

Editing for the Web

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Tonight's Topics

- ▶ How We Read Online
- ▶ Edit Copy for Online Reading

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How We Read Online

How We Read Online

We go online to:

- ▶ Solve a problem
- ▶ Learn something
- ▶ Get information
- ▶ Be entertained

Personality of Online Readers

Online readers are “selfish, lazy, and ruthless.”

—Jakob Nielsen, “[Information Foraging: Why Google Makes People Leave Your Site Faster](#) (2003)”

The Copyeditor's Role

Know your site's
purpose and goals
and how your copy
fits in.

providing transportation services that consistently meet our customers' expectations.

A vision statement is only as good as the people who work to bring it to life each day. To live the vision, the diverse group of more than 38,000 professionals who comprise the BNSF community embrace a set of shared values:

- Listening to customers and doing what it takes to meet their expectations
- Empowering one another, showing concern for our colleagues' well-being and respect for their talents and achievements
- Continuously improving by striving to do the right thing safely and efficiently
- Celebrating our rich heritage and building on our success as we shape our promising future

Success in living our vision and values is evident when we fulfill the highest expectations of our four key stakeholder groups:

- Our customers find it easy to do business with us, receive 100% on time, damage-free service, accurate and timely information regarding their shipment, and the best transportation value
- Our employees work in a safe and secure environment, are focused on continuous improvement, share in the opportunity for personal and professional growth available to all team members, and take pride in their association with BNSF
- Our owners earn financial returns that exceed other railroads and the general market as a result of BNSF's superior revenue growth, an operating ratio in the low 70s, and a return on

BNSF responds
to Harriet's
Kathie and Rita

Learn more about these
real-life customer
service stories. >

Scan (v. tr.)

“To look carefully or thoroughly, especially in search of something; examine.”

—*The American Heritage Dictionary*

Eye-Tracking Study Results

Eye-tracking studies reveal:

- ▶ We read slower online.
- ▶ We spend 80% of our time above the fold.
- ▶ We don't like large blocks of text.

Eye-Tracking Study Results

- ▶ We like lists.
- ▶ We like white space.
- ▶ We like headlines.
- ▶ We don't always like subheads.

Reading on Mobile Screens

- ▶ 5% of users read the text
- ▶ 58% scan the text
- ▶ 37% read only the headlines
- ▶ We'll skip reading in favor of images

Edit Copy for Online Reading

Editing Web Copy

Make headlines
specific and
clear.

Write Descriptive Headlines

- ▶ Readers know what they're getting
- ▶ Search engines will understand context

Creative changes offered for a Boston with rising seas



A Back Bay canal system was among the more imaginative solutions in a new report about preparing Boston for climate change.

- 📷 **Photos: Combating rising seas**
- 🗺️ **Graphic: Flood hazard areas**
- 💡 **Ideas: Preparing for rising seas**

Editing Web Copy

Write
descriptive
subheads.

Editing Web Copy

Create short paragraphs.

Shorten Paragraphs

About now, you're shaking your head, thinking, "That's impossible! Of course a word can have more than one meaning. Of course its meaning might shift over time. Of course we can have synonyms." And on and on.

Silly, right?

When you start looking at all the rules peevers have proclaimed over time, you start to see how ridiculous it all is. You might even identify a rule or two that you follow in editing and wonder at its validity.

Source: Erin Brenner, "[Little Shame over Bad English](#)" (2014)

Editing Web Copy

Top-load
paragraphs.

Top-Load Paragraphs

Before

Way back in 2002, when our founder was enjoying her thriving dog-walking business, she suddenly realized what a great idea it would be to offer emergency dog sitting to busy professionals who discovered at the last minute that they needed to leave town on business. We created our Dog Sitter Direct option to meet the needs of busy professionals and others who may require these emergency services.

Source: [*The Yahoo! Style Guide*](#) (2010)

Top-Load Paragraphs

After

Our Dog Sitter Direct option meets the needs of busy professionals and others who may require emergency and last-minute services.

Even Shorter

Dog Sitter Direct meets the needs of busy dog owners who require emergency and last-minute services.

Editing Web Copy

**Front-load
sentences.**

Front-Load Sentences

Before

When the term *service economy* first came into being decades ago, it was about phone and car technicians, waiters, hotel employees, personal assistants, house cleaners, and business consultants.

Front-Load Sentences

After

Not long ago, *service economy* described phone and car technicians, waiters, hotel employees, personal assistants, house cleaners, and business consultants.

Editing Web Copy

Prefer lean
sentences over
wordy ones.

Trim the Deadwood

Use prenominal adjectives:

A decision to buy → a buying decision

the impact of the content → the content's impact

Trim the Deadwood

Prefer single verbs over verb phrases:

are able to → can

Trim the Deadwood

Use present tense instead of
present progressive:

is going → go

Trim the Deadwood

Turn nominals into verbs:

make it clear that

expectations for students

→ clearly expect students

Trim the Deadwood

Before

An example is the use by XYZ Inc. of big data to improve the positioning of its wind turbines for customers, reducing its response time for wind forecasting information by around 97%, from weeks to hours.

1 sentence; 37 words

Trim the Deadwood

After

For example, XYZ Inc. uses big data to better process wind data and improve wind turbine positioning for its customers. It has reduced response time by around 97%.

2 sentences; 27 words

Editing Web Copy

Use active
voice.

Editing Web Copy

Use strong
verbs.

Use Strong Verbs

Strong verbs light up “the mirror neurons in our brains. (These nerve cells fire both when we act and when we see someone else performing the same action.)”

—Constance Hale

Use Strong Verbs

Static verbs = *be*,
seem

Dynamic verbs =
break, eat

Use Strong Verbs

Before

“I could not forbear to reproach myself for having so long neglected what was unavoidably to be done, and of which every moment’s idleness increased the difficulty.”

—Samuel Johnson, 1751

Source: Constance Hale, [*Vex, Hex, Smash, Smooch*](#) (2013)

Use Strong Verbs

After

Eat, drink, and make
merry, for tomorrow we
die.

Thank You!



Get the Presentation

<http://bit.ly/1lvT3ia>

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