

# “Writing for the Web”

## 0UC14 – Lecture 4

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[www.inventingeurope.eu](http://www.inventingeurope.eu)

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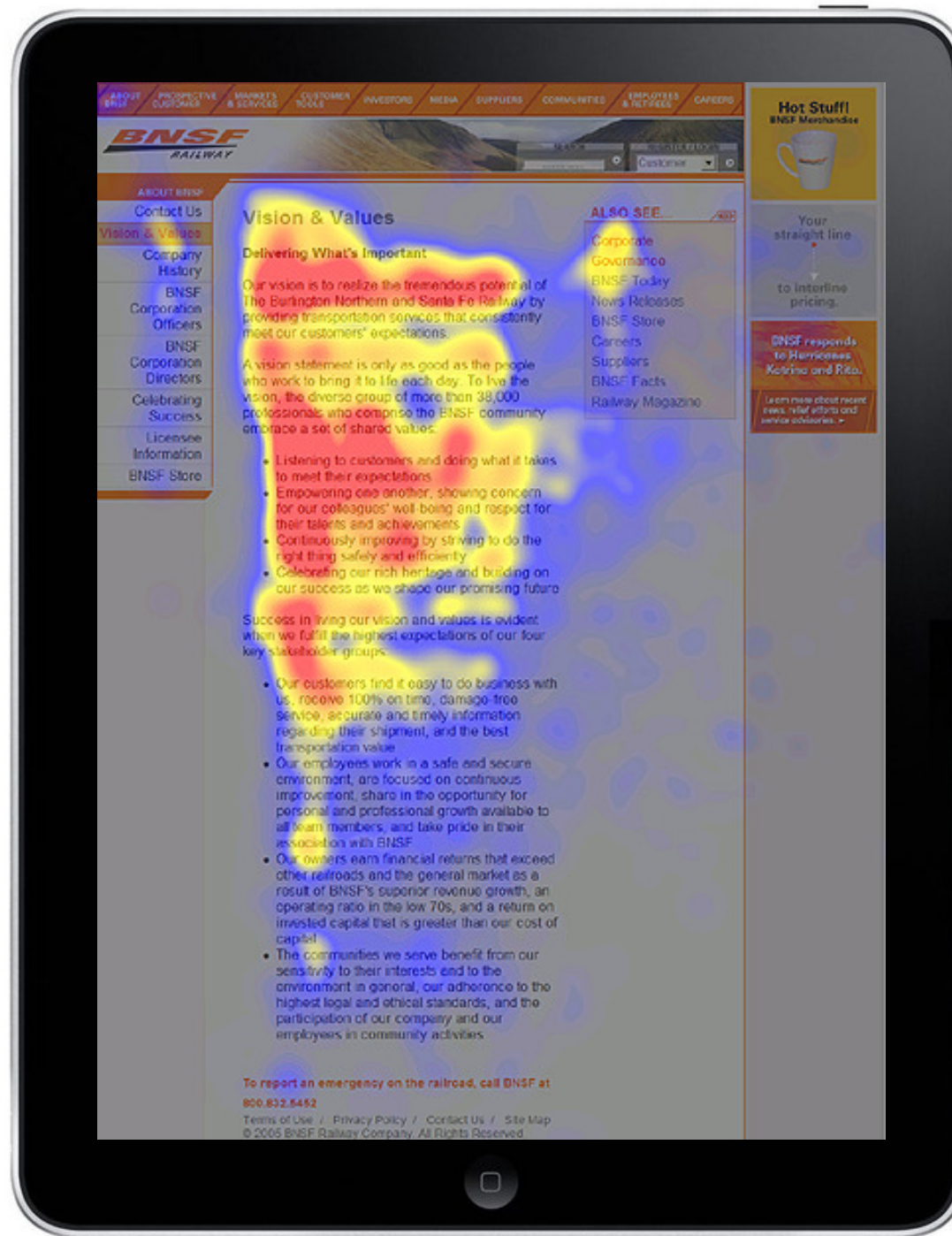
# Writing for the Word Wide Web

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Who of you ever writes for, or has ever written for, the web? (e.g. blogs, reviews...)**
- **What makes writing for the internet different from writing for e.g. a newspaper?**

# Why is web writing different?

- **Technical reasons: screens inferior to print**
  - Lower resolution (tired eyes)
  - Different orientation (neck strain)
  - Solution: technical fixes (e.g. better fonts, higher ('retina') resolution, tablet computers)
- **Behavioral reasons: people read differently**
  - Scanning instead of reading: 79% scan vs. 16% word-for-word (source: useit.com)



# So what lessons can we learn from this?

Key elements to consider are:

1. Title
2. Lenght
3. Structure
4. Language

# Ad 1: Title

**QUESTION:** What is the function of a title...

**1. ...for an academic book?**

→ Accurate & comprehensive description of what the reader can expect:

*“Cultural Legitimacy and Innovation Journeys: A New Perspective Applied To Dutch and British Nuclear Power”*

**2. ...for a news article?**

→ GRABBING ATTENTION!





# What does this mean for your story title?

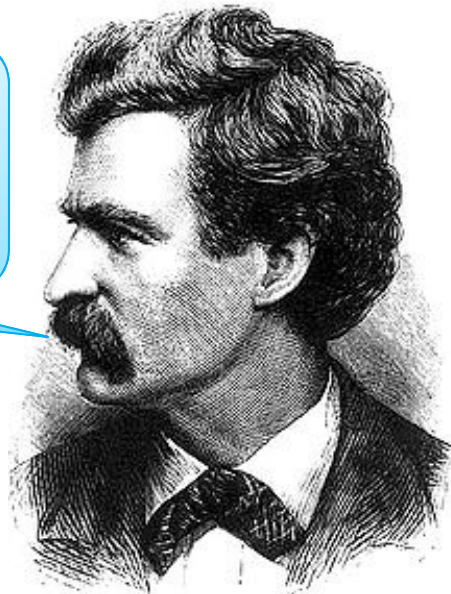
- People don't click on your story by accident: they select it from the menu (or from Google results) based on its title.
- So, also for a Virtual Exhibit tory/story, attention grabbing is key.
- ...but then again, you're not writing for a tabloid, so keep it short, informative and direct.
- Some examples from [www.inventingeurope.eu](http://www.inventingeurope.eu)
  - *“Making Ends Meet: the Gotthard Tunnel”*
  - *“Mountains, Myths and Maps”*
  - *“ELDO: the European Space Flop”*

## Ad 2: Length (slide 1 of 2)

- **“Snack sized”**: shorter = better!
- **For every word, sentence & paragraph, ask: “is this really necessary”?** If “no”, then delete it!
- **Once you’ve finished, try to make it 10% shorter still!**
- **It’s (more) difficult to write short than long!**

“I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.”

- *Mark Twain*





# Length (slide 2 of 2)

“Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors), Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166), Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum (100,000), Carhenge (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).”

control  
group

“In 1996, six of the best-attended attractions in Nebraska were Fort Robinson State Park, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum, Carhenge, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park.”

58%  
usability  
increase

**Source: useit.com**

# Ad 3: Structure

- Often-taught “basic rule”: stories have a beginning, a middle and end.
- But for web writing, this ‘basic rule’ should be broken: Use an inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion / main point.
- Paragraphs should be short (1-2 phrases)

~~The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. “Where shall I begin, please, your Majesty?” he asked. “Begin at the beginning”, the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”~~

- Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland



# Ad 4: Language (slide 1 of 2)

- **Mind your spelling, grammar and punctuation.** Mistakes are like obstacles that your reader trips over: more than 1 and he/she will click the back button...
- **Think of your audience:** who are you trying to impress? (e.g. the Intellectual Agenda from Assignment 1...)
- **Adapt you language** to that audience.

# Language (slide 2 of 2)

- **For everything you write, ask yourself:**
  1. **Is this clear?**
  2. **Is there a simpler way to say this?**
  3. **Is there a shorter way to say this?**
- **Don't exaggerate (“greatest X of all time”): your readers won't believe you & get annoyed.**

# Lets see how the Virtual Exhibit scores...

**Read the story on the next slide, with these questions in mind:**

- **Title:** Q: attention grabber?
- **Lenght:** Q: short enough?
- **Structure:** Q: 1-2 lines?  
Q: inverted piramid?
- **Language:** Q: clear and simple language?



## The birth of the cool

Like televisions, home refrigerators were produced well before the Second World War, but it was not until the decades after 1945 that they became commonplace in European kitchens. In fact, various forms of refrigerator were invented during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Initially, they were mostly used in industry, such as at the Guinness brewery in Dublin, which installed refrigerator units in 1896. In the USA, some automobile companies acquired refrigerator manufacturers and began selling individual refrigerators in addition to individual automobiles, as when General Motors acquired the Guardian Refrigerator company and changed its name to Frigidaire in 1918.

Adapting the devices to individual homes – and adapting homes to the devices – would take many years. Especially before the Second World War, many refrigerator models ran on gas rather than electricity, making them adaptable to a wide variety of homes.

[More about this object](#)



**Refrigerator, 1935, Etna**



# ...and now it's your turn! Some tips:

1. Pick a story on [www.inventingeurope.eu](http://www.inventingeurope.eu) that you like (or better still: pick a few)
2. Analyze it (using the checklist we used):
  - Title
  - Length
  - Structure
  - Language
3. ...then try to imitate it! Don't wait for inspiration: just start writing (1% inspiration, 99% perspiration)

**NB. imitation is good, but plagiarism is bad (you'll fail the course).**

**That's all for today...see you next week!**

**DEAR INTERNET...**

