

15 Tips to Up Your Web Copy Game

Gregory Caswell, AEF Executive Director

I have come across many a website where it's clear there has been a great deal of effort put into the copy. I can feel the writer's desperation to prove themselves and their cause in every long sentence, paragraphs, fancy word choice, and snazzy punctuation. And I'm sad to say that despite the obvious effort behind it, I probably didn't read it.

Here's why:

Like most who come across too many words on a webpage, I thought "There is no way on this green earth I am reading all of this" and ventured over to YouTube instead.

It's not that I don't value words – I love words! However, reading online is very different from reading from paper. From paper, readers are able to process fancy punctuation, long sentences, and multisyllabic words, where online, when visitors are confronted with words like "multisyllabic," there is a greater potential for them to disengage.

Some may say this is the death of the English language, but in my opinion, it's just a different reading experience, and a new challenge to rise to as a writer. Reading from paper is a more focused activity where online, we are looking for quick information while also contending with multiple distractions.

But fear not fancy-sentence writers, your wordsmith skills are still required. Capture your reader's attention – and fingers crossed, form a connection with them – with these quick tips for writing for your website.

Avoid punctuation.

This doesn't mean don't use punctuation. What it means is use it sparingly and creatively. The period is your friend. Use it to create simple sentences that effortlessly relay your information.

Tip 1: If your sentence has a comma, see if you can rewrite it as two separate sentences without the comma.

Tip 2: Don't overuse the exclamation mark! The reader knows you're excited about what it is you're promoting.



Establish a friendly and approachable voice.

In my other tutorial, [I have social media. Why do I need a website?](#), I made the analogy that your website is your house: i.e. you want to invite your visitor in and make them feel welcome. The best way to do this is with the language you use. This not only includes your word choice but the font as well.

Tip 3: Develop a welcoming writing style that represents your company or organization.

Tip 4: Pick a sans serif font that is easy to read. Do not use fonts like Comic Sans or Papyrus. I loathe Papyrus.

Tip 5: If using humour, use it sparingly and make sure everyone is in on the joke. Not everything that's funny in conversation translates when read. Sometimes the reader may not even realize it's a joke and will just end up confused.

Avoid jargon.

It's best to assume the reader is visiting your website for the first time, has some idea of who you are and is interested in learning more. Using jargon or acronyms they don't know is a sure fire way to make them feel unwelcome and want to leave.

Tip 6: If you need to use jargon, find a way to define it first.

Tip 7: If using an acronym, provide the fully-written version followed with the acronym in parenthesis. From then on, you can use the acronym. Example: United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UN's SDG).

Break paragraphs into bullet points.

Bullet points help with online reading in the following ways:

- The reader either consciously or subconsciously decides if they are willing to commit the time to read the content because they can quickly count the points you're making.
- The content seems shorter and less overwhelming.
- It makes the content more engaging and consumable.

Tip 8: Rather than a lengthy paragraph, consider breaking it into shorter thoughts with bullets.



Use headings to highlight important information or to draw the reader in.

If you're like me, when you see posts like the one you're reading, you do a quick scan of the headings for an overview of the content, aka: to see if you need to read more than is necessary.

With this in mind, headings can serve two purposes:

- Quickly relay information. This tutorial uses headlines in this way. You could read it in it's entirety, but you can also look at it quickly and see the points I'm making.
- Draw the reader in for more information.

Tip 9: If you're using headlines to draw your reader in, be creative and show your organization's personality through the language you choose.

Incorporate Calls to Action.

You have your visitor on your webpage, now what do you want them to do? An easy way to get them to do it is by simply telling them what you want. Want them to read your content? "Read on for more information." Want them to register or donate? "Visit our donation page." "Register now!"

Tip 10: Avoid "Click here..." Be creative. The typical user will know to "click here" if they see a hyperlink, or even better, a button.

Tip 11: Use hyperlinks or buttons to take your visitor on a tour. Plan out their navigation. First they visit your home page, then where do you want them to go? And from there, what's the next stop?

Break up your web copy with images and videos.

Reading is great, but reading with pictures is awesome! And let's face it, it feels more natural to watch something on a screen than to read it. Both pictures and videos are impactful, and oftentimes create a stronger connection for the user than just written words.

Tip 11: If you have the budget, hire a professional company, like [our partner Hoopla Media](#), to support you in your content creation. Let me know if I can set up an introduction.



Proofread on a computer screen before making your content public.

I can't count the times I've written something either in a Word doc or on a page that just doesn't translate once it's on a website. The only reason I can think of is that your website is not a Word doc. Adjustments may need to be made.

Tip 12: Preview your content on your website before making it live. Have more than one person look at it before publishing.

Avoid the eternal scroll.

Nothing triggers an overwhelmed feeling in a user than scrolling down a webpage for what seems like forever. We've all done it. You start reading, and then think "How long is this?" You start to scroll...and scroll...and scroll...and suddenly, the content seems too long to read.

Find creative ways to break up the information. In addition to simple sentences, headings, and bullet points, consider if the user experience would be better if the content is separated into different pages.

Tip 13: If your web copy seems long, as in more than a screen, consider breaking it into different webpages. For example:

- Page 1 is an introduction with the call to action "Find out more."
- Page 2 provides more depth. If the user has clicked the "Find out more" link, they have agreed to do just that, and will be more likely to read the entirety of your content.

Clean your house regularly.

Nothing is worse than realizing that information on your website is out of date. It can give the impression that you've forgotten about the website completely – the house is there, but no one is home. If no one's home, your visitor is likely to visit someone else. For that reason, it's important to review every page of your website regularly so it's current.

Tip 14: Review your webpages regularly to make sure they are up-to-date. This is especially important around occasions where you're expecting a lot of visitors, like special events. And if a webpage is no longer relevant, get rid of it.





Tip 15: If a deadline you are promoting has past, or you are about to launch something new, use your website to build excitement. Example: “The deadline to register has past. Stay tuned for upcoming events!”

—

Gregory Caswell is the Executive Director for the Alberta Emerald Foundation. In addition, he is a theatre artist with wide experience in event management.

