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Web Writing Guidelines

- **Be succinct.** If there's a shorter, simpler way to say something, do it that way.

- **Keep paragraphs short and the eye-swing narrow.** This—especially if paragraphs have topic sentences—speeds scanning and alleviates fatigue.

- **Make copy "scannable."** Bulleted lists, hyperlinks (links imbedded in text), and identifiable subsections bolster scanning of copy onscreen.

- **The name of a link should match the name of the page it links to.** Click on "Admissions" and you should get to a page named "Admissions," not "Getting In" or "Forms & Applications." There is more latitude with hyperlinks, but the relevance between the name of the hyperlink and the page it links to should be readily apparent. (Otherwise, visitors get irritated.)

- **Use common nomenclature.** A clever, but somewhat obscure, link name can cause frustration and confusion. These should be used only on minor links (links not on the main grid).

- **Hyperlinks should be "phrased."** By that, the gurus mean that a hyperlink should be more than one word. "Admission to QU is selective." The reason: It's easier to spot a phrase than a single word.

- **Create "levels of information."** The most general level is on the top of the hierarchy: It answers the most basic questions. The most detailed information is at the bottom of the hierarchy. This hierarchy speeds reading: Users looking for the gist get it right away; users looking for details, click downward, through links or hyperlinks. This structure allows for great web-like structures of information that reverberate with connections and ideas.

- **Guard against irrelevant hyperlinking.** Just because you use a word that is the name of another page on your site doesn't mean that it's relevant. Be sure to check the content of the linked page to ensure that it is relevant and will help the reader.

- **Avoid Web clichés.** Early on, when the Web was young and we were all a bit unsure of whether people would "get it," we created a lot of unnecessary directions, introductions, and other embarrassing stuff that young users find cliché. These include:

  - Welcome to the Benneton College Weaving Department Web Page. This suggests that Web pages aren't an everyday communication tool, such as a brochure or newspaper is. ("Welcome to the New York Times front page..." See the problem?)

  - Click here to find out more! The hyperlink should be imbedded in the text—people know what a hyperlink is and what it will do without being told to click.

  - On this Web page you will find... The only time you'll need to explicitly state what is on the page is when the page is lengthy and dense.

- **Use subheads, section titles, and anchors.** When you have tons of stuff that belongs together on a single page (student organizations, for instance)), create internal links so that the reader can scan the list of internal clinks (called anchors), and then link to the section of the page that's of interest, rather than scrolling in a blind search.

- **Remember you're in a nonlinear medium.** It's possible for a visitor to reach your page from Google...which means top-level pages in particular should recognize that the visitor is likely to need context. This is why the Admissions page has introductory copy even though there's an About page with introductory copy. (But of course we don't want to restate everything, so...be brief.)

- **Use a style sheet.** Some institutions use a modified Chicago Manual of Style. We've used A.P. style, because the book itself is much easier to use, although the style can be quirky and outdated. Among the modifications to A.P. we frequently recommend:

    - We use the serial comma before the "and."

    - The names of courses are italicized when they appear in text.

    - Hyphens for phone numbers 607-631-4000.