

CHECKLIST - WRITING FOR ONLINE COURSES

Use this list to ensure that your product complies with the best practices for Web writing as well as the accessibility standards. In compliance with these practices, you will facilitate the programming and publishing work.

Layout of information

1. The most important information appears first (inverted pyramid).

Headings

2. The headings are short: 4 to 10 words.
3. The first words of the headings are meaningful.
E.g. "Grant instructions" and not "Overview of key instructions concerning grants."
4. Certain headings are in the form of a question.

Sentences

5. The sentences are short: from 15 to 20 words.
6. The sentences are simple: replace long sentences with two short sentences.
7. Avoid including too many numbers, acronyms, and abbreviations in the same sentence.

Paragraphs

8. The paragraphs are short; one idea per paragraph.

Terminology

9. The terminology is consistent.
E.g. Don't go from "learner" to "student" in the same text.

Style

10. Use simple language that allows users to find what they are looking for, understand and use what they have found.
11. Use the active voice.
E.g. The Director signed a letter. Not: The letter was signed by the Director.

12. The subject, verb and complement all agree and are not inverted.
E.g. "The practitioners refused the offer." Not: "The offer that the practitioners eventually refused."
13. Avoid superfluous words (adverbs, adjectives, fillers etc.).
E.g. "July" and not "the month of July."
14. Avoid double negatives.
E.g. "It would not be useless to remind participants of the address."
15. Write directly to the user.
16. Timelines are absolute.
E.g. a specific date, not "next week".
17. Avoid spatial guidelines.
E.g. above, further on, on page 2, etc.

Font and font style

18. The font is simple and easy to read.
E.g. Arial, Verdana, Tahoma.
19. *Italics* are reserved for titles, legislation or non-English words that appear in the text.
20. Avoid writing IN ALL CAPS; it can be aggressive and harder to read.
21. Use **bold** to highlight what is important, never solely for esthetic reasons.
22. Use underlining only for clickable text, i.e. hyperlinks.
23. Use bullet lists. Only use numbered lists if a specific order is necessary.

Colours, shapes and placement

24. Avoid using only colours, shapes or placement to provide an instruction or explain a concept.
E.g. "Select the red square."
E.g. "The boxes on the left represent the priorities."
25. Make sure there is sufficient contrast between the text and the background.

26. Only use background colour if necessary.

Headings and sub-headings

27. The headings <H1> and sub-headings <H2, H3...H6> describe the content and are independent in order to enable users to jump from content to content.

28. The headings and sub-headings are appropriately formatted in the Word document (use of the "Style" property) to enable the automatic transfer of the codes to HTML.

29. The headings and sub-headings are unique. The same heading cannot appear in two different levels of the same section.

30. There is space around the headings and sub-headings.

Tables

31. Avoid nesting one table inside another table.

32. Use tables that can be read from left to right.

33. Avoid empty cells, if needed use n/a or ---.

34. Avoid using tables to format text.

35. Make sure check boxes are large enough.

Punctuation

36. Use appropriate punctuation. (Automated readers read hyphens, points, parentheses, and quotation marks, but not commas.)

37. Avoid using dashes to split words at the end of lines.

Other

38. Acronyms are difficult for screen readers to read. Put a space between letters to facilitate reading.

39. Instead of "click here," use "select."

40. Hyperlinks are integrated in the text itself (do not use "click here") and long enough to describe the content. The Word function "Insert - Hyperlink" is used. E.g. The [notions](#) of...

41. Use a table of contents if the text is long (2 screens in length).

42. Avoid full justification of text.

43. Use examples.

44. Clearly identify sources.

Alternative text for images (ALT text)

45. Decorative image: Indicate: ALT="" The automated reader will ignore the image.

46. Simple image/graphic: The text should not describe the graphic in detail but provide meaning. Alt text should be short, around 65 characters.

47. Complex image/graphic: Long text that describes the graphic should be found on the same page, under the image, or on another page, and be clearly identified.
