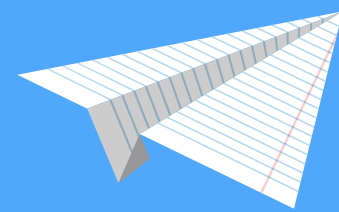


MIT WEB WRITING WORKSHOP

Presented by Dave Demerjian | 43,000 Feet



43,000 Feet.
Making content fly.

MAKING CONTENT FLY 



43K BY THE NUMBERS

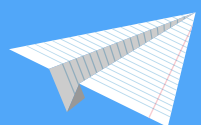
6 years in business

3 core competencies

4 focus markets

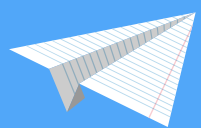
5 team players

300+ projects



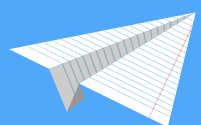
CROSS-MARKET BY DESIGN

- Higher education
- Technology
- Healthcare
- Architecture, engineering, construction (A/E/C)



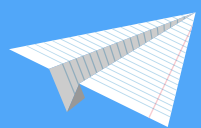
BRAND MESSAGING

- Stakeholder interviews
- Peer + competitive benchmarking
- SWOT analysis
- Brand pillars
- Value proposition
- Elevator pitch
- Personas + audience-specific messaging



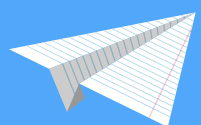
CONTENT STRATEGY

- Web inventory, audit, and gap analysis
- Communication planning
- Workflow and governance protocols
- Editorial strategy and calendars
- Workshops and training



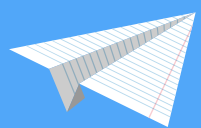
CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

- Naming and taglines
- Web content and architecture
- Email marketing
- Blogging and social media
- Sponsored content
- Print collateral
- Video and interactive



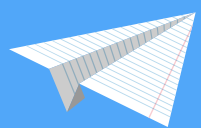
CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

- Naming and taglines
- **Web content and architecture**
- Email marketing
- Blogging and social media
- Sponsored content
- Print collateral
- Video and interactive



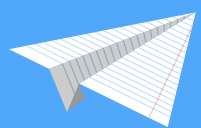
WEB CONTENT MATTERS

- **Attracts and engages your target audiences**
- **Builds credibility and positions you as a thought leader**
- **Helps your SEO**
- **Allows you to humanize your organization**
- **Keeps the site fresh and engaging**



WHAT YOU'LL SEE TODAY

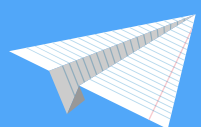
- Web writing best practices
- Accessibility
- SEO basics
- Voice + tone
- Style guide
- Governance



WRITING FOR THE WEB

FOUR SIMPLE TRUTHS

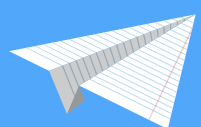
1. People read content that is relevant to them
2. Website visitors skim first, then decide whether to keep reading
3. If the content isn't good, people will stop reading
4. Readers get frustrated when they can't find what they're looking for



WEB WRITING IS JUST DIFFERENT

People read websites differently than they do print. That shift has become even more pronounced with the growth of mobile.

More than ever, it's essential that the team producing or editing content for your site ensures that it is informative, resonant, and exciting—and allows the website to live up to its full potential.



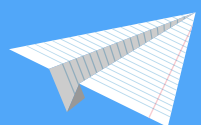
Some basics to keep in mind.

KEEP IT STRAIGHTFORWARD + SIMPLE

We recommend not We suggest that you consider

For more information not If you would like to learn more

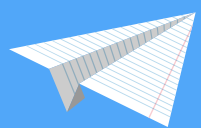
Contact us not Feel free to reach out



GIVE READERS A VISUAL ANCHOR

Use headings and subheads to:

- Organize content
- Help readers locate key information quickly
- Break up long chunks of copy
- Assist with skimming
- Ensure compliance with accessibility



GIVE READERS A VISUAL ANCHOR

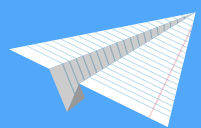
Follow these heading/subhead best practices:

- No more than eight words
- Concrete and descriptive
- Think about keywords that might help guide readers

Choose from 28 global study abroad sites

not

You can choose from more than 25 diverse, exciting study abroad destinations on three continents



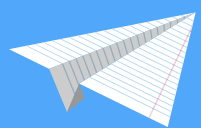
CHOOSE YOUR PRONOUNS CAREFULLY

Use of “you” and “we” creates connection with your readers:

We work with **you** to build a program that meets **your** goals and gets **you** ready for career success.

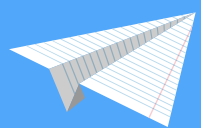
VS.

MIT works with **students** to build a program that meets **their** goals and gets **them** ready for career success.



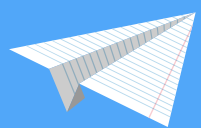
KEEP THINGS SHORT + SWEET

- Limit paragraphs to three sentences, and never exceed five
- When in doubt, split it into two
- Limit each paragraph to one main idea
- Convey instructions in as few words as possible
- Write short, clear sentences
- Where possible, incorporate search terms



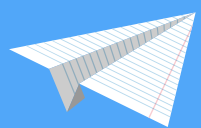
USE LISTS TO KEEP READERS ORGANIZED...

- Use bullet points when order doesn't matter
- Use numbers to indicate a sequence of steps
- Limit lists to six bullets or less – never exceed eight
- Prioritize bullets based on importance of content
- Use sub-bullets sparingly and never go more than one level deep



...OR CONTENT ENDS UP LOOKING LIKE THIS

Use bullet points when order doesn't matter. Use numbers to indicate a sequence of step. Limit lists to six bullets or less—never exceed eight. Prioritize bullets based on importance of content. Use sub-bullets sparingly and never go more than one level deep



ACRONYMS ARE ANNOYING (AND CONFUSING)

They are a way of life in higher ed, but still....

CAAB

Campus Alcohol Advisory Board

M.C.P

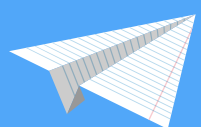
Master in City Planning

GABLES

Gay, Bisexual, and Lesbian Employers and Supporters

MBTA

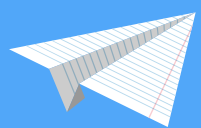
Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority



WATCH OUT FOR INSIDER BASEBALL

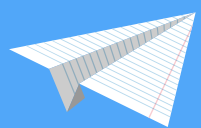
Do your readers understand this MIT lingo?

- Brass rat
- DSpace
- Infinite Corridor
- Stellar
- Course (as opposed to Major)



WRITE IT SO THEY CAN READ IT

- Website copy should be written at a level accessible to eighth graders.
- Colleges and universities are encouraged to aim even lower.

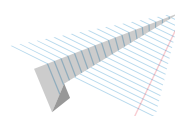


But simple doesn't mean dumbed down.

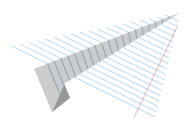
READABILITY

Harvard Business School alumni profile

“On his first day at HBS, Mark Tatum (MBA 1998) went to the career office, told them he wanted a job in the business of sports, and came home with a printout of every relevant alumnus in the HBS database. Then he hit the phones. 'Remember, this is before email,' he says with a laugh. 'I was cold calling them.' His persistence paid off: He's marking his 15th anniversary with the National Basketball Association next month—and he'll be celebrating it in a new office.”



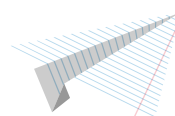
Grade level: 8



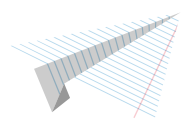
READABILITY

China's Growing Ambitions in Space – *Atlantic Monthly*

“China first sent an astronaut into space in 2003. Yang Liwei, a former fighter pilot, orbited the Earth for 21 hours inside a Shenzhou spacecraft, launched by one of the Long March rockets. The pace of exploration quickened from there. In 2007, a Long March rocket sent Chang’e-1, an uncrewed orbiter, for a 15-month rendezvous around the moon.”



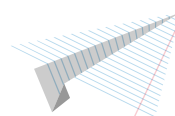
Grade level: 8



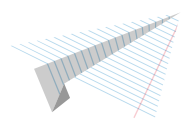
READABILITY

The Old Man and the Sea – Ernest Hemingway

“He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days without taking a fish. In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish the boy’s parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst form of unlucky.”



Grade level: 4



READABILITY

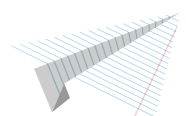
Online tools:

[Hemingway Editor](#)

Highlights complex sentences and common errors, and offers tips for improving a particular piece of content

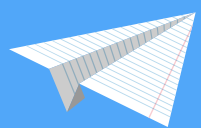
[The Writer readability tool](#)

Scores content readability using most standard methodologies



EDIT. THEN EDIT AGAIN

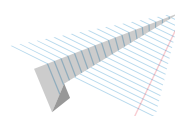
- Reexamine your content regularly
- Ask a second writer to review new stories or pages
- When possible, take a day between drafting a piece of content and giving it a final review



OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE - 155 WORDS

The Residence Life Staff fosters an environment where diverse perspectives are appreciated and each student is respected. This is achieved through one-on-one connections and through various programming initiatives. Resident students are encouraged to plan and participate in residence hall programs and activities, which helps to cultivate their sense of community while gaining valuable learning experience.

The Assistant Director and Resident Directors live on campus and supervise the Community Advisor Staff. They also serve as liaisons, resources, and mentors for Community Advisor Staff and for students residing in the residence halls. As student leaders, Community Advisors fulfill many roles including that of mentor, peer advisor, and ambassador for the residents. One of the goals of the Community Advisor is to achieve a true sense of community. Living within this community, Community Advisors are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the Community Standards of Conduct and with the University mission statement, the foundations for University Life.



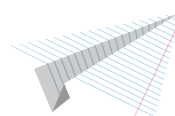
OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE - HEAVY EDIT

The **Our** Residence Life staff fosters **creates** an environment that **celebrates and** respects the diverse perspectives **of every** ~~are appreciated and each student is respected. This is achieved through~~

As an on-campus resident, you'll find yourself living alongside our community advisors. Advisors keep dorm life fun by helping students plan and take part in study groups, movie nights, and other activities. They work hard to form one-on-one connections with students, and to create a true sense of community in the residence hall. Chances are, you'll come to see your community advisor as a mentor, peer advisor, and friend. ~~ambassador for the residents and through various programming initiatives. Resident students are encouraged plan and participate in residence hall programs and these activities, which helps to cultivate their sense of community while gaining valuable learning experience.~~

The Assistant Director and Resident Directors live on campus and supervise the Community Advisor Staff. They also serve as liaisons, resources, and mentors for Community Advisor Staff and for students residing in the residence halls.

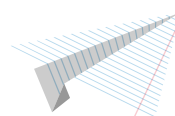
~~As student leaders, Community Advisors fulfill many roles including that of mentor, peer advisor, and ambassador for the residents. One of the goals of the Community Advisor is to achieve sense of community. Living within this community, Community Advisors are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the Community Standards of Conduct and with the University mission statement, the foundations for University Life.~~



OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE - 81 WORDS

Our Residence Life staff creates an environment that celebrates and respects the diverse perspectives of every student. As an on-campus resident, you'll live alongside our community advisors. Advisors keep dorm life fun by helping students plan study groups, movie nights, and other activities. They work hard to form one-on-one connections with students, and to create a true sense of community in the residence hall.

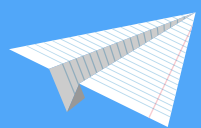
Chances are, you'll come to see your community advisor as a mentor, peer advisor, and friend.



ACCESSIBILITY

ACCESSIBILITY DEFINED

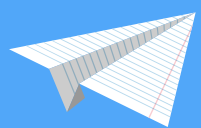
Accessibility means that anyone – hearing-impaired, visually impaired, those with cognitive and learning challenges, those who cannot physically use a mouse to navigate (keyboard only/alternative input) – can consume the information on your site.



GOOD WRITING = ACCESSIBLE CONTENT

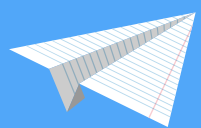
You know all that stuff I just shared about how to make your content better?

That goes a long way toward improving the accessibility of the site for ALL users.



GOOD WRITING = ACCESSIBLE CONTENT

- **Good page titles:** where am I and what will I learn here?
- **Good headings:** screen-readers use these to guide visually impaired users
- **Clear, concise content:** users with learning difficulties will be more successful and struggle less



AVOID GENERIC LINK TEXT

People who use screen-readers use a feature called Links List—it's one of the most used features of screen readers.

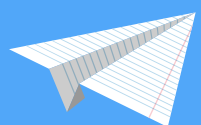
NO:

[click here and learn more](#)

YES:

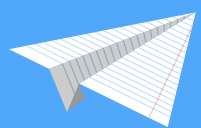
[Learn more about the XYZ program](#)

[Read more about academic advising](#)



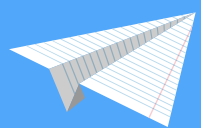
IMAGES: ALT TEXT

If an image conveys meaning, write a meaningful text alternative (a.k.a. alt-text). Ex., Infographics
For purely decorative images, alternative text is not required.



MULTIMEDIA: USE TRANSCRIPTS AND CAPTIONS

- Transcripts and captions ensure that the same content is available to all users regardless of their physical abilities.
- For audio-only content, such as a podcast, provide a transcript
- For audio and visual content, such as training videos, provide captions and consider transcripts as well

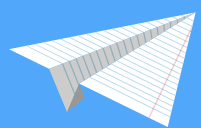


SEO BASICS

THE SEO BIG FOUR

SEO doesn't have to be overwhelming. A focus on four areas makes a difference:

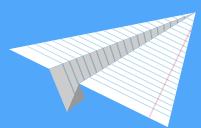
1. Content quality and relevance
2. Keywords
3. Authority and trust
4. Linking



QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

High quality content is:

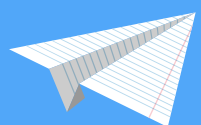
- Unique
- Informative (who, what, where, when, why, how)
- Engaging and sharable
- Useful to the reader



QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

How to improve quality

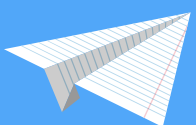
- Use a mix of text, images, and audio
- Keep it simple
- Chunk content by using short paragraphs, headings, subheads, and lists (sound familiar?)
- Remember that often users will not be entering the site via the homepage



QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

Things to avoid:

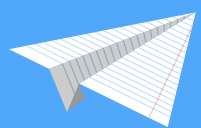
- Thin content
- Duplicative information
- Lengthy paragraphs or blocks of text
- Out-of-date and inaccurate content
- Inconsistencies across pages
- Misspellings, broken links
- PDFs



**"Keywords are a window into what users want,
the user intent."**

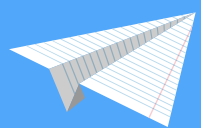
KEYWORDS: OLD SCHOOL

- Ranking was based on how closely the words in search query matched words on the page.
- The result: authors stuffed keywords into their writing, resulting in low-quality, spammy content.



KEYWORDS: NEW SCHOOL

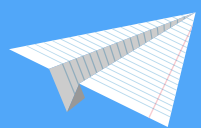
- Semantic search
- Google now connecting terms ("Lincoln" "White House" "Civil War")
- RankBrain is gauging and measuring intent



THINKING ABOUT KEYWORDS

Three ways to identify keywords:

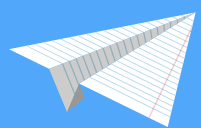
- Think about how “regular people” talk about MIT and its programs
- Think about how experts talk about our programs and the ideas behind them
- Look at how competitors are talking about their programs



USING KEYWORDS

And how to use them in your content:

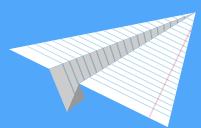
- Include them in headings and subheads
- Use them in body copy (particularly in the first paragraph)
- Make them part of URLs



AUTHORITY + TRUST

Being an authority on a topic is far more important for ranking than keywords and phrases alone. To be recognized as a thought leaders in your area, you need high quality content.

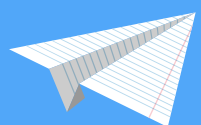
Content driven websites provide with myriad opportunities to generate the kinds of news, stories, videos, and articles that position you as category leaders.



LINKING

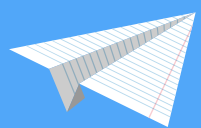
Three types:

- **Internal:** Crosslink to relevant content within your site
- **Inbound:** Create original, engaging content and people will link to your site
- **Outbound:** Leverage the web ecosystem by linking to high-quality outside webpages



MORE SEO RESOURCES

- SearchEngineLand's periodic table of SEO factors and SEO guide
- The Ultimate 2017 Website SEO Checklist
- Why SEO and Lousy Content Don't Mix



VOICE + TONE

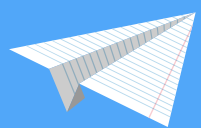
VOICE AND TONE.

That's the same thing, right?

Nope.

tone vs. voice

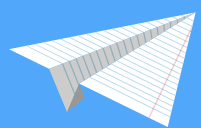
- **Voice** is your style, your point of view, and your personality. It's the core of who you are.
- **Tone** conveys a specific mood or attitude



TONE VS. VOICE

Let's say that you call me, depressed, to talk about a bad breakup. If you call again a week later to tell me you've won the lottery, your **tone** will be very different.

But your voice won't change, because it's who you are. It's what makes you, you.



-tone BRINGS THAT PERSONALITY TO LIFE

Voice is constant, but tone varies based on audience and message. Tone can be:

Proud

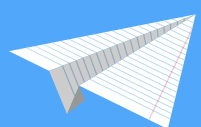
Bold

Concerned

Clever

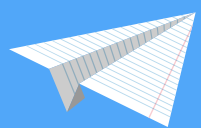
Spirited

Emotional



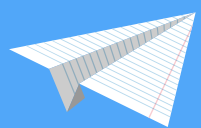
CONSIDERATIONS

1. Make it relatable
2. Make it powerful
3. Make it personal
4. Make it clear
5. Make it worthwhile
6. Make it readable



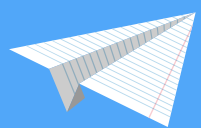
MAKE IT RELATABLE

- Be conversational and authentic
- We write like we speak, which may mean breaking a grammar rule every now and again
- Contractions and fragments can add personality



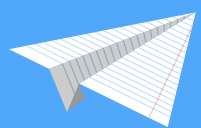
MAKE IT POWERFUL

- Use bold, direct statements
- Get to the point as quickly as possible
- Truly powerful ideas don't need lots of explanation



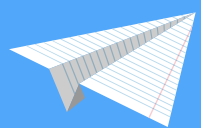
MAKE IT PERSONAL

- Use **we** and **you** not **MIT** and **students**
- Put yourself in the shoes of your target audiences—
how would you like to be spoken to?
- It's all about engaging readers in a direct, relevant,
human way



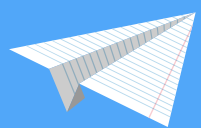
MAKE IT CLEAR

- Limit each sentence to one key point
- Use as few words as possible
- Remember that your writing can't do everything—
focusing on what really matters will improve clarity
and readability



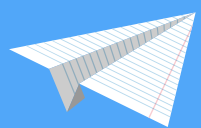
MAKE IT WORTHWHILE

- Give your readers a reason to care about what they're reading
- Start with benefits (what they get) then move into features (what you offer)



MAKE IT READABLE

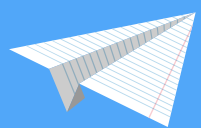
- Vary the cadence
- Mix short and long sentences
- Read aloud to check for rhythm and flow
- Assess readability levels



STYLE GUIDE

MIT STYLE RESOURCES

- [Reports to the President Style Sheet](#)
- [Office of Communications and Donor Relations](#)
- [MIT Acronyms Wiki](#)

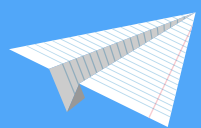


GOVERNANCE

THE CASE FOR A GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

Governance means a system of procedures, best practices, and processes that support effective content creation and management.

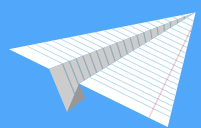
- Promotes consistent, accurate, professional content
- Ensures a big picture perspective of the website
- Prevents duplication
- Supports a framework for site-wide accessibility and SEO standards



THE CASE FOR A GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

Developing your strategy:

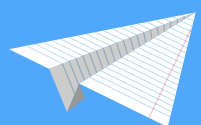
- Plan for an annual or periodic review of all site content
- Use the review period to evaluate whether content is still relevant and up-to-date
- Determine who in your organization has authority to write, edit, post, or decommission content
- Create an editorial calendar so that your site is regularly updated with fresh content



INVEST IN YOUR AUTHORS + EDITORS

A successful authoring community will be:

- Well-informed about their roles
- Trained in how to use the CMS
- Trained in how to write for the web in the tone and voice of your organization
- Part of a community of authors that support the same set of goals

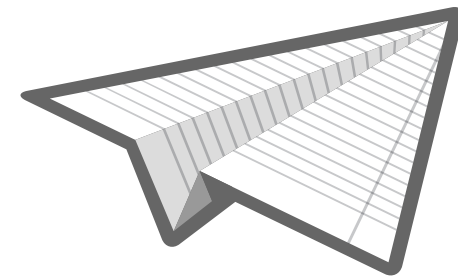


Questions? Want to learn more?

Dave Demerjian

dave@43000feet.com

HEY, THANKS!



43,000 Feet