Aalto University *Editor's Guide*

Aalto University

Content

Aalto online – *a window* to the world

Aalto-university is one of the best universities in the world – and surely it deserves to have an online presence which reflects this. Now we start to work towards this goal. At the end, the website will be more engaging for people at Aalto as well as visitors.

During the first part of the communications platform renewal project, the task is to edit all the material on aalto.fi and Inside. This means that all unnecessary information will be removed, and the remaining texts will be edited to make them more engaging to read.

Later, in Spring of 2018, aalto.fi and Aalto Inside will also be redesigned, both visually and technically. The new look and navigation system will better support the needs of internal and external visitors to Aalto online.

This booklet will be your guide on this journey.

How the Internet *changed the content*

PEOPLE READ text differently online than in print. When a reader lands on a webpage, they tend to read it by scanning in the shape of the letter F. After a quick scan, which may take only few seconds, they decide if they will continue reading the text.

What does this mean for the writing process? It means that the headline, lead and beginning of the text are especially important. We will explain this more later in this guide. ■

5 ideas when writing for the web

- **The beginning of the text should clearly, but in an enticing way, tell why the text is worth of reading.**

- **The text itself may be short or long, but the sections and the chapters should be kept relatively short.**

- **Keep the sentences compact.**

- **Know your audience. Who will read the text and will it be shared on social media?**

- **If possible, use sub-headlines. They make scanning easier.**

More and more information

The Internet took over the world and changed the ways people produce, share and handle information. There is much about this that is positive. More information than ever before is available for more and more people, and with the help of the world wide web, more people are able to take part in global conversations.

On the other hand, this phenomenon has its negative side. Today there is so much information available that it can be tough to discern which of it is trustworthy.

This phenomenon of increased amounts of information has been named a *content shock*. Already by 2010 the CEO of Google said that in just two days people now produce as much information as had been created during the whole history of humankind by 2003.

If that was the situation almost ten years ago, at a time before social media really took off, one can imagine what the situation is now!

Know your *audience*

The main user groups for Aalto University content are:

1 **Students**
2 **Potential students**
3 **Academic staff**
4 **Service staff**
5 **Alumni**
6 **Partners and affiliates**
7 **Media**

THE CONTENT on Aalto University's web pages has many different kinds of providers, producers and readers. The academic staff will most likely need – and produce – different kinds of information than, for example, students or the general public.

On its top-level the content in aalto.fi is Aalto University's face to the world. Aalto Inside is a website which should make the university's staff's workday a bit better and easier in as much as finding the relevant information quickly. These sites really do matter!

User-research has been done on aalto.fi, and it tells that the websites' user groups have common needs: They want to find information on research, get to know about Aalto's campus life and create contacts.

For the academic staff, the website is a place for getting attention for their research from wider audience and staying in touch with other researchers. Aalto University's website must succeed in attracting the attention of potential students, and also potential staff. The online presence is an important factor in recruiting talented students, researchers and service staff.

For the media, aalto.fi is a place to find topics for their stories and contact information for experts to interview. ■

5 questions that help successfully target your audience

- **What do you want your text to achieve?**
- **Do you want your text to spark a discussion?**
- **Should your text solve a problem?**
- **On which channels will your text be distributed?**
- **Which questions should your text provide an answer for?**

Write a fantastic *headline*

ON THE Internet, people read by scanning. This means that headlines are very important in getting your message through. If the headline is too hard to understand or is uninteresting, the whole story will most likely not be read.

The headline should let the reader know why they should spend their time reading your text. The headline should contain information, but it can also carry emotions and even be provocative. The relationship between emotion and information depends on the audience and the context of the text.

Example 1

Teaching throughout Otaniemi

This headline is far too general. More information on what the article is about should be included in the headline.

Example 2

Become a recognized expert

As a headline for a degree programme, this is rather general and boring. Becoming a recognized expert is what every single university in the world is most likely to say they offer. This promise does not differentiate Aalto from other universities.

Sub-headlines

Sub-headlines have the job of making it easier for the reader to digest large amounts of text. For very short texts, sub-headlines are unnecessary. The same basic rule applies to both the headline and sub-headline: they should entice the reader to focus on the text for longer.

On the Inside, sub-headlines can be in the form of a question. This way, they make it easier for the reader to find the information they are looking for.

Lead

After the headline, text may have a lead. A lead consists of a few sentences, and is there to give some more information on the subject in ways that may attract the reader to read the full text.

If your text is a news article, the main website usually displays the headline and the lead of the story. This puts a lot of pressure on these two text elements, and they should always go hand in hand, so to speak. Simply put, it's the headline and the lead, which help the reader to decide whether to click on and read the full story.

It is usually best to write the ingress after the story is ready.

Example 1

Rerouting transport research: from driverless cars to fresh thinking

Focusing research on technological development will further lock us into a motorized, private-vehicle transport system.

Here the headline and the lead nicely complement each other. ■

5 points to keep in mind when writing a headline

- **The headline must tell why the reader should read the article.**

- **The headline may contain both information and emotion. In what portion these factors are present depends on the audience.**

- **If you want your text to be shared on social media, its headline should contain emotion.**

- **Sub-headlines help draw the reader into continuing to read the article.**

- **The lead and the headline create a coordinated entity.**

Fast guide
to editing

THE first part of this project in creating a completely new online presence for Aalto University means that the existing text on the communications platform need to be edited.

Put simply, editing is the adding, removal and adaptation of text. The difficult part of editing is understanding which part of the text should be modified.

The first step to answering this is to know whom the text is aimed at, and why. Once the writer is clear about these things, the actual editing process starts to make sense.

The first step in editing aalto.fi and Aalto Inside is to remove unnecessary text.

Unnecessary text include, for example:

- **Dated content**
- **Duplicate content**
- **Relevant content in the wrong place**
- **Unnecessary, long lists within a text**

Dated and duplicate content should be removed, and relevant content in un-relevant contexts should be rewritten and placed in the right context. It should also be kept in mind that the Internet, and even more so the intranet, is not an archive.

Lists within a text need a little thought. If they are absolutely necessary, alternative ways of presenting them should be considered. Aalto's intranet, for example, currently has lots of this kind of content.

Sometimes editing means adding text. Once you read through your website, you should pay attention to texts which need more information or emotion added, in order to for the text to be more readable and/or relevant. ■

Be careful with *your words*

EASY TO understand text is impossible to write using hard to understand words. This is why the simplest possible word should also be found. By doing this, the structure of sentences usually becomes simpler as well.

Write no unnecessary words

An unnecessary word is a word which, when left out in the text, does not actually change the meaning of the text.

Example

A large share of research in this area is done in close collaboration with the University of Helsinki and Helsinki University Hospital.

Use common sense words

In the world of research, field-specific words are sometimes used. In these cases, an easier synonym should be found, or the specialist term should be clearly explained so that the general public may find the text readable.

Example

Living+ is Aalto University's multi-disciplinary platform focusing on planning, design and testing of human centered living environments in all scales.

Every sentence should have a reason

As with every word, every sentence should also have a reason. Keep in mind that a sentence communicates one idea, or a group of closely integrated ideas.

Example

Knowledge building activities in art and design at Aalto University can be characterized by a quest for a human approach in any topic.

Avoid using numbers

If your text includes numbers, they really should further communicate the idea of the text. Remember that sometimes numbers are better understood when written out, rather than presented as numerals. ∎

How to structure *your text*

EFFECTIVE ONLINE text has a somewhat different structure than text for print material. Also, a text geared for the general public differs structurally from text written for research papers.

In research papers, it is important to prepare the ground for the conclusion as carefully as possible. For this reason, the actual point of the text usually can be found only at the end of the research paper.

When writing online, this structure should be turned upside down.

First, let the reader know the point of the story, then do the ground work.

Online, most people first scan the headline, lead and maybe a few lines of the actual text. These should tell the reader why they should spend their time reading the text and not move on to something else.

We live in an era of content shock, and in this era, **people's attention has become a sort of currency!**

Now, let's consider what the implications this claim means for your work and for Aalto University more generally.

Other important points regarding text structure are that each chapter should similarly follow the rule of beginning with a captivating sub-headline and/or first few lines. The sentences should be short and easy to digest. No difficult compound sentences should be used in the text.

Usually, text contains some information which can be presented in alternative, eye-catching ways. These possibilities should be considered.

These alternative ways of presenting information include:

- **Numbered lists**
- **Visual lists**
- **Different kinds of information boxes**
- **Film**
- **Audio**
- **Infographics**
- **Photos and drawings**

About
drama

THESE DAYS lots of content producers want to be storytellers. Sometimes different kinds of texts – especially news, research and personal texts – can be written in the form of a story. If so, a dramatic structure can be employed.

Using a dramatic structure means that the story will have a clear beginning, middle and the end. Often stories are written using characters, since this can help the reader to connect emotionally with the story.

A story is often needed if the writer wants to grab the reader's emotions!

Writing a story is often a time-consuming process. The structure needs clever planning, and the right people need to be found for the interviews. It can also be emotionally draining for the writer.

But the payoff is that with the help of a story, readers can become fully engaged and more likely to finish the story. ■

Structure of a story

1   The beginning of the story introduces the reader to the characters and the issues they are dealing with.

2   The middle of the story shows how the characters try to solve the issues. At the end of the middle part, a turn of the events is presented. This turn gives the characters new tools for solving the problem.

3   At the end part of the story, characters successfully solve the issues.

Some key SEO ideas

SEO, OR search engine optimisation, refers to producing content in a way which help it to gain online visibility. SEO is based on knowledge of how search engine algorithms work. But since those algorithms are very secret – and keep changing all the time – SEO has become a sort of science in itself. The search engine companies wish to keep the search results as organic as possible, and for this reason, as soon as content producers find ways of affecting the result, the algorithms often change. It could even be said that there is a bit of a rat-race between the people who write the algorithms and the people who produce content on the Internet!

Here are some basic rules for how to make SEO work for you. ■

Basic rules for how to make SEO work for you

- **A key rule of SEO is the use of keywords. Keywords are often searched words or pairs of words, which help your text to show up in search engines.**
- **You can check out popular keywords – for example at *keywordtool.io*.**
- **You should include those keywords in your text, headlines and sub-headlines.**
- **Use words which are easy and simple – as this means they are well-known.**
- **Create links inside your text. If possible, use keywords in those links.**
- **Keep your pages updated.**
- **Any photos should be a maximum of 72 pxls.**
- **However, never let the readability of the text suffer because of your SEO tactics. It is not worth getting people to click on website if the text is unreadable.**

Some facts *about social media*

ONLINE TEXTS and websites can get visited often if their link is shared via social media. But it should be remembered that clicks do not always mean the text is read.

When writing online, it is always worthwhile to be clear about what your text's relationship to social media is.

AALTO UNIVERSITY HAS A PRESENCE ON THE FOLLOWING SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS:

- **YouTube**
  Over one billion users world-wide. Contains entertaining as well as informative video.

- **Instagram**
  800 million users world-wide. A platform for photos, and a lot of them are of very high quality.

- **SnapChat**
  Mainly used by youngsters, though the company is making moves to attract a more adult audience.

- **Facebook**
  Over two billion users. Favored by adults and even seniors and companies.

- **Twitter**
  350 million users. Great for sharing links and news stories.

- **LinkedIn**
  About 100 million users. Worklife-focused social media.

CHECK THESE OUT FOR INSPIRATION:

- **Facebook Spaces**
  Facebook's take on virtual reality.

- **Medium**
  Essays, research papers and other writings.

- **Reddit**
  Very unattractive visually, but very active discussion boards.

- **Tumblr**
  Micro-blogging platform. This never really took off in Finland, but quite popular in other countries

- **Pinterest**
  Visual media for collecting visual boards. ■

Writer's *checklist*

1   Know who your audience is – and know your audience. The Internet is full of content, so you should have a specific audience in mind and know how to grab their attention.

2   Think about the channels you want your text to be present in.

3   Be clear about how long your text should be.

4   Write catchy headlines, but don't try to be funny or witty.

5   If your text needs a lead, make sure it coordinates with the headline.

6   Right at the beginning, share the key part of the story.

7   If your text contains information which can be presented visually or in a video, you may want to do that.

8   Use as simple and easy words as possible. Keep your words specific: fish is fish, not "an animal of the oceans".

9   Keep your sentences short.

10 Remember the key rules of search engine optimisation (SEO), but don't let it affect the readability of your text.

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Start the process by editing out all unnecessary text!