



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

CISER: Center for the Integration of Science Education & Research

A Summary of Technical Editing Theory for Website Design and TTU Web Identity Guidelines

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I. What can a technical editor do for a website?

A technical editor can anticipate reader needs and contribute knowledge about organization, navigation, consistency, screen design, and style (Kemp, 2007). In order to do this, a technical editor must first identify the website audience and website purpose.

Technical editors are also aware that websites are distinct genres and not extensions of print (Rude, 2006).

II. What practical theory do technical editors follow when editing a website?

1. **Identification of the user is the first task:** The primary users of the research site (TTU/HHMI) are **TTU faculty and students** – especially current scholars and members. The primary users of the education site (Science Education) are **teachers, school administrators, and SEdS**. Users also include **CISER staff** (Enderson, 2008). All users of all websites have one thing in common: “they are people seeking quick access to information (Rude, 2006).
2. **Identification of website type is the second task:** There are 3 general types of websites including informational, business, and entertainment. The CISER website is an **informational website with elements of business (Enderson, Wainscott 2008)**. Informational websites have “the serious purpose of making information available to users who have to complete tasks or get information” (Rude, 2006). (Note: The CISER website uses TTU’s Tier 3 template in [TTU’s Web Identity Guidelines](#).)
3. **General methods in technical editing for increasing efficiency of use of websites (i.e., user finds/sends correct information faster):**
 - a. **Single sourcing**, the creation of one source (the database) to which multiple documents are linked, keeps information up-to-date and consistent throughout the information pieces of an organization. By updating the database, documents that

draw from this source are automatically updated. This method keeps content most available to users (Rude, 2006). **The SharePoint application uses single sourcing.**

- b. Content must be available**, which means that the website writers and editors must anticipate reader needs and questions (Rude, 2006). Website writers and editors must be able to think like users of the website.
- c. Means of searching must be obvious and reliable** (Rude, 2006). It is extremely important for users to have multiple ways of finding the same information on a website (Rude, 2006).
- d. Effective screen design** is achieved by consistency and simplicity. “Effective screen design creates a page that supports the purpose of the document, is easy to read, minimizes scrolling, and allows readers to find information easily” (Rude, 2006).
 - i. “**Visual consistency** helps users search because they know where to look” (Rude, 2006). There is a direct correlation between visual consistency and usability. Visual consistency is necessary for information conveyed in visual design, and through topics and their structure for related pages. Headings, menu items, list items, links, and the screen module layout itself should be standardized throughout a website to create visual consistency. Templates provide an excellent tool for creating visual consistency. (Note: TTU has a [system of templates](#) that may help to create visual consistency throughout TTU websites.)
 - ii. **Sections** increase control over placement of text and graphics for maximum readability, and placement of these sections of different types of information “follows increasingly stable conventions” (Rude, 2006). Sections include columns, side headings, side-by-side text and graphics, menus, toolbars, search boxes, and vertical navigation bars. “Functional information (menus, toolbars, and search boxes) typically spans the top of the screen. Structural and content information may go across or down one side...variations from webpage to webpage within the site interrupt users from their main task of locating and understanding the content. A simple design that is easy for users to comprehend functions better than an elaborate design that may be breathtaking on first viewing but clumsy to use” (Rude, 2006). Again, users need multiple ways of finding information, and sections help with this task.
 - iii. **Text should be short enough to fit on one screen** because readers do not want to scroll. Substantial text or documents should have a printable version available (Rude, 370).
 - iv. **Legibility of type** is a challenge since type on screens is generally harder to read than print. “Dark characters on a light background are easier to read than background and text created with two colors of the same intensity, such as red and black” (Rude, 2006). Font affects legibility. Fonts designed for reading on the web are simple and broad, and include Verdana (sans serif), and

Georgia (serif). *Italics are especially hard to read on computer screens.* (With the exception of the two sentences immediately above this sentence, this document text is Times New Roman). Type also becomes easier to read on the screen by using sections. (Note: TTU official typefaces are Charter and Helvetica Neue, but website styles on TTU templates have substituted Times New Roman for Charter and Arial for Helvetica Neue.)

- v. **Style** advice of website experts is consistently “Let go of the words” (Redish, 2004). However, being too brief is worse than giving too much information since readers can skim. If text is too long, content can be cut or divided into smaller units. Consideration of international user needs is included in this category. (Note: All text representing TTU falls under TTU [writing guidelines](#).)
- vi. **Effects of users’ potential hardware, software, operating speed of computer or other network connections on screen design choices** needs to be considered because all color, graphics, patterned backgrounds, sound, and animation slow loading time.

Resources

Kemp, Fred. Summer 2007. Lectures from ENGL 5374, Technical Editing, TTU.

Enderson, Brian. March 2008. Personal Communication.

Redish, Janice C. June 2004. Writing for the Web: Letting go of the words. Intercom. 4-10

Rude, Carolyn D. 2006. *Technical Editing, 4th Edition*. 367-379.

Further Reading

<http://www.slate.com/id/2193552/?GT1=38001>