**Web Content Guidelines**

**for**

**United Arab Emirates Government Entities**

(A summary of the Arabic Web content guidelines)

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# Introduction

For any government entity, the website is a significant tool of communication with the outside world including its clients, media and researchers. Content is the most important component of any website. It is via content that an organization can convey its message to people and invite them to use its services. Content is what makes a website good or bad. If content is usable, a website will be usable and visa versa.

This document is a summary of the Arabic Web Content Guidelines document developed by the UAE’s Telecommunications Regulatory Authority for the purpose of developing the content of the federal government websites in the UAE. To some extent this document provides orientation on how to manage the official websites of the ministries and other government entities.

This document will be available for use by content managers and editors for the federal government websites and other content providers contracting with the government.



# scope and context

This document covers only a small fraction of the guidelines in the Arabic one. The reason for this is that while English web content guidelines can be found easily on the Internet, few sources are available for Arabic language content guidelines.

This document (and its extended Arabic version) will be open for continuous development, and it can be extended subject to general UAE government policies and pertinent instructions. The development of these guidelines comes in line with the efforts exerted by the UAE government to enhance its government websites. Therefore, this cannot be considered a standalone document. It should be read in conjunction with other guidelines and policies pertaining to government websites.



# Web Content Management Processes

The management processes may differ depending on the size of websites and the volume of content in it. Thus, complexity of such processes may vary from one entity to another. Within an organization, the management processes applied to Web content production should be consistent with the processes used across the organization in providing information to the public. These processes should be documented, clearly stated and accessible to those working on developing the content regardless of their roles.

To start with, the following roles need to be involved on content development:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No. | Role | Function |
| 1 | Content Author | Researching, Authoring and Writing |
| 2 | Chief Editor | Revising and Approving |
| 3 | Translator | Translating |
| 4 | Editor | Reviewing and approving the English content |

# Before you start

Before you begin creating content for a website, ask yourself these questions:

* Who is the audience? Who are trying to reach with the message?
* What is the message? What are you trying to get across?
* What should happen after this message is delivered? What are your goals?

# What visitors do

## People visit a website for a Reason

Visitors have something they want to do when they come to your website. They are there either to do an action or to find information. It is your job to anticipate what they will want to do and help them to do it.

## Visitors are in a hurry

Time is valuable, and visitors to your website want to find what they are looking for and move on quickly. If they cannot do this, you risk losing them.

## Visitors don’t read, they scan

Research shows that the majority of people scan Web copy, looking for key words or phrases. You must make your content conducive to scanning. That means breaking it into small, easily accessible and readable chunks. Headlines and subheads can further break up the content. Use bulleted lists instead of long, comma delimited lists.

# Web writing is different

Web writing is different from print writing. Web writers need to take two things into consideration:

1. their target audience and
2. the search engines.

# What makes good content

To write or create good content, you need to follow these tips:

## Put the important content first

Don't bury your important information under several paragraphs of filler content. Keep top-level content simple and to the point and provide links to allow visitors to "drill down" to more specific items. Lead with your most important content, then elaborate. This will help your visitor find what they are looking for.

## Use links within your text

Incorporate your links within your text, rather than using phrases such as "click here" or "more." Having a sentence or a phrase as a link will make it clear to your visitor exactly what is going to happen when they click it.

## Keep it simple

Simple pages lend themselves to scanning. The following guidelines will help you help your visitors.

* Keep your content simple and straightforward
* Use terms your visitor will understand
* Avoid jargon, overly formal language or highly technical terms at the highest levels of your site
* Use keywords that your visitor will expect to find

## Keep it short

Use as few words as possible in your content. Keep your writing tight.

## Proofread and edit your copy

Check your facts and your spelling. Do not only rely on a computer spelling or grammar checker. Have somebody who is unfamiliar with your content check it for accuracy. It may be helpful to print your pages and proofread them away from the computer, as mistakes are often easier to find.

## Provide useful information which meets the users’ needs

Web writers should know what users need and how to present information. Users should be provided with the option of commenting on the content, saying whether it is useful for them or not.

## Adopt the inverted pyramid methodology

Start your subject by stating the most important information. You may place the lesser important details in the following paragraphs.

## Make your writing compelling

Knowing what people care about may not be enough. You need to make people pay attention to what you are writing.

## Make your content clear

By clear we mean simple, but not simplistic. In a complex world, you must communicate complicated information in a simple and clear manner.

## Write complete content

Add relevant links to make content complete. Web links help people get the whole picture.

## Write concise content

Do not write long sentences and put irrelevant information. Be precise and to the point. This saves the reader from getting confused and saves his time.

## Make sure your content is correct

If you are not sure of a ‘fact’, check it. Don’t make the readers question the correctness of your claims. Unreliable or incorrect information harms the reputation of the organization.

## Give ‘original’ content

Good content should be original; expressing the essence of the organization’s message, services and products. If the organization buys content from a third party, a quality assurance from that party should make sure it is in line with the quality standards of the organization.

## Minimize the use of abbreviations

Abbreviations may be used in the English text, but they must be clarified.

## Copyright needs to be regarded

Make sure you do not violate copyright laws when you state facts and information that may not have been produced or owned by you. Be fair to the source and give him credit by mentioning his name as plagiarism will invite legal hassles.

## Mention the type and size of files

When you put up files for users to download, it would be wise to mention the type and size of these files. This will help the users to adjust and plan the downloading as per their available bandwidth and software installed on their computers.

## Be relevant

Is there any content on your page that might make someone say, 'So what?' If so, get rid of it. Don't provide information they already know, such as 'This is the Department of X' when the title already makes that clear.

## Be consistent

Follow the [Editorial web style guide](http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/staff/webSupport/guides/archivedWebeditorsHandbook/bestPracticeGuide/editorialWriting/editorialWebStyleGuide.htm). A consistent approach will help people navigate your site, and make the site look more professional.

## Use bold and italics sparingly and never underline or type in CAPITALS

Most default browser settings underline links on the page, so underlining text that is not a link causes confusion. Remember too, that large amounts of text in bold or italics are difficult to read on screen. Typing in CAPITALS makes it seem that you are shouting.

#### Check grammar

Grammar and spelling are important for the same reasons as consistency. Your content is important so follow the rules to make sure you get your message across. Remember, you may well be writing for users for whom English is a second language. Non-standard use of English can only confuse users.

#### Think globally

Remember that your website can be accessed by everyone in the world, so choose both appropriate content and words

## Provide a call to action

All useful web content drives an action and should end with a call to action, such as a link, a phone number, a form, etc. After reading a good piece of web content the reader should either know something they didn't know before, or be able to do something they couldn't do before.

# Tips to follow when creating and managing Web content

* Follow the Web writing style, which may differ from traditional styles.
* Writing should be consistent across the organization.
* Content should be grammatically and linguistically correct.
* The website should contain the vision and mission of the organization.
* The website should contain a page about the minister or CIO with his/her contacts information.
* Date of last update should be mentioned on the website
* Data and statistics of services and usage should be published on the website.
* A career page or section should be created on the website.
* ‘Help’ and ‘FAQ’s sections should be made available on the website.
* Privacy policy should be published on the website.
* Disclaimer policy should be published on the website.
* Terms of use should be published on the website.
* The website should clarify how it uses the user’s data and how it maintains their rights and privacy.
* Page titles should be clear and reflective of page contents.
* The website should provide a calendar of the organization’s events and those in which the organization is participating.
* The website should provide a list of events in which website users can participate (forums etc.).
* The website should publish summaries or the users’ participations, feedback, polls etc.
* The website should have a policy about using the social networking channels (forums, polls, surveys etc.) in which it encourages visitors to use these channels to communicate with the organization.
* The website should publish sufficient information about the e-services provided and how to use them (time needed for transaction, means of delivering documents etc.)
* Web managers should make sure all links on the website are intact.
* The website should contain information about the persons responsible for providing the e-services, and those in charge of replying to users’ enquiries.
* The website should contain an archive library of laws, policies, documents etc. with the search capability.
* The website presents data on site traffic and number of users of the services provided on the site.
* The website should give its users the option of entering their personal data to be saved and used for future procedures.
* Most used services should be highlighted on the homepage. Access to those services should be easy and fast.
* The website should contain a discussion forum in which the issues of interest to the users are discussed.
* The website should measure satisfaction of the service users. An enquiry button should be inserted at the bottom of important pages asking: “Was this information useful?” with an active mechanism ensuring that the users’ answers are properly dealt with.
* The website should ensure that users are given the chance to enrich content by proposing new content or reviewing the current content.
* The website should foster content collaboration through highlighting content provided by users. Example: “The following content has been added as per users’ request….”
* Web writers should use keywords properly.
  + Insert each keyword 2-4 times on the relevant page.
  + Insert keywords in hotspots such as in the main page headline and sub-headlines, the first paragraph, in the link-text, the search results page title, and anywhere that seems right and natural.
  + Replace vague, general words in your web content with keywords.
  + Your name(s) or organization’s name, location and street address, and relevant dates are vital keywords.
  + Edit the text until it reads like natural, friendly prose.
* Make your sentences short and to the point
* Start with clear information on what the page is about. Once a user has established that the page contains information that interests them, they are more likely to read the text properly.
* Because people read slower on-screen, they want to read less text. If you can pare down your language without sacrificing your content, you should do so
* You can be concise even if your subject is very complex. Start with a broad stroke: an overview, or even an abstract. Narrow your subject as you go on, giving more and more detail towards the bottom of your page. This is known as the 'inverted pyramid' style of writing. Very detailed background information, or information of interest only to a minority of readers, can be presented on secondary pages, linked from your main page
* Avoid unnecessary content. Most web users will not bother reading marketing blurb, detailed information or 'welcome' messages
* Use one idea per paragraph
* Publish a website you can manage. Make sure you check each piece of content at least once every three months
* When scanning, web users tend to look for keywords or interesting headlines, so make your writing appealing
* Headings and subheadings are useful for structuring information for scannability. Use two levels of headings (sometimes you may write 3 levels) so that your reader can navigate the information easily
* Headings must be meaningful. A good heading should convey clearly what the following text is about. Do not rely on context to make the meaning clear; a scanning reader will fix their eye on one or two words without reading the text around them
* Avoid long, uniform blocks of text; users will shy away and may even be discouraged from scanning when faced with such density. Break up your text into shorter paragraphs than you normally would
* Use bulleted lists and other such elements to relieve the user's eye. Bullet points also have the advantage of bringing important points to a scanner's attention
* Remember that text used as a hyperlink will stand out (it will be coloured and underlined). Scanners will fix on this text
* If you can, avoid long pages; users don't like scrolling, and will often only do so if you have already caught their interest in some way, so your top level pages must be short and to the point. However, do not break up information that belongs together into separate pages just in order to avoid scrolling. Moving pages is more disruptive than scrolling
* Scanning readers will often read the first line of each paragraph, and skip the rest if it seems irrelevant. The first sentence of each paragraph should therefore suggest what is to follow
* No matter how confident the Web writer is, a second reading remains a necessary practice to ensure content quality.
* Second draft must be made by someone other than the original writer.
* Although we live in the digital age, reviewing texts on paper is still necessary to ensure error-free content.
* Responsibility and ownerships should be clear when allocating roles within the content team. Each person within the team should have his/her own username and password.
* Published content should be revisited regularly to ensure validity and to find out potential slip-ups or mistakes.
* As far as possible, minimize the use of passive voice. Users prefer to know who does what.

# Further reading

* Writing for the Web - <http://www.nngroup.com/topic/writing-web/>
* [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview](http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag)

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