

University of East Anglia

Writing for web guidelines

Admissions, Recruitment
and Marketing Department

How to write copy for the web

These guidelines are designed to help you write or commission copy to promote the University of East Anglia on the web. They are intended to:

- Provide guidance on how to write in a tone that reflects the University's values
- Correct common mistakes and provide a reference of key terms
- Enable a user to format and present information in a fitting style for www.uea.ac.uk
- Provide information on the University's House Style
- Direct you to useful resources

Writing for the web

Writing for the web is a different proposition from writing for brochures or other publications - readers will usually scan pages for prominent headings, links, images and keywords. As a result, you need to think carefully about how you present your information - if copy is not presented clearly, then a user will probably be unable to find the information they need.

When writing copy for the web, it may help to consider your own behaviour online - how often do you read every single word on a web page? Do you simply read the sections in bold, or the first few lines of all paragraphs?

To accurately convey your message to users, you need to write and present your copy in the clearest way possible.

Key ingredients of promotional writing

The quality of written content is one of the most significant aspects of getting your message across, however, design and imagery are just as important. The first contact that many of your target audiences will have with you is via the written word – whether through printed materials or the UEA website.

Brevity

Readers tend to skim-read web copy at first, only fully reading the parts that catch their attention at first glance. Try to use short, concise sentences to get your point across quickly, and remove any unnecessary words. Stick to roughly one idea per paragraph. Users tend not to like scrolling, and will often only do so if you have already caught their interest in some way, so your top-level pages must be short and to the point.

Tailored to your audience

When writing content, try to keep your target audience in mind - what might be good copy for an academic to read is unlikely to be as engaging for a prospective student. Aim for writing that is easy to read and avoid colloquial or overly formal language.

Key audiences for the website:

- Undergraduate students - potential home/EU and international
- Postgraduate students - potential home/EU and international
- Academic Researchers - collaborators/funders/potential staff

- Business - collaborators/partners/employers
- Current students
- Current staff
- Alumni
- Media
- Influencers - e.g. parents/teachers
- Local community

Accurate

One of the most important factors to consider is accuracy - everything you write should be true (especially in the case of league table positions). Obviously, we want the site to be as accurate and up-to-date as possible at all times. If you are unsure about some information, do not include it. Furthermore, please make sure that if possible, you have someone proofread your work, and any documents you include.

Structured

Think about the structure of your content. Are the key messages at the top of the page? Would it help to add some sub-headings? Does the copy run in a logical order? Your key point should always be first.

The majority of web readers are looking for general information, not minute details. Start with general information and filter down to more specific information. This structure is applicable to both pages and paragraphs. Very detailed background information, or information of interest only to a minority of readers, can be presented on secondary pages linked from your main page.

When structuring content, it's important to check to see if the information already exists within your site and be mindful of repetition. If content exists in more than one place on your site, it may dilute the impact of your message and make version control more difficult. Try to limit your information to one, clear pathway.

Context

Be aware that users may come to your pages through a search engine rather than navigating from the homepage. Names of Schools, Faculties or any other UEA-specific terms which are usually shortened to an acronym should be written out in full for at least their first mention on a page. For example:

'Staff in the School of Film and Television Studies (FTV) have an international reputation...'

Purpose

Most useful web content drives an action and should end with a 'call to action', such as a link, a phone number, a form, email address etc.

Questions you should ask yourself when including copy include:

Why write content? Is it really required? Should it be internally facing?

The website is not an archive, it needs to be easy to navigate with high usability. Don't confuse the user with irrelevant content and navigation. If the content is required, where should it fit within the siteplan and what is the call to action?

Formatting, Grammar and Punctuation

- Text should never be underlined on the web. Readers expect underlined text to be a link
- Italics should be used sparingly, and in accordance with academic convention. Examples of acceptable use of italics include titles of books, magazines, periodicals, and films. Italics should not be used to signify captions
- Do not use double spacing after a full stop and before a new sentence. A single space is more appropriate for screen reading
- Avoid justifying the margins of paragraphs – this makes text on the screen much harder to read

Remember, too, that you may be writing for users for whom English is a second language. So try to keep structure and vocabulary simple, and avoid using University jargon. A form of jargon is caused by an assumption of knowledge (alumni, registry, ordinances and Senate). For an academic audience, these are perfectly acceptable, but for a non-specialist audience they may mean little.

Avoid clichés and hyperbole - it is easy to slip into exaggerated claims and descriptions. Terms like ‘first class’ and ‘innovative’ are used far more frequently than is warranted, and superlatives should be used sparingly.

Never write sentences in capital letters, as this appears as shouting or aggression to an online audience. If you want to emphasise short sentences, then bolden text rather than writing it completely in uppercase letters.

Tone of voice

Think about how you want your readers to perceive the University. In terms of tone, we aim for a fairly informal (but not colloquial), friendly and welcoming approach to addressing readers. Try to imagine you are talking to a potential student. It is best to talk about the university in the third person.

If you use ‘active’ verbs rather than ‘passive’ verbs, this will also help to create a crisper, more direct style:

- The student was enrolled by the University. [passive]
- The University enrolled the student. [active]

- The course was offered by the School. [passive]
- The School offered the course. [active]

Think SEO

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, and is the process of getting web pages to rank highly in search engines like Google. This is one of the most significant aspects of writing online content, as the easier the site is to find, the more people will visit.

Basic SEO tips:

- When naming a page, try to keep the title short, and with the most important descriptive words first

- The URL that appears in the address bar has an impact on SEO too, so when working in Polopoly make the short title the same as the page title. It is best to miss out any words like 'and' or 'the', and keep the title in lowercase, with hyphens instead of spaces
- When working in Polopoly, the 'Lead' text is the text that appears as the description of your page in Google search results. Use this to write a very brief summary of the key aspects page, and try to make it as enticing as possible for potential visitors. Ideally, it should be less than 160 characters
- When linking to web content, try to avoid making the link text 'Click here' or similar. Try to make the link text make sense when taken out of context - this can improve a page's ranking in Google. Aim for a sentence which describes the page thoroughly

This document is designed to be a reference point for those producing copy for the website, and act as a set of guidelines to follow. If you believe that certain stylistic elements would enhance the aesthetics of the page you are editing (and those elements are grammatically correct), then feel free to add them.

If you have any questions or problems relating to this document, please email digitalmarketing@uea.ac.uk.

Appendix A

Use of Images

This is a short reference guide, for a detailed description of UEA policy please refer to the 'Image Guidelines' document on the UEA website.

Images are very important when creating content for the web, but there are various issues to consider when using them.

Image Rights

The internet makes it easy for you to find a relevant image for your article, however a large amount of images on the web are copyrighted and the relevant license must be sought before using any image found on a non-University website.

Sometimes this is simply a case of asking the owner of the image for permission to use it. Often there is a licensing cost involved. This can be troublesome, and if not carried out properly can lead to repercussions.

It is with that in mind that the University has set up an image archive (<http://www.cis.uea.ac.uk/imagearchive/>), which contains images that have been approved and are 'safe' to use on any University website. They have been commissioned by photographers regularly used by the University. This ensures that you are using actual images of the University and this should be your first port of call for using images within your article.

Sizing

Make sure when you upload the image that it is of reasonable dimensions for the page, or bigger than you want it to appear. Making images smaller for the web is fairly easy. Making them larger tends to distort the image and leaves you with a blocky, poor quality image that will make the page look unprofessional.

You should also be careful about how much file space the images will take up - they should definitely not be any larger than 900KB.

Image Descriptions

The description is a text field where you can describe the contents of the image. There are two groups of visitors to your page that can not see your images. The first is any visitor using a Screen Reader or other assistive technology. The others are search engines like Google or Yahoo!

Images that include text within the image itself cannot be read by search engines or screen readers. This should also be included in any description you add to the image. Image descriptions should simply describe what the image contains.

Appendix B

Specifics of House Style

This document provides a guide to issues of language, style and spelling which will help to ensure greater consistency in writing for web within UEA. It is unlikely to be comprehensive or to cover all possible issues and colleagues are invited to suggest other areas or circumstances in which guidance would be helpful.

Abbreviations

- It is not necessary to use full stops in or after abbreviations where there is no likelihood of confusion: GCSE, BSc, BA, MA, PhD, BT, eg, ie, etc, inc, sq
- When they appear in text, &, %, ie and eg should be spelt out in full as 'and', 'per cent', 'that is to say' and 'for example'. In tables, headings, or when you need to save space, the abbreviations may be used but not with full stops
- The first time that an abbreviation is used, it should be written out in full and followed by the abbreviation. This applies to the name of the University as well as to operational units within it. The abbreviation alone can then be used in sentences that follow. For example:
'This course is taught by staff in the Climatic Research Unit (CRU). CRU is world-renowned.'

Affect/effect

- The film really affected me
- What is the effect on his health?

A levels

- A levels not A-levels or 'A' levels

Apostrophes

- Use apostrophes to show possession (the student's notes, the University's history)
- Add only an apostrophe if the things or people possessing already end in 's' (Students' Union, lecturers' offices)
- Do not use apostrophes for plurals unless it is to denote possession (in the 1960s, MAs, PhDs)
- Use an apostrophe to show that a letter is missing (isn't, can't, it's)
- Pronouns like his, hers, ours, yours, theirs and its don't need apostrophes

Biannual/biennial

- Biannual - twice a year
- Biennial - every two years

Capital letters

Don't use capitals:

- Avoid unnecessary capitals in all headings and text. In headings the first word should be capitalised with remaining words capitalised only if a proper noun, name or if a specific title or position is involved. For example: The British university system not The British University System
- internet not Internet
- web not Web
- Use lower case for seasons and semesters. For example: The prospectus will be updated in spring 2008
- Use lower case for points of the compass: east, west, north, south. For example: Schools in the north east, the south of Scotland, southern Europe

Do use capitals:

- Capitalise the names of books, films and other major works in the usual way. Capitalise first words and all words apart from prepositions and conjunctions of fewer than five letters. For example: Leading from the Middle
- The Government takes a capital letter if it refers to the present British Government; but a previous government takes a lower case initial. If used adjectivally, government takes a lower case
- Use upper case for definite geographical places, regions, areas and countries: South-East Asia, The Hague, the Midlands, the Middle East, the West (as opposed to the Developing World), the West Country, Western Europe
- University (meaning the University of East Anglia). Lower case should be used when referring to universities generally
- Vice-Chancellor (referring to our Vice-Chancellor), all others are vice-chancellors
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor
- Faculties (Faculty of Medicine and Health), Schools (Environmental Sciences) and Course titles (MA Theatre and Development), but not when referring generally to the study subject (for example: a good background in mathematics is essential)

Century

- 21st century, 20th century (noun); 21st-century (adjective), eg in the 21st century (noun); but a 21st-century dilemma (adjective)
- 300 BC not 300BC

Circa

- Abbreviate simply as c (roman) followed by a space, eg c 1342

Compare to/with

- Compare to - liken to
- Compare with - make a comparison

Contact details

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Email someone@uea.ac.uk

Web www.uea.ac.uk

Web addresses should not include http, eg www.uea.ac.uk

Dashes

- Use short dashes (ens) when there are no spaces between words, ie 2000-2005, 5,000-word dissertation, and long dashes (ems) when there are spaces between words ie, first-year module – British cinema.

Dates

- Friday 10 August 2007 not 10th August 2007 or August 10 2007
- 2007-08 not 2007-2008 or 2007/08
- Decades should be expressed as 1960s (not 1960's or '60s)
- 21st century, 20th century (noun); 21st-century (adjective)

Degree

- Capitalise the full degree title and module titles but use lower case when referring to subject areas. For example:
'The School of Biological Sciences offers courses in ecology, biology and conservation.'
'To study for the Master of Mathematics programme, you should have studied mathematics to at least A level.'
- A first, a second, an upper second, a lower second, a third

Double spacing

- Once used in the days of mechanical typewriters, double spacing is now not necessary. Always use a single space after a comma and full stop

Email

- Email and email not E-mail and e-mail

Faculty

- The University has four faculties (lower case): the Faculty of Science...

Fewer, less

- For countable nouns use 'fewer': There were fewer boys than girls
- For non-countable nouns use 'less': There was less wine than water

Government

- The Government takes a cap if it refers to the present British Government; but a previous government takes a lower case initial. If used adjectivally, government takes a lower case

Historical periods

- Capitalise names of widely recognised epochs in anthropology, archaeology, geology and history: the Bronze Age, the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Victorian era, the Enlightenment, the

Third Reich; or periods named after specific dynasties or people: the Tudors, Elizabethan. But lower case medieval, baroque

Honours

- Use a capital letter when describing a specific degree course, BA Honours French or BA Hons French, otherwise – you will need a good honours degree

Hyphenation

- Full time (noun), full-time (adjective), eg the referee blew the whistle for full time; she has a full-time job
- First year (noun), first-year (adjective), eg he is in his first year; he is a first-year undergraduate
- A level not A-level, 'A'-level or 'A' Level
- Email or email not E-mail or e-mail
- World-class not world class

Initials

- Use a space but no full stops between personal initials: A M Smith

Internet

- internet not Internet

International

- Refer to international not overseas students

International telephone style

- Tel +44 (0)1603 456161
- Fax +44 (0)1603 458553

Inverted commas (quotation marks)

- Use single inverted commas, reserving double inverted commas for a quotation within a quotation and for direct speech

Italics

- Use italics for titles of published books, periodicals, dissertations, plays, films, paintings, newspapers
- Titles of articles and features are set in Roman type and enclosed in single quotation marks
- Use italics for foreign words which have not become part of the English language

Master's

- Refer to Master's degree not Masters degree, masters' degree or masters degree

Newspaper titles

- Generally in italics and with lower case 'the': the Guardian. Exceptions to this are The Times and The Economist

Numbers

- Use words for numbers below ten unless they are in tables
- 10 upwards as figures, so 10 not ten, 29 not twenty-nine
- Spell out any number that begins a sentence, eg One hundred and ten people graduated this year
- Use commas for numbers of four or more digits: 1,000 not 1000
- £100 million or £100m not £100 m
- £10,000 not £10k, although £10k acceptable in internal documents
- Fractions are hyphenated as adjectives (one-third full), but not as nouns (one third of the population)
- The course runs for two years but it is a two-year course
- Spell out ordinal numbers in text: first, second, third (not 1st, 2nd, 3rd)

Over

- Our house style is to say 'more than', rather than 'over'. There are more than 10,000 international students not - there are over 10,000...

Percentage

- Use per cent rather than percent or % (except in tables)

Practice/Practise

- She practises the piano every day (verb)
- He set up practice as a lawyer (noun)

Principle/principal

- It's against my principles
- She is the college's new principal

Programme

- As in part-time degree programme, but a computer program

Qualifications

- A levels not A-levels not 'A' levels
- A Master's degree not a masters degree
- GCSE, BSc, BA, MA, PhD not G.C.S.E. etc

Schools of Study

- When referring to the University's Schools (because of the possible confusion with secondary schools) UEA's usage is a capital S for School of Study or Schools of Study

Spelling

- Some commonly misspelt words:
 - Accommodation

- Dependant (person); dependent (adjective)
- Enrol, enrolling, enrolment
- Focused
- Liaison/liaise
- Licence (noun), licensing; licensed; to license (verb)
- Practice (noun); practise (verb)
- Program (computer context); otherwise programme

ise / ize

- Our house style is to use –ise:
- civilised not civilized
- organised not organized
- civilisation not civilization
- organisation not organization

We use the following

- Adviser not advisor
- A levels, O levels – no hyphen
- Continental Europe not continental Europe
- Co-ordinator not coordinator
- Co-operation not cooperation
- Coursework not course work
- En suite not ensuite or en-suite
- Field trip not fieldtrip
- Field work not fieldwork
- Focuses not focuses
- You take a full-time course but you study full time (same for part-time/part time)
- Healthcare (when used as adjective – healthcare professions), otherwise health care
- Master's not master's or masters
- Online not on-line
- Postgraduate/Undergraduate not post-graduate or under-graduate
- Problem-based learning
- Supervisor not superviser
- Under way not underway
- Website not web-site
- Worldwide not world-wide
- World-class not world class

Time

- 17.30 not 5.30 pm or 5.30pm

Titles

- Mr not Mr.
- Mrs not Mrs.
- Ms not Ms.
- Dr not Doctor
- Rev not Rev.
- Prof not Prof.

Website

- website not web-site
- No http in websites

World-class

- World-class not world class

Years

- 2005-06 not 2005-2006 or 2005/06