



Style Guide: Writing for the Web

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A. Style

1. Writing style should be **short and to the point**. Keep sentences simple and clear. Do not repeat yourself. Start sentences with a subject + verb. Do not use slang.

2. **Paragraphs should be short**, even shorter than if the story were running in a newspaper. White space on the page makes the text more readable on a computer screen. Don't cram your page with lines of endless text.

3. **PROOFREAD**. Typos are the difference between a reputable news website and an ill-informed blog.

2. **Use "hot" words**. "Hot" words are words or phrases that are likely to be used in a search and will lead to your story appearing in the search results. This is especially important in the title and the first sentence (the hook/the tease).

If you write a story about a get-out-the-vote activist group in Dayton, Ohio, hot words might include: get-out-the-vote, GOTV ("get-out-the-vote" is sometimes used in acronym form), Ohio, voters, voter registration, Obama, Clinton, Democrats, Republicans, elections, Miami Valley, Dayton. Imagine you're a viewer or listener trying to find a story about voting in Ohio. What would he/she search for in the search box?

4. **Text that accompanies an audio story should be a minimum of three sentences**. This text is your lede. It should provide your audience with the necessary context for the story. For example, if you mention a congressional representative to a national audience, be sure to provide the district and state he represents.

B. Example Story

Notes:

- Attribution follows quotations.
- Lede is a standard newspaper lede, not a radio lede.
- Reporter's name is not mentioned in body text.

* This story is only an example. Not all stories must be this long. However, remember the three-sentence minimum guideline.

[Tuke Seeks to Challenge Alexander for U.S. Senate](#)

by Shawn Jacobs, WMOT
Murfreesboro, TN

Former Tennessee Democratic Party Chairman Bob Tuke is competing to run against incumbent Republican Senator Lamar Alexander in the November general election.

In a nod to Alexander's "walk across the state" in his successful 1978 gubernatorial campaign, Tuke is "marching" in Tennessee communities in combat boots and fatigues in reference to his service as a marine in Vietnam.

During a march through Murfreesboro at the Stones River National Battlefield, Tuke outlined three top issues that he says Alexander is not addressing.

"I think it's about time that we had somebody who really paid attention to the needs of Tennesseans, and I think Senator Alexander has allowed himself to become too much of the Washington establishment," Tuke said.

Depicting himself as a friend of Alexander's, Tuke insisted, "This is all about issues, politics, and outlook."

Tuke's top issue of concern are high fuel prices.

"Unless you're willing to take on big oil, you can't bring down fuel prices, and Senator Alexander has not been willing to take on big oil," Tuke alleged.

"We need somebody in there who would vote for a windfall profit tax, which is what I would do, and who would vote for removing tax subsidies that these big oil companies obviously enjoy and that they don't need, since they've been enjoying record profits," Tuke said.

Tuke supports diverting the money for oil company subsidies to groups that are working on alternative energy technologies.

Tuke's second major issue of concern is free trade.

"The whole idea of free trade agreements was to have the other side have to do something as well. The United States eliminated its tariffs, but on the other side they were supposed to raise their labor standards and their environmental standards, and none of that's been done," Tuke said.

"I would suspend NAFTA and CAFTA until the countries on the other side begin to demonstrate that they will raise their labor standards," Tuke added.

Tuke also advocates a plan to pull out from Iraq.

"Our military is being badly misused in Iraq. It is essentially supervising a civil war," he said.

"On the other hand, I think the war in Afghanistan is precisely what we need to be doing to fight the war on terror," Tuke stated.

"The Bush administration made a terrible mistake by not focusing on [Afghanistan] and instead invading Iraq," he added.

Tuke will face Democratic opponents in the August Tennessee Democratic primary, including Mark Clayton, Gary Davis, Kenneth Eaton, Leonard Ladner, and Mike Padgett.

C. Additional Resources

Slate.com, "[Lazy Eyes: How We Read Online](#)," by Michael Agger, June 13, 2008
Humorous and insightful commentary on how we read online.

The New York Times, "[Talk to the Newsroom: Richard W. Stevenson, Political Editor](#),"
June 23, 2008
Inside information about how The New York Times handles web journalism ethics and breaking news coverage online.

Sun Microsystems, [Writing for the Web](#)
A helpful step-by-step guide from the corporate world.

USC Annenberg Online Journalism Review, [For Pioneers of Web Journalism, the Future Is Still Full of Surprises](#)
A 2003 discussion with online news media pioneers that still holds relevance for today.

The Poynter Institute Online and Multimedia section
<http://www.poynter.org/subject.asp?id=26>
News, tips, and in-depth features about online news coverage.

Project for Excellence in Journalism, online news media data
http://journalism.org/num_by_media_industry/58/*/*
Latest data regarding production and consumption of online news.

Project for Excellence in Journalism, State of the Media 2008 - Online
http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.com/2008/narrative_online_intro.php?cat=0&media=5
Latest report on trends and challenges in online news media.