Writing for the Wired World

Resources and Exercise

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Five Ways to Improve Your Writing

1. Strike out useless words.

This section describes the types of identification that would satisfy the application requirements for a library card.

What identification is needed when applying for a library card?

2. Avoid noun sandwiches.

Remote patron authenticated licensed database access.

3. Use “you”.

“You” personalizes your text and adds directness and clarity. For example:

   Faculty, staff and students must return books by the end of the loan period.
   If books are returned after the due date, fines will accrue.

   You must return books by the due date. You will be fined if books are returned late.

4. Cut out redundancies.

absolutely essential

essential

Garbl's Fat-Free-Writing Links has a good list of redundancies.
http://garbl.home.attbi.com/stylemanual/redundant.htm

5. Avoid jargon.

CINAHL, collections, reference, circulation and so on.
Word Substitutions

There are many sites that offer word dictionaries and plain language examples. Two sites that offer a good selection of word substitutions are:

- **Dictionary of Plain Language**
  http://www.techcommunicators.com/diction.html
- **Plain Language: Reference Library, Section on Simpler Words and Phrases**
  http://www.plainlanguage.gov/library/smpl1.htm

### “Dirty Dozen” List of Words from Plain Language Reference Library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assist, assistance</td>
<td>aid, help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commence</td>
<td>begin, start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implement</td>
<td>carry out, start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in accordance with</td>
<td>by, following, under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the amount of</td>
<td>for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the event of</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is</td>
<td>(omit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promulgate</td>
<td>issue, publish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this activity, command</td>
<td>us, we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timely</td>
<td>prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this activity, command</td>
<td>us, we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utilize, utilization</td>
<td>Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Suggested Substitutions for Common Terms on Library Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>concerning</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forward</td>
<td>Send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in order to</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitate</td>
<td>Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategy</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>access (as a verb)</td>
<td>Get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assist, assistance</td>
<td>help, aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construct</td>
<td>build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask a question</td>
<td>ask</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10 Strategies to Encourage Better Web Writing

1. Create an editorial style guide for acronyms, names, etc.
2. Mandate site wide look and feel using CSS.
3. Lead by example.
4. Recognize good writing.
5. Encourage key content providers to be observers in usability testing.
6. Promote good writing by using marketing techniques like a “tip of the day” newsletter.
7. Create input forms with fixed fields and limits to field sizes or add a character counter to a form field that displays total characters as the user types in the field.
8. Set up quality pre-publication checklists.
9. Be a teacher. Train new authors.
10. Educate managers that one of the “W's” in WWW is writing!
Exercise on Wordiness

In the following examples, circle the words that you think might create problems for readers. Strike out useless words. Then, rewrite the sentence.

1. Note: This paragraph appears on an ILL form just before the “submit” button and just after a copyright notice quoting part of Title 17 of the United States Code.

   By clicking the submit button, you agree to abide by regulations specified by both the borrowing and the lending library concerning the use of the borrowed item. You also agree that you have read the copyright notice and will observe copyright provisions in the use of any library material requested.

2. AGRICOLA is the most comprehensive source of bibliographic citations covering U.S. agricultural and life sciences information. Compiled by the U.S. National Agricultural Library, AGRICOLA consists of over 3,300,000 citations to journal articles, monographs, theses, patents, software, audio-visual materials, and technical reports related to all aspects of agriculture. Timeliness of response, which usually depends on the proximity of rescue resources to incidents, is a critical factor in saving people in distress.

3. This resource is licensed for use by members of the University of XYZ community. Proxy server accounts are available for U of XYZ members with external internet addresses.
4. In order to remotely access library databases, the Internet web browser should be configured to utilize the library's proxy server.

5. Reference service is available in the XYZ Library and the ABC Resource Center during library hours. Services are provided on site, and reference requests can be made by mail, telephone, fax, e-mail, or web form. The Library offers a variety of computer-based reference services (see Electronic Resources), including access to:
   Commercial online databases (such as ScienceDirect, Agricola,)
   Online library catalogs, World Wide Web databases and resources.
Web Sites on Writing

Ten Web writing tips to gain your Web visitors' trust and keep them coming back for more, Constance Petersen (constance@smaritans.com), May 2001, IBM DeveloperWorks

Create User-Friendly Copy
http://uncle-netword.com/articles/writeweb4.html

Good Documents: How to write for the INTRAnet
http://www.gooddocuments.com/

Usable Web - Writing Styles
http://usableweb.com/topics/001310-0-0.html

Writing for the Web - Jakob Nielsen
http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/

Writing for the Web - Sun Microsystems
http://www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/

Yale's Web Style Guide
http://www.webstyleguide.com/index.html

Web Sites on Plain Language

Better Writing – Plain English
http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/plainenglish/

Writing User Friendly Documents
http://www.blm.gov/nhp/NPR/pe_toc.html
Other Resources

Zooming In: Writing Content for Intranets
http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m1388/6_25/79593582/p1/article.jhtml

Definitely Not Your Father's Newspaper
http://www.poynter.org/centerpiece/050300.htm

Stanford Poynter Project

Pre-Publication Checklists - Gerry Gaffney, Infodesign.com