

Biz Buzz

Web Writing:

Think Skim 'n' Scan

Your visitors won't read every word on your website. Our eyes skim - rather than read - online text. We scan web pages, trying to pinpoint certain words and sentences. On-screen, words are tiny dots of coloured lights and patterns. This, plus a flickering computer screen, makes online reading really hard on the eyes!

You can help your website visitors find what they need as quickly and easily as possible by writing for skim-reading.

Start by including some descriptive headings. Headings prepare your visitors for what you're about to say, and create a sense of flow within the page. Write your headings like a newspaper headline: a description of what's to come.

Keep your paragraphs and sentences short. Be sure to begin each paragraph with the most important point. Paragraphs shouldn't be longer than 100 words, and sentences no more than 20.

Use bullet points. Bullets make skimming a breeze! Just be sure to keep the items short: no less than 3 items, and no more than 6.

Use friendly, everyday language. "Talk" to your visitors like you're having a conversation. Web users prefer - and actually expect - a pleasant, informal tone. Address them personally: say "you" and "we" and use everyday contractions such as "you've" and "didn't".

Keep scrolling to a minimum. If a web page takes up more than one screen, your visitors won't see all of the content at once. Most web users know how to scroll down a long page - there's just no guarantee that they will. Add anchor links and try to include at least one heading per browser window.

It takes 20% longer to read a computer screen than a printed page, and web users are in a hurry. So write for scanners. Your visitors will find information much faster, and they'll appreciate the time you saved them!

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