



20 minute webinar

How to Write for the Web

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY


Web Style and Story Guide

[Download Style Guide >](#)



**What writing style best
proves the Iowa State story?**

—



The Iowa State Narrative – Storytelling with **Heart**

“ This one word encapsulates what Iowa State is and how Iowa State works.

‘Heart’ evokes drive, innovation, and tenacity. It emphasizes inclusivity, community, and caring. It echoes Iowa State’s ‘heartland’ location and central value to our state, country, and world.

When deciding how to show and tell the story of Iowa State, always choose the option that resonates most with the concept of ‘heart.’



Storytelling Tips

- Speak plainly, no jargon
- Vary sentence and paragraph length
- Name usefully
- Communicate why
- Smile with your writing



Quick Style Guide

Oxford (serial) comma?

Yes, always.

Ampersands?

No, never.

Punctuation in headlines?

Only when a question mark is needed.

Dash usage?

En-dash separated by spaces (–),
not a full em-dash (—).

HTML: `–`

Exclamation points?

Only for social media or athletics.



Content Strategy

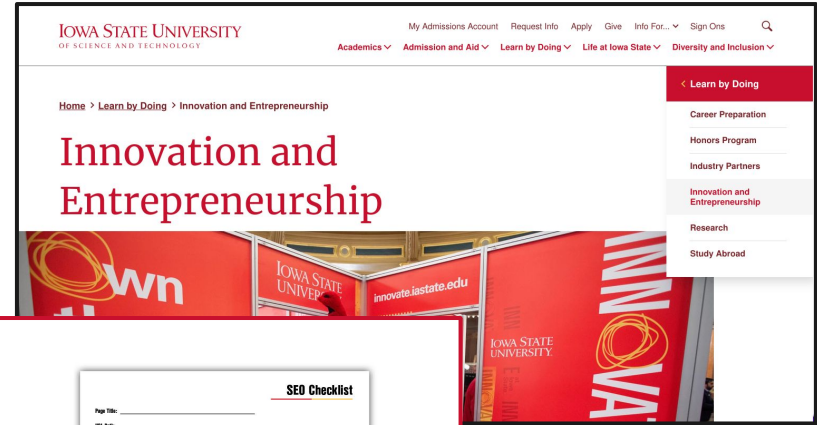
50% time in headings (H1, H2, H3)

25% in first sentence of each paragraph, photo captions

25% on everything else

Page Titles (H1)

- Always consider visitor
- 60 Characters or less
- Lead with most search-relevant info or term
- Use hyphen “-” rather than pipe “|”


A screenshot of an SEO Checklist form. The form is titled "SEO Checklist" and contains several sections with checkboxes for various SEO tasks. The sections include: Keyword Research, On-Page, Technical, Off-Page, and External Links. The form is designed to be a checklist for SEO tasks.

SEO
Checklist



Page Headings (H2, H3, H4)

- Use throughout page to make it easier to skim
- Not used for design, but for readability
- Use your content outline

- 
- ✗ Why is it important
 - ✓ Why are heading tags important
 -
 - ✗ What experts have to say
 - ✓ Experts take on heading tags

Page Copy (Normal)

- Break content into small paragraphs
- Avoid large blocks of text
- Use bulleted or numbered lists when possible
- Photos, charts, and videos are good ways to break up text





Links

Descriptive hyperlink text

- ✓ “Learn more about our application process.”
- ✗ “Visit our application process page at <https://www.iastate.edu/admission-and-aid/apply>.”
- ✗ “Benefits”
- ✓ “Benefits of accessible hyperlinks”



Other Best Practices

- Avoid first person plural unless the visitor can be included in the context
- Second person makes it easiest to connect with visitors
 - “If you’re applying as a transfer student”
- Start with most important info at the top and work down
- Proofread
 - Free Premium Grammarly
 - Keywords



Overall Website Purpose

Our content should [purpose] and help audiences feel [adjective, adjective] so they can [visitor goal].

Our content should **show the value of our website platform** and help audiences feel **confident and empowered** so they can **make professional and accessible websites.**



Overall Website Purpose – Writing for Web

Your website is your most powerful communication tool.

We'll help you make your site

beautiful, professional, and accessible.

The CALS/LAS Team



John VanDyk

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