

Web Writing Tips

LINKS

Hyperlink words and phrases to internal and external sites. Readers like to “interact” with their pages, so if you can send them to other sources for more information they’ll be happy you did. Think about linking to calendars, forms, contact information, etc. Remember to include e-mail links, too.

Linking makes your job easier. Rather than fully explaining something you know already resides on Concordia’s Web site or another external site, simply send your readers via a hyperlink to one of those pages for the information.

Avoid “click here” phrases and written out urls. Rather than saying “For more information, click here,” “Read the news at <http://www.cord.edu/news.php>” or other similar directives, simply write out what the reader will be doing at the new site: “Read more about Cobber Athletics,” “Register for Homecoming” or “Read the latest news.” (Then hyperlink each of these statements to the appropriate page, so when someone clicks on each phrase they are automatically taken to the new page.)

Adding links in Cascade

If you’re writing your Web copy in Word and then copying/pasting into Cascade, here’s a quick tip for adding links. In your Word copy, underline the phrase you would like hyperlinked. Immediately following that phrase, enter the url you’ll be linking to, complete with the <http://>. Place the url in brackets. For example:

Concordia College is a school of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](http://www.elca.org) [<http://www.elca.org>].

Learn More

For an easy-to-read and even easier-to-understand book on the basics of Web writing, pick up a copy of “Don’t Make Me Think” by Steve Krug. In just a couple hours of your time, he’ll give you a thorough understanding of what readers are looking for on Web sites and how to make your writing fit that bill.

We Can Help

Office of Communications and Marketing

For Web writing help, contact:

Erin Hemme Froslie

Publications Director
froslie@cord.edu
299-4957

For CMS and Web design help, contact:

Jamie Thompson

Web Producer
thompson@cord.edu
299-3987

Dustin Pattengale

Web Producer
djpatten@cord.edu
299-3149

Joel Beseler Thompson

Web Developer
thompsoj@cord.edu
299-3643

Or visit www.ConcordiaCollege.edu/marcom.



Web Writing Guide

As you write and create new pages for your department or office on the Concordia Web site, we thought it would be helpful to share some Web writing tips. Many of you are already familiar with the concise, clear quality of Web writing, along with the importance of making it extremely easy for your readers to find what they’re seeking. This guide will help you throughout your writing and editing process.

Web Writing Tips

Be brief.

Write what you mean to say and then cut about half of it. Readers only spend 2 or 3 seconds scanning a page before they determine if it is important to them. Writing for the Web is NOT like writing for any other medium. People want information very quickly and they won't take the time to read through tons of copy. We've all been on sites that make it nearly impossible to find what we're looking for – don't do the same to your readers.

Keep your writing to the topic.

If you've created a page about the faculty in your department, for example, don't also include information on that page about upcoming department events. Create a separate page for each new topic, linking it to related pages.

Use lists and bullet points.

They're an easy way to fit lots of information into very little space.

Use short sentences and a more casual and inviting tone.

Very formal language can be difficult to scan and readers do far more scanning than reading on the Web.

Steer clear of jargon.

If you have specific terms or acronyms commonly used in your department or office, try to clearly write them out or use more easily understood phrases.

Limit information to one page.

If the same information applies to more than one topic/page (e.g. an upcoming conference), don't create multiple pages about it in different locations. Simply create one page (about the conference) in the most relevant location and link other related pages to that page. You'll appreciate having only one page to update.

Use subheads.

Visually break up copy so your readers can find a section that interests them.

Create more pages, not longer copy.

Rather than creating one very long page of copy (even with subheads), think about ways that copy can be broken down into other pages. Include links within your main copy page to those new pages. Readers don't mind clicking through several pages if it all makes sense and information is easy to find. However, they do mind reading through tons of copy to hunt for what they need.

Common Concordia Web Words

Audience: An important factor in Web writing, an audience is the group of readers using the site. Your writing tone, content, organization and many other elements may change depending on your audience, such as faculty, students, support staff, parents, alumni or community members.

Banner: In our CMS, banner is another name for the large photo used at the top of a Web page. Concordia's site features banners on most pages, which can be selected from a number of photo banks on various topics.

Breadcrumbs: Also known as the breadcrumb trail, this handy navigation tool allows a user to see where the current page is located in relation to the Web site's hierarchy. In other words, this little line of words located above a page's body copy enables a reader to easily backtrack through related pages, returning to pages earlier visited. The term comes from the story of Hansel and Gretel, who left a trail of breadcrumbs as they walked through the forest so they could trace their way back home.

Body copy: The main portion of copy on each Web page is known as the body copy.

Cascade: This particular Web-based content management system is used by Concordia to manage our Web site. You may access Cascade by entering your username and password at <http://cms.cord.edu>.

CMS: Short for content management system, a CMS is a system used to manage the content of a Web site. It allows a user, including those not familiar with computer programming languages, to create, modify, update and remove Web content.

Hyperlink: Also known as a link, a hyperlink is a clickable word, phrase or picture that takes you to another Web page.

IA: Short for information architecture, IA refers to the strategic and hierarchical ordering of Web pages within a site. This particular ordering not only makes it easier for those maintaining the site to locate material, but also for site users who rely on breadcrumbs and other navigation forms.

Navigation: Navigation refers to how readers find their way through Web pages on a site. Several different navigation tools are available on Web pages, including tactical navigation (such as search boxes), breadcrumbs (see breadcrumbs definition), gateways (pages designed for particular audiences) and main navigation (the main Web site topics often found at the top or side of a Web page).

Page hierarchy: Organizing your Web pages in an orderly hierarchy greatly assists users while they are looking for information. If all pages are listed on the same level, rather than nestled under similar headings and subject matters, it's more difficult for users to find what they need. Think of your page hierarchy as a family tree, with "parent" pages for your main topics, "child" pages for subtopics under those headings and "grandchild" pages for even more specific topics. Here's an example:

1. Music (parent page)
 - 1.1. Department (child page)
 - 1.1.1. Why Study Music at Concordia? (grandchild)
 - 1.1.2. Programs of Study (grandchild)
 - 1.2. Ensembles (child)
 - 1.2.1. The Concordia Choir (grandchild)
 - 1.2.1.1. About the Choir (great-grandchild)
 - 1.3. Tours and Events (child)
 - 1.3.1. Tours (grandchild)

SPIFF: Short for special interest feature, these mini-feature stories are used throughout many college and organization Web sites to highlight interesting people, places, events and programs. The Concordia site has four banks of Spiffs, with four to eight stories in each bank. They appear on the home page and on many other pages within the site to help us tell the Concordia story. You are welcome to use them on your pages.

URL: Short for Uniform Resource Locator, a url is the unique address for a file accessible on the Internet. For example, the url for Concordia's main Web page is www.ConcordiaCollege.edu.