

The following essay is about 330 words long. Cut it to 150 words.

Editing Exercise: Adapting Print Text to the Web

Too many people use the web like a billboard, pasting up documents designed as print on paper. While a website can certainly serve as an archive for such work, most web surfers aren't looking for long print documents, and don't bother to read them.

They prefer to scan a screen of text, looking for key words and interesting links, and they don't like to scroll. So a "chunk" of text, enough to fill a screen, is the basic unit of webwriting. It won't be more than 100 words long, and might be much shorter.

To turn print text into chunks, it's a good idea to try to cut by 50 percent. So if your original text was 500 words, you should try to get it down to 250. Then you should see if you can break it into two or three chunks, each able to stand on its own. What's more, each chunk should be two or three short paragraphs. That's because a solid mass of text is hard to read on screen--especially when people prefer to scan rather than read line by line.

Webwriters have three jobs: They have to orient their readers so they can navigate around each page, and around the whole site. They have to supply information that's easy to find and understand. And they have to enable readers to act on that information--to buy the product, subscribe to the email newsletter, join the club.

That's a tall order, all right. But if Webwriters can't fill that order, their readers will soon be confused, or frustrated--and then they'll be gone to some other site. But simple navigation, useful information, and easy action will make any site worth visiting and revisiting.