

# The Rhetoric of Web Design

## Website Strategies for Writing Centers

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## ABOUT ME

- Deputy Director of Communications, Web and Graphics, Tennessee Department of Education
- Adjunct Professor of English, Lipscomb University
- MA Professional Writing, Carnegie Mellon University
- MA English (Composition, ESL, Linguistics), MTSU
- Specialties: writing, communication design, web design, information architecture

# ABOUT THIS PRESENTATION

- Topics:
  - User-centered web design
  - Methods for strategizing and developing a user-centered website
  - Web design best practices
- Application:
  - Analyze and discuss existing writing center sites
  - Consider methods for redeveloping a site
- Goals:
  - A new perspective on your website as a communication tool
  - Ideas for improving the usability of your website
  - Ideas for better engaging target audiences on your site

## CAVEATS: INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS

- Required branding
- Required boilerplate or template
- Content limitations or restrictions
- Technology limitations
- Maybe you can't build your dream site, but you can apply principles of good web design to improve what you have.
- Web design is more than visual—it's about connecting your audience with the information they need.

# USER-CENTERED DESIGN

- Design that keeps primary users in mind throughout the design process, from beginning to end.
- Design that is research-based to identify...
  - Users
  - Users' needs, tasks, and goals
  - The most effective design for users to accomplish their goals
- All design decisions should be made with regard to user experience.

# Strategizing a User-Centered Site

Research

Goals

Users

Tasks

## STRATEGIZING: **RESEARCH**

- User Testing
  - How do users *actually* interact with your site? (“You’re doing it wrong.”)
  - What are users trying to do?
  - What are they seeing, and what are they ignoring? (you’d be surprised)
  - How to do user testing? Devise a task, ask user to complete it, watch and listen to how they interact with the site (use think-aloud protocol)
- Surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups: Just get feedback!
- Benchmark against peer sites
- Site Analytics (DEMO)

**Don’t assume.**

## STRATEGIZING: **GOALS**

- What are your communication goals?
  - Provide and/or advertise a service
  - Inform, teach, share resources
  - Gain support (student, teacher, administrator, public, etc.)
  - Increase standing or visibility in the academic community
  - Innovate (or share innovative ideas)

Research  
Goals  
Users  
Tasks

## STRATEGIZING: **USERS**

- Who are your primary users?
  - How do you know?
- Who are your secondary users?
  - How might they influence your design decisions?

## STRATEGIZING: **TASKS**

- Why do people come to your site? What are they trying to accomplish?
  - Learn what services are offered
  - Make an appointment
  - Find operating hours
  - Find resources
- What tasks are they less likely to be doing on your website?
  - What content exists for you, and what content exists for the user?
  - Justification for content is fine, but user-testing is better.

# Web Design Best Practices

Techniques for improving  
usability and engagement

## BEST PRACTICES: **CONTENT**

- Streamline
  - Remove unnecessary, unused, and unimportant content
  - Remember your audience!
- Simplify language
  - Avoid jargon
  - Use meaningful navigation labels and page headings (meaningful for users)
  - Label testing: Show users labels, ask them to predict what they'd find.

## BEST PRACTICES: LAYOUT

- Three clicks deep
  - Keep important content shallow. Don't make users dig.
- Keep important information “above the fold”
- Visual Hierarchy
  - Arrange important information left to right, top to bottom
  - Where does the eye go first?
  - What information is “hidden” or ignored? (Confirm through testing, not just instinct.)

# Application

Analyze and discuss existing  
Writing Center websites

# Contact

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- Sample user tests
- Sample reports (user analysis, user testing, benchmarking)
- Resources for user testing and web design