Developing web content for learning

Focus on what is important
Create easier to read content

Before you start
How will students actively use the content of your course? Consider activities students can undertake to go beyond reading, watching and listening.

Is there content that you can reuse? Can you direct your students to excellent resources that already exist? Can you rework resources you already have?

Developing content students use
In many cases, getting students to read is difficult. The Internet has not made this easier.

How you deliver content affects students. Identify what makes your content interesting. Use your own voice and style. Optimise your content to help students read, listen and watch.

Content that people read generally has:

- Important information first
- Fewer words
- Short, strong sentences in the active voice
- Short, meaningful headings
- Bullet point lists
- Meaningful text formats
- Text-friendly hyperlinks
- Strategic image use

There are many ways to develop content. A useful process is:

1. Start with the outcome: what are the learning objectives?
2. Explore the key questions.
3. Outline the title and headings.
4. Fill in the gaps.
5. Edit and test.

These points are expanded in the following sections.

These guides focus on text-based content, but the same guidance and processes work for audio and video content (with the added stage of recording).
Effective web content

Important information first
Place the most important information at the top. If you are going to lose readers, make sure they read the most important message. Alternatively, make sure you draw your reader into your content.

Fewer words: as concise as possible
People don’t read on the Web: people skim text on the Web. People are more likely to read when there is less to read.

Short, strong sentences
Write with the active voice. Begin your sentences with strong subjects and verbs. Tell the reader who is acting and what the actor is doing. This keeps the important information at the front and condenses your text.

Short, meaningful headings
Meaningful headings and subheadings help people find what they are looking for and encourage further reading.

Bullet point lists
- Bullet points attract attention.
- Reading a bulleted list is easier than reading a paragraph.
- Not everything makes sense in bullet points.
- You can have too many bullet points.
- A stem sentence is useful for introducing a bullet list.

Meaningful text formats
Bold and italics draw attention. Use these formats to consistently and sparingly to highlight important information.
Don’t underline or colour text unless it is a link; otherwise you will confuse your readers.
Avoid ALL CAPS; it is more difficult to read because it changes the shapes of words.

Text-friendly hyperlinks
Hyperlinks are a huge advantage of online content. Links connect the reader with sources and further content.
Pick user-friendly text for links. Make the link say what it is. Instructions like ‘Click here’ are not informative on their own. Providing full URLs interrupts the flow of content.
Provide links that don’t fit the flow of your content at the end.

Strategic image use
Images dominate text. Use visuals that reinforce or replace text. Position images as close as possible to related text.

Writing for the Web
1. Start with the outcome
Start with the learning objectives. What do you want students to learn from this content?
Identify productive questions. What concepts do your students not yet understand but must accept at the end? These are the questions you must address to achieve your goal. You must understand your students’ perspective to do this.

2. Outline the title and subheadings
Your title will ideally cover the questions: what are you teaching with this content? Why should your students care? Subheadings should then address the major questions your students will face with this content.

3. Fill in the gaps
Answer the question of each subheading.
Avoid tangents and digressions.

4. Edit and test
Review your work:
- Test it – will it achieve the objective?
- Is anything missing?
- Can you make it shorter?
More useful information:

- http://styleguide.yahoo.com/writing/