

Gould Library Website Style Guide

Purpose of the Style Guide

This style guide shows how library staff should write content for the Gould Library website. It will help us to have a **consistent tone and writing style** across all pages of the site.

This guide follows the [recommendation of Carleton Web Services](#) that websites be “written for the web”, which means **the writing should be concise and easy to understand**. This is important for two reasons.

1. It will be easier for the readers of our website to understand and know how to use our collections, services, and spaces.
2. Writing that is easy to understand is **more accessible** to everyone, including readers with different reading levels, cognitive abilities, and English language skills.

Audiences of the Website

The Gould Library website is primarily intended to serve the following two audiences. While other readers of our website may exist, they are not the main audience we are writing content for.

- The **primary audience** of the website is **Carleton students, faculty, and staff** who have come to find information about our collections, services, and spaces. Most content should be written with this audience in mind.
- A **secondary audience** includes **alumni, visitors, and local community members** who can access our collections and spaces and qualify for some of our services.

Tone

The tone of the website should strike a balance between being **serious and professional but not too formal, academic, or jargony**. While we may be tempted to use a formal, academic, or jargony tone because we are in a college setting, doing so decreases readability and makes our content less clear and accessible to everyone. A degree of humor or playfulness may sometimes be appropriate.

Reading Level

We should aim for a **Flesch Reading Ease score of 60 or higher** on all pages of our website. High reading ease scores mean that 1) our readers can easily read and understand our content and 2) our content is accessible to the most readers possible.

Reason/WordPress shows the Flesch Reading Ease score for every page. The guidelines in the following section will help increase the Flesch Reading Ease scores of our pages. [Read more about readability and accessibility from Web Services.](#)

Guidelines

Please use the following style guidelines when writing for the website. These guidelines improve readability and accessibility for all readers.

- Conciseness
 - Use **short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs** (one idea per paragraph).
 - Edit out all unnecessary text.
 - Use simple syntax.
 - Reduce the number of clauses in sentences.
 - Use **bulleted or numbered lists** when possible.
- Organization
 - Use **informative page titles**.
 - Split a page into **sections with headers** if there are multiple topics.
 - Consider using expandable/collapsible sections if there is a lot of content.
 - Page titles and section headers help people using screen readers to navigate pages better.
 - Use descriptive, full-word URL addresses.
 - *Example: “.../building_hours” instead of “.../bldnghrs”*
 - Avoid puns or jokes in page titles and section headers.
 - **Summarize your main point** at the start of the page.
 - Don't overload a single page with too many topics.
 - Link to other pages with more information if necessary.
 - Make key words in paragraphs **bold** to draw readers' attention and emphasize meaning.
- Words
 - Use **common words** instead of rare words.
 - Use words with low syllable counts.
 - Use the same words consistently.
 - Don't use synonyms for the same word just for the sake of variety.

- Use unambiguous words.
 - Use words that have a **familiar and clear meaning** to readers.
 - Make sure it is clear what words pronouns refer to (e.g. this, that, it).
- Voice
 - Use the word **“you”** to talk directly to the reader.
 - Use active verbs instead of passive verbs.
 - *Example: “You can request a book” instead of “A book can be requested.”*
- Links
 - Write text for links that **focuses on the action the reader wants to take**.
 - This helps readers, especially those using screen readers, know exactly where links will take them.
 - Avoid “Click here” links.
 - *Example: “Read library policies” instead of “Click here for policies”*
- Visual clarity
 - Reduce visual clutter and busyness on pages in order to reduce the cognitive load on readers.
 - Use white space between page elements (e.g. headers, paragraphs, images).
- Punctuation
 - Use **periods instead of semicolons**.
 - Periods are simpler, familiar to more readers, and mean almost the same thing as semicolons.
 - User testing shows that readers have trouble seeing semicolons online.

Resources

- [Writing for the Web](#) and [Writing for Readability and Accessibility](#) by Carleton Web Services have great resources.
- The library websites of [St. Olaf College](#), [Middlebury College](#), and [Amherst College](#) are also good models for writing for the web.

Last Revised: 5/4/2020