Web Content and Writing Style Guide  
Bryn Mawr College  
August 2016

Audience

Bryn Mawr College's website, [www.brynmawr.edu](http://www.brynmawr.edu), is designed with the following key audiences in mind:

- Prospective students and their families
- Alumnae/i, donors, prospective donors, and friends of the College
- Current students
- Current faculty and staff
- Prospective faculty and staff
- Thought leaders and influencers in higher education and beyond
- Members of the general public

We should keep these core audiences in mind as we think about what we're trying to accomplish and communicate with our web pages.

For example, website sections that cover academic programs should certainly include accurate and necessary information for current students and other members of the Bryn Mawr College community, but a critically important component of this content is to provide compelling information on academic program offerings to prospective students and their families.

Important Links

[Website Image Size and Format Guide](http://example.com). This guide provides information on image dimensions, file size, file format, how to save images, and other details about imagery used on our website.

[Web Accessibility Guide](http://example.com). This guide addresses common accessibility concerns, including how to include descriptive links, headings, alt text for images, and other matters.

[AP Style Guide](http://example.com). AP Style is used for many types of official Bryn Mawr communications, including web content. If you have a specific style question not covered by AP Style, email [communications@brynmawr.edu](mailto:communications@brynmawr.edu).

Writing for the Web

Reading text on a website is a different experience than reading something in print, so it stands to reason that writing for the web is different than writing for print.
According to research, website visitors tend to scan quickly before focusing on a particular page element. They tend to read just a fraction of the words on a page. Extensive scrolling often results in a visitor exiting the page. This can become a particular concern with mobile viewing, which many members of our audience rely on to view our pages.

Some general tips for reaching online readers:

**Write clearly.** Site content should be written in a straightforward, active-voice, conversational style while at the same time adhering to the high standards of an institution of higher learning.

**Organize content in order to make important information stand out.** Put the most important content first on a page. Use bullet points, headlines and subheadlines in order to break up your page — and break out the most important information. Focus on one topic per paragraph.

**Keep it as brief as you can.** A total word count of no more than 400 to 500 per page should be the goal. If what you have is longer than that, take a look at the structure of your section and consider creating subpages to house the longer content.

**Use images.** Website visitors are drawn to compelling photography and graphic elements. Feature people, and people interacting, when you can.

**Make sure your content stands alone.** These days, visitors tend to arrive at web pages from many different sources. Someone might search for a term on Google and end up on one of your section's pages, not knowing anything in advance about the content or Bryn Mawr. Keep that in mind when writing content for your pages. For example, the page title needs to be able to stand alone in bookmarks and search results — so "Africana Studies Courses" is preferable as a page title, while remaining "Courses" in the side navigation. (However, the name "Bryn Mawr" does not need to be included in the title since it is automatically included in bookmark names.)

Also, brief page taglines (intro text) adds helpful context in search results (see the first bolded paragraph of this page).

**When possible, include a call to action.** What do you want the reader to do on your page? If it's requesting information, applying to a program or registering for an event, include a prominent link to that action.

**Be inclusive.** Use gender-neutral language when it is appropriate to do so, and be aware of sensitivity to issues related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, and the like. In some contexts, such as undergraduate admissions, language will be geared toward a specific gender audience (women, in this case). Check with the appropriate department for guidance.

**Guidelines for Bryn Mawr College Web Content**
This information is primarily for Web Stewards and department heads or chairs who oversee web content at Bryn Mawr College, but these guidelines should be of interest to everyone in the Bryn Mawr College community. The website is a shared resource and responsibility. Only by working together can we keep it current, compelling, and well organized.

**Landing Page Guidelines**

Your department or program landing page is the virtual front entrance for web visitors.

The landing page should include the introduction and condensed description of what your department or program is all about. Don't include a separate "general information" or description page in your section.

Spruce up your page. Use a photo (or multiple photos in a carousel) or other graphic elements to give the visitor a sense of what you have to offer.

Include key information your visitors need to know. This most likely means contact information, both generally for the department and for a key individual or individuals.

Include other key links. This could be calls to action, news or blog content, related online resources, a link to a listserv, or social media links.

This key landing page information can also be copied and included on all the other pages in your section, if desired. If you're not sure how to do this, contact czavisca@brynmawr.edu.

**Subpages**

A section's subpages can be found in the left-hand menu (side navigation) anchored to each page. Subpages are intended for content that doesn't rise to the level of inclusion on your main page; longer content and information that would make the landing page too unwieldly; and standard information that needs to have a designated page to call home, such as online forms, catalog information, faculty and staff landing pages, and other content. Remember also that not every detail of every program and process needs to be conveyed on a web page. Often a better practice is to succinctly summarize information and provide avenues for visitors who want to know more (an email address or phone number to contact someone, or another resource).

Here are some guidelines to those types of page content.

**Page addresses and titles: Name with care.** Page URLs (web addresses) and titles should be as short as possible and as informational as possible. Note that page titles are often different from
addresses, but page titles that appear in the side navigation should be as brief as is feasible (the title at the top of the actual page can be a bit longer and more descriptive if needed).

Some page titles and addresses are standardized. Those include:

- **Program Requirements and Opportunities (URL is /description)**: Academic program page that includes a course catalog feed.
- **Courses (URL is /courses)**: Page that displays courses offered by a department in an academic year. Also a catalog feed.
- **Faculty and Staff (URL is /faculty-and-staff)**: Listing of faculty and staff in an academic department. Some elements of landing page and individual pages can be customized.

Bear in mind the following tips when naming pages and sections:

- If you can, try to avoid using the words "department," "office," "program," "major" or "minor" in a web address for a landing page or section (so brynmawr.edu/africana, not brynmawr.edu/africanaprogram).
- Avoid acronyms, which are not usually known by the broader audience, in both web addresses and page titles when you can.
- Be as specific as possible when titling a page in the side navigation. "Student Resources" is better than "Student Information."

**Keeping Content Current**

Developing compelling content for web sections is only the first step. An often greater challenge is keeping that content from getting out of date too quickly. Here are some best practices for making sure your pages are up to date.

**Create content with timeliness in mind.** As much as you can, strive for "evergreen" content that will stand the test of time (relatively speaking). This might mean writing "recently" instead of a specific year or time period, or describing the passing of time in more general terms than you might normally do.

**Make sure content that needs to be updated for timeliness is important enough for inclusion.** A good example of this is a list of officers for an organization for a specific year, especially when listing multiple organizations on a page. Is that list important enough to your audience to warrant its inclusion? Are you prepared to update this content annually? If not, leave it out.
Another good example is a news page or feed. Is there enough news that this feature will be updated frequently? Do you have a plan for this to be updated, or will it update automatically? All good questions to ask yourself as you develop content for your section.

**Don't let prominent content get stale.** A landing page's main photo should be changed out from time to time. Bear in mind that when students (and faculty and staff) depart, photos of them should be phased out. Also, a "new" program or building isn't so new after a couple of years, so plan to review the language you use when describing recent developments.

**More General Guidelines**

**Linking to outside sources** (sites that are not directly affiliated with brynmawr.edu or the college) should be done with care. In some cases, such as content related to federal financial aid programs, regulations, and information of that nature, linking to outside sources is necessary and provides crucial information to our audiences.

In general, the listing of multiple outside links on a page (sometimes called "link farms") is an outdated practice. Search engines can often accomplish what these pages used to, and in a more user-friendly and efficient manner. If you do plan to link to multiple outside sources, please be sure to include descriptive information to let the audience know why these links are important, so that they make an informed decision when navigating away from the College's site.

Also, be sure to check outside links frequently, since they can change.

**We're Here to Help**

Don't worry: You're not on your own when it comes to maintaining your web section. On the technical side of things, the Web Services team is available to help with training and technical questions.

On the content side, Christian Zavisca, Digital Media Editor in the Communications Office, is the point person for developing and maintaining text, photos, and other content for your web pages.

Feel free to ask questions and seek assistance as we work to maintain and improve Bryn Mawr College's public web presence.

Content questions:

czavisca@brynmawr.edu
Technical questions:

help@brynmawr.edu