Make your website easy to use

① Use plain language

Use language that is simple and direct. Write as if you were speaking. And imagine the person you are speaking to is not an expert in your field.

Remember: The average American reads comfortably at the 5th – 7th grade level. The closer your text is to that reading level, the greater the number of people who can use your site.

Learn how to test for reading grade level at: www.transcend.net/library/tools.html.

Here's an example of plainer writing.

This text is at the 12th grade level:

> **Uniform Civil Affidavit of Indigency**
> This Uniform Civil Affidavit of Indigency is an optional form for those who believe they qualify for financial relief. If the judge determines that you qualify for financial relief, the filing fee may be deferred; however it will not be forgiven.

Using plain language brings it to 5th grade level:

> **What if I cannot pay the filing fees?**
> If you cannot afford to pay the filing fees at this time, fill out this form.

② Use readable fonts

Use *sans serif* fonts to optimize the readability of your text.

E *Sans serif letters are plain.*

Serif fonts do not stand up well to online display or low-resolution printing.

E *Serif fonts use fine cross strokes.*

③ Organize your text intuitively

Long sections begin with a "Table of Contents" so users can quickly go to the section they want.

- **Put the most important information at the top.** Most readers spend only a *few seconds* on a page. Typically they read only headings and subheads. Get your reader to spend more time with your material by putting the key messages in the headings, in easy-to-understand language.

- **Use fewer words, shorter sentences, and familiar language.** Proficient readers can visually capture larger chunks of words all at once. But marginally proficient readers' reading is less automatic; they often read word by word. This makes it harder for them to decode, contextualize, and remember the text. Keep your text lean; concise text is a good fit for readers of all levels. **Tip:** Too much information repels users.

- **Group related information together.** Users can get lost and frustrated with too many cross-references or links.

- **Divide large blocks of text into smaller chunks.** Clear subheads followed by short paragraphs work best. This allows users to quickly find what they want.

④ Make your site mobile-friendly

Accessing the Internet with a mobile device (cell phones, tablets and more) is on the rise. Design and test your site to ensure that it works on both large and small displays. That means:

- make scrolling easy,
- use images and layout that keep file sizes small, and
- make your text columns short and narrow.

Learn how to test your site for mobile device display at: http://webtide.wordpress.com/2009/09/14/how-to-test-websites-for-mobile-devices/

Users find this layout intuitive:

Top and/or left navigation provides links to other areas of your site. Sites that use both top and left navigation should put more general links in top navigation.

A search function that tolerates spelling mistakes is best.

Breadcrumbs at the top of the page show where you are now and how you got there.

A **Table of Contents** at the start of each section lets you easily see if this is the page you need. Links quickly take you to the right spot.

The **right navigation** contains important information or links.

Site maps help navigation, and they are a **must** for accessibility.

The **last updated date** tells users how current the information is.

Marin County Elections Department Official Website · Translate · Search Our Site · go

County Home · Board of Supervisors · Contacts · Departments · Job Postings · My Marin · Services & Info

Marin County Elections

Home · Contact Us · Reports

You are here: Home Page ▶ Polling Places

Main Topics:
- Register to Vote
- Polling Places
  - List of Polling Places for the Next Scheduled Election
  - Find Your Polling Place
  - Polling Places in Past Election
  - Accessibility at the Polls
- Poll Workers
- Voting
- Elections
- Candidates
- Measures
- Campaign Finance
- Advisory Committee
- Related Links
- Feedback

Polling Places:
- ▶ List of Polling Places for the Next Scheduled Election
- ▶ Find Your Polling Place
- ▶ Polling Places in Past Election
- ▶ Accessibility at the Polls

Next Scheduled Election:
November 8, 2011
Uniform District Election
Polls Open: 7 am–8 pm!

Last Day To Register To Vote:
October 24, 2011

Click *here* to see if you are registered to vote.

Accessible Web Site
Text Size
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⑤ Use an intuitive web layout

Your site should contain **4 clearly defined areas:**

1. Top and/or left navigation
2. Table of Contents at the start of each section
3. Breadcrumbs
4. Right navigation

Also include:

- Site map
- Search function
- Date last updated

⑥ Test your website's usability

Your website should meet your users' needs *and* ADA and § 508 requirements. There are many ways to find out if your site works the way you want it to:

Can users easily accomplish common tasks?
Recruit typical users to test your site, and create a *field test instrument* to find out whether users can accomplish common, important tasks.

Example: For the Marin County Elections site, we wanted to make sure that users of their web page could easily:

1. Check whether they are registered to vote, and
2. Find their polling place.

Your field test should identify areas that need improvement.

Is your website accessible to users with disabilities?
Test for ADA and § 508 accessibility problems at: www.Cynthiasays.com

Is your website accessible to the colorblind?
Test your use of color at: colorfilter.wickline.org. One out of 7 men is thought to be color-blind.