Writing for the Web

Questions? Contact Lisa Nguyen | 530-752-5431 | lmwnguyen@ucdavis.edu

1

WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

Like any commercial organization, we are competing. We are competing for the **BEST STUDENTS, STAFF AND FACULTY**. So, we need to be clear about what makes us different from other universities and, importantly, we need to be able to communicate this.

Communications

We communicate in three ways; the way we look, the way we sound and the way we behave. As well as our visual identity, which includes our logo, colors and typography, our verbal identity is a crucial part of who we are and how we connect with people, be it colleagues, students, alumni, or business partners. It comprises our tone of voice, our stories and our names.

Consistency is everything

The more consistent we are, the more likely it is that people will understand what makes us special. The way we express ourselves has to be joined up and consistent so that people admire, respect and, crucially, trust us. We need a strong verbal identity that we all understand and know how to use.

WHAT IS OUR MESSAGE?

The UC Davis Graduate School of Management is focused on preparing the next generation of inspired, results-driven and innovative leaders who are committed to making a positive impact.

Our Goals

- **Continue our ascent** to the upper tier of U.S. business schools and **greater prominence** on the international stage.
- **Strengthen and advance our community** of faculty, students and alumni as influential, responsible and agile leaders.
- **Set the standard** as shapers of global business and management practices with game-changing knowledge, integrity and the highest degree of personal character.

Why UC Davis GSM?

- **We set the standard** for responsible business leadership.
- **We prepare** results-driven, innovative and agile learners who can adapt quickly, leading and collaborating to make a positive impact.
- **We think and act boldly**, working smarter and harder as a global leader in business and management research and education.
- **We partner** with corporations that practice and value our approach and share in our success.

GENERAL WRITING TIPS

1. **Think about what you are trying to say**. Take a few moments first. What are you trying to say? Jot down the main points. Don't worry about structuring them. Let the ideas flow; you can organize them later.

2. **Remember who you are talking to.** What's important to them? What would excite or help them? How much time do they have? How old are they? The more detailed the picture, the easier it will be to write for them. Think of someone you know who is in this target audience. Imagine them sitting right in front of you. Read it out. Would you talk to this person like this?

3. **Create a clear structure**. Divide your work into manageable paragraphs of no more than eight sentences and sentences of no more than 20-25 words with a single idea in each. This helps create a clear narrative that people can easily navigate. It helps you get your message across too.

4. **Use headings**. Headlines for chapters, pages, sub-sections and paragraphs create a narrative. These act as signposts for busy readers and ensure they get, even at the quickest glance, some of the messages you want them to.

5. **Just start Now.** you have the bones of a structure. Start writing. Write to your structure, but let the ideas flow. Don't worry about getting it right first time. You can edit later.

6. **Edit, edit, edit Always edit.** Editing is as important as writing itself. The art of great editing is knowing when to stop. Strive for concision, but don't cut it back so far that the language has no personality. Be brutal. Your writing will be better for it.

7. **Avoid the passive**. Why? The passive sounds weaker, is less direct, more formal and impersonal. Have a look at this simple example: Your letter will be replied to in due course. We'll reply as soon as we can.

8. **Get straight to the point.** No-one has time to navigate reams of copy to find out what you're trying to say. Get to the point quickly and make it interesting. Be clear about what you want to say and stick to it. People read differently online than they do when they read print materials -- web users typically scan for information.

9. **We / you**. Give your writing a more personal, human touch. Instead of saying 'The University has an active relationship with students', say 'You can get involved'. The emphasis here is on 'we' and 'you' rather than 'we, we, we'. Remember it's about what our readers want to know and not just what we want to tell them.

10. **Use every day English.** Use simple words. Language is to express and communicate, not impress.

TOP TEN TIPS FOR WRITING FOR THE WEB

1. **Digital content** is not the same as print content. People encounter and read it differently – they scan it, so you need to write it differently. Divide it into smaller chunks with subheadings.

2. **Language** is most powerful when used economically, and that's doubly true online. Write in tabloid-size packages using a maximum of 25 words per sentence, one sentence per paragraph, four to six words per headline.

3. **Legibility.** It's hard to read off a screen. It's 25% slower than print. Help your reader. Don't go crazy with bolding, italicizing and capitals. Never use underlining to highlight because it will make your text look hyperlinked and confuse your reader.

4. **Credibility.** There can be no excuses for poor spelling and grammar. It seriously undermines the credibility of your message. Sloppy spelling will not make you look serious or professional. It could even make your communications appear fraudulent. Make the dictionary your best friend.

5. **Ambiguity isn't good.** Your writing should do what it says on the tin.

6. **Searchability**. Write to be found. What words would people type into Google to find you? Use those words in your copy. But don't overuse the same phrase to the detriment of your writing or marketing.

7. **Accessibility**. Don't exclude visually impaired or blind readers. Don't let your copy rely heavily on imagery, and use tags and captions as opportunities to fully describe pictures. Remember to describe hyperlinks fully.

8. **Personality**. Just because you're writing for digital media doesn't mean that you have to lose your brand's personality. There is always a way to infuse even the most restrained copy with personality.

9. **Spam**. Don't unintentionally make emails to customers look like spam. This is especially important in subject lines. Avoid words like 'free', 'win'. Avoid spelling mistakes, text speak abbreviations and acronyms as these are all on the spam filter hit list. Think hard about the words you use and how they'll look sitting in someone's inbox…

10. **Structure**. When structuring your work, think of an inverted pyramid. The most important information first, the broader base of detail later.