



.....Writing for the Web

The heart-warming story about hypertext, a pack of ruthless scanners, and a dog named Ginger.

In this mini-lecture we cover:

- Audiences and behaviours
- Writing for those who scan
- Formatting
- Reading differences between print & web
- Hypertext & linking



Audiences/Behaviours

- ◆ **Viewer**
 - ◆ Rather be watching TV
 - ◆ Looking for the next visual jolt

- ◆ **Users**
 - ◆ Want information
 - Are not there to read beautiful prose



Audiences/Behaviours

- ◆ Readers
 - ◆ Will actually scroll through long documents (or more likely, print and read them offline)
- ◆ Listeners
 - ◆ Use readers to listen to web content



Trenchant Quote...>

"In other words, the most common behaviour is to hunt for information and be ruthless in ignoring details. But once the prey has been caught, users will sometimes dive in more deeply. Thus, Web content needs to support both aspects of information access: foraging and consumption. Text needs to be scannable, but it also needs to provide the answers users seek."

--Jakob Nielsen



Largest Audience/Most Common Behaviour

◆ Users

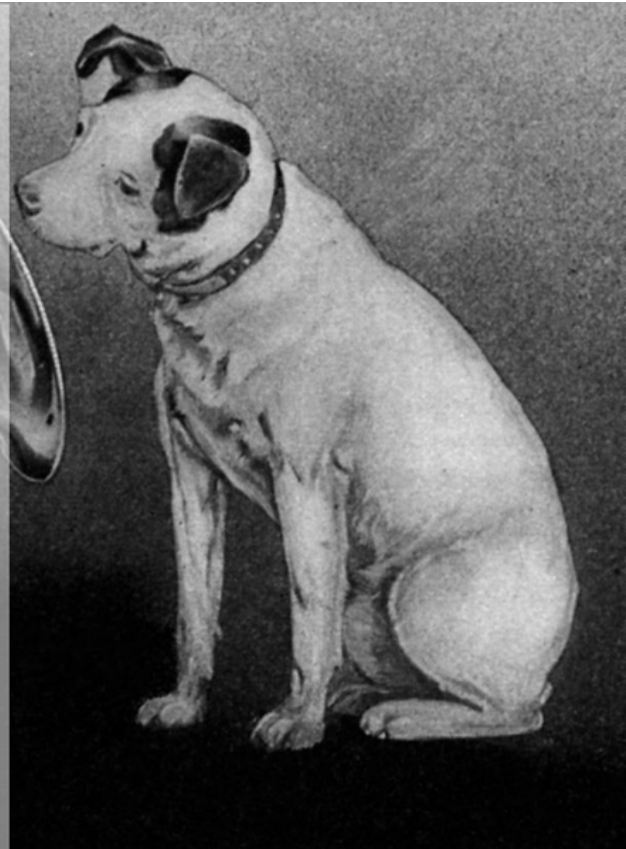
- Scan pages for information
- Skip whole sections of text
- This group needs a particular kind of text, and if they don't find it on your site, they'll move elsewhere, so understanding your audience is more important than ever.
- Are like “Ginger”

Krug's "Ginger" effect

What we say to dogs:

"“Okay, Ginger! I’ve had it! You stay out of the garbage!”

Understand, Ginger?
Stay out of the garbage, or else!”

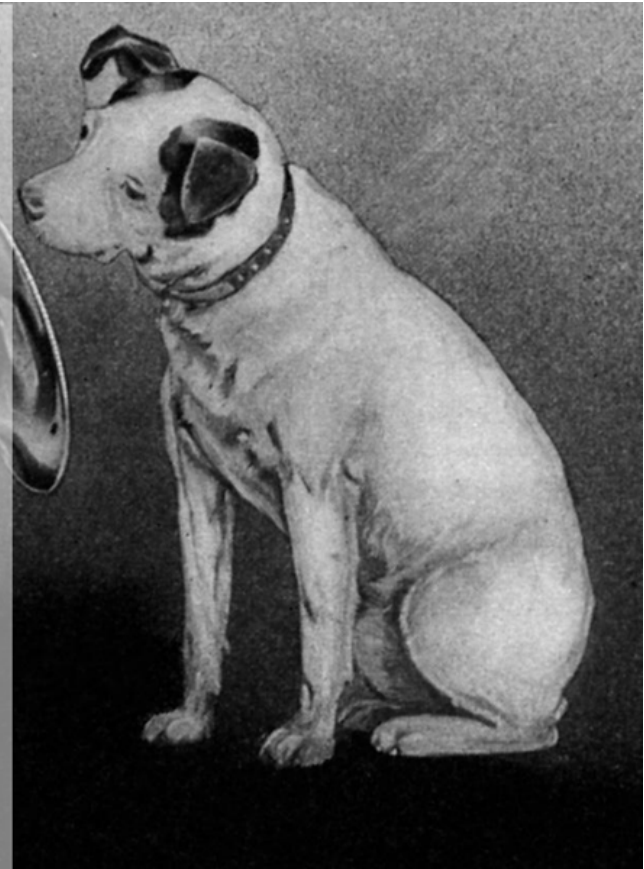


Krug's "Ginger" effect

What dogs hear:

"Blah, **Ginger!** Blah
blah, blah! Blah blah
blah blah blah blah!

Blah, **Ginger?**
Blah blah blah blah
blah, blah blah!"



The “Ginger” Effect

Welcome to the order form

- In the same way, our eyes naturally slide over information that is not of interest to us. In order to service your needs better, we have established a new web-based form. This form contains three major components, your name, your email address, and the choice of widget that you would like to order. So, a simple page like this:

Widgets cost \$23.70 US each.

Name:

Email:

No. of widgets:



The “Ginger” Effect

blah blah blah **order form**

blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah widget blah blah blah **like to order.**

blah blah **\$23.70 US** blah

Name:

Email:

No. of widgets:



Write for those who scan

- ◆ We all exhibit the behaviour of the “users” at some point, or it might be our dominant behaviour.
- ◆ Remember it’s the scanners that will be most ruthless



Write for those who scan

- ◆ Find out who they are and what they want
- ◆ Every page is important
- ◆ Edit print text down!



Write for those who scan

- ◆ “Chunk” the text
- ◆ Use headlines & subheads
 - Keep them informative and simple
- ◆ Use lists



Write for those who scan

- ◆ Use "hooks"
- ◆ You don't have to sacrifice depth
 - Use hypertext



Write for those who scan

- ◆ **Be credible**

--Sidebar--

Suggestions from Stanford's Credibility study:

- 1. Make it easy to verify the accuracy of the information on your site.**
- 2. Show that there's a real organization behind your site.**
- 3. Highlight the expertise in your organization and in the content and services you provide.**



Write for those who scan

- ◆ **Be credible**
- 4. Make it easy to contact you.
- 5. Design your site so it looks professional (or is appropriate for your purpose).



Write for those who scan

- ◆ **Be credible**

6. Make your site easy to use -- and useful.
7. Update your site's content often (at least show it's been reviewed recently).
8. Use restraint with any promotional content (e.g., ads, offers).
9. Avoid errors of all types, no matter how small they seem.



Format text for the web

- ◆ Poynter Institute “Eye Scanning Study”
- ◆ We read differently on the web compared with print

◆ Print:

- Photos
- Headlines
- Cutlines and captions
- Then text

◆ Online

- Headlines
- Text
- Photos & Graphics
- Back to text

Poynter Study

The large blocks of red show the order in which text was read on this **front page**:

- the headline
- the local brief
- the caption under the photo
- the general war brief.



The screenshot shows the front page of the St. Petersburg Times ONLINE. The main headline is "NATO attacks on Yugoslavia resume" (1). Below it is a large photo of a missile launch (2) with the caption "The USS Philippine Sea launches a cruise missile at targets in Kosovo, during operations in the Adriatic Sea. (AP Photo, US Navy; Enzo Arneria)" (4). To the right of the photo is a text block about American warplanes (5) and another headline "Tampa Bay area Serbs watch attacks with anger, fear" (2). Below that is a sub-headline "ST. PETERSBURG... Catholic Americans around Tampa Bay felt sad and awkward Wednesday, watching the warplanes on TV." (3). The page includes a navigation bar with "Classifieds", "Comics/Games", "Interact", "Shopping", "Sports", and "Weather". A sidebar on the left contains a "Quick Search" box and a list of links. A sidebar on the right contains a "Weather" box and a "Stock market links" section.



Format text for the web

Print:

- ◆ Serif body text
 - To help the eye
- ◆ Column width = 4"

Online:

- ◆ Sans serif
 - Serif gets in the way
 - Question of resolution
- ◆ Column width = 400 pixels

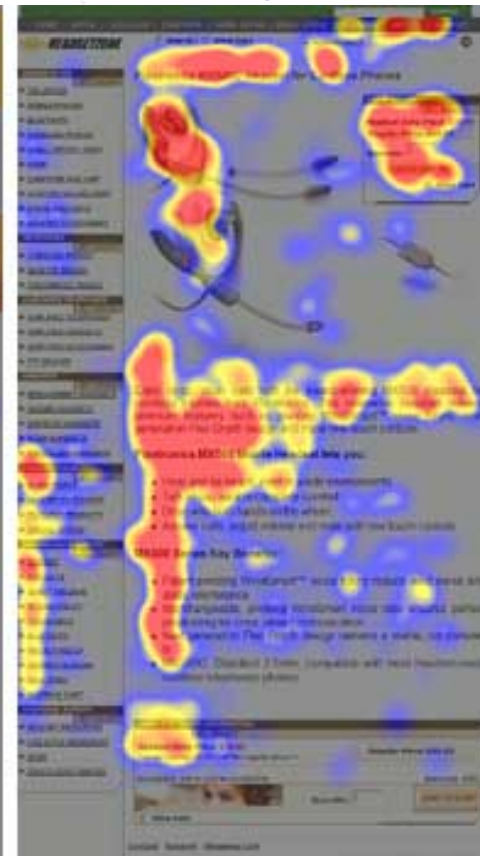


Layout implications

- ◆ Users are expecting large text header somewhere in the middle top third of screen
- ◆ Focus on words
- ◆ Not to say graphics and design isn't important (Stanford study)



Heat Scans - Layout Implications





Online writing etiquette

- ◆ Give good link
 - (Also helps with credibility)
- ◆ Don't be afraid to link off site
- ◆ Don't let links get stale
 - link rot kills sites and credibility



Linking etiquette (two)

- ◆ Generally speaking, you will not want to embed links.
- ◆ Provide links in a separate list in a sidebar or at the end of a piece of content.
- ◆ Don't force your readers away.



Hypertext additions

- ◆ In addition to hyper-text, think of other interactive elements that could add to your content:
 - Feedback
 - Questions
 - Quizzes
 - Polls
 - Maps, Clickable Graphics, Search boxes, forms
 - This list could be very long