Nine Dates with Content and Coffee

Date 8: Web-writing and e-newsletters
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
How We Scan

Still Hanging on the Higgs?

Thirty-three years after he first started the field of the theoretical study of particle physics, physicist John C. South gave an overview of the field in his essay on “Prologue: The Science.” The story of the latter tale has not only given birth to a new subdiscipline of particle physics but also led to the seemingly daunting quest to find the Higgs boson, the particles that give mass to other particles.

Man’s quest for his origins is not new. The fascination of the origin of the universe, in science and in nature, is one that has intrigued us for quite some time, with less visible or obvious manifestations. Physicists view the physical universe in terms of fields, forces, particles, energy, and motion. The standard model of particle physics explains the universe as a combination of the weak nuclear force, the strong force and electromagnetic force.

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

Professor Chi-Ming Che, professor of physics at CUHK, likened the Higgs field to a sea. When we walk in water, we feel the tug of a rubber band or weighted shoes, as if we have been given extra mass. That is a field suffered with mass or mass-giving particles. How can the existence of the field be proved? Because a filled sea is not standing on the shore. By freezing a drop of the water, one can tell by the sound of the water that it is filled with water molecules. Similarly, scientists would search high-energy particles so that the resulting explosion would destroy the field and release Higgs particles which can be detected and whose nature can be studied.

But the Higgs particle which has been sought is not yet powerful enough to set loose the Higgs. But the arrival of the next generation powerful Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in the latter part of the 2010s changed all that.

The LHC at the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, 26.5 km in circumference and 50 m deep in the ground, can crash protons at 99.99999% of the speed of light, thereby producing fields of efferent particles such as the Higgs and having traces which can prove its existence. For months into the beginning of this year, the scientific community has been looking for the emerging and proving of the existence of the Higgs particle. Then in July, the research teams at CERN announced, “They have found a Higgs-like particle.” The whole world rallied 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 decaying of this Higgs-like particle, to see whether the particle is the same as the standard model Higgs. To that end, some of the rarest decay processes have not been observed yet. So they need to have more events in order to see all the decay modes of the particle.” Professor Chung emphasized that the
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)

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.”

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 star 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.

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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/enewsaspx/app/article.aspx/7E8AED4BDC32552634609984D6F58C53/
C. W. Chu College:
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:

Sustainable Campus:
The e-footprint and Analytics

Inaugural issue of *Sustainable Campus*, September 2013

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