MODULE 2: Developing content

Presenting clear and effective online content

People are increasingly using the internet to find information, including by using mobile phones and tablets. If information is not well organized with clear headings and small chunks of text, people might give up after a few sentences. The internet has been described as promoting a "culture of impatience".

How we read	
Print	**Online**
• we read most of the words on a given page	• we read only 20-30 percent of the words that we see on a typical basis
• we read from top to bottom, and from left to right (in English)	• we read in an "F" pattern (left to right, top to bottom, left to right)
• we can read up to 250 words a minute in print	• we read 25 percent slower than in print

(table reprinted with permission from Emily Dockrill-Jones, Page&Screen Communications)

That's why it's important to think about writing a bit differently for the web than you would for print. People want to find the information they need quickly, and are not likely to scroll through long lists of information.

The principles discussed in the previous section of this module, "Designing clear written information" also apply to online content, but there are specific principles related to creating online content. Here are some things to keep in mind when writing information to be used online.

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Presenting clear and effective online content

Make your information easy to scan

- highlight key words and hyperlinks to make them stand out

- use clear headings and subheadings to help direct readers to what they need

- use vertical or "bulleted" lists rather than including several points in one sentence - if using lists, make sure that the language and punctuation in the lists are consistent from point to point

- chunk your content - make sure that information is presented in short sentences and paragraphs

- use lots of white space

- consider using images to highlight what you're saying

- avoid using a complex layout that is hard to follow on screen (for example, more than one column of text)

Get straight to the point

Place the key message at the very top of the page, where even readers who typically give up after a few lines will see it. This is often referred to as the "inverted pyramid" style of writing. See the graphic on the next page for an example of inverted pyramid presentation.

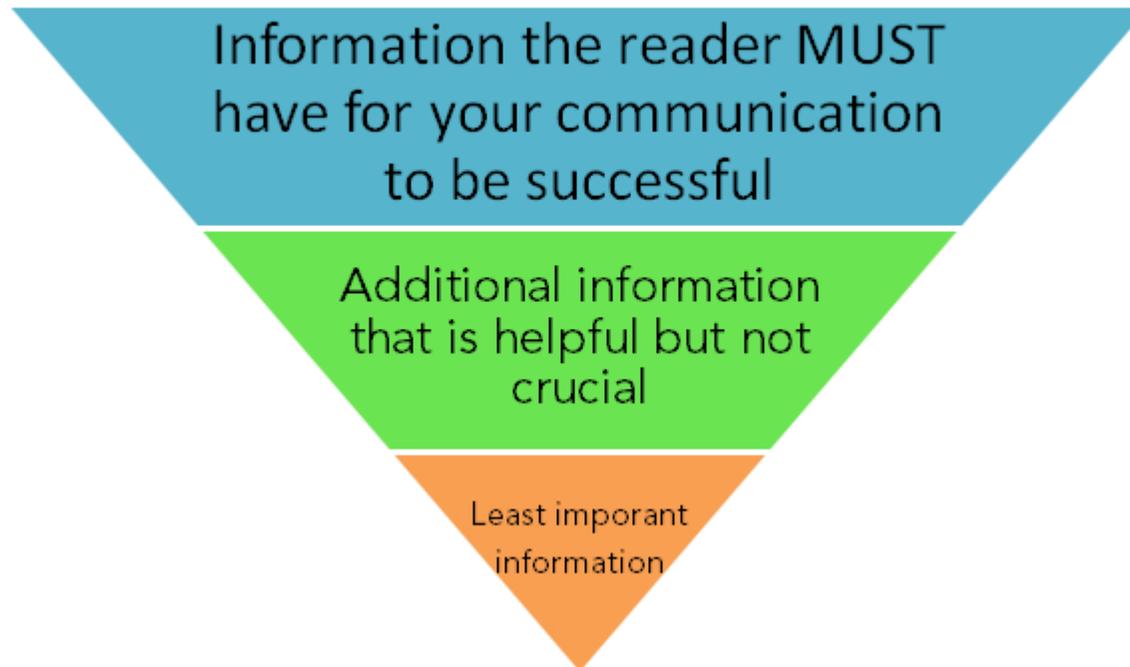**Helping Clients with Public Legal Education and Information**

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Inverted pyramid writing

Information the reader MUST have for your communication to be successful

Additional information that is helpful but not crucial

Least imporant information

What to remember when writing online content

- crucial information must go at the beginning

- people could stop reading at any time

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Be brief

- use half the word count (or less) than when writing for print format

- write in small chunks of text

Don't use Adobe or Microsoft uploads as your only type of information

If using documents produced in Adobe Portable Document Format (PDFs) or Microsoft Word or PowerPoint documents, make sure your content is available in HTML as well.

- PDFs and MS documents can be hard to find online

- some users who rely on screenreading devices can't access PDF content at all

Make your hyperlinks descriptive

- avoid making hyperlinks from phrases such as "click here" or "for more information"

- use the link to describe where the reader will be taken (for example, "You'll also find more clear design tips for print in CLEO's Better Legal Information Handbook, pages 47-50.")

Consider what your content will look like on mobile devices

- make sure that your online content is mobile-responsive and can be read on smaller devices

- think carefully about the order that items displayed horizontally on a desktop should look like when placed vertically at smaller resolutions in a mobile setting

- PDFs and MS documents are not always mobile-responsive and, even if responsive, are almost impossible to read on phones or small tablets

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Boost the chances of people finding your content

- use the words your audience uses - by using keywords that your audience might use, you will help them understand the content and will help optimize it for search engines

- use search engine optimization (SEO) techniques

- create keywords for your content - use them in the text, not just in the "metadata" or hidden descriptions for your page

- insert links to outside sources where appropriate

- try to have your URLs reflect the nested nature of your site's content (for example: www.example.com/main-topic/sub-topic/name-or-article)

Use images, graphics, video, and multimedia where possible

- any graphics, images, video, or multimedia used should reinforce the text on your page

- if using images or graphics, create "alt text" (text that describes any images you upload) so that people with limited or no vision can "access" the images

- if using videos, they should be captioned in order to be accessible to people with hearing disabilities