Organizing information. Despite the fact that print media is
together and, basically, ignore all our carefully laid plans for
the page—link to somewhere else on the site, leave the site alto-
gether, and so on. Users can enter a site at any point, leave before they finish read-

Ted Nelson (1999)

Even a database has a point of view,
and every such package has a point of view.
Information always comes in packages...
"Information" referred to as a commodity is a myth.

Tips to bolding and italicizing online text
Rhetorical strategies for Web titles, text headers, and conclusions
The characteristics of quality Web content
Capturing the attention of the "drive-through" reader
Persuasive text in the Information Age

What's Inside:

4

of Persuasion
E-Rhetoric: A New Form
CHAPTER
has elements of this nonlinearity—readers hop around text through the use of indexes and tables of content, and skim and scan content to find what they need—we have, as print content developers, ignored this reality. We’ve believed that the structure of print—its visibility as a unit of use, such as a book, newspaper, manual, or brochure, and its page-by-page sequencing—means that, no matter how readers use the text, they must ultimately follow our thread of reasoning. Being in authorial control is, not surprisingly, a source of comfort, and we’ve enjoyed that comfort for a long time.

**Death of the Author?**

The Internet presents information stripped of sequencing and not encased in any visible unit of use. As literacy researcher Myron Tuman (1992:58-59) states: “First, the individual works lose their distinctive boundaries (their former clearly marked beginnings and endings) as part of a larger database, and second, the searching and eventual reading activity are themselves largely driven by the user or ‘reader.’ The author, when there is one (reference databases often being anonymous), has the task of providing the general context, not a single specific track, within which the reader moves.” For many early theorists, the Internet appeared to mean the end of authorial control over content.

**Hypertext Theories**

Even before the Web existed, Internet researchers were concerned about how hypertext would alter the relationships among writer/editor, reader, and text. For example, early hypertext researcher Joseph Jaynes (1989:158) predicted cognitive chaos: “Readers learn by discerning and internalizing structure...When we learn, we do so in large part because we perceive—and come to expect—sequence. We scan a painting and absorb its meaning because we have a sense of what has passed and what is to come. When such expectations are violated—for instance, in the paintings of M.C. Escher—we experience a serious sense of disruption and dislocation.”

Writing researcher Jay Bolter (1991:31, 233-234) believed that electronic writing would lead to cultural chaos: “It opposes standardization and unification as well as hierarchy. It offers as a paradigm the text that changes to suit the reader rather than
Web means the death of text.

In other words, the prediction of the death of the author, in the

"haptographic" theories have taken to be the print world's norm.

creating text is at the very core of humanistic scholarship, which

assists [breaks] apart the link between writing and

communities received at every rung. Multilayer authority, Lanks

moves up and down the social ladder with

involve multiple authors as people collaborate to develop con-

informational work. Where workplace documents generally

the hermeneutics also regard the real world of workplace

our ways of living in the world. These tools are actually texts.

"... these things we think of as tools, a form that uncomplimentarily downplays their deep implications for

reformer Johnathan Johnathan-John (1997:6) says: we must

By focusing solely on literary works, early researchers ignored

demonic work and within

just traditional form of text, and focuses too narrowly on ecc-

print and electronic publishing considers books to be the nat-

rather than real technology experience, the difference between

revel a number of weaknesses. If the theories about an ideal

problematic character of the varieties of authorism and reading

needed in making sense of certain aspects of multimedia, but the

researcher A.L. Panza (1997:6) notes, "This work has proved quite

focus of these early researchers was too confining. A hyper-

a new medium for writing and reading, they argue that the

Although more recent haptographic theorists agree that the Web is

would exist without order or stability.

no wonder that they envisioned a world where information

a document, and even entire intellectual communities inter-

texts and a haptographic that allowed users to go anywhere within

other. These early researchers focused on literature and

convinced to say that one subject is more important than any

culture becomes a vast haptograph, the reader is free to choose

experiencing the reader to conform to his standards... As our writ-
The Futurists

Some early futurists were also concerned, and some exhilarated, by the idea that computers and hypertext would mean the death-knell of the printed book—a forecast that has, as yet, not come to fruition. Other visionaries, who believe that the alphabet and print media taught us to think in a certain linear way, believe that non-linear digital delivery of textual content, mixed with a variety of media, may affect us profoundly. Literacy researchers Brent Robinson and Edward Versluis (1985:27) suggest: “It is a new medium with its own characteristics which will have important consequences for literate users—it may affect their facility in the reading process; it may alter their concepts of the nature of print material...; it may have other, possibly less obtrusive, effects upon the social, political and economic structure of a society which is dependent upon the free and efficient passage of information.” Discourse analyst Gunther Kress (1998:72) is less tentative, stating that both language and visual modes produce messages, but that: “...the two modes produce quite distinctly different takes on the world,” and through their interaction provide “...ways of organizing representations of the world [that] have the most fundamental consequences for an individual’s or a culture’s orientation in the world, so that this shift is bound to have equally fundamental repercussion in social, cultural and economic practices...”

The scholars will continue to ponder, argue, and analyze, but what is most important for you, as a Web writer/editor, to realize is that the author is not dead, and that the Web is truly a new and different medium, requiring just as much creativity on your part as any informational product based on print. However, working in this new medium means that you’ll have to re-adjust your thinking about many aspects of text, from its development to its presentation, and consider new methods, techniques, and strategies for presenting online information.

Rhetoric Returns!

*rhet-o-ric Noun: 1a. The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively.*

THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY
In Chapter 2, we described the education of a young Greek around 500 B.C., who learned to orate through memorization of what was already known. He would be renowned for rhetorical skill if he could speak persuasively on any topic. As writing researcher Richard Lanham (1976:4) notes in Motives of Eloquence, "Rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it." The young Greek held no central values of what was right or wrong, what was appropriate or not, and what was worthy or not. Rather, he was a purely social being who knew all sides of the argument and was trained to take any side necessary. Aristotle described rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." The world to rhetorical man was essentially a game of language.

In 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded after lift-off, killing all of its seven astronauts. Two O-rings had failed to seal, allowing fuel to leak. The high risk of the O-rings not sealing at low temperatures. Within a few hours, they drew up 13 charts, faxed them to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and recommended that the mission be aborted. They expected that the facts would, essentially, speak for themselves. In his analysis of these 13 charts, visualization researcher Edward Tufte (1997:45) notes that, "...there is a scandalous discrepancy between the intellectual tasks at hand and the images created to serve those tasks. As analytical graphics, the displays failed to reveal a risk that was in fact present." The result was that NASA officials were skeptical, the Thiokol managers decided that their engineers' evidence wasn't conclusive, and the company reversed its position. As Tufte (1997:45) says, "On the day before the launch of Challenger, the Rocket engineers and managers needed a quick, smart analysis of evidence about the threat of cold to the O-rings, as well as an effective presentation of the evidence. ... In other words, the lack of rhetoric at the written level and poor rhetoric at the graphic level were major contributors to the Challenger tragedy."
Western society, on the other hand, is far less playful. Although traditional rhetoric exists pervasively in our activities—just consider what politicians say versus what they do—we aren’t comfortable with the notion that we could, or even should, switch moral gears at a moment’s notice just for the sake of winning. In fact, we’ve become highly suspicious of anything that smacks of the kind of rhetoric that the American Heritage Dictionary (2000) defines as: “Language that is elaborate, pretentious, insincere, or intellectually vacuous.” Given its bad reputation, you might be surprised to know that rhetoric is making a comeback, not in the Aristotelian sense, but in how we use language in a world where there are no verifiable truths—only ideas, concepts, opinions, and theories.

A New Definition

Writing researcher Lanham (1993:117-119), noting that words are the commodity of the Information Age, suggests that we need a better definition of rhetoric, that is, “the economics of human attention-structures”:

...whenever we “persuade” someone, we do so by getting that person to “look at things from our point of view,” share our attention-structure. It is in the nature of human life that attention should be in short supply, but in an information economy it becomes the crucial scarce commodity. Just as economics has been the study of how we allocate scarce resources in a goods economy, we now will use a variety of rhetoric as the “economics” of human attention-structure...a vital activity in our information society.

Getting people’s attention isn’t, however, about the number of words you use, but how you use them. Technical communicator and design specialist William Horton (1997:42) demonstrates this by showing the number of words in “influential and not so influential documents.”

- Lord’s Prayer—56 words
- Gettysburg Address—266 words
- Ten Commandments—297 words
- Declaration of Independence—300 words
- Box of breakfast cereal—1,200 words
- U.S. Government order on pricing cabbage—26,911 words
But Whither Fact and Accuracy?

multiple media and interactivity.

of your presentation of persuasive strategies, all the advantages of
editor must focus on text but that you must also include, as part
therefore, the rhetoric not only means that you, as the writer/

hinges to its realization as a new form of communication.

goal expressivity. In fact, this mix of traditions on the Web can-

And if voice and music sampling are added to the

the mix... And if voice and music sampling are added to the
color and visual... With sound and color rapidly becoming part of

visuals... With sound and color rapidly becoming part of

Latham (1993:77) suggests that rhetoric on the Web is emerging

as a combination of the oral tradition of the early Creek orator

and photographs.

colors (black-and-white or with color) and visuals (illustrations

within the design of text such as headers (font type and sizes),

document designers use rhetorical strategies involved with

speech—document designers use rhetorical strategies involved with

laws, and we conclude—there is no clear-cut answer to how to

theorize how that text is presented. Instead of chance, hand-held-

cells, they should not only plan the text with the same care that

in the print tradition, document designers are also rhetoric-

sounding his audience that he was right

of these actions would be just as important as his words in per-

the type of eye comfort he would make with his audience. Each

create telling pauses, his physical stance, his hand gestures, and

and rhetorical pauses, his physical stance, his hand gestures, and

counter the modulation and pitch of his voice, when he would

used a variety of strategies as he played the game of rhetoric. He

one convincing argument on another. His rhetorical strategies

needed are a variety of strategies as he played the game of rhetoric. He

presentation, how the words would be presented, our Greek orator

in which the words would be presented. Our Greek orator

emphasis on the audience and an understanding of the stasis.

focus on persuasion through the choice of words.

reader, this concept of writing is based on the rhetorical rules.

In Chapter 2, we also described how writing is now understood

E-Rhetoric: A New Form of Persuasion

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together prose, graphics (including illustration and photography), and typography for purposes of instruction, information, or persuasion. Good document design enables people to use the text in ways that serve their interests and needs.” E-rhetoric is, to paraphrase Shriver, the act of bringing together text, photographs, illustration, typography, animation, navigation, links, and audio- and video-clips for the purposes of persuasion on the Web.

“Wait a moment,” you may protest. “What about facts and accuracy? Do we sacrifice these important elements of information for rhetoric?” However, the fact and its close cousin, accuracy, are subjective and depend entirely on the sayer and the receiver of the statement. For example, the Morton Thiokol engineers were, they thought, creating indisputable facts with extreme accuracy. The NASA officials thought otherwise.

In Chapter 2, we briefly mentioned social semiotics, a field of study that examines how statements make meaning. Social semioticians believe that a statement, whether fact or opinion, has a meaning only within its context of situation, and this meaning can change when the situation changes. Even science, usually considered the bastion of fact and accuracy, is social and, therefore, subjective. Sociologist Bruno Latour (1987:29, 33) demonstrates how scientific writing creates meaning and uses rhetoric through the use of citations.

By themselves, a statement, piece of machinery, a process are lost. By looking only at them at their internal properties, you cannot decide if they are true or false, efficient or wasteful, costly or cheap, strong or frail. These characteristics are only gained through incorporation into other statements, processes and pieces of machinery...

The presence or the absence of references, quotations and footnotes is so much a sign that a document is serious or not that you can transform a fact into fiction or fiction into fact just by adding or subtracting references...A paper that does not have references is like a child without an escort walking at night in a big city it does not know: isolated, lost, anything may happen to it. (Our emphasis).

As members of a particular society, culture, and social class, none of us can avoid our subjectivity no matter how hard we try. Information and design consultant Richard Saul Wurman (2001:31) also notes that: “Facts in themselves make no sense without a frame of reference. They can be understood only as
E-Rhetoric: A New Form of Persuasion

E-Rhetoric and the Drive-Through Reader

is to bring accurate and objective
bound to be subjective, no matter how committed the recounter
key to understanding is to accept that any account of an event is
impossible, you can only reconstruct and remember with your
unthinkable. Once you realize that absolute accuracy is
incidents, because each reporter provides information based on
they relate to an idea. He describes a situation in which 15
Table 4.1  Viagra Sites and Rhetorical Credibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SITE</th>
<th>SUGGESTED CREDIBILITY RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government health site</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician’s advice column</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s health forum</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical company</td>
<td>Medium to Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail-order pharmacy</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonials (a sales site)</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Being an E-rhetorician is not, essentially, different from the work you’ve done in other media. However, in this case, you won’t be able to fall back on the rhetorical advantages provided by other media, such as the linearity of printed material, or the focus of the camera which creates a film’s narrative, or the singular space of the stage which provides cohesion for a play’s language and action. Instead, you’ll need to develop rhetorical strategies that take advantage of Web characteristics such as the information architecture, navigation, and visuals. To do this, you’ll need to understand user reading and navigation behaviors.

The Web with its mix of media and instantaneous linking is a highly complex communications environment. And, because it is undergoing constant change as a result of technological advances, its possibilities are unknown. Nevertheless, we believe that there are rhetorical strategies for making online text persuasive—strategies that will remain stable and enduring regardless of technology.

The Four C’s of Quality Web Content

The textual area of rhetoric will be the one you’re most familiar with, because it’s likely that you’ve written intentionally persuasive texts in print-based media—texts such as brochures, booklets, press releases, advertising copy, speeches, and so on. As you know from these experiences, every word choice is a rhetorical strategy. However, there are some macro-textual areas that require special consideration as you write/edit for the Web. Credibility, clarity, conciseness, and coherence are elements of text that contribute significantly to a document’s ability to persuade readers that it has the “right stuff.”
In a world where there is no one truth, and everyone is hunting for information, credibility is a highly valued commodity. Credibility is the quality of being believable, reliable, and trustworthy. It is in a print format called Adobe Acrobat Reader that allows viewers to see a text as if it were in HTML.

A pdf file is a method of delivering content through software. The process is a matter of delivering an argument through the web. A print writer is accustomed to develop a print writer, and the text is not always easy to read, but the web makes it possible to enhance the text's readability. The web makes it possible to enhance the text's readability by the reader. The web makes it possible to enhance the text's readability by the reader. The web makes it possible to enhance the text's readability by the reader. The web makes it possible to enhance the text's readability by the reader.
engender differing opinions and attitudes. For example, what is believable to one person may seem hypocritical to another, or what feels like proselytizing prose to one user may appear to be credible information to another.

Librarians Janet E. Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate (1999:10-14) present five criteria for evaluating the quality of information on the Web and demonstrate why online content poses such problems regarding credibility.

- **Authority:** “Authority is the extent to which material is the creation of a person or organization that is recognized as having definitive knowledge of a given subject area.” Establishing authority is particularly important on the Web because anyone can become a Web publisher.

- **Accuracy:** “Accuracy is the extent to which information is reliable and free from errors.” In print, we can expect reputable publishers to provide accurate material through use of editors, peer-reviewers and/or fact-checkers. Unfortunately, “the steps that contribute to the accuracy of traditional media are frequently condensed or even eliminated on the Web.”

- **Objectivity:** “Objectivity is the extent to which material expresses facts or information without distortion by personal feelings or other biases.” Although “no presentation of information can ever be totally free of bias,” our knowledge of who published material, and why, can help us evaluate objectivity. “However, because the Web so easily offers the opportunity for persons or groups of any size to present their point of view, it often functions as a virtual soapbox.”

- **Currency:** “Currency is the extent to which material can be identified as up to date.” Copyright dates provide information about print publications, but Web dates are confusing because they can be “variously interpreted as the date when the material was first created, when it was placed on the Web, or when the Web page was last revised.”

- **Coverage and intended audience:** “Coverage is the range of topics included in a work and the depth to which those topics are addressed. Intended audience is the group of people for whom the material was created.” Print documents usually come with prefaces, tables of content, introductions,
will, in fact, provide them with the necessary information. And will those words truly convince them that the Web page
need, "why write," so, now that you've got exactly what you
do citizens like to be called "folks just like you?"

Do people other than accountants and tax lawyers, ever

asked themselves a number of questions after creating this page; We suggest that the writers/editors of this text should have

solved for themselves; or as a way to smooth out what you need, things will definitely go a

there's even a map to help you find out where to go, so now heat
(higher taxes). In case you don't have a printer-friendly version.

Easily discover all the latest changes and related features.

If you find out about expansions, learn how to estimate tax
because you'll find tax tips for individuals—for folks just

You'll be glad you've landed on the tax info for your page.

The tone of this paragraph is sales-oriented, designed to convince


opening paragraph from a page on the Internal Revenue Service

usability. In other words, users are often confused by language

because, rather than just simple facts, generate significantly than

demonstrates that online credibility is strongly affected by whether

the text is the combination of words and phrases

includes

users are compelled to visit the site to find out what is

immediately obvious. If the site doesn't include a good site

means, and therefore coverage and included audience aren't

private audience. Web sites on the other hand, lack these ele-

knowledge of the content and whether they form the appro-

and/or indexes—all elements that provide readers with
- How effective is colloquial terminology such as “things will definitely go a whole lot smoother” in convincing people that the complex process of tax-filing will actually be easier?

- In trying to avoid complicated tax jargon, has the text been “dumbed down” too far?

To demonstrate how promotional this text is, we have re-written it, eliminating subjective evaluations and hyped facts, and used bullets for easier reading.

The “Tax Info For You” page is designed to help you through the process of filing your federal income tax. In it, you will find many useful tax tips, including information about:

- Exemptions
- Tax liability
- Recent changes in taxation policy and legislation
- Reminders regarding filing
- Where to file your tax forms if you don’t have a pre-printed envelope

Every Web site is trying to sell something, and a site’s credibility depends not only on words, but also on who is providing the information and why, its visuals and navigation, and how often the information is updated. Nevertheless, the paradox that you face as a Web writer/editor of informational sites, other than those of e-commerce, is to develop content that “sells” the user without appearing to sell anything. Table 4.2 includes useful tips to help you develop textual credibility.

**Clarity**

The ability to write and edit text so that it will be clear and easily readable are skills you should already have under your belt. The most important issue with regard to clarity is that its greatest enemy, on the Web, is a strongly expressed personal writing style. Strunk and White (1959:66), in their classic text *The Elements of Style*, describe style as “an increment in writing” and that “every writer, by the way he uses the language reveals something of his spirit, his habits, his capacities, his bias.” As a Web content developer, you must suppress any inclination you have to reveal any of the above. The user is not interested in you, but in the information you have to offer. Table 4.3 includes useful advice to achieve clarity.
Readers prefer plain language.

Readers understand documents better.

Based on research by Baldwin (1999), he concludes that documents written in plain language are more effective in conveying a message to a wider audience. His findings have been supported by other studies. For example, the U.S. Government Printing Office recommends using plain language in all government documents.

Writing with clarity is often referred to as using plain language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Textual Aspect You Should Focus On</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep content clear and unambiguous.</td>
<td>Your goal is to be direct and unambiguous. Avoid long sentences and complex vocabulary. Use short, concise sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use clear, concise language.</td>
<td>When selecting vocabulary, choose words that are simple and straightforward. Avoid idioms, jargon, and technical terms that may not be understood by your audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make your writing easy to read.</td>
<td>Use bullet points, headings, and subheadings to organize your content. Break up large blocks of text into smaller sections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use active voice.</td>
<td>Active voice makes your writing more direct and engaging. It also helps your audience follow your ideas more easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be concise.</td>
<td>Avoid unnecessary words and phrases. Focus on your main message and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep paragraphs short.</td>
<td>Use short paragraphs to help readers understand your message more easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use bullet points.</td>
<td>Bullet points help your audience see the main points at a glance. They also make your writing more scannable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use clear, consistent visual formatting.</td>
<td>Use bullet points, headings, and subheadings to organize your content. Break up large blocks of text into smaller sections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use clear, consistent visual formatting.</td>
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<td>Use clear, consistent visual formatting.</td>
<td>Use bullet points, headings, and subheadings to organize your content. Break up large blocks of text into smaller sections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tips for Developing Online Credibility

Table 4.2
- Readers locate information faster.
- Documents are easier to update.
- Documents are cost-effective.

However, it's important to remember that clarity is not the same as simplicity. As information designer Nathan Shedroff (1999:281) explains:

...if the message is about a complex relationship, it may necessitate presenting a large amount of data. This complexity can be

**Table 4.3  Tips to Clarity in Online Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTUAL ASPECT</th>
<th>YOU SHOULD...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Structure**  | - Keep sentences short—no more than one or two clauses.  
                 - Keep paragraphs short and discuss only one topic per paragraph.  
                 - Ensure that the first sentence of the paragraph states the theme. Many users will skim first sentences only. |
| **Words/Phrases** | - Use the active voice such as *The CEO held a meeting*, not *The meeting was held*.  
                          - Use phrases that are specific and concrete such as *we transformed the text*, rather than abstractions such as *the transformation of text*. Long, abstract nouns require concentration to read and understand.  
                          - Do not use adverbs unless you deem it necessary.  
                          - Avoid puns and other jokes that will not be understood by a global audience. |
| **Presentation** | - Use a Web page title that condenses and explains the page's content.  
                      - Use short and informative headers frequently.  
                      - Put spaces between paragraphs for easier reading.  
                      - Highlight key words either through bolding or italics. However, be careful not to overdo highlighting as it will detract from readability.  
                      - Put captions both above and below tables and figures. Remember that users often scroll fast and use the PgUp and PgDn buttons. Putting captions above and below helps users identify content easily. |
Reducing Verbiage

Web Pages: Writing/Editing to the Web Screen. For more detailed discussion, see Chapter 7. Writing/Editing for the Web (p. 244). Editing/Proofreading for the Web (p. 246). To edit or proofread a page, you must have the original page in front of you. (For example, if you are editing a Web page, you will need the original page or a copy of it.)

The amount of economy required of Web text depends on where you can put the user's need for information. You can put the user's need for information in the most economical manner possible, that is, using as few words as possible.

Be brief, for no discourse can please when too long.

Conciseness

E-Pragmatic: A New Form of Persuasion

Miguel de Cervantes
### Table 4.4  Test of a Paragraph’s Readability in Four Different Versions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF TEXT</th>
<th>SAMPLE PARAGRAPH</th>
<th>USABILITY IMPROVEMENT RELATIVE TO THE CONTROL CONDITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Original Version</td>
<td>Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors), Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166), Arbor Lodge State Historical Park &amp; Museum (100,000), Carhenge (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), and Buffalo-Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).</td>
<td>0% = the control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concise Text (50% of word count)</td>
<td>In 1996, six of the best-attended attractions in Nebraska were Fort Robinson State Park, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Arbor Lodge State Historical Park &amp; Museum, Carhenge, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park.</td>
<td>58% better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Scannable Text (same word count but use of bullets) | Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were:  
- Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors)  
- Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166)  
- Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum (100,000) | 47% better |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF TEXT</th>
<th>SAMPLE PARAGRAPH</th>
<th>USABILITY IMPROVEMENT RELATIVE TO THE CONTROL CONDITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective (using neutral words but no bullets)</td>
<td>Nebraska has several attractions in 1996, some of the most-visited places were Fort Robinson State Park (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).</td>
<td>27% better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Version (condensed and scannable and objective)</td>
<td>In 1996, six of the most-visited places in Nebraska were Fort Robinson State Park, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, Orchard Lodge State Historical Park, Carhenge, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park.</td>
<td>124% better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

altered the paragraph in four different ways to gauge how its readability was enhanced.

However, it's important to remember that not all text can or should be bulleted. The paragraph in Table 4.4 particularly lends itself to bulleted because it includes a list of items. When considering how text should be presented, you must constantly consider the readability needs of users. Some text won't work as bullets. As well, the decision to use a sentence/paragraph structure versus a list depends primarily on what you want to emphasize and the visual effect. Bulleted lists with short items are easier to read and, therefore, draw the eye. That's why they're extremely useful for highlighting important information. On the other hand, a page that only contains bulleted lists is confusing for users because all of the text appears at an equal level of importance. Your job as a writer/editor is to provide a judicious, balanced mix of sentences/paragraphs and bulleted lists.

**Advice for Shrinking Text**

The revisions of the CIA site in Chapter 2 (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2) and the “Tax Info for You” paragraph in this chapter are examples of how text can be edited down to make it more concise and, therefore, more readable for users. M.D. Morris (2001:21), writing in *Intercom*, the magazine of the Society for Technical Communication, provides useful tips for “shrinking any written product to scale.”

- Determine precisely what the document wants to tell you, that is, the theme.
- Select key words or thoughts that would be the basis of major headings in your revised document.
- Build sentences applicable to the theme around the key words.
- Only use one or two key thoughts per sentence. Put those sentences in a logical sequence to convey the narrative of the document.
- Add some transitional words to make the abbreviated text flow smoothly. (You’ll find a list of these words under “Conjunctions: Those Old Standbys” in this chapter.)
- Continue to rewrite until your text achieves these four goals:
  1. You’ve reduced principal concerns to the fewest words possible.
Understanding assumptions:

information in the right way? These questions have two

topics that convey well when you select them through the

sure that they follow a useful flow of information. What
can think around to their paths? How can you make

users can enter a site on any page and once they have returned,

their id be most connected with the their lack of hierarchy.

As a writer/editor coming to the Web from print, you are

found on next page through use of an arrow icon.

indicate this to readers through an instruction such as "con-

each sentence. If an article is split between pages, you have to

each paragraph within each article; and the structure of

subsequent pages; how content is organized on each page; the

each page. The structure of content is what content will appear on the front and

levels of structure: what content will appear on the second level, for example, of the structure from the macros to micro-levels. For example,

When you write/edit print material, you are consistently aware

Nonlinearity

The structure of information and the Myth of

Background Knowledge,

you’re the less that hold text together and use of the reader’s
through three inter-related elements: the structure of informa-
tional, hierarchical, and arranged. Textual coherence occurs

will experience a coherent situation or they will become disjoint-
est in the same way that print content does. Users must

together in clear and logical ways, enhancing their ability to get-

ic of this situation is the coherence. All parts of the text connect

In Chapter 2, we described text as a place where writers/editors

Coherence

Your document

4. You’ve identified a clear sense of substance and quality in

clearly differentiated whenever they occur in the text.

3. You’ve ensured that the concepts of cause-and-effect are

2. You’ve provided a comprehensive view of the situation.
- Users' Web behavior is significantly different from readers' behavior in print.
- There is a right and wrong way to go through information to make it coherent.

Let's look at the first assumption. Do print users behave differently than Web users? Do they actually follow the linear path of information that you’ve so carefully structured in your print publications such as textbooks, training manuals, and how-to books? Patrick Lynch (2000), a specialist in new media design, says: “How many non-fiction reference books have you ever read straight through from cover to cover? There’s nothing unique about the ‘non-linear’ way we use Web pages; readers have bounced from one content point to another in reference documents since the dawn of writing.” Computer scientist and futurist Steven Holtzman (1998:171) describes a common way we read newspapers:

You visually sweep a paper’s front page to capture a sense of what’s happening in the world. You absorb a picture, headline, caption, and some text in a glance. You spread the paper over your desk and read what catches your eye or intrigues you, skipping from one article to another, not necessarily completing any of them. There is no fixed beginning or end; you select a beginning when you jump straight to the business or sports page, and the end whenever you put the paper down. You scan a story, turn pages for more and turn back easily to the beginning. You skip to the paragraph that summarizes the conclusion. As with a mosaic, you build an image of the day’s news from various pieces of information.

In other words, in print publications, readers use tables of content, indexes, and skimming and scanning strategies to determine what content they actually want to read. In fact, we suggest that the only print text that readers follow from page to page is fiction, and even then we’ve met readers who check out the ending of a novel before they start it!

The second assumption—that there is a right and wrong way to go through information to achieve coherence—is no longer correct if the first assumption is not accurate. If readers can approach print information in a nonlinear fashion and still experience coherence, the variety of ways they can approach Web content should not present as much of an obstacle as you may think. “Hold it,” we can hear you saying, “At least readers can see the way a print document is structured. All they have to
Important elements that we discuss in this book are coherent path through the text, hyperlinks, and content structure.\(^\text{footnote}\) One of the most important features of a hyperlink is that it allows readers to move from one piece of text to another, linking different sections of a document. This feature enhances the user experience by providing easy navigation and a logical flow of information. However, the effectiveness of hyperlinks depends on how they are implemented and integrated into the document. Poorly designed hyperlinks can confuse readers or lead them to irrelevant sections of the text.

In this section, we will focus on the importance of content structure and how it affects the overall comprehension of the material. Content structure is crucial for readers to find the information they are looking for quickly and easily. A well-organized structure helps readers follow the flow of ideas and connect different parts of the text.

To explore the relationship between content structure and readers' comprehension, we will use a real-world example from an academic paper. The paper discusses the impact of using hyperlinks in scientific articles, comparing traditional articles with those that incorporate hyperlinks. The study found that readers who used hyperlinks had a better understanding of the content and were able to find relevant information more efficiently.

In conclusion, the use of hyperlinks and well-organized content structure is essential for effective communication. By providing clear, logical, and accessible information, we can help readers navigate through complex topics and improve their comprehension.
- Well-built information architecture in Chapter 3, "Organizing a Web Site: 'Elementary, My Dear Watson.'"

- Internal links that make logical sense in Chapter 6, "Logic, Links, and the Layered Reader."

- Web pages that can stand alone as rhetorical units of information in Chapter 7, "Writing/Editing for the Web Page; Writing/Editing to the Web Screen."

When this type of content coherence is supported by equally strong coherence in design and navigation, users gain confidence in their ability to understand what the site is about and how it will meet their needs.

**The Ties That Bind: Holding Text Together**

When you write/edit print material, you continually make use of rhetorical strategies to ensure that the text presents a clear flow of information and readers won't get lost as they follow the text. One such strategy is the use of cohesive ties. These are equally useful on the Web, but you must re-think how they work on the Web where readers scroll and move from page to page. Table 4.5 demonstrates the positive and negative effects of using print cohesive ties on the Web.

**What Readers Know and the Importance of Prediction**

As a writer/editor, you've taken, consciously or unconsciously, advantage of readers' background knowledge when you develop content. In this book, we have made many assumptions about your knowledge of writing/editing and your experiences in different media. As well, we've counted on your experiences as Web users so that, for example, when we mentioned scrolling in Table 4.3, we didn't have to actually describe what this action entails. Our use of your background knowledge is an important strategy that we've used to create coherence in this book.

To create coherence, readers can combine the text and their prior knowledge in four ways:

- **Genre recognition:** They recognize the kind of text that they are reading—for example, conversation in a Web chat room.

- **Understanding of conventions:** They understand the conventions of a text—for example, that underlined words are links.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COHESIVE TIES</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>AS APPLIED TO WEB WRITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repetition:</td>
<td>Your resume is an important tool. When building or updating your resume, start with your work objective.</td>
<td>Repetition is the most powerful cohesive tool that you have to connect text within a Web page and across Web pages. The repetition of a word in the titles and headers and throughout the site is like a strong glue holding the content together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonyms:</td>
<td>The audience stood and the performer bowed to acknowledge the applause.</td>
<td>You may find that you're using the same word too often. If that's the case, then a synonym is your best device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collocation:</td>
<td>The child played with a toy at the day care center.</td>
<td>Building a collocational chain throughout a Web site is an important means of holding the content together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference:</td>
<td>Sharon hit the ball. She hit it hard.</td>
<td>Can be used within a single sentence, a single paragraph, or in the bullets following a sentence. However, do so with caution. Users who are scrolling may not be able to go back easily if the reference confuses them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference:</td>
<td>Ernest Hemingway was a famous writer. He was known throughout the world and won a Nobel prize.</td>
<td>Cannot be used at all among Web pages. Take the second example: If a user enters the Web site on a page where Hemingway is only referred to as Papa, he/she is likely to have difficulty understanding the content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 Print Cohesive Ties and Web Content (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COHESIVE TIES</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>AS APPLIED TO WEB WRITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction:</td>
<td>consequently therefore in other words on the other hand in addition</td>
<td>Extremely useful for connecting text—sentences and paragraphs—together on a Web page, as long as this type of tie is not overused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellipsis:</td>
<td>“Did you go to the store?” “No.” (The full, non-ellipsis answer would be “No, I didn’t go to the store.”)</td>
<td>Ellipsis occurs primarily in dialogue which occurs rarely on information-based Web sites. Use with caution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitution:</td>
<td>When buying oranges, make sure you pick out ones that are ripe.</td>
<td>Can be used within a single sentence, a single paragraph, or in the bullets following a sentence/paragraph. However, use with caution as users who are scrolling may not be able to look back easily if the substitution confuses them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- **Language knowledge:** They have prior knowledge of the rules of language, that is, how words come together to make meaning.

- **Background knowledge:** They bring their knowledge of the world based on their personal experiences, education, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and values.

Although all of these types of knowledge contribute to coherence, as a Web writer/editor, you must pay particularly close attention to types of texts and conventions of text, because this knowledge plays a significant role in users’ ability to make pre-
Table 4.6 provides useful strategies for ensuring coherence.

The Web has been, and will continue to be, as it evolves, an environment in which users understand Web genres and conventions, on the other hand, help users understand Web genres. The bubble syndrome is a component of coherence, as the use of cohesive ties. Remember that users know what they will be reading. Prediction is as strong as every single word.
Table 4.6  Tips to Building Online Coherence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT OF COHERENCE</th>
<th>TIPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Signals of Predictability** | • Make sure the content clearly explains what the site contains.  
• Check that navigation information indicates how the site is structured.  
• Ensure that each Web page reinforces the identity of the site through text, design, and main navigation links.  
• When making changes to an existing Web site, consider all users—whether previous or new visitors—as first-time readers who must learn the new “signals.” |

| **Conventions** | • Help the designer understand that the rules of well-known Web conventions shouldn’t be broken. (We have, for example, come across Web text that is underlined, but not a link. We have also worked with a designer who decided that links should be in a different color than the main text, but not underlined. Because Web design research is still relatively new, it will be a long time before conventions are tested, evaluated as efficient, and become so well-established that they no longer can be changed.)  
• When setting up a new convention, work with the production team to ensure its clarity. |

The Small Stuff Counts

As we mentioned earlier, every word you use is a rhetorical choice. This micro-aspect of writing is crucial in Web content development in three areas: microcontent, conjunctions, and the decision to bold or italicize a word/phrase for visual impact.

Make Microcontent Meaningful

Microcontent is a term we use in this book to refer to small bits of text such as titles, headers, and labels. Jakob Neilsen, who coined this term, also uses it to refer to links, but because links have a different function than titles and headers, we don’t find
Good, persuasive argumentation works because it helps readers form strong opinions about the issue in question. Research shows that readers form their opinions based on the strength and clarity of the arguments presented. Persuasive argumentation is effective because it helps readers to see the issue from multiple perspectives and consider all relevant evidence. It encourages critical thinking and helps readers to make informed decisions.

**Conjunctions: Those Old Standbys**

Search engine results may not always align with what is written. Even when a site appears on a search engine, it may not be the best choice for the reader. Why? Because readers want to know immediately why the content is relevant to them. If the site does not address the reader's needs, it may not be relevant to their search. Therefore, it is important to remember that

When considering the choice of words, it is important to remember that

Cookie search engines can sometimes prioritize relevance over accuracy. It is important to consider the source of the information and the intended audience when determining its usefulness.

**About the Reader**

**Good: We Sell It**

Indexing

**With Ian McRitchie**

**VIAGRA WORLD-WIDE**

**A Good Rhetorical Strategy?**

**Table 4.7**

Web page titles as rhetorical strategies.
hierarchical frameworks, known as schemata, in their minds in order to understand content. They first determine what’s the most important bit of information, what comes next, and so on. As part of this cognitive work, readers seek to identify the relationships among items of content. Technical communications researcher Jan Spyridakis (2000:366) notes that: “...studies suggest that the more an author does to order information in ways that will orient readers and help them follow connections, the better off the reader will be.”

Traditional rhetorical strategies for building a persuasive argument include:

- The introduction that sets out the topic.
- The discussion that builds the argument through facts, examples, citations, and examples.
- The conclusion that sums up the evidence.

The introduction, discussion, and conclusion are, in turn, made up of facts which are the “meat” of the argument and conjunctive words/phrases, such as nevertheless and on the other hand, which are the connective “tissue.” Conjunctions help readers understand rhetorical relationships—how and why X fact is related to Y fact. For example, here are four such facts:

- I eat oranges after dinner.
- Oranges are sweet.
- Apples can be tart.
- Navel oranges are the sweetest.

These facts could be connected in a variety of ways depending on the rhetorical argument that you are presenting. Table 4.8 demonstrates how these facts can be connected through three types of conjunctions and provides you with a good inventory of conjunctions to ensure your text is not overly repetitive.

Not all rhetorical conjunctions work well on the Web because readers don’t follow a linear path through pages and are often forced to scroll down a single page to get the information they want. Avoid conjunctions that will cause problems, because they refer back to text that the users can’t see or access easily. Such conjunctions include:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Strategy</th>
<th>Conjunctive Words/Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration</td>
<td>For example/instance, in other words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The second sentence/clause further specifies or describes the first. For example, oranges are sweet in fact. Actually, they can be quite tart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>Moreover, in addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The second sentence/clause extends the meaning of the first by adding something new. For example, oranges are sweet. On the other hand, apples can be tart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement</td>
<td>Next, afterwards, at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The second sentence/clause qualifies the first by reference to time, place, manner, cause, or condition. For example, oranges are sweet. For that reason, they are often eaten before dinner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To Boldly Go...?

The Web designer generally determines the font type, size, and characteristics for titles, headers, and subheaders. But within the text itself, you, as the writer/editor, will determine if and when words/phrases should be highlighted by bolding or italicizing the font. Given the number of possible visuals on Web screens—icons, navigation bars, graphics, links—it is clear that, if you decide to bold or italicize text, you will have to do so cautiously. Too much and your text will be screaming at readers and fighting with the other visuals for their attention. On the other hand, little or no bolding or italics may mean that you’re missing opportunities to signal important information to users.

So how can you decide when and if text should be bolded or italicized to provide rhetorical clues to readers? The answer lies in the context of your Web site and page. Mindy McAdams, a professor of online journalism, says that: “Bolding online text is like using a yellow highlighter to alert readers to something that could be meaningful to them which they might otherwise miss. It emphasizes or hints at a significant idea within the content.” Figure 4.1 is text from one Web page that appeared in an online scholarly article, Hypertext, written by McAdams and her collaborator, Stephanie Berger (2001). The authors have chosen to bold certain words and phrases that they feel are important flags for the reader. Take the opportunity to read through it and see if the bolded material enhances your understanding of the text. For an even better analysis of the effect, read the text online at www.press.umich.edu/jep/06-03/McAdams/pages/threads.html.

To Sum It Up

As you research the area of Web content development, you’ll discover many rules of thumb. Some rules are general—for example, one such rule suggested by Jakob Neilsen (2000:101-102) is to “write 50 percent less text.” Other rules are more specific—a common one is to use more headers. These rules are useful, but our approach is to ask “Why?” every time we come across one. And we feel the answer—that people scan text on the Web because it’s hard to read online—is only part of the
A knowledgeable and effective way to fully build your own intellectual practice and apply the rules in your field is to understand how the context will help you thoughtfully present ideas. The increasing need for persuasive text in modern society means that you must be able to navigate the larger context of rhetoric effectively. The purpose of this chapter is to help us understand how to do this. Figure 4.1 shows an example of embedding within online text.

**Figure 4.1**

Example of embedding within online text.

- Threads
- Threads and others
- Threads and possibly pathways
- Threads and possibly pathways
- And the pathways about where to go next
- Architects so that the reader will not be burdened with confusing decisions
- With a larger number of components, the writer must construct a hier-
- Thread for that reader.
- Whichever path the reader takes will become the thread.
- Whichever path the reader chooses will become the thread.
- Whichever path the reader chooses will become the thread.
- Whichever path the reader chooses will become the thread.
- Whichever path the reader chooses will become the thread.
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- Whichever path the reader chooses will become the thread.
- Whichever path the reader chooses will become the thread.

The absence of a null leaf thread marks the most obvious difference between hyperpetax and the typical printed text. The responsibility of the writer involves recognizing the multiple threads that might be present within a single article or a single thread within a larger article. The primary difference between a single thread and a single article is then apparent.
Resources for This Chapter

Books

*Dynamics of Document Design: Creating Texts for Readers* by Karen Shriver. Although primarily aimed at developers of print documents, this book highlights rhetorical principles that are relevant to Web development. (John Wiley & Sons: 1997)


*Secrets of User-Seductive Documents: Wooing and Winning the Reluctant Reader* by William Horton. Although written for technical communicators, this book has good advice for all Web writers/editors. (Society for Technical Communication: 1997)

*Web Wisdom: How to Evaluate and Create Information Quality on the Web* by Janet E. Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate. Includes useful checklists for developing and/or evaluating different types of Web sites. (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: 1999)


Endnotes

Web Sites