Text on XYZ.com

A HOT Evaluation by YourNameGoesHere

Brevity

Purpose

To determine the extent to which the text on this site achieves the brevity needed for effective online presentation.

Brevity makes text sink in, online.

To achieve brevity, though, a writer must adopt half a dozen strategies, and within those broad approaches, a number of tactics. Writing a short article takes more effort than going long. The strategies are:

Strategy 1: The language is terse.

Strategy 2: The paragraphs are short.

Strategy 3: Marketing yes, fluff no.

Strategy 4: Tangential material is moved out of the way.

Strategy 5: Brevity is not carried to the point of ambiguity.

Strategy 6: Repeating categories of information appear in tables.

These strategies and tactics for brevity appear here as a set of guidelines based on research and actual experience, documented in books, journal articles, and online styleguides. (References appear at the end of each strategy). Each guideline, then, provides a method for a writer to follow, or a **heuristic**.

In this evaluation we test the text against these guidelines. This, then, is a heuristic evaluation.

Method

Here's how to perform a Heuristic Online Text (HOT) evaluation.

1. Save this file with a name that includes

- ❑ The site you are analyzing
- ❑ The aspect you are evaluating (brevity, in this case)
- ❑ Initials
- ❑ A period
- ❑ A suffix indicating the file type (doc for Word files, htm for HTML files)

Examples: ibmbrevityjp.doc, yahoobrevityds.htm

2. Go to the site, and locate a fairly typical page that has several paragraphs of running text.

Running text is actual content, not labels, menu items, or link descriptions.

3. In this file, type the subject of the page, under Sample #1, below.

The subject appears in the title bar of the window (not including ads for your browser) or in the major heading at the top of the page. Use whichever best articulates what the page is about.

4. Copy the paragraph and paste it into this file after the subject.

5. Return to the page and copy the URL for that page, then paste that into this file, in the line right after the paragraph.

The URL is the address of the page.

6. Type today's date on the next line, to show when you collected the sample.

7. Repeat this process, collecting paragraphs from at least 5 pages.

If possible, find pages with different kinds of content. Also, for consistency, pick the same number paragraph on each page; for instance, pick the second paragraph on every page.

Tip: You may want to print out your samples, so you can look at their text on paper as you work onscreen.

8. Apply the HOT Evaluation to the text samples you have collected, filling out the evaluation form.

If a strategy or tactic seems irrelevant, omit it from your evaluation. Note that this will change the total possible points.

Samples

Sample # 1

Subject:

Paragraph:

URL to the page:

Date investigated:

Sample # 2

Subject:

Paragraph:

URL to the page:

Date investigated:

Sample # 3

Subject:

Paragraph:

URL to the page:

Date investigated:

Sample # 4

Subject:

Paragraph:

URL to the page:

Date investigated:

Sample # 5

Subject:

Paragraph:

URL to the page:

Date investigated:

Evaluation

Strategy 1. The Language is Terse.

Nothing is repeated except where the context demands repetition.

Test

In each sample paragraph, I found only one or two repeated words or phrases, or none.

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, did the running text seem **free** of repetition?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly repetitious (if any)? (Sample #   ).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The text is generally free of unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.

Test

In each sample paragraph, I found only one or two adjectives or adverbs that could be removed, without changing the meaning of the text.

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, did the running text seem **free** of adjectives and adverbs?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly flowery (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The text does not take more than a phrase to establish context at the beginning or end of a paragraph or sentence.

Test

In each sample paragraph, I found only one short phrase or clause establishing context, or offering a transition.

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, did the running text seem **free** of lengthy transitions or context-setting?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly burdened with transitional material (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

There are few phrases that could easily be replaced with single words.

Test

In each sample paragraph, I found no more than a single phrase that could be replaced with a word, without changing the meaning of the text.

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, did the running text seem **free** of junk phrases?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly full of deadwood (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

One-or-two syllable words make up the bulk of the words.

Test

In each sample paragraph, I found that one-syllable words and two-syllable words made up the majority of the text.

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, did the running text seem **built on** words of one syllable?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which sentence seemed particularly straightforward because of its one-syllable words (if any)?

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

In each paragraph, at least one key word describes a physical thing or an act.

Test

In each sample paragraph, I at least one word describing a physical object, or a concrete action.

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, the writer often chooses words that refer to tangible, visible, common objects, or activities.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly concrete (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

In general, the writer has chosen the familiar or frequently used word over the rare or unfamiliar one.

Test

In each sample paragraph, the writer generally used familiar terms, not strange jargon, and words that are common, rather than unusual. (Of course, if the writer is explaining a strange concept, we want to see it explained in simple terms).

YES=1, NO=0.

Impression

Overall, did the writer choose commonly used words over jargon?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly prone to unfamiliar, or uncommon language (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

References:

See: Baker & Goldstein (1966), Bork (1983), Glass (1989), Horton (1990), Krug (2000), Levine (1997), Morkes & Nielsen (1997, 1998), Nielsen (1997a, 1997b, 1999f), Spyridakis (2000), Sullivan (1998) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

Strategy 2. Paragraphs are short.

Each paragraph has four sentences or less.

Test

On **average**, the sample paragraphs have four sentences or less.

ONE SENTENCE= 4, TWO SENTENCES = 3, THREE SENTENCES = 2, FOUR SENTENCES = 1, MORE = 0.

Impression

Overall, did the writer make short paragraphs?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly long (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

Each paragraph focuses on only one main idea.

Test

On **average**, each paragraph focused on only one main idea.

YES=1, NO = 0.

Impression

Overall, did the writer keep each paragraph tightly focused?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly unfocused (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

In the layout on the site, each paragraph has no more than six lines.

Test

On **average**, the sample paragraphs have six lines or less on the site.

TWO LINES= 5, THREE LINES = 4, FOUR LINES = 3, FIVE LINES = 2,
SIX LINES = 1, MORE = 0.

Impression

Overall, did the writer work within the layout to make paragraphs look short?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly long on the site (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

References:

See: Abeleto (1999), America Online (2001), Apple (1997), Bricklin (1998), Gee et al (1999), Henderson & Bradford (1984), Holcomb et al (1999), Horton (1990), Hudson & Berman (1985), Kaiser (2000), Killian (1999), Lynch (1997), Marschark & Paivio (1977), NCSA (1996), Spyridakis (2000), Sullivan (1998), Zipf (1949) in the bibliography at
http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf

Strategy 3. Marketing yes, fluff no.

The focus is on the customer, not the corporation.

Test

On **average**, the sample paragraphs mentions YOU more than WE.

YES=1, NO = 0.

Impression

Overall, did the writer focus on the customer, rather than the corporation?

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly self-centered (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The text does not seem boastful.

Test

The text does not make broad claims, full of pride.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer makes few or no exaggerated claims about the company, or its products or services.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly boastful (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The writers avoid slogans and marketing phrases.

Test

On average, a paragraph contains no more than two slogans or marketing phrases.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer avoids sloganeering.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly offensive because of its marketing slogans (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The writers restrain their enthusiasm.

Test

The average paragraph contains no more than two enthusiastic adjectives and adverbs.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer makes few or no exaggerated claims about the company, or its products or services.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly boastful (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The writers avoid noun clumps.

Test

There are absolutely none of those concentrated noun strings that marketing people use to summarize their pitch ("world-class enterprise solutions")..

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer uses very few noun clumps.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly clotted with strings of nouns (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

If discussing features and benefits, the writers use far more nouns and verbs than adverbs and adjectives.

Test

In discussing features and benefits, the writers use more nouns and verbs than adjectives and adverbs.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writers rely mostly on nouns and verbs to convey features and benefits.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly full of adjectives and adverbs (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The writers provide evidence behind the claims.

Test

The text links to or includes elements that customers regard as trustworthy, such as quotes from trusted sources, links to reviews, statistics, datasheets, or detailed descriptions.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer provides convincing evidence for claims.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly bare of evidence for claims (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The tone is neutral, almost objective.

Test

The tone does not sound like a stewardess, or a commercial spokesperson.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer sounds objective.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly full of emotional appeals, without much basis in fact (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

References

See: Bricklin (1998), Morkes & Nielsen (1997), Nielsen (1997b, 1999f, 2000a, 2000b), Spyridakis (2000) in the bibliography at
http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf

Strategy 4. Tangential material is moved out of the way.

Background or supplementary material is linked to, not forced on the users.

Test

If the text refers to background information or specialist details, that material is linked to, rather than forced on the users here.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer unfolds information gradually, rather than putting it all on one page.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly crammed with material that could have been moved to another location? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

When the topic is complex, information is broken up into many paragraphs, sections, or pages.

Test

When the topic seems complicated, the writer uses many small paragraphs, many sections, or pages, rather than pouring it all into one long flow of text.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer divides the material up into bite-sized chunks.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly overloaded (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

When there are multiple links to related stories the links are pulled out of the regular running text.

Test

If there is a set of links to other stories, the links appear in a separate sidebar, a distinct list, or a separate section.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer separates link lists from the rest of the text.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly jammed with links within the running text (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

All facts and ideas are relevant to the main topic of the paragraph, not extra.

Test

The facts and ideas refer to the main topic of each paragraph.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer makes sure that every part of the paragraph relates to the main topic.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly chaotic, or incoherent (if any)? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

References

See: Bricklin (1998), Horton (1990), Levine (1997), Morkes & Nielsen (1997b), Rajani & Rosenberg (1999), Slatin (1988), Spyridakis (2000) in

the bibliography at
http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf

Strategy 5. Brevity is not carried to the point of ambiguity.

The writer does not achieve brevity by condensing phrases into clumps of letters.

Test

The writer uses no more than two contractions, unexplained abbreviations, or acronyms per paragraph.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer is willing to take the text to explain a term, or spell out a phrase before showing its abbreviated form, or its acronym..

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed crowded with cryptic abbreviations and acronyms? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The writers leave articles in the text..

The, *a*, and *an* help people identify the nouns and noun phrases, distinguishing them from verbs. The articles also make explicit whether you mean this particular item, or just any item like this.

Test

The writers consistently use *the*, *a*, and *an*, throughout all the paragraphs.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writers avoid sounding like a telegram.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed particularly confusing because of the lack of articles? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

The writers preserve relative pronouns like who*,* which*,* that*.*

These help people see the relationship between the subordinate clause and the main clause.

Test

The writers use relative pronouns everywhere they can.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer does not achieve brevity by leaving out relative pronouns.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed confusing because a relative pronoun has been omitted? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

Nothing stands between the subject and the verb.

Test

The writers make sure that no long phrase or clause stands between the subject and the verb.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer seems direct, moving quickly from subject to verb, and from verb to object.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed confusing because a phrase or clause slips between the subject and verb? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

References

See: Bricklin (1998), Galitz (1985), Horton (1990), Ramey (1989), Waite (1982) in the bibliography at
http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf

Strategy 6. Repeating categories of information appear in tables.

If the same categories appear over and over, they form columns in a table.

Test

The page displays lists of information, in which the same categories appear over and over, in a table. The categories form the columns, and the individual entities appear as rows.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

Overall, the writer breaks repeating information out into lists, and if each item contains two or more categories, a table.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph seemed crowded with information that could be turned into rows and columns? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

If the text seems to be comparing sets A and B, all the components of each set appear in a table.

Test

If there is a table, all the components are included.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

The tables seem complete.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph contains a table that seems to have left out items, or forgotten bits that remain in the paragraph? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

Tables fit within the window.

Test

The table does not force me to scroll horizontally, if I am viewing the window in a low resolution. In general, that means that the table has only two or three columns.

YES = 1, NO= 0.

Impression

The tables do not require horizontal scrolling. I can see a whole row at once.

YES=1, NO=0.

Example

Which paragraph contains a table with a sprawling table? (Sample #).

Comments

If this guideline does not seem to apply, indicate that here.

If you have further thoughts, or reflections, about the way the text follows, or ignores, this guideline, please put those observations here.

References

See: Brusaw, Alred, & Oliu (1997), Horton (1990), Tufte (1983) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf

Total Score

Assigning a grade to text is always a bit arbitrary. But counting up the points for these sample texts, we reach this diagnosis:

Total Points:

Total Possible:

Percentage:

Interpretation

90-100%: Excellent brevity.

75-89%: Pretty brief, but occasionally rambling.

60-74%: Could use some trimming.

45-59%: Verbose.

25-44%: Horribly overgrown.

0-24: Grotesque.

Overall Conclusions

In a few paragraphs, summarize your most important observations—both positive and negative.

Major Recommendations

List the top five problems with the text, and in a sentence or two, summarize what you would recommend as solutions.