



## WRITING FOR THE WEB: A CRASH COURSE

Elaine Sharpe  
Digital Content Specialist

# Seven Steps to Smarter Content

## THE BASICS

- ▶ Check your grammar, spelling and punctuation.
  - Simple errors that are often just typos can undermine all the hard work you've put into your content.
  - Don't use "serial commas."
    - This: We need apples, bananas and grapes.
    - Not: We need apples, bananas, and grapes.
    - Why? This slows down your readers.
- ▶ Get a second (or third) set of eyes
  - At least two people are required to approve your content before it's published, but three is the magic number.
- ▶ Be Accurate
  - What you write can impact your credibility *and* the University's.

## Seven Steps to Smarter Content

# WRITE FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

- ▶ Your site's content helps a prospective student decide to enroll, so it must be engaging to **18- to 25-year-olds**.
  
- ▶ Your goal is to **help them accomplish *their* tasks quickly**, and you can do this by answering three questions:
  - What problems are they trying to solve?
  - What information are they searching for?
  - What do students need most?

# Understanding the Justin Bieber Principle

- ▶ What's relevant to you isn't always what's relevant to users
- ▶ Listen, anticipate
- ▶ Remember the user first
- ▶ ***Did you know?*** *There's a petition to deport Justin Bieber.*



## Seven Steps to Smarter Content

# BE THOROUGH BUT BRIEF

- ▶ Users can form their impression of your website in seconds, so it needs to look clean and be easy to follow. How do you do this?
  - Make your text **scannable** by adding bullet points and relevant subheadings.
  - Add engaging elements like photos to keep people from tuning you out.
  
- ▶ Attention is a commodity, and you'll lose it if your content doesn't meet students' needs quickly.

# What Does This Look Like?

[Home](#) / [University Information](#) / [Office of the Provost](#) / [Commencement](#)

## GRADUATION CEREMONY

### Fall 2013

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary - MacGorman Chapel

[4616 Stanley Ave., Fort Worth, TX 76115](#) | ([Get Directions](#))

Saturday, December 14, 10:00 a.m.

### How to Participate

Students who wish to graduate must submit a [graduation application](#). Please note, applications received after the deadline (4/1/13) will be assessed a \$25 late fee. Graduation applications will not be accepted less than one month prior to a graduation date. Other important application processes include:

- Checking your student record to ensure you are in the correct major and catalog year.
- If a major, minor or catalog year change is needed, please see the [Office of Student Records](#) for the necessary paperwork.
- Students wishing to graduate must meet all requirements on the [graduation checklist](#).
- Visit the [Registrar's commencement website](#) for more information on graduation requirements and fees.

### Day of Ceremony

- **Graduates** should arrive for check-in and line up no later than **9:15 a.m.**
- **Women** should wear dressy business attire and dark shoes. Leave all personal items including purses and phones with family and friends.
- **Men** should wear a dress shirt, preferably with tie, slacks and dark shoes.
- Please wear your **gown, hood and cap** to the commencement ceremony.
- **All honor cords, stoles, medals and tassels** should be worn during the ceremony.
- Please note - students who arrive with an unprofessional appearance or unprofessional behavior will be asked to leave the ceremony.

### DVDs and Photography

If you would like to order a commencement and robing DVD, fill out the [order form](#) and submit completed forms and payment to the Texas Wesleyan Psychology department.

Graduation ceremonies from December 2007 forward are currently available on DVD.

### Graduation Ceremony Photography

Photography at the Texas Wesleyan commencement ceremony is provided by Flash Photography. Flash Photography offers a range of products and services. Please visit the [Flash Photography website](#) for more information.

## Use the Inverted Pyramid



## Need an Example?

- ▶ You can always the content on the website as a guide.

### The Rambler recognized at Texas Intercollegiate Press Association Awards

*The Rambler* and staff received 19 awards for journalistic excellence at the 2014 Texas Intercollegiate Press Association's three-day convention.

The 106<sup>th</sup> annual convention was held in San Antonio at El Tropicano Riverwalk Hotel, and hosted 47 colleges and universities.

At the convention, students had the opportunity to participate in 22 live contests, more than 30 workshops and a one-on-one critique from a media professional.

Advised by Texas Wesleyan's Dr. Kay Colley (faculty media liaison) and Bo Carter (student media adviser), *The Rambler* continues to strive for excellence while serving students, faculty and staff with quality print, online and televised news, events and entertainment.

## Seven Steps to Smarter Content

### **BE ACCESSIBLE**

- ▶ Keep your content simple and intuitive. Don't make your audience overthink when they're visiting your page.
- ▶ Little things like adding "alt text" to your images and making sure your hyperlinks are active can go a long way toward providing an equitable user experience.
- ▶ This will also help viewers find your content through searches.

## Seven Steps to Smarter Content

### **BE CONSISTENT**

- ▶ Part of looking smart is establishing a style and voice and sticking with it.
- ▶ When you lack consistency, it detracts from your content's value, and when your content lacks value, you lose your audience.
- ▶ Keep your writing conversational and concise with clear points of interest.



# Message, voice and tone: What is it?

- ▶ **Message:** What we're trying to communicate
- ▶ **Voice:** The overarching style and sound of the university's message
- ▶ **Tone:** The delivery of that message

# Message, voice and tone – who cares?



- ▶ **Users:** Impacts their first experience with us
- ▶ **You:** Better way to connect with users
- ▶ **All of us:** It's how we fulfill our promise

# Can I really use message on *my* site?

## ▶ **Key: Show, don't tell**

- Intentionally small
- Engaging educators
- Critical thinkers
- Movers & shakers
- Top-tier value
- Texas-sized reputation

# Speaking with the university's voice

## ▶ We are:

- Friendly, not stuffy
- Conversational, not “academic”
- Passionate, not preachy
- Listening, not yelling
- Motivated, not entitled
- Inclusive, not exclusive



# The difference between tone and voice

- ▶ Tone is how you say it – It's all about timing and audience
- ▶ Tone is different for a cashier's office than admissions
- ▶ Voice doesn't change. Be consistent!

# The difference between tone and voice

- ▶ **YES:** Want to teach? Go into business? Make a great scientific discovery? You can test one of 60 programs of study
- ▶ **NO:** We have 60 programs students can enjoy
- ▶ **YES:** We teach critical thinking because it pushes you to be great.
- ▶ **NO:** We take teaching and learning personally.



# Finding the right tone

- ▶ What is my user trying to do?
- ▶ How will they feel while they are doing it?
- ▶ How should they feel when they finish?
- ▶ How can I anticipate their needs?

# The tip – read it out loud

- ▶ We've said it before and we'll say it again ...
- ▶ **Read aloud**
- ▶ You'll be glad that you did ...



# Review

- ▶ Message is showing the “Smaller. Smarter.” mindset
- ▶ Voice is speaking consistently as a university
- ▶ Tone is the right way to say the right thing.



# Wrapping Up

**Questions? Comments?  
Ideas?**