## This information is a copy of the relevant Web pages of Website Criteria’s *Website Writing Guide* at www.websitecriteria.com

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Do you want your website to work?

Do you want your content to be easy to understand and relevant?

Assuming it’s yes to both questions, then writers and editors must get to know their audiences. Identify who they are, how they want content presented and when and where they are likely to be reading it.

Writers need to enter the world of their audiences to understand the personal and practical factors that affect the quality of the audiences' experience with the content.

The website audience classification tool helps you to classify your website audiences for a whole website or specific sections so you can adjust your writing style and content presentation to suit their needs.

Work through the four steps for your website in general, and for any specific sections that you believe have a unique audience. Use your judgement as to how thorough your approach needs to be.

**Step 1: Identify the audience group or groupings**

Is your entire website aimed mostly at one audience group (eg just local residents or just customers), or at separate audience groups - eg local residents and tourists, customers and suppliers?

If the whole site is aimed mostly at one audience group, proceed to Step 2.

Identify the audience groupings - eg tourists, local customers, citizens, students.

Draw up a table showing each audience group and alongside each one, note the related section or sections of the website.

This is useful for undertaking step 2 and eventually for the writers and editors of each section. It will tell them for whom they are writing, while the output of step 2 will tell them much about the characteristics of those audiences.

**Step 2: Identify the characteristics of each audience group**

If you identified in Step 1 that the whole website is aimed mostly at one main audience group then complete the website audience classification tool below.

Did you identify in Step 1 that the site is for multiple audiences? If so, then you may need to complete the website audience classification tool below for each audience group and for each section of the website. How far you need to go in breaking the site down to sections and audiences is a matter of judgement. But this is all about planning, and rarely is any planning wasted.

If you have trouble assessing each attribute for particular audiences, you may need to do some research into the users. Refer to the section User testing or contact us for assistance.

[insert more *audience characteristics* columns as required for each major audience sector or section of the site]

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Audience attributes** | ***Example characteristics and scenarios*** | **Your audiences’ characteristics & scenarios** | **Impact**  **H, M, L** |
| **Who** | Age and age groups | *children, teenagers, baby-boomers, young adults, over 65, in their thirties* | Young adults & adults 16-65 | H |
|  | Personal life-style | *resident, parent, single-parent, person with a disability, retired, tourist, Y-generation, school student, university student, migrant* | Y&X-generations | H |
|  | Gender | *mostly male, mostly female or both in equal numbers* | Mostly female | H |
|  | Language | *English as first language, English as a second language* | English as a 1st & 2nd language | H |
|  | Education | *school, college, university, post-graduate* | All | L |
|  | Learning preferences | *practical demonstrations, learns by example, likes to know the theory, free-thinker, images rather than text, systematic learner, task-oriented, left-brain vs right-brain* | Images rather than text | H |
|  | Work attributes | *employee, home duties, shift-worker, academic, professional, business owner, executive, carer, unemployed, volunteer, specific industry sector* | All | L |
|  | Expectations | *what they expect based on their experience with similar websites* | Find and buy the appeal they like | H |
|  | Existing knowledge | *how much they already know about the content, product, service* | Most of the familiar with the brand | H |
|  | Web and computer experience | *none, low, medium, high* | Medium to high | M |
| **How** | On what device they will read it | *PC, handheld device, large monitor, small monitor* | PC and mobile | H |
|  | Internet connection speed | *fast broadband, standard broadband, slow* | Slow to standard | H |
| **Where** | User’s location | *local, national, international – urban, regional, remote* | Local, regional | H |
|  | Place where the page is read | *at home, school, work, public library, on the road, in the field, public places* | Mostly home and work | M |
| **Why** | Why users seek the content | *to be informed, complete a task, seek an answer, buy something, entertainment, training* | Buy winter apparel | H |
|  | Importance of the content to them | *vital, useful, interesting* | interesting | H |
|  | How they found the page | *Google, link from other site, word-of-mouth, enewsletter link, found it accidentally* | Google & word-of-mouth | H |
| **When** | When it is read | *at work between 9am and 5pm, during a lunch-break, after the children are in bed, weekends, at night, early morning* | All | M |

**Step 3: Rate the impact on the content**

Rate each attribute in the Website audience classification tool low, medium, high or not applicable, according to the degree of impact it will have on the style and nature of the content.

Aspects of the content to consider when assessing the impact-rating for each attribute are:

1. style and tone of the writing
2. readability, vocabulary and comprehension
3. quantity of text and level of detail
4. use of Google, YouTube etc to discover the information
5. structure and method of imparting the message
6. provision of images, diagrams, video.

The rating exercise can be a relatively simple one for websites that have one or two well-defined audiences. However, if your site is complex with multiple audiences you may need to be more systematic with the rating.

You may need to draw up a table like the one below for some key attributes to determine whether they have a low, medium or high impact on the nature and style of the content.

In the example below, the *Age and age group* attribute for a website was identified as being mostly the Y-generation. A systematic examination of each aspect of the content reveals that the Y-generation audience will have a high impact on the nature and style of the content.

Example Attribute: Age and age groups

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Style and nature of the content** | **Audience:**  **Y-generation** | **Note to the writer and editor** |
| 1. style and tone of the writing | HIGH | it will need to be informal |
| 1. readability, vocabulary and comprehension | MEDIUM | needs to be in plain English |
| 1. quantity of text and level of detail | HIGH | it will need to be brief |
| 1. use of Google, YouTube etc to discover the information | HIGH | they use Google and YouTube to find content, they don’t guess URLs |
| 1. structure and method of imparting the message | HIGH | it will need clear headings and step-by-step |
| 1. use of images, diagrams, media. | MEDIUM | images needed to get and keep their attention |

**Step 4: Prioritise the audience attributes**

Having completed the rating exercise in Step 3, prioritise the audience attributes for the whole site or for each relevant section of the website according to those that will have the highest impact on the nature and style of the content. Writers and editors then need to keep this front-of-mind when composing, structuring and editing content.