

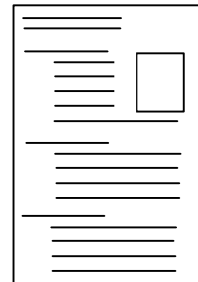
Carefully arranged white space also gives a web page a polished and professional look. Along with small and well designed border images, white space can be used to give a web page a graphic intensive look, without taking a minute and a half to load.

5. Information layout and presentation -- design for scanning

Most people do not come to the Internet to read. They come to the Internet to learn. If they want to read, they curl up by a fire with a good book.

When people view a web page they scan rather than reading from top to bottom. When designing your pages, design for scanning. Identify text that your customers might be looking for and bold the text, or color it, or make it a different size. You want to distinguish the text from the surrounding information so that it will draw the scanning.

Using hanging indents is an effective way to design for scanning. Heading and subheadings should be bold, perhaps larger, but justified to the left of the screen (headings should not be centered). The text beneath the headings should be indented such that the scanning eye easily picks up the headings.



6. Menu size

Try to keep your page menus to less than seven items. People are less likely to read a long menu, preventing them from visiting any of the valuable links from your page. If menus offer fewer than seven options, then people are more likely to read them and to link to the information that will help them solve their problem.

If you need to have more than six options from a single page then have more than one menu listing. Select the most important options, the ones that would be most relevant to most of your readers, and make them a main menu with large and bold text. This is the menu that would draw the readers eye. Then if they see value in your website from this main menu, then their eyes will wonder to other menu listings.

7. Page size

Working a mouse is work. The less you make people use their mouse, the happier they are and the more positively they take your information. This requires that you make lots of decisions regarding page size. Your choices frequently are having a long web page that forces the reader to use his or her mouse to scroll down the page, or having lots of short pages, requiring the reader to click options from a menu.

Usually it is preferable to have smaller pages. They are easier to manage for the reader and give a greater sense of organization. However there are two very good reasons to go with longer pages. If the nature of the information and its use might cause the reader to scan the page for occurrences of specific words or phrases, then the long page has an advantage. The reader can use the Find feature that is in most browsers to search the entire content of the page for the word or phrase.

Another advantage of longer pages is the ability to print them. If the information is such that people would want to have a printed copy, then they can print the single long page once. If the information is divided into several shorter pages, then the user will have to print that many pages.

Another important consideration is the fact that most people do not scroll down a web page...at all. Their decision to scroll depends on what they see at the top of the page. Therefore, the top six inches of your web page is the most crucial part. This is where you place your hook. This is where you advertise the information, convincing the reader that he or she should scroll further.

Designing your website's structure should take this fact into consideration. Who will your audience be? What problems are they likely to be trying to solve by coming to your website. Where can you put the answers so that he or she can reach them with the fewest number of mouse clicks?

Always consider your goals and your audience, and the reasons that they have come to your website. Arrange your information and links for ease, convenience, and speed.

5. Facilitate review and feedback

It is easy to provide e-mail links in your web page so that people can e-mail the webmaster with complaints and suggestions. Users of your website, however, seldom use this feature. You must be more proactive in pursuing input from your web customers.

Here are some ideas:

- a. Teachers, as they participate in parent conference, can ask parents if they have used the website before, what information they were looking for, if they found the information, did they enjoy the experience?
- b. If your school has an end of the year survey for parents, include some questions about your website.
- c. Include a form on your website that asks for input from users. The form should be short. It should look like that person could complete it within one minute. If it looks like it will require more investment of time than one minute, then they won't answer the questions. The form shouldn't ask more than four questions. If you have more than four questions, then cycle them through each week. Ask four questions one week, then four different questions the next week.
- d. Ask parents during PTA meetings to raise their hands if they have used to website. Ask them to raise their hands if they found the information they were looking for. Ask them to meet with the webmaster after the meeting if they have any suggestions on how to improve the service.

Design Issues

Getting information coded, onto a web server, and across tens of thousands of miles of Internet is easy. The hard part is designing the pages so that the information travels the 18 inches from the reader's screen into their understanding. In the Information Age, your information competes with gigabytes of other information, and it competes by being

- inviting,
- easy to scan, and
- easy to understand

Here are a few tips for designing your web pages.

1. Goals, Goals, Goals

Always consider your goals first. Also consider them last. Anything that you can do in the design of your web pages that helps you accomplish your goals is good design. What you want to accomplish with your website will always outweigh the rest of these suggestions.

2. Use images deliberately

If an image does not help you accomplish your goals, then don't use it. Images cost your web customers time. What they accomplish must be worth the time that they cost.

Keep images small, both in terms of disk space and the geographic space that they take up on your website. Scanned photographs and pictures from digital cameras tend to be smaller (file size) if they are saved as JPEG files. Pictures drawing with a graphics program tend to be smaller if they are saved as GIFs.

4. Use white space

White space is not the absence of information. It is a positive element that you use to arrange information on the page. White space draws attention to information by setting it apart.

- School administrator
- Media Specialist
- Representatives of Each Grade Level or Department
- Representatives from the PTA or PTO
- Technology Savvy Students
- Technology Savvy Parents
- Representation from the Central Office (communications officer and/or technology director)
- Clerical Staff

What is the Planning Process?

It is important to structure your planning session(s) as much as possible. Otherwise, the meetings can deteriorate into issues that are not particularly relevant to the construction of your school website. Below are some questions to be answered in the planning process. These questions can serve as a structure for your meetings to bind to discussions to the task at hand.

1. Who is the intended audience of your website?

Who are your stakeholders? Parents, the broader community, people who are considering moving to your community, the central office, local and distant political officials are a few examples.

Think also about your audience in terms of how to best design your web site. What is their reading level? What kind of access to the Internet do they have? Will they have high speed or low speed access? Are they beginners or sophisticated users?

2. What are your goals?

Your goals should be based on your audience, not the school. Your goals should never be, "I want to publish this information." They should be behavioral goals. By this I mean, How do you want to affect the behavior of your audience? How do you want to affect their decision making, their attitudes, their knowledge, or their beliefs?

Your goals should be clear and always up front in your mind during the continued development of your web site. It is a good idea to post your goals in large text above the computer where most of the web design and building will take place.

3. What information do you already have that will help you accomplish your goals?

In considering the information that is already available or being generated on a regular basis, discuss the procedures that will be necessary to convert the information to web format (HTML). There are two ways to think about this.

- a. What will it take to convert the information to web format. If the school secretary is typing up (with a typewriter) a monthly newsletter that you would like to include on the web, then get him or her a computer with word processing software that will easily convert files to be printed into HTML format.
- b. How should the information present itself? Understand that getting information onto the web is easy compared to getting the information from the user's screen into his or her understanding. Laying out information so that it presents itself effectively for accomplishing your goals is perhaps the most challenging part of creating a website. Think about how you best understand information. Typically, people understand a picture better than prose, graphs better than tabular data, charts better than outlines.

4. How will you structure your website?

The important thing to understand about the World Wide Web is the fact that it presents information from a three-dimensional information environment. From any one point, we can go in a variety of directions depending on our information needs.

<http://www.gsn.org/project/>

There are two important reasons why online projects should be web-based.

7. The interactive nature of the web enables context to be created for the project. The information can be organized in a way that keeps the project, its real world application, and the learning objects connected.
8. The web helps to facilitate the project. It manages the information, freeing the teacher to monitor and support student learning.

The first online projects were e-mail projects. A teacher would organize a project sequence, write an announcement e-mail message tailored to convince other classrooms to participate, and then manage the processing and flow of information manually. She also relied on other teachers to find and create context resources for their students to use in their participation.

The information and communication were linear. First the announcement, then the initial correspondence, then the work and exchange of information, and finally the conclusion. In contrast, using the web to manage your project affords you the ability to include all of the information and correspondence in one place. Participating teachers have ready access to the complete listing of information and the managing teacher can easily add and adapt the information to specific needs and situations.

The web can also be used to assist in managing the project. Many projects involve collecting information through surveys. Traditionally, these projects were done through e-mail where survey questions were e-mailed out to classes across the country, and the results were e-mailed back. One problem with this was that the teacher had to spend a great deal of time dealing with the variety of formats people used in recording their results. Some separated the data with commas, others with returns, some put sever returns between lines. Each e-mail message had to be process differently.

If the survey data is collected through a web form, and the form e-mails the data to the teacher, then every message will be formatted the same, saving the teacher an enormous amount of time. This type of form can be easily established as explained later in this chapter.

Increasing in sophistication, a database can be employed to collect the data through a web form. Once the information is in a database, it can be reported in a wide variety of ways. These and other techniques can be used in a web project that frees the teacher to pay attention to student needs instead of managing the project.

The next part of this book will discuss some of these potentials and techniques for realizing many of them, techniques that are well within the reach of most schools.

Planning Your School Website

Perhaps the most critical element to building a web presence and the most often neglected one is planning. To build a website that accomplishes something for you or your school requires planning. Before anyone starts thinking about HTML coding, images to be used in the web page or any of the information, you must plan for what you want to accomplish and how to set about that task.

Who Should be Involved in the Planning?

This is a difficult question to answer. Your planning team depends so much on the character and culture of your school or school district. The number of participants is also critical. The smaller the number, the faster you will be able to move. At the same time, critical people can easily be left out, people who can be instrumental in helping plan a more successful web presence.

Some of the people you might consider are:

accessed that page through the classroom web site and printed it. This freed the teacher to spend more time supervising student learning.

Most links, however, should be presented within the context of what the students are doing in class. You should establish a list of links that are appropriate for the current unit of study, and make it available to the students. When a new unit comes up, post a new list of links. If you are posting your assignment and projects on the web site, post the links within the assignment so that students know why this link is there and how it is to be used. This is an essential way to assure the appropriate use of the Internet -- to proactively lead students into appropriate uses with clear guidance on what they are to do.

The big talk right now over the Internet is web-based learning. Usually the context is distance learning, creating web classes that people can attend remotely. The techniques that educators are employing in their web classes might also be utilized very effectively in face to face classes.

I recently corresponded with a teacher in a school in Manhattan. They were doing just this, leveraging the technology that is being developed for distance learning for their classroom students. For instance, as he covers concepts in economics, he posts questions and problems on an online discussion form for his students to respond to. Students spend two or three of their class periods a week in the computer lab where they respond to the teacher's post -- and to each others. The teacher reported that this style of discussion had important advantages over verbal classroom discussions since the students were able to take time to reflect on the issues and craft their responses using word processing functions. An additional advantage was the fact that the entire discussion could be archived and printed as a study resource.

I have also had teachers tell me that students who discussed class issues online, through web forums or mailing lists, typically wrote better essay answers on their tests. They had become more fluent in discussing the issues since they had been forced to reflect on the ideas and craft their ideas .

WebQuests are another tool that can easily be incorporated into a classroom web site. WebQuests are highly developed assignments for students that involve each of the following components:

1. Introduction -- sets the stage
2. Task -- what the students will be doing
3. Information sources -- a list of information resources, both networked and traditional
4. Process -- clearly described steps for what the students will be doing
5. Guidance -- on how to process and organize the information that the students have collected
6. Conclusion -- reminds the students what they have learned in the quest.

WebQuests make a logical addition to a classroom web site with forms and forums included so that the students actually work through the web in researching, building, and publishing their results. You can learn much more about WebQuest from Bernie Dodge, the inventor of the WebQuest and Tom March, one of its chief developers at:

<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html>

Project Web Sites

This type of web site is not, at this time, very common. They are mostly built by organizations who have among their missions to assist schools in facilitating project based learning. The **Global SchoolNet Foundation** (<http://www.gsn.org>) is a prime example. Their projects are all web based. You can see excellent examples at:

Also, take steps to assure that your web site is being used by a broad range of people, not just those who have Internet access at home or work. Convince the public libraries or other venues with Internet access to place the district's web site on its bookmarks, or as a link on its home page. Print a sign to post near these computers advertising the fact that people can access their school district through these computers. Do everything that you can to avoid information inequities in your community.

School Building Web Sites

The school web site serves a slightly different customer with similar and different objectives in mind. Typically, the audience is the parents, potential parents, and local community of the school. There is a tendency to consider students a customer of the school web site by creating a page of links for the students. However, students are in our schools to learning, and they learn best under the leadership of their teachers. Educational resources intended for students should be made available to them through their teacher and their classroom web sites.

The school site is designed to help parents help the school. I was recently working with an elementary school that had the problem of too many volunteers. Now we all know that an elementary school can't have too many volunteers, but managing their movements and assignments had become a time consuming task for the professionals of the school. The solution that we invented was a web form that teachers could fill out when they had specific tasks for volunteers to perform. These tasks, along with the contact information for the teacher were published as a report on a web page. When volunteers wanted to come to the school to help, they would check this web page, select a task that they were best suited for, and then report through the office and directly to the classroom or lab and to the professional who would supervise them.

Each school has its own needs. Each school has its own culture. The school's web site should be a reflection of that culture. When parents or community members have visited your school's site, they should have a sense of having visited the school itself. A school web site should be designed to be effective, but not necessarily to be professional and polished in the same way that a district site would aspire to.

One of the unique benefits of building a school web site is that your school is full of technology savvy people who, by nature of their presence, need to learn to communicate. Have students do as much of the work as possible. They can do much of the graphics, some of the copy as part of their regular classes and probably all of the coding on the side.

There is much that should be posted on a school web site. A unique and potent opportunity is to use your school's web site to help the public appreciate the teaching profession. It is easy to clearly illustrate the high standards that any teacher must meet and the impressive accomplishments that most have achieved. A school web site should advertise the fact that:

- 54% of its teachers hold a graduate degree,
- that 43% have taught for more than 15 years,
- that 26% have traveled abroad, or
- that Ms. Velez traveled to southwestern Colorado this summer to make her own slides of Neolithic Anasazi villages and relics for use in her social students classes this year.

We should use the web to promote the profession.

Classroom Web Sites

There are probably fewer classroom web sites than the previous two, but they are certainly the fastest growing, with the greatest potential for growth. They also have the greatest potential for impacting student learning.

Most frequent teachers post web links for their students. They include general links that are regularly used by students, such as links to search engines. I examined a web site recently where a chemistry teacher had links on his classroom web site to the various lab report sheets that his students used. When a team of students needed a tessellation report sheet, they just went to the lab's computer,

Web Sites that Work for You

What Kinds of Web Pages are Educators Building

At least half of the workshops that I teach today involve helping educators learn to build web pages. Conference sessions related to web building and web design are certainly the biggest draw. This originally concerned me, because establishing a school web site to satisfy the principal, or the PTA, or because the central office was requiring one seemed less important than teachers learning to skillfully use the Internet as a powerful teaching and learning tool.

Yet, I continued to work with teachers, enjoying their natural creativity. I explored the web work done by educators across the country and beyond. As a result, it has become increasingly obvious that publishing on the web, establishing effective communication venues between our information customers and ourselves helps us do our jobs. Education is an information-intensive endeavor -- perhaps our greatest. We are passing generations of knowledge on to the next generation, preparing our students to inherit their futures, and all of this within a society that is mobile, complex, and increasingly diverse. The information must flow!

There are four logical types of web sites that educators are creating today. Each has its own style, goal, and objective. These types are:

- School District Web Sites,
- School Building Web Sites,
- Classroom Web Sites, and
- Project Web Sites.

School District Web Sites

The district web site will be the most formal and political in nature. Its goal is to support the broader community by:

- Making its citizens aware of general policies and standards,
- Providing a conduit through which the community can become aware of state and national policies and standards,
- Featuring programs that the district offers for students with special needs and desires,
- Instilling an impression that the school district is successfully educating its students to the standards of the community, and
- Attracting new and productive residents to the community.

There are many more goals that a district web site might have, depending on its characteristics. But the style of the design, content, and flow will be of a more professional and polished nature. The district site, of the four mentioned above, is the most likely to be implemented by professional web designers. This, of course, will be a greater likelihood of larger urban districts.

It is important to note that a district web site must facilitate communication, not just broadcast information. Knowing the community is essential to any successful school district, and a web site can effectively facilitate this communication.

Any district web site should include a fill out form for the community. But this form should be designed to invite comments and suggestions that will be of the greatest help to the district. Great care must be given to designing a form that gets the most benefit from the minute that your citizen spends filling in their information. The form should also be designed to get the information to the right person. A drop down menu could be employed so that the person filling the form can select the person to receive it. Or you might have all entries e-mailed to the central office receptionist, who is already practiced at getting information to the right person.