

# Language, Style and Publication in a University Context



Co-organizers: Information Services Office  
Chinese University Press  
Personnel Office

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# On Developing a Web Style

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- reading vs scanning
- writing for a global anonymous audience
- search engine optimization (SEO)  
copywriting



# THE YAHOO! STYLE GUIDE

THE ULTIMATE SOURCEBOOK FOR WRITING, EDITING,  
AND CREATING CONTENT FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

BLOGGING  
NEWSLETTERS  
EMAIL  
SEO  
MOBILE  
HTML  
COPYRIGHT  
TEXT  
WEB



### 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



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# How people browse a webpage

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



# How people scan a web page

- pay most attention to content in top part of page
- focus on triangular area in upper-left corner (subject to photos and images)



# Effective online writing

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





# Components of a text/page

- Headings
- Sentences
- Paragraphs
- Lists
- Images (photos and captions)



# Headings

- create headlines and subheadings that distill content, make story easy to scan, and break up text into readable chunks
- avoid long headlines or headings

**Example:** University X receives Donation from Mr. Y and Z Foundation to boost study on Asian family business and international business cases

**Rewrite to:** Asian family business studies boosted by generous donations



# Headings

Use familiar, sexy, attractive headings (from well-known phrases, songs, books and movies)

- ‘When the Going Gets Global, the Global Gets Going’ (web feature, Feb. 2010)
- ‘Streets of London’ (web feature, Oct. 2011)
- ‘A Tale of Two Asian Cities: why Singapore should be more like Calcutta—and vice versa’, Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, *Time*, 17 May 1999
- *A Bridge Too Far*



# Headings

## Alliterative titles

- ‘Hunting the Higgs’, *Time*, 9 April 2012
- ‘Helping hunt for the Higgs’, *Harvard Gazette*, 11 July 2012
- ‘Still harping on the Higgs?’, *CUHK Newsletter*, 3 September 2012



# Sentences

Write strong, concise, informative sentences that compel people to keep reading

- express one point in one sentence
- front-load your sentences
- use basic verb forms (infinitives, imperatives, simple present, simple past, future tenses)
- avoid interjections, qualifications and adjectival/adverbial clauses/phrases



# Sentences

‘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.



# Sentences

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.



# Sentences

Use basic verb form:

We can take the first step toward real communication by going to Beijing, Mexico City, or Damascus.





# Paragraphs

Keep them short, simple and on one topic

- one idea/argument per paragraph
- front-load your paragraph (topic sentence)
- short (2 or 3 sentences)



# Paragraphs

‘Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.’

Bertrand Russell, ‘What I have lived for’, prologue to *Autobiography*.



# Paragraphs

- Idea/argument:  
The 3 passions I live for
- Topic sentence:  
Three passions (love, knowledge, pity) have governed my life.
- Number of sentences: 2



# Lists

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

- numbered list
- bullet points



## Bullet points

- A bulleted list should not have fewer than 3 items.
- For single words or short phrases, no need for capitalized first words or ending punctuation.
- For long clauses or complete sentences, capitalize first words and end with a full-stop.



# Writing for a global anonymous audience

- write to appeal to the widest possible audience
- English pages a must



# Writing for a global anonymous audience

- Keep words and sentences short and simple
- simple sentence structure (subject-verb-object)
  - spell out shortened words, acronyms and abbreviations except widely recognized ones
  - avoid jargons, professional terms or neologisms (or define them)



# Writing for a global anonymous audience

- use gender-neutral terms whenever possible
- avoid location-specific references
- note differences in number punctuations and units of measurement
- avoid culture-specific usages, slangs or puns
- rewrite texts that don't translate satisfactorily





# 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.



# Number punctuations

36,333.333 (US and British style)

36 333,333 (European style)

36 333.333 (Canadian style)

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



# Units of measurement

*ton, tonne*

- British *tonne* (1,000 kilogrammes)
- American *ton* (907 kilograms)
- *ton* in 'tons of work', 'tons of complaints' (strictly not unit of measurement)
- *ton* = 噸
- *tonne* = 公噸



# Writing for a global anonymous audience

- General message or specialized contents?
- Choice of topics and news angles



# SEO Copywriting

What is search engine optimization?

Implications for copywriters

- write information-rich texts
- figure out keywords
- embed keywords throughout text

Caveat: Write for humans not engines



# SEO copywriting

Best practices:

- strategically seed your page with keywords that describe your content and correspond to people's search phrases
- embed keywords where they matter most: title, headings, links, metadata, image and video tags



# SEO copywriting

- links to other relevant sites, and vice versa
- aim at people not machine, so write clear, concise and logical text
- gamble with keywords
  - *notebook, laptop*
- key words must be precise
  - *professional school, vocational school*



# SEO copywriting

- embed variants of your keyword
  - interview, interviews, interviewed, interviewer, interviewee, interviewers, interviewees
- the best keywords are multiword phrases (3 or more words)





# SEO copywriting

- avoid saving text as image (image looks blank to a search engine)
- broken links are a no-no



## Final question

- Is there a Chinese web style guide?
- For us/CUHK to develop!



THANK YOU!

