

**PREPARED BY JOE TORRES
FOR CAMP BLOG 1-C
BASED ON PROBLOGGER POSTS**

Writing Blog Content

How Do Users Read on the Web?

They don't!

Blogging expert Jakob Nielsen said people rarely read Web pages word by word; instead, they scan the page, picking out individual words and sentences.

So Make your blog or Web post scannable.

A research on how people read websites found that 79 percent of test users always scanned any new page they came across; only 16 percent read word-by-word.

A newer study found that users read email newsletters even more abruptly than they read websites.

As a result, Web pages have to employ scannable text, using

- **highlighted keywords** (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others)
- **meaningful sub-headings** (not "clever" ones)
- **bulleted lists**
- **one idea per paragraph** (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph)
- **the inverted pyramid style**, starting with the conclusion
- **half the word count** (or less) than conventional writing

The same study also found that **credibility** is important for Web users because it is unclear who is behind information on the Web and whether a page can be trusted.

Credibility can be increased by:

- high-quality graphics
- good writing

- use of outbound hypertext links

Links to other sites show that the authors have done their homework and are not afraid to let readers visit other sites.

Note that users detest "marketese"; the promotional writing style with boastful subjective claims ("hottest ever") that currently is prevalent on the Web.

Web users are busy: they want to get the straight facts.

Also, credibility suffers when users clearly see that the site exaggerates.

Knowing this – how should bloggers who want to communicate effectively write?

Make your blog or posts "**Scannable**".

Most people read online by scanning the page for **individual words or phrases, headings and other visual cues**.

Studies have shown that reading from a screen is more tiring and therefore about 25% slower than reading from paper – hence scanning becomes a technique that most employ.

Is your Blog Scannable? It's a pretty simple thing to test.

Ask a friend who is not familiar with your site to take a quick look at a few of your recent posts. Give them 15 to 30 seconds on each post, at the end of which you ask them what the post was about. You'll quickly get a sense of how they've interacted with your blog.

Techniques to Make your Blog Scannable

Good bloggers keep this in mind as they write and will employ a variety of techniques to make their posts easier to read. Some of these techniques include:

- **Lists** – Posts with bullet point lists in them get linked to **A LOT** more than similar length posts written in of an essay style.
- **Formatting** – Use **bold**, **CAPITALS**, *italics*, underlining, teletext to emphasize points. Don't go overboard as you run the risk of frustrating your reader. Also consider changing font size, color and style to draw your readers eyes to your main points.
- **Headings and Sub Headings** – Large, Bold words that act as visual cues of what is happening in the content are effective ways of drawing readers further into articles.

- **Pictures** – Research shows that readers eyes are drawn down the page by pictures. Place them cleverly by your key points (especially when they closely relate to the content) and you have more of a chance of getting readers to read full articles.
- **Borders/Blockquotes** – boxes around quotes and key points can similarly get the attention of readers.
- **Space** – don't feel you have to fill up every inch of your screen – rather create spaces because they help readers not to feel overwhelmed and again tend to draw readers eyes to what is inside such space.
- **Get to the Point** – try to be succinct with your points.
- **Don't Bury your Points** – one trap many of us fall into is to bury our main points deep within content where it's unlikely to be noticed. If you have a key point make sure you say it up front. You can expand upon it later but get your message across in the first few sentences if possible.
- **Find creative ways** to reinforce your main point throughout your post.'
- **Don't Introduce too many New Ideas** in one post – once again this helps to avoid overwhelming readers with information all at once. If you want to cover many ideas that relate to one another consider a series of posts that link to each other.

If your site and its posts are not easily scannable you run the risk of losing your reader to another blog that is.

Post Length – How Long Should a Blog Post Be?

We might as well continue exploring the topic of writing good content with a topic that has been debated by bloggers rather hotly over the years, the length of the optimum post. There are a number of ways of looking at it:

- **Reader Attention Span** – It is pretty well documented that the typical web reader has a short attention span when it comes to reading content online. Research shows that average blog readers stay 96 seconds per blog. Whatever the number – it's generally not long. As a result many webmasters purposely keep their content length down to a level that is readable in short grabs.
- **SEO** – There is a fairly strong opinion among those considered experts in **Search Engine Optimization** that both extremely short and extremely long web pages are not ranked as highly as pages that are of a reasonable length. Of course no one really knows how many words are ideal – but the general opinion seems to be that a page of at least **250 words** are probably a reasonable length. Similarly, many advise keeping pages under 1000 words.

- **Quantity of Posts** – One theory that goes around is that shorter posts allow you to write more posts and that more posts are better for generating readership with **RSS** and in Search Engines. Some believe this is what sites like **Engadget** and **Gizmodo** do with their high number of short posts which make up the majority of their content.
- **Topic/Genre** - The type of post that you're writing will often determine it's length. For example when writing a review of a product you'll generally write a longer post than when you write a news related post where you link to something someone else has written.
- **Comprehensive Coverage of the Topic** - Ultimately this has to be the main criteria that bloggers go with. You should write enough to comprehensively cover your topic and then stop. Long posts for the sake of them are not a wise move – but so are short ones that don't cover the topic well.

Using Titles Effectively on Blogs

First impressions are important.

Outside of the design of your blog, perhaps the best way of creating that impression is through your post's title.

Titles are so important on many fronts – including:

- **Grabbing Attention in Search Engines** – Head over to Google and type in virtually any word you can think of and you'll often find millions of results. The interesting thing is that for most search results in Google (and other SE's) there is very little for readers to go by in deciding which result to click on. There is a title, a short excerpt and a URL. The most highlighted of these is the title and I believe it is key in getting SE referral clicks.
- **Getting RSS Readers Attention** – in a very similar way titles have the ability to grab the attention of those following your blog via RSS in news aggregators. Even if your feeds are full post feeds rather than excerpts it's likely that most news aggregator readers scan the titles of posts for things that interest them rather than reading full text. The same principle is true in other indexes and directories like Technorati, del.icio.us, digg etc
- **Loyal Readers** – Good titles also impact the way your loyal readers interact with your blog. As we've already mentioned – web users scan pages and one of the best ways to make them pause as they roll their eyes down your site is to capture their attention with a good title that intrigues them enough to slow down their frantic web surfing and actually read some of the content that you've poured time and energy into.
- **Search Engine Optimization** – While there are many factors that contribute to how search engines rank a page of your blog, one of the most powerful onsite factors are the words that you use in the title of that page. This means making sure that the titles of your posts end up being in the <title tags> of your page. Also important for SEO with respect to

titles, in the opinion of many, is that your post titles form the basis of your URL structure and that your titles are live links.

Using Titles Successfully

There are many strategies that successful bloggers use to draw attention to their posts with titles. There is no real right or wrong and as with many aspects of blogging what is a 'good title' is a little subjective. Having said this – you might want to consider these six factors in writing titles for your blog posts:

1. **Keep it Simple** – Most research into titles seem to argue that the most effective titles are short, simple and easy to understand. While breaking these rules can help grab attention (see below) they can also confuse, frustrate and put a glazed look in the eyes of potential readers. Shorter titles are also good for Search Engines – keep it under 40 or so characters and you'll ensure the whole title appears in search results.
2. **Grab Attention** - Good titles set your posts apart from the clutter around them and then draw readers into your post. Grabbing attention might happen using tactics of 'shock', 'big claims', 'controversy' or even 'confusion'. While these tactics do work at getting people in – it should also be said that they can do more damage than good if the rest of your post doesn't live up to the promises your title makes. By all means try to grab attention – just 'trick' your readers into thinking you'll provide them with something you can't give them.
3. **Meet a Need** – An effective title draws people into reading more because they feel you've got something to say that they NEED to hear. Indexes like del.icio.us illustrate just how effective this is. Quite often the articles that get to the top of the list are 'how to...' or 'tutorial' type articles that show readers that they will learn how to solve a problem or need that they might have.
4. **Describe** – Some readers will be drawn into a post by a cryptic title that doesn't tell them much about what they'll be reading – but the majority of readers need to know something about what they'll find if they read further. Titles should describe (in a word or few) what readers will get in the main post.
5. **Use Key Words** – As mentioned above – titles are a powerful part of SEO. If you want to maximize their power you need to consider using the keywords that you want your post to be found with in your title in some way. This of course is challenging when you are attempting to 'keep it simple' and to also 'grab attention and intrigue' – but it can be done. Words at the start of titles are thought to be more powerful than words at the end when it comes to SEO.
6. One last tip on titles – **Take your time with your titles**. Many bloggers pour a lot of effort into writing engaging and interesting posts – but then just slap any old title onto it without realizing that in doing so they might be ensuring that their post is never read.

Treat your title as a **mini advertisement** for your work. Take at least a few minutes before hitting publish to not only make sure your post is in order – but that your title is going to do everything it can to maximize the chances that people will engage with what you have to say.