

# Creating a website with style and substance



Part 2: Style

## Navigation

### Tips for making all links more usable:

- Make link names as intuitive as possible. Try to avoid library jargon and other vagueness in links. If the link name isn't intuitive to everything that is underneath that link, the content might as well be lost.
- Try to make a link match the title of the page that the user will be sent to by the link.
- Try to use natural language for links, not the URLs for the page it will take the user to.
- If you make two links with the same name which go to two different documents, people will be very confused. The same link text should point to the same document.
- If you make two links to the same document with different descriptions, people will be very confused. The same document should always be described in the same way.
- Avoid using links labeled things like "current news" or "current issues". Try to give your users as much information as possible before they click on the link.
- Separate adjacent links with some printable character (like a |). This allows screen readers to pause between links.
- It is sometimes helpful to let users know if a link is going to take them to another site or to a different section on the same page.
- If a link is going to launch a new window, let people know that it is going to launch a new window. Users may not notice the new window and can be disoriented. This is particularly disorienting to people using screen readers.
- Try to avoid making links different colors than the standard blue for unvisited links and red or purple for visited links.
- It is better to use text for links than images because images cannot follow the link conventions of turning a different color after being visited.

## Helping people navigate your site:

- Provide consistent navigation on all of your pages. This should, at the very least, include a link to the home page (which should look the same and be in the same location on each page).
- Including the following navigation elements on each page of your site can be very helpful to users: the site ID, a link to the home page, links to sections of the site, a way to search (if you have a search engine), and links to utilities like “Contact us”.
- Navigation will help users answer the following questions on a site: What site is this? What page am I on? What are the major sections of this site? What are the options at this level? Where am I in the scheme of things? Where have I been?
- The navigation on your home page can be different, but it should be similar to the navigation on other pages.
- Pull-downs and graphics should be used with great care for navigation because they do not behave like standard links.
- Use conventions that are familiar to users for your site’s navigation (links down the side, tabs on the top, etc.). Don’t be innovative with the placement of your site navigation. This will be confusing to users.
- Try to indicate in some way where in the site the user currently is: use a pointer, change color, bold the link, etc. Also reflect where they are in the site by the page title.
- One technique used by some sites for in-site navigation is “breadcrumbs”. This shows the user where they currently are in the hierarchy of the site. If you are going to use these, put them at the top of the page, use “>” between the levels, use tiny type, bold the last words, and use words like “You are here:” at the beginning of the list.
- Tabs can be used for navigation, but should be created and considered very carefully. They must look like tabs, the active tab must give the illusion that it is in front, they should be one graphic for faster loading, and alternate text links should be provided.

### **Tips for navigation pages (or index pages within your site):**

- Pages on your site that are designed to provide navigation should be 1-2 screens at the most. Avoid scrolling if possible.
- For faster scanning of navigation pages, reduce the amount of unused space. The greater the density, the faster the scanning.
- If things are logically related in your hierarchy, make them visually related. Group different topics under headings with a similar style, and in clearly defined “areas” of the pages.

### **Searching your site:**

- Consider adding a searching feature, particularly if you have 100 or more pages in your site.
- If searching is available, every page should have a search box or a link to the search box.
- Use the word “Search” to label the search box.
- If there may be confusion about what is being searched with this box, spell out what is being searched with this box. For example, on a library website, you may want to indicate that the search box is searching the website of the library rather than the online catalog.
- Don’t include instructions on how to search: users won’t read them, and if your searching mechanism requires instructions, it should be easier!

## Page Structure

### **Tips for creating a template for content pages:**

- Create a basic layout grid, or template, for your content pages. Use things like headings, subheadings, and titles consistently throughout your pages.
- Elements on a page should be structured so that the broadest elements are at the top and sub-elements appear underneath, and sub-sub elements appear underneath the sub-elements, etc. etc.
- Remember that, unlike paper, people are viewing this content one screen at a time. Think how each screenful of information will look to the user.
- Pages should not be structured to a specific screen resolution. Instead, the page should change with different resolutions.
- All list elements on a page should be justified to the same line for easy of reading.
- Left-justify text on pages. People can read left-justified text much faster.
- Test out your template by filling it with nonsense. See if users can still get a sense of where the title, paragraphs, sub-elements, etc. would be. If they can figure it out, the template of the page is arranged effectively.

### **Elements that are recommended for all content pages and should be included in your template:**

- Last update date or a creation date or both.
- Contact information: street address, phone, email or web form for feedback or content contact, URL of home page, or some combination of these.
- Consistent navigation, including a link to the home page.
- Site identification: logo or some indication on every page that this page belongs to your site.
- A copyright statement, if required or a link to a copyright statement.
- Author of the page.
- A title

**Things to include on your home page template:**

- Site identification.
- Mission: What is the purpose of this site?
- Navigation through your site.
- Shortcuts.
- Content promos and timely content.

**Things to avoid on your home page template:**

- Large graphics that take up a majority of the first screen.
- Long introduction and welcome statements
- Long and detailed information about the library. This information can be relegated to secondary pages.
- A “splash screen” or other screen that appears before the content.
- Information that may not be valuable to everyone: This is very valuable real estate!
- A button to take the user to the home page.

## Fonts

### Tip for choosing fonts:

- A 10 point font or larger is best.
- Consider using a sans-serif font for text. It is easier for people to read on computer screens.
- Avoid mixing serif and sans-serif fonts on the same page.
- Use a maximum of 2 fonts per page: one for the body text and one for the headings.
- Use consistent fonts throughout your website.
- When specifying font sizes, try to make all sizes relative to one another. This allows users to increase the font size on all pieces of text.
- Remember that fonts are determined by a combination of browser and operating system (Windows vs. Mac). When specifying fonts, include multiple fonts, but remember that fonts won't be rendered the same in each environment.
- Try to use common fonts that will be present on most systems.

## Formatting

### Tips for formatting text:

- A good rule of thumb for formatting is to use only one formatting element (like bold or italics) at a time.
- Avoid using deprecated HTML elements to format text. These elements will eventually be phased out. They include <CENTER>, <FONT>, and <U>.
- Avoid blinking text. This is a distraction for all users, and can be a major problem for users with cognitive impairments.
- Avoid scrolling text: This is another distraction that can be a major issue for some users.
- If you must, must, must have moving text, provide a way for it to stop moving.
- IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO READ THINGS IN ALL CAPS. THIS IS ONE OF THE LEAST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO ADD EMPHASIS. TRY TO AVOID IT.
- **If you bold everything, it will look like you are shouting all of the time. Try not to format large blocks of text in bold.**
- Underlining has become a convention to indicate links, and users can be confused by underlined text that isn't linked, so try to avoid using underlining if at all possible.
- *Italics are difficult to read for long strings of text. Use sparingly or for things like book titles where italics are used by convention.*
- Consider using style sheets for formatting text.

## Color

- For maximum readability, use black text on a white background.
- If you would like to use a colored background, keep the colors very muted, and low in saturation. Try pastels, grays, and light earth tones.
- Mixing yellow and black can be fairly legible.
- Avoid using red or green text. If you do choose to use one of these colors, create text large and bold enough to be read if it was yellow rather than red or green.
- Avoid using black text on red backgrounds, or using red text on black backgrounds. This will appear as black text on a black background for some users with visual impairments.
- If you want to guarantee that your colors will be the same on all platforms, try to use only the 216 “safe” colors. For more information about the 216 safe colors, see: <http://www.visibone.com/colorlab/>
- Do not use color to convey meaning. People without color monitors or with visual impairments may not see the colors, and may therefore lose the meaning associated with them. An example would be changing the color of a tab to indicate that it is the “currently selected” tab.

## Images

### Tips about size and number of images:

- Keep pages below 30,000 bytes (including graphics!) for an acceptable downloading time.
- Avoid gratuitous graphics that don't add meaning to the site. These add unnecessary download time.
- Keep in mind that "A picture is worth 2,000 words" in the context of download time. Does the picture you are thinking about adding warrant that?
- More images can be included on pages that are farther down the hierarchy of pages.
- Remember your page structure and template! Carefully mix graphics and text to maintain this structure.

### Things to avoid with images:

- Avoid images that are constantly in motion. These images are distracting for all users and can take attention away from the content you want them to pay attention to. They can also make pages unusable for people using screen readers.
- If at all possible, avoid using images to make styled text. Try using style sheets or text on a background image instead.
- If at all possible, avoid using images for spacing elements on a web page. Use style sheets or other ways to position text. If you must, must, must do this, use an ALT tag with nothing in it to describe the image: ALT=""

## Image map tips

- When you use an image map, provide text links to the same items somewhere else on the page.
- If you are using image maps for navigation at the top of your pages, consider providing a small one-pixel image link that matches your background above the image map. This link should go to the beginning of your content, and will allow individuals with screen readers to bypass this repetitive navigation.

## Providing text descriptions for images:

- All images on pages should have a text description for people using screen readers or others who choose not to see the images. This includes image maps, single images, animated images, graphical buttons, images used to mark list items, etc.
- When providing a text description, make it as clear and concise as possible.
- Use the chart below for help with text descriptions:

<b>To describe this:</b>	<b>Put this in your text description:</b>
Logos or site identification images	Description of what the logo represents, rather than a description of the picture. For example, “Logo for the University of Wisconsin” is better than “Red W”.
Small decorative images	ALT=””
Bullets or graphics used to indicate list items	ALT=”*”
Animated image	Include the word “animated” somewhere in the description.
Pictures that change as people interact	Make sure the text descriptions change with the pictures
An image used as a link	Where the link will take the user.

## Professionalism

### Tips for making your page professional:

- Avoid “Under Construction” pages: Only post pages to your website that have enough content to justify being posted. A web site is always “under construction” because the web is a fluid medium where sites are always changing. Bringing attention to under-developed areas with “Under Construction” pages is not valuable to your users.
- Proofread and spell check your pages, proofread again, and then have someone else proofread it for you. Grammatical and spelling errors are easy to miss, but also easy for users to spot!
- Avoid heavy background images or dark background colors.
- Check links! Dead links make a page feel out-of-date and unkempt.
- Make your site have a consistent look and feel throughout.
- Avoid “Clown’s Pants”, the effect of using a lot of horizontal rules, bullets, visual markers, and huge fonts so that nothing stands out and everything seems out of place.
- Think carefully before putting a counter on your page: These devices don’t tell you any real information about how many visits a page has had, and can cause distrust of your pages. Would you want to get information from a page that appears to have received only 300 hits since 1998?
- When an event is over, get rid of references to it from your site. Keep your site as up-to-date as possible.

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