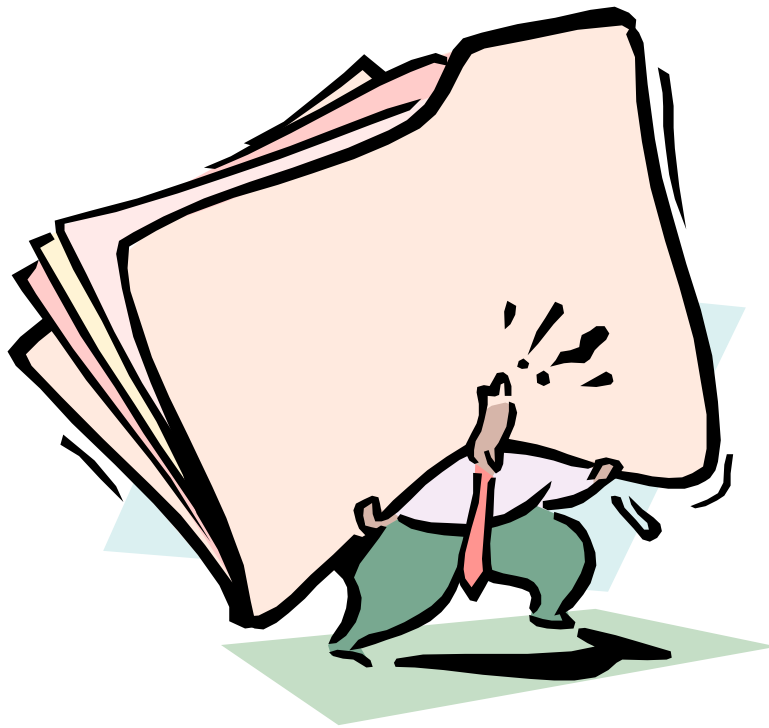


# Creating a website with style and substance



Part 1: Substance

A recommended process for designing or redesigning your website:

**Step 1:** Look at the mission of your organization.

**Step 2:** Determine your audience.

**Step 3:** Develop goals for your site.

**Step 4:** Determine what content should be included: what content meets your goals and the needs of your users?

**Step 5:** Collect your content: determine what content already exists on your site (if it already exists) and in other places.

**Step 6:** Organize this content.

**Step 7:** Re-write the content for your website.

**Step 8:** Make the content look more interesting, professional, consistent, and navigable.

## Exercise 1: Audience, Goals, and Content

In this exercise, you will brainstorm possible audiences, goals, and content for your library's website based on what you know about your library and your library's mission.

**Some possible audiences:**

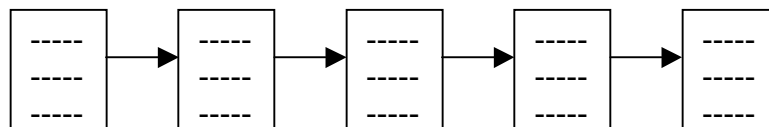
**Some possible goals:**

**Some possible content:**

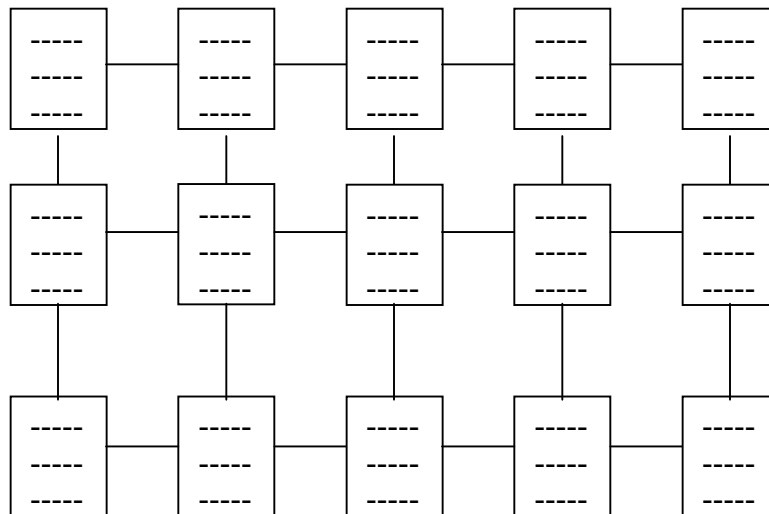
## Creating a structure for your site

- It is important for your site to have a structure. This creates a predictable and logical environment for your users.
- It is important that your structure and the organization of your site reflect what is important to your audience.
- There are 4 basic information structures for written content (from Web Style Guide):

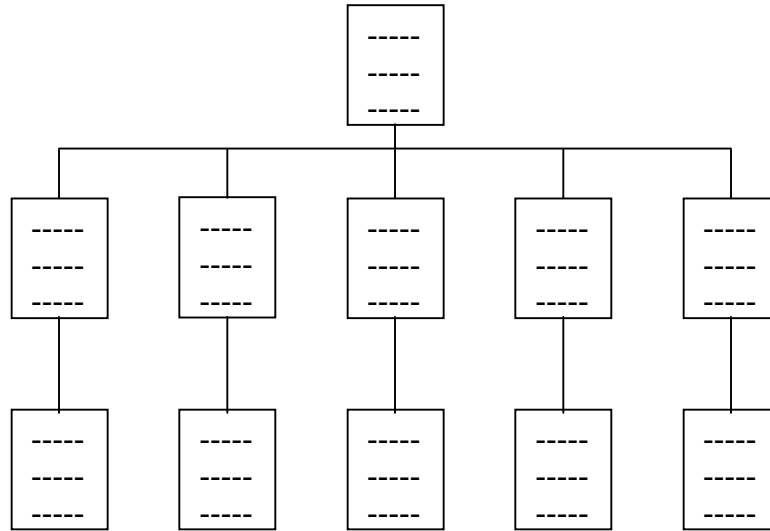
1. **Sequences:** Content is placed in a logical series. Users go through the content by clicking on links that move them through the content linearly. An example is a tutorial. A visual diagram of a site arranged as a sequence would look like this:



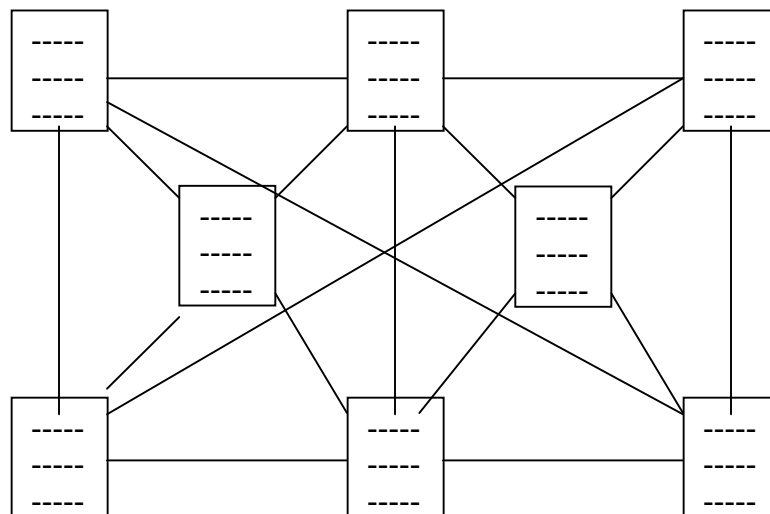
2. **Grids:** Content is interrelated and must share a uniform structure of headings and subheadings. Users can jump from topic to topic at any level of the structure, or go through the content for one topic. Procedural manuals are an example. A visual diagram of a site arranged as a grid would look like this:



3. **Hierarchies:** This is the best way to organize complex groups of information. This structure has a home page with subareas. Material must be well-organized for this to work. Most web sites are arranged in this way. A visual diagram of a site arranged as a hierarchy would look like this:



4. **Webs:** Content is freely organized. Dense links are available to other parts of this site, and to other sites. This structure is difficult for users to understand and to predict. A visual diagram of a site arranged as a hierarchy would look like this:



- No links on your pages should just “jump out at you”. Things should be categorized and organized.
- Some things to keep in mind about hierarchies:

One advantages of creating a well-designed hierarchy of pages is that a site map, or table of contents, can easily be created for your site. This can help users with navigation.

The important content in your site should be as close to the top of the hierarchy as possible.

Try to make your hierarchy 4-5 levels deep or less. Each level means an extra click for users. More choices with fewer levels is better than fewer choices with more levels.

## Exercise 2: Organizing content

In this exercise, you will take the list of items from the Adams County, PA web site (<http://www.adamslibrary.org>) and create a hierarchy for it. Try to create a hierarchy that is only 3-4 levels deep.

## Content for your home page:

From the content on your home page, users should be able to answer these four questions:

1. What is this?
2. What do they have here?
3. What can I do here?
4. Why should I be here?

To help users answer these questions, include the following on your home page:

- Site identification.
- Mission: What is the purpose of this site?
- Navigation through your site.
- Shortcuts.
- Content promos and timely content.
- A welcome blurb: keep this brief!
- Tagline: this short statement, usually next to the site identification, is a clear, informative 6-8 word blurb that conveys what this site is about and its clear benefit. This should be something that tells the user what value this site has for them.

## Elements to be included on all pages:

- **Last update date or a creation date or both.**
- **Contact information:** street address, phone, email or web form for feedback or content contact, URL of home page, some combination.
- **Consistent navigation, including a link to the home page.**
- **Site identification:** logo or some indication on every page that this page belongs to your site.
- **A copyright statement**, if required or a link to a copyright statement.
- **Author of the page.**
- **Enough content to justify the page.**
- **Metadata:** at least a title and description. Keep both of these elements short: description should be 150-200 characters, titles should be 2-6 words.
- **A title.**

More information about the title:

- Titles should be clear and concise. Aim for 2-6 words.
- All pages should have a unique title.
- The title of the page should match the link that the user clicked on to get there.
- The information in the title should be “front-loaded”: that is, the most valuable information should appear at the beginning of the title.
- The title should appear at the top of the page, and graphically frame the content it is labeling, but it should be far enough away from the site identification logo to clearly be the title.
- Eliminate the words “a”, “an”, and “the” from the beginning of titles.
- Try to incorporate the name of the company, organization, or web site, particularly at the end of the title (for the metadata titles).

## Exercise 3: Home page and “all page” content

In this exercise, you will look at the two pages from the Adams County, PA website, the home page and the library news page. Determine what content could be added to these pages to make the page more useful to their users.

**Home page (<http://www.adamslibrary.org>):** What content could they add to help their users answer the 4 questions users should be able to answer from the home page?

**Library News Page (<http://www.adamslibrary.org/newwebpage/librarynews.htm>):** What elements (that should appear on ALL content pages within a site) would make this page more useful to users?

## Writing for the web

Ideally, a web page will be 1-3 pages in length when printed. What do you do with longer documents?

- If possible, rewrite the document into “chunks” that can stand on their own. But avoid dividing a long document into pieces that may not be logical.
- If you rewrite a document into “chunks” and people may want to also print the document, provide a link to print the entire document at once. This link could point to a PDF version.
- If you cannot make the document into shorter, logical chunks, provide a table of contents and links to return the user to the top. When you provide a table of contents, the links should be as specific as possible, and each level of the document should be linked.

The goal of writing for the web is to get users information as quickly as possible with as little reading as possible. Here are some methods to do this:

- Use the “inverted pyramid” style of writing, which is often used in newspapers. Start with a summary of the entire content of the page or a conclusion that would be drawn from the content. Then gradually add detail to the page, providing the most important details first, and putting smaller details last.
- Limit each paragraph to one main idea.
- Make the first sentence of the paragraph a topic sentence.
- Use simple sentence structure.
- Avoid complex words.
- Write as concisely as possible. Use 50% of the words you would have used on paper to express the same thing.

- “Front-load” everything. Put distinguishing and important information at the beginning of headings, paragraphs, list elements, etc.
- Break up long, continuous blocks of text with headings, lists, typographical emphasis to highlight information, and white space between paragraphs.
- Avoid “happy talk”, including long welcome messages and lengthy cheerful introductions.
- Avoid marketing fluff.
- Avoid instructions.
- Expand abbreviations at least once on every page that the abbreviation is used on.
- Avoid slang, jargon, and specialized meaning of familiar words.
- Limit the number of links you place within text. Group minor, less important links at the bottom of the documents.
- Include some explanation to let users know where they are going if you do include links in text.
- Avoid using “Click here” for links. Try using a descriptive phrase instead.

### **Updating content:**

- Update your content frequently.
- Calendars and event lists should be updated as often as possible to remove out-of-date events.
- Do not include pages that require frequent updating (News, Calendars, “What’s New”) unless you are committed to maintaining them.

## Exercise 4: Writing for the web

In this exercise, you will take the information from the Adams County, PA “Community and System Profile” and re-write it to make it more “web-friendly”.

To access this information, go to [www.adamslibrary.org/INDEX4~1.HTM](http://www.adamslibrary.org/INDEX4~1.HTM) and click on the “Community & System Profile Information” link.

## Homework

### **For everyone:**

In just one week, you will forget a large percentage of what we talked about today, and you will probably lose a lot of the motivation you may feel right now for redesigning your site. Your assignment is to take a first step in redesigning your site in the next week. This can be setting a time to talk to your staff about the goals, content, and audience for your website, writing some of this information yourself, or talking to patrons and thinking about what may be helpful for them.

### **For those of you returning for Part 2:**

Choose one site that you use that you think is especially professional, usable, and attractive. Bring the name and URL of the site with you to Part 2.

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