

How to write for the web

People consume content online very differently than they do in print.

No one browses the web anymore.

Most web readers:

- scan a page in under 10 seconds looking for specific information, or bold headings and subheadings;
- do not read every word –at least at first;
- browse linked text for calls to action or to navigate to what they're looking for;
- don't go below the fold (in other words, scroll down the screen) unless what they want has been confirmed above it;
- read in an F-pattern, spending more time scanning the left side of a web page;
- often only scan the first few words of a headline, blurb or sentence;
- click around a lot: most page visits are only seconds long; most site visits only include one or two pages;
- leave a site quickly if they can't find what they need.

Why reading on the Web is different

Reading on the web is different for a few reasons.

Screen display makes reading slower.

Lower resolution makes online copy harder to read, due to factors like screen glare

Studies have shown reading online is about 25% slower than reading a printed document

As well, there is limited real estate on the screen, after which we must scroll. Many people do not scroll if they don't see what they want at a glance.

The user state of mind is different on the Web than in print media.

The Web is all about information on demand vs. Browsing

The user state of mind can be divided into two main attitudes:

- Give me short overviews until I find what I am looking for
- Give me detailed content when I want to find out more

How do we adjust?

So, how does this change how we write for the digital edition of LawNow?

You may feel a little overwhelmed but there are some easy tricks to writing for the Web.

Get to the point

Focus on what the reader is looking for, and offer it up quickly. Don't waste your reader's time. Select your primary point or message, and deliver it quickly. Be concise.

Shorten the copy

Web content should never ramble or take too long to tell the reader why they should care.

Web content should be 1/3 to 1/2 the length of the same content in print.

Title articles transparently, using key terms

Determine what your content is going to focus on, and what users are likely to search for to find your article. Make a list of relevant keywords and ensure you build them into your content.

The title should use primary keywords. They should be clear and descriptive without being clever or using puns. Readers don't generally spend time trying to decipher what the page is about, they want to know at a glance.

It shouldn't be longer than 4-5 words.

Write a subtitle that contains all essential info.

The subtitle should provide additional information that didn't fit in the title

It should use secondary keywords to create alternate ways of saying what you said in your title.

Use meaningful headings and subheadings

Headings and subheadings:

- should be concise, descriptive, lively and inviting
- Clearly explain what content is about
- Write in plain language
- Do not to use —cute or —clever headlines
- Avoid teasers that trick people into clicking

Use short paragraphs

Long paragraphs look intimidating on the Web. Large blocks of text are difficult to read as they do not provide any pauses for the eye

Use plain language - shorter, simpler words and Eliminate unnecessary words

On the Web, the ideas can be complex; the words, simple.

Using words like —utilize rather than —use just slows down the reader.

Weed out all words or phrases that are repetitive or that do not contribute to your main idea.
E.g.: —Expert specialists : use —experts.

Use scannable content

Developing scannable text means providing detail for those who need it, while allowing those who only need preliminary information to scan for the most relevant points.

How to create scannable text:

- Clear headlines/subheads (every two to three paragraphs).
- Shorter paragraphs.
- Variety in the text –sentence length, paragraph length, bulleted/numbered lists, etc.
- Highlighting and emphasis –bolding, links, etc.

Use bulleted or numbered lists

Bulleted or numbered lists quickly let readers know if the article is what they are looking for. It gives them immediate, take away information. It breaks up the text and provides interest.

Use hyperlinks

Use links strategically:

- Use links to streamline your article and to keep it focused
- Use links to keep people moving

Instead of references or footnotes, insert links to lead readers to additional or ancillary information that cannot fit on the page in question.

When adding hyperlinks, integrate them into the text, rather than writing about the user's movements. For example, avoid:

- [Click here](#) to read J.R.R. Tolkien's bio.

Instead, use:

- [Tolkien's bio](#) is fascinating to read.

Choose your links wisely.

Don't overwhelm readers with links –use them to show the priority of information, or for related background material.

By using these tips, you will create content that people will learn from and will enjoy reading!