

Nine Dates with Content and Coffee

Date 8: Web-writing and
e-newsletters



香港中文大學

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The Digital Challenge

Facts you should have known by now:

- Reading vs scanning
- Writing for a global audience
- Less is more



How We Read

From left to right, from up to down

Still Harping on the Higgs?

Thirty-three years after his *Alien* started the cult of the thorax-bursting body snatchers, director Ridley Scott gave us a prequel to the saga in the form of *Prometheus*. The actions in the latter film have not only gone back in chronological time but also redirected the seemingly doomed space journey towards the origin of the human race.

Man's quest for his origin is not fodder for the imagination of the artists only. In science a similar but more rigorous quest has been going on for quite some time, with less violent or ghastly manifestations. Physicists view the physical universe in terms of fields, forces, particles, energy and matter. The standard model of particle physics explains its working as a combination of the weak nuclear force, the strong force and electromagnetism.

All is so very well, but there is a missing piece to the jigsaw. Where does the mass of the fundamental particles come from? And why do different particles have different masses? A half century ago, the Scottish physicist Peter Higgs theorized that there is an energy field which gives mass to particles that are trawled through it.

Professor Chu Ming-chung, professor of physics at CUHK, likened the Higgs field to water. When we walk in water, we feel we are pulled back or weighed down, as if we have been given extra "mass". That is a field suffused with mass or mass-giving particles. How can the existence of the field be proved? Imagine a blind man standing on the shore. By throwing a stone into the water, he can tell by the sound of the water breaking that it's all water instead of rock in front of him. Similarly, scientists would smash high-energy particles so that the resulting explosion would disrupt the field and release Higgs particles which can be detected and whose traces can be analyzed.

But this Higgs particle, which later came to be called the God particle, had proved elusive. Man proposed, but God was not ready to dispose. This is because the particle accelerators were not yet powerful enough to set loose the Higgs. But the arrival of the much more powerful Large Hadron Colliders (LHCs) in the later part of the 2000s changed all that.

The LHC at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, 26.5 km in circumference and 90 m deep in the ground, can smash protons at 99.9999991% of the speed of light, thereby producing fireballs with effervescent particles such as the Higgs and leaving traces which can prove its existence. For some months since the beginning of this year, the scientific community had been holding its breath in anticipation of the tracking and proving of the existence of the God particle. Then in July, the research teams at CERN announced they have found a Higgs-like particle. The whole world erupted in euphoria. But a lot remains to be done.

Professor Chung explained, "The scientists at CERN would then have to measure the ratio of the different ways of decay of this Higgs-like particle, to see whether the particle is the same as the standard model Higgs. In fact, some of the ways this particle can decay have not been observed yet. So they need to have more events in order to see all the decay modes of the particle." Professor Chu estimated that by the



How We Scan

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Scanning a Webpage

- scan the main sections of a page to determine what the page is about, whether the content is relevant, and whether you want to stay (usually under 3 seconds)
- look mostly at headings, boldfaced terms and lists



- pay most attention to content in top part of the webpage (therefore, avoid scrolling)
- focus on triangular area in upper-left corner (subject to photos and images)



Writing for the Global Audience

- Spell out shortened words, acronyms and abbreviations except widely recognized ones
- Avoid jargons, professional terms or neologisms (or define them)
- Use gender-neutral terms whenever possible



- Be specific about locations (Paris, Texas; Cambridge, Massachusetts)
- Note differences in number punctuations and units of measurement
- Avoid culture-specific usages, slangs or puns
- Beware of local variations (graduate vs postgraduate; semester vs trimester)



Number Punctuations

We are familiar with:

- Bolt won by only **0.5** second.
- Some **7,500,000** tourists visited Hong Kong last year.

But in Europe they write:

- Bolt won by only **0,5** second.
- Some **7 500 000** tourists visited Hong Kong last year.



36,333.333 (US and British style)

36 333,333 (European style)

36 333.333 (Canadian style)

(The Chicago Style of Manual (15th ed.), #9.22, p. 385)



Unit of Measurement

ton, tonne

- British *tonne* (1,000 kilogrammes)
- American *ton* (907 kilograms)

- *ton* as in 'tons of work', 'tons of complaints'



Less Is More

Effective online writing:

- Keep it short
- Keep it simple
- Front-load your content



Sentences

- Write strong, concise, informative sentences that compel people to keep reading
- Express one point in one sentence
- Use basic verb forms
- Avoid interjections, qualifications and adjectival/adverbial clauses/phrases



“Many of us, in fact, do have the power, however small, to take the first step toward real communication—by going to Beijing, or Mexico City, or, best of all, Damascus.”

(Pico Iyer. ‘The Necessity of Travel’, *Time*, 27 May 2002)



Take away the interjections,
qualifications, etc:

Many of us do have the power to take
the first step toward real
communication by going to Beijing,
Mexico City, or Damascus.



Use basic verb form:

We can take the first step toward real communication by going to different places.



Paragraphs

- Keep them short, simple and on one topic (idea, argument)
- Front-load your paragraph (topic sentence)
- Short



“With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway about the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.”



Argument:

I am a seeker of knowledge, in addition to other things.

Topic sentence:

With equal passion I have sought knowledge.

Number of sentences: 5 (topic sentence + knowledge 1 = knowledge 2 + knowledge 3 + result of seeking)



Listing and Bullets

Simplify complicated steps, organize ideas for your readers, and add welcome white space to a page.

- Numbered list
- Bullet points



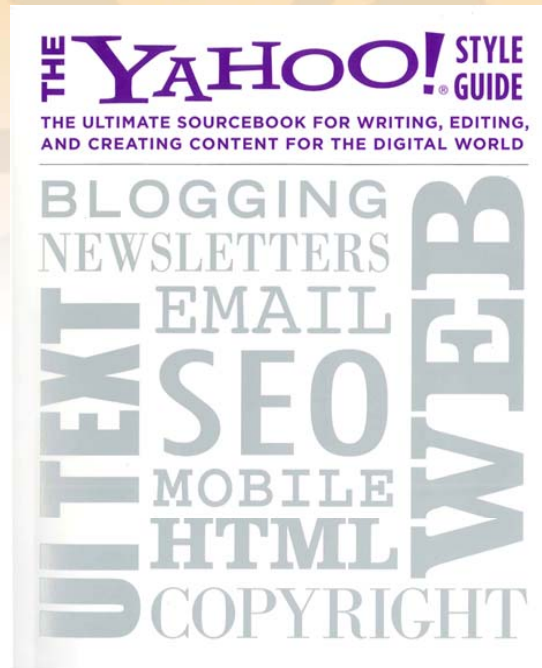
Style on Bullet Points

- Should not have fewer than 3 bullets
- For single words or short phrases, no need for capitalized first words or ending punctuations
- For long clauses or complete sentences, capitalize first words and end with full-stops



Should Check Out

The Yahoo! Style Guide



But it's advisable to develop your own web style.



Search Engine Optimization

Implications for writers/copywriters

- Write information-rich texts
- Figure out keywords
- Embed keywords through text



A Few Tips on SEO Copywriting

- Strategically seed your page with keywords that describe your content and correspond to people's search phrases (reader-oriented instead of writer-oriented)
- Embed keywords where they matter most: title, headings, links, metadata, image and video tags



- Links to other relevant sites, and vice versa
- Aim at people not machines, so write clear, concise and logical text
- Gamble with keywords (notebook or laptop?)
- Keywords must be precise (professional school vs vocational school)



- Embed variants of your keyword (interview, interviews, interviewed, interviewer, interviewee, interviewers, interviewees, etc.)
- The best keywords are multiword phrases (3 or more words)
- Avoid saving text as image/pdf (image looks blank to a search engine)
- Broken links are a no-no



The Proliferation of e-newsletters

At present, CUHK has 23 e-newsletters, but the number has doubled in the last 5 years.

Year	No. of issues sent
2010	97
2011	120
2012	146
2013	184
2014	183



College e-newsletters

New Asia College:

<http://cloud.itsc.cuhk.edu.hk/enewsasp/app/article.aspx/C4181A5818D831F50876D3854B3DDB38/>



United College:

<http://cloud.itsc.cuhk.edu.hk/enewsasp/app/article.aspx/ED5628CBFDAF0C83029BB350D926D4B7/>



S. H. Ho College:

<http://cloud.itsc.cuhk.edu.hk/enewsasp/app/article.aspx/7E8AED4BDC32552634609984D6F58C53/>



C. W. Chu College:

<http://cloud.itsc.cuhk.edu.hk/enewsasp/app/article.aspx/271B595B6FFDE387F1249E57FAFA5054/>



Some Observations

Design:

- Masthead
- Table of Content
- Volume No.
- Modeled on printed version
- Need to scroll down



Issuing frequency:

- Some irregular (hard to create reading habit)

Content:

- Pictures not dominant
- Headlines can be more attractive

Web functions

- Social media
- Hyperlinks to other sites
- Can readers leave comments?



ISO e-publications

CUHK Newsletter:

http://www.iso.cuhk.edu.hk/english/publications/newsletter/index.aspx?issueid=1490&utm_source=ISOwebsite&utm_medium=ISO_home_NSL_box&utm_campaign=NSL460



Sustainable Campus:

<http://www.iso.cuhk.edu.hk/english/publications/sustainable-campus/index.aspx?issueid=1480>



The e-footprint and Analytics

Inaugural issue of *Sustainable Campus*,
September 2013

Total no. of e-mails sent	128,056
Total no. of visitors	4,492
Conversion Rate (%)	3.51
Total no. of pages viewed	8,895
No. of pages viewed by a visitor	2.0



Section	% of visitors	% of fb likes
Feature	25.09	14.45
The Arts	20.81	13.67
The Sciences	14.30	13.41
GO! Programme	7.39	1.56
The World	12.45	10.29
The Activist	19.96	46.61



Language version	% of visitors
English	66.97
Chinese	33.03

