Top tips for producing a good website

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<th>Planning:</th>
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| **1.** Your website isn't for you! | **Who are your users?** Think about what they are likely to want, rather than what you want to tell them.  
**What will they be looking for?** Where might they expect to find it?  
Avoid grouping information that just reflects your internal structure – it is meaningless to those outside your organisation. |
| **2.** Clear navigation | **The recommended number of links to have in a main menu is eight, with no more than 10.** Ideally your left hand menu links should all fit on one screen, without the need for scrolling.  
Avoid using the main menu for all your links. The main menu should be used to address your main audiences. Supplementary information that is relevant to a narrow, or internal only, audience may be better as a link in a right hand box (the traditional place for shortcuts and supplementary information).  
Example: A main menu link that says, "Information for staff (restricted access)" is only relevant to an internal group of people in your department. It may be better in a Quick Links box on the right hand side of the page. |
| **3.** Use your homepage | **You can use the homepage of your website to draw people through to important content.** Add three or four links to your homepage to draw attention to important sections. It just helps your main audiences find their way that bit quicker.  
The homepage doesn't have to be static. Small changes may help users trust that someone is behind the scenes keeping it all up to date. |
| **4.** Convention helps | **There are some elements of websites that have become the norm (such as the main menu being on the left, or links being underlined).** If you are going to break with what people think of as 'normal', then have a very good reason for doing so. Users are unlikely to re-learn your way if they feel more familiar with the way most other sites are doing it. |
| **5.** Goodbye to the '3-click' rule | **It's important that your information is easy to find.** The number of clicks is less important. A user would rather click on five links and find the answer in 20 seconds, than click on two or three links and search down a long page for two minutes. |
### Page structure and layout:

1. **Make it ‘scannable’**  
   Web users tend to have a particular task in mind. They will scan their eye down a page, looking for headings and links that relate to their objective. For this reason we chunk text into easy-to-scan content. You should use plenty of sub-headings, keep paragraphs short and write links that describe where the user will be taken (see Accessibility below).

2. **Tone of voice**  
   The tone and style of your web content should always have the audience in mind. In general the tone we use on the University website is informal, friendly and engaging. Web language generally edges towards the conversational and away from jargon and complicated terminology.

3. **Be concise**  
   Pages that lead the user to specific content (signpost pages) should be kept short and to the point. Users should not have to scroll down these pages. Obviously, once you have directed a user to the content they are after, you can afford for pages to be longer. Once someone has found the information they are looking for, they will be more likely to stay in once place and read (or print) the page.

4. **Meaningful links**  
   Use links to help draw the user through your site. Links should always be descriptive, to give people an idea of what they will find. Avoid acronyms or jargon that is unfamiliar to users (see Accessibility below).

5. **Search engine optimisation – choose your words**  
   A carefully worded introduction on a page not only gives users an indication of what they’ll find, it also helps search engines (such as Google) pick up key words to identify the subject matter for search results. You can read more about SEO on the web pages: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/web/seo](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/web/seo)

6. **Get the picture!**  
   Don’t use pictures just for the sake of it. Choose images that add something to the page and give context.

   Optimise images for the web to keep file sizes small (Photoshop’s ‘save for web’ function is good for this). Generally:

   - Photographs should be saved as jpeg format.
   - Pictures containing solid blocks of colour, eg. graphics, should be saved as gif format.

7. **Accessibility**  
   Many blind and partially sighted people use screen reading software to help them use websites. To aid this software you should always:

   - Include ‘alt text’ (alternative text) with all images. This is the text you see when you hover the mouse over a picture. CMS has a compulsory field for this.
   - Avoid “click here” links. Describe where the user will be taken. Example: "Find out how to apply", rather than "Click here for more".
### Managing and monitoring your website:

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| **1. Be realistic** | Don't put lots of time-sensitive information on your pages if you do not have time to monitor and update regularly.  
• Keep prompts or a diary to remind you when something needs removing or updating.  
• If you have feedback forms do reply to people who send in feedback. Try to do this within a reasonable timescale (ideally one or two days). |
| **2. Review** | Remember to review your site to make adjustments and improvements. Conducting user testing can help you identify areas that need further change. For help and advice on user testing, you can contact one of the web marketing team: webmarketing@sheffield.ac.uk |

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