**You belong in a Zoo:   
Teaching Technology, but not “Technically”**

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**Writing for the Web**

In this workshop, you will be outlining the creation of a single page for a web site. You will have a choice about the audience and purpose but not about the base content for the page. This lesson will cover the following material.

* Know your audience & what they want
* Understand the writing process
* Design your text for accessibility
* Write clearly and effectively
* Edit with SEO in mind

**The ZOO ASSIGNMENT**

For this assignment, you will be writing a web page about the zoo animal assigned to you. You will be given a source article (from Encyclopedia Britannica) from which you should **draw information to use in your page**.

You will also be assigned a "zoo" group (each of you will have a different animal you are writing about). Your group will need to do two things:

* Select the tone and audiences (kid-centered, family-friendly, focus on cultures or origin, focus on preservation/education).
* Negotiate the look and organization of the pages (common subheads like "Habitat"? tone for the writing?)

For this assignment, I will be paying attention to these things:

* Your project contains information drawn from the encyclopedia article.
* Your project is written in your own words and does not use sentences or phrases of more than 5 words in length directly from the article.
* Your project is organized effectively, with meaningful paragraphs that focus on no more than one major idea per paragraph.
* There is consistency between all of the pages from each "zoo" in terms of organization and tone
* Your writing is clear, using effective key words in strategic locations.
* Your writing is correct.
* You should also include the following meta tags
  + Title
  + Description
  + Keywords

Next class, your group will be collaborating on the text for your zoo's homepage.

You may include graphics in your page. The file containing the Giraffe article is located in the Lesson #2 folder in STEP #2.

**You can turn in this assignment as a .doc, .docx, .rft, .pdf, .html, or .jpg file**

**Know your audience & what they want**

* Picture your audience
* Reading level/Vocabulary
* Text/graphics balance

**Picture your audience**  
Prior to beginning any writing task, it is essential to consider your user. Who are they? How old? Is gender an issue? Why are they looking for the information you have? What groups do they identify with? All of these are important considerations for various reasons.

Often, students come to a writing task with the idea that they are writing for a "general" audience. In a lot of ways, this is a logical assumption--why wouldn't you want to reach the broadest audience possible? Isn't that the best way to attract a large audience? Actually, no. In terms of usage, very few products are bought and/or used by all segments of the population equally, and marketers generally recommend targeting high-use customers. In product areas like soda, electronics and movie tickets, for example, 80% of sales are made to about 20% of the total users (think of it this way--you get 10 friends or family members that represent various ages and other demographic groups. If you ask them to list all the movies they have seen in the last two months, in general you will find that just two or three of the people have bought the majority of movie tickets purchased during that time). It is those high-use customers that you want to target unless you have a product that is specifically aimed at a "boutique" audience in an effort to expand your base (for example, if you are creating construction tools specifically for women who are beginners at home repair, then you will ignore the majority of traditional high-use customers for tools).

After picking a target customer and writing text suited to them, test your text by finding someone (or ideally a small focus group) that fits the profile of your target audience. Listen carefully to what they say about the clarity of your content. If your focus audience does not understand what a sentence is saying, revise it. It might be your favorite sentence. It might be a beautiful sentence. It might be the most elegantly clever metaphor ever constructed, but if it doesn't speak directly to your target audience, it has to go.

**Reading level/Vocabulary**  
Most newspapers and magazines today are written between the 6th and 9th grade level. This is not always a comment on a decline in American literacy; more often it reflects the need for speed in our society. Depending on your audience, you will probably be targeting that range (unless you are writing the page for the children's encyclopedia). Readability is mathematically calculated from counting and averaging words-per-sentence and syllable counts per word and putting them into a specific formula. Texts written in shorter sentences with shorter words have lower scores. Not sure what this means in practical terms? Put the address for several web pages into this site and you will see what the readability level is for the page you are testing.

http://juicystudio.com/services/readability.php#readweb

Word 2010 also allows users to test the readability of their own work. If you are interested in testing your own work, follow these instructions:

http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/help/test-your-document-s-readability-HP010354286.aspx?CTT=1

In addition to looking at things like sentence length and syllable counts, however, it is essential to also look at the specific words you are using. Many a "four-letter" word are short and simple, but that does not make them appropriate for an encyclopedia targeted to fifth graders. Likewise, other short words like "fen" or "pyx" do not equate to simple reading. This is where that focus group comes in handy once again.

**Text/graphics balance**  
Although reading studies have shown that web users--unlike newspaper users--put less emphasis on graphics, one of the undeniable advantages of new media is that graphics (pictures, graphs, video) can be incorporated at little cost (except for download times); however, non-textual elements should be included for a purpose and placed where they are appropriate. A map of the areas where giraffes are native would be a great addition to whatever kind of page you end up designing for the giraffe assignments, but not if it is placed next to a section about how adult giraffes care for their young. For younger readers, use graphics as hints about content.

**Design your text for accessibility**

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3) has created and published these guidelines on making written text accessible to all people despite disabilities. Meeting

http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10-CORE-TECHS/#writing-style

5.1 Writing style

The following writing style suggestions should help make the content of your site easier to read for everyone, especially people with reading and/or cognitive disabilities. Several guides discuss these and other writing style issues in more detail.

1. Strive for clear and accurate headings and link descriptions. This includes using link phrases that are terse and that make sense when read out of context or as part of a series of links (Some users browse by jumping from link to link and listening only to link text.) Use informative headings so that users can scan a page quickly for information rather than reading it in detail.
2. State the topic of the sentence or paragraph at the beginning of the sentence or paragraph (this is called "front-loading"). This will help both people who are skimming visually, but also people who use speech synthesizers. "Skimming" with speech currently means that the user jumps from heading to heading, or paragraph to paragraph and listens to just enough words to determine whether the current chunk of information (heading, paragraph, link, etc.) interests them. If the main idea of the paragraph is in the middle or at the end, speech users may have to listen to most of the document before finding what they want. Depending on what the user is looking for and how much they know about the topic, search features may also help users locate content more quickly.
3. Limit each paragraph to one main idea.
4. Avoid slang, jargon, and specialized meanings of familiar words, unless defined within your document.
5. Favor words that are commonly used. For example, use "begin" rather than "commence" or use "try" rather than "endeavor."
6. Use active rather than passive verbs.
7. Avoid complex sentence structures.

For a printable list of guidelines, go to this checklist:

http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/full-checklist.html

**Edit with Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in mind**

There is a variety of advice when it comes to the best way to write in order to be found and ranked higher by search engines, with perhaps the most practical advice being this: don't write for search engines; write for your audience first, and then tweak and edit in ways that might help engines like Google or Yahoo find you.

Most modern search engines are run by highly complex algorithms that are not easily fooled by simple tricks. Most ranking are determined by a variety of factors. The ranking for "Site X" would be calculated with a formula giving different weights to factors like the total number of visits to "Site X"; the number of links to "Site X" from sites already ranked highly for reliability and popularity; the use and positioning of keywords in titles, headings, meta-tags and early sentences/paragraphs in the cite; and a lack of red flags that signal an attempt to abuse any specific kind of formula. Some search engines allow sites to pay for special consideration in the rankings. Each major search engine has their own algorithm, and that formula is always being refined. You can pay an SEO expert a lot of money to tweak your site in hopes of a better rating, but none of them will guarantee anything.

And yet . . . even though it is impossible to write in such a way to guarantee yourself an instant high ranking in the most popular engines, there are some general principles that you can follow that will help to some degree.

* Be consistent and deliberate with titles & subheads
* Use meta-tags wisely and ethically
* Have content worth visiting
* Don't try to outsmart the system

**Be consistent and deliberate with titles & subheads**  
Many "spiders" or web crawler programs pay particular attention words that are encased in headings (they are programmed to search out the text in <H2>text</H2>), so using your keywords there is more likely to be beneficial. In the giraffe project, for example, you might be tempted to put "Habitat" as a heading within a page with multiple sections; however, in terms of getting a higher ranking in a search engine, the heading "A Giraffe's Habitat" might be more beneficial--more so early in the page rather than later.

To get an idea about what words might produce the best results with a search engine, you might spend come time with Google's adwords feature. Type in a key word or descriptive phase into this page https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal and you will get a list phrases most commonly types into the search engine by that engine's users. This is a good way to learn what vocabulary your audience is using so that you can use those terms in your pages, headings and titles.

**Use meta tags wisely and ethically**  
The "meta" in meta tags comes from the Greek word μετά, which translates as roughly meaning "beyond" or "adjacent." As a prefix, it is generally used as a way to reference an abstraction related to a concept--in HTML, a meta tag is a piece of coding embedded into a web page that is generally not seen by the final user, except in particular circumstances. All meta tag coding will appear within the **<HEAD> </HEAD>** tags at the top of an HTML file. ***Note: any content in green is being used as an example and is not coding.***

**Title tag** The title tag is what makes the title of your page appear in the reverse bar on top of the browser as well as on the taskbar. Titles should be distinctive and descriptive. The code looks like this: **<TITLE>Edit with Search Engine Optimization</TITLE>**

**Descriptive meta tags** are a concise description of a web page's content. When you search for "meta tag" on Google, you may find this entry:

**How To Use HTML Meta Tags - Search Engine Watch (SEW)**

This tutorial explains how to use HTML meta tags, with links to meta tag generators and builders. From SearchEngineWatch.com, a guide to search engine ...

If you were to go to the page in question, you would not see the sentence "This tutorial explain how to use HTML . . ." anywhere on that page. That sentence exists as a descriptive meta tag within the HTML coding of the page. A clear, effective descriptive meta tags can be a great way to get people from the results page to your actual site. On you assignment, you will be asked to write a one-sentence description suitable for a descriptive meta tag.

A descriptive meta tag would look like this: **<META name="description" content="This page discusses strategies for writing with a search engine in mind.">**

**Keyword meta tags** are words that are embedded in the HTML coding but are invisible to the user. Keywords were intended to play a key role in helping search engines find relevant pages for a search, but in recent years some engines have scaled down the importance of keywords because of abuse. Keywords typically include the most common terms for your topic, but might also include alternative spellings (for example, in the US we worry about search engine "optimization" but in the UK and other British English-speaking nations around the world they worry about "optimisation" with the British spelling) or even common misspellings (play doh, play dough, etc.)

A keyword meta tag would look like this: **<META name="keywords" content="meta tag, metatag, descriptive, keyword, key word, title">**

**Have content worth visiting**

The best way to have content that rates highly is by having content worth visiting. If your information is clear and different from other sites out there, your pages will be found. You can help with smart tagging and titling, but having information that people will seek out is key. Look to make each page specialized so that it will turn up with different combinations of search words and make sure to include information like city, state and zip code (when appropriate) that is certain to be included in searches for local businesses.

**Don't try to outsmart the system**

Part of the reason algorithms for search engines have become so complex is the sheer volume of people attempting to "out smart" the engines. Most search engines ignore multiple entries of the same key word in meta tags, titles, headings for the text, so a headline like "Giraffes! Giraffes! Giraffes!" may actually detract from your chances of rating higher in search engine ranking (but it seems like an interesting headline--is this site *selling* giraffes?).

You should also avoid attempting to manipulate results by putting words that are not consistent with the rest of your site. For example, in earlier days before search engine algorithms became as sophisticated as they are now, some writers found it tempting to try to manipulate results by inserting the names of competitors into their meta tags (so, for example, a distributor for Coke products might include key words like "soda," "pop," or "soft drink," but also "Pepsi" in an effort to redirect at least some of the people looking for their competitor's site.)

**For more reading on writing for search engines, go to http://www.netconcepts.com/seo-writing-effectively/**

**Gift shop: Searchable Databases/Kiosks**

Searchable databases are often the heart and soul of transactional web sites. In its simpler form, a searchable database allows customers to find exactly what they are looking for. Most commercial web sites use both PRIMARY and SECONDARY and navigation. On the left edge, for example, a site might include major categories a client might search under. If I were designing a commercial site to sell books, I might have categories like "Fiction," "Non-Fiction," "Graphic Novels," "Children's," and so on. Once a user selected a category--Fiction, for example--generally a second tier of navigation would appear. In addition to the major genres lists along the side, a secondary navigational bar might run near top, listing categories within the subdivision "Fiction": "Best Sellers" "New Releases" "Award Winners" and so on.

Obviously, however, for the person with a specific object in mind, it is necessary for a web site to offer the user a chance to search. Unfortunately, the difficulty with searches is that your "periwinkle" is my "country blue." And, if I'm in a hurry, I might mistakenly search for "Umberto Echo" rather than "Umberto Eco." In either case, if I am using a matchy-match database, I won't find what I want, and I'll surf away from your site without buying anything. Even if we both speak English, sometimes, we don't seem to be speaking the same language. So how do we let people search for anything they want and help even the person who doesn't have any idea what to call whatever it is they are looking for EXACTLY what they want? To accomplish this, a site might use one of several strategies:

* Amazon uses an Autofill feature -- on this page, start typing in "rabid rabbits"--you should start to see a list of all the Rabid Rabbits options long before you finish typing. Autofill is great for a site like Amazons where people might not recall all of the details or spelling of what they are looking for. By the time you get "Umbe" typed, Amazon knows you want Umberto Eco. It also guesses that's who you are looking for if you type "Emberto."
* JCPenney uses a simple Boolean based searching tool. In this kind of structure, the user selects attributes they want. Here the Boolean operative is AND, which (counterintuitively) limits the pool of choices. It works this way--you are looking at a total pool of 81 pairs of jeans. You specify that you want the jeans to be Levi's **AND** have a relaxed fit--now you have 5 pairs of jeans that meet both criteria.
* Reece & Nichols use a more complex Boolean formula to search its database. Notice there are multiple simple search strings (for example, you can use a defined textbook to indicate the name of a specific city, click on the two drop-down menus to bracket a price range or a range of building dates, or use a drop-down menu to specify more specific details. See checkboxes here.

All of these search tools have one purpose--to get the customer to the exact product they are looking for as quickly as possible.

**Where are these things? How do I start creating one?**

A searchable database might appear in any number of places. Two of the more common are web sites and kiosks. A commercial web site might use a searchable database to aid in a sale; a city might use a searchable database to help residents find a park with the features they want; a mall might use a kiosk to allow shoppers to find which stores stock eco-friendly fashions.

Prior to constructing your searchable database, you need to know what you are collecting and what attributes your customers will be searching by. Then you need to come up with the best "tags" for your database to use (for example, if you are creating a searchable database for a clothing store and the jean you bought come from the fashion designers in "stonewash" "indigo" "dark indigo" "faded" "charcoal" "black" and "midnight," you might select the tags "Blue" and "Black" to simplify the structure of the search).

If I'm compiling a restaurant database, I need to ask myself questions like this: Do I want to list every type of cuisine I can think of (American, Southwestern, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Thai, Vietnamese, French, Italian, Middle Eastern, Health food, Vegan . . . and on and on and on . . .) OR can I group ("Asian" as one category)?

If I'm creating a record for an Indian restaurant, I might include multiple tags for a single criteria--for "Type of Cuisine," the Organic India restaurant might have all these tags assigned to it: **Asian**, **Health food**, and **Vegan**. If the user decides he or she want to search for any of those kinds of restaurants, Organic India will come up as a possibility.

When I am collecting my materials (information about restaurants, cars, prom dresses, jeans or whatever), I want to think about how people make their decisions about my product--what do they care about most, and what are the large categories I can group those choices into?

**What is a "tag"? an information sheet? a results page?**

There are three major pieces in a searchable database--two that the user sees and one that is invisible to the public.

**The interface--** this is the screen where the user inputs information describing what they are looking for. The user is inputting the *search criteria* or the details that narrow the search. If I'm at a restaurant database, my criteria might be type of food (Asian? Mexican? bar food?), cost ($, $$, $$$?), and a full bar (yes!). I may or may not care about hours or location, but those will surely be in any database I would search.

**The information page**-- this is the page that the public does not see. It lists all the information that needs to be encoded into the database in an unformatted structure. An information page will include the follow:

* ***A discrete and unique item number.*** This is just for your records so that you know exactly which item you are looking at. For example, every year, JCCC constructs a database of all the classes that are being offered. In English, over 100 sections of ENGL 121 - Composition I will be offered; as many as 6 of them at any one time during the day. All 100 sections could be identified as "ENGL 121." As many as 6 will have the tag or criteria "TR 9:30." Only one will have the CRN "123456." You need this discrete number so you can track all the specific information.
* ***A complete list of tags.*** This includes all of the information applicable. So, assume that for the restaurant database you are compiling, you are putting together the information sheet for an Organic Indian restaurant. The "tags" would include the following:  
  - Type of food: Asian, Health Food, Vegan  
  - Price: $ -under $10 per person  
  - Full Service Bar: Yes  
  - Hours:  
  - Open: 11:00  
  - Close: 22:00  
  - Location: 66210, Overland Park, Johnson County, Kansas  
  Where there are multiple "tags" the restaurant fits multiple criteria.

**The results page** -- the results page will actually pull information from the database and arrange it in a way that is appealing to your audience. It will contain name and basic description of your item (a product description with the concrete physical details, for example), probably a picture of some kind, the information relevant to the criteria search and some promotional sales copy. This is where you finally get to have some personality!

**The Assignment:**

For this group project, everyone in your group will bring in 10 "items" to be sold in your zoo gift shop. Your group will be in charge of creating a "database" structure that will allow people to search with a few questions to find the items closest to what they want. Before you start bringing in items you might want to consider some of the search criteria you anticipate using.

For example, say you sort the picture by several criteria, two of which are "product type" and "adult/kids audience"--

--for the first "sort" you would assign each and every picture a corresponding "tag" such as "apparel" "toys & games" "books" etc.

--for the second "sort" you would assign each and every picture a corresponding "tag"--either such as "adult" "two color" or "black & white/sepia"

**What you will turn in--**

* A mock up of the interface the user will search through--there should be a minimum of 4 ways to search your collection (one per group)
* The database sheet from this project with all the corresponding "tags" filled in for each of your 10 items--MUST be consistent with groups (included in this folder)
* 8 "results pages" -- with the image, an "alt tag" describing the picture and suggestions for the pictures use in outside projects.