

*Writing for the Web is a specific skill. Here are five guidelines to effectively communicate online.*

## 1. Identify Your Purpose

What are you trying to say and why do you need to say it?

What are you trying to do? Inform, motivate, change opinion?

## 2. Know Your Audience

Identify your target audience by age, geography or niche market (e.g. rural, ethnic, youth, etc)

Ensure you know how much they know about the issues and how much they want (or need) to know about them

Use appropriate language rather than technical terms with which they may not be familiar

Don't patronise your audience

Provide the information they really need — anything else is optional.

## 3. Say it Simply

Use plain, clear language

Keep sentences short — an average of 15–20 words

Avoid too much text (use half the word count you would normally use)

Keep paragraphs short

Each paragraph should cover only one issue

Avoid cliches, jargon or technical language and overuse of acronyms

Don't use complicated technical descriptions

Summarise complicated topics before you describe all the details

Summarise key points or provide abstracts for long articles and documents

Be punchy but not overly dramatic or self-promoting — website usability testing shows a high resistance to boastful language.

## 4. Display it Simply

Use descriptive headings

Write short sections, using white space to separate them clearly

Use lists to outline:

- the steps in a process, or
- the order in which things happen, or
- the most important to least important issues.

Writing that is best suited for the Web states key facts first and concludes with background information, in the manner of the journalistic style called "inverting the pyramid"

The ability of the Web to link to other documents through hypertext links assists this process by letting you break up information into easily accessible and relevant parts.

Don't use confusing colours or rely purely on graphics for hyperlinks

Use headings and bullets to break up the text

Put the most important information first

Use meaningful words for hypertext links rather than "click here"

Avoid unnecessary or excessive use of links — they invite your reader to go elsewhere and break the continuity of information

Check and double check spelling — the credibility of your entire website and business is at stake

Think visually and use screen readable fonts and colours

Minimise the use of colours — mixed colours are hard to read

Dark text on a light background is easier to read and print

Emphasise by using bold not italics.

## 5. Test it Out

Conduct a reader test with a representative sample of your target audience

Check that you've used the right medium for the message

Website usability testing has shown that people don't like to read online or to scroll very far down a page to read

People usually read from a computer screen about 25 per cent slower than from paper. Readers of Web pages tend to scan the text on screen

## And finally ...

**Edit, revise and rewrite — until it communicates your message to your target audience.**

### **Handy Hint**

*Use the Internet and research effective writing techniques. There is a lot of information online to help!*

## Where to Get More Information

- *eNote 4: Web Addresses Explained*
- *eNote 5: Website Development*
- *eNote 6: Essential Website Information.*

Look for information online to help you write for the web effectively, as well as see excellent examples. Visit search engines for more information.

## Disclaimer

These materials are provided for general assistance and information only. Neither APT Strategies Pty. Ltd nor the State of Victoria makes any representations or warranties (express or implied) as to the accuracy or currency of the information contained in the materials nor endorses any company or organisation or other web-sites or materials referred to. The State of Victoria does not accept any liability for any reliance placed on this material, including any liability in negligence for relying on any information in these materials or any products, services or information which may be provided by the companies and organisations referred to. Copyright State of Victoria 2004.