



# Writing for the Web Reader

**We need a new literacy for the digital age.**

Maryanne Wolf

*Director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners and Social Justice at UCLA*

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Laurel Painter – Sr. Instructional Designer



# Origins

- Reading is an invented human process
- Cultural disruption around the reading process is not new
- Socrates' saw value in a writing/reading system, *except*
  - Inflexibility of the written word
  - Destruction of memory
  - Spread of misinformation



# Traditional Media

- Deep reading/intellectual processes
  - Critical analysis/generation of insight
  - Empathy/perspective-taking
  - Analogical reasoning
  - Inference



# Digital Media

- Characteristics
  - More visual, More information
  - Less text, Less structure  
(narrative, paragraph, space/time)
- Reading behaviors
  - Quick scanning in “F” or “Z” patterns
  - Word spotting



# The Bi-Literate Reading Brain

- Digital/internet reading
  - Finding pertinent information in voluminous amounts of text
- Traditional reading
  - Deep learning

*Take advantage of both reading processes*



# Traditional Reading Preparation

- Distinguish for deep learning
  - Use PDFs or URLs
  - Provide estimated reading time
  - Provide the significance of the reading:  
deep learning

# eLearn page example

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## Rural Tourism in 1990s ▾



[Printer-friendly version](#)

### How Did Nebraska Make Parks the Most Visited Tourism Sites?

In 1996, six of the most-visited places in Nebraska were:

- Fort Robinson State Park
- Scotts Bluff National Monument
- Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum
- Carhenge
- Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer
- Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park

See what "[Park Ranger John](#)" has done to signify the national parks in Nebraska.

How does he provide a rural context?

How does his information compare to the [National Park Service site](#)?



Read "[Assessing Rural Tourism Efforts in the United States](#)," by [A. E. Luloff, et. al.](#) This is a 19-page article from 1994 in the journal, *Annals of Tourism Research*.

Please read it carefully, it should take you 30-45 minutes. Identify what rural areas have done to promote tourism in their national parks. Compare those promotion efforts to the Nebraska programs we discussed earlier. This article will be included in the midterm essay exam and serves as a source for your final paper.

Example derived from NNG's "How Users Read on the Web" (<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-users-read-on-the-web/>)

# Headings - techniques

- Make sure heading works out of context
- Be concise and specific, shouldn't need much punctuation
- Front load headings with strong keywords
- Tell readers something useful





# Headings - examples

Which is the better heading?

*Make better, faster decisions with data visualization*

*Data visualization helps you detect and prevent fraud faster*

# Headings – types with examples

- Question
  - Do You Close the Bathroom Door Even When You're the Only One Home?
- Command
  - Turn in This Paper or Fail This Course
- Reason Why
  - 10 Reasons Why Some Opposed Independence from the British Crown



# Subheadings – types with examples

- Question or Quotation
- Recommended Experiments
  - Take a look around a busy, public place and count how many people are texting.
- Restarted Sentence
  - Simple harmonic motion – the motion of a child on a swing, restoring equilibrium while we determine position, velocity, and acceleration.

# Body - techniques

- Rely on verbs more than adjectives
- Use second person active voice (unless other POVs/voice are best)
- Front load each sentence, paragraph, page with most important information
- Vary sentence length
- Express “earned” authority over “designated” authority



# Body - examples

Use active voice unless you need to “subordinate the doer,” then use passive voice.

“Their Creator endows all men with certain inalienable rights.”

“All men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.”

*Declaration of Independence (1776)*

# Body – more examples

Shorter sentences to set up longer ones:

“We got in. The steps went up. The coach drove off. The murmurs of mine hostess, not very indistinctly or ambiguously pronounced, became after a time inaudible...”

- Lamb, *Imperfect Sympathies* (1823)

# Body – more examples, cont.

Longer sentences to set up shorter ones:

When I first enrolled in college my priorities were a bit askew; in short, I wasn't the greatest of students. I made great friends...some of whom I partied with extensively and some of whom I talked long hours into the night on topics such as philosophy and politics. Before I knew it, my first semester was over and my grades were up. I had failed.

# Body – and more examples, cont.

[User Interface/User Experience Design Guidebook,  
Sinclair eLearning Division](#)

Instructions and General Descriptions, pages 32-33





# Design - techniques

- Bold or hyperlink text to highlight keywords
- Subheadings
- Lists (bullet and number)
- White space/chunking
- Word count
  - 10-17 words per line
  - 60-70 words per paragraph

# Design – examples

[User Interface/User Experience Design Guidebook,  
Sinclair eLearning Division](#)

Length and Readability, page 23

[“8 Incredibly Simple Ways to Get More People to Read  
Your Content,” Copyblogger](#)



# Word Choice - types

- Latinate words
  - longer and more elevated, intellectual, formal
- Saxon-based words
  - shorter and more colloquial, visceral, informal

*Mix and match in different combinations of word types and meters for different effects.*

# Word Choice – meter

- Iambic finish: x / x / x / (rising rhythm)
  - for a “sense of lift”, keep the reader engaged and moving to the next segment
- Trochaic finish: / x / x / x (falling rhythm)
  - for a “somber/critical” sense, give the reader something to mull over
- Anapestic finish: / x x / x x / (even rhythm)
  - for a sense of serious assessment and truthfulness, gives a cue of finality, an ending thought

# Word Choice - examples

Saxon-based Words	Latinate Words
See	Perceive
Ask	Inquire
Talk	Conversation
Kin	Relatives
Tool	Implement
House	Residence
Let	Permit
Break	Damage

# Word Choice – more examples

Iambic finish (weak to strong, rising)

- “This frightful business is now unfolding **day** by **day** before our **eyes**.”  
- Churchill, London radio broadcast (1941)

Trochaic finish (strong to weak, falling)

- “**Keep** thy **tongue** from **evil**, and thy **lips** from **speaking guile**.”  
- *King James Bible*, Psalms 34:13

Anapestic finish (balanced)

- “Never **dream** with thy **hand** on the **helm**!”  
- Melville, *Moby Dick* (1851)

# Before and After

Writing example using the discussed techniques/strategies in action:

[“How Users Read on the Web,” Nielsen Norman Group](#)

Scroll down to see the *Measuring the Effect of Improved Web Writing* section of the article.

# Now What?

**How can faculty apply the learned outcomes of this session immediately?** Examine a current eLearn page in your course that is your original work. Use the learned techniques/strategies to rewrite your work for better usability and engagement.

**How can faculty apply the learned outcomes of this session in the future?** Continue examining current eLearn pages in your course and rewrite them on a doable schedule, such as one page a week. Try the learned techniques/strategies when you develop your next eLearn course.





# Works Cited and/or Consulted

Baymard Institute, <https://baymard.com/blog/line-length-readability>

Copyblogger, <https://copyblogger.com/blog/>

Nielsen Norman Group:

<https://www.nngroup.com/topic/writing-web/>

<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ux-writing-study-guide/>

Ward Farnsworth's [\*Farnsworth's Classical English Style\*](#)

Evan S. Porter's blog post, ["Sentence Rhythm: How to Use Sentence Variety for Better Writing"](#)

Sinclair eLearning Division, [User Interface/User Experience Design Guidebook](#)

Maryanne Wolf's *The Guardian* article, ["Skim reading is the new normal. The effect on society is profound"](#)

Maryanne Wolf's [\*Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain\*](#)

Maryanne Wolf's [\*Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World\*](#)