

## **GUIDE TO WRITING FOR THE INTERNET**

This is a brief guide to writing content for the LTDS Blog or website. It is by no means exhaustive, it's just a quick reference point to avoid common mistakes in writing for the web and some other print media.

**The name of the game is really to keep everything clear and concise, without overly relying on jargon or acronyms.**

**If you are rewriting website content or creating something for the blog, and want someone to look over it before sending live then Claire, Katie C or Suzanne are happy to help out with proofreading.**

### **Writing for the LTDS website**

#### **KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER:**

##### **Audience:**

Think about the person you are writing for: they are probably a new member of staff (academic or administrative), an external user or an experienced member of staff looking for information about a new role or responsibility. You should be assume your reader has no knowledge of Learning and Teaching at Newcastle or of the topic you are writing about, but should take care not to sound patronising. Before you start think about who you are writing for? What sort of information might they be looking for? What's the best way to help them to get it? Try to stay away from the marketing bumf. This needs to be practical answers to practical questions.

##### **Structure:**

- 1) Front Load – The first sentence/paragraph on your page should contain a really basic summary of what that page addresses. Eg: What is Blackboard? What is small group teaching? What are the University's systems of governance for?
- 2) Think about the structure of what you are writing, try to include the most important key information near the top of the page so it's easier to access.
- 3) Is it useful to put in a picture, a short video to illustrate how something works and to break up the line of the text.
- 4) Break up text with bullets and sub headings – make sure that people can navigate through easily to extract the information they need, they may only look at it for a couple of minutes, make it easy for them and they'll come back!

##### **Writing:**

- 1) Remember you are writing for staff and for a University webpage. Your tone should be informal but not too much so. See other University webpages for examples.

- 2) Keep paragraphs and sentences short – a paragraph should only not be more than five lines. Anything more looks unwieldy and is tricky to navigate or scan for useful information.
- 3) Expand acronyms in the first use – we use loads of acronyms and I wonder how many of us just nod and pretend we know what we're taking about when a new one comes up?! Break it down, make it accessible for everyone, not just those in the know.
- 4) Be ruthless – the aim is not to give the reader an exhaustive guide to a given topic but rather to offer a simple introduction and a series of links to where they can gain more information. Keep it brief and cut any information which is not essential or which can be found elsewhere.

### **Style:**

- 1) It's important to keep things looking uniform on the blog. You'll note that sub headings are used a lot throughout. If you are using a sub-heading you should use Headings 3. Note that sub-headings are not underlined.
- 2) Make sure that your page matches the style and layout of other pages.
- 3) Make sure that your page matches the font and colours of other pages.
- 4) Make sure that your page matches the tone of the writing on the other webpages. Remember not to use contractions such as 'would've', 'could've' or 'don't'. Avoid starting sentences with conjunctions such as 'and', 'because' or 'but'.

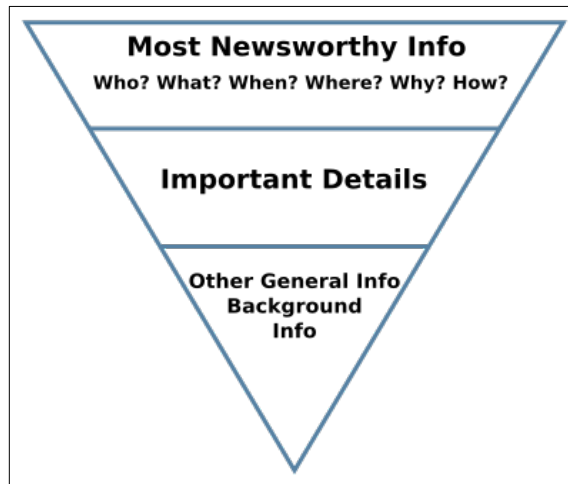
### **Proofing:**

Please read your pages carefully before submitting them.

## **Writing a blogpost**

If you're writing a post for the blog, even if it's just about a new version of a technology or a list of workshops, try to have a think about some of these. Though not always relevant, they could bring a little bit of colour to your post and draw in a bigger audience for your workshop/event. If you have an idea but are too busy to write it up, drop Katie C. an email and she'll write it up for you. If you have written something but are unsure about it, Katie C. and Suzanne are happy to proofread/edit people's stuff.

- 1) Think about what makes the post interesting, what would you say to someone to get them to read more? What is the hook?
- 2) Put that in the first paragraph and the title. Use the inverted pyramid, crucial information at the top, tapering to more technical/specific information at the bottom.



- 3) Keep it short – 400 words is sufficient for a blogpost and if you need more why not attached an additional link or information sheet?
- 4) Short and interesting title – aim to pull people in or at least describe exactly what your piece will do. Questions are good, eg: ‘Want to learn about e-portfolio?’
- 5) Keep paragraphs and sentences short – a paragraph should only contain one sentence. People should be able to scroll through and extract information quickly and easily without wading through reams of text.
- 6) Expand acronyms in the first use – we use loads of acronyms and I wonder how many of us just nod and pretend we know what we’re taking about when a new one comes up?! Break it down, make it accessible for everyone, not just those in the know.
- 7) Break up text with bullets and sub headings – make sure that people can navigate through easily to extract the information they need, they may only look at it for a couple of minutes, make it easy for them and they’ll come back!
- 8) Include a contact email and telephone extension number on the end, and think about linking to other resources or parts of the website. ‘Eg: ‘For more information see Graeme’s new webinar’ or ‘Contact Ruth Walton for more information...’.
- 9) Ensure the person writing the blog/web page is the person who puts it on the blog to make sure that their name appears as author
- 10) Always try to use a picture, it makes the whole thing far more alluring. Newcastle University have their own image library for snaps of the campus or of people crowded around a PC, you can take your own or get one with a Creative Commons license. It’s really important to find who owns the copyright and cite them accordingly.
- 11) Think about including real humans where possible. They make the whole thing seem more...human. Eg: ‘Emma Robson from CEGS said that she really hoped to be involved with more educational partnerships in the future’. This applies less to website updates, but could be a great way of livening things up.

If you're not familiar with Wordpress, here is a quick guide to adding content to the Blog. If you need help, do just ask Katie or Suzanne.

How to add a blog post to LTDS blog: <https://youtu.be/vXODMAjtZZg>

## Useful Links:

This is a great government site about how they write for their websites and blogs: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design/writing-for-gov-uk>

This is a good site for simplifying your language to make sure that what you're writing is easily read and understood by a range of audiences: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/the-a-z-of-alternative-words.html>

This is a BBC Site about writing a blogpost: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school\\_report/resources\\_for\\_teachers/9600548.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/resources_for_teachers/9600548.stm)

Lauren Laverne's blog on The Pool is a great example of how to tackle something quite complex in a concise and informal fashion but without losing too much of the nuance: <https://www.the-pool.com/news-views?filter=Lauren%27s+blog>

This is a fantastic Teaching and Learning Blog at Sheffield University:

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FRIDAY, 24 JULY 2015

## Taming the grade centre with colour

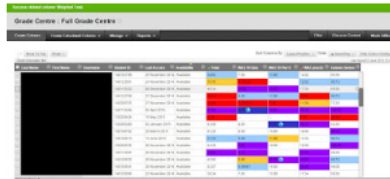
Posted by Ian D Loosby

One of those "why didn't I know you could do that" moments that I thought was worth sharing. This is where I find out that I'm the only blackboard user who didn't know about it but here goes anyway.

At the recent North England Blackboard User Group Meeting (NEBUG) there was a really useful presentation from Adam Elce (North Notts college) showcasing the blackboard templates and VLE audit framework they use. His presentation may be worth another blog post in itself but he casually threw in the fact that you can colour code student scores in the grade centre.

Now I've always found the grade centre in blackboard to be an unwieldy beast at the best of times.... very powerful but unwieldy.

In our Legal Practice course we make extensive use of MCQs but the default grade centre just displays numbers that could be out of any total, the quizzes may vary from 3 questions up to 30. A quick visit to the "manage" tab in the gradebook, drop down to "grading colour code" tick the box to enable colour coding then just build your own criteria and colour scheme.



Student	Quiz 1	Quiz 2	Quiz 3	Quiz 4	Quiz 5	Quiz 6	Quiz 7	Quiz 8	Quiz 9	Quiz 10	Quiz 11	Quiz 12	Quiz 13	Quiz 14	Quiz 15	Quiz 16	Quiz 17	Quiz 18	Quiz 19	Quiz 20	Quiz 21	Quiz 22	Quiz 23	Quiz 24	Quiz 25	Quiz 26	Quiz 27	Quiz 28	Quiz 29	Quiz 30	Total
Student 1	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Student 2	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Student 3	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Student 4	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Student 5	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

It just so happen in this one we have gone for purple for very high scores, the reds are less than 50% (a fail), dark blues are in progress and various shades represent the grade ranges in between. This

was a 30 second job to set up, .

Now the whole grade centre becomes a lot more useful as you can easily see a student's progress across the quizzes without having to remember what each score was out off. You can of course toggle colour on and off if it all gets a bit too much.

Gareth Bramley, University Teacher on our LPC course writes *"the colour coding can usefully be adapted so that it highlights various grade boundaries, and the colours make it a lot easier to assess how the students enrolled on the module have performed in each quiz"*

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<http://learningtechnologiesteam.blogspot.co.uk/>

This is also a great example of a blogpost, it's short, direct, informal in tone and has lots of pictures to draw in the reader: