

Web Writing Tips

Visitors to your site typically want to find information quickly and tend to skim until they find relevant content. Below are tips for effective, usable web copy:

- **Be concise.** Shorter copy is less overwhelming and more likely to be read by users.
- **Chunk content to allow for easy scanning:**
 - Use bullet points for lists.
 - Break information into shorter paragraphs with meaningful headings.
- **Help visitors find their way** through navigation drilldowns:
 - Write clear link text navigation labels that clearly indicate the content behind the link. Avoid using "click here," internal jargon, marketing speak, or overly vague labels for link text.
 - Use keywords or "triggers" that indicate content relevance.
- **Tell users they're in the right spot** through clear page titles that match or are very similar to navigation labels.
- **Use progressive information disclosure.** Begin with the conclusion or the most important information and follow with supporting details. This allows the user to get to the point first and then dig deeper for more details if they choose.
- **Anticipate questions** and clearly indicate where to find the answers. (Ample headings and clear calls to action.)
- **Favor useful information over marketing-speak.** Web users tend to bypass marketing speak. Appeals to emotion can be made without sacrificing useful information. Show, don't tell.
- **Use common/plain language.** Avoid jargon or clever language that obscures meaning. Clarity should take priority.
- **Use a conversational tone** to the degree that it's warranted by the brand. Overly formal language can sound alienating.

Writing to the Information Architecture and Design

General Considerations

- Be aware of all page-specific elements in the design that require copy (e.g., contextual promotions that are page specific vs. globally managed) and account for them in the copy deck.
- Consider space limitations for certain design elements (e.g., the size of the feature boxes on the Visual Landing Page). While the design will be somewhat flexible, the amount of copy shouldn't deviate drastically from the amount provided as placement copy in the design.

Home Page

Primary Focus: First Impressions and Navigation

- Gives users a quick impression and provides an overview of offerings.
- Provides clear paths to more information.
- Elevates and provides lead-ins for important or often-used content.

Category Landing Pages

Wireframe/design layouts: Plain Navigation Landing, Visual Landing, Elected Officials Landing

Primary Focus: Navigation

Landing pages provide section overview information (sometimes just headings and links) to help users confirm they're in the right place and route them to more detailed information. Pages that are solely category landing pages shouldn't contain lengthy expository content that obscures the ability to quickly scan choices and make the next click.

Help users narrow down the choices and decide where to click next:

- Write meaningful link text that helps users understand what content they will find after the click.
- Use headings to group subpages in a way that makes it easy for users to scan for relevant information.

Detail Pages

Wireframe/design layout: Internal Page

Primary Focus: Information and Conversion

"Conversion" = taking a desired action (e.g., registering, engaging with information, etc.)

- Start with the most important information.
- Allow users to scan the page information by chunking content into short paragraphs with meaningful headings.
- Make it easy for users to take the next step, if appropriate, by providing clear calls to action.

Writing Metadata

Purpose of Metadata

Metadata plays an important role in helping users who are browsing a search engine results page (SERP) determine whether a page/website is relevant to their needs. Search engine spiders also use it to some degree to determine the relevancy and rank of pages.

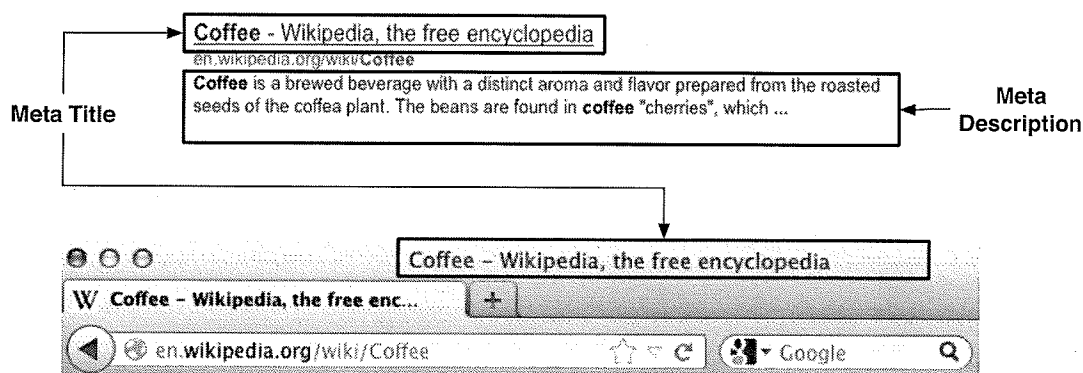
All metadata elements need to be unique to each page of content. It's not unusual to find sites that use the same titles, keywords and descriptions on multiple pages. To be effective, metadata must be specific to the content on each page.

Metadata is often thought about in terms of keywords, but it's important to go beyond just a few words. Think about key phrases. Specific phrases, rather than just keywords can help lead search engines and users to the right content much more quickly.

Metadata Elements

SEO metadata consists of the meta title, meta description, and meta keywords. This metadata displays on third-party search engine results pages or site search. Below is an example of search results on a Google search results page indicating where the meta title and meta description display.

Fig. 1.0 Google Search Result



Meta Title (Page Title)

The meta title is still important for determining rank on search results pages, although the quality and relevance of page content is equally if not more important. The meta title also acts as the link text for each search result and can appear at the top of some browsers when the page is visited (see Fig. 1). It indicates the primary topic of a page and should be unique to each page. Users should be able to quickly glance at the meta title and determine whether the page will be useful for their information needs or not. It's important to make meta titles **human-friendly**.

Include the most important keywords as close to the beginning of the meta title as possible. Don't "keyword stuff" as this likely won't improve search results and isn't as human-friendly.

Syntax

It's best practice to use either a hyphen (-) or a pipe (|) in page title tags to separate keywords and phrases. These characters help usability by making the title more readable. Avoid using commas or underscores in meta titles.

Industry best practices recommend a maximum length of 70 characters.

Meta Description

The meta description is most important for helping users determine whether a page is relevant to their search, but doesn't play as much of a role in determining page rank in search results. For example, in Fig.1 above, it's clear that the page described is focused on defining and providing the history of coffee, rather than selling coffee as a retail item. It's very useful for users to understand this distinction before clicking on a result, and it will help keep traffic to your site relevant.

Industry best practices recommend a length not exceeding 160 characters.

Keywords

Keywords are commonly searched words and can be included in meta titles, meta descriptions, page headings, and body copy. Determining the best keywords requires research into common search terms and phrases, and an assessment of the competition for any given keyword or phrase (this is less important for Ramsey County).

The meta keywords field is no longer relevant for search rankings. In the event that meta keywords are added, they should relate directly to the topic of the page. It would be detrimental to include every keyword relevant to your organization in a single meta keyword field. Keywords included in the meta keywords field are visible in the page source code, but not on the search results listing. Keywords inserted in the meta title, meta description, page headings, and copy are visible to users.