Purpose

WSU’s website is the primary source of information for the campus community and the public. It also serves as a vital marketing tool to attract prospective students, professionals, alumni, parents and the media. Additionally, it is a platform that fosters engagement, encouraging web visitors to become involved with our community of learners.

Importance

It is a fact that our web audience judges us based on our website quality. More importantly, they make decisions based on those judgments. For example: More than 93 percent of college-bound high-school students said they would drop a school from their search if its website didn't have the content they needed. --Noel-Levitz, 2013

Table of Contents

Pg. 2 I. Style Guide at a Glance
Pg. 3 II. Understanding Your Role & Your Audience
Pg. 4 III. Writing for Your Audience I Accessibility
Pg. 6 IV. Enhancing Site Searchability (Titles, SEO, Meta Data)
Pg. 8 V. Creating Consistent Navigation (Landing pages, Menus, Links)
Pg. 12 VI. Adding Multimedia Content (Images, Files)
I. Style Guide at a Glance

Creating and maintaining a website is complex and requires the whole WSU team to work together. It is important to ensure that we create a site that has a consistent brand image and provides our users with a pleasant web experience. This style guide will help the team create that cohesive experience across different department pages. (Page with a similar look: http://www.northamptonma.gov/73/Site-Standards)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Images</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For times use numerals and am or pm without periods or spaces. Don’t use minutes for on-the-hour times. 8am – 5:30pm or 9 - 10pm</td>
<td>Use only WSU images. S = 748x748, M = 748x400, L = 876 x400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clip art, stock photography and blinking images are not allowed.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Phone Numbers</th>
<th>Link Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>For telephone numbers use periods without spaces between. 507.457.5555</td>
<td>Do not use the terms click here, under construction, or coming soon.</td>
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<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 14, 2015 or Sunday, Nov. 14</td>
<td>Do not underline unless text is a link.</td>
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<th>Numbers</th>
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<td>Spell out First through Ninth and One through Nine.</td>
<td>Do not center text; all text should be left aligned.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Email Addresses</th>
<th>Text Color</th>
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<tr>
<td>Addresses are always spelled out and linked with “mailto” links.</td>
<td>Do not color body text. Headers and links only.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Do not use all caps text.</td>
<td>Ampersands (&amp;) are ok in headings but use “and” in body text</td>
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<tr>
<th>Italic</th>
<th>Link Destination</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do not use italics.</td>
<td>Hyperlinks open in a new window unless the link is to another page on the WSU site.</td>
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I. Understanding Your Role & Your Audience

Your Role

a) Content Ownership & Management
Departments own and manage their own content because they are the experts on their own material. Each department should have a person who is responsible for updating the website. These experts will help Web Communications understand what information their users are looking for and Web Communications will help the experts display that information in the best way possible. Content owners provide the information, but the web team has a duty to uphold the web standards and present that information in a way that meets the need of users.

b) Single Sourcing
To ensure accuracy, information must not be reproduced but rather "single sourced" by linking to the official web page that is the "owner" or origin of the information.

• If you do not control and update the information, link to the page that does. For example, single sources include the catalogs (including program requirements and course descriptions) academic calendars and financial aid information.

• Use caution when duplicating content from our site and outside sites, as it could lead to copyright infringement litigation. It is permissible to use small amounts of content, which must include a link to the content’s original source. (Multiple sources of content can create inconsistency and confusion)

Your Audience

b) Understanding Your Audience
1. It is critical to create site content and navigation with the web visitor in mind. Focus on what your users want to know.

• **Who** visits your site? (Current or prospective students, alumni, staff, the community?)

• **Why** are they likely visiting your site?

• **What** information or resources are they seeking? What tasks do they wish to accomplish? What questions do they ask on a regular basis?
II. Writing for Your Audience

Users "read" the web differently than print. In fact, often, they don't read, they scan. Therefore, web content should be written and formatted in easily digestible chunks. Web copy should be: clear, relevant, error-free, brief, scannable.

Relevant:
- When writing content, ask yourself: Do my visitors need to know this? Do they want to? If not, cut it.
- Include all relevant information on the page topic. Avoid sending users to multiple pages to get the whole story.

Clean, Clear and Engaging:
- Don’t try to put every detail on every page. Each page should have a clear, singular purpose or users will get lost/frustrated and leave.
- Don’t bore visitors with wordy language and filler information. Instead use common language (avoid jargon, acronyms and wordy language).
- Use photos, video and brief, personable writing to hold visitors’ attention and leave a powerful, lasting, favorable impression.
- Leave users with a call to action if possible.

Consistent Style:
- Left-justify all text, including headings
- Use Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3, etc., to adjust text. Do not manually adjust font size or color.
- Communicate with the target audience using accurate, and complete information
- Write in the active voice using simple sentences
- Divide large blocks of copy into groups that can be skimmed, using sub-headings and bullets
- Start the page with a short intro summary of the content
- Use lists that can be easily scanned
- Do not underline words that are not links
- Do not use all caps
- Do not use italics
- Limit the use of bolded text to keywords or phrases
- Carefully review spelling and grammar (use merriam-webster.com as a standard)
- Do not publish until content is complete, never use “under construction” or “coming soon” messages.

a) Using and Writing for Homepage Tabs

Homepage tabs are used to spotlight people, events, news and initiatives. The content we choose to spotlight tells our visitors what we find important. Tabs help tell our story and draw visitors in. It’s important that tab content is held to homepage standards – accurate, high-quality, and consistent aesthetics.
• **Tab Usage**
In order to maintain organizational integrity of the overall WSU website, use of the tab feature is reserved only for top-level sites. Tabs are **dynamic** (not static) content that serve to aggregate subsets of related information.

• **Tab Box Heading**
Keep headings to **30 characters** w/ spaces.

• **Tab Box Image**
All tab images must be routed through **Creative Services**, who apply a special aesthetic treatment (standardized size, rounded corners, sheen) to the image. Images are to be submitted to Creative Services via an online form. Note that a turnaround time of 5 business days is requested by Creative Services:
https://mywsu.winona.edu/campusnews/forms/Lists/Tab%20Button%20Request/NewForm.aspx

• **Tab Box Content**
  o The content, known as a “teaser” should concisely describe the crux of the spotlight or event:
  o Paste **unformatted** text, between **100-122 characters** w/ spaces
  o Use **“bold”** button to highlight most important phrase or words of teaser
  o Titles should be no more than 3 words if short

• **Tab Text and Button Colors**
The color of the heading should match the color of the button (e.g., the “Read More” button).

**b) Accessibility**
By optimizing web accessibility you ensure that as many users as possible can use your website. You ensure that people with disabilities and reading difficulties can read your web pages and also that the website has a robustness that allows for most user agents to render content in a consistent and sensible way. To learn more about our accessibility efforts visit WSU Accessibility Best Practices page.

Federal agencies in the US are obligated by law to comply with the web accessibility guidelines, covered by Section 508 of the Americans With Disabilities Act.
II. Enhancing Site Searchability
You can have the most fantastic website on the Web, but if nobody can find it, no one will ever use it.

a) Page Titles
Just as you wouldn’t publish a book without a title, web pages should not be published without page titles -- for the same reason: without titles, they won’t be indexed or found. Web page titles are used in a number of ways. They:
- Appear in the title bar of a web browser window
- Appear as the hyperlinked text in search results
- Are used when pages are saved in browser favorites or bookmarks
- Are used to create the history list that shows users their recently visited pages

Guidelines for writing page titles
- Each page should have a unique title, and should follow this format:
  **Page name – Site name – Winona State University**
  For example: Student Resources – Political Science – Winona State University. “Winona State University” is automatically entered at the end of the title, so you need only enter the information that is specific to the pages of your site.
- Titles should be **no longer than 70 characters**.
- Page titles should match the breadcrumb and reflect the URL name
- Titles should accurately and succinctly describe the information provided on the page

b) URL Naming
Proper URLs will help not only with site search-ability but also navigation and audience comprehension. Users should be able to look at the address bar and make an accurate guess about the content on the page before ever reaching it.
- Avoid numbers, dates, abbreviations, unnecessary jargon and nonsensical words (i.e. Financial Aid becomes finaid)
  - Numbers & Dates dilute the value of the other keywords and create non-evergreen pages.
  - Search engines struggle with indexing non-uniform names, i.e. abbreviations and nonsensical words.
- When separating keywords, only use hyphens
  - Don’t use underscores, plus signs, periods or spaces.
  - Hyphens help with readability but can be seen as “spammy” so limit hyphen use when possible.
- No more than 5 keywords
  - After 5 words, search engines won’t consider the rest
  - The lower the number of words the higher the relevance of each word
  - The shorter the URL the better.
• URLs should always semantically make sense; however try to put the most important keywords first without disturbing the meaning or intent.
• Do not make case-sensitive names.
  o Should be: cast.asp not CAST.asp
  o Case sensitive URLs can cause some browsers to return an error

c) Meta Data
Meta data doesn’t appear on the web page. Even though it appears “behind-the-scenes,” meta data is critical: It’s how search engines find your pages, and it helps make your page information accessible.

Meta Description
A meta description is a brief and concise summary of your page’s content. They are used by search engines, and appear in search results. If meta descriptions are not entered, gobbledygook will appear in the search results.

Guidelines for writing meta descriptions
Each page in your site is unique, so each meta description should be, too. Write meta descriptions in sentence form, and keep descriptions to less than 150 characters.

d) Image Alt Text
Image alt text has three important purposes:
• Most importantly, alt text is used for accessibility: people who have vision impairment utilize screen readers that read web page information aloud. When a screen reader comes to an image, it will read the image alt text, which should describe the photo to the visually impaired person. As a public university, WSU must provide alt text for images on its website in order to be compliant with accessibility laws.
• Image alt text also appears when a cursor hovers over the image, providing context
• Search engines factor in whether or not pages contain image alt text. Entering image alt text helps boost search rankings
Guidelines for writing image alt text

Each image should contain a brief, accurate description of the image. A simple sentence will suffice. For example: If the image is of students playing Frisbee outside Kryzsko Commons, the alt text should read: “Students playing Frisbee outside Kryzsko Commons.”
II. Creating Consistent Navigation

Surfing. Browsing. The words used to describe visiting web pages reflect the dynamic nature of the web. Users who come to your site will need your help to guide them as they explore your site content. Like any journey, navigation is key. Clear directions are a must. Navigation labels are the signposts, and should be simple, intuitive, descriptive, and indicative of where the link will take the visitor. Link name and destination page name should match. (For example: If the link is going to the Dining Services page, the link text should be “dining services.”)

Site orientation and mobility:
- Users should be able to move freely within your site (move back, forward, through steps), and should not leave your site prematurely.
- Navigation should be predictable, keep menus consistent, provide obvious navigation cues and give users a clear connection between action and outcome.
- Keep users in one window/tab while on the WSU site, open in a new tab when navigating away.

a) WSU Drop-down Curtain
The drop-down curtain spans across every web page in the WSU site, in our trademark purple. When you click on one category, the gray curtain drops down, offering a list of links. Although no single web editor can change the curtain (it’s a job reserved for the Webmaster), we’ve included a section about the curtain so you better understand its logic (and perhaps, why your department doesn’t appear on it.

Curtain Logic
- The Curtain offers content-based navigation (types of information)
- Curtain items are broad categories
- Because curtain links are categorical (and do not contain micro details), curtain items often link to landing pages that direct users to related, more specific pages within the category-landing page. For example: Safety & Security (category of info) is on the curtain while Sexual Violence (a specific page) is not

b) Landing Pages
Landing pages give visitors an overview of a topic, help point them in the right direction, and give them a sense of the information available on the site. They can also include checklists and other useful things that simplify complex info, such as steps in a process.

c) Primary site-navigation (left)
Primary navigation consists of top-level, site-wide categories. Website visitors can see, at a glance, the main topics addressed on your site. The primary navigation, which remains consistent on each of your pages, helps anchor and orient visitors during their exploration of your site.

Guidelines for Primary Navigation links
- All left links should link to your pages on your own site. (Not other WSU sites. Not off-site.)
- The menu label should match your site name (e.g., Business Office)
• Links must remain consistent throughout entire site (do not change or remove the left navigation from pages)
• Label links with primary categories of information found on the site (broad, “evergreen” labels) For example, use the category label “Student Resources” instead of listing separate links for Internships, Tutoring, Research Tools, etc.
• No more than eight links (the fewer, the better)
• Adhere to 25-character limit (with spaces)
• Use common language (avoid jargon, acronyms or formal, verbose titles)

d) Secondary page-navigation (right)
The web2010 templates offer the option of adding a second set of links (in addition to your primary site links), which can be used to provide links to further information about a page’s topic. Just as the Primary Navigation links are site-specific, the Secondary Navigation links are page-specific.

Guidelines for Secondary Navigation links
• Include links that are relevant to the page contents (For example: A Student Resources page might include links to Internships, Tutoring, Research Tools, etc.)
• Set all winona.edu links to open in same window. (Why? If you set your links to open in new windows, after spending any amount of time on your site, the user has a bunch of windows or tabs open. This is annoying, and confusing, and makes it impossible for the user to “go back.”)
• Off-site links open in new window. (Why? If you are directing users to an external site, you don’t want them to “close” their interaction with WSU. If you set external links to open in a new window, you are able to connect them to another site in a separate window, while still keeping their interaction with the WSU “open” in the original window.)
• Links must remain consistent from page to page in the group (do not change or remove the left navigation from grouped pages)
• The menu label should match the category “Student Resources” instead of “Quick Links”
• No more than six links
• Adhere to 25-character limit (25 with spaces)

e) Breadcrumb navigation (top)
We all know what happened to Hansel and Gretel when birds ate the breadcrumb trail that was to lead them home: they got lost in the woods. Website breadcrumbs play the important role of giving web visitors a clear path, so they can backtrack if they would like, and avoid getting lost in a tangled forest of web pages.
Guidelines for Breadcrumb links

- All pages must have accurate breadcrumbs
- The first breadcrumb link should be the “umbrella” that your site falls under (For example: Academic departments should have their first breadcrumb link to their respective college. E.g., College of Science & Engineering | Physics)
- The breadcrumbs should match the page names (Note: You will need to manually change the breadcrumb to the page name, replacing the default, which says, “Welcome.”)
- Remember, breadcrumbs are based on navigation path, so all breadcrumbs should follow the path (E.g. College of Science & Engineering | Physics | Student Resources | Tutoring)

**f) Links**

Links are critical to a healthy, robust site. Their purposes are many:

**Streamlined writing, easy access:**
Similar to footnotes, key words can be linked to further, relevant information. The benefit is twofold. It allows you to write clean, concise copy rather than elaborating on every last detail. And it provides easy access to more information for your visitor, minimizing their need to searching your site.

**SEO (Search Engine Optimization) boosters:**
When ranking page relevancy, search engines take into account link quantity and quality. The more helpful you are – the more relevant links you provide – the higher your SEO.

**Guidelines for Links**

- Do not use a web address (URL) as the text for a link. Link text should accurately describe the link’s destination or function
- Link should be short, only include relevant keywords. “Undergraduate catalog” instead of “visit the undergraduate catalog.”

**Undesirable:** For more information, visit: www.winona.edu/undergradcatalog.

**Preferred:** For more information, visit the undergraduate catalog.

- **Never** use “click here” as your link. Why?
  - **Accessibility:** Screen readers open a list of links contained on the page. If you use "click here," visually impaired users won’t be able to tell what content is on the linked pages.
- **Out-of-date**: “Click here” was used back in the early days of the Internet when users didn’t understand that underlined, blue (or purple) text indicated hyperlinks. Nowadays, we get it. We don’t need the outmoded cue of “click here.”
- **SEO**: Search engines take into account which words on a page are hyperlinked. It is wise to hyperlink key words, rather than “click here.”

  **Undesirable**: To apply for admission, click here.  
  **Preferred**: Apply for admission.

- **Email address**: Not everyone uses auto-launch email clients, so we need to make it possible for them to copy and paste the address into their email manually. Email links must be the actual email address:

  **Undesirable**: Contact the Webmaster  
  **Preferred**: webmaster@winona.edu

- **Do not** underline text that is not a link
- **Placement**: When links are placed within body text, users might click on the links before reading the text. To avoid users’ prematurely navigating away from the information they seek, place links at the end of a paragraph, so they have the info before navigating away
III. Adding Multimedia Content (Photos and Files)

a) Images (Photos)

Images are a powerful messaging tool. When selecting images for your site, ask yourself, "What is this image saying?" Images also affect search rankings. To improve search rankings, images must load quickly and include image alt text.

Image sources:

- Custom photography services are available through the University Communication Office. Simply submit a photo request.
- The Creative Services image database contains more than 30,000 professional photos. To set up an appointment to view and select photos, email: create@winona.edu.
- A Flickr archive with pre-sized, web-ready images is available. You will be able to view and download photos to use on your website. To set up access to the Flickr gallery, contact Mollee Sheehan: msheehan@winona.edu.

If you choose to use your own photos:

Guidelines for Images

- Do not use clip art
- Do not use blinking or animated images
- Do not use stock photos
- Small square images = 748 x 748
- Medium Images = 748 x 400
- Large Images = 876 x 400
- Limit use of text on images. If using images that include text, make sure that text is included on the page and in the image alt text.
- Use authentic images of WSU (campus, classrooms, students, faculty and staff)
- Be judicious: Not every page needs an image. Pages that are information-dense should be image-free.
- Include alternative text (alt text) to improve accessibility
- 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 interacting)
- Be careful when using a large number of photographs that may delay page loading or distract from site content
- 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 dots-per-inch (dpi)
- For fast loading, image size should be between 40 and 100 kb (In Photoshop: File> Save for Web)
- Update pages frequently with new images
- Check that images are free of copyright and have been granted permission for use
- It is recommended that people featured in photos sign a model release form.

TLT offers a Preparing Images for the Web course. You can sign up via TLT.
e) PDFs & Files

There are two types of pages that should be on a website: HTML (web) pages, and the occasional PDF. At WSU, we have luxury access to Microsoft Word. Word is expensive, Adobe Reader is free so all users have access. Another problem is that Word docs are editable; we don't want to circulate editable documents. Additionally, content in PDFs is not searchable via web, so any information in PDFs is not discoverable using WSU’s or other search engines. If possible, create a web page that has the option to download a PDF of the info – the best of both worlds.

Guidelines for PDFs & Other Files

- **When to use PDFs**: PDFs should be used for forms or other materials designed to be download, printed or faxed.
- Do not use, .doc, .docx, .excel, .ppt or .txt (convert to PDF if document if necessary)
- **Always label** a link to a PDF with (PDF), so that users know they will be downloading or viewing a PDF, and not a web page. For example: Course Planning Sheet (PDF)
- For large PDF files, reduce the size for faster loading (in Acrobat: Document > Reduce File Size)
- **Fonts**: Use accessible fonts: Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri or Helvetica. Otherwise, Adobe reader may lock and won’t be able to display the PDF.