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Writing for the Web Sharecase 2003

What We Know About Web Readers

1. Up to 80% of Web readers read only the **article summaries**. If they want to read the entire article, they print it out.
2. Most readers (nearly 80%) first **scan** headlines, article summaries, and captions on a Web page.
3. Web readers **read 25% slower** onscreen than when reading print.
4. Readers **understand more when reading less**.
5. Up to 90% of people reading a Web page **don't scroll down**.

Sources:

May 2000 study by Stanford University and The Poynter Institute
Jack Powers, Director, International Informatics Institute

Blink resource:

Writing for the Web

<http://blink.ucsd.edu/go/webwriting>

Notes:

What We Know About Web Writing

Ten Tips for Writing Tight, Scannable Copy

— Excerpt from "Writing for Readers Who Scan" by Kathy Henning,
Senior Copywriter and Managing Editor, ClickZ.com

1. **Delete every unnecessary word.** As author Crawford Kilian says in a recent article about Web writing, "Every word and phrase should have to fight for its life."
2. **Keep sentences short and simple.** As a rule, semicolons don't belong on Web sites.
3. **Include only one idea per paragraph.** Keep paragraphs to three sentences.
4. **Use subheads,** and make sure they're clear and relevant. Subheads give readers a quick overview of what's on the page. Subheads also allow scanners to skip over chunks of copy that don't appear to have a direct relationship to their needs.
5. **Bullet-point** parallel words, phrases, or clauses — especially information that's important. Bullet points not only cut down on words and organize content but also stand out from surrounding text and get read.
6. **Put important information at the beginnings** of sentences and important sentences at the beginnings of paragraphs.
7. **Use transition words** whenever possible, such as "but," "so," "and," "also," and "because."
8. **Choose shorter words** whenever possible, for example, "lie" for "prevaricate" or "recline."
9. **Avoid circumlocutions** (e.g., "at a later time" for "later").
As Thomas Jefferson said, "The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do."
10. Whenever possible, **use the active voice** (e.g., "John threw the ball." instead of "The ball was thrown by John.").

Kathy Henning is a freelance writer and editor with nearly 20 years' professional experience. Since 1997 she has focused primarily on the Web, as senior copywriter and editorial manager for three companies, most recently Vertebrae, a Web development firm. She has written and edited copy for more than 30 sites.

Two more Blink tips:

- Identify your audience and write directly to them.
- Identify your main message and put it in the summary at the top of the page.