Chunking - transcript

Part of the ‘Effective Digital Content’ training

Now we’re going to look at how to break down your content into manageable pieces.

# Consuming content

The way people ‘consume’ web content is very different to how they might read a book.

We call it consuming content because we’re not always talking about text that you can read, but also because, typically, web users aren’t going to read all your content. Users scan pages looking for information they need.

# F-shaped reading

Study after study has shown that when they do this, people tend to look at web pages with an ‘F-shaped’ viewing pattern - a focus along the top of the page, then down the side, with a move out to the right further down the page.

To use this user behaviour to your advantage, you should break down your content into small pieces of information, and place this where it will get the most attention.

# Chunking

Breaking down your information into small, manageable pieces, is known as chunking. This is a term that originates in cognitive psychology to show how much easier it is to retain information when it’s broken down into manageable chunks. In Web content, ‘chunking’ your information mean to present small pieces of information in a well-organised format. It makes it much easier for users to find what they need.

There are a few different ways you can use chunking in web content.

# Lists

Where you can, break your content into lists. This keeps your content within the downward stroke of the F in the viewing pattern.

You should always use a list where you have three or more items that relate to each other. However, don’t put to many items into a list. When you start to get more than 7, think about breaking up the list with some paragraph text or a subheading.

# Bullets v numbers

If the order of your list is not important, you should use ordinary bullets, with a sub bullet for a related piece of information.   
  
If you are describing a process, and the order is important, use numbered bullets.

# Push keywords to the front

You should always try to start items in a list – or whatever you’re writing – with the key word that defines that bullet point. As users scan down the page, they often only take in the first two words of each line. Making these 2 words the most important words in that line will help users find what they need.

The video on subheadings gives an example of this concept – remember that it applies to all kinds of content.

# Short paragraphs

Where you can’t use a list, you should use short paragraphs. Only address one simple concept per paragraph, and break up this text with a new subheading every 2 or 3 paragraphs (the video on subheadings goes into this in more detail).

# Standout elements

You can also use standout elements on your page to chunk information – in EdWeb this might include a feature box, the quote element, or even just bold text.

# Microcopy

The majority of your most valuable content is actually made up of what’s known as microcopy – including heading text and link text. A great deal of user attention is focused on these tiny bits of copy, and it’s worth investing your time on getting these right.

The videos on page titles and summaries, subheadings, web addresses and links go into more detail on how to create effective microcopy.