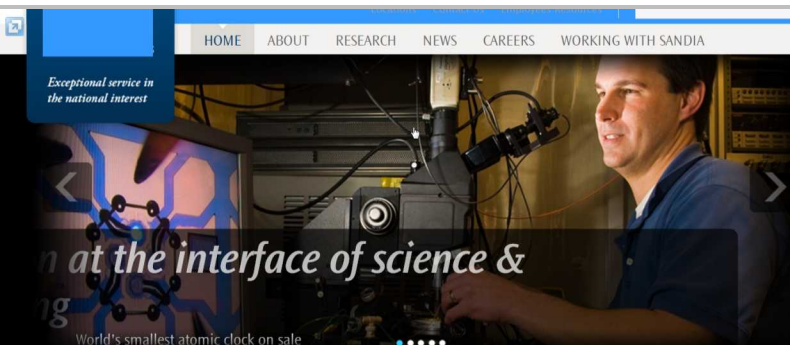


*Exceptional service in the national interest*



# Writing for Web Readers

## Back to the Basics

Jennifer Awe, Public Relations



Sandia National Laboratories is a multi-program laboratory managed and operated by Sandia Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lockheed Martin Corporation, for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration under contract DE-AC04-94AL85000.

# Write for your audience

- Advertising copy differs greatly from news releases or print, which differ greatly from web
- Likewise, readers read different media in different ways



## Tweets

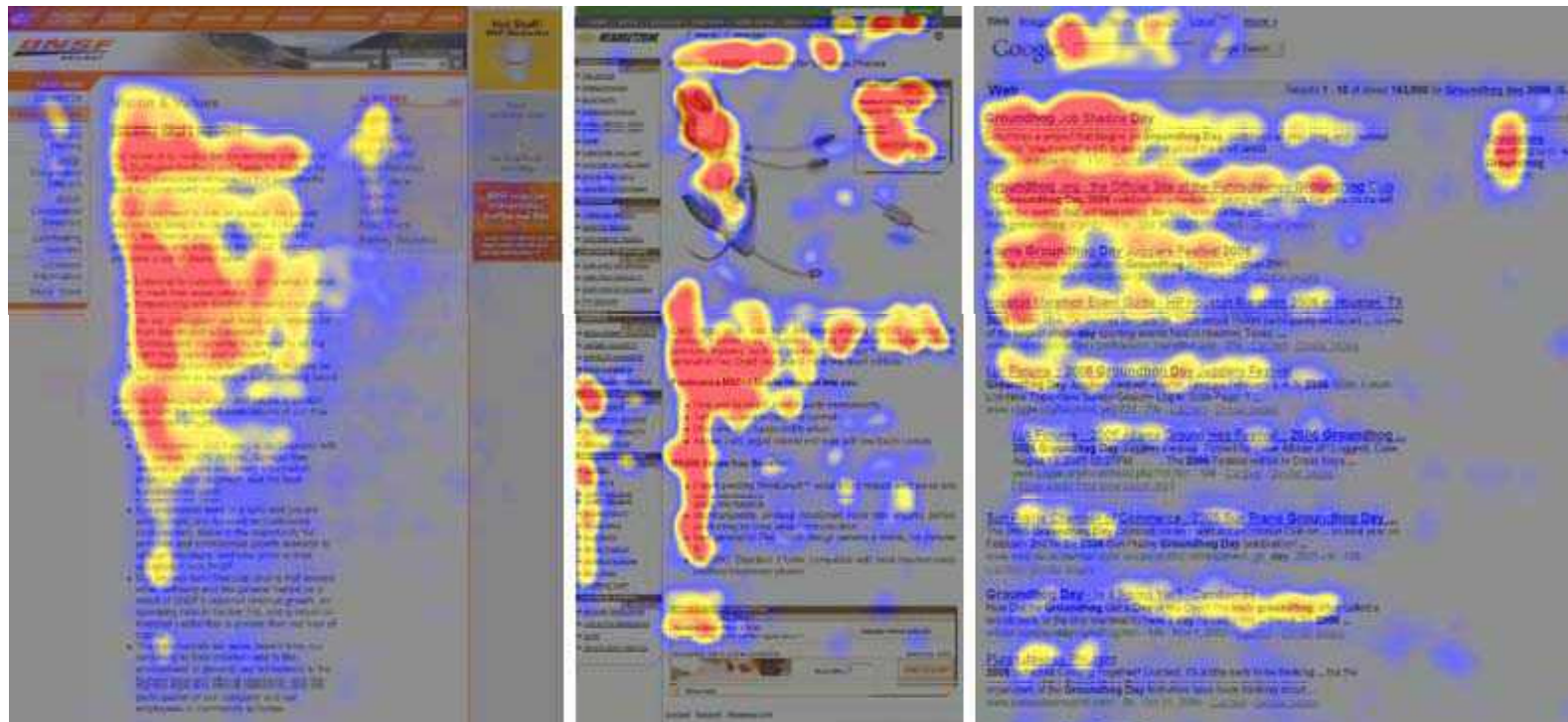


# Know your audience

- They skim — they don't read
  - 79% of users scan instead of reading each word
- They want information quickly
- Reading a computer screen is 25% slower than reading paper
- Clicking hyperlinks is the #1 activity for users

# “F” format

- Users scan **horizontally** across the top first
- Then, users scan a **second horizontal line** covering a shorter area
- Users scan the left side in a **vertical movement**



Heatmaps from user eyetracking studies of three websites. The areas where users looked the most are colored red; the yellow areas indicate fewer views, followed by the least-viewed blue areas. Gray areas didn't attract any fixations (useit.com).

# Why is this important?

- Key information on top
  - Top of story, front of headline (frontload)

*Researchers near final test phase for **HIV vaccine***

vs.

***HIV vaccine** in final stages*

- Make it scannable:
  - Bulleted lists
  - **Bold**, *italicized* words
  - [Links](#)
  - Sidebars
  - Subheads and short paragraphs

# Why is this important?

- Eliminate most adjectives, most fluff
- Reduce word count from print
  - By about 50%
- Readability
  - [SMOG](#)



-

# How?

- Short
  - *<7 words*
  
- Informative
  - *tell your readers what they need to know*
  - *simple subject, simple predicate*
  - *facts, stats – 85% of cigarette smoke is invisible*
  
- Understandable
  - *easy to understand without the article below*

# Examples:

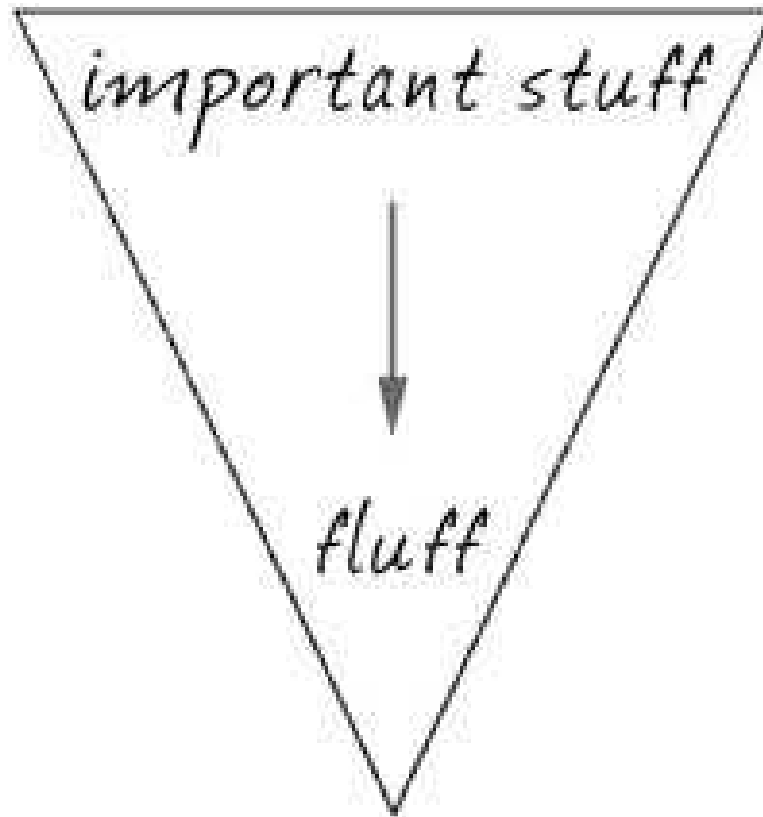
- Italy Buries Quake Victims
- Is Microsoft dying? CNNMoney
- Toxic Metals Tied to Work in Prisons
- Feds: Elderly face financial abuse
- Brain Eating Amoeba Kills Three

# Next...telling the story



# The story

- Inverted pyramid to the extreme



# The story

- Strong lead – who, what, where, when
- Emotion “sells” the story
  - Why should I care?
  - How does it affect me or my family?
- Eliminate most adjectives, most fluff – get to the point

# How concise is too concise?

- Study posted an original document and a revision cut by 54%  
(Morkes and Nielsen)
- Users preferred the **shorter** version and even thought it was *more* complete than the original
- "How complete is the site's treatment of the topic?", the rewritten version scored 7 out of 10, compared with 6 for the original

**Concise writing is *not*  
inconsistent with  
comprehensive writing**

# Step outside...

Think like your audience.

- How would *they* search the page?
- What would “capabilities” or “assets” mean to them?
- Ask for help from someone *outside* your area

# References

- [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)
- Plain Writing Act guidance:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>
- [www.alistapart.com](http://www.alistapart.com)
- [www.websitetips.com](http://www.websitetips.com)

# Thank you

- Questions?
- Discussion