Web 101 Lunch & Learn Series: Session 2 of 5

Writing for the Web

Brought to you by the Web Communications team, Communications & External Relations

Presenters
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That was 8 seconds.

Didn’t that seem like forever?
Welcome to Writing for the Web

• Who we are
• Slides will be sent around after the session
• Time for questions at the end
A bit of review...

There are only two things on the internet:
1. Information
2. Transactions

What is the goal of your website?
*Hint: What are your departmental/business goals?*

What you write should be directly related to these goals.
Meet your users
Users...

- Are impatient
- Don’t like to read
- Look for clues to help them do what they want to do, and above all
- Don’t want to work to find what they want
Some (depressing) stats

• Studies show that our attention spans have gotten shorter.
• Around 30% of users will start abandoning slow sites at 5-8 seconds. If not less.
• If you put 111 words on a page, people will read 49% of them.
How people read web pages

• This picture is from an eye-tracking study
• ‘F’ shape
• Attention is focused on the top of the page
• Rest of the body is skimmed, with more attention paid to bulleted lists
Introducing Jessica...
What do users want?

• Information that is **short and sweet**, and easy to digest.

Present a trail of bite-sized cookies...

...instead of a huge blob of cookie dough.
What do users want?

• Users want **skimmable content** that is easy to read and find on the page.

• What we’ll tackle:
  1. Focus on the user. **Who is your audience?** Write for them.
  2. **Keep it short.** Get your point across in as few words as possible.
  3. **Use formatting** to your advantage.
Write for your audience.

• Who is your user?
• Use **simple language** and choose words that everyone can understand. Avoid jargon, slang and obscure references.

• Think of your audience. Include those who speak English as a second language.
  • 48% of new students (enrolment 2014) say that English is their first language.

  *Think of the other 52%!*


Give users what they want.

• Put **important info at the top** of the page.
• Get your main point across **QUICKLY**.
• Internet **users are impatient** and expect to find what they’re looking for quickly. **Give users what they want**, or they’ll leave your site.
Cut the fat.

“I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.”
–Mark Twain

Original version (79 words):
Many opportunities for involvement exist within our unit, Academic Affairs and the rest of the University. Below is a list of some of the programs where your involvement can and will make a difference. The success of these programs relies on the generosity, energy and time of many student volunteers. You can help by sharing what you’ve learned through your own university experiences by signing up with any one, two (or all) of the major programs described below.
Cut the fat.

Step #1: Time to cut the fat! Ask yourself:

• What should I keep? What can I cut? Call to action?

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Cut the fat.

Now what?
1. Write a title (or several): Keeps you focused and guides the reader’s eye.
3. Re-write again: Tweak and shorten some more.
Before and after.

Original version (79 words):
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New versions: 25-26 words, including title (down from 79 words)

Get involved!
Become a student volunteer—you can make a difference in your university while building new friendships. See the many opportunities below and sign-up today.

Give back
Become a student volunteer—share what you’ve learned and make a difference in your university. See the available opportunities below and register now.
Cutting the fat: Exercise

It’s your turn! Editing takes practice.
Please cut the fat on the example text below to create a slim and trim new version.

1. What stays and what goes? Who is the audience? What do they need?
2. Edit. Add a few title options. Edit again.
3. Proof-read.

Original version (78 words):
A network of twenty Emergency Phones covers the Wonderful University’s west campus! *These Bell S200 phones are located outside buildings, along walkways and in structures at various locations where they are most visible and recognizable.* The box-type phones can be used to contact Wonderful University’s Security and are equipped with a BLUE LIGHT THAT FLASHES once the phone is activated to make them visible. To find out more information about the Emergency Telephones including their locations, please click this link: [www.wonderfulu.com/securityservices/communityarea/phones/](http://www.wonderfulu.com/securityservices/communityarea/phones/).

Note: Calls can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Cutting the fat: Exercise

What stays, what goes?

A network of twenty Emergency Phones covers the Wonderful University’s west campus! These Bell S200 phones are located outside buildings, along walkways and in structures at various locations where they are most visible and recognizable. The box-type phones can be used to contact Wonderful University’s Security and are equipped with a BLUE LIGHT THAT FLASHES once the phone is activated to make them visible. To find out more information about the Emergency Telephones including their locations, please click this link: www.wonderfulu.com/securityservices/communityarea/phones/.

Note: Calls to Wonderful University’s Security can be made using the Emergency Phones 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Before (78 words)
A network of 20 Emergency Phones covers the Wonderful University’s west campus! *These Bell S200 phones are located outside buildings, along walkways and in structures at various locations where they are most visible and recognizable.* The box-type phones can be used to contact Wonderful University’s Security and are equipped with a BLUE LIGHT THAT FLASHES once the phone is activated to make them visible. To find out more information about the Emergency Telephones including their locations, please click this link: [www.wonderfulu.com/securityservices/communityarea/phones/](http://www.wonderfulu.com/securityservices/communityarea/phones/). Note: Calls to Wonderful University’s Security can be made using the Emergency Phones 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

After: Edited version (25 words)

**Emergency phones**  
The **20 emergency phones** on Wonderful University’s west campus provide instant contact with **Security** at any time. Flashing blue lights make the phones easily visible.
Formatting is your friend

Before
McGill Web Editors: Do you want to learn how to write content that gets read? From 12:15-1:15pm on Friday November 2nd a “Lunch & Learn” will be held on the topic of Web Writing at Leacock 232. The event will be recorded and posted online along with slides. The topics covered will include writing engaging goal-oriented copy, making your content scannable, the ‘inverted pyramid’ approach and good standards for web writing in general. The talk will also cover how to use styles, display features and images well in a web context. All McGill site editors and managers are invited to attend and no registration is required for this event.

After
Lunch & Learn: Web Writing
McGill web editors – learn how to write content that gets read! On Friday November 2nd from 12:15-1:15pm at Leacock 232, the Office of Communications and External Relations presents a free, no registration required session on writing for the web.

Topics covered will include:

• writing engaging, goal-oriented copy,
• editing and structuring your content to give people what they want, and
• using styles, formatting and images to really make your web content pop.

A recording of the talk will be posted online along with slides from the event.

• Use bulleted lists
• Use clear headings
• Choose a consistent font
• **Bold** and *italicize* sparingly
• *Italics* are useful for titles: books, conferences, talks
• Avoid underlining
• Avoid all caps. IT’S LIKE YELLING.
• Note: This is unnecessary.
Embedding links

• Bad linking:
  Click here for more information:
  www.mcgill.ca/yoursitehere/more/more

• Good linking:
  The Department of Microbiology holds regular conferences about cell anatomy. Register now!
Avoid duplications

Your site doesn’t need to say everything.
• Just **show users where to go** for more information.
• Don’t duplicate content that already exists elsewhere.

**Whenever possible, link away!**
  • ex: exam schedules, tuition fees, program descriptions, Convocation, health services, residences, student services, About McGill, etc.

When content is in more than one place:
• It’s **time-consuming to update**, and might be done inconsistently.
• **Causes user confusion** and can spread incorrect, out-of-date information.
• The website is unnecessarily **cluttered**.
Blocks are the best

• In the McGill WMS, use blocks to have the same content appear on more than one page:
  • notices, news or reminders,
  • highlight important links (internal or external)
  • easier to update all at once in multiple places
Blocks are the best

How to apply to the Faculty of Engineering

On this page:
Applying to Undergraduate Studies | Applying to Graduate Studies

Applying to Undergraduate Studies
Applications to undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Engineering are handled through Enrolment Services. Please visit Applying to McGill to learn more about the application process, such as:

- Application deadlines
- Admissions criteria
- Special requirements for specific programs
- Language proficiency requirements
- Visa requirements
- Transcript requirements
- Apply online
- Request for information

Placement Examinations
Applicants to the Faculty of Engineering from outside Quebec who believe they have taken the equivalent of one or more introductory college-level science
Formatting friends or foes?

- **Columns**: Affect the way a user views a page and may be more confusing than helpful. Use in small doses.

- **Accordions**: hide content and save users from scrolling. If the info in an accordion needs frequent updates, they can be tricky to work with —best reserved for more static info.

- **Tabs**: can be useful, but they hide a lot of content. Use with caution.
- **Advising**

Advising and assisting students in program planning and in the proper selection of courses, so that all students understand the education goals of the University and follow programs that coincide with their talents, interests and goals.

**Drop-in**
Monday - Friday
10:00 am - 12:00 pm

**By appointment**
Monday - Friday
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Tel: 514-398-7257
Fax: 514-398-2169

- **Peer Tutoring Services**

The Peer Tutoring program has been available to engineering students for more than 40 years to ease students’ transition from high school and CEGEP to university. Peer Tutors are available daily from the third week of each term.

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**Engineering Career Centre (ECC)**

The Engineering Career Centre provides students with opportunities to gain career-related experience through internships (Engineering Internship Program). Connect with employers, learn about various career paths, develop job search skills, and more.

**Drop-in**
Monday - Friday
10:00 am - 11:00 am

**By appointment**
Contact MESC for hours - 514-398-8100
Formatting: Accordions

categories, course grading options and final examination information to help you make the best decisions.

FAQ
+ Transfer Credit/Registration
+ Curriculum
+ Course is Full
+ Complementary Studies Courses
+ Choosing a Major for Electrical, Computer, and Software Engineering
+ Science Placement Exams
+ Exemptions
+ Minors
+ MINERVA Error Messages
+ Course Registration Details
+ Exams
+ Exam Deferrals
Formatting: Tabs
Images

On this page:
Image selection | Placement | Size
Accessibility | More information

Images are a great way to break up text, add visual interest and clarify your content. But there are definitely right and wrong ways (and places) to use them.

Choosing the right images

• Pick pictures with purpose.
  Your images should help achieve your site's goals -- not just brighten up the page. If they don't convey something about your site, your unit, your service, etc., they'll simply feel like filler.

If you have been thinking of creating a new website or if your existing website needs a drastic overhaul, this is a great place to start. Find out more

Upcoming sessions:
• Writing for the Web
The bottom line

• Users are impatient: You need to quickly give them what they want.
• Who is your audience? What is your goal?
• Cut the fat: Get your point across in a short and sweet way.
• Formatting is your friend.
• Make it easy for users to get what they came for.
Need some guidance?

• Web Communications can help!
• We offer:
  – one-on-one consultative support
  – Google Analytics reports for McGill sites
  – usability testing
  – and more!
• Get in touch at webcomms@mcgill.ca
Web 101

• [mcgill.ca/web-101](mcgill.ca/web-101)
  • Full of useful tips and guidelines for making a good McGill website.

• Slides and recording of this presentation will be available by email following this session.
Thank you!
Questions? Please ask!

Krystle Manintveld
Jessica Mineau