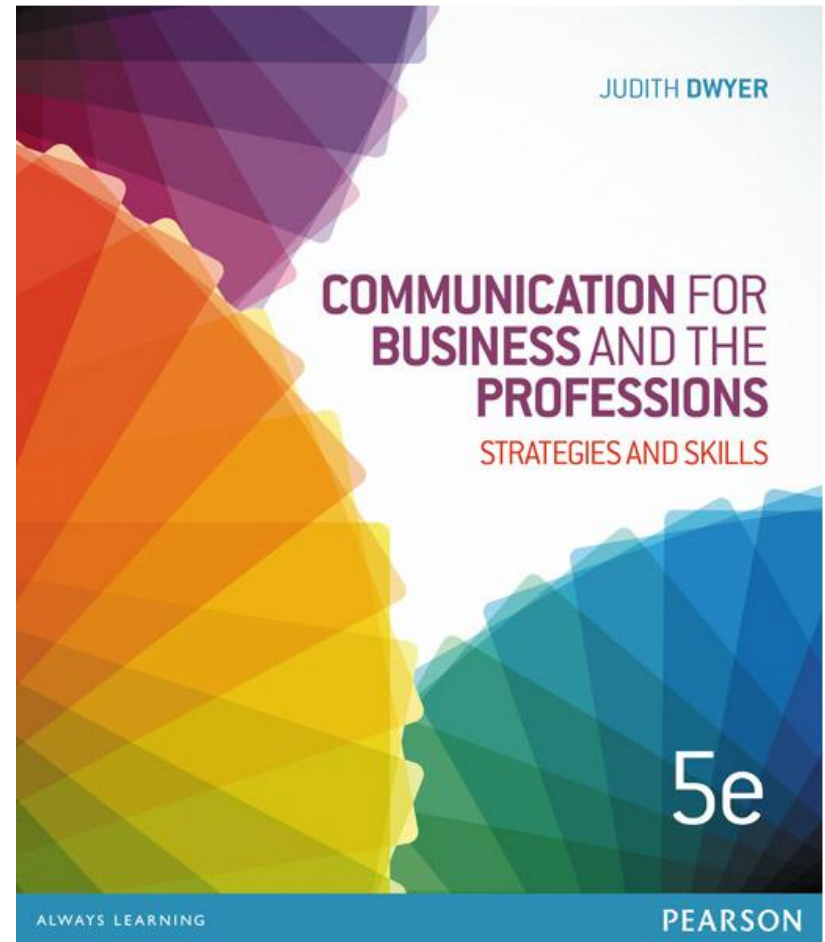# Topic 9

Writing Professionally: Document & information design

[drawing on materials from chapters 18, 16 & 21 of the Dwyer text]

Chapter 21

Writing for the Web

PowerPoint to accompany:

Learning objectives

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

1. Describe how a mosaic form of page design enhances web based communication

2. Discuss ways to structure, write and present scannable content appropriate to the needs of web audiences

3. Discuss the importance of website credibility

Website functions

The range of organisational functions fulfilled by websites include:

o Disseminating factual information

o Advertising and persuasion

o Supporting e-commerce

o Conducting B2B transactions

o Entertaining existing and prospective customers

o Interacting with and building relationships with customers and other stakeholders

o Public relations tool

Writing for a web audience: Mosaic Page Design

Nielsen (2010) cited in Eunson (2012, p.213) states that;

- ***"Users of the web do not read at all – they merely skim and scan, picking out salient pieces, rarely reading extended blocks of text."***

- ***Mosaic form –*** a non linear approach to the design of information facilitated by hyperlinks that enable navigation around and between web pages

- In addition to getting the message across, good web writing enables online audiences to interact easily and quickly with the website and its content.

- Web writers also need to consider design elements such as; symbols and graphics, colour preferences, site features (links, site maps, search functions, page layout) content language and site accessibility

Importance of Clarity, Conciseness & Consistency

- A primary function of online writing is to communicate clearly and concisely.

- Web content also needs to be presented in a style that conforms with the organisation's standard web style in terms of structure, layout, font type, font size, use of colour, presentation of links, use of and positioning of headings and sub headings, use of logos and images, etc;

- Standard web style is important;
    - Professional consistency
    - Aesthetic appeal

Initial planning activities

In the initial planning of a website or web page a writer may be required to:

- consult with stakeholders to discuss ideas for the layout and organisation of the site

- meet with the graphic designer to discuss the types of colours or images to use (photos, illustrations, videos, other features) to contribute to the look and feel of the web page

- explain to the web page developer how concepts are interlinked to enable the developer to create links and navigation aids that allow users to drill down for particular links or images

Effective navigation system [#1]

An effective website navigation system:

✓ is consistent throughout the website to enable visitors to learn through repetition how to get around the website

✓ keeps the main navigation links together and requires minimal clicking for visitors to get where they want to go

✓ is created at the website planning stage to ensure consistent overall design of the web page layout, enhance how the links look on the screen and reduce page clutter

Effective navigation system [#2]

- [Hypertext](#) enables users to jump between documents, easily find specific information within a document or navigate to related sites and resources
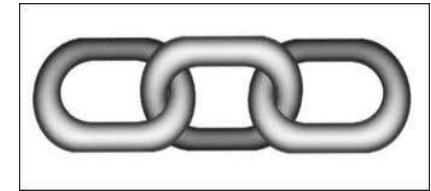
- Relevant links add interest to a webpage

  - Annotate links clearly and concisely to explain where the user is going and what they are going to find if they click on the link.

- Avoid 'link rot' by deleting redundant links.

Effective structure, language and presentation

o Visitors to webpages do more than read the words, they also spend time understanding the page layout and navigation features, as well as interpreting the images.

❖ 'Web users spend 80% of their time looking at information above the page fold. Although users do scroll, they allocate only 20% of their attention below the fold …Web users do look below the fold, but not nearly as much as they look above the fold.'

•(Nielsen, 2010)

▪ Above the page fold means the material initially viewable on the screen

➢ The research found that users will look past the page fold if:

- the layout encourages scanning, and
- the initially viewable information makes them believe that it will be worth their time to scroll down
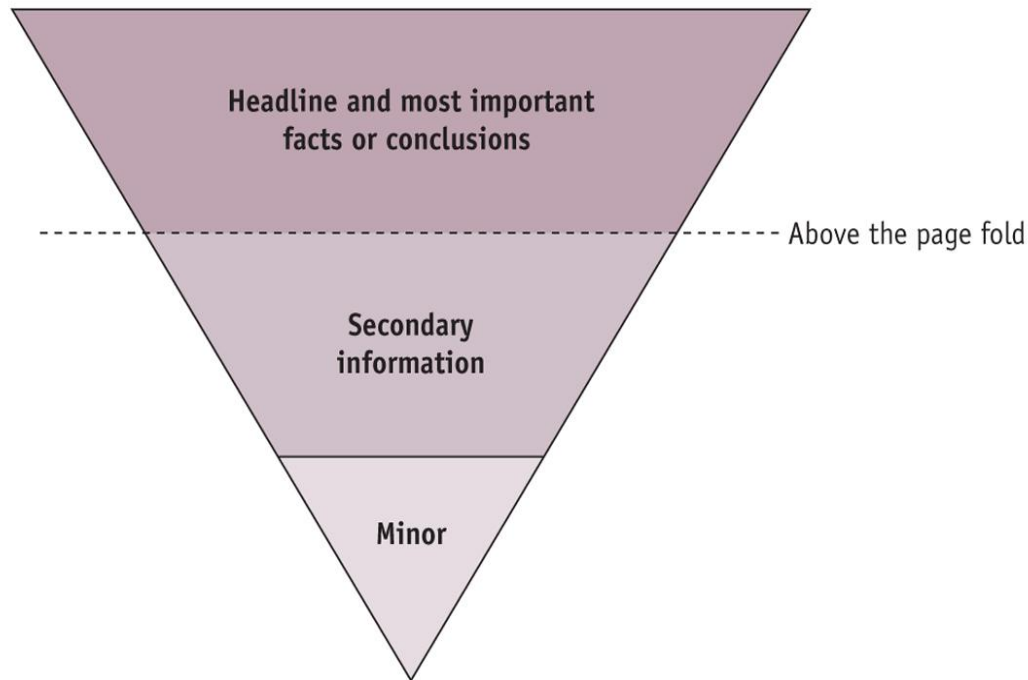
Inverted pyramid order of information

Figure 21.1
Inverted pyramid style of writing

Web writing language style

➢ Brief and get to the point quickly.

➢ Succinct using half the words as in conventional writing

➢ Restrict sentences to one idea
  ➢ containing maximum of 15 – 20 words

➢ Web writers should use a plain English writing style.

➢ Word selection focused on familiar, unambiguous language
  ➢ only use jargon if suited to audience

➢ Use an active voice

Use inclusive language

❖ Good writers think about their message from the perspectives of multiple readers from differing backgrounds and make sound language judgements based on awareness of cultural difference

❖ They use unbiased, inclusive language avoiding descriptive identifications that may prejudice, stereotype or cause offence and create ill-will towards the writer and their organisation

Scannable presentation

- ✓ Provide structured pathway for reader

- ✓ Use writing and design that;
  - ✓ Enables ease in scanning
  - ✓ Maintains clarity of message
  - ✓ Facilitates ease in navigation

- ✓ Result = *increased holding power and likelihood of return*

Table 21.1 Characteristics of scannable web pages

Easy to scan	Difficult to scan
Non-linear, mosaic form of page design	Linear, traditional form of page design
Inverted pyramid order of information (relevant points and conclusions upfront)	Indirect order of information (introduction, body and conclusions last)
Consistent font and text alignment, preferably left-aligned	Inconsistent font and text alignment—centred and justified text is difficult to read
Plain English—focuses on user needs and conveys its meaning precisely and clearly	Convoluted, inflated or hyperbolic language—hides or confuses the real message
Topic headings and subheadings—enable the user to skip to the required information (a heading may be more engaging and understandable when it contains a verb)	Complicated long passages of text with passive verbs—may confuse the user and make writing long-winded and less direct
Subheadings—guide the user's eye and break content into manageable sections (a concise subheading should summarise the main points or findings in the subsection)	Material written in an 'officious', unfriendly style—difficult for the reader to user and hence is inefficient as well as unclear
Subsections that start with a topic sentence that clearly states the main point and then elaborates in subsequent sentences or paragraphs	Long blocks of narrative, over-complicated text—obscure or even distort the message and make content difficult to scan quickly
Bulleted lists—highlight points and structure content for easy scanning	Dense text—difficult to scan and makes the user scroll horizontally
Attractive yet simple layout and design—facilitate rapid loading of the page	Complex animations, graphics and special effects—slow page loading
Easy navigability due to good site maps, site search functions and hyperlinks to related information and sites	Limited navigability due to poor site maps, inadequate or non-existent site search functions and hyperlinks
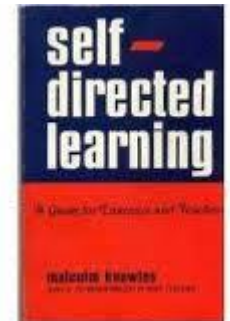
Directing traffic to the website

➢ Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

- ➢ Process of directing more visitors towards a website or webpage

- ➢ By including in the website content **keywords and phrases** , the writer improves the website's search engine ranking and thus the chances that people will find the website

➢ Other strategies

- ➢ Encouraging links from other sites

- ➢ Paying search engines to ensure high search ranking

- ➢ Identifying web address in marketing materials and non marketing related written communication

- ➢ measurement and analysis of audience engagement with site, using information as catalyst for redesign.

Search Engine terminology

- **Search Engines** identify and classify websites and webpages by reviewing data that sits below the visible surface of a webpage.

    - The first things they look for are the page title and what are called Mega-tags.

- **Mega-tags** are a few lines of HTML code that identify keywords associated with the webpage that facilitate search engines being able to find and classify the page.

- **Keywords** are words or phrases indicated by a mega-tag which in turn enable search engines to identify and classify web pages.

Source = Eunson 2012 pgs. 215-6

Characteristics of GOOD Web writing

➢ Be concise (up to 50 per cent shorter than comparable print text)

➢ Be laid out in mosaic rather than linear style, with small blocks of text and good use of headings / subheadings

➢ Be linked to other levels of related blocks of discrete text via hyperlinks

➢ Feature one idea per paragraph

➢ Be expressed in a direct mode of exposition (inverted pyramid style)

➢ Use objective rather than hyperbolic language

➢ Differentiate points using bullet points, different fonts and colour

➢ Be as technically simple as possible, facilitating rapid loading of page

➢ Be supported by good site search function

Source = Nielsen cited in Eunson 2012

Characteristics of BAD Web writing

- Long blocks of narrative text, without paragraphing or headings

- Overly wordy expositions of concepts, with more than one idea per paragraph

- Obscure or 'clever' headings / subheadings

- Little or no hypertext or hot links

- Hypertext that merely takes the reader to the text on the next page, rather than linking discrete blocks of related material

- 'Marketease', or inflated and hyperbolic language

- Technically complex elements that inflate file size and slow page loading

- Inadequate/non-existent site map & site search function resulting in reduced site navigability.

Website credibility

Fogg (2002) compiled the following guidelines for building the credibility of a website:

1. Make it easy to verify the accuracy of the information on your site

2. Show that there is a real organisation behind your site

3. Highlight the expertise in your organisation and in the content and services you provide

4. Show that honest and trustworthy people stand behind your site

5. Make it easy to contact you

6. Design your site so that it looks professional (or is appropriate for your purpose)

7. Make your site easy to use—and useful.

8. Update your site's content often (or at least show that it has been reviewed recently)

9. Use restraint with any promotional content (e.g. ads, offers)

10. Avoid errors of all types, no matter how small they seem