WINONA STATE UNIVERSITY
WEB CONTENT GUIDE

The Winona State University Website is one of the primary sources of information for the campus community and the public. While the Office of Marketing and Communications maintains designated externally focused areas of the university Website, colleges, departments, offices, initiatives, and individuals are responsible for developing and maintaining content within the winona.edu domain.

When a variety of content editors actively contribute to and update their sites, users experience a dynamic and informative WSU Website. The following guidelines offer recommendations for developing and maintaining Web content that is accurate, timely, relevant, optimized for search engines, and representative of Winona State University.

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Content Quick Guide

GENERAL CONTENT AND COPYWRITING

Page titles
- Write titles and sub-titles that accurately and concisely express the content on the page
- Use simple and commonly employed language
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations, slogans, or “cute” titles
- Do not use the same title for multiple pages
- Use title case for titles and sub-titles

Good title: Biology Courses by Semester
Needs improvement: Course info

Good use of titles and sub-titles: [http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/evening-mba.shtml](http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/evening-mba.shtml)
Needs improvement: [http://www.smumn.edu/UndergraduateDepartment_wUgCSci.aspx](http://www.smumn.edu/UndergraduateDepartment_wUgCSci.aspx)
Organization

- Organize content in a consistent and logical way that makes sense to your audience
- Write appropriate headings and sub-headings for each section of text (see guidelines above)
- Bullet copy or write in short, one or two-sentence paragraphs (many users quickly scan copy)

Good organization: Click here to apply for admission.  
Needs improvement: Apply for admission to Winona State by visiting our application page.

Good organization: http://www.biola.edu/undergrad/apply/process.cfm

Organization relevant to audience: http://extension.washington.edu/ext/certificates/default.asp
Needs improvement: http://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/adultlearning/default.htm

Body Copy

- Communicate with the target audience using relevant, accurate, and complete information (particularly for names, dates, times, course information)
- Make copy concise, brief, and direct – is it clear; is there a simpler way to communicate this?
- Write in the active voice using simple sentences
- Divide large blocks of copy into groups that can be skimmed, using sub-headings or bullets to clarify what the content is about
- Start the page with the conclusion and a short summary of the remaining content
- Use lists that can be easily scanned
- Carefully review spelling and grammar (use www.merriam-webster.com as a standard reference)

Good use of relevant copy: http://www.ugrad.vcu.edu/admissions101/financing/index.html

Good use of concise copy: http://www.smsu.edu/Academics/Departments/English/Index.cfm
Needs improvement: http://www.uwsuper.edu/acaddept/dbe/facts/details.cfm?id=56314

Good use of “scannable” copy: http://www.northeastern.edu/sustainability/news/index.html
Needs improvement: http://sustainability.berkeley.edu/

Formatting

Templates and Style Sheets
The Office of Marketing and Communications and the WSU Webmaster provide templates and style sheets that are customizable to the needs of departments and individuals. Use of WSU templates and style sheets is recommended to provide consistency and ease of implementation and maintenance.

Text Styles
In general, follow the editorial style recommended by the WSU Office of Publications. Following are a few commonly encountered text style issues:
• Italicize the titles of books, (CDs), catalogs, paintings, plays, movies, radio and television programs, musical compositions, pamphlets, periodicals, and Web publications

• Place in quotation marks the titles of presentations, lectures, dissertations and theses, radio and television episodes, songs, essays, lectures, parts of volumes, and short stories

• Omit periods for abbreviations of degrees:  BA, BS, MA, MS, MFA, MBA, PhD

• Write bachelor’s, and master’s degrees with an apostrophe, then an “s;” it is not necessary to capitalize degrees in running text

• Avoid underlines or bold in running text; these typically indicate a link to other Web information

• In bulleted lists, the bullet is the punctuation; no other punctuation, such as a commas or semicolon, is required at the end of each item

• Use standard fonts and font sizes recommended by WSU Web style guidelines

Images

• Use photos that are sharp and well colored

• Choose images relevant to the target audience (current WSU research indicates that audiences identify with images that portray campus experiences or natural activity [instead of stiffly posed], and that include groups of people actively interacting)

• Pages with images are preferred by most audiences, but be careful of using a large number of photographs that may delay page loading

• Provide images in an appropriate format:  JPEG (photos, full-color images); PNG (line drawings, images with transparency); GIF (line drawings, low-color images, images with transparency)

• Image resolution should be 72 dpi

• For fast loading, image size should be between 40 and 100 kb

• For large PDF files, reduce the size for faster loading (in Acrobat:  Document > Reduce File Size)

• Avoid using blinking or animated images

• Update pages frequently with new images

• Include alternative text (alt tags) and captions to improve accessibility

• Check that images are free of copyright and have been granted permission for use (it is recommended that people featured in photos have a signed release on file)

Good use of sharp, attention-grabbing images:  http://bealonghorn.utexas.edu/
Needs improvement:  http://www.umich.edu/acad_research.php

Good use of relevant images:  http://www.northeastern.edu/sustainability/initiatives/index.html
Needs improvement:  http://www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/

Navigational and Contact Aids

• Consider how the user will see the page: keep navigation options above the bottom of the screen where they can be seen without scrolling (as a rule of thumb, organize navigation so that it includes no more than 6-8 options)

• Use navigation titles and links that are short, descriptive, and relevant
• As a rule of thumb, use no more than one link per paragraph of body copy
• Direct audiences to the next step or action using prompts or visual links, for example, an “Apply Now” button
• Make helpful information easy to access, for example, whom to contact, how to contact them, hours of operation, etc.

Good use of navigation aids and links: [http://www.wm.edu/campuslife/index.php](http://www.wm.edu/campuslife/index.php)
Needs improvement: [http://www.baylor.edu/campuslife/](http://www.baylor.edu/campuslife/)

Good use of navigation aids: [http://www.parent.wisc.edu/financial.html](http://www.parent.wisc.edu/financial.html)
Needs improvement: [http://www.cmich.edu/x690.xml](http://www.cmich.edu/x690.xml)

**MAINTENANCE**

Accuracy and Relevancy of Information
• Present relevant, accurate, up-to-date, and complete information
• Delete obsolete information promptly
• Frequently add useful, interesting, and timely information
• Update images to reflect current activities, interests, technology, facilities, faculty, staff, and students
• Before approving pages for publication, check for accuracy and impeccable spelling and grammar

Maintenance Schedule
• Review and update frequently changing sites as new information is added
• Review and update infrequently changing sites monthly for accuracy and relevance
• Frequently check links to ensure they are active, unbroken, and point to the intended information

**SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION**

Many users find information using search engines, such as Google. The following tips facilitate indexing by popular search engines, increasing page rank so it is more easily found among the more than one trillion sites in Google’s search engine.

• Provide concise and descriptive titles and sub-titles, using keywords (language commonly employed by users) for every page to improve search engine page rankings
• Use keywords frequently – the more a word or phrase appears, the higher its relevance score
• Write a meta description for each page (this is the snippet of text following the page title that describes page content) to improve the chances that users will recognize relevant content
• Update pages frequently to increase visits by common search engines
• Point new pages to existing pages so that search engines may find them more quickly
• Link pages to compatible services that audiences look for, for example, link “Dining” to “Housing” or “Advising” to “Course Catalog”
• Include alternative text (alt tags) and captions for images to facilitate searches
CONTENT CREATION AND MAINTENANCE QUICK GUIDE

Copy
- Concise, descriptive titles and sub-titles on every page
- Titles and sub-titles using keywords (language commonly employed and searched by audience)
- Body copy organized in a way recognized by audience
- Body copy that is easily skimmed (short paragraphs and sentences, bullets, lists)
- Copy is accurate, up-to-date, informative

Formatting
- WSU template and style sheet system
- WSU recommended font styles and sizes
- Sharp, relevant images submitted in recommended file formats and sizes
- Alternative text or captions for images to improve accessibility and search indexing
- Visible navigational aids to direct to important information

Maintenance
- Accurate, relevant, up-to-date information
- Obsolete information regularly deleted
- Review pages monthly for accurate information
- Regular checks for broken links

Search Engine Optimization
- Concise, relevant titles and sub-titles on every page
- Commonly employed words and phrases (keywords)
- Meta descriptions
- Frequent updates and addition of new information
- New pages linked to existing pages and compatible services
- Alt tags and captions for images