Hints for writing clear, effective and engaging Website content

Communicating effectively with different audiences is a routine task for many. However, your message is more likely to promote understanding and encourage change when the audience feels supported and their concerns are acknowledged—without any sense of judgment.

This guide offers practical tips to support effective writing, especially for websites.
Use as many tips as possible to ensure your resource is as strong and effective as it can be.

Tips to enhance your writing of websites	**Step 1 Information** ☐ Ensure the documents purpose is clear from the beginning ☐ Select a title that clearly explains the topic ☐ Check all Information is directly related to the topic (no "nice to know" extra's) ☐ Ensure the most important points appear first and stand out ☐ Make sure a reader can understand the content on the first read ☐ End with a clear conclusion that supports the topic
	Step 2: Organise ☐ Keep paragraphs short – no more than 5 sentences ☐ Include one main idea in a paragraph ☐ Informative headings are used to break up the text and support easy navigation ☐ Use dot-points or numbered lists for detailed or complex information
	Step 3: Wording & Language ☐ Use personal pronouns like 'you' and 'we' to engage the reader ☐ Use plain language and simple words when possible ☐ Keep your sentences short and clear ☐ Express one idea per sentence ☐ Use action-oriented instead of passive language ☐ Remove all unnecessary words or phrases to keep your message concise
	Step 4: Simplicity & clarity ☐ Use plain language to keep the message clear ☐ Keep sentences short and easy to understand ☐ Avoid jargon that could confuse the reader ☐ Check spelling, grammar and punctuation for accuracy ☐ Make sure information is accessible for people with a disability or using assistive technologies. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provides more information
	Step 5: Formatting ☐ Align text to the left margin only (avoid fully justified margins) ☐ Use one easy to read font that is in a size that's comfortable for all readers ☐ Bold important information to make it stand out ☐ Highlight key points with bullets, arrows or text boxes ☐ Ensure images are simple and clearly represent the main message ☐ Simplify tables, charts or graphs so easy to understand ☐ Select tones which do not distract readers ☐ Test with at least 5 consumers who represent the target audience (include length, layout, content, ease of reading, words & language, usefulness).

Creating content that resonates with your readers	The **SCARF model** (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, Fairness) is a useful framework to consider whenever writing because it helps address key emotional drivers, and can help enhance user engagement, satisfaction, and the likelihood of action
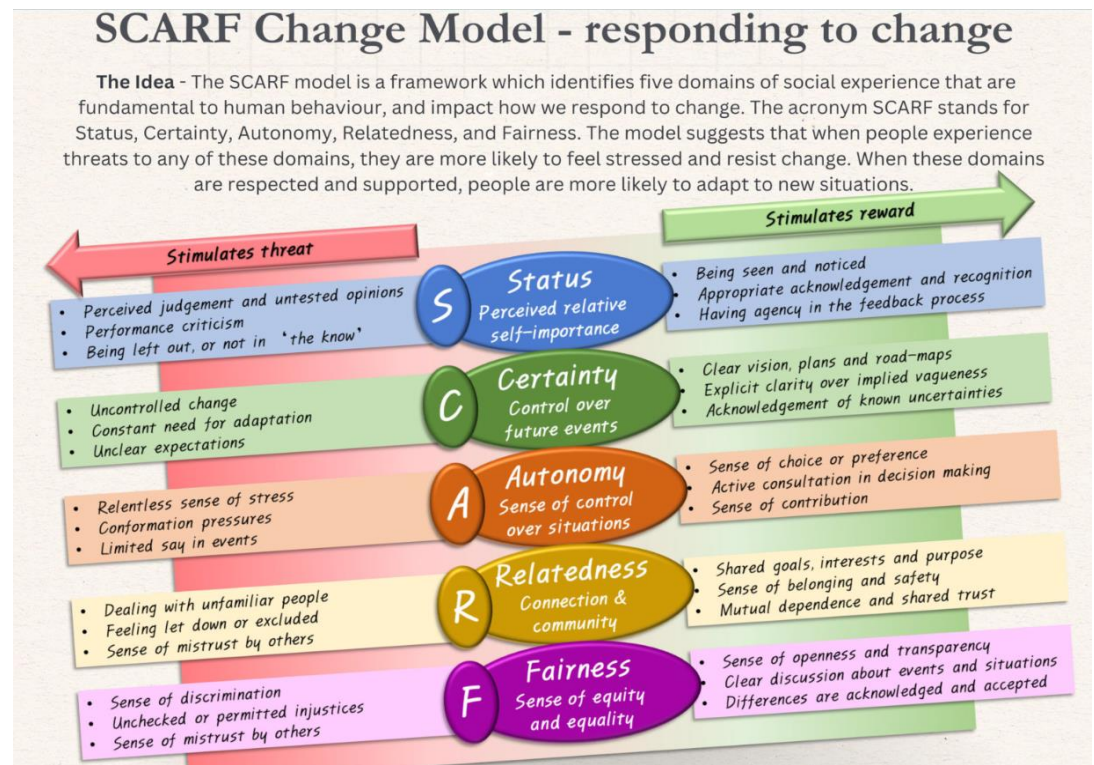
With acknowledgement to [SCARF Model – responding to change – Thinking Frameworks](#)

The model supports moving towards "Rewards" and away from "Threats".

By considering **status**, you can ensure that your content makes the user feel important, acknowledged, and recognized. Reduce threats by allowing self-review and not challenging competence, accepting the opinions of others and by using audience-appropriate language. Addressing the user directly, highlighting their needs, or presenting solutions that make people feel empowered.

As an example, "Status" REWARD approaches may include
- increasing opportunities for learning and recognising improvements
- beating your personal best, building in receiving positive feedback
- acknowledging "I am valuable" and what is being done well
- positive feedback, regular praise, acknowledgements
- allowing people to provide feedback on their own work

The **certainty** aspect of the SCARF model highlights the importance of clear and straightforward content. Reduce threats by referencing the source of information and being transparent regarding services and processes. When developing website content, offering users clear guidance, structure, and expectations (such as easy navigation, concise instructions, or visual cues) reduces uncertainty, leading to a more positive user experience.

	By respecting **autonomy**, you empower users to make their own decisions. Reduce threats by acknowledging people have a choice about how they achieve their goals. It can be achieved by offering choices, such as opting in or out of content, selecting preferences, or allowing users to navigate content at their own pace. This approach builds trust and engagement. **Relatedness** is about making users feel like they belong or have something in common with your content. Reduce threats by ensuring all people feel in a safe place, eliminate words that isolate or damage social connectedness and by celebrating as a group. Content that is relatable, addressing their specific needs or interests, and using conversational tones or stories that resonate with your audience helps build emotional connections with users. When developing content, **fairness** involves presenting information in an unbiased, transparent, and equitable way. Reduce threats by sharing rationales and having people feel valued. This could mean ensuring that all user experiences are considered, which ultimately fosters trust and credibility. Using the SCARF change model helps us answer the questions of • *What motivates people to act?* • *What pushes them away?*
Accessibility Tips	The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 covers a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible. This information is based upon a The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to optimise the accessibility of websites. The link contains a lot of valuable information, very helpful insights including: • Providing text alternatives for any non-text content • Creating content that can be presented in different ways • Making it easier to see and hear content • Avoiding design content known to cause seizures • Having all functionality available from a keyboard • Helping users navigate

Useful Links: (Accessed April 2025):
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality - Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool: http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/prevention-chronic-care/improve/self-mgmt/pemat/index.html
- Canadian Public Health Association - Easy does it! Plain language and clear verbal communication training manual: Easy Does It! Plain Language and Clear Verbal Communication Training Manual
- Checklist for information production and review" Checklist for information production and review | Cancer Research UK
- Checklist of Strategies For Writing and Reviewing Consent Forms: Checklist of Strategies | HHS.gov
- Free readability formulas: http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php
- SCARF Model – Publications: SCARF: A Brain-Based Model for Collaborating With and Influencing Others
- SCARF Model – Responding to change: SCARF Model – responding to change – Thinking Frameworks
- The Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT) and User's Guide: Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Simply put: A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials: Simply put; a guide for creating easy-to-understand materials
- Web Content accessibility Guidelines: W3C Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 3.0
- Web Content accessibility Guidelines: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - Wikipedia