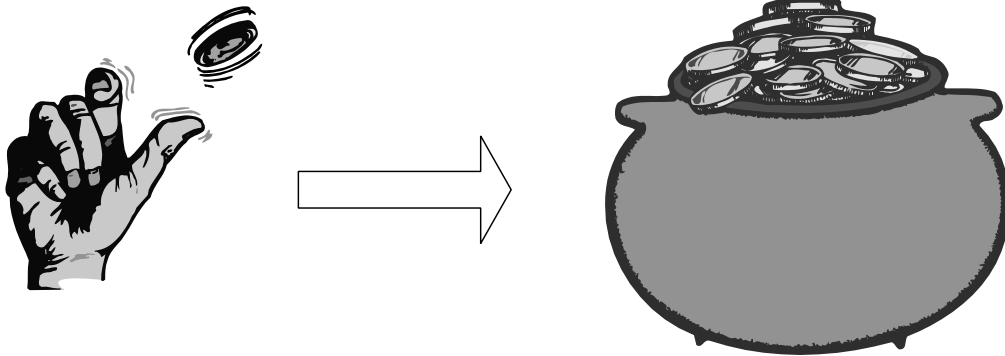


Make Clear What the User Will Get from a Link



BACKGROUND |

Give me enough information so I can skip the link

The ideal link is one that users can get **real information** from—enough so that some folks realize they don't need any more.

Write links that don't have to be followed.
(Bricklin, 1998)

Even the inventor of the Web, Tim Berners-Lee, urges charitably informative links. “When you make a reference, qualify it with a clue to allow some people to skip it.”

Pop up a description

Javascript rollovers let you save space by popping up a sentence describing the target of the link. Users are less likely to waste their time going down a false trail, and someone following a good link can more easily understand the point of the destination page upon arrival.

Of course, the user has to guess that the description exists, and move the mouse over the link to get this extra info.

*Descriptiveness aids prediction.
Differentness aids navigation.*

—Jared Spool, 1997

Short link, big explanation

Instead of making a whole long phrase into a link, write a brief link and supplement it with an explanation. Put the explanation in its own paragraph or column in a table, so guests can skip it easily. (This approach works well in lists).

This strategy often allows for more attractive visual design than is possible with lengthy links. Furthermore, it gives users the option of skipping the supplementary text if the link gives them enough information about the destination. (Farkas and Farkas, 2000)

Match the target

To avoid confusing the user, make the link text match the title of the target page. It's not always possible to do this exactly, but you can write link text that uses keywords from the title or similar concepts.

Avoiding the problems associated with inconsistencies between link labels and where they lead is difficult. (Rosenfeld and Morville, 1998)

Difficult, yes, but worth trying

The ideal is, of course, that the very same title object appears as the link, so that if you change the title, the link changes too. But this utopia makes for ungainly link text, unless you craft your titles for both locations.

Include a relevance rating

As in the best search results, give users some idea how relevant the target pages may be, so users can decide how much they really want to download a page that may be off topic. Examples:

- ***** [How to Choose the Right Paper](#)
- ** [Photographic Papers: Glossy vs Matte](#)
- ** [Notecard Papers](#)
- ** [Large size Papers](#)
- ** [Tyvek and Cloth for Printing](#)
- * [Inks Available by Printer](#)

EXAMPLES

Before

[Aussie Birds](#) and [lxnest](#) may offer other information.

After

If you are planning a visit to bird sanctuaries in Australia, you may want to learn to recognize typical species through photographs of the birds in flight and at rest, as shown in [Aussie Birds](#). The ornithologists at [lxnest](#) also offer nesting information on all the birds of Australia.

Before

Click [here](#) for results.

After

62% of users found the new interface “an improvement,” but significantly, 20% found it “confusing to learn,” according to our [Beta KM Product Usability Test Results](#).

Before

Non-imaging detectors have also [been developed](#).

After

To prevent proliferation of **nuclear weapons**, we need to use detectors that do not rely on imagery. We track the movement of clandestine nuclear weapons by identifying the weapon’s signal in the middle of a noisy background. These non-imaging detectors depend on [sophisticated tracking algorithms](#).

Before

[DeMaupassant’s](#) writing reflected many of [Monet’s](#) experiences.

After

DeMaupassant published *Bel Ami* in 1885, the same year that he visited with Monet near Etretat. At the time, Monet was painting the tall, jagged rocks of that coastline facing the Bay of Biscay, in the [Manneporte series](#). DeMaupassant’s novel describes a journalist on the make in Paris, clamoring out of the poverty that Monet had known so well for years. In fact, Monet’s experiences during the previous 25 years were reflected, obliquely, in several of DeMaupassant’s [scenes](#).

Before

[Next](#)

[Previous](#)

[Up](#)

[See Also](#)

Before

[Next](#)

[Previous](#)

[Up](#)

[See Also](#)

After

[Next: The Unfolding of XML](#)

[Previous: How HTML grew out of SGML](#)

[Up: Why We Use Tags](#)

See Also:

[How Hot Lead Turned into Cold Type](#)

[The First Typesetting Tags](#)

After

[Next: The Role of Gamma-Ray Detectors in Counter-Proliferation and Treaty Verification](#)

[Previous: How Gamma Ray Detectors Grew Out of Astrophysics](#)

[Up: Research into Gamma Ray Detectors](#)

See Also:

[Counting Warheads Remotely with Gamma-Ray Imaging Spectrometer \(GRIS\)](#)

[Seeing Behind Shielding with GRIS](#)

AUDIENCE FIT

If visitors want this...

TO HAVE FUN

How well does this guideline apply?

The more text, the merrier. Long explanations of links form part of the entertainment on this page, and let users choose whether or not to go on.

TO LEARN

You can make clear what the relationship is between the target page and the one I am reading now. Educational.

TO ACT

Very helpful to let me know ahead of time where I am going and why. For instance, if you want me to buy something, alert me that I am about to go to your super secure server.

TO BE AWARE

Sensitive Web writers let users know where they are going—ahead of time.

TO GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE

Yes, in your enthusiasm for a particular link, take the time to describe it before just dropping it in.

See: America Online (2001), Apple (1997), Berners-Lee (1998), Bieber et al (1997), Borges et al (1998), Bricklin (1998), Farkas and Farkas (2000), IBM (1999), Levine (1997), Microsoft (2000), Nielsen (1995, 1998, 1999e, 1999f), Nielsen & Morke (1997), Rosenfeld & Morville (1998), Spool (1997), Spyridakis (2000), Sun (1998), Tchung (1998b), W3C (1999).

For your review only.

Excerpt from *Hot Text: Web Writing that Works*.
(New Riders).

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