

## Writing for the Web

Writing content for web use is not the same as writing content for a print publication. The list below contains a few tips and tricks for use in creating web content. We hope you find it useful.

### **Perspective:**

Perspective refers to the author's relationship with the reader. While many marketing and copywriting professionals recommend web content be written in first- and second person in order to create more of a connection with site visitors, it is not a concrete rule. Third person can be useful when you are assuming the role of narrator, for example in the event you are detailing a service that another agency provides in your area. It is also useful in legally sensitive situations where you need to maintain neutrality on an issue.

Using third person to describe your area in every instance can begin to sound impersonal, but may be appropriate, especially in the initial description of your area. You may decide to avoid first person altogether to appear more objective and deliver the facts using third person. That is ultimately up to your discretion.

Another tricky perspective is in reference to our primary audience, prospective and current students. The continual use of 'students' can create separation whereas the use of second person 'you' creates a partnership.

**a. First person** is written from the author's point of view and use pronouns such as "I," "our," and "we."  
*Ex. - I encourage you to write your program web content carefully.*

*Ex. - We have many programs designed to the industry's high-tech standards.*

**b. Second person** places the reader into the conversation and uses pronouns such as "you" and "your."  
*Ex. - Using these tips will enable you to write more effectively.*

*Ex. - We hope you will consider joining us at CSN, Your Future Starts Here!*

**c. Third person** tells the story as if you are looking in from the outside or from a narrator perspective and often uses pronouns such as "he," "she," "they," and references to yourself, your area, and others by name.

*Ex. - They were able to accurately describe their area using these tips.*

*Ex. - The Music Program is housed on our Cheyenne Campus.*

*Ex. - Students will earn their degree in 2 years.*

**The continued use of third person in the description of your area may necessitate the use of third person to describe students. Make sure you balance the use of second- and third person. Also make sure to use active voice wherever possible. Passive voice can create awkward sentences and that can begin to sound less interesting.**

### **Tense:**

Tense is the form of the verb that indicates time. In general, use the present tense. Like the active voice, the present tense is relevant, assertive, and direct—all qualities that support the Peterson's brand and voice. The present tense is also more contemporary, making events or activities seem ongoing instead of finite—key for evergreen content on the internet. This also jibes with the general, "it's always now" tone of social media.

At every opportunity, web descriptions should be present tense—"Students can earn AA degrees online"—but where necessary past tense is fine.

***Like this: present tense***

- MIT heralds a new milestone in online education.

***Not like this: past tense***

- MIT tracked a new milestone in online education last quarter.

**In web descriptions, use past tense where necessary to refer to the accomplishments or doings of the school in the past. Use present tense wherever else possible.**

**Programs and Courses:**

When referring to a course by its name, bracket the name in quotes. Include punctuation within the quotes.

*Example:* Students are required to take the course, "Theories of Subjective Individuality and Equivocation."

When referring to a course by its more general subject matter, use lower case letters and no quotes.

*Example:* Students are required to take courses on history and philosophy.

When referring to a specific degree, use capitalized letters in a proper name.

*Example:* Students will earn a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene degree upon completion of the required coursework.

*Note:* Proper (capitalized) usage of degree names is not possessive and apostrophes are not used. Most general possessive references to a bachelor's degree do have an apostrophe, as does the reference to a master's degree. A possessive apostrophe is not used in reference to an associate degree or doctoral/doctorate degree in any usage. There is also no acceptable plural usage to either form, only the 'degree' can be plural.

When referring to a program without the degree, use lower case letters.

*Example:* Students studying sociology can earn their AA degrees through the college's online program.

When programs are listed out in an actual bulleted list, then we can forego quotation marks.

*Examples:* Students can study in one of the following programs:

- Biology
- Chemistry

When programs are listed out within a paragraph, they should still be capitalized. When used without reference to the program, they are not capitalized.

*Example 1:* Students can study in one of many programs including Education and Accounting.

*Example 2:* Students must take both education and accounting courses to earn their degree.

**Publications:**

Any print publication's title is bracketed in quotes. Any online publications are not.

*Example:* This professor is published in "Warrington's Guide to Animals," and in Forbes online.

**Lists:**

The name of a list of schools is always capitalized, but not bracketed in quotes.

*Example:* The school is featured in the Best Schools edition of "US News & World Report."

### **Formatting:**

Higher education web descriptions should follow a common hierarchy to ensure viewers are seeing consistent information thorough the site. A heading should be used and a paragraph break should be forced before the text begins. (May have to use two 'shifted' blank lines in some web text editors.) If not already forced by the web content management system, the heading should be bolded and in a larger font than the text that follows it.

#### ***Like this***

(HEADING) **The Engineering Technology Program**

(TEXT) This program features many courses such as...

NOTE: Paragraphs should be short and to the point, ranging from two to four sentences. Get to your point quickly and drive them to your other links and features. Remember, the average time spent on an individual webpage is approximately 15 seconds before visitors move on to find the information elsewhere.

### **Acronyms:**

The first time you use an acronym on a page or in a section, if it's new or unfamiliar, spell out the phrase and follow it with the acronym in parentheses. In subsequent uses, just use the acronym. The exception to this rule is in headlines or titles, where space is at a premium.

Don't put periods between the letters in an acronym. It's always "GMAT," no periods or spaces required. It's "BA," not "B.A.," and it's "US," not "U.S."

### **Capitalization:**

Use sentence case in page titles, headlines, and calls to action. Sentence case means you should only capitalize the first word and any proper nouns. Sentence case looks more modern, streamlined, and friendly. In many cases, we use rhetorical questions and actual sentences as headlines, so this convention ensures consistence across all our headlines.

#### ***Like this (sentence case)***

Grad school bound

#### ***Not like this (Title Case)***

Grad School Bound

For roles, only capitalize titles that precede someone's name. Don't capitalize titles that follow someone's name to describe what they do.

Like this:

- President Barack Obama
- Barack Obama, president of the United States, visited campus

### **Contractions:**

Don't waste time and space with more formal, extended forms of verbs (e.g., use "can't" instead of "cannot" or "can not"). The contraction is more contemporary and concise.

### **Numbers, dates, and times:**

Unless you're describing quantities in a list, spell out numbers zero through nine. Use numerals for 10 and above.

There are exceptions when clarity trumps consistency. Use numerals in these purposes:

- Ages
- Technical terms and designations (Phase 2, tier 3)
- Numbered references (page 5, room 1, chapter 8)
- Percentages
- Scores and rankings

When describing ordered numbers, use the written words, not the numeral followed by "st" or "nd" or "rd" or "th".

*Example:* This school ranks first in the country.

### **Punctuation:**

In general, omit end punctuation in page titles, headlines, subheads, bullets, and calls to action.

*Ampersands:* Ampersands help convey a concise and modern voice in headlines and titles. Avoid them in body copy, where they're too informal.

*Exclamation points:* Use periods and emphatic words more than exclamation points to drive home your emphasis or excitement. Exclamation points are more suited to casual conversations and texts.

*Hyphens:* There are three symbols that hyphens describe: em dashes, en dashes, and dashes. An em dash (—) indicates a break in thought; an en dash (–) indicates a range of time or quantities. (Note there are no spaces around an em dash.) A basic dash joins a compound word in the form of an adjective.

### ***Like this:***

A campus tour may attract 100 – 200 people, but you'll find valuable follow-up discussions with fewer than 10 participants—no more.

**In the case of web descriptions, em dashes and en dashes may not work as they do in a word processing program where their long and short forms are evident as above. In this case, use two hyphens (--) for an em dash and one hyphen for an en dash.**

*Spaces:* Use a single space after end punctuation.

*Percent:* Use the percent symbol "%"

*Smart quotes:* Use straight quotes instead of smart (curly) quotes.

*Italics and Bold text:* Don't use italics or bold text in web descriptions.

### **Usage and terminology:**

In general, choose to use more modern forms of newer tech terms.

*Example:* "email" has evolved from "e-mail," the concatenated form of "electronic mail."

Please use "email", without capitalization, as it's the most advanced yet acceptable form of the term. In the same light, "internet" and "web" no longer connote special, separate spaces for communication. Please do not capitalize them unless they are the first word of a sentence.

Here are a few other terms and usage hints:

- Email, not E-mail

- Homepage, not Home page
- Web-based
- Webpage, not Web page
- Website, not Web site or Web Site
- Affect versus effect
  - o Affect – verb: to influence; use it instead of "impact" as a verb
  - o Effect – noun: the result; verb: to bring about, as in "to effect change"
- Campus wide (noun)
- Campus-wide (adjective)
  - o *Example:* a company-wide event
- Complement versus compliment
  - o Complement – to complete
  - o Compliment – to praise
- Insure versus ensure
  - o Insure – to provide financial backing, as in insurance
  - o Ensure – to make certain
- Its versus it's
  - o Its – the possessive form of "it"
  - o It's – the contraction of "it is"
- Sign in/sign out (verbs)
  - o *Example:* Sign in with your username.
- Pop up (verb)
- Pop-up (adjective)
  - o *Example:* See the pop-up window for more ideas.

*Some sections of this document were reprinted with the permission of:*

