

SPRINT GO - Standards and style workshop

Design principles

(www.gov.uk/design-principles)

Start with needs - user needs, not government needs

Do less - only do what only government does

Design with data – analytics, usage stats

Do the hard work to make it simple – make sure the user has an easy experience

Why you should use GOV.UK style

(www.gov.uk/design-principles/style-guide)

It's not about the message you want to send, its about what the user needs.

User needs are not the same as government or agency needs. If there isn't a need for it, we shouldn't publish it.

People use GOV.UK because they have to, not for fun. So make it simple for them to accomplish tasks and fulfil needs.

Plain English:

- is fair and inclusive
- promotes equality of access to government information and services, including people who don't have English as a first language
- isn't "dumbing down", it's opening up government information for all

Good writing:

- is about what you leave out as well as what you put in
- means more traffic - research shows more people are reading policies on GOV.UK than ever before

The message should match the medium: modern website, modern rules and modern language.

Open government means accountability. The taxpayer (fee payer) funds everything we do, so we should make sure they understand what we're doing and can assess the value for themselves

Clarity doesn't just help the end user, it helps the organisation too. If users understand what they have to do when they interact with the organisation, and then they do it, they're meeting the organisation's needs too.

Variety of content types allow for clarity for all readers and deeper delving for experts, eg policy plus white paper.

Award-winning writing. The Black Pencil says we're doing something right - government websites don't usually get awards for writing.

How people read on the web

Web reading is different to print. Screen fatigue means people 'scan' for what they need and disregard the rest.

Scanning works best with our primary set of 5,000 common words. You use them every day. They are Plain English. You learn to recognise them and then you stop reading them.

Readers don't progress smoothly through text. They can miss up to 30% and still comprehend meaning.

Readers don't read every word - they rely on anticipation, context, recognition of the shape of common words (which is why no bold, no italic).

Effect on your content - cut down the words that aren't relevant to ensure users read the important content.

Front-load content - put the most important content first as that's the bit most people read.

General pointers

Don't be intimidated by grades and structures. Use the structure if you can but remember it's about the user, not the organisation.

See people face-to-face. It's far easier to discuss things this way and sometimes email leads to an unnecessary escalation of issues.

Workshop the content. Get colleagues involved – not exactly word by word, but working to get the content to meet the user need. People who've been involved in the early work are more likely to buy in, and less likely to have problems.

Think about what matters to colleagues and try to pitch accordingly. "I understand that what you do is important and we want other people to understand what you do too. Let's make the language clear to make that happen."

Ask for their expertise – can a novice understand this and does an expert also have enough info to work out if the detail is for them?

Avoid getting into complex or sign-off process with lots of back and forth. Structure it with as few revision opportunities as possible.

Set demanding but realistic time limits for comments after you create content.

If you're really getting nowhere – escalate.

Remember that GDS has always got your back, so get their support if you need it to make clear arguments. Alternatively, you can always say GDS style stipulates that you have to do it in a certain way.