WRITING FOR THE WEB

A practical approach to content creation

Objectives

1. Digital.nsw – the home of digital transformation for NSW Government
2. Why writing for the web is important
3. How to write for the web
4. Where to go for more help
5. Walk away with skills to bring your content to life

Digital.nsw – what is it and what does it do?

- Digital.nsw was launched in November 2017 as the home of NSW government's digital transformation

- Digital.nsw is more than a website. It is a platform that:
    1. Reports on digital government progress
        - Data visualisation of DGIPS
    2. Builds digital government communities
        - Policy Lab
        - Digital.nsw community of approximately 10,000 subscribers
    3. Houses resources
        - Guidelines, toolkits that support teams to design and deliver digital services
    4. Shares information about digital initiatives across government
        - Regular newsletter updates
        - *In Focus* to feature topical content

Digital.nsw – what's next?

- Digital.nsw is being released in stages – we will add new functions and content overtime based on user feedback.

- We are decommissioning www.finance.nsw.gov.au/ict and migrating relevant content to digital.nsw.

- But we must practice what we preach:
    1. Customer-centric
    2. Data-informed
    3. Digital-first

WHY WRITE FOR THE WEB

What do we mean by writing for the web?

When we say "writing for the web" we mean a whole raft of channels, including:

- Websites
- eDMs (electronic direct mail)
- Social media
- Videos
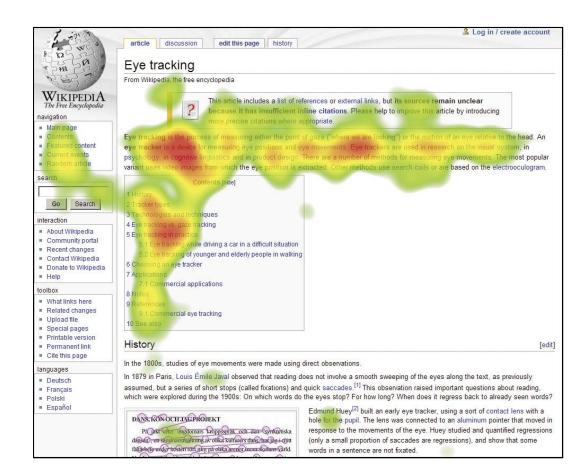- Online surveys

….Basically anything digital!

How we consume online content

Eye-tracking studies – how we read online

- Sweep eyes across page (roughly in F pattern)

- Make lightning fast decisions about whether a page is worth reading

- 80% only look at information above the fold

- Only 20% scroll

- 70% look at left half of webpage and 30% view the right
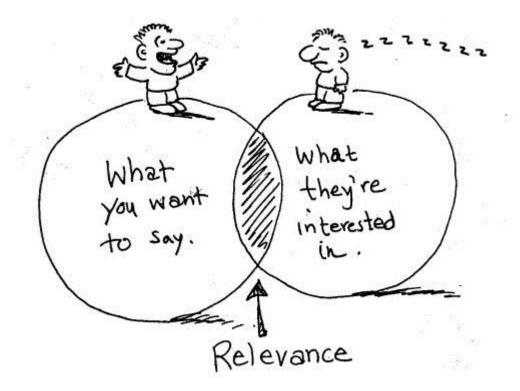
- Only read 20% of text

Sources:

https://www.nngroup.com/articles/scrolling-and-attention/

http://www.useit.com/alertbox/percent-text-read.html

Keep your audience in mind

When you are writing you should always keep your audience in mind.

Key things to consider:

- Who are you talking to?
- What do they care about?
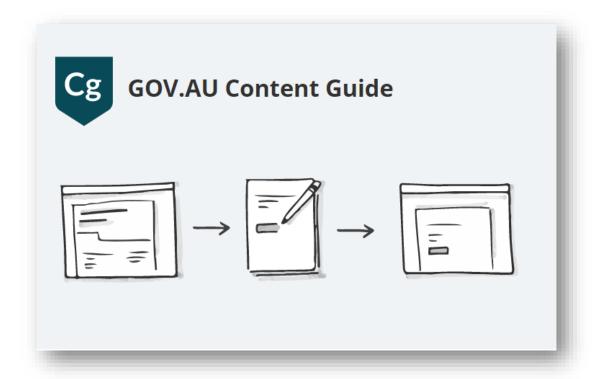- What do you want them to know/do/feel?

CONTENT BEST PRACTICE

Content best practice

Achieving best practice and compliance

1. Use the DTA's Digital Service Standard and Content Guide

2. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA (more information about this on slide 23)

Content best practice

Design for mobile first

This is in the DTA guidelines and is a good habit to get into. A responsive website is one that changes structure depending on what device it's viewed on.

- Think about how the page will stack when it's on a mobile

- In the case of fiance/ict most of our traffic is from desktops but this doesn't mean we shouldn't follow best practice guidance

Content structure best practice
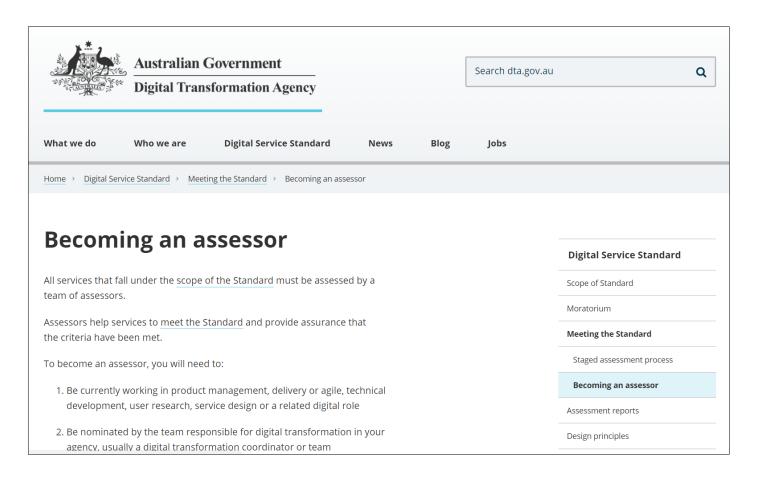
Content structure

- Structure the content around meeting the user's needs first, then meeting requirements around mandated information.

- Design content to:

    - give the user only the information they need to complete the job/task

    - lead the user to the information they need

- Use simple language and get to the point quickly

- Communicate with text first, don't rely on images and videos

Content structure best practice - example

Example of good page structure

When drafting content, make sure it is clear:
1.   Who the information is for
2.   What this content helps the reader do

Writing style best practice

Writing style

When writing, think like a journalist – think about how to front load the important information and make the content compelling.
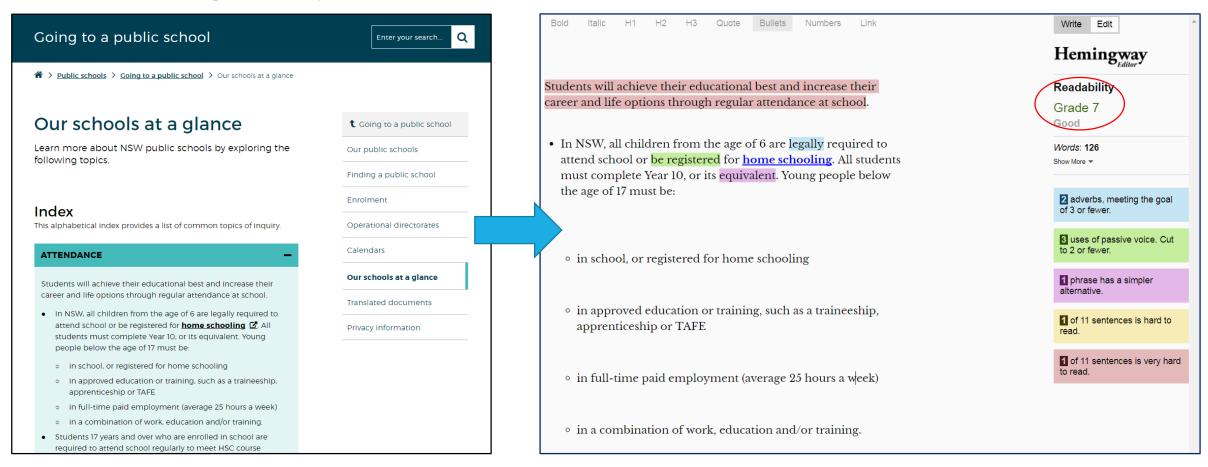
As a guide try to do the following:

- Use pronouns (You is the user and We are NSW Government)
- Use short sentences
- Lists and bullet points – use an intro sentence and short lists for effect
- Use active voice

Writing style best practice - example

Example of good copy

- Use Flesch–Kincaid, Hemingway App or other readability tests to help determine how readable your writing is.
- Remember, the easy it is to read, the more likely it will be read, understood and actioned.
- Aim for Grade 5 reading level.

Headline best practice

Headlines

Users scan pages so headlines act as important sign-posts to help understand what content is on a page.

Keep in the mind the following:

- Write a clear title and lead summary (e.g. what is the page about and who is it for)

- Headings are the first words users read to check the relevance of content before they commit to reading it

- Make headings short and succinct, and enough to stand alone when read out of context (e.g. in search results and on social media)

- Google searches only show 55 characters of the page title.

- Use only 1 top level (H1) heading

Headline best practice - example

Example of an effective headline

Headline is short, succinct and let's the reader know what the content is on.

Engaging call to action – entices the reader with urgency to find our more about Aus' 7th largest city.

Click through link says what it will take you to specifically and avoids generic calls to action like "Find out more"

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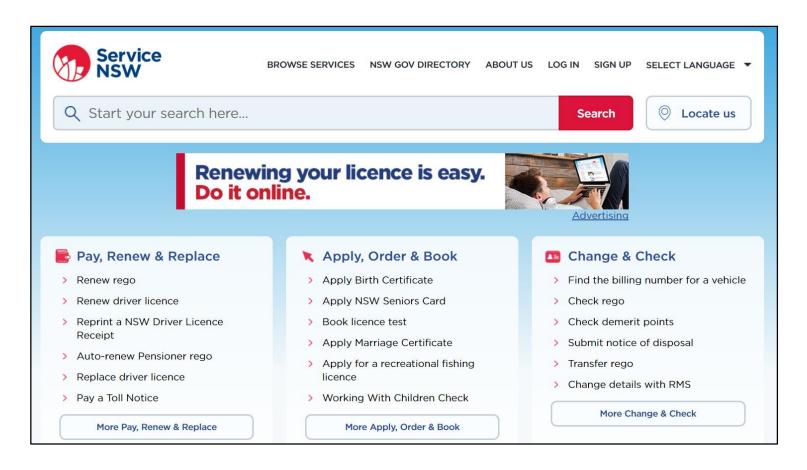DIGITAL FUTURE

Hyperlinks best practice

Hyperlinks

- Make the destination of the link clear (e.g. if I click on this, I know what I will get X)
- Think about the user and their context when reading the information.
- Don't use meaningless terms such as 'click here', 'read more' or 'useful links'.
- Don't make the link text too long, only link the keywords

Hyperlinks best practice - example

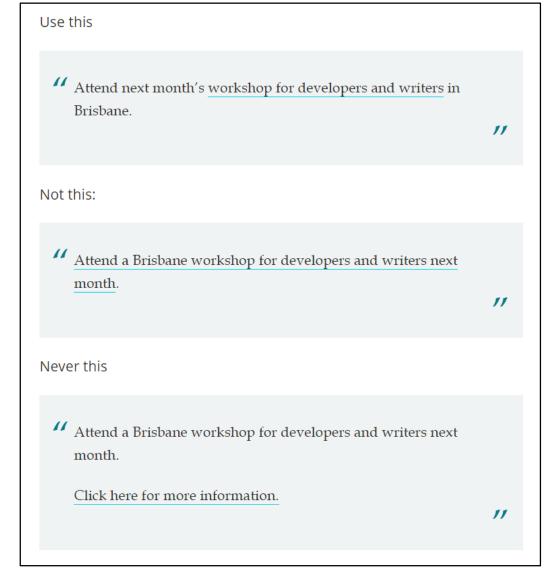**Example of hyperlinks as a Call to Action (CTA)**

Intext hyperlinking

- Hyperlinking relevant words only.
  - Remove superfluous words
  - Make content more trustworthy e.g. user less likely to think it will be a scam/virus/take them to a random site

Use this

" Attend next month's workshop for developers and writers in Brisbane.
"

Not this:

" Attend a Brisbane workshop for developers and writers next month.
"

Never this

" Attend a Brisbane workshop for developers and writers next month.

Click here for more information.
"

Source: https://guides.service.gov.au/content-guide/content-structure/#hyperlinks

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White space best practice

White space

White space (or negative space) is a useful design technique to:

- Not overload the user with too much information
- Help users process information
- Help content standout

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White space best practice - example

Example of good use of white space

WCAG compliance

WCAG compliance – what is it?

As a government agency it's mandatory that our websites are WCAG 2.0 AA compliant. The WCAG standards are designed to help people with hearing and sight impairment to easily access information online.

- A recent report* found 66% of sites documents don't meet accessibility standards

- Navigation labels are crucial

- Use tools like the WAVE Chrome plugin to check content

- Use ALT tags on images

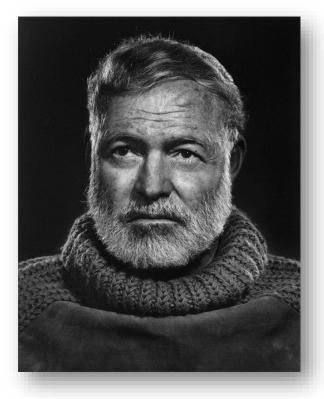- Make sure PDFs (which shouldn't be used anyway) are accessible

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Testing content

Test your content

- There are online tools where you can test the readability of pages
- You can use Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics feature
- Flesch-Kincaid readability test - https://readable.io/
- Hemingway App - http://www.hemingwayapp.com/
- Ask your users!

Ernest Hemmingway

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Understanding your audience

- The first criteria in the DTA's Digital Service Standard is understanding user needs.
- It is the first criteria for a reason…

*"If we can capture in data what really matters to you, and if we can understand more the role that our work plays in your actual life, the **better content we can create for you**, and the **better that we can reach you**."*
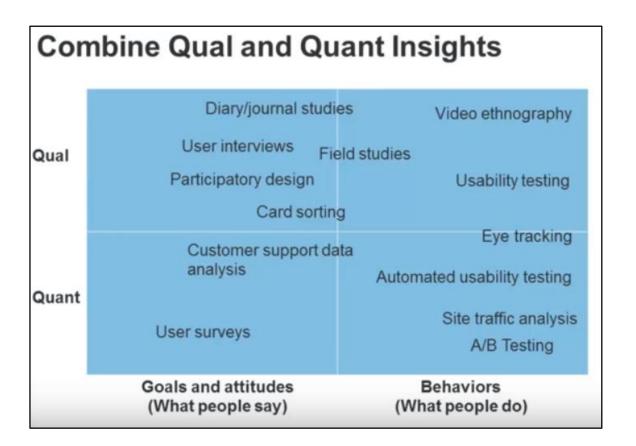
Dao Nguyen, BuzzFeed's Publisher

So how do you find out about your audience?

- There are many qualitative/quantitative research techniques available

- To get the most complete understanding of who your audience is, you ideally want research from each quadrant

What do you do once you have this information?

- Create job stories

Combine Qual and Quant Insights

	Goals and attitudes (What people say)	Behaviors (What people do)
Qual	Diary/journal studies, User interviews, Participatory design, Card sorting	Video ethnography, Field studies, Usability testing, Eye tracking
Quant	Customer support data analysis, User surveys	Automated usability testing, Site traffic analysis, A/B Testing

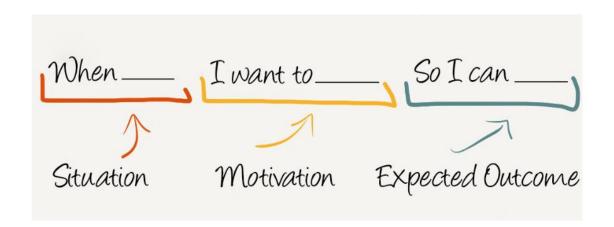digital nsw
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What is a job story?

We can write content better if we understand what our audience wants to do and why they want to do it.

What job does your audience want to do?
Why do they want to do it?
What information do they need to do it?

E.g. **When** I have a $20M ICT project **I want to** know what I have to report to the IAF on **so I can** comply.

E.g. **When** I'm drafting content **I want to** know best practice standards **so I can** write great content.

Job stories don't have to be from a single point of view.

E.g. **When** I'm looking for an ICT provider **I want to** find out who I can use **so I can** procure them.

When I'm looking for an ICT provider **I want to** find out what the technical standards are **so I can** procure them.

TIP: Be as specific as possible, make the problem as defined as you can.

RECAP

Recap

Keep a checklist in mind when working with content. Make one that works for you. As a guide we recommend:

- Find out about your target audience

- **Always** keep your audience front of mind and what there purpose/goal is for visiting your page

- Use short sentences, front load the important info and use lists where appropriate

- Use hyperlinks as call to actions and avoid using "read more"

- Do **not** use PDFs – keep the content on the page and searchable

- Use white space

- Plan your content (ideally as a page plan) prior to writing

- Test your content with colleagues and with online tools prior to publishing

RESOURCES

Online resources

Links

Here are links to online resources mentioned in this training session:

- Google analytic basics

- Hemingway app

- DTA content guidelines

- WCAG 2.0 guidelines

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