

Content Handbook

For all your content needs

Intro

This document is meant to help you understand what is acceptable in a content, what goes in it, and what to keep in mind when first writing it. You could consider it a checklist, or a rulebook and whatnot; it's primary goal is to give you a set of guidelines with which you can improve your content and make it stand out not only to the reader but also to the World Wide Web.

Without good, relevant content, the SERPs will ignore the website and we will have to go through major reworks to make sure that doesn't happen. None of us want extra work. So follow the handbook - use it as a guide - and your content will be brilliant, when putting your writing skills aside.

You can always come back to this document if you feel that you are missing something.

Content and Quality

Below are some points I've addressed that you must keep in mind when writing or proof-reading your content.

Keyword Research

It's important to break down how your content is performing in terms of keyword analysis. Keywords don't just have to be words; they can be phrases, questions, sentences, and so on. Read about [short-tail versus long-tail keywords](#) and [seed keywords](#) to get a basic idea.

Now, onward to a few questions to keep in mind related to your content:

- Have you done your research on keywords?
- Does your content have any keywords in them?
- Do you feel that there are not enough keywords in your content?

You can use [Ubersuggest](#) to get some relevant keywords. The website breaks down the statistics of each keyword in depth.

Have you been using that already, but you're not getting enough keywords? Use your Google account to sign up for the service so that you get the whole list.

The disadvantage of using Ubersuggest is that it limits the user to commit only a limited number of keyword searches. So carefully consider the information you are searching for before you type the search on there and think about how it is relevant to your content.

Ubersuggest has two tabs: *Suggestions* and *Questions*. Use them both to narrow down what the best keywords are for your content.

Do you still feel that the keywords you're getting aren't satisfactory or relevant enough? Use the search engines.

- **Type the name of the university and wait:** A list of keywords will drop down for you. Those are what are trending with respect to the subject you entered in the search box.
- **Type the name of the university along with the word related to your content:** For instance, 'XYZ University admissions'. If there are a few keywords that will drop down, you can be sure to use them in your content.

However, one search engine isn't enough. Google isn't the only search engine out there. You have:

- **Yahoo!**
- **Bing**
- **DuckDuckGo**
- **Ask.com**

Personally, DuckDuckGo is a great place to go to because as a non-profit organisation that wants to provide quality over intrusive advertisements, the search results are almost always relevant, and **relevancy** is what we need. However, there may be keywords present in other search engines that you can't normally find in Google.

You could also take a look at [Keywordtool.io](#), and [Google Trends](#). [LSI Graph](#) is another good website to use if you can't find anything on others, however unlikely that is to happen.

[Keyword Sh**ter](#) is another tool worth looking into... but I'm not sure how exactly that becomes relevant as it just fires random keywords at you. So I would suggest others over this one.

Engaging Intros

Content cannot be boring. With that said, the content you are writing tends to cover boring topics. Sadly, nobody works on knowing how to write content... they just write content!

(That's why you must be thinking that this handbook is ridiculously boring to think about, let alone read through.)

Do you see what I did there? That language use right there is meant to take you away from that mundane 'formal' language in the Keyword Research piece.

If you cannot engage your audiences, your content will have automatically failed. Engaging readers is a difficult task, and requires you to have a seamless understanding of how to write content, not necessarily what to write.

For instance, you can tell me how to make an egg with full knowledge and I will listen. But if I doze off before you get to the important part, then both of us will take a massive hit. And it's all because nothing interesting was being said... in an interesting way!

My only suggestion to improve on this is to read other kinds of content that aren't necessarily focussed on being formal. Blog posts, reviews, and journal reports written for other 'casual' industries (entertainment is one) are some great pieces to look into.

However, the most important point is to adopt a slightly care-free mindset. Imagine talking to a friend about the topic of the content you are writing. How would you go about explaining it to them in an approachable, light-hearted and relevant manner?

When proof-reading, imagine telling what you've written out loud to yourself, or to someone else. What do you feel when reading it? Bored? Dull? What is the other person saying? Do they feel interested? Did they continue to look at their phone? What can you write or rewrite to make all of these problems disappear?

Take your time to understand this point. It's a difficult concept - simple to learn, hard to practice - but you only need to understand the fundamentals of it for the content you're working on.

Hyperlinking Official Sources

Taking data from official university websites, or government websites is fine. With that said, it's important to hyperlink the sources you got that data from. It's an ethical practice, one that will help us answer questions if people ask us, 'Where did you get this data from?'

Conversely, not linking it would mean you would be the one answering that. Your content, your responsibility. If no one knows how the data is calculated or where it is coming from, they're going to doubt the legitimacy of the content you've written.

Highlight that relevant word, Ctrl+K to paste the link, press 'OK' and you're set. A simple 3-step process that saves you from a lot of trouble.

Content Structure

Always make sure that the structure is consistent. The structure, once completely understood, can be bent to fit certain situations, but know that you cannot fully change it and make it look like something else entirely.

This is largely important to keep in mind, especially when you are working on content pieces that require subheadings such as Admissions and Financial Aid.

When writing headings, don't just write the heading in Normal Text. **Changing the font and the size of the text does not make it a heading.** You have to format it correctly.

You also do not want to use too much of the passive voice structures for your content. Find ways to write the same thing in **5 different styles of writing**. That can really test your writing skills. It's necessary because once you figure this out, you will always keep your content fresh, and you won't build the reader's eye bags up too much too often.

Short sentences are fine as long as you pick the right words for it; it's got to convey all the information accurately without feeling clunky and chunky, otherwise it'll feel junky.

Short Paragraphs

Would you rather eat a burger in two bites, or would you rather keep the chomps smaller in size?

If you can fit all of the relevancy of the content into shorter paragraphs, then you are boosting the content quality numbers. Think simple, think easy, and think relevant.

Getting good at this will take time because this can range between various factors - using different words, summing up a sentence into a single word, shortening phrases, eliminating irrelevant content - it could be anything!

The most important skill involved here is optimising. Learn to identify the chunkiness of the content and learn how to optimise it to fit the convenience of both the reader and yourself.

Readability

Readability is a vast topic. So, here are a few pointers to take away to help you increase it in your content:

Bullet points

Bullet points are amazing. Everyone loves bullet points. Not every piece of content should be bulleted, but if you are making a series of points, then it would be a good idea to apply the format. For points that follow a chronological order, use numbered lists.

No superlatives

No, the university is not *the best*, it's not *awesome*, it's not *the greatest*.

Stay neutral. Doing so gives you more writing space and helps you express other additional pieces of information for the content better.

No colons or any other punctuation marks for headings and subheadings

Just, who does that? Nobody! Just don't!

Justify (Ctrl + J) your content

This whole handbook has been written with the content being justified in its entirety. It's just neater. You wouldn't want your content to be building speed bumps on the side; it's ugly.

It's a great habit to adopt as a content writer. You **will** get a lot of respect from your peers if you do this. So, always highlight your content and Ctrl+J it away to save you a lot of proof-reading hassle not only for you, but also for others.

For any coders out there, this is akin to using tonnes of **if-else** statements instead of adopting a better design practice. It won't look visually pleasing if you build the code into a mountain, would it? Same logic.

Rhetorical questions keep the reader interested

Sometimes, it's necessary to remind the reader why they are reading it. So put in questions to keep them reading.

Don't believe me? Take a look at Snickers. Their tagline is 'Hungry?'.

The previous sentence can be used as an example, too!

Just don't do so too many times otherwise your content will come off as being written by an insufferable know-it-all. Nobody likes an insufferable know-it-all. Save your Gryffindor points.

No white spaces

No white spaces. (Just typing this so that you see the white space. Changed the page background to help reflect it better, as well.)

A lot of people don't remove that bit of empty space at the end of sentences. This can cause problems when uploading content. So check every paragraph ends.

Hyperlink your content properly

When you're hyperlinking, or putting a link to some other website, or adding an email address or whatnot, don't just paste it and move on. Hyperlink it to the text.

Additionally, 'Click here to know more' is not the kind of hyperlinking we need or want. You want to blend the hyperlinked content with the rest of the content.

For instance, this is how you'd hyperlink something: 'Not a lot of people know how to proceed with a FAFSA form, but we've provided you with a handy guide for it.' (Insert link here.)

Or like how I hyperlinked the Ubersuggest tool above. Or anything else below!

Most importantly, however, is that you must hyperlink only information that is appropriate with the content you are writing. For instance, if you are stating the SAT ranges of a university, you may want to link a blog post that talks about SAT ranges. Linking

a blog post that talks about SAT scores (not ranges) is acceptable, but not recommended as it does not fit with the current subject.

Learning English is a constant work

Don't know the meaning of a word you want to use? Google it! Don't be afraid to use the dictionary or a simple Google search. It's impossible to learn *all* of the English language. It's fine if you can't write well. Strive to be better at it by putting in the effort to learn.

This way, it will reflect on your content. The more you put that into practice, the better your understanding for writing will be and the quality for it will increase as well. Win-win!

Keep calm and don't overuse punctuations

If you find yourself using punctuation marks to assert urgency... don't. Now you must be thinking, 'What do you mean by that???? Tell us!!!'

I mean exactly what is written above. Wouldn't you agree that a single question mark looks better? Most would even agree that a single exclamation mark is enough!

Some wouldn't... but only in the case of the period character, like so.

No bad language

This is a no-brainer. Keep it all G-rated. Think of Sesame Street. Bad language makes for bad feelings, and the feel of content being informative diminishes due to this as well.

No short forms

Let's say that you are writing about something that has a short form, such as a university. Take Northwestern State University as an example. Its short form is 'NSU'. It's valid to use its short form if you are going to repeat the name numerous times throughout your content.

What is not valid, however, is using short forms for words that **aren't** used as frequently. For instance, you would only state the name of the accreditation body of a university once, along with its short form, and leave it at that.

Another instance is writing short forms for important terms such as 'cost of attendance', which is not allowed either. This is because 'cost of attendance' is a long-tail keyword. Unless the short form itself is a keyword, never shorten keywords.

Using short-forms is done on a case-by-case basis, so to be on the safe side, write full forms.

Grammar Check

If you can't correct the grammar in these sentences then it's a good time to think about how you can best improve your skillset with proofreading,

Hint: There are **11** errors in the sentence above.

Grammar checks can involve punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, appropriate sentence formations, common sense in the content written, consistent alphabet capitalisation and so on. You not only need a good eye, but you also need a good perception for written language.

Now, how do you go about doing this even if you suck at spotting errors? We have resources for that!

Grammarly is a service you could use to detect errors automatically. I would say it's slightly better than what Google Docs already offers. It checks for a lot of stuff apart from word-based errors. You can find the extension in the plug-in store for the web browser you are using and install it. Using the plug-in more efficiently will require you to create an account, so go ahead and search for it.

You could also use Grammarly's [Grammar Checker](#) to do a quick check on what exactly is wrong with the content you've written (note that it will not tell you where you are going wrong with it).

However, I would still highly suggest that you make an account there so that the service allows itself to point out where you are going wrong so that you may make the changes immediately.

[This Slideshare](#) I found talks a bit about punctuations. It explains each of them clearly and is ultimately a great resource for going back to if you feel confused about what punctuation to use.

It's also important to 'Americanize' your content language as your target audience is the American education market. Now, this is tricky because we follow British English. Both styles of writing have subtle differences, but make all the difference. [This blog post](#) explains the basic differences between them. In fact, that site on which that blog is posted is a good resource for learning about writing in and of itself.

And finally, keep a bit of space between sentences that you are writing.

Would you like it if you read content like this? Or maybe like this , with the punctuations given inappropriate spacing ?

Or if I were to start a new sentence, would it be okay to write certain sentences, like this, or like this?

Short answer, no. So keep an eye out for such mistakes as well.

Plagiarism

This is a genuine cardinal sin of writing. Never, **ever** plagiarise.

This is not just applicable to writing. This is applicable to all kinds of media. Including [this review on Dead Cells](#), an action-adventure video-game. Take a look. You'll see the similarities.

This caused a *big* stir in the independent game development industry on how games are reviewed because the person who plagiarised the content was working in a well-known game journalism company. It was big enough for a website like The Verge to cover it ([here's the article](#) in question).

Simply put, do not copy another site's content, paste it on your content and call it your own. It is dangerous, especially to your own career. Stay safe and work honestly, even if you may or may not do a crap job at it. A crap job is a lot better than stealing because the former is easily fixable.

'Well, I ain't copied nothin'! How do I know some other website wrote the same thing as I did if I didn't even know about it!?'

Good question. And there are ways to work around it. Mind you, it's not the perfect solution, but it's effective enough.

[EduBirdie](#) is a free plagiarism tool used to detect ... well, plagiarism. It's a lot better than Grammarly's supposed plagiarism checker as EduBirdie's focus itself is on plagiarism rather than everything related to content. Make sure the tag you apply is for 'web site content', of course. And then paste whatever paragraphs you want to check for plagiarism on there.

Another way to check for plagiarism is to Google your sentences! Go ahead, Google the following sentence and see how many hits you get:

'Writing essays is time-consuming and arduous for students in all fields. What's more, rewriting old essays to improve grades can feel like an even greater time suck.'

Thoughts on plagiarism

Now, plagiarism itself tends to be murky in terms of the ways we've talked about its restriction so far. Certainly, we can't have **100% pure, non-plagiarised content**, can we? To say that you can 'never, **ever**' plagiarise sounds a bit too extreme.

However, it is a good thought process to have in order for you to put in the effort to make your content feel different.

Having said that, content can't ever be that perfect. You'll never get that 100%, and for some of us OCD types like me, that is annoying to deal with, but it's a reality we have to face. A good rule of thumb in this case would be to bring your plagiarism count down to **20-30%**. The reason why only a low percentage of it is acceptable is because you can't achieve a 100% plagiarism-free status in report or fact-related content.

Text Highlights

When it comes to writing, it's important to shift the reader's eyes to things that are more important. So that comes with boldening content.

For the most part, you will be boldening numbers, most of which should relate to the headings you are talking about. For instance, bolden **all the currency amounts in Tuition** and **Financial Aid pages**. This is done on a **case-by-case basis**, so it all depends on how you have written the content and on what you are writing exactly.

Personally, I bolden the following:

- Monetary values / currency amounts.
 - Percentage values.
 - Ratios.
 - Number of X (students, faculty members, courses, etc).
 - Ranking values.
 - Test scores.
-

Fact-Checking

You are essentially doing reporting work. Therefore, your work has to reflect a lot of facts that are verified. When doing research, it's important to make sure that whatever facts you collect are verified.

The facts have to be up to date, accurate and should be reflected upon trusted websites, largely governmental portals and official university websites. This is applicable to any new information you may find on the subject you are writing on.

All of this entails the requirement of good researching skills from your side. So put your thinking caps on and keep your magnifying glasses close. You **need** these skills so that you won't have to rely on me for help; I may neither be available nor be able to manage the time for it, such factors have to be considered.

Content Interlinking

Writing content related to education would mean the reader will be bombarded with content they are not familiar with. Which is why interlinking different pages that our website talks about is important.

Let's say that a reader is reading about the admission process in your content, but your content doesn't talk about how to apply. They are going to feel lost because they don't know how to proceed, even though they know the process.

In this case, you would hyperlink our blog posts that talk about the university's admission process forms and methodologies. Through these links, the reader can educate themselves on it.

This way, you are not only providing people with relevant information, but you are also establishing a form of relationship between your content and the other pages on our website.

Not only that, but once your reader is done with reading your content, you will want them to read other posts or pages as well. Much like a tourist, they have to explore our website and take up interest in what we offer. We are their tour guide. So it's important to keep them moving from page to page, so long as the content is relevant.

MozBar and **SEO Minion** are two effective tools to use for your content interlinking needs. They are best used once you've finished interlinking your content. This way, you can check if your content truly does have links and if so, whether they are broken or not. It can potentially save you a lot of time if you find out that a lot of your content has *broken links* and whatnot.

- If you're dealing with university pages, it's best to interlink all of your pages back to the Overview page with their respective focus keyphrases. (Google's your friend; go ahead and search for that term.)
- If you're dealing with blog posts, don't leave your readers hanging at the end. Direct them to other posts that may be similar to the topics covered, or other posts that may interest them.

'Can we link third-party competitor websites such as Niche, or USNews?' **No.** It is a lot like copying your rival's homework.

FAQs

Should you have any questions about the handbook and its contents - if it's a frequent one - you can be sure that you'll see its answer under here. However, don't stop yourself from asking your questions anyway. I could add them here and keep them as reference. And remember, there are no stupid questions. Only stupid answers! So ask away.

You can open a conversation about your questions either by phone or through a Hangouts chat, for which I've provided my mail or you may also contact your respective mentors about it.

Why use DuckDuckGo (or any other engine) over Google for finding keywords?

Google is our core engine. So we aren't replacing Google Search with anything. If you find yourself unable to find the most relevant keywords for your content via Google Search, then the other engines may help.

DuckDuckGo simply tends to show relevant searches than the others. It's not, however, meant to be a replacement. Your first and foremost place to research keywords is Google Search.
