

# Formatting Content: Think 'Text Book' Not 'Novel' (h1)

Web content should be **easy to scan**. Generally a visitor to your website is looking for specific information, whether that is a phone number or more detailed information on a specific product. Rather than having a client wade through content that has no relevance to their needs, you should **break your site content into an outline format** similar to the structure you would find in a text book.

## Dividing Content Using Headers (h2)

Following the example to the right, you are going to separate your content, label it and create a hierarchy.

The first step to organizing your content is to **divide it into sections** that you can **label with a header**. **The header must accurately describe the section of content that it is labeling.**

Once you have labeled all of your sections, organize them in a hierarchy.

Keep in mind that the number of headers and **depth of organization will vary depending on the amount and type of content** you have on a page. A contact page that only contains your address, phone, and email really only requires a Page Title (Header 1) followed by the details of your contact information.

### Header 1 - Page Title

1-2 paragraph summary of page contents.

#### Header 2 - 1st Subject

Paragraph

##### header 3 - subcategory of 1st Subject

Paragraph

Paragraph

Bulleted List

##### header 3 - subcategory of 1st Subject

Paragraph

#### Header 2 - 2nd Subject

Paragraph

Paragraph

## Formatting Text (h2)

Now that you have divided your content into hierarchical sections with descriptive headers you can format your text. The text in each section will be laid out as:

- **Paragraphs:** will be used to format most of your content (Example: A company mission statement). Generally paragraphs on the web **do not have indents**.
- **Lists:** When appropriate, it is better to **format it as a bulleted list** rather than a list within a paragraph separated by commas. Remember you are formatting easy to scan text, and bulleted lists are easy to find.

## When to bold (h3)

Bolding text makes it **easier to see** and indicates that a word or phrase is **particularly important** within a paragraph. Bold text highlights the most important message found in a paragraph.

It is not necessary to have bold text in every paragraph or even on every page. Be careful not to abuse the bolding of text. If you are bolding whole paragraphs or most of the page, you are defeating the purpose of bolding important text. **Bold less instead of more.**

- **Less bolding improves search engine optimization:** Bolded keywords and phrases are good for search engine optimization, but an entire bolded paragraph will not improve the priority of text when being read by a search engine.
- **Maintain the significance of bolding:** When too much is bolded, it loses its significance. Readers will begin skipping over bolded text.
- **Do not be pushy:** If it is not directly helping a visitor to navigate the content, do not use it. Writing all of your text in bold is similar to writing in all capital letters and can grate on a visitor's nerves.
- **Bolding affects visually impaired users:** Bold text is an indication to *screen readers*, software that reads text aloud to people with visual disabilities, to stress the text more than normal text. If a visitor is using a screen reader to navigate your page, they are going to be put off by large chunks of bolded text.

### When to italicize (h3)

You should italicize the text you would normally italicize in print, such as book titles. In addition, you can italicize when you want something emphasized. Here are some suggest uses of italics:

- **Catch phrases or taglines:** Any phrases that are unique to your business.
- **Embedded quotations:** Sometimes quotations are not enough to set off a particularly valuable piece of text. If you have a quote from a client testimonial embedded in a paragraph of text, set it apart by italicizing it.
- **Definition term or unique turns of phrase:** Italicizing the word indicates it is a unique term that you do not expect every reader to be familiar with. Try to follow the word with an explanation/definition after the first occurrence of the term when applicable.

Once again, try not to overuse italics. A sentence can be acceptable, or even a whole block of quoted text, but overusing italics can have the same negative consequences as overusing bold.

### When to add links (h3)

#### **Internal Links (h4)**

It is a good idea to **add links in the main content of a page that link to other pages in your website.**

Text books do not have links, but they often have notations directing a reader to a different section for more information.

**Example:** Imagine you have a vacation home that you are trying to rent. One of the pages on the website describes the cost of renting the property. It would be wise to add a link in the content on this page that says “Make your Reservation” and takes users to your reservation page.

Adding links within the content makes it easier for visitors to navigate your site and is good for search engine optimization.

#### **External Links (h4)**

It’s also helpful to **add links in the main content of a page that link to outside websites.** Adding external links can help back-up your content facts by linking to other sources or just to give your users more information on a subject. The World Wide Web is based on links, so do not be afraid to use them!

**Example:** Imagine you have a vacation home that you are trying to rent. One of the pages on the website describes the cost of renting the property. To back the price you are charging for your rental, maybe you can add an external link to a popular travel site that has a past renter raving about your property.

**Tip:** If you do have partner companies, suppliers, or other associates in your related field, contact them and ask them to add your link to their site. If prompted, you can offer to post a return link in exchange. Search engines like to see reputable sites with content related to yours linking to your site.