Writing & Presentation for the Web

Best Practice Guidelines for iCAN members

iCAN
IRISH COMMUNITY ARCHIVE NETWORK

Training purpose & goals

Purpose

► To give you the knowledge & skills to professionally present your local history & heritage material online

Goals – for you to …

► Gain insight into how people access & use online content

► Understand the importance of presenting your information in a clear & accessible way

► Gain the knowledge & skills to create a well-presented web post including editing & formatting public contributions

► Feel ready to begin preparing content for your website

What we will cover …

- ✓ What makes a good web page (discussion)
- ✓ How people access & use online content
- ✓ Tips for writing & presenting online content
- ✓ The importance of images
- ✓ Preparing an article
- ✓ Editing submissions (that are not your own)
- ✓ Example public submission: Garrarus Beach (discussion)
- ✓ Resources

What works for you will work for others….

Compare these two web pages on Our Irish Heritage:

► The Mushrooms and Toadstools of Drummin Wood

► Isaac Weld

In these examples, note down what works and what doesn't.

How will people interact with your website?

They will:

1. Browse homepage to find areas of interest
2. Scan sub-headings to find key information
3. Skim text for keywords/phrases
4. Read to get detail
5. Click to interact

The 'F' pattern
how people commonly scan online content

▶ First, users scan across the top of the content area in a horizontal movement

▶ Next users move down the page a little then read across in a 2nd horizontal movement

▶ Finally, users scan the left side of the page in a vertical movement (menus/sub-headings)

'F' pattern implications

Our eyes are trained to start at the top-left corner, scan horizontally then down to the next line until we find something interesting.
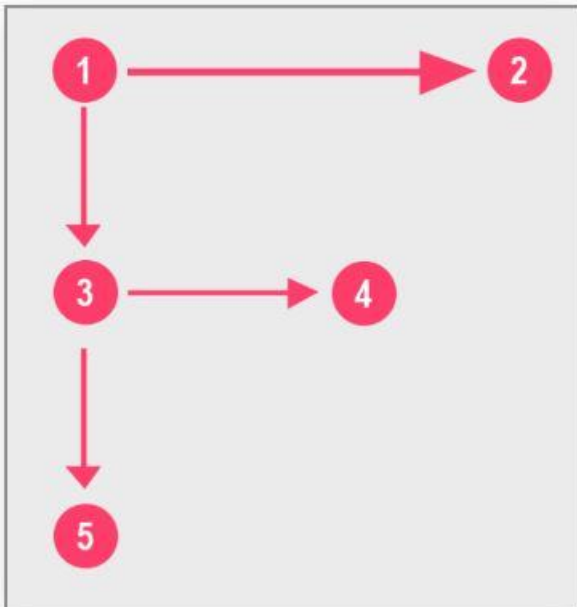
▶ The first lines of text receive more attention than subsequent lines of text on the same page

▶ The first few words on the left of each line receive more attention than subsequent words on the same line

Offsetting the 'F' pattern

▶ Include the most important points in the first two paragraphs

▶ Use headings and subheadings. Ensure they look more important and visible than normal text so users can distinguish them quickly.

▶ Start headings and sub-headings with words carrying most (or key) information, so that if users only see the first few words they will still get the gist of the following section.

▶ **Bold** important words and phrases.

▶ Ensure that links include information-bearing words (instead of generic "go", "click here" or "more"). This also improves accessibility for users who hear links read aloud instead of scanning the content visually.

▶ Use bullets and numbers to highlight items in a list or process.

▶ Cut out unnecessary content

Understanding how users 'read' the web

Reading online versus printed material:

- ▶ Approx. 80% of users scan the page instead of reading word for word

- ▶ Reading from a computer screen is about 25% slower than on paper

- ▶ Web content should have about 50 % of the word count of a paper equivalent

Making the most of online communication

1. **Linear versus non-linear**

Readers of the printed page usually turn pages sequentially starting at the beginning and moving through to the end (linear). Web users might not start at the home page or move in a way that you can predict. So …

▶ Pages need to stand alone

▶ Save posts to relevant 'parent' category (breadcrumb trail)

▶ Use sub headings

▶ Use links effectively

Making the most of online communication

2. **Impatient scanners**

Most online readers are very impatient, they don't read every word or line and they want to find and absorb information very quickly, so:

▶ Say what it does 'on the tin'

▶ Put the most important information/words first

▶ Write (or format) text in chunks, use subheadings

▶ Use lists & bullets

Making the most of online communication

3. **Reading less**

If reading online is slower and less comfortable than reading print, what does this mean for writing online?

- Write less
- Write shorter
- Write simpler
- Write stronger
- Write to the readers

Online Writing

'The finest language is mostly made up of simple unimposing words'

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans, 1819 – 1880)

novelist, poet, journalist & translator

<u>KISSSS</u> your text!

- KEEP
- IT
- SHORT
- SIMPLE
- STRONG
- SINCERE

Plain English

'Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style.' Matthew Arnold, poet & cultural critic (1822-1888)

- ▶ Communicate clearly and concisely using **Plain English**.

- ▶ This will capture the reader's attention and help them to get your **message** quickly and easily.

Using Images

Online, images are more important than text for capturing a visitor's attention

- ▶ It is better to have images & no text, than text & no images

- ▶ 1 image per 1 to 3 paragraphs (the ideal)

- ▶ Space images on the page to look attractive

- ▶ Always give images a title and a credit

- ▶ Always get permission to reproduce images

- ▶ Can use images as a link to another page or website

Preparing an article for the web

Composition:

➢ Compose in a Word (or similar) doc

➢ Check (or get another editor to check) spelling & grammar

➢ Decide whether to use whole article or a summary + pdf

Display complete article (500 to 1000 words):

➢ Divide into sections & apply sub-headings

➢ Check references & use 'footnote' formatting tool

➢ Check copyright info for images

➢ Copy & paste into web post and add images (via the Media Library)

Summary + pdf (over 1000 words)

➢ Use 1st paragraph of article or write a short overview

➢ Save complete Word doc article as .pdf & upload to Media Library

➢ Add 1 or 2 images & .pdf to view and download.

Editing articles submitted for publication

- ✓ When preparing a submission for publication, use checklist on 'Preparing an article for the web' (previous slide).

- ✓ Do not change anything other than spellings, grammar & punctuation– it is important to retain the integrity of the author's work.

- ✓ If very poorly written, you may need to go back to the author and either:

  - ▶ Request a re-write highlighting changes that are needed, or

  - ▶ Request permission to substantially edit

  - ▶ Try to ensure positive interactions (only constructive criticism, e.g. please include references so that visitors know where you sourced your information)

- ▶ Treated with positivity and respect, contributors may submit more articles/photos etc

- ▶ Operating safely and ethically online - Netiquette Training

Editing & formatting a contribution:
Garrarus Beach: a short journey on the last boat

- ✓ Contacted by email
- ✓ Reviewed text and images
- ✓ Needed more information on 'owner' (copyright) of images
- ✓ Worked with Robert to figure out copyright
- ✓ Checked spellings, grammar & punctuation
- ✓ Added captions & credits to images
- ✓ Formatted text using subheadings
  - ✓ Pull a few words/interesting phrase from paragraph

To say that I am over the moon would be an understatement. It is excellent. Perfect! It is everything I could have wished for. The professional way you have edited it with titled subheadings really makes the presentation perfect and easy to read. You have more than enabled me to attain my goal of having the people who fished and who made a living from Garrarus Beach and their lifestyles to be never forgotten.

Resources

Our Irish Heritage website www.ouririshheritage.org

Main menu:

Resources>Member's Section>Training Handouts & presentations

- ✓ Download/view these slides

- ✓ Download/view Sample Editing Guidelines
    - ▶ Adopt the guidelines, or
    - ▶ Use as a template to create your own