

ABSTRACT

CREATING A COLLEGE WEB STYLE GUIDE: DEFINING VALUE, PROCESS, AND CONTENT

Jesse C. Racine, M.A.
Department of English
Northern Illinois University, 2008
Jessica Reyman, Director

This project describes both the process used to create a web style guide for a higher education institution as well as the final product. I established the value of a web style guide, consulted published literature on best practice for style guide creation, evaluated web style guides from around the country, and formed a content-based method of creating a web style guide. Based on this process, I recommend that web style guides should combine the editorial and technical standards of a website, to better reflect the changing nature of web communications. Technical communicators who use this process will have a web style guide that can help their website earn higher search engine results, satisfy federal and state accessibility requirements, and better serve their end users by making information easier to find.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEKALB, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2008

CREATING A COLLEGE WEB STYLE GUIDE:
DEFINING VALUE, PROCESS,
AND CONTENT

BY

JESSE C. RACINE
© 2008 Jesse C. Racine

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Thesis Director:
Jessica Reyman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES | iv |
| LIST OF APPENDICES..... | v |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| The Need for a Web Style Guide | 2 |
| The Purpose of a Web Style Guide | 4 |
| The Value of a Web Style Guide..... | 5 |
| 2. THE PROCESS OF CREATING A WEB STYLE GUIDE | 8 |
| Gain Managerial Approval | 8 |
| Form a Committee | 8 |
| Define the Audience | 9 |
| Create the Content of the Web Style Guide..... | 9 |
| 3. SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF WEB STYLE GUIDES FROM PEER INSTITUTIONS | 12 |
| 4. SURVEY OF COMMON WEB STYLE GUIDE CONTENT AREAS FROM PEER INSTITUTIONS..... | 17 |
| Description of “Top 14” Web Style Guide Content Areas..... | 19 |
| 5. WRITING THE WEB STYLE GUIDE | 23 |
| 6. THE MCC WEB STYLE GUIDE..... | 26 |
| Description of Unique Content Areas in the MCC Web Style Guide..... | 26 |

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| 7. CONCLUSION | 28 |
| 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY | 32 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Web Style Guide Content Area Frequency | 18 |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| Appendix | Page |
|--------------------------------|------|
| A. WEBSITE SURVEY RESULTS..... | 34 |
| B. MCC WEB STYLE GUIDE..... | 39 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I work on the web team for McHenry County College (MCC), a two-year community college in Crystal Lake, Illinois. As part of the marketing and public relations department, our team is responsible for the college's website communication. When I was first hired, I was surprised to learn that the web team did not have a style guide for the website in place. My previous work experience as an editorial assistant at a publishing house showed me the value of an accessible style guide for daily tasks, primarily because it brings editorial and stylistic consistency to an organization's communications. I assumed that a publication as complicated as an institutional website composed of thousands of web pages would have a corresponding style guide as well. My coworker explained that the team had been meaning to create a web style guide for the last few years, but it always got bumped to the bottom of the priority list when new projects came in.

In an effort to prioritize an important tool for an organization's communication plan, I undertook the development of a web style guide for MCC. I surveyed the published literature and discovered that although much had been written about corporate style guide creation, nothing existed about how to create a *web* style guide. Additionally, my research on 70 web style guides from peer institutions revealed that there was no correlation between the quality of a web style guide and the quality of the

corresponding website: exemplary web style guides were found on sub-par websites, and vice-versa. Finally, based on a content analysis of web style guides, I developed a new approach for creating a web style guide for higher education institutions.

In this paper I describe both the process we used to create a web style guide for a higher education institution as well as the final product. We established the value of a web style guide, consulted published literature on best practice for style guide creation, evaluated web style guides from around the country, and formed a content-based method of creating a web style guide. Based on this process, I recommend that web style guides should combine the editorial and technical standards of a website, to better reflect the changing nature of web communications. Technical communicators who use this process will have a web style guide that can help their website earn higher search engine results, satisfy federal and state accessibility requirements, and better serve their end users by making information easier to find.

The Need for a Web Style Guide

A web style guide was sorely needed because of the unique fusion of our job responsibilities, as evidenced by our job titles: web content specialists. At our institution, we crafted the content *and* coded the web pages. Positions like this are a relatively new development in the field of technical communication because traditionally someone from the marketing department crafted the content and someone from Information Technology (IT) coded it. We needed a guide that not only spelled out the editorial and stylistic preferences of our institution, but also documented the

technical features of our website. With the turnover in the department and the need to bring stylistic consistency to our daily content creation, it was imperative that MCC's website practices were documented.

To be sure, the MCC web team had a small section in the departmental style guide on how to spell certain web terms, and bits and pieces of the preferred web style were written on Post-It notes pinned to a few cubicle walls, but most of it was locked in the head of my co-worker, who had maintained the website for the last six years. Since I was new and relatively inexperienced regarding the technical aspects of web development, we thought it would be an excellent learning experience to create a comprehensive web style guide for the MCC website.

MCC's website is public and consists of approximately 3800 web pages. It provides credit course information for incoming traditional students and returning adult students, as well as non-credit course information for nontraditional students and small business owners. The site is also useful for prospective students looking for information on specific programs and schedules. Additionally, the site serves the community of McHenry County by hosting community seminar information, ESL/GED registration, fine and performing art schedules, as well as information about recycling from our Recycling Center. Our internal users, the faculty and staff, make use of our online event calendar and submit requests for announcements of their upcoming events, but they primarily use our intranet for the bulk of their day-to-day activities. Maintaining the intranet is not our department's responsibility. Finally, current students are a "captive" audience of sorts, but they primarily use our school's learning management system,

ANGEL, for their online classroom needs and the web portal for online registration and paying tuition. These areas are outside the scope of our department.

The Purpose of a Web Style Guide

Following MacKay, a style guide can be loosely defined as “a rule-driven document that sets the parameters for consistency and acceptability for all written materials produced by an individual or group” (244). A style guide is typically a compendium of preferred grammatical usage regarding punctuation and spelling, the most common example being the corporate style guide. A style guide is important because it constitutes the stylistic preferences of an entire institution, and consequently should affect every publication produced by that institution. Since some aspects of editorial style are preferential and open for discussion, a style guide makes such preferences explicit; it draws a line in the sand, so to speak, for institutional publications.

The definition of a *web* style guide is harder to pin down. Indeed, Lynch and Horton sidestep this difficulty in their popular *Web Style Guide* by offering not a definition but a tagline: “basic design principles for creating web sites.” The reader is left to conclude that a web style guide is simply composed of the topics addressed in the table of contents: process, interface design, site design, page design, typography, editorial style, web graphics, and multimedia (Lynch and Horton).

Popular web style guides include the New York Public Library Online Style Guide and the *Sun Guide to Writing for the Web* by Jacob Nielsen, PJ Schemenaur, and

Jonathan Fox. The NYPL Style Guide is technical in nature, specifying the DOCTYPE (DTD) and Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) for the website, whereas the *Sun Guide* is solely a set of editorial and stylistic guidelines for writing for the web. Clearly, there is great variation for what comprises a web style guide, with some leaning towards either the technical or editorial side of the spectrum, as these examples demonstrate. For the purpose of this paper, though, I will categorize Lynch and Horton's topic areas and say that a *web style guide is a set of basic design principles which are composed of editorial, visual, and web-specific standards*. Put this way, a web style guide becomes more familiar: editorial features derive from traditional style guides or style handbooks, visual features come from graphic standards manuals, and web-specific features draw from technical web standards. Two of the three components, namely the traditional style guide and graphic standards manual, already exist in most institutions; it is the compilation of the two with the web-specific standards that make web style guides unique.

The Value of a Web Style Guide

The greatest benefit of creating a web style guide is that it makes the online publication consistent with a set of editorial, visual, and web guidelines; every page across the website will have the same “look and feel.” Our marketing director immediately agreed to support the effort because she understood the value of establishing consistency in our web communications for both external and internal users; there was no need to remind her that she “[has] the responsibility for every

publication that leaves [her] department” (MacKay 246). External users or online visitors to our website benefit because content displayed in a predictable manner enforces a similar ethos across the site—this builds trust and credibility with our external users (Gelb and Gardiner 469). Put differently, a web style guide helps to satisfy user expectations by providing a predictable online experience; the navigation as well as the spelling is the same across our 3800+ web pages.

A web style guide benefits internal users as well, the creators of the online content. Work flow is improved because once stylistic decisions are made, the web style guide becomes the baseline for future projects—there is no need to “reinvent the wheel” for each project. Once the main content of a style guide is published, it can be disseminated throughout the organization. If an individual or group is absent, the style guide is still available to curtail haphazard editing. My co-worker told of how the previous director decided to update the website himself while she was on vacation. When she returned, she found the website riddled with stylistic and usage errors that went against her web style sensibilities. “He was clueless; he really had no idea that he had done anything wrong until I pointed it out to him,” she recalled.

Additionally, a web style guide facilitates the training of new employees and contractors. New hires will have a handy reference on how to properly use the web as a communication tool, and they won't need to interrupt others to answer common questions. In what amounted to an apprenticeship, I spent more than month sitting next to my co-worker learning not only basic HTML but also the way MCC communicated on the web. While some hands-on training was unavoidable, the process would have

been much quicker if a web style guide were in place. Spending a large amount of time with my coworker was the only way to transfer the knowledge.

Establishing a web style guide can also help manage internal client expectations. With a web style guide in place, clients would know what is or is not permissible before they ask for additional features or graphics. For example, when the automotive department asks for animated cartoon cars on their departmental web page, we can decline the request because it violates our style guide: not only is it poor taste, animation can potentially render content inaccessible per the Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (IITAA) guidelines. Pointing to a web style guide is much more effective than saying “No, because I said so.” Simply put, these internal benefits—new employee training, improved work flow, managing client expectations—save an institution time and money (Allen 285).

CHAPTER 2

THE PROCESS OF CREATING A WEB STYLE GUIDE

Once we got the green light, we needed a game plan for how to create the web style guide. What steps should be taken? What is the best process to adopt? There is virtually nothing in the existing literature on the process of creating a *web* style guide; the closest recommendation is the literature on creating a corporate style guide, the web style guides' close relative. Taking corporate style guides as my starting point, I surveyed technical communication scholarship and practitioners' texts on creating a style guide to establish some consensus on the best approach to create our guide.

Gain Managerial Approval

Thankfully, we had already taken the recommended first step: getting the necessary stakeholder buy-in by gaining managerial approval (Allen 287).

Form a Committee

Indirectly, we also accomplished the second recommended step, forming a committee to involve coworkers early in the process (Quesenbery 5, Johnson, par. 2, Gelb and Gardiner 470). A committee of three was still a committee, and I could not write the guide for such a large site by myself. Only a “divide-and-conquer” strategy was plausible.

Define the Audience

Once we solidified managerial buy-in and formed a working committee, we took the next step suggested by Allen by defining the audience of the document (287). Who would most likely use it? This is an important step because different users demand different levels of detail. For instance, a web style guide created for a departmental secretary who inputs content through a content management system (CMS) would look dramatically different than a web style guide created for someone who “hand-codes” each web page.

Initially I thought we should write the web style guide for our director, so that it would not assume too much technical knowledge of the end user, and I even started writing portions of it with her in mind. However, after discussing it some more, my co-worker persuaded me it would have more value if it were written for a new employee. “This way,” she said, “we could make it sound 'a little bossy' by being direct.” That is, the web style guide would be easier to follow if it were composed of directives: “Do this, Check this,” etc. A new employee could follow the guide verbatim to accomplish a task.

Create the Content of a Web Style Guide

Once we identified our audience, we needed to create the actual content. The literature I surveyed suggested we break this process down into several steps. First, Bright advises choosing a comprehensive style guide to backup the minutiae of editorial

terms and then adopting a flexible medium that can be quickly updated (45-47, see also Magyar 540-41). We already used the *Associated Press 2008 Stylebook* as our comprehensive style guide for the department.

We considered several options when choosing our preferred medium for the working document: should we use a free online wiki, Microsoft Word, or some other technology? Our goal was to use a software application that was flexible, as Bright advises, and supported collaboration among members of our team. We decided to use Google Docs to create the style guide because we were curious about the feature set and had heard good reviews of the product. Google Docs is a free web-based word processor that allows multiple users to view or edit a document, regardless of location. Because it is online, it can function like a wiki; different people can be given permission to either edit or view the document. The interface is immediately familiar to anyone who has used a desktop-based word processor, such as Word. Another benefit is that Google Docs allows you to see a detailed revision history, so you can view who added what and when they did so.

Now we could begin to flesh out our content. We needed to include a section on common editorial terms. Damrau gives a helpful list of often overlooked grammar, punctuation, and branding issues that style guides typically address (357, see also Bright 47-48). Our existing departmental style guide answered most of these questions; we had a few web-specific items to add but nothing major. For example, we wanted to delete the hyphen in the word *e-mail* to make it *email*, and we also wanted to spell out months, to avoid any difficulty screen readers may have with abbreviations.

Taylor-Collins recommends that we work from existing needs, and the smattering of Post-It notes covered this point as well (472, see also Wieringa 531). Similarly, Redish advises that a web style guide be organic, that it “start small and grow as issues and questions arise” (345). Until now, the recommendations derived from creating a corporate style guide were largely answered by our existing editorial resources: we already had a comprehensive style guide in place, we had a departmental style guide to draw from, and we had a pile of Post-It notes that pointed to our existing needs. We were further along than we anticipated.

However, for the next step we were on our own: creating *web-specific* content. What should we include? Exclude? Magyar recommends that to get started, “you steal from the best. Begin by finding good examples of the class of documents [you are interested in] and specifying components that aren't covered by a general guide” (541). With this in mind, we decided to survey existing higher education web style guides to find the good examples to follow and to note components of existing guides, hoping that we could use the best guides as a starting point for our own web style guide.

CHAPTER 3

SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF WEB STYLE GUIDES FROM PEER INSTITUTIONS

We queried Google for “web style guide” and took the first 70 non-duplicating results for higher education institutions. We collected a few more than 70 web style guides, but we limited it to a number that would allow us split the workload evenly given the time we had available for the project. We created an Excel spreadsheet to evaluate each with the following criteria: web standards, accessibility, and date stamp. We chose these three criteria in an attempt to quantitatively determine which guides were worth emulating. We also recorded our initial impressions of the style guide and overall website for future reference.

Web standards refer to a collection of technological “best practices” defined by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to make sure web content is more accessible and usable. Though the complete scope of web standards is still under debate, a few widely accepted best practices include separating content from presentation and behavior, using cascading style sheets (CSS) to style documents, using a Document Type Definition (DTD) in the X/HTML code, validating the files against the W3C specifications, and testing the website across multiple browsers (Dickerson). By adhering to web standards, institutions can ensure that their sites will be viable years down the road.

Fortunately, the W3C created online tools (known as validators) that test web pages for web standards compliance. We used two of these tools, the W3C Markup Validation Service and W3C CSS Validation Service to test each website style guide for X/HTML and CSS compliance. Specifically, we recorded pass or fail on the style guides displayed as X/HTML; 6 web style guides in our sample group were PDF files and could not be tested with the W3C tools.

Because MCC is a county-based institution that receives state and federal funding, we are required by law to make our website meet certain accessibility standards. Specifically, this means that we seek to comply with the IITAA, by following the Implementation Guidelines for Web-Based Information and Applications 1.0. IITAA also satisfies Section 508 of the 1998 Amendment to the Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (specifically part 1194.22) as well as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 1.0, Priority 1 and 2 recommendations. These guidelines help ensure that our web content is accessible to those using alternative browsers, screen readers, and other assistive devices. Hence, we wanted to follow models that made accessibility a priority in their style guide. We used the online Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool (WAVE) to test each web style guide page for accessibility (if images had alternative text, and forms had proper labels, for instance) and recorded the errors, if any.

The connection between web standards and accessibility is important: if a web page is created using web standards, it is probably (though not certainly) more accessible than a web page created without regard for best practice. Accessible content ensures that the user will still be able to get the content of the page, regardless of the

device used: screen reader, mobile device, or web browser. As the Web Standards Project mission statement summarizes, “These technologies, which we call 'web standards', are carefully designed to deliver the greatest benefits to the greatest number of web users while ensuring the long-term viability of any document published on the Web. Designing and building with these standards simplifies and lowers the cost of production, while delivering sites that are accessible to more people and more types of Internet devices” (Web Standards Project).

Beyond web standards and accessibility, we also thought it would be useful to record the date stamp left on the page. It is common practice to leave a date stamp to show when the web page was last published. The reasoning was that if a web style guide was recently updated, say within the last year or so, people were actually using it.

The results of our survey were sobering (see Appendix A for survey results). Only 25% of the web pages surveyed passed the W3C X/HTML validator, 46% passed the CSS validator, and only 34% passed the WAVE validator. The oldest web style guide was last updated in 1997, with the most current updated in 2008, and 48% showed no date stamp. More disheartening was the fact that out of 64 higher education web style guides tested, only 2 passed all three tests: Iowa State University and Penn State University. On the flip side, 25% of the web style guide web pages tested *failed all three tests*.

When we saw these results we realized we were still no closer to finding ideal models to follow. It became obvious that there was *no direct correlation between web page compliance and the quality of the web style guide it displays*. Just because a web

page in a guide validated—passed the W3C X/HTML and CSS coding tests—did not entail that the content displayed was very helpful or useful. For example, the Iowa State University guide was one of two that passed all three tests, but the content of the web style guide itself was minimal and very brief; the section on accessibility was lifted almost verbatim from the W3C WCAG “Quick Tips”. The Penn State guide was equally lacking in content, most of which was tied to two dense policy statements. The majority of the guides who failed validation were inconsistent because they professed adherence to standards that they failed to implement.

We came to understand that an institution may have a comprehensive web style guide in place, but if the department does not have support from upper management to enforce compliance across the university, the web style guide will have little impact on web visitors, who are still served poorly-formed web content that does not meet current technical standards. For example, the Southern Methodist University web style guide is comprehensive and well-organized, yet their website’s homepage failed the W3C X/HTML validation tool with 77 errors. Did that mean the web style guide itself should be disregarded for the purposes of our study? The converse was true as well: two web style guide web pages validated perfectly, yet the contents were sorely lacking. Should these sub-par-yet-well-formed web style guides become our models to follow?

Another difficulty was the dawning realization that there was no “ideal” web style guide. Ideal for whom? Best for what purpose? It became a question of audience. The guides in our survey were as varied as the websites that housed them—from the colors and fonts to the organization and content, no two guides covered the same

territory. For example, Drury University and University of the Pacific *only* included the traditional editorial content in their web style guide. Topics such as code, web standards, or graphics—what we would consider the “web” portion of a web style guide—never entered the picture. That is not to say they did not have policies governing those web-specific areas, just that those policies were never referenced in their web style guide.

On the other hand, the majority of institutions (62 out of 70) had comprehensive web style guides. These guides included not only editorial and visual preferences but also web-specific standards: detailed X/HTML markup specifications, code samples, video and audio standards, privacy and copyright policies, not to mention sections on mobile devices, search engine optimization, and the correct use of Flash and JavaScript technologies. Clearly, somebody needed this level of detail documented in the web style guide for those institutions.

Hence, the idea of finding prototypes or ideal models to follow was abandoned. Nonetheless, there was still great benefit in the survey we conducted. In the handful of web style guides that appealed to us, it was their *content* that we found valuable, topic areas that we could use or borrow from to start our own guide. We realized we were looking for the wrong thing: we did not need web style guides that passed the W3C standards compliance tests, we needed common web style guide content areas.

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY OF COMMON WEB CONTENT AREAS FROM PEER INSTITUTIONS

Using the original 70 web style guides, we went back and listed the table of contents and, when necessary, the specific details of each guide in an Excel spreadsheet. For example, if a web style guide listed “Design Standards” as a major heading, we looked at the specific content to determine what they meant by “Design Standards” and recorded the specific terms. We were not interested so much in how they classified their content as much as the content areas themselves. As a final note, when a style guide linked to web-specific policies, say a web accessibility policy, we counted that as being part of their web style guide, even though technically it is not. Our reason for doing so was that these supporting documents inform the web style guide, at least indirectly. When policies were not prominently linked, however, we did not search for them.

Once we listed the table of contents and supporting details, we made a master list of possible content areas for web style guides. This was a great step forward, in that we had a bank of terms to draw from for our content areas. Moreover, we determined from the master list what terms were common to the greatest number of guides, and then created a starter list of content areas that most higher education web style guides shared.

After many painstaking hours of analysis, we came up with a master list of 55 possible content areas for web style guides (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Web Style Guide Content Area Frequency

| Topics | Instances | % |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| Colors/palettes/schemes | 45 | 64.29% |
| Fonts | 38 | 54.29% |
| Accessibility | 37 | 52.86% |
| Template | 34 | 48.57% |
| Images/Photography/Graphics | 33 | 47.14% |
| Logo | 33 | 47.14% |
| Editorial Guides | 20 | 28.57% |
| CSS/Style Sheet | 19 | 27.14% |
| Header/Banner | 19 | 27.14% |
| Navigation | 17 | 24.29% |
| Copyright | 15 | 21.43% |
| Hyperlinks | 15 | 21.43% |
| Resources | 15 | 21.43% |
| Web Standards (validators) | 14 | 20.00% |
| Naming Convention/File Structure | 11 | 15.71% |
| Tables | 11 | 15.71% |
| Browsers | 10 | 14.29% |
| Lists | 10 | 14.29% |
| Advertising | 9 | 12.86% |
| Meta data/meta tags | 9 | 12.86% |
| Footer | 8 | 11.43% |
| Frames | 8 | 11.43% |
| Search | 8 | 11.43% |
| Privacy | 7 | 10.00% |
| File Size | 6 | 8.57% |
| Maintenance/Timeliness | 6 | 8.57% |
| Paragraphs | 6 | 8.57% |
| Usability | 6 | 8.57% |
| Flash | 5 | 7.14% |
| Forms | 5 | 7.14% |
| Development (Project Management) | 4 | 5.71% |
| Sample page layouts | 4 | 5.71% |
| Video | 4 | 5.71% |

Top 14 Content Areas

(continued on following page)

Web Style Guide Content Area Frequency (continued)

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|-------|
| Blockquotes | 3 | 4.29% |
| Javascript | 3 | 4.29% |
| PDF | 3 | 4.29% |
| Site Architecture/Navigation | 3 | 4.29% |
| Date stamp | 2 | 2.86% |
| External link/link policy | 2 | 2.86% |
| Noncompliance | 2 | 2.86% |
| Security | 2 | 2.86% |
| Analytics | 1 | 1.43% |
| Character entities | 1 | 1.43% |
| E-commerce | 1 | 1.43% |
| Email signatures | 1 | 1.43% |
| Fundraising | 1 | 1.43% |
| Historical Content | 1 | 1.43% |
| Infrastructure (Server info) | 1 | 1.43% |
| Inline elements | 1 | 1.43% |
| Microformats | 1 | 1.43% |
| Mobile | 1 | 1.43% |
| Page counters | 1 | 1.43% |
| Plagiarism | 1 | 1.43% |
| Site Review Checklist | 1 | 1.43% |
| Wireframes | 1 | 1.43% |

From this master list, we chose the top 14 content areas, topics shared by 20% or more of the web style guides sampled, as a starter list, with the lesser-supported terms as options.

Description of “Top 14” Web Style Guide Content Areas

1. Colors/Palettes/Schemes (64.29%) – Refers to the institution's official color scheme for web publications. It includes the school's primary colors, as well as supporting color palettes that could be used. Some schools have a few color schemes while others permit more flexibility with multiple color schemes. Most

- give hexadecimal specifications, though some schools recommend RGB values.
2. Fonts (54.29%) – refers to the official font family for the website (usually sans serif), as well as font sizes and spacing for specific page elements, such as headers, paragraphs, and unordered lists. Some web style guides specify font stacks as well.
 3. Accessibility (52.86%) – refers to supported accessibility standards, usually the WCAG 1.0, Priority 1 and 2 recommendation checklist. Accessibility is necessarily broad and encompassing (it includes elements of coding, text, images, data tables, and multimedia, to name but a few) but most accessibility policies are homogeneous, being derivatives of WCAG and Section 508. Higher education institutions are mandated to follow their state's web accessibility policy, as well as the federal requirement.
 4. Template (48.57%) – refers to the template or templates of the website, page elements that are common across the website. Several institutions use a content management system (CMS) for their website, and templates are integral to that arrangement. First-level, second-level, and third-level web templates are usually given.
 5. Images/Photography/Graphics (47.14%) – refers to the preferred file type (.jpg, .gif, .png), file size, resolution (dpi), and actual image size (height and width) of common images on the website. Some web style guides give direction on how to add images to a web page, which directory to store the images in, and so forth.
 6. Logo (47.14%) – refers to the proper usage of the logo on the website, including

logo colors and sizes. The recommendations are similar to what is found in a college's graphic standards manual for correct logo usage.

7. Editorial Guide (28.57%) – refers to the preferred grammar, punctuation, and stylistic considerations, such as preferred words, phrases and spellings, of the institution. Some web style guides include recommendations for writing for the web and other stylistic concerns.
8. CSS/Style Sheet (27.14%) – refers to the style sheet of the website. Some link directly to their style sheet(s), some give a format for how to write CSS rules, while others give advice on how to include CSS in a web page, either in-line, embedded, or linked.
9. Header/Banner (27.14%) – refers to the top-most banner across the website, with alternatives, if any. Some web style guides give an explanation for the different elements in the header, such as search or navigation.
10. Navigation (24.29%) – refers to the common (or global) navigation elements on the college website. Also includes secondary navigation elements, such as breadcrumbs or server-side-includes (SSI).
11. Copyright (21.43%) – refers to the official copyright policy regarding the website. It addresses not only the copyright of the website itself but also how copyrighted objects, such as photographs or comics, are treated on the web.
12. Hyperlinks (21.43%) – refers either to the coding of hyperlinks or the styling of hyperlinks, or both. Most give good and bad examples of hyperlink usage.
13. Resources (21.43%) – refers to a collection of resources for content editors or

web developers, depending on the audience of the web style guide. Common resources include accessibility, web standards, and writing for the web.

14. Web Standards (20.00%) – refers to a collection of technologies specified by the W3C for creating accessible web pages. This is necessarily broad; some web style guides specify the correct DOCTYPE for the website, link to code and accessibility evaluators, or give a list of supported browsers.

It is important to point out that the “Top 14” list of content areas reveals that less than 30% of the institutions surveyed include editorial style as part of their web style guide. Should editorial concerns not enter into a web style guide? Perhaps most schools think their existing style guide covers everything one needs to know about writing for the web. Or maybe those existing guides have a web-specific section already, and there is no need to duplicate the information. This demonstrates that there is little agreement on content areas to include in a web style guide; each institution has to decide what's appropriate based on the needs of the end user.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING THE WEB STYLE GUIDE

Since we decided that our primary audience would be a new employee, our next step was to write the style guide with this user in mind. Using the “Top 14” as well as the master list of 55 topic areas, we came up with our index (see Appendix B - MCC Web Style Guide). Every topic in our index can be tied, at least indirectly, to the twin priorities of web accessibility and web standards. Accessibility affects page structure, navigation, and page layout (Clark 46-50, 141-147, 229-230), not to mention the use of hyperlinks and images (Theofanos and Redish 41-45). Accessibility concerns are so pervasive that Coyne and Nielsen recommend 75 usability guidelines for implementation (35-39). In this case, our IITAA accessibility guidelines formed the backbone of our web style guide content. In practice, then, writing the style guide became an exercise in demonstrating how our website and web content was accessible.

Specifically, the IITAA accessibility guidelines required that we specify typography, color, hyperlinks, page size, images, information architecture, and pdf requirements. Web standards informed browser and mobile specifications, CSS, markup, meta data, and validation (though IITAA 1.1 calls for validation as well) (Illinois Department of Human Services). The remaining topics—Privacy/Copyright, Resources, Template, and Web Page Review Checklist—we included because we thought they would benefit a new employee managing the website. For example, if a

faculty member requested that a “Calvin and Hobbes” cartoon be posted to the website, the new employee could use the web style guide to make a sound decision not to fulfill the request. Also, a section on templates would help a new employee get started constructing a new web page.

Topics we did not include in our table of contents from the “Top 14” were fonts, navigation, header/banner, or logo. Fonts are referenced in our CSS file, and navigation is part of our common page elements, which we cover in Graphical Design. The header/banner is similarly locked down by the page structure and outside of the banner image, we rarely have use for the logo on our website. Other than that, you could say we were smitten by the long tail, adopting even those content areas that only a few schools shared. For our purposes, though, our lack of supporting documentation and policies compelled us to be more rather than less comprehensive. Most of the web style guides we surveyed were tied to official policy statements regarding web accessibility and standards; we wanted our style guide to be a “one-stop” destination for our website, since we did not have any similar supporting policies in place.

Over the next few months, I wrote the style guide. My co-worker periodically reviewed my work. It turned into a relatively straightforward process. Because I had a list of common content areas, I could see how different style guides handled the same topic and borrow from them. For example, we decided to include a HTML Markup Guide, similar to one included in University of Missouri Graduate School. I used theirs as the basis for ours, though I used a different online reference guide (www.sitepoint.com) than they did.

Once I wrote the web style guide, it needed review and feedback. Google Docs streamlined the review process; I left my comments highlighted for my coworker to see and comment on. A few of the issues are yet to be resolved, but given the flexibility of the medium, we have left those comments in the style guide, as it is a working document. It is not accessible by the general public.

CHAPTER 6

THE MCC WEB STYLE GUIDE (see Appendix B)

We structured the document into two main sections, the visual style guide and the editorial style guide. We included certain editorial considerations in the visual side of things, but only when they were closely tied to the HTML code. For example, the correct format of email hyperlinks on our website is Contact Jesse Racine (where the name “Jesse Racine” serves as the `mailto` link), not Contact `jrachine@mchenry.edu` (where the email address is spelled out and serves as the `mailto` link). What follows is a description of the content areas we included that are outside of the “Top 14” list given above.

Description of Unique Content Areas in the MCC Web Style Guide

Browser Versions – refers to a list of supported “A-grade” web browsers, as defined by the Yahoo development team. These web browsers offer the greatest support for web standards and serve as our benchmark in testing purposes.

Graphical Design – refers to a visual orientation of our first-level, second-level, third-level, and departmental web pages. We also give an explanation of each section.

Information Architecture – refers to the rationale behind the structure of our website. We structure our global navigation based on audience—New Students, Current Students, Continuing Ed, ESL/GED/Literacy, Business, and Alumni—rather than by

institutional organization. This arrangement informs our linking strategy as well.

Markup – refers to an explanation of common HTML elements and examples. Two other web style guides included this in their guide; we include it as a resource for new employees to establish best practices in coding web pages.

Metadata – refers to the three required metadata in the `<head>` portion of our HTML documents. Includes description, keywords, and character set. We specify this because there are other metadata elements that we do not include that other companies or institutions do.

Mobile – refers to our support of mobile devices that access our website.

Page Size – refers to the maximum page file size, as measure in kilobytes (kb), that we allow. The larger the size of page file, the longer it takes to download to your computer. Some methods of connecting to the Internet like cable enable larger files to download to your computer faster. However not everyone has the fastest internet connections. We aim for the lowest size possible, to make sure that our web pages download as quickly as possible for our users.

PDF – refers to how we identify PDF documents on our website, including the file size. We also specify PDF document properties too.

Validation – refers to a list of X/HTML, CSS, and accessibility validation tools we routinely use.

Web Page Review Checklist – refers to a checklist to use when creating new web pages.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The process derived from the existing literature from technical communication researchers and practitioners for creating a corporate style guide proved to be useful. Creating a corporate style guide and creating a web style guide for higher education institutions are very similar, except for the part about the web. I would recommend the method—get managerial buy-in, form a committee, define the audience, create the content, and distribute and get feedback—to anyone thinking of doing the same, as long as they keep in mind that “there is no right or wrong way to create a web style guide” (Taylor-Collins 471). One major deviation from the corporate style guide process was creating the web-specific content. Our survey results on the major content areas can get one started on piecing together a guide.

Surveying higher education web style guides in order to find the “best models” revealed a variety of approaches and content among institutions. We soon realized that the different documents served different audiences and different institutional contexts. Even if the “best” web style guide could be revealed, it might not be appropriate for the needs of other institutions. To be sure, we found some web style guides more comprehensive than others, but “comprehensiveness” (i.e., including editorial, visual, and technical standards) may not be necessary for a school that has detailed policies in place governing website communication or that has extensive existing editorial style

guides. In fact, based on our working definition of a web style guide—basic design principles composed of editorial as well as visual and web standards—70% of the web style guides we surveyed were not comprehensive because they did not include editorial sections in their documents.

The marked separation of web from editorial standards is interesting, as it is necessarily a separation of form and content. I think this is a reflection of the traditional demarcations of these two functions: traditionally, the marketing department created the content for web publications whereas the information technology department coded it for the website. The web style guide content survey indicates that this is the present arrangement at many institutions. Nonetheless, I think this is an artificial distinction, because the content to a large extent *determines* the form, particularly when writing for the web. HTML stands for Hypertext Markup Language, and at its root is the idea of determining the structure of content and applying markup to reflect this structure. Put this way, the structure determines the form (visual display) of content on a web page. Also, the fact that some institutions such as MCC are combining these two responsibilities into one position points to the changing nature of web communications.

The consequences of merging writing and coding responsibilities for technical communicators are many. For one thing, writing for the web is intimately connected to coding for the web, and technical communicators who pride themselves on their writing ability can only benefit themselves by learning coding standards. Not only does good web writing help people find the information they need, it also increases a web page's search engine results. What employer does not want to attain higher Google search

rankings? The strengths of technical communicators—clear, organized writing that is audience-specific—will only become more important as the web as a medium continues to mature.

Rather than look for the ideal model for web style guides, it is more fruitful to consider what most web style guides *contain*. The fact that higher education web style guides display such a variety of content areas points to the relatively unstable classification of web standards and best practices in website creation and maintenance; there are few generally-accepted criteria in the industry, and similarly there are few shared topic areas in higher education web style guides. My survey of the common content areas of 70 higher education web style guides and the derived “Top 14” list breaks new ground in web style guide creation. Through this research, I have identified what appears to be standard in the emerging genre of web style guides. Further, my experience with the study and creation of “best practices” for web style guides has led me to believe that guides that contain information on both editorial and technical standards better support the connections between form and content inherent in web writing practiced by technical communicators.

Those writing for users of a content management system (web publishing software that allows non-technical users to update web content) will undoubtedly disregard much of the coding and visual standards for their style guide because those areas are locked down by the web publishing system; specific coding details will only be a distraction. Instead, editorial standards and instruction on “writing for the web” will take a higher priority. Nonetheless, institutions who use the “Top 14” list and the

supporting master list of common content areas can know they are in step with their peers, even if they wish to deviate from it, depending on their specific needs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Paul R. "Save Money with a Corporate Style Guide." Technical Communication 42.2 (1995): 284-289.
- Bright, Mark R. "Creating, Implementing, and Maintaining Corporate Style Guides in an Age of Technology." Technical Communication 52.1 (2005): 42-51.
- Clark, Joe. Building Accessible Websites. Indianapolis, IN: New Riders Press, 2003.
- Damrau, Jackie. "Developing a Corporate Style Guide." Proceedings of the 52nd International Technical Communication Conference. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication (2005): 356-358.
- Dickerson, Robert. "Best Practices for Web Sites." HighEdWebDev 2007 Conference, Rochester. 16 October, 2007.
- Gelb, J., and J.J. Gardiner. "Developing a Company Style Guide." Proceedings of the 44th Society for Technical Communication Annual Conference. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication (1997): 469-472.
- Illinois Department of Human Services. Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act Implementation Guidelines for Web-Based Information and Applications 1.0. February 2008. 13 March, 2008
<<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/IITAA/IITAAWebImplementationGuidelines.html>>.
- Lynch, Patrick J., and Patricia Horton. Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites. Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 2002.
- MacKay, Peter D. "Establishing a Corporate Style Guide: A Bibliographic Essay." Technical Communication 44.3 (1997): 244-251.

Magyar, Miki D. "Do-It-Yourself Style Guides for All Occasions." Proceedings of the 43rd International Technical Communication Conference. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication (1996): 540-543.

Nielsen, Jacob, P.J. Schemenaur, and Jonathan Fox. Sun Guide to Writing for the Web. 14 October, 2008 <<http://www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/>>.

New York Public Library Online Style Guide. 14 October, 2008
<<http://www.nypl.org/styleguide/>>.

Quesenbery, Whitney. "Building a Better Style Guide." Proceedings of Usability Professionals' Association, 2001. 13 November, 2007
<www.wqusability.com/articles/better-style-guide-paper.pdf>.

Redish, Janice. Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works. San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2007.

Taylor-Collins, Pamela. "Getting Your Style Guide Written!" Proceedings of the 42nd International Technical Communication Conference. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication (1995): 470-473.

Theofanos, Mary Frances and Janice Redish. "Bridging the Gap between Usability and Accessibility." Interactions 10:6 (2003), 36-51.

Web Standards Project. "Mission Statement." 14 October, 2008
<<http://www.webstandards.org/about/mission/>>.

Wieringa, Douglas. "Developing a Style Guide in the Real World." Proceedings of the 43rd International Technical Communication Conference. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication (1996): 531-532.

APPENDIX A
WEBSITE SURVEY RESULTS

| School | X/HTML Validation | CSS Validation | WAVE Validation | Date Stamp |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Binghamton University | pass | fail | fail | 03/18/2008 |
| Bradley University | fail | pass | fail | none |
| California Institute of Technology | fail | pass | fail | none |
| California State University, Channel Islands (PDF) | | | | 07/01/2003 |
| Calvin College (PDF) | | | | 12/20/2006 |
| Case Western Reserve University - Student Affairs/IT | fail | pass | fail | none |
| Central Michigan University | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Clemson University | fail | fail | fail | 11/30/2007 |
| College of Charleston | fail | fail | pass | 05/04/2007 |
| Colorado State University, Pueblo | fail | fail | pass | 10/07/2005 |
| De Anza College | fail | pass | fail | 08/16/2007 |
| Drury University | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Duke University - Law School, Library and Technology | fail | fail | pass | none |
| Evergreen State College | pass | fail | fail | none |
| Fayetteville State University | fail | fail | fail | 06/13/2006 |

(continued on following page)

WEBSITE SURVEY RESULTS (continued)

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------------|
| Gallaudet University | fail | pass | fail | none |
| Georgetown University | fail | pass | pass | none |
| Harvard University - Faculty of Arts and Sciences | fail | fail | pass | 06/24/2005 |
| Humboldt State University | fail | pass | pass | none |
| Indiana State University | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Iowa State University | pass | pass | pass | none |
| Iowa State University | fail | pass | pass | none |
| Las Positas College (PDF) | | | | 09/13/2006 |
| Lehigh University | fail | pass | fail | 05/02/1997 |
| London School of Economics and Political Science | pass | fail | pass | none |
| Madison Area Technical College (PDF) | | | | 07/27/2005 |
| Michigan State University | fail | pass | pass | none |
| Millersville University | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Missouri State University | pass | pass | fail | 12/13/2005 |
| New School University | fail | pass | fail | 06/28/2005 |
| North Central State College | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Northern Kentucky University - Library | pass | fail | pass | 08/20/2005 |

(continued on following page)

WEBSITE SURVEY RESULTS (continued)

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------------|
| Ohio University | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Penn State University | pass | pass | pass | none |
| Ryerson University | pass | fail | fail | none |
| Saint Mary's College | fail | pass | fail | none |
| San Diego State University | pass | pass | fail | none |
| San Jose State University | fail | fail | pass | none |
| Seattle University | fail | pass | fail | 09/15/2006 |
| Southern Methodist University | fail | pass | fail | none |
| Southwestern Oklahoma State University | fail | fail | pass | 04/28/2008 |
| Stanford University - IT Services | pass | fail | fail | 04/25/2008 |
| Stanford University School of Medicine - IRT | fail | fail | fail | none |
| Swinburne University of Technology | fail | fail | pass | 06/14/2007 |
| Tufts University - Medical School | fail | pass | fail | 11/12/2002 |
| University at Buffalo - School of Engineering and Applied Sciences | pass | fail | pass | 05/14/2008 |
| University of Alaska, Fairbanks | pass | fail | fail | none |
| University of Arizona | fail | fail | pass | 06/27/2005 |

(continued on following page)

WEBSITE SURVEY RESULTS (continued)

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------------|
| University of Arkansas | fail | pass | pass | none |
| University of British Columbia – Enrollment Services (PDF) | | | | 09/01/2008 |
| University of California, San Diego | fail | fail | fail | 01/01/2008 |
| University of Central Florida Libraries | fail | fail | fail | 04/04/2008 |
| University of Georgia - College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences | fail | fail | fail | 05/12/2008 |
| University of Georgia – College of Veterinary Medicine | fail | pass | fail | none |
| University of Louisiana, Monroe (PDF) | | | | none |
| University of Michigan, Dearborn | fail | fail | fail | 06/28/2005 |
| University of Missouri Graduate School | pass | fail | pass | 04/11/2007 |
| University of Nebraska, Kearney | fail | fail | fail | 06/30/2005 |
| University of Nevada, Las Vegas | fail | pass | fail | none |
| University of Nevada, Reno | pass | pass | fail | 05/15/2008 |
| University of South Carolina | fail | pass | fail | none |
| University of Tennessee | pass | pass | fail | none |

(continued on following page)

WEBSITE SURVEY RESULTS (continued)

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------------|
| University of Texas, Austin | fail | pass | pass | 12/20/2007 |
| University of the Incarnate Word | fail | fail | fail | none |
| University of the Pacific | fail | fail | fail | 06/29/2005 |
| University of Vermont | pass | pass | fail | 02/18/2008 |
| University of Victoria | fail | pass | pass | 08/05/2004 |
| University of Wisconsin, Green Bay | fail | pass | fail | 05/19/2004 |
| University of Wisconsin, Whitewater | fail | pass | fail | 06/29/2005 |
| Xavier University | fail | fail | pass | none |

APPENDIX B
MCC WEB STYLE GUIDE

MCC Web Style Guide

Visual Style Guide

Accessibility
Browser Versions
CSS
Colors
DOCTYPE
Hyperlinks
Graphical Design
Images
Information Architecture
Markup
Metadata
Mobile
Page Size
PDF
Privacy Policy and Copyright
Resources
Templates
Typography
Validation
Web Page Review Checklist

Accessibility - Seek to comply with the Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (IITAA), by following the [Implementation Guidelines for Web-Based Information and Applications 1.0](#). IITAA also satisfies Section 508 of the 1998 Amendment to the

Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (specifically part 1194.22) as well as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 1.0, Priority 1 and 2 recommendations.

Implementation Guidelines for IITAA

1. Coding

- 1.1 - Use valid, standard web programming code.
- 1.2 - Use appropriate markup to convey document structure.
- 1.3 - Provide meaningful page titles.
- 1.4 - Use headings to introduce sections and sub-sections, and use them in the correct order.
- 1.5 - Use lists to identify series of related items, including navigation menus.

2. Text

- 2.1 - Use text to display text, unless formatting that cannot be achieved with CSS is required.
- 2.2 - Use relative sizes for fonts.
- 2.3 - Identify the language of text.
- 2.4 - Use images instead of "ASCII art."

3. Colors

- 3.1 - Do not convey information with color alone.
- 3.2 - Use contrasting foreground and background colors.

4. Images

- 4.1 - Provide appropriate "alternate text" for all images.
- 4.2 - Provide full descriptions for graphs, diagrams, and other meaningful images.

5. Image Maps

- 5.2 - Use client-side image maps instead of server-side image maps unless areas cannot be defined with available shapes.

6. Sounds

- 6.1 - Do not convey information with sound alone.
- 6.3 - Provide text transcripts for audio containing speech when it is provided to the public and/or is required to be viewed by employees.

7. Multimedia

- 7.1 - Provide synchronized captions for all multimedia that contains essential auditory information when it is provided to the public and/or required to be viewed by employees.
- 7.2 - Provide audio descriptions for all multimedia that contains essential visual information when it is provided to the public and/or required to be viewed by employees.

8. Animation

- 8.1 - Provide a means of pausing any moving, blinking, scrolling, or auto-updating information.
- 8.2 - Do not include content that flashes faster than 3 times per second.

9. Links

- 9.1 - Ensure that links are understandable out of context.
- 9.2 - Provide a means of skipping past repetitive navigation links.
- 9.3 - Avoid using small links.
- 9.4 - Ensure that same-page links move keyboard focus as well as screen focus.

10. Forms

- 10.1 - Provide labels or titles for all form fields.
- 10.2 - Provide legends for groups of form fields.
- 10.3 - Ensure that form fields are in a logical tab order.
- 10.4 - Avoid placing non-focusable text between form fields.
- 10.5 - Ensure that text in form fields can be enlarged.

11. Tables

- 11.1 - Identify a header cell for each column and row in simple data tables.
- 11.2 - Identify relationships in complex data tables using id and headers attributes.
- 11.3 - Provide summary attributes for data tables.

12. Frames

- 12.1 - Provide concise, unique, and understandable titles for frames.
- 12.2 - Avoid using hidden, empty, or non-essential frames.

13. Scripts

- 13.1 - Ensure that scripted functions are usable with assistive technologies.
- 13.2 - Ensure that significant interactions can be performed with both keyboard and mouse.
- 13.3 - Avoid changing focus unexpectedly.
- 13.4 - Avoid changing content unexpectedly.

14. Embedded Objects

- 14.1 - Use accessible embedded objects whenever possible.
- 14.2 - If an inaccessible embedded object must be used, provide an accessible alternative that includes the same content and functionality.

15. Downloadable Documents

- 15.2 - If a downloadable document cannot be made natively accessible, provide an accessible alternative that includes the same content and functionality.

16. Timing

- 16.1 - Notify users of time limits and provide a means to extend time if possible.
- 16.2 - Do not automatically refresh the current page.

17. Page Layout

- 17.1 - When using tables for layout, ensure that reading order is logical.
- 17.2 - When using style sheets for layout, ensure that reading order is logical.
- 17.3 - Avoid horizontal scrolling.

18. Alternate Accessible Versions

- 18.1 - Use separate accessible versions only as a last resort.

In addition to following the above guidelines, validate every page touched with WAVE and the W3 HTML validator. Check the CSS with the W3 CSS validator. Periodically, test the entire website from first, second, and third level web pages with FAE.

Evaluators:

[WAVE](http://wave.webaim.org/) - Web Accessibility Evaluator Tool (<http://wave.webaim.org/>). WAVE our pages to check for accessibility errors caused by improper markup.

[FAE](http://fae.cita.uiuc.edu/) - Functional Accessibility Evaluator (<http://fae.cita.uiuc.edu/>). Use this tool periodically site wide as another check for accessibility compliance. FAE is more in-depth than WAVE and helps check that page titles match headings, etc.

W3C [HTML Evaluator](#) - Validate all pages to ensure that the HTML code is valid and well-formed.

W3C [CSS Evaluator](#) - Periodically validate our external style sheets to ensure that the CSS is valid and well-formed.

Browser Versions - Test web pages with multiple, standards-compliant browser environments including the latest versions of:

- Internet Explorer (7)/Windows
- Mozilla Firefox (3.0)/Windows
- Safari (3.1)/Macintosh

These [A-grade browser](#) and operating system combinations make up 98% of the traffic on the MCC website. Avoid use of browser-specific features which do not degrade gracefully in Internet Explorer 7 or later, Mozilla 2 or later, and Safari 2 or later.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) - Use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to separate presentation from content. Use tables to display tabular data (identifying header and rows) and do not use them for layout purposes. Migrate public-facing legacy web pages that use layout tables to a CSS-only layout.

- Reference the main style sheet ([Records.css](#)) using the <link> element in every page.
- Reference the main print style sheet ([Print.css](#)) using the <link> element in every page.
- Reference the form style sheet ([form.css](#)) in web forms.
- The Art Gallery mini site pages reference the ([gallery.css](#)) style sheet.
- Place page-specific CSS rules in the head of the document. If a rule applies to a group of pages, create a separate style sheet to reference the group-specific styles. See [gallery.css](#)

- Use inline styles () only as a last resort.

Name CSS ID's and classes semantically; call them what they are. For example, .fileinfo is correct, .style17 is not.

Colors - The current color palette consists of blue (#006699), white (FFFFFF), and light gray (#F5F5F5).

The universal navigation colors are royal blue (#339), green (#2C743E), red (#B40315), purple (#7B1C93), orange (#D08A09), and teal (#508B96).

DOCTYPE - The current DTD of the MCC website is HTML 4.01 Transitional but we are in the process of migrating to HTML 4.01 Strict. The Strict doctype forces support for web standards, e.g., under HTML 4.01 Strict, all images *must* have alt text.

Hyperlinks - Hyperlinks should use a meaningful, descriptive group of words rather than a single word so that the hyperlink will make sense if read out of context.

For example, [View more information about painting](#) is correct; Go [here](#) is not.

Ideally, place hyperlinks at the end of a sentence or paragraph as a call to action for the user.

For example, Did you know you can schedule a tour of the MCC campus? [Fill in the Visit Request Form](#)

Spell out entire names when giving email addresses rather than just giving the email address.

For example, [Jesse Racine](#) is correct; jracine@mchenry.edu is not. The exception to this rule is when contact information is listed in a table/staff directory.

Graphical Design - The current design is simple and predictable: header, main content, and footer. The header includes the site index, contact information, season-specific banner, universal navigation, and Google site search box. In the main content area, every page has a h1 that closely matches the page title and every page (except the homepage) includes a date stamp to show when the page was last updated. The footer contains links to high-traffic areas in the website (the inclusion of some links is largely political). Within this structure, there is great variation in the main content section of the page, with the header and footer remaining static throughout the site. Since the homepage or primary level page is the gateway to the rest of the site, keep it generic in orientation. The overall feel of the site is intentionally simple,

straightforward, and slightly campy as reflected by minimal use of color, font styles, and technical chicanery. As such, pages degrade gracefully with the style sheets removed and remain accessible to alternative browsers, e.g., screen readers and mobile devices.

Homepage

The screenshot shows the homepage of McHenry County College. At the top left is the MCC logo and contact information. The main header features a banner image with the slogan "The Right Choice for You" and links for "Site Index" and "Contact MCC". Below the banner is a "Universal Nav" bar with categories: "Future Students", "Current Students", "Continuing Ed", "ESL | GED | Literacy", "Business", and "Alum.". A search bar is located to the right of the navigation bar. The main content area is divided into three columns: "Permanent Links" on the left, a "Picture Column" in the center, and "Announcements" on the right. The "Announcements" column lists several events, including a summer camp, a garden walk, and parent orientation. The footer contains a comprehensive list of site links and copyright information.

Header

Universal Nav

Main Content

Footer

- Permanent links are relevant to all audiences.
- Announcement column lists current announcements that apply to a broad range of audiences.
- Put the most current announcement at the top.
- Picture column shows photographs of recent events, to give the sense that "someone like me attends MCC." Note: There is no date stamp on the homepage.

Secondary Level Page

Site Index | Contact MCC

MCC
McHenry County College
8900 US Hwy 14
Crystal Lake, IL 60012

The Right Choice for You

Future Students | Current Students | Continuing Ed | ESL | GED | Literacy | Business | Alumni

Google Custom Search Search MCC

Future Students **h1**

Below are just a few links to help you navigate your way around the MCC web site. Got a question? Contact recruitment by calling (815) 479-7732


Links

- High School Students & Parents
- Returning Adult Students
- Summer Only Students

Resources **h2**

- Academic Advising
- Admissions and Academic Planning
- Application for Admission
- Career Resources
- College Catalog
- Counseling
- Course Schedules
- Degrees and Programs
- Distance Education
 - Credit
 - Non-Credit

Picture Column



"My older brother attended MCC and after hearing how much he loved it I was convinced it was the school for me."
- Mary Kate, future MCC student

Pre-College Opportunities

- Financial Aid and Scholarships
- New Student Orientation
- Multicultural Programs
- Professional Education
- Registration
- Student Leadership
- Student Life
- Student Services
- Tuition and Fees
- Kids and College
- Running Start
- Tech Prep

In Detail **In Detail Column**

Parent Orientation for Fall 2008 Students
July 15, 6:30 p.m. in Conference Center. Please R.S.V.P. by calling (815) 479-7712 or e-mail newstdor@mchenry.edu.

"Getting Started" seminars for returning adult students
Free informational seminars start soon. Call Helen Jost at (815) 455-8914 for more details.

Join us for New Student Orientation
The perfect introduction to MCC! Learn about the programs and services we offer. Meet with academic advisors to select courses and register for the semester. New Student Orientation Session schedule >>

Special Needs Program Provides Support
Special Needs accommodations are available to MCC students with documented disabilities. For information call (815) 455-8676 or e-mail balbrigh@mchenry.edu

Did you know... Did you know Column

You can schedule a tour of the MCC campus? Fill in the Visit Request Form >>

A recruiter is available to answer your questions about admission procedures, financial aid, placement testing more on our discussion board? [Ask a recruiter >>](#)

You can be admitted to MCC and a 4-year school simultaneously? [Discover Dual Admissions >>](#)

That we offer an interest-free monthly tuition payment plan that you can sign up for online? [Learn more about Nelnet >>](#)

Security staff can walk you to your car if needed? [Find out more about campus safety and security >>](#)

MCC provides on-going evaluations to make sure you are getting the best possible education? [Read more about Assessment >>](#)

Auto Tech has night classes to help you gear up for a new career? Call (815) 455-8914 for more information.

date stamp 7/2/08


Home | About MCC | Academic Programs | Administration | ANGEL | Assessment | Athletics | Bookstore | Employment | Events | Faculty Sites | Library | News | School Closing Center | Statements | © 2008, McHenry County College. All rights reserved. McHenry County College, 8900 US Hwy 14, Crystal Lake, Illinois 60012-2738 -- (815) 455-3700

- Picture column is a future student picture which links to the student's profile. This reinforces the users' connection with MCC.


- “In Detail” column highlights special events and announcements for specific audience. See Editorial style for announcement format.
- “Did you know...” column explains academic jargon and terms that may be referenced in the hyperlinks.

Academic Department Page

Site Index | Contact MCC



The Right Choice for You



[Future Students](#) |
 [Current Students](#) |
 [Continuing Ed](#) |
 [ESL | GED | Literacy](#) |
 [Business](#) |
 [Alumni](#)


Art **h1**

Our students transfer to a wide range of public and private universities after completing an Associate in Art or Associate of Fine Art Degree. Foundation courses transfer easily and we offer specific transferability plans with many state and private universities.

We offer courses in: **h2**

- Art Appreciation and Art History
- Ceramics
- Computer Graphics
- Painting
- Photography
- Drawing
- 2D Design

- 3D Design
- Life Drawing
- Sculpture
- Fibers
- Interior Design
- Jewelry
- Watercolor
- Introduction to Studio Art




Art-o-mat dispenses small works of art created by artists from around the world. Five dollar tokens can be purchased in Room A144.

We feature four art galleries on campus. **h3**

- Check exhibit schedules here.
- Accepting proposals for Student Installation Projects for artspace144 (installing details here PDF)

See the 2008 Skyway Art Competition Participants



This photograph was taken by one of our digital photography students, Emily Krepel. See more student artwork here.

Department Chair:
 Mark Arctander
 Phone: (815) 479-7623
 E-mail: marctand@mchenry.edu

Gallery Inquiries
 Sandra Lang, Gallery Curator
 Phone: (815) 455-8785
 E-mail: slang@mchenry.edu

Additional information:
 Have you seen the Pathways to History Mural?
[Faculty and Staff Directory](#)
[Course Schedules](#)
[Fine and Performing Arts Event Calendar](#)
[Division News](#)
[Art Access@ ArtDeadline.com](#)
 listing of exhibition opportunities for artists
[Read the Art Department's mission statement](#)

4/7/08

[Home](#) |
 [About MCC](#) |
 [Academic Programs](#) |
 [Administration](#) |
 [ANGEL](#) |
 [Assessment](#) |
 [Athletics](#) |
 [Bookstore](#) |
 [Employment](#) |
 [Events](#) |
 [Faculty Sites](#) |
 [Library](#) |
 [News](#) |
 [School Closing Center](#) |
 [Statements](#) |
 © 2008. McHenry County College. All rights reserved.
 McHenry County College, 8900 US Hwy 14, Crystal Lake, Illinois 60012-2738 -- (815) 455-3700

Third Level Page

Site Index | Contact MCC

MCC
McHenry County College
8900 US Hwy 14
Crystal Lake, IL 60012

The Right Choice for You

Future Students | Current Students | Continuing Ed | ESL | GED | Literacy | Business | Alumni

Google Custom Search Search MCC

Student Senate h1

Home | Events | Organizations | FAQ | Student Senate | Student Trustee | Goals Sub Nav

Being involved in the student senate means members can:

- Represent student opinion to the college administration and faculty
- Share in the governance of the college
- Organize campus and community projects
- Have the opportunity for local, regional, or national travel for conferences
- Earn scholarships for your academics and involvement as a Student Senate member

How can I join the student senate? h2

You can join the student senate by completing an application form located in the Multicultural Office in Room A252.

What positions make up the student senate?

The student senate includes a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, student senators and standing committees each with their own responsibilities, but share common student goals.

Who should I contact for more information?

Advisor, Sonia Reising at (815) 479-7749 or e-mail sreising@mchenry.edu or contact Lesley Frederick at (815) 455-8734 or e-mail lfrederick@mchenry.edu

The Student Government of McHenry County College is a recognized platform for student governance and leadership development. The student organization is directed by an Executive Board and a Senate. The Student Government is charged with working with the Student Trustee in promoting student welfare, protecting student rights, and representing the opinions of the students of McHenry County College wherever possible.

3/6/08

Student Senate participating in a team building activity.

Home | About MCC | Academic Programs | Administration | ANGEL | Assessment | Athletics | Bookstore | Employment | Events | Faculty Sites | Library | News | School Closing Center | Statements | © 2008. McHenry County College. All rights reserved. McHenry County College, 8900 US Hwy 14, Crystal Lake, Illinois 60012-2738 -- (815) 455-3700

Historical Content - the only historical content that is deliberately maintained is athletic rosters and schedules/scores. See [volleyball](#).

Images - To ensure reasonable download times, try to limit image file sizes to 100 kb or less wherever possible. The image quality standard is 72 dpi. Use a .jpg format for pictures and .gif format for simple color logos. When naming image files, don't use special characters or spaces. If a space is required, use an underscore (_). When possible, state the intended location of the file, then a description of the event or picture. For example, the file name home_mccnight.jpg means the image is for the homepage, and it's of MCC Night. Save general images or images used site wide in the

images folder. Keep department or program specific images in their respective image folders, e.g., athletics/images/basketball1.jpg.

Information Architecture - Structure the website by audience rather than by organization as apparent from the universal navigation found in the header: Future Students, Current Students, Continuing Ed, ESL/GED, Business, and Alumni. Try to organize information based on who the target audience is and what information and services they need from the MCC website.

Within each universal navigation webpage (e.g., Alumni), link to various departments and programs based on what would be of interest to respective visitors, in this case, former MCC students. For example, more general information about admissions and degrees is found on the Future Students page, whereas current scholarship information is found on the Current Students page.

Markup - Strive to use semantic markup. Apply HTML to text to logically delineate the hierarchy of information therein; markup paragraphs, headers, and lists as such. This ensures that alternative browsers display information properly. Don't use presentational markup, such as using haphazard tags to achieve the look you want without regard to the meaning of the tag. For example, using a level-three heading to make something bold instead of using the tag or using CSS to change the font-weight.

Headers

Use headers to logically separate content on a page. Remember users scan rather than read text on a computer monitor, so the judicious use of headers helps people find information quickly. Use headers sequentially, to demonstrate importance.

Header Examples

Current Students [Level-one heading <h1>](#)

Use only one h1 per page that corresponds closely to the page title. Make the h1 the first item in the <body> after the header file.

Resources [Level-two heading <h2>](#)

Use more than one h2 per page when necessary to logically group information.

Help Us Help You! [Level-three heading <h3>](#)

Put level three headings after level two headings to denote further organization of the content.

Do not use h4, h5, or h6 level headings. If these are needed, spread the information across multiple pages.

[Paragraphs](#)

Wrap all paragraphs in p tags. Paragraphs are the basic building blocks of content. There is no need to add br at the end since a </p> breaks the line automatically.

[Block Quotes](#)

Use block quotes to offset quoted content; [see the alumni page](#). Do not use blockquotes for spacing; use CSS for the desired effect.

Inline text - There are a number of inline HTML elements you may use anywhere within other elements. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list; it just covers the basics.

[a](#) - Use ID's rather than names for the hyperlink. For example, Back to Top is correct, Back to Top is not.

[a:href](#) - creates a one-way link to another web resource; specifies the location of the hyperlink. McHenry County College

[a title](#) - gives a tooltip description of the hyperlink. Use the title attribute to alert users whenever a hyperlink leaves the MCC website: "You will leave MCC's site by selecting this link." NJCAA

[abbr](#) - this tag spells out the abbreviated form. Define the abbreviation at the first instance if it is repeated throughout the page. <abbr title="et cetera">etc.

[acronym](#) - similar to the above, this tag spells out an acronym. Use it once if it is repeated throughout the page. `<acronym title="National Junior College Athletic Association" lang="en">NJCAA`.

[em](#) - this tag gives text special emphasis, and so italicizes it. `<p>Isaid, get outta Dodge now!</p>`

[strong](#) - this tag makes text bold, and draws attention to it. `<p>Applications are required by July 25.</p>`

[Lists](#) - lists are usually used to denote a general list of items or a list of links.

For lists of hyperlinks in index page layouts, apply the class `.links` to the `` to remove the default bullets. Note: the universal navigation is marked as a list, as are the footer links. Additionally, all static navigation should be set as a horizontal list. Use lists to structure the [administration agenda pages](#).

[Definition lists](#) - are a flexible though underused list type throughout our site. It consists of a definition term `<dt>` with definition description `<dd>` pairs and indicates a parent/child relationship. See `<dl>` used in [Types of Financial Aid](#) and [student descriptions](#).

[Forms](#) - Style all public facing forms using CSS rather than tables using [forms.css](#). [See the ABC form as an example](#). Run the form through JAWS screen reader before making it live to make sure the screen reader doesn't choke.

[Tables](#) - tables are used to display tabular data only - tables should not be used for layout purposes. [Learn more about data tables on the web](#).

Per IITAA Section 11, identify a header cell for each column and row in simple data tables, identify relationships in complex data tables using id and headers attributes, and provide summary attributes for data tables. [See the CLC class table](#) as well as [multiple tables on a page](#) for examples. Semantic table markup is tricky but essential if tables are to be understood correctly by alternative browsers and screen readers.

Table styling - see [table.css](#) for CSS document regarding table styling. Using CSS allows us to ignore outdated inline declarations such as border, cell spacing, etc. An added benefit using the `table.css` styles is that it forces you to build an accessible table; the styling only works when you declare headers for your table rows.

Metadata - Use, at a minimum, these three metadata elements in the head of documents.

1. `<meta name="description" content="A list of the steps to follow to become a first time student at McHenry County College.">` The description metatag does what it says, describes the content of the page. Very often, this is what you see in search engine results. Be succinct in the description.
2. `<meta name="keywords" content="foo, bar">` The keyword metatag provides keywords or topic phrases that describe the content of the page. This designation is helpful for search engines to accurately report the content of the page.
3. `<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">` is the declared character set, which doesn't change.

Mobile - Use semantic markup and CSS so the MCC website degrades gracefully in either CSS compliant or text-only mobile devices. Periodically check the site with Adobe Device Central CS3. Though mobile use on our site is negligible (less than 1%), we predict a steady increase going forward and this underscores how important semantic markup is for the longevity of the website.

Page Size and Download Time - The goal with the original site design was to have a page size of 30K to achieve sub eight second response times on 56K connections. At this time Google Analytics indicates that dial up visitors constitute 1.6% of our web traffic. Therefore, we no longer hold to the 30K standard but instead try to be judicious in our use of graphics and images to keep the page weight as low as possible.

PDF - Reference that a hyperlink opens a Portable Document Format (PDF) file by using `PDF` (in all caps) and indicate the file size if > 500 KB. Within the PDF document properties, set the title, author, keywords, and description. Also indicate language (US English) and default document size (view 100%) as well as any password protected features. Once CSS 3 properties are supported across all A-Grade browsers, we will incorporate PDF icons.

Privacy and Copyright - The official privacy policy is found [here](#) and states:

The information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of developing our business relationship with you. No information you provide or details of any business transactions between us will be disclosed or sold to any third party.

External hyperlinks - The links included within the McHenry County College web pages may allow you to leave the MCC web site. These links are limited to those that meet the institutional mission of the college. Linked sites are not under the administration of MCC and the college is not responsible for the content of any linked site or any link contained in a linked site, or any changes or updates to such sites. MCC is not responsible for any form of transmission received from a linked site. McHenry County College provides these links as a convenience only and the inclusion of any link does not imply endorsement by MCC or any association with their operators.

Our copyright policy states that copyright laws prohibit us from publishing any web pages that contain substantial amounts of content from any other published source, including other websites. Requests to duplicate content existing on other websites will be denied.

Resources - We highly recommend Sitepoint's online [CSS](#) and [HTML](#) references. Also, the Web Standards Group [Resources](#) page is an excellent compendium of tutorials and expositions on web design and maintenance.

Templates - While the MCC website does not have a template per se, we do have set of standard page elements that form the predictable look of our site. These include the Header and Footer SSI and the other graphical distinctives of the website. See Graphical Design.

Typography - The base body typography is Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif, in a 10pt size. The headers are derivatives of this. Arial is the preferred font because it is common across almost all platforms and so lends typographic consistency to the site. Sans serif fonts are easier to read on a monitor. For specific uses, see [Records.css](#)

Web Page Review Checklist

Check to see that the page contains the complete DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional, including the language declaration.

1. Give an appropriate page title - is it descriptive, short? Does it emphasize the h1?
2. Don't forget about the keyword and description meta tags.
3. Link to records.css and print.css (and others as necessary).
4. Include comments or design notes as necessary.
5. Spell check each page (Shift F7 in DW).
6. Proofread each page - does the page have a h1?

7. [Validate each page.](#)
8. Add links to new pages to the site index. Temporary announcement pages do not need a link in the site index.
9. Use the `<a href title="foo">` to indicate when a hyperlink leaves our site. (title="You will leave MCC's site by selecting this link.")
10. Indicate when a link is a .pdf file and indicate the file size if > 500 kb.
11. Avoid opening links in an additional browser window whenever possible; tell users when a link will open in a new browser window. (title="This site will open in a new browser window." target="_blank">)
12. Use descriptive alt text for all images (this is a requirement for HTML 4.01 Strict)

Editorial Style Guide

Announcements (homepage, "In Detail" column) - For homepage announcements, convey the most amount of information in the least amount of words. Do not use catchy phrases that mean nothing, e.g., "Look here!" When crafting announcements, think of how they would sound if read aloud.

Contact Info - Include contact info such as email and phone number, whenever feasible. Leave out contact name whenever possible. For example, "Call 815 555-1212 to register" rather than "Call Lisa at..."

Date - give the date, not the weekday. August 18, not Monday, August 18.

Month - Spell out name of month, but don't include day of the week.

Price - Include price when applicable.

Room - Use A252 not Room A258 or Rm A258. Do not place hyphens or spaces between building and room number (not A-258 or A 258).

Time - For homepage announcements, only list the start time of the event, rather than the entire duration. Classes start at 8 a.m., not Class runs from 8 - 4:30 p.m. Where we have more space to work with, the full duration can be noted. For announcements outside of the homepage, use 1 to 3 p.m., not 1 - 3 p.m.

Spelling Preferences

all-region, all-conference, all-star

email

e-commerce

homepage

ID (not I.D.)

Internet

online (not on-line)

web-based

web

web page

website

web address

the web