Short and Snappy: Writing for the Digital World

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Short and Snappy: Writing for the Digital World

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Overview of session

• Users’ expectations for:
  • Websites
  • Blogs
  • Social media
• Setting goals for your website
• Getting mobile-friendly (and why you should)
• Good formatting strategies
• Reliable storytelling tactics
• How social media can help you
• Takeaways and next steps
Website: Where users go to get information
Website: Evaluate where you are

• Outline your existing site
  • Does this structure make sense?
  • Is anything out of place?
  • Is anything missing?
  • When were pages last updated?

• Ask students, faculty and others to review your site
  • Give them a task to complete
  • Have them review a key page, tell you what they learned from it
Website: Identify your audience and establish your goals

- Determine primary and secondary audiences
  - Why are they visiting your site?
- Develop goals for the website
  - What do you want it to accomplish?
- Create some goals chemistry
Website: What’s your +1?

• Do you offer my program?
  • Yes + you’ll have many opportunities to gain real-world experience.

• Can I get financial aid?
  • There’s a good chance + here’s the step-by-step of the application process.

• Is this a good student organization for me?
  • Yes + there are upcoming events where you can try us out.
Exercise: Audiences & Goals

• Who is my primary audience? Who are secondary audiences?
• What does my audience want from my website?
• What are my goals for the website?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Academic website</strong></th>
<th><strong>Student life website</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong> Prospective students, their parents, current students, prospective faculty, current faculty, the world</td>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong> Current students, prospective students, parents of current students, faculty &amp; staff, the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They want:</strong> Information – probably have specific questions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My goals:</strong> Student recruitment, faculty recruitment, sharing information, promoting the department &amp; University</td>
<td><strong>My goals:</strong> Awareness of opportunities, engagement, general promotion of Missouri State students &amp; environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Website: Is it mobile-friendly?
Website: Mobile-friendly desktop

Engage, connect and understand
- Strengthen your cultural competence with an area studies minor.
- Set yourself apart in the job market by developing skills in diversity and inclusion.
- Expand your horizons and prepare for a wider range of opportunities in the future.

Undergraduate programs

- African American Studies Minor
- Asian Studies Minor
- Disability Studies Minor
- Diversity Studies Minor
- Gender Studies Minor
- Latin American Studies Minor
- Law and Society Minor
- Middle Eastern Studies
- Native American Studies
- Ozarks Studies Minor

Related information

- Student Opportunities
- Advisement
- Faculty and Staff
- Contact Information

African American Studies Minor
Asian Studies Minor
Disability Studies Minor
Diversity Studies Minor
Gender Studies Minor
Latin American Studies Minor
Law and Society Minor
Middle Eastern Studies Minor
Website: Mobile-friendly tablet

The left navigation is hidden in this view, so important items must be featured in the body content.
Website: Mobile-friendly phone

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Website: Mobile-friendly

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Website: Getting mobile-friendly

- Outline mobile-friendly organization for your website.
- Request that your site be converted to the mobile-friendly template.
- Once converted, optimize your content for the mobile experience.
  - Navigation is hidden on mobile; important items need to be featured in your main content area.
  - Visuals are even more important.
  - Use hyperlinks – strategically and efficiently.
  - Use headings to provide context on smaller screens.
  - Write lean and break up passages of text whenever possible.
Engage, connect and understand

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Website: More about writing for mobile

- Limit paragraphs to 1 – 2 sentences, 140 – 200 characters.
- Consider starting a new paragraph when you need more than 2 sentences.
- Consider adding a heading when you start a new paragraph.
- When possible, use bullet points to break up your text and make it easier to quickly absorb.
Exercise: Adding information to your website

Hi–

I just confirmed a cool new internship program that will be exclusive to our students. Can you see that the attached information from HD International makes it onto the website?

Thanks,
Dr. Presley
To: Missouri State Dept. of Music, Fashion & Entertainment

As YOU know, Hound Dog International is the world’s leading maker of blue suede shoes. We have heard our shoes described as “heavenly” and “life changing”. Some even call us scrumptious!!!! It is easy to understand, then why we take such care when choosing partners for our heavenly, life changing and scrumptious products. When one is thinking of fashions by Hound Dog International, only the best will do!!! In the past, we’ve considered taking on interns, but we have always hesitated. Who could match our standards of perfection? Who would even want to try? In days gone by, we’ve considered and rejected partnerships with entities such as Viva Las Vegas State University of Blue Hawaii.

Now, having learned of Dr. Presley’s unprecedented and remarkable work in our field, we are now led to feel and hope that we have found the ideal partner in developing the trailblazers of tomorrow’s blue suede shoe fronteir. All of which is why, starting next semester, we will be accepting applications exclusively from Dr. Presley’s students. May they all be bold enough to try! It is very important that applicants remember certain things when applying. 1. They must include a portfolio of past work. 2. They must write an essay expression heartfelt passion for blue suede. Perhaps even more important than those, students must really want to be a part of all the wonderful things we are doing at Hound Dog International.
Exercise: Adding information to your website

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Thanks,
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What should I look for?

• Does this support any of my website’s goals?
• What is the main purpose of the content?
• Is this one-time use or long-term information?
• Who is this content relevant for?
• Where on my website would this content make sense?
What are my goals again?

- Student recruitment
- Faculty recruitment
- Sharing of information
- General promotion of Missouri State
What should I look for?

- What is the main purpose of the content?
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- Viva Las Vegas State
- University of Blue Hawaii

Now, having learned of **Dr. Presley’s** unprecedented and remarkable work in our field, we are now led to feel and hope that we have found the ideal partner in developing the trailblazers of tomorrow’s blue-suede shoe frontier. All of which is why, **starting next semester, we will be accepting applications exclusively from Dr. Presley’s students.** May they all be bold enough to try! **It is very important that applicants remember certain things when applying.**

1. They must include a portfolio of past work. 2. They must write an essay expression heartfelt passion for blue suede. Perhaps even more important than those, students must really want to be a part of all the wonderful things we are doing at Hound Dog International.
Key takeaways

- Hound Dog International is a prestigious brand.
  - Consider a hyperlink to the Hound Dog International website.
- Our students have a unique internship opportunity.
- Dr. Presley is the coordinator of this program.
  - Include his contact information.
- There is a specific process that applicants must follow.
  - Submit portfolio.
  - Write essay about their interest in fashion.
- Some follow-up may be necessary!
Internships

Find your place in the fashion industry
Gain hands-on experience in the fashion industry. Apply for a highly competitive summer internship with Hound Dog International.

Internship description
Summer interns will gain experience in all aspects of the business, including:
• Product development and testing
• Marketing
• Pricing
• Distribution

Application instructions
Submit the following items via email to intern@hdinternational.com by March 1:
• Electronic portfolio of past design work
• A 500-word essay expressing passion for fashion

Hound Dog International is a worldwide leader in the fashion industry. Explore more about Hound Dog International on its website. Contact Dr. Elvis Presley with any questions.
Writing for the digital world: Formatting strategies

Challenges
- Visitors won’t read every word.
- They will skim, not read.
- They’ll notice structure more than individual words.
- Readers want you to tell them what to do.
- They pay attention to lists and hyperlinks.
- Words alone have much less impact than words + visuals.

Strategies
- Lead with strength.
- Convey one idea per paragraph.
- Use internal sub-headings.
- Write short sentences with action words.
- Use bulleted lists and hyperlinks.
- Whenever possible, add photos or videos.
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Which goals have I served?

- Student recruitment
- Faculty recruitment
- Sharing of information
- General promotion of Missouri State
Blog: The perfect place to tell a story
Blog: What does it do?

• It supports your website’s goals.
• It’s a great format for time-sensitive information.
• It has strong search engine optimization benefits.
  • Update at least once per week.
• It tells your story with a conversational tone.
  • Rounds out your website’s recruitment messages
  • Puts a familiar face on faculty, students and staff
  • Talks about what you offer in human terms

Communicates meaning, atmosphere, environment
Writing for the digital world: Storytelling tactics

• Tell a specific story with a specific point-of-view.
• Start in the middle of the action.
• Use details to convey meaning.
• If possible, subvert expectations.
• If possible, establish (and resolve) a conflict.
• If possible, set up a puzzle or mystery.
Exercise: The 6 word story

I hoped that this would happen.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
Exercise: The 6 word story

I thought this would never happen.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
- Sets up a mystery
Exercise: The 6 word story

I prayed that this wouldn’t happen.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
- Sets up a mystery
- Subverts expectations
Exercise: The 6 word story

I’ve wanted but dreaded this moment.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
- Sets up a mystery
- Subverts expectations
- Establishes a conflict
Exercise: The 6 word story

Well, I can’t tell him now.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
- Subverts expectations
- Establishes a conflict
- Sets up a big mystery that takes us in a new direction
Exercise: The 6 word story

Storytelling tactics

- Tell a specific story with a specific point-of-view.
- Use details to convey meaning.
- Start during the action.
- Subvert expectations.
- Establish a conflict.
- Set up a puzzle or mystery.
Blog: Example

Hi –

Dr. Presley did it again! Please see that news of the attached grant makes it onto our website.
The Association for Music in Prisons (AMP), the world’s leading organization for the advancement of music composed or distributed in prisons, is pleased to bestow a grant of $15,000 on Dr. Elvis Presley for his research on Jailhouse Rocking. His landmark paper “Everybody in the Whole Cell Block” convinced our board of the worthiness of his research, and AMP is proud to support Dr. Presley’s continued study.

- Faculty accomplishment
- Specific to a certain time
- Supports the following goals: sharing information, faculty recruitment, student recruitment

Perfect for the blog!
Blog: Example

Challenges

• Scholarly tone
• Told from association’s perspective
• Doesn’t communicate the point of his research or why it matters

Storytelling tactics

• Tell a specific story with a specific point-of-view.
• Start during the action.
• Use details to convey something about the subject.
• Subvert expectations.
• Establish a conflict.
• Set up a puzzle or mystery.

Need more information!
Blog: Example

- Reach out to Dr. Presley:
  - What is the purpose of this project?
  - How will the funds be used?
  - What have you learned by working on this project?
  - What surprised you?
  - What do you want others to understand about it?
  - Do you have any photos or videos to share?

Really want a quote and a visual!
Untapped talent in an unexpected place

It's easy to think of prison as the end of all opportunity, but Dr. Elvis Presley has found that it can also mark a beginning. He's been working with inmates who discovered their musical talent only after being incarcerated.

“For many of them, it was their first chance to slow down and produce this beautiful music,” Presley said. “I was just there to listen, but when I realized the quality, I started taping it on my phone! Then I brought in real equipment to record demos.”

Presley used those recordings to help two past participants find jobs in the music industry after they were released from prison.

Recognition from AMP

Presley feared he’d have to quit listening when his project ran out of funding. Thanks to a $15,000 grant from the Association for Music in Prisons (AMP), his study will continue for at least two more years.

According to Presley, “AMP is making it possible for me to support people who are looking for a happier and more fulfilling way of life. This work fundamentally changes lives—including mine.”
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Start during the action

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Establish a conflict

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Social media: A way to create new impressions
What can social media do for my brand?

- Connect you to people
- Help you make a lot of noise
- Legitimize you (particularly for younger audiences)
- Influence and shift people’s opinions
- Provide an easy channel by which others can promote your brand
- Make you more aware of what others think of you
What can’t it do?

• Magic
• Conversion
• Maintain itself
• Replace your website or blog
• Guarantee a dependable, stable platform over the long term
Social media: Best practices for all platforms

• Adopt a long-term philosophy. If you commit to a platform, stick with it.
• Understand that things move fast. Post consistently and with low expectations.
• Content is king! If you think something is interesting, others are likely to as well.
• Brevity is crucial. Always ask yourself if you can shorten your post.
• Get selective. Be wary of jumping into too many social networks at once.
Choosing a platform: What do you want to accomplish?

• To connect with a lot of people? Consider Facebook
• To share real-time news and events? Consider Twitter
• To share visual content (via mobile)? Consider Instagram
• To distribute videos? Consider YouTube
Choosing a platform: Other questions to consider

• How much time do you have?
• Where and when will you be posting updates? From your office? From your phone? During traditional business hours? Evenings and weekends?
• Which social media sites do you personally enjoy?
• What is your skill set? Words? Photography? Visuals?
• Who is your ideal audience?
Exercise: Your ideal audience
So what can I take away?

- Does your **website**’s organization make sense?
  - Ask someone to find something on it.
- Define your audiences and goals.
  - Get input from stakeholders; write the goals down.
- Use the formatting strategies.
- Update your **blog**; set a goal of one post per week.
- Use the storytelling tactics to engage readers.
- Identify the ideal audience for your **social media**.
- Use the resources; share this information with others.
  - Additional exercises available in handout
  - Other resources are included in handout
  - Table and flowchart for using new content are in handout
Upcoming trainings

• Find Your Place in the Digital World – Part Two: Social Media Boot Camp
  • Today!
• Upcoming trainings will be announced on our blog: www.blogs.missouristate.edu/web