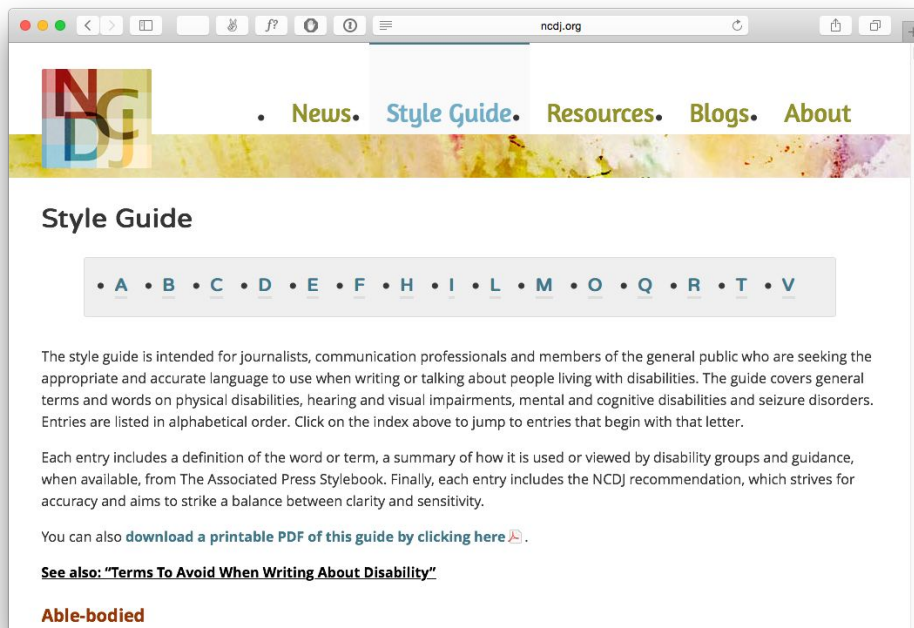
We have a responsibility to our users, our clients and colleagues, and the world.

**“This is difficult but it is important: either we and the technology that we build work against the systems that prolong inequality or we perpetuate them.”**

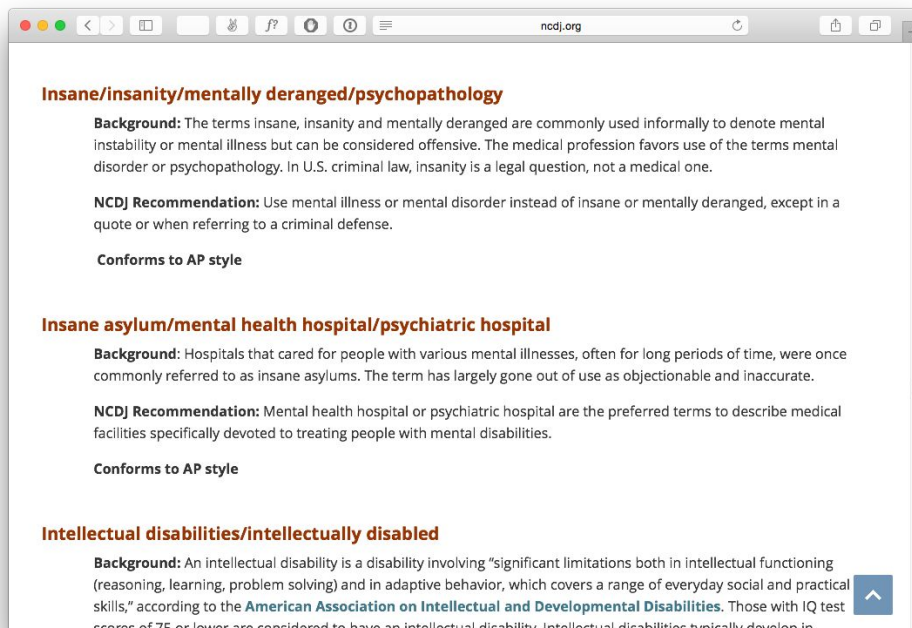
Mandy Brown, “Hypertext as an Agent of Change”

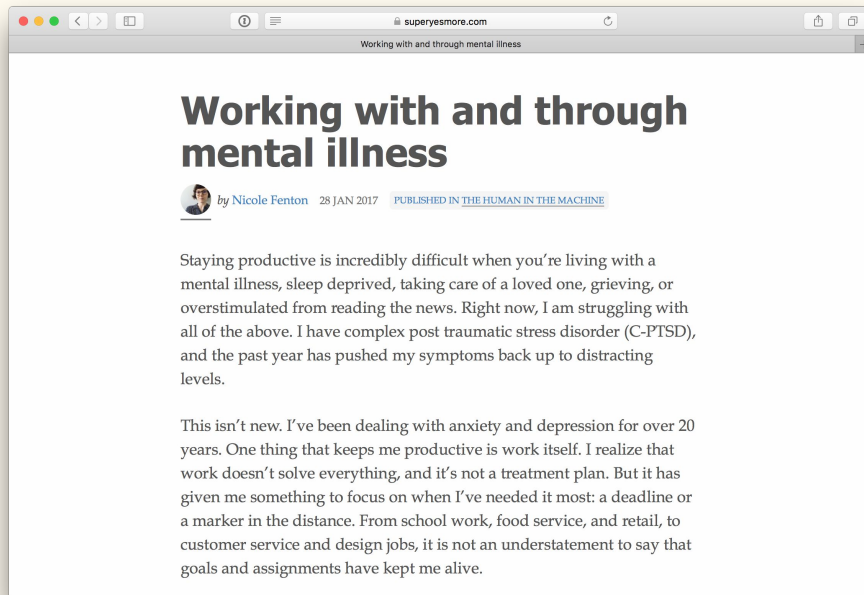
<http://aworkinglibrary.com/writing/hypertext-as-an-agent-of-change/>

Even in the words we choose, we can perpetuate inequality and hurt people’s feelings.

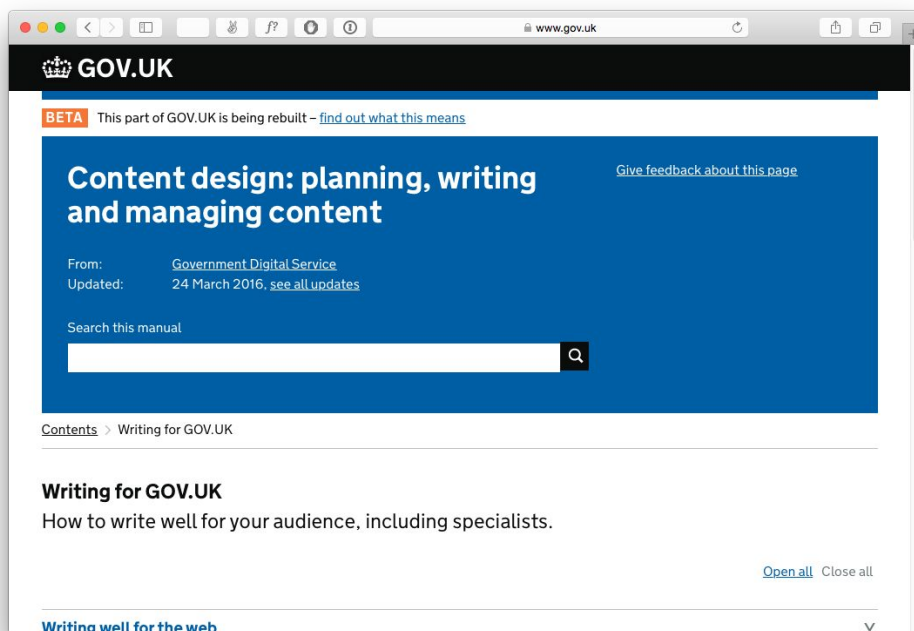


National Center on Disability and Journalism <http://ncdj.org/style-guide/>



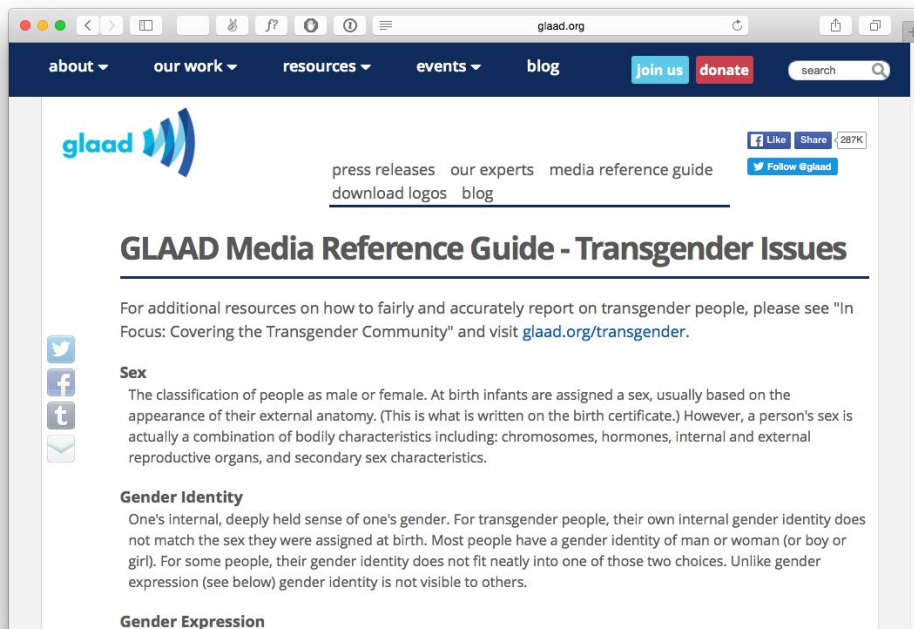


<http://nicolefenton.com/working-with-and-through-mental-illness/>

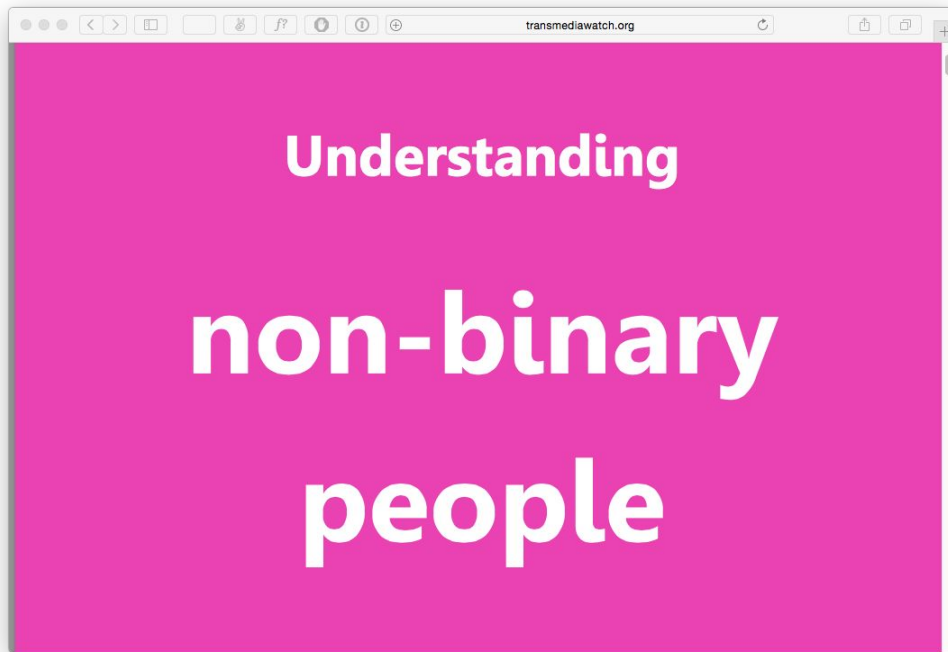


<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design>





<http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>



*Understanding Non-binary People* is from Trans Media Watch, a nonprofit in the UK:  
[http://www.transmediawatch.org/Documents/non\\_binary.pdf](http://www.transmediawatch.org/Documents/non_binary.pdf)

# 3. Culture shapes content.

Another way to say it: your content can only be as good as your organization is at communicating. It takes time to get these things right. And it never ends.

# Healthy culture:

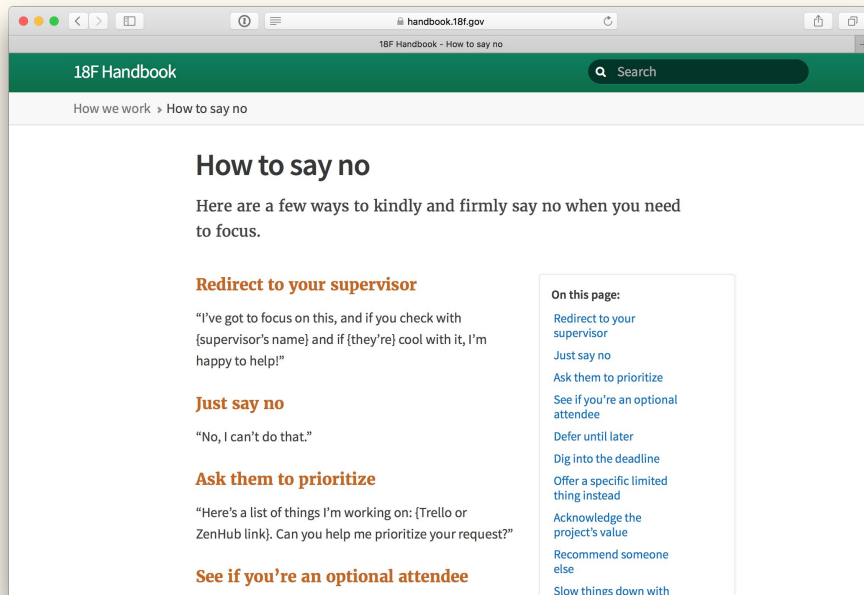
- Collaborative
  - Iterative
  - Inclusive
  - Generous
  - Thoughtful
- 

This is how you get there.

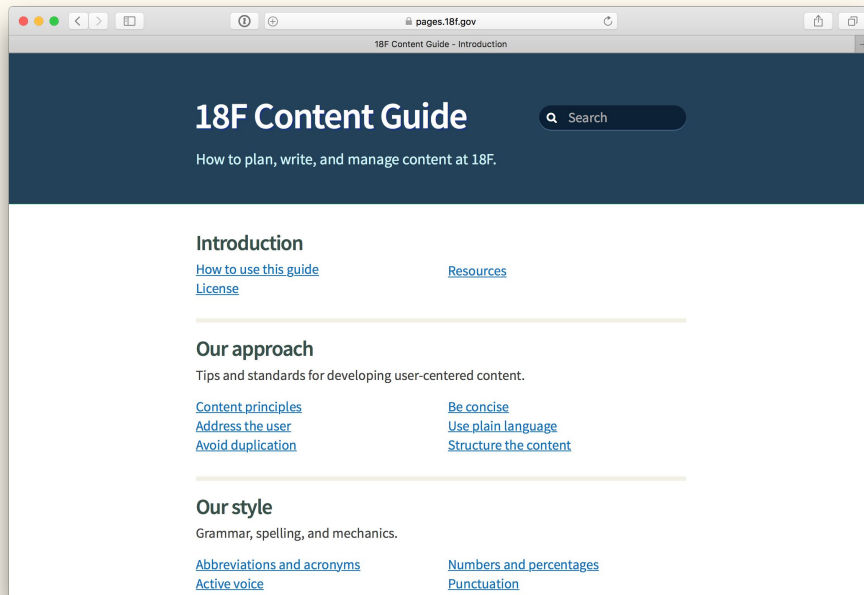
**“Language doesn’t just make things—it assembles, cobbles together, entire worlds and all the relations within.”**

Dr. Anne Galloway, VUW School of Design

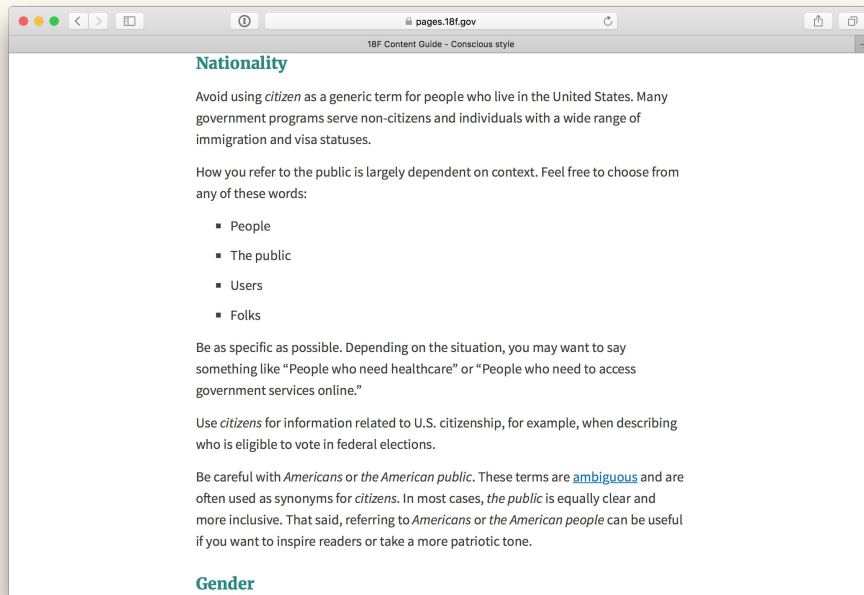
Our word choices shape our culture too.



<https://handbook.18f.gov/how-to-say-no/>



<https://pages.18f.gov/content-guide/>



<https://pages.18f.gov/content-guide/conscious-style/>



## 4. The content will change.

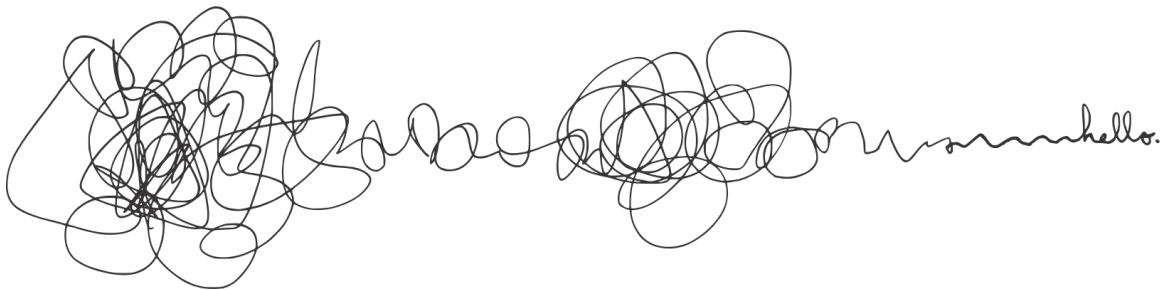
Just like your website, you need to take your goals and resources into account. Keep updating it; it's not the first or last thing, but an ongoing thing.

RESEARCH

CLARIFY

WRITE

REFINE



<http://www.nicelysaid.co>

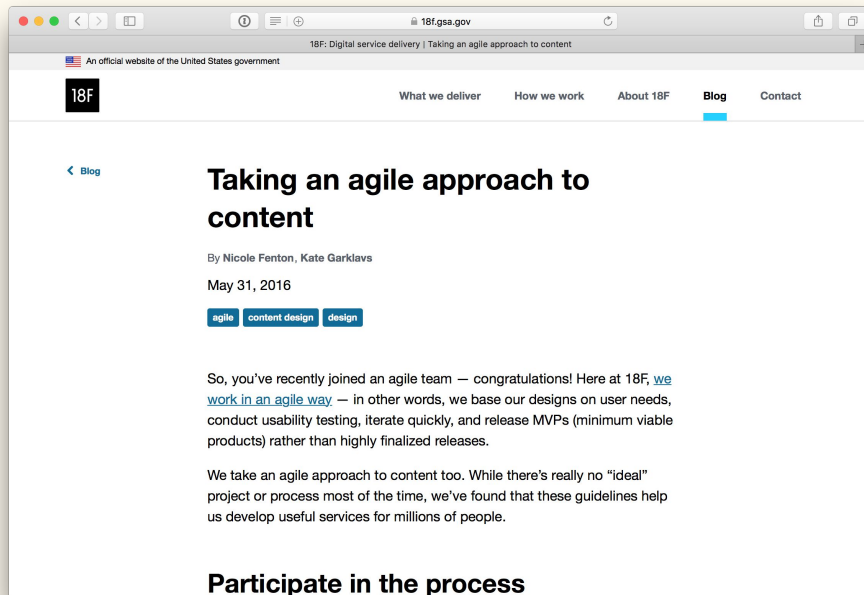
Ask questions and put yourself in the reader's shoes.

Gather the steps and map out the conversation.

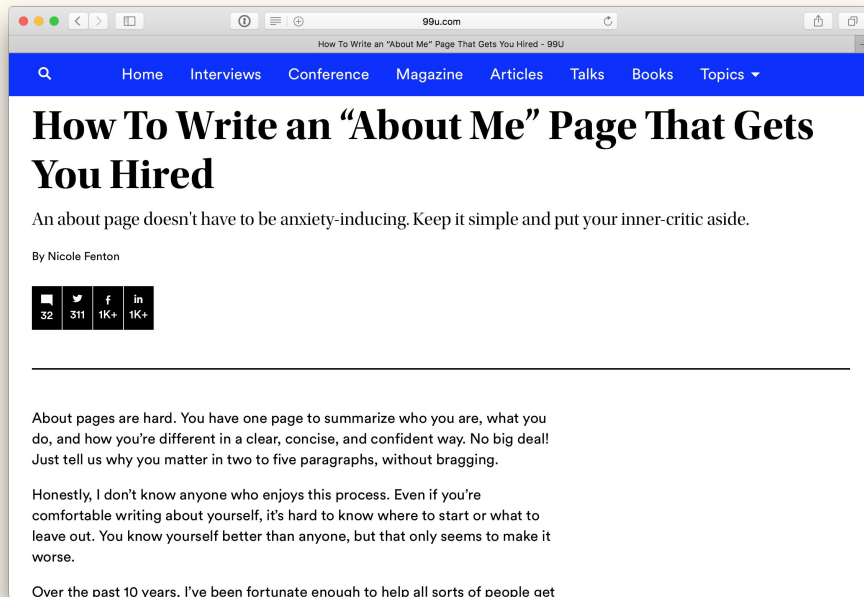
Write a rough (shitty first) draft.

Wordsmith like you mean it.

Revise, test, and revise.



<https://18f.gsa.gov/2016/05/31/taking-an-agile-approach-to-content/>



<http://99u.com/articles/51669/how-to-write-about-me-section>

# Discussion

---

What have you been  
writing lately?

What other types of  
content are important  
right now?

# What do you want to focus on in this class?

These are our goals for the next few weeks.



# Core values

---

Think about someone you respect and admire.

1 min

Think about someone you respect and admire.

Write down their name.

1 min

- What are their strengths?
- What are they passionate about?
- What keeps them going?
- Why do you look up to them?

12 min

- What are your strengths?
- What are you passionate about?
- What keeps you going?
- Why do people look up to you?

7 min

# Inspiration

---

Writing is inherently subjective:

Style

Purpose

Mechanics

- Find 3 companies or websites with good content.
- Collect evidence as to why the sites or brands appeal to you.

You have 20 minutes. You can pair up if you like.

We'll talk through some of them together afterwards.

What did they do well?



## What we liked

Reliable, tested

Accessible

A good story

Quick, simple

Personal, honest

Innovative

# Questions?

---



# See you next week.

—

nfenton1@sva.edu  
strategicwriting.club

Bring something you wrote that you're proud of.