



# Writing for the web

Quickstart

*August 2016*

## Table of Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Understand your readers	3
3 Adapt the structure of your text	3
4 Write in a simple and plain style	4
5 Next steps	4

### Community IT Academy

The Beacon  
Westgate Road  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE4 9PQ

07958 482 509

[www.communityitacademy.org](http://www.communityitacademy.org)  
[admin@communityitacademy.org](mailto:admin@communityitacademy.org)

*Registered Charity no. 1106848, Company Limited by Guarantee no. 04964898*



## 1 Introduction

A website revamp needn't cost the earth. Sometimes a careful editing of the main pages of your site will make a big and positive difference. Especially if you put yourself in your readers' shoes.

## 2 Understand your readers

People read web pages in a different way from print pages. They rarely read all the text on a page from start to finish. More often people scan content because either:

- they are looking for a small item of information, or
- they're trying to work out whether the page is the page for them.

You'll need to adjust the structure of your website text to take this into account.

And remember that you are not your reader. You have an in-depth grasp of the topic that they may not. Take care over the language you use and how you approach your topic.

## 3 Adapt the structure of your text

- **Make sure that you put the main point of the page up front.** Assume that people won't read too far into the page.
- **Use headings and sub-headings where possible.** This helps readers to scan content and breaks up long areas of text that can be off-putting.
- **Use lists where appropriate.** Listed information is much easier to take in than information buried in a long paragraph of text.
- **Use clear signposting.** If your page is encouraging people to take some kind of action, be clear about what their next steps may be.



- **Use sub-pages or related pages to keep pages short.** If your page is very long, consider whether chunks of it may work better as sub-pages to which you can link.

## 4 Write in a simple and plain style

Avoid:

- over-complex sentences,
- words that people rarely use,
- unexplained acronyms (which pepper voluntary sector websites!),
- using 5 words where 2 will do.

Tools such the [Hemmingway App](#) help you edit your text to make it more readable.

Before:

*"Convoluted text, delivered in a voice that is not your own, and which employs a lexicon unfamiliar to your readership does not mark you out as a great writer; rather, it obscures what you have to say and evidences a certain lack of confidence in the ideas you are trying to express."*

After:

*"Sometimes people use complex sentence structures and unfamiliar words to sound authoritative. These things make text hard to read. They may also be evidence of the author's lack confidence in her ideas."*

## 5 Next steps

- The University of York has produced a helpful [Writing for the web guide](#) for their staff. We can all learn from it.  
(<https://www.york.ac.uk/communications/websites/content/writing-for-the-web/>)
- The website UXMyths has summarised some research to give us a more accurate idea of [how people read on the web](#). (<http://uxmyths.com/post/647473628/myth->



people-read-on-the-web)

- Why not spend half an hour examining a page or two of your website. You might be able to make some quick but effective improvements.

