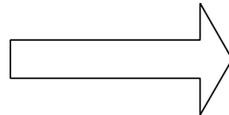
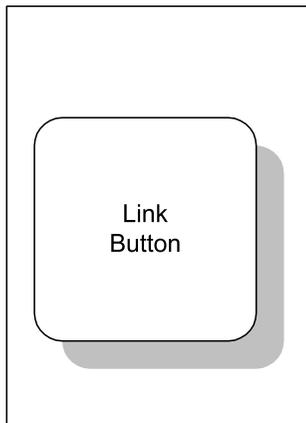


Shift Focus from the Links or the Linked-to Documents to the Subject



BACKGROUND |

Electronic text is the first text in which the elements of meaning, of structure, and of visual display are fundamentally unstable.

—Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space*

Don't point out your links

Sure, when you first create a link, you want to tell everyone, “Hey, this is a link.” But now that you have created hundreds or thousands of links, you don't have to keep reminding the user that you have, in fact, provided links. Assume the links. Shift your attention to the subject and let the links grow out of your meaning.

The frustrated creator of the Web, Tim Berners-Lee, says, “Use links, don't talk about them.”

He particularly hates expressions like “Click here.”

He pleads with Web writers, “Let me urge you, when you construct your HTML page, to make sure that the-thing-you-click is actually some kind of title.”

Ignore the apparatus

You don't have to tell people to “surf on over,” or “point your browser.” You don't have to emphasize that you are offering a link.

In fact, you don't have to alert visitors that a link will take them to another page or site. They get it.

Forget all the hard work you put in creating the link or the list of links. Concentrate instead on saying something meaningful about the subject, and you'll soon see which word or phrase to make hot. Just let links appear.

Write about your subject as if there were no links in the text. (Levine, 1997)

EXAMPLES

Before

Click [here](#) to go to the Ecommerce Statistics Page, a listing of the most recent survey information in that area.

After

George Kennedy collects the most recent survey information in the field and publishes that on the [Ecommerce Statistics Page](#).

Before

Click [here](#) for the tutorial.

After

Step-by-step instructions for using the Parameter Hunter appear in the [tutorial](#) (which takes half an hour) and the [online manual](#).

Before

We have some wonderful [links](#) we have discovered for national parks.

After

The National Park Service describes every park in its system, giving information on campsites, utilities, stores, trails, and weather in its enormous [Park List](#).

Before

After a lot of surfing, I have made up a list of [cool Web sites](#) dealing with the founders of pattern research.

After

The founders of the pattern movement were tentative, open, and quite flexible in their thinking when creating their original articles and books:

- [Design Patterns](#)
- [Thinking in Patterns](#)
- [Patterns as Breakthrough](#)

- [“A Joint Report on Patterns”](#)

Before

One [site](#) offers a lot of information on nonproliferation research.

After

To verify arms control treaties and help detect the clandestine production of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, we must turn to [laboratory research](#).

AUDIENCE FIT

If visitors want this...

TO HAVE FUN

How well does this guideline apply?

Unless you are indulging in self-referential post-modern whining (always amusing), follow this guideline and let the links take care of themselves.

TO LEARN

Students understand how links work. No need to distract them from your ideas by waving your hands around, pointing out the mechanism behind the screen.

TO ACT

Keep your focus on the action the user wants to perform. Make the whole mess of Internet protocols invisible.

TO BE AWARE

Unless you are dealing with absolute newbies, who find the Internet and computer an exciting new world, follow the guideline.

TO GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE

It's acceptable to boast about discovering a site you want your community to check out, and you may even admire your own links, without upsetting other people too badly. On the other hand, you could be polite and say something intelligent about the topic.

See: Arthur (2000), Berners-Lee (1995, 1998), Levine (1997), Nielsen (1997b).

For your review only.

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

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