

One of the keys to a successful intranet is high quality, well written content, making it both useful and usable. Writing for the online medium is different from writing for paper. Staff typically scan a web page to determine if the information is relevant to them, and content has to grab them immediately.

Reviewing and rewriting content is a big job and cannot be done by the intranet manager alone. But training authors to write great content is a challenge, as most have never learnt to write for a specific audience.

This article outlines ways to help authors write content that is easy to find, easy to read and easy to use.

Conduct in-house training

More organisations are now recognising the importance of good quality content and are using professional trainers to conduct in-house workshops for intranet authors. This demonstrates the organisation's commitment to the intranet and the role authors play as well as giving authors another skill to add to their resumes.

As one of the most effective ways to get authors up to speed on writing techniques quickly, training should include:

- understanding the audience
- writing for the online medium
- making text easy to scan
- writing in plain language
- writing great headings, summaries and links
- creating strong information scent
- plenty of examples
- practical exercises getting authors to rewrite existing content

Complete online training

Another popular option is online training, especially for organisations with authors in a number of locations. One such course is that by Rachel McAlpine, author of *Write me a web page Elsie*. Refer to www.contented.com/courses for Rachel's web writing courses.

Alternatively, training could be conducted by your intranet manager.

Provide exemplars

Presenting a before and after example of content that has been rewritten using writing for the web principles, an exemplar can be used as a resource to support training or on its own if you simply don't have time to train staff.

Selecting commonly used pages to rewrite can 'kill two birds with one stone' by showing users how to rewrite content they are familiar with and getting some key content rewritten at the same time.

Suggested pages may include:

- HR information page
- Policy page
- 'About us' or team page

Provide information on audiences

Understanding who you are writing for is one of the most obvious yet most overlooked areas. Who visits your pages, what are they looking for, and what is their level of subject matter knowledge?

It is not always possible for all intranet authors to 'get out in the field', especially as the intranet is just part of most authors' day-to-day roles.

You can help authors understand their audience by:

- providing persona packs (refer to *An introduction to personas and how to create them*)
- getting them involved in needs analysis activities (refer to *Conducting intranet needs analysis*)

Provide a checklist for quality content

As one of many author resources, a simple checklist for quality content should be provided on the intranet and should include:

- writing for the web key principles
- ownership guidelines
- content review expectations
- where to go for help