

# 01. Web writing overview

## Introduction

Writing for the web is different from writing for print publications. Research has shown that people read online by scanning for information rather than reading the full text. They typically come to websites with a specific task in mind.

Consequently, it is important to present written content online in a way that is quick to scan, relevant, useful, consistent and easy to read.

The writing guidelines provided here should be referred to for the production of web content. By following the guidelines, you will help to ensure that the European Commission's digital content meets these user needs and helps the Commission meet its objective of communicating effectively with citizens.

For printed publications, official documents and reports, there are currently three recommended official writing guides available:

- [Interinstitutional Style Guide](#) – mandatory rules for document production in any EU institution, body, office or agency. Includes detailed rules for acts published in the [Official Journal](#) and the main technical and editorial norms for general publications. *Produced by the Publications Office.*
- [European Commission style guide](#) – mandatory rules for Commission staff drafting documents in English. Provides tips on clear writing, how to refer to official and non-official sources, and templates for standard Commission documents. *Produced by the Secretariat-General.*
- [English Style Guide](#) – a deeper level of advice on style and grammar points (aligned with and expanding on much of the content of the other two guides). Aimed at in-house translators and freelance translators, but useful for authors and editors as well as translators in all EU institutions. *Produced by DG Translation.*

DG Translation produces a weekly newsletter providing tips on how to write clearly. If you wish to receive this newsletter, log in with your EU Login credentials and [subscribe](#).

## Guiding principles

Whenever you create content for the Commission's online presence, bear in mind that it should be

- consistent – recognisable as coming from a single authoritative source
- relevant and useful – focused on user needs
- usable – quick to scan, understand and act on
- accessible – easy to read and interact with (particularly with regard to people with disabilities, e.g. alternative text for images)

Make sure to take into account that your content

- should be as easy as possible to translate into other languages
- should be as accessible as possible and easily readable on mobile devices
- is often written by and for non-native speakers of English

See [Content accessibility checklist](#) for tips on how to make your content as accessible as possible.

For guidelines on how to optimise your content for search engines, see [Search Engine Optimisation](#).

## Focus on user needs

### Always focus on the user task

Before writing anything, answer these questions

- who is your target audience?
- what do they want to do on your web page?

You will have business goals in writing your text, but these must map onto some feasible need or interest of your target audience. All content should meet at least 1 pre-identified user need.

Your text should be useful and usable – not simply information in a void. What do you want your audience to do, having read your text?

### How to write user-focused web text

- try to imagine which questions users would have in their mind on coming to your page (prompt yourself with the typical question words: *who, why, what, how, when, etc.*)
- list these questions – in the order your users need the information
- this can be the outline for your page structure. Each question could be a separate subheading, and the solution you are offering would be the text in that section
- go straight to the point - put key information prominently at the top of the page. Don't bury it in long explanations or the history of the European Commission's work
- if you do need to give some background to the key information, this usually belongs lower down the page. Users will find it easily, if you make good use of headings and in-page navigation
- don't leave users hanging when there is a next step – give them an option to find more information, make an enquiry – whatever helps them on their way

## Contact and support

If you require further assistance, please contact:

[Comm Europa Management](#)

European Commission  
DG Communication  
Unit B.3  
Europa Web Communication