

DO'S AND  
DON'TS OF  
ONLINE WRITING




**The way you present an article (online) has major impact on your outreach, on how you professionally present yourself and on the appreciation by your audience. In this document some tips on increasing the impact of your article.**

### **Use pictures**

The main picture of an article is like the cake in the display case: it is the first thing you see. It is therefore important to ensure that the photo is attractive and matches the content. Often a pretty picture of the interviewee or pictures you took when on the road, will work. Alternatively: use Flickr (Creative Commons), allthefreestock.com, Google (reusable) or a still from YouTube. A cute cartoon also works well.

Try to vary the images and don't place a picture of pitiful children who beg for water in a story about water scarcity. Make sure pictures are bright and use, if possible, images of people standing. **Work accurately:** In a story about fishing in India don't add a picture of a boat with Thai fishermen. Also take your mobile readers into consideration: when using a picture taken from a large distance you won't see anything on a small screen. Use images in the text, especially in longer articles; it eases reading and helps clarifying the text.



When taking pictures: always ask for permission. To take them and to use them.

### **Catchy words in Italic**

Avoid as much as possible the use of foreign-language words. Ask yourself why you use them: because they are difficult to translate or because they are catchy. If you use them, put them in italics. The word is immediately apparent, and the reader knows that he/she needs to do something; to interpret the word differently than the other words in the sentence. ***This is italic.***

### **Embedding relevant information**

To substantiate your story visually you can embed materials from another website in your article without uploading. You do this by using a HTML code. The urgency of your article is much bigger by inserting for example an interesting tweet, graphic or statistic, or videos from YouTube and Vimeo. You can also embed a link to a relevant article. And last but not least, do not forget to include a poll on your site. Always fun to engage the reader in a subject and to hear his/her opinion.

### **Link to Facebook & social media**

With more than 2 billion monthly active FaceBook users, 800 million monthly active Instagram users and 350 million monthly active Twitter users social media are important in reaching your audience. Provide attractive and bright posts together with your article/picture. Two, not very long, sentences are often enough to seduce readers to your post.

### **Google-findability**

Some of your audience will find you through Google. In that case the searcher has used a term that matches any of your topics. The header is the most important part of the story in this case. Pay a lot of attention to a headline. For example, it must contain **clear and relevant keywords**. In addition, use subheadings.



### Use hyperlinks

If you are writing an article in which you refer to another article you can provide the reader access to that information by inserting a **hyperlink**. Don't do this too often as it is quite ugly.

Another option is to insert a box or informative framework (see 'frames ') in the text or mention one or two sentences about the previous article or report. Give every link an advisory capacity which is the alt tag of the link. Use a short sentence rather than keywords.

### Make your introduction attractive

You can draw your readers into your story with a provocative intro. Open with an attractive sentence that outlines the relevance or timeliness and describes what is discussed in the article. Do this short and sweet, use a maximum of 40 words. The 5 W's and H can also be addressed in the first paragraph (who, what, where, when, why and how).

Do not use: a lot of numbers, abbreviations, names of organizations, foreign terms (see catchy words) or itching words (see itching words).



**You don't have to give a complete summary in the introduction, nuance and details will be discussed later in the text!**

### Avoid "itching" words

Sustainable, inspirational, corporate social responsibility are terms that are often used.

Abstract words like these can scare readers off, in an introduction, but also when used frequently in the body copy. If you really need to use them explain the words and use concrete examples. Often (interviewed) people use business terms that sound better than that they actually mean something. It is your job to write for a broad public and to make the story **understandable**.

### Use frames with titles

There are always passages that fit better as a framework (a 'box') than as part of the ongoing story. Don't try to put too much text in a box, the font is often smaller than the body text which makes reading difficult. If possible, use the enumeration balls/digits that create order and readers love lists. Give your frame a clear heading so that the reader knows exactly what it is about. Reference should be made in the text to the frame.

### Too long is risky

Readers often hesitate to start reading when they get a 'mountain text' presented. Long-reads can be wonderful as a background story, but for generally this rule applies: writing is deleting...

Often you can tell the same story in fewer words. Although internet provides endless space, people love to do online 'snacking'. Besides that, many people have less patience and time to read a long article.

If you have the idea that a text is too long, but you do not know what to delete, let someone else look at it. Definitely: make **paragraphs**. Short texts are more attractive than long laps. Split a paragraph into two can often be just fine. And: paragraphs with titles improve readability.

### Quotes as eye catcher

Sometimes someone gives such a beautiful, funny or interesting statement in an interview that you want to quote this as a header. That is oke, but use a single quote. Double quotes are not only incorrect in a header, it also looks ugly on the homepage. Decide when your text is finished if your quote is still catchy enough. Often it sounds very nice at first, but it actually says nothing once you finished your article. Ask a colleague for instance and find out if the quote is attractive enough to continue reading the whole article. If you decide to make another header, you can still use the quote as a streamer in the text.



### **The value of news – make strategic linkages**

An article, interview or list of tips is not always related to something in the news. Yet it is important for the reader that the product has a certain urgency or timeliness. Always try to look for a clue. You can do this in the introduction or in the social media message. Then the reader knows why he/she should go reading the piece. Is it International Women's Day? Has your organisation recently published a report? Or did sexual reproductive health rights projects dominate the news this week? With a simple reference to current events the reader will already be attracted.



**To increase the urgency, you can embed a tweet (see 'embedding'). You can also pick up a previously written article again as there is news related to the article.**

### **Social media**

Many of your readers are drawn to an article through social media (Facebook and Twitter). Therefore, think carefully about how to entice these readers: how do you attract as many users as possible from this specific social media? This can be done in more ways than only with text. A photo on Twitter often attracts attention, '@' an organization / person in a tweet for extra reach. Also remember: use - if you have - your LinkedIn- and an Instagram account and spread the word through your personal accounts on social media.

### **Questions**

It can be a good idea to put a question in your header: 'How safe are contraceptives anyway?' or

"How sustainable is an average relationship?" The same applies to the end of the introduction. A question pulls people into your story and they are prepared on what to expect. It is important to answer the question in the last paragraph. Do not give an ambiguous answer. If that is not possible, you can use the form 'on the one hand...', 'on the other hand...'. Always write a '**round**' story and make sure you come back to where you started.

### **Be consistent**

Many words can be written in different ways. In case you are not sure about the correct way, at least use the applied spelling consistently. The reader will notice when the word is spelled in different ways. Consistency is also required in numbers: know when you need to write them in letters (three) and when in numbers (499).

### **Extra information**

It could happen that a story or interview connects nicely to a documentary airing on TV, a crowdfunding action or a theater performance about this specific issue. You can draw attention to this event in your article, and provide the readers the opportunity to take action.

### **YouTube-video**

Footage makes text more vivid. A movie can be a valuable addition, but don't 'overfeed' the reader with it. In an interview with the maker of a documentary about adolescent female activists, it is interesting for the reader to watch the trailer.

### **(Self) reflection**

Always look critically at a text. Not just a text you have written yourself but also articles you received from a freelancer or blogger. Is the topic interesting enough and suitable for your audience? Is the text easy to read? Does it really need to go online today? These kind of questions you can ask yourself. Are you not sure about the article, there always be a colleague willing to help you. And remember: quality rather than quantity!

**GOOD LUCK**