

OCAD University Style Guide

JANUARY 2015

Section A:

Web writing overview

1. Intro

What's different about writing for the web?

Consider first what's different about reading. Users read web pages 25 per cent slower than they read paper, which tells us that reading web copy is significantly more strenuous. Not surprisingly, usability studies show that users don't read web text, they scan it. Moreover, users tend not to want to scroll vertically (and are even less inclined to scroll horizontally).

Web users are after what is least strenuous when reading copy online. This means that the fastest way to communicate your point is almost always the best. On most web layouts, a 40-word sentence takes up four lines. Try to keep sentences under 25 words.

In keeping web text concise and by offering headings and lists, web writers can help users access desired information quickly and easily. Users are thus less inclined to tire of a given page and go elsewhere.

There are other structural issues to consider when producing content for the web. Unlike creators of the printed text that makes up a single, longer document, web writers must plan how to divide and organize their content. Information "chunking" involves breaking information into small units, or chunks. A chunk usually consists of one topic, idea or concept. Presenting small chunks of information that link to more detailed or complex information makes optimal use of layering.

Text on a web page is often layered, or linked, to other text as an invitation to go elsewhere on the site and/or to skip through the site in non-sequential fashion. Also called progressive disclosure, layering is the technique of beginning with general information and then providing links to more detail and supplementary information. Layering is one of the benefits of hypertext and one of the more obvious differences in web content as opposed to print.

Sections, or pages, of web content also require a certain amount of *context* independence, which is rarely a concern in printed text. This ensures that web text is coherent, regardless of how and from where a user "landed" on the page.

What's in this guide?

Intended as a quick reference for OCAD U content providers, this guide focuses on what makes writing effective web pages different from writing for print. It also outlines house style, or standards of usage accepted by the university to ensure its written communications are correct, current and consistent. Consistency in particular will communicate to readers a sense of uniformity — of institution or brand. This is critical to achieving maximum impact with copy.

The guide contains:

- Web Writing Overview
- OCAD U House Guidelines: Editorial
- OCAD U Content Editing Process
- Overview of “Plain Language” Practices
- Bibliography/Resources

What do these conventions reflect?

This web writing overview was compiled using a combination of sources and reflects standards governing popular usage as well as current website practice. Please see the Bibliography for more information.

OCAD U house style reflects *The Canadian Press Stylebook*, *The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling* and the *Oxford Canadian Dictionary* in matters of spelling, capitalization, punctuation and usage. There are a number of conventions unique to OCAD U. These take into account evolving standards governing popular usage in Canada, and are outlined in Section B.

Why conform?

Our community prides independent thinking. However, university-wide consistency in writing builds the credibility of our publications and our online presence. It also enhances our community's understanding of OCAD U as a whole.

2. Tone

Web writing tends to be less formal in tone than print. This allows for latitude with language and can make communicating easier. It requires that we tailor more formal or academic language to a web audience.

Remember, the web is an intimate and immediate medium. Writing conversationally and using the second person (e.g., addressing current or prospective students as “you”) encourages identification and reader involvement.

3. Usability

Web usability guru Jakob Neilson (see Bibliography) always argues for the three fundamentals of “successful” web copy. In his words, web pages should be:

Concise — Users do not like long scrolling pages: they prefer the text to be short and to the point.

Scannable — Users do not read on the web; instead they scan pages, trying to pick out a few sentences or even parts of sentences to get the information they want.

Objective — Users detest anything that seems like marketing fluff or overly hyped language (‘marketese’) and prefer factual information.

Much as your sentences should be concise, so should your page. There is no point in having concise sentences in concise paragraphs if it takes an hour to scroll through the page. Try to have all your text viewable on one screen without scrolling. If this isn’t possible, craft scannable text.

Copy that is scannable will guide a user’s eye as it travels down the page, so that every piece of important information is hit and digested. Scannable elements include:

- tables of contents
- headings
- bolded text
- bulleted lists
- topic sentences
- captions

4. Accessibility

Too often, web accessibility issues arise because information is presented in a way that can’t be perceived by all students/browsers. The consistent and generous use of headings, for example, is important to students with disabilities who may need extra contextual clues, as well as to anyone who

finds a clearly structured document easier to understand. Remember: when you maximize usability you also maximize accessibility. This benefits everyone.

Quick guide to web accessibility:

- Use heads to organize content.
- Images require alt text as an alternative to visual information. If the image is purely decorative, no alt text is required.
- Instructions provided for understanding content should not rely solely on sensory characteristics such as shape, size, visual location or orientation (e.g., don't write "see at the red box below").
- Avoid images of text, except in the case of logotypes such as the OCAD U logo.
- Abbreviations should be spelled out in first reference.
- Use CMS web page features instead of typographic tricks to organize information
- Use tables for data, not layout.

5. Organization

Organizing website information in a clear and intuitive manner is critical to presenting a cohesive product.

The inverted pyramid

Journalists use this writing method all the time. It perfectly suits the "quick and dirty" nature of the web environment and the short attention spans of most web users. Unlike scholarly papers, which build towards a conclusion, the inverted pyramid structure puts the most important information (who, what, when, where, why, how) first. It follows this with the details and then finally, the background information.

State the conclusion first, and then give general supporting information followed by detailed supporting information. This means arranging points in descending order of importance. Your readers will be hooked into the strong opening and will gradually learn more as (or if) they read on.

The technique makes it easier to get your point across at the top of a page, rather than forcing the user (who we'll assume has a short attention span) to read an entire page before finding out what the message is.

Paragraph length

A good rule is to limit the length of a paragraph to three or four sentences. Use scannable text that's easily digestible to a user. And don't present more than one idea in each paragraph. The second idea will probably not get the user's attention.

Chunking

After determining content, you must begin to divide and organize it. Information "chunking" serves this purpose by breaking information into small units. A chunk usually represents one topic, idea or concept.

Chunking information into small units makes large topics more manageable. It also allows for easier revision and updates and lets readers decide which topics they need. Presenting small chunks of information that link to more detailed or complex information makes optimal use of hypertext.

Do note, however, that usability studies show that people tend to effectively handle only seven pieces of information at any given time.

Layering and use of hyperlinks

A link should feel organic — as natural and intuitive as turning a page in a book.

A hyperlink serves the dual purpose of highlighting a word, increasing scannability, and allowing users to narrow their focus on a particular subject. In the case of hyperlink, users understand that clicking will result in movement.

A common hyperlink mistake is to talk about the user's movement within the site. For example, consider the way the following overstates the call to action:

The *Fall/Winter Calendar* outlines student services, procedures and responsibilities. For more information, visit www.ocad.ca/events_calendar.

Then consider this easier and far more elegant alternative:

Consult the [*Fall/Winter Calendar*](#) for information about student services, procedures and responsibilities.

Simply put: write about your subject and let your subject be your hyperlink.

Embedded links within the text are also more conversational. This is because surrounding text provides both context and explanation. Usability studies show that browsers prefer embedded links.

6. Headings and navigation

Headings organize content to help make a page more navigable. Headings (or heads) are used to introduce a change of subject and to indicate a hierarchy of topics.

The best headings are short, simple and explanatory. Try not to use too many articles (the, a, etc.) And remember that the heading doesn't have to be grammatically precise; it just has to contain the necessary information.

The size and appearance of a heading should match its importance, and the same type of heading should be used consistently on a given page to indicate subdivisions with the same degree of subordination.

OCAD U head levels

The Content Management System (CMS) for the current OCAD U website was designed with embedded page title heads (as well as two additional, already formatted subheads) to enable content providers to create and set heads themselves. Because of their embedded tagging, heads (H2 and H3) are recognized by accessibility readers. They are thus critical to easy navigation for any users with disabilities.

- To create a page or first-level head, simply write the page title in the appropriate field. While formatting is automatic, it's also case-sensitive, and we follow CP Style with respect to heads. CP convention is to use sentence case as opposed to title case in headlines. Capitalize only the first word and any other words, such as proper nouns or titles, which require capitals in their own right. (See this section's heading as an example.)
- To create a next-level subhead (also known as a level 2 head, or H2), write it out and select the "H2" tag to complete your formatting. H2 heads also appear in sentence case.
- Level 3 heads, which are set using the "H3" tag, are lowest in the hierarchy and will format naturally in all caps.

Don't use end punctuation unless the headline or subhead is a question. And, don't include a carriage return between "H2" heads and paragraph text.

7. Lists and tables

Use web-page features instead of typographic tricks to organize information (e.g., use the bulleted list and numbered list command icons on the CMS menu bar rather than line items beginning with dashes; use HTML tables instead of pre-formatted text). If tables are necessary (and they are best avoided within the CMS), always use them for text — i.e., to communicate information — instead of visual effect.

8. Images, colour and the use of visual cues

Avoid using images of text, as these are created as “graphics” outside of the CMS. Logotypes, such as the OCAD University logo, are the exception. Again, note that images require alt text that communicates the same information. If the image is purely decorative, no alt text is required.

Coloured type does not conform to OCAD University branding and must be avoided, unless it’s part of a logotype or branded graphic. As per the accessibility tips outlined in this guide, remember that instructions provided for understanding content should not rely solely on sensory characteristics such as shape, size, visual location or orientation.

9. Style

Style differs from tone in that it reflects and incorporates key messaging, branding, demographics, etc. Aim to develop content that is consistent in style with the rest of the site and in line with all of these elements.

A note about house style

As the institution’s online presence, **ocadu.ca** must at all times reflect the professionalism of OCAD U staff and faculty. Because today’s less formal online environment allows for more latitude with language, OCAD U content providers should aim for a “professional casual” tone that also incorporates the university’s key messages and branding.

The consistent use of active language, for example, will reinforce the university's dynamic milieu. The OCAD U website strives to communicate the institutional brand and so too should any web editorial. The active voice is not only more direct; it's also bolder, vigorous. This suits the OCAD U brand.

It goes without saying that certain sections of the site will be easier to animate with language because of content that is particularly dynamic (e.g., news items or feeds) or because it involves a narrative of some kind (e.g., faculty profiles).

Drier or more prescriptive language is sometimes necessary, but even this need not be cumbersome. Keep content clear, concise and constructive. The use of contractions can help warm drier sections of text and will maintain the more "conversational" tone established elsewhere on the site and online. Readers are used to this and have come to expect it; contractions are commonplace in all manner of consumer publications.

Don't use "we" when what you mean is the institution. Do use "you" when referring to your reader. Instead of "Applicants must deliver completed forms..." write "You must deliver completed forms..."

10. Summary checklist

- Be clear. Use the inverted pyramid structure to arrange points in descending order of importance.
- Be concise. Eliminate unnecessary words and redundant information.
- If possible, limit paragraphs to three sentences and aim to get important information onto one screen. This eliminates the need for scrolling.
- Be direct. Use active voice whenever possible. Use action verbs and concrete nouns.
- Be friendly. Use language readers will understand and a tone they'll respond to.
- Be objective.
- Be persuasive. Use language that will convince readers of the points you're making.
- Be a guide. Use language, headings and links that allow readers to navigate the site and remain oriented at all times.

So, in short, what you really want is to be:

- clear
- concise
- complete
- constructive
- credible
- correct
- coherent
- conversational
- considerate

*Do not apply these guidelines to academic papers or publications. Other sources, such as The Writing & Learning Centre, can provide advice about this specialized kind of writing. Do use this style guide to assist you with writing anything (and everything) intended for a campus audience and for the general public.

Section B:

OCAD U house guidelines, editorial

The following standards have been compiled for quick reference and should be followed by OCAD U content providers when creating, revising or editing web content. OCAD U uses *The Canadian Press Stylebook*, *The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling* and the *Oxford Canadian Dictionary* as its controlling style guide and dictionary. Together, these publications guide us on matters of spelling, capitalization, punctuation and usage.

There are also a number of conventions unique to OCAD U. These take into account evolving standards governing popular usage in Canada, and are outlined, along with some basic editorial practices and principles, in this section

Controlling dictionary: *Oxford Canadian Dictionary*.

Controlling style guides: *The Canadian Press Stylebook* and *The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling*.

This is a working document. Comments, criticisms and new additions are encouraged and should be directed to the Marketing & Communications at OCAD U.

OCAD U principles, practices and word list

a, an, use of

British style for indefinite articles a and an, as follows:

an homage [not a homage]

an historical [not a historical]

abbreviation

For months used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Spell out standing alone or with a year alone. For example: Oct. 1, 1999 was a Friday. January 2006 was wet.

In numbered addresses, write Ave., Blvd., Cres., Dr., Hwy., Rd., Sq, St., Ter. For example: 205 Richmond St. W.

Spell out general locations: on King Street, the McCaul Street corridor, the Queen West gallery district.

Use periods with the geographical abbreviations of provinces, territories and districts *when they follow* the name of a city, town or village: Vancouver, B.C.; Toronto, Ont.

Also use periods with most lower-case abbreviations: a.m., p.m. e.g., i.e.; and at the end of abbreviations for single words: Mr., misc.

academic degrees, abbreviations of

Generally, cap first letter of degree and field.

BA

BFA

BDes

BArch

MA

MFA

PhD

acronyms and articles, use of

An acronym is a pronounceable word formed from the first letter of a series of words (e.g., CAMH, NATO). Acronyms should be spelled out in first reference (with the acronym itself appearing in parentheses). In general, acronyms are not preceded by a definite article:

The members of NATO rejected the idea.

Note that with our change in designation from Ontario College of Art & Design, to OCAD University, “OCAD” ceased to be an acronym.

alumni

Please note the correct terms of use when referring to individuals or groups of former students who have graduated from the university:

alumna: former student, female

alumni: two or more former students, male or female

alumnus: former student, male

Where alumni status is understood, omit the word and include the program name and year of graduation, if prior to degree-granting: John Smith (Drawing & Painting, 1950). After degree-granting: Sue Parker (BFA, Photography, 2010).

Group reference (alumnae or alumni) should precede listing of names.

(e.g., Alumni Jane Doe, Jasper Doe and Jennifer Doe participated in a group exhibition.)

ampersand vs. and

The ampersand (&) is correctly used only when it forms part of a proper noun or title. The ampersand is actually used in many course names and staff titles. Ampersands should not be used within the body of copy or in headings; in body copy and headings, the word “and” should always be used.

and, &, use of

In course titles, use ampersand symbol [not and] where correct. This makes reading easier by ensuring reference has been made to only one course, as shown in the following examples:

Co-requisite(s): ENVR 3B09 Interior Design & Rendering Lab/Visiting Lecturers

Co-requisite(s): ENVR 3B06 Presentation Drawing & Rendering

doctor, use of

According to the Canadian Press, the professional title “Dr.” is used only for licensed health care professionals, such as dentists, veterinarians and chiropractors. Please do not use “Dr.” to refer to a

faculty member with a PhD (except in rare circumstances where context is an issue, and in first reference to Dr. Sara Diamond).

college

No longer refer to the institution as “the College.” See “university.”

commas

In keeping with the general trend toward less punctuation, don’t use serial commas in straightforward enumerations, as in the following:

This includes the visual, verbal and conceptual skills that are essential to the... [no comma between verbal and conceptual]

contractions

Do use contractions (won’t, you’re) where appropriate to keep language conversational.

dashes

Em dashes separate thoughts for effect and are different from hyphens, which connect two words to create a compound. Don’t use two hyphens when what you’re looking for is a dash. Do, however, use spaces before and after em dashes, in run-on text, as follows:

Developing perception — the consciousness with which we see, envision and understand the visible world — is vital.

An en dash is bigger than a hyphen and shorter than an em dash and is used to indicate a numerical range, e.g., I read pages 10–22 last night. Do not use spaces before and after en dashes.

date and time

Spell out the day and utilize correct punctuation (see page 11). Write in this order and include year:

Correct: Monday, Feb. 27, 2006

Incorrect: Mon. Feb. 27/06

Correct: February 2006

Incorrect: 27, February, 2006

Use the following to indicate time and duration:

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

9 a.m. to noon

9 p.m. to midnight

Note spacing and use of lowercase, with periods.

duration in time

The use of the word to is preferred over the use of a hyphen or en dash:

Correct: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Incorrect: Monday-Friday, 9–5PM

email, online, website

Although The Canadian Oxford Dictionary recommends “e-mail” and “on-line,” these words are much more commonly spelled on the Web without hyphens. The same is true for “website.” Please spell them as they’re listed, in bold, above.

extensions and phone numbers

When referring someone to an extension number in printed and online copy, the full phone number should be included as follows: 416-977-6000, Ext. 111. (Note that numerals are separated by a hyphen, and that the E in Ext. is correctly capitalized).

This is different from the way we reference extensions and list phone numbers in email signatures and on business cards (e.g., T 416.977.6000 x327).

faculty offices and capitalization, use of

When referring to the faculties in their proper form (e.g., a Faculty of Art student, a Faculty of Design initiative), capitalize as in example.

faculty/staff reference

When referring to a faculty or staff member, please use the following criteria where possible:

Faculty: name, rank, faculty

(e.g., Richard Fung, assistant professor, Faculty of Art)

Staff: name, title, department/faculty if applicable

(e.g., Ruth Eveleigh, administrative assistant, Faculty of Liberal Studies;)

faculty/staff titles, capitalization of

Capitalize professional titles and titles of nobility when they precede and form part of a personal name:

Professor Astman

Chancellor Delaney

In other words, capitalize job titles before the name, but not after. And don’t use capitalization following an indefinite article.

Barbara Astman, professor, Faculty of Art
Gerta Wenti, a professor of physics

for example vs. that is

In the American style of writing, a comma is inserted before and after i.e. (that is) and e.g. (for example). However, in the British style of writing, a comma is inserted before but not after these abbreviations. OCAD U conforms to American style in this instance. So, use a comma before introductory words such as namely, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., or for instance when they are followed by a series of items. Also use a comma after the introductory word.

health care

Caps and Spelling recommends this version, as opposed to healthcare, which is also common. Health-care is appropriate when used adjectivally.

honours

Abbreviate “Honours” in titles following faculty members’ names, as follows:

Jane Doe, BA (Hons), MA; Professor, Faculty of Art

hyphenation

In keeping with the general trend toward less punctuation, and to reflect the widespread use of certain newer compound words, the Oxford Canadian Dictionary does not hyphenate the following:

email
online
onscreen
postmodern
prerequisite
weblog
webmaster
website

Common words at OCAD U utilizing hyphenation include:

co-requisite
non-major
on-site
post-secondary
studio-seminar

vice-president

location

When referring to a specific campus building, be sure to include its proper name and address:

e.g., Sharp Centre for Design, 100 McCaul St.

e.g., Rosalie Sharp Pavilion, 115 McCaul St.

Be sure to include the word street:

Correct: 100 McCaul St.

Incorrect: 100 McCaul

numbers in text

Numbers below 10 should be spelled out, e.g., Students have two weeks to complete the assignment. One student will be chosen as the winner.

Never begin a sentence with a number unless it is spelled out.

numbers and percentage symbols

When abbreviating the words number or numbers within the body of a text, use No. or Nos. but not the symbol #, which is generally reserved for tabular and statistical material:

Nos. 56–86 are missing

Use the per cent sign (%) in economic, financial, statistical or other documents/pages where figures are abundant. In material of a general nature containing isolated references to percentages, the term is usually written out, except when used adjectivally.

15 per cent

a 15% bond (no space between numeral and %)

OCAD University

For first reference, use OCAD University; OCAD U in subsequent references.

periods

Do use periods where it's grammatically correct to do so. Do not use periods in acronyms, such as OCAD U, MA, USA.

period/comma with quotation marks

Use American style, as follows [note period/comma inside end quote marks]:

“...word pictures,” which are...

plurals

Add an s, but not an apostrophe, to form the plural of most abbreviations:

MPs

URLs

program names

Please avoid using acronyms wherever possible. Also note that course code names are not appropriate for editorial usage. However, some of the newer program names are a mouthful; acronyms may be used in second reference in these cases. In alpha order (and not including specializations and minors):

Advertising

Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories (CADN)

Criticism & Curatorial Practice (CCP)

Cross-Disciplinary Art

Digital Futures

Digital Painting and Expanded Animation (DPXA)

Drawing & Painting

Environmental Design

Graphic Design

Indigenous Visual Culture program (INVC)

Interdisciplinary Art, Media and Design (IAMD)

Illustration

Inclusive Design

Industrial Design

Integrated Media

Material Art & Design (MAAD)

Photography

Printmaking

Sculpture/Installation

Strategic Foresight and Innovation (SFI)

Visual and Critical Studies

punctuation, general

The same rules of punctuation apply in web content as in printed content.

practice and practise

In British English, the word practice (note c) is a noun, referring to the act itself. The word practise (note s) is a verb, meaning “to do something repeatedly to improve one’s skill.” In American English, however, both the noun and the verb are spelled practice (note c).

OCAD U recommends conforming to the principles and practice of British English by using *practice* when referring to the noun and *practise* when referring to the verb, as in the following:

It's not local *practice* to sing loudly at dinner.
In *practice*, it was a disaster.
She ran a thriving medical *practice*

Practise what you preach.
He is a *practising* artist.
She was a confident and *practised* speaker.

restrictive vs. non-restrictive clauses (that and which)

Much confusion surrounds use of the words *that* and *which* as markers of a restrictive and/or non-restrictive clause. A restrictive word, phrase or clause adds to the word that it's modifying a restrictive or defining element essential to the meaning of the whole; it should therefore not be separated by a comma or other mark of punctuation. A non-restrictive element provides incidental or supplementary information that doesn't affect the essential meaning; it should be set off by a comma or commas.

In short, a nonrestrictive, or non-defining, clause is one that can be regarded as parenthetical: My house, which has a blue door, needs painting.

A restrictive, defining, clause is one that is essential to the sense of the sentence: My house that has a blue door needs painting.

room names

If the room has a name, it should be used. Room names can be found on the Campus Wayfinding Floorplans available online.

e.g., Publics Canada Inc. Studio. Room 668, Level 6, 100 McCaul St.
e.g., Frederick Hagan Studio, Room 387, Level 3, 100 McCaul St.

room numbers and floors

When referring to a room number, use the following criteria to clearly indicate location:

Room number, Level, Address
e.g., Room 310, Level 3, 100 McCaul St.
e.g., Room 1412, Level 4, 113 McCaul St.

Please note the use of capitalization. Floors are referred to as levels in all OCAD U buildings.

Sara Diamond (titles)

Use Dr. Sara Diamond for first reference, Dr. Diamond or Diamond in subsequent references. Note that this is an exception to our convention regarding use of “Dr.”

school year (time durations)

When referring to the academic year — be it past, present, or future — date references should be written as follows:

Correct: 2012/2013

Incorrect: 20012-2013

Incorrect: 12/13

Incorrect: 2012/13

Incorrect: 12-13

spacing

Place a single space (or two carriage returns) between paragraphs. A double space (or three carriage returns) should be placed at a section end, before the new subhead.

spelling

Partly as a result of our historical ties with Britain and our proximity to the United States, Canadian spelling has tended to waver between the principles and practices employed in these parts of the English-speaking world.

At OCAD U, we use British spelling in matters of *ou* and *re*, as follows:

colour [not color]

centre [not center]

However, we use American spelling in verbs with a single *l*/double *l* and their derivatives:

enrol, enrolled, enrolment

fulfillment

We also use American spelling in verbs ending in *ise/ize* and their derived forms:

organize [not organise], organization [not organisation]

specialize [not specialise], specialization [not specialisation]

text styles

Text styles and point sizes have been predetermined for you by the CMS system. However, you do have options when creating online content. Use style options like italics sparingly and for emphasis only. Do not, for example, use italics to indicate head levels. Nor should you use all CAPS for emphasis; CAPS should be reserved for abbreviations, acronyms and, in some cases, headings. Finally, do not use the word underlining function, as in an online environment the word(s) will look like linked text.

university subjects, courses and degrees

Do not capitalize the names of disciplines when used in a general sense. Capitalize them when used to refer to school subjects, languages or the names of particular courses.

The university requires English as a prerequisite.

He reads articles on environmental design.

She is an Environmental Design major.

university

Cap the letter “U” for University only when referring to OCAD University by its full and proper name. Use lowercase in all other instances.

voice mail/voice-mail

Caps and Spelling spells voice mail as two words. If however, the two words are part of an adjectival phrase (as in voice-mail system), a hyphen is introduced for clarity.

year levels and hyphens, use of

First-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year are all hyphenated when used adjectivally (e.g., third-year program) and when referring to that year-level of study. They are also lowercase unless used at the beginning of a sentence.

year levels and numerals, use of

Spell out, in lowercase (unless in a heading), year number, as follows:

year one

year two

year three

year four

students in their second year

Dangerous words, common pitfalls

and more

Ending a list with and more promises everything and reveals nothing.

allow vs. enable

Be mindful of connotations associated with the word “allow.” The alternative “enable” is a more positive choice. For example, “Online registration enables students to register remotely.”

applicant (the)

Instead of applicants must include..., write you must include...

back

Which way back depends on the direction your visitor came from. Describe the subject of the page instead, or use absolute directions.

bios

For reasons of consistency and professionalism, please use the third person (as opposed to the first) when crafting bios.

capitalization and head levels

In headings that begin at the margin (as almost all headings on the website do) capitalize only the first word as well as any other words, such as proper nouns, which require capitals in their own right. For more information, see Section A: 6. Headings and navigation.

current

Often redundant. Used well, it refers to the current instance of a periodical event (e.g., the current issue). But it can quickly become out of date. Consider also replacing currently with now, or editing out altogether.

hyphen/adverb

Adverbs ending in “ly” are never hyphenated to form compounds with a paired adjective, as in a nearly complete series of meetings.

list

If you describe the format you present your information in (e.g., Here is a list of...) you could and should be talking about the subject instead.

note

If you ask your readers to note something, they should have a chance to arrive at your conclusion by examining the evidence themselves. Almost any sentence that uses note or please note can be reworded. Simply state the fact the reader should be aware of.

over and more than

Avoid language that requires spatial/visual references. One of the greatest powers of the Internet is the ability to cross link related documents, allowing user to read/ learn in a non-linear fashion. Content authors must remember, however, that not all users will be experiencing web pages the same way.

practice

Note that practice is spelled with a “c” whether noun or verb.

startup

Caps and Spelling does not use a hyphen when spelling “startup,” nor does it split the word in two.

that and which

Much confusions surrounds use of the words that and which as markers of a restrictive and/or non-restrictive clause. A restrictive word, phrase or clause adds to the word that it’s modifying a restrictive or defining element essential to the meaning of the whole; it should therefore not be separated by a comma or other mark of punctuation. A non-restrictive element provides incidental or supplementary information that doesn’t affect the essential meaning; it should be set off by a comma or commas.

In short, a nonrestrictive, or non-defining, clause is one that can be regarded as parenthetical: *My house, which has a blue door, needs painting.*

A restrictive, defining, clause is one that is essential to the sense of the sentence: *My house that has a blue door needs painting.*

there is and this is...

If you start a sentence with Here, *This* or *There*, you usually end up talking about the document rather than the subject.

view

Don’t use view when what you mean is *read*.

who vs. that

Write “the company that makes the best digital apps.” Not “the company who...” “The inverse is true when writing of people.

Section C:

OCAD U content editing

The OCAD U Content Management System (CMS) is preconfigured to allow users to format, post and edit content in their areas of responsibility. The system uses workflows to ensure that web pages go through a number of controlled steps that guarantee they will be edited, reviewed and approved before being published on the site.

Changes to the hub structure, addition of new pages, images, changes to the design or requests for new features must be routed through, and approved by Marketing & Communications.

To speed up the approvals process, all authorized content providers must itemize their changes when submitting them for approval. This allows content approvers to scan the page for revised sections of text, eliminating the need for a total edit. It also means that your pages will be approved and published faster.

For example:

V	Date/Time	User	App Level	Action	Note
10	13/02/2007 11:25:31 AM	Jane Doe jdoe@ocadu.ca	1	SubmitForApproval	Updated change-of-address information; Altered text in 4th paragraph

OCAD U Content Management System content provider guide

Please follow the steps below to easily update content on the OCAD U web server via the Content Management System (CMS). For more detailed information, please consult the Content Provider Guide (PDF).

STEP 1

- Go to <http://.ocadu.ca/admin>

STEP 2

- Log in using your username (first letter of your first name followed by your last name) and password (same as your username). *
- If this is your first time logging in, please change your password and unclick the “Make this my home page” check box. Then, click “Save.”
- Click the “My Sites” button at the top of the page and choose the website of your choice.

STEP 3

- Once logged in, navigate as you normally would to your section of the site or use the “My Sites” or “Site Menu” buttons on the Admin Toolbar positioned along the very top of the browser window.
- There should be two button icons near the top of the “Content” page. Click the one marked “Full Edit” to take you into edit mode within the CMS.

STEP 4

- In the editor, make sure the “Title” and “URL Title” fields are filled in. Note the use of lowercase characters and underscores instead of spaces for the URL Title. With the “Title,” however, you don’t have to worry about specific formatting.
- The “HTML Title” should contain the page’s location line (e.g., “OCAD U - Academic Programs - Graduate Studies”) with all word/phrases separated by a hyphen as opposed to the greater-than symbol (>).
- Under “Meta Data” > “Description,” use the same combination of words/phrases separated by a hyphen.
- Under “Meta Data” > “Keywords,” use the same combination of words/ phrases separated by a comma (e.g., “OCAD U, Academic Programs, Graduate Studies”) as opposed to the hyphen (-).

STEP 5

- Scroll down to the “Content” (tab) section of the editor and, using the familiar formatting buttons available to you, start editing your content. (For information about OCAD U head levels, see Section A: 6. Headings and Navigation.)
- Click on the “Preview” button to present the page as it would live on the www.ocadu.ca site. Be sure to close the preview window when you’re finished viewing.
- Hit “Save” regularly in order not to lose any important changes.

STEP 6

- When you’re satisfied with your work, click the “Submit” button in order for the changes to be sent out for review. Once you click the “submit” button, a new, smaller window will open, allowing you to add a workflow note describing the action just taken. Be sure to always itemize changes/additions in this note.
- Remember that you won’t be able to edit the page until the review has been cleared; only then will you again be given editing rights to that particular page.

**** “Review Required” emails**

The system will send out review-required messages with the subject line “Review Required” if no updates are made to a page within 30 to 60 days of inactivity. In the event that you receive a review-required message, simply open and then click on the link at the bottom. This will log you in to CMS and take you to the “Editor” for the page in question. Once there, click on the “Edit” button to edit the page or the “Reviewed” button to open the page up to another 60 days of inactivity. The latter requires that you make no changes.

OCAD U Content Management System Power Users

Coming soon.

Section D:

Overview of “plain language” practices

The “Plain Language” movement is in many ways an extension of contemporary journalistic practice, which itself is part of a long tradition that equates good writing with an economy of language. Take, for example, George Orwell’s writing rules circa 1946:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive when you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Plain language is even more important when writing for the web. According to Nielsen usability studies, 79 per cent of readers scan any new web page they come across. The Plain English Campaign recommends the following as a way of making web text clearer:

7. Keep your sentences short. Clear writing should have an average sentence length of 15 to 20 words.
8. Prefer active verbs.
9. Use “you” and “we.” Instead of *advice is available from...* write *you can get advice from...*
10. Choose words appropriate for the reader.
11. Don’t be afraid to give instructions.
12. Avoid nominalizations. A nominalization is a type of abstract noun; it’s the name of something rather than the thing — usually a verb — itself. Instead of *we had a discussion about the matter* write *we discussed the matter*.
13. Use positive language (do vs. do not).
14. Use lists where appropriate.

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