

# Make your website easy to use

## ① Use plain language

Use language that is simple and direct. Write as if you were speaking. And imagine the person you are speaking to is not an expert in your field.

*Remember:* The average American reads comfortably at the 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> grade level. The closer your text is to that reading level, the greater the number of people who can use your site.

Learn how to test for reading grade level at: [www.transcend.net/library/tools.html](http://www.transcend.net/library/tools.html).

Here's an example of plainer writing.

### This text is at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level:

#### **Uniform Civil Affidavit of Indigency**

This Uniform Civil Affidavit of Indigency is an optional form for those who believe they qualify for financial relief. If the judge determines that you qualify for financial relief, the filing fee may be deferred; however it will not be forgiven.

### Using plain language brings it to 5<sup>th</sup> grade level:

#### **What if I cannot pay the filing fees?**

If you cannot afford to pay the filing fees at this time, fill out this form.

## ② Use readable fonts

Use *sans serif* fonts to optimize the readability of your text.

**E** *Sans serif letters are plain.*

*Serif* fonts do not stand up well to online display or low-resolution printing.

**E** *Serif fonts use fine cross strokes.*

## ③ Organize your text intuitively

Long sections begin with a "Table of Contents" so users can quickly go to the section they want.

- **Put the most important information at the top.** Most readers spend only a *few seconds* on a page. Typically they read only headings and subheads. Get your reader to spend more time with your material by putting the key messages in the headings, in easy-to-understand language.
- **Use fewer words, shorter sentences, and familiar language.** Proficient readers can visually capture larger chunks of words all at once. But marginally proficient readers' reading is less automatic; they often read word by word. This makes it harder for them to decode, contextualize, and remember the text. Keep your text lean; concise text is a good fit for readers of all levels.  
**Tip:** Too much information repels users.
- **Group related information together.** Users can get lost and frustrated with too many cross-references or links.
- **Divide large blocks of text into smaller chunks.** Clear subheads followed by short paragraphs work best. This allows users to quickly find what they want.

## ④ Make your site mobile-friendly

Accessing the Internet with a mobile device (cell phones, tablets and more) is on the rise. Design and test your site to ensure that it works on both large and small displays. That means:

- make scrolling easy,
- use images and layout that keep file sizes small, and
- make your text columns short and narrow.

Learn how to test your site for mobile device display at: <http://webtide.wordpress.com/2009/09/14/how-to-test-websites-for-mobile-devices/>

## Users find this layout intuitive:

The screenshot shows the Marin County Elections Department Official Website. The page has a top navigation bar with links like 'County Home', 'Board of Supervisors', 'Contacts', 'Departments', 'Job Postings', 'My Marin', and 'Services & Info'. Below this is a main navigation bar with 'Home', 'Contact Us', and 'Reports'. The main content area is titled 'Marin County Elections' and features a breadcrumb trail: 'You are here: Home Page > Polling Places'. There are several callout boxes with lines pointing to specific features on the page:

- Top and/or left navigation** provides links to other areas of your site. Sites that use both top and left navigation should put more general links in top navigation.
- A search function** that tolerates spelling mistakes is best.
- Breadcrumbs** at the top of the page show where you are now and how you got there.
- The right navigation** contains important information or links.
- The last updated date** tells users how current the information is.
- Site maps** help navigation, and they are a *must* for accessibility.
- A Table of Contents** at the start of each section lets you easily see if this is the page you need. Links quickly take you to the right spot.

The page footer includes copyright information, a site map link, and the last updated date: August 24, 2011.

## ⑤ Use an intuitive web layout

Your site should contain **4 clearly defined areas**:

1. Top and/or left navigation
2. Table of Contents at the start of each section
3. Breadcrumbs
4. Right navigation

### Also include:

- Site map
- Search function
- Date last updated

## ⑥ Test your website's usability

Your website should meet your users' needs *and* ADA and § 508 requirements. There are many ways to find out if your site works the way you want it to:

### Can users easily accomplish common tasks?

Recruit typical users to test your site, and create a *field test instrument* to find out whether users can accomplish common, important tasks.

*Example:* For the Marin County Elections site, we wanted to make sure that users of their web page could easily:

1. Check whether they are registered to vote, and
2. Find their polling place.

Your field test should identify areas that need improvement.

### Is your website accessible to users with disabilities?

Test for ADA and § 508 accessibility problems at: [www.Cynthiasays.com](http://www.Cynthiasays.com)

### Is your website accessible to the colorblind?

Test your use of color at: [colorfilter.wickline.org](http://colorfilter.wickline.org). One out of 7 men is thought to be color-blind.

