



Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

**Maynooth University
Communications &
Marketing Office**

Internet Publishing Policies and Standards



Contents

Introduction	3
1. Writing for the Web.....	4
2. House style	14
3. Accessibility.....	21
4. Usability.....	24
5. Search engine optimisation.....	27
6. Naming conventions	34
7. Images and video.....	38
8. Social media.....	49
9. Legal issues	63
Appendix A: checkpoints for plain English	772
Appendix B: checkpoints for web content.....	74

Introduction

This document brings together the policies and standards on Internet publishing for Maynooth University's websites and other online channels such as social media. These have been derived from best practices in online publishing. Their function is to make Maynooth University's content as effective as possible, and in particular to ensure that:

- Visitors to its websites have the best possible experience, with content that is written and presented in a consistent manner and easy to understand
- Any obstacles to accessibility are minimised
- The web content complies with all relevant legal provisions, technical standards, national and international codes of best practice, and Maynooth University brand guidelines

Any form of publishing also has to operate within a framework of laws and regulations. This document includes a section on legal issues such as defamation (libel) and copyright, and requirements for publishing under legislation such as the Disability Act and Official Languages Act. The document should also be read in conjunction with Maynooth University's Internet Publishing Governance document.

Queries regarding these policies and standards should, in the first instance, be sent to the web team.

1. *Writing for the Web*

Writing for your audience

An "organisation-centric" website is built from an organisation's own point of view, explaining its view of the world and assuming that site visitors know the structure of the organisation.

Audience-focused publishing, by contrast, puts the audience first. While you may have expert information or advice, this approach involves trying to see things from your audience's point of view, rather than assuming that prospective users have prior knowledge of the internal structures of your organisation.

This user-friendly way of communicating recognises that prospective and current students and other audiences will have specific tasks in mind when they come to our websites. For example:

Site visitor	Typical tasks they have on the site...
A prospective student	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding out about what certain courses cover and how to apply for them
A current student	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looking for the finer details of a module• Looking for contact details of a staff member whose name they already know
A business person or a journalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting information about a research centre's areas of expertise• Looking for the names and contact details of a particular type of expert

Being audience-focused means keeping the target audience's key tasks in mind at all times, in order to help visitors to do what they came to do on the site, while supporting Maynooth University's overall organisational goals. We should design and develop our online content with these audiences and tasks in mind.

Writing for the Web is not just about writing directly for these site visitors. It is also about ensuring that your content can be found and used properly by audiences who may be coming to the site indirectly via search engines and via the search facilities within the site.

This is examined in more detail in Section 5 ("Search Engine Optimisation").

Language and tone of voice

An important part of this audience-focused approach is to provide content in plain English, Irish and/or other languages as appropriate. Besides being best practice for content in general, **plain language** is good for accessibility and recognises that this might not be the first language of a significant proportion of the audience. In particular, remember to:

- Be active, not passive
- Be brief and specific
- Avoid jargon and acronyms unless they make complete sense in the content (for example if you're explaining them)

Write in the **active voice** and in the present tense wherever possible and appropriate. Active verbs (doing, not being done to) are easier to understand and get to point, often with a lower word count too. For example, "monitoring of international trends is also undertaken" could be: "we also monitor international trends".

Tone of voice is important and needs to be consistent across the university's websites. In general, readers on the web expect a more informal tone of voice than in printed matter. Therefore your tone and writing style should be more casual and conversational, using "we" and "you" where appropriate. This is not only friendlier but also easier to read.

Being conversational does not mean being chatty – this can become too informal, and can move away from using plain language.

The following are examples of how to apply plain English and the right tone of voice to headlines and other content, making them more audience-focused and easier to read.

Instead of this...	Try this...	Why it's better
MU research centre is awarded €6m by EU	Maynooth University wins €6m EU research award	More active
CAO applicants advised not to leave their change of mind applications to the last minute	CAO applicants: don't leave your change of mind applications to the last minute	Active, direct, less formal
Inquiries regarding the availability of individual grant cheques should be made in person at the front desk only where a member of staff will gladly help you.	Find out whether a grant cheque is available: talk to a member of staff at our front desk.	Much shorter, more clear, active, informal, introduces calls to action ("find out", "talk to")

<p>Students entering University may be coming straight from secondary school or, in the case of mature students, after a considerable break from formal education. In either case the transition for entrants can be a challenge, and Student Services are provided to support students during this transition.</p>	<p>Whether you are a school leaver or a mature student, going to college can be a challenge. Talk to our staff in Student Services, who can support you during the transition.</p>	<p>Gets to the point, less formal, and even manages to introduce a call to action ("Talk to..."). "Our people" might also be acceptable here rather than "our staff"</p>
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See Appendix A for checkpoints of plain English.

Scanning versus reading

There are major differences between reading printed material such as a book or newspaper and reading from a screen. Being aware of these differences will help you to write content which is more "screen-appropriate" for Maynooth University's websites:

- **Physically**, our eyes can suffer from fatigue after relatively short periods reading from a screen
- **Psychologically**, our attention span is shorter on electronic media than on printed media.
- Web users also have different **expectations and habits** – they are more impatient than print readers, and few will read a document from end to end on a website: they scan pages rather than reading everything on a page in its entirety – their eyes will be attracted towards headings, bullet points, key words, graphs and image captions on the page

Content that takes account of the way people use websites works better online. More people will use it and it will do more for the communication goals of Maynooth University and your section of it.

Write your content so that you engage your readers and help them to get to the most important information quickly. For a start, web content should be substantially shorter than its paper equivalent – some usability studies suggest that you should write 50% less text.

You also need to use various techniques to hold the user's attention and aid scanning. Too much text will turn them off, and many readers will skip over large uninterrupted slabs of grey text. Instead, breaking up text, or "**chunking**", helps to keep users for longer. Common, simple but effective chunking techniques include using:

- Short paragraphs
- Lists (usually with bullet points, but sometimes numbered)

- Sub heads
- Illustrations, diagrams and tables

A brief history of the Department.

The Department of Biology was established in 1970. From a small department, heavily dependent on bought-in, part-time academic staff the department has grown to be amongst the largest in the College. Until 1979, the Department was involved solely in teaching a component of the three year BSc (General) degree. In that year, three events, significant to the development of the Department, occurred: The Department was approved for participation in the 4 year (Joint Honours) BSc programme; the first research grants were awarded to the Department; the Department recruited its first postgraduate student.

Since that time, the Department has expanded steadily in terms of numbers of undergraduates, postgraduates, post-doctoral workers and academic and support staff and in the range of courses offered. The research activities of the department have increased significantly in scope and the department has established international reputations in areas of Biological Control, Bioinformatics, Immunology, Medical Mycology, Molecular Genetics and Plant Biotechnology. The success in research is measurable in terms of publications and research grants obtained and postgraduate students who have completed their degrees.

The department has grown in the accommodation available for its teaching and research activities. Initially the Department was housed in Logic House on the South Campus, two halls of which had been converted into teaching laboratories. Research and office space were provided by adapting what had previously been student bedrooms. In 1978 a purpose-built teaching laboratory housing sixty students was added. This laboratory was named the McCullagh Laboratory after Dr. (Bro.) Patrick McCullagh one of the first staff of the Department. As the department grew, particularly in its research activities, it spread to temporary buildings which were mostly linked with the McCullagh Laboratory. Although these buildings had been well converted, they deteriorated steadily and were not particularly pleasant places in which to work. It was with much joy and some relief consequently, when, in the summer of 1993, the Department crossed the Galway Road to its present home on the North Campus in the excellent Callan Building.

By the end of 2002, the Department was further enhanced by the addition of the new Biosciences building, which houses two research institutes and a variety of core equipment for biological and biomedical research, which are closely associated with the Biology Department. The scientific directors of the Institute of Immunology and the Institute of Bioengineering and Agroecology, Prof. Paul Moynagh and Prof. Philip Dix, respectively, have assembled teams of internationally recognised researchers who have attracted considerable amounts of external funding underpinning the core support under PRTL1.

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Above: an example of dense text on a page before chunking techniques are applied

A brief history of the Department.

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Until 1979, the Department was involved solely in teaching a component of the three year BSc (General) degree. That year, three significant events to the development of the Department occurred:

- The Department was approved for participation in the four-year (Joint Honours) BSc programme
- The first research grants were awarded to the Department
- The Department recruited its first postgraduate student

Since then the Department has expanded steadily in terms of student numbers, post-doctoral workers and academic and support staff and in the range of courses offered. The department's research activities have increased significantly in scope.



In 1993 the Department crossed the Galway Road to its present home on the North Campus in the Callan Building. In 2002 the new Biosciences building was added, housing two research institutes and core equipment for biological and biomedical research.

International reputation

The department has established an international reputation in the areas of:

- Biocal control
- Bioinformatics
- Immunology
- Medical mycology
- Molecular genetics
- Plant biotechnology

Our research success is measurable in terms of publications and research grants obtained and postgraduate students who have completed their degrees.

The scientific directors of the Institute of Immunology and the Institute of Bioengineering and Agroecology, Professor Paul Moynagh and Professor Philip Dix, have assembled teams of internationally recognised researchers who have attracted considerable amounts of external funding.

Find out more

Contact the [Department of Biology](#) to find out more about the department.

Above: how the same page looks after applying chunking techniques. These include much shorter paragraphs, bulleted lists, subheadings and an image. These break up the text and make it much easier to scan

Use chunking techniques whenever you are building up content for a page. For example, keep an eye out for content that would lend itself to being turned into a bulleted or numbered list with a reasonable amount of items. The list may sometimes make the page slightly longer but it will break up dense passages of text and make information easier to scan. Here is a basic example:

Text as a long sentence	The same content as a list
<p>This four-year programme is designed to prepare its graduates for a variety of careers including litigation, providing legal advice in transactional settings, government, compliance, regulatory agencies, public service, international agencies, non-governmental organisations, and businesses, to name but a few.</p>	<p>This four-year programme prepares graduates for a variety of careers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Litigation • Providing legal advice in transactional settings • Government and public service • Compliance and regulatory agencies • International agencies • Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) • Businesses

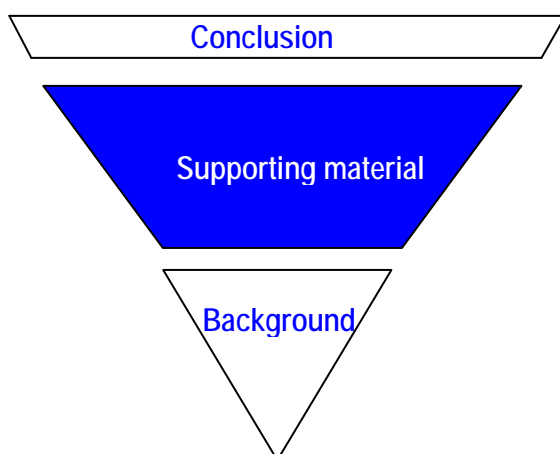
Inverted pyramid

In writing for print – including academic publications – a common format is to start with the problem, then describe the methodology, move to a detailed analysis supported by figures and tables, relay the results and finally give the conclusions.

This type of content is structured like a pyramid. On the Web you should use an **inverted** pyramid style. This means:

- Putting the conclusion first
- Placing supporting information next
- Then including more background information

The inverted pyramid



Writing lengths

Pages should be as short as possible, trying to stay within the following word counts:

Type of content	Maximum word count	Comments
Heading	8 words	Include an active verb if possible, avoid punctuation at the end such as a full stop or exclamation mark
Sentences	20 words	
Opening paragraph	30 words	Include your key message
Other paragraphs	60 words	2-3 sentences
Web page	600 words	

Note that **paragraphs** on web pages should be much shorter than in printed text, and should have a blank line between each paragraph to make them easier to scan.

Headings

All pages on an Maynooth University site need a **main headline**. This is one of the most important content elements on the page, as it is used by visitors to determine if they want to read (or scan) the rest of your text. This headline has to capture the busy reader's attention.

Headings should follow house style, for consistency, readability and accessibility:

- Use **sentence case** (*"This is the main headline"*) rather than capitalising the first letter of each word (*"This Is The Main Headline"*)
- Never use **all caps** (which is "SHOUTING" and harder to read)
- Use **true headings** (Heading 1, Heading 2...) from the website's content management system, rather than manually creating styles such as "Bold", "bigger". This is important not only to maintain a consistent look across the site: it's also about showing search engines and screen readers what is important – they will recognise a Heading 1 headline as the most important heading on the page and so on
- Use **subheadings** to break up areas of text on the page and draw the reader into the content, making it easier to scan through sections of content on the page

For **news headlines** in particular:

- Try to get just one core idea across clearly
- Be as brief as possible – never use three words if one will do (*“starts”* rather than *“announces initiation of”*; *“signs agreement”* rather than *“enters into an agreement”*)
- Don't be vague: "Department Research Seminar" as a heading gives no indication of what the research might be about
- For figures in headlines, use our house style for abbreviations and figures – the “€” sign (rather than “euro”) and “m” (not “M” or “million”) – “€5.6m” rather than “EURO 5.6 million”
- Avoid unnecessary punctuation (use *“Dr John Smith”* rather than *“Dr. John Smith”*)
- Think of words and phrases that are more likely to be used in a typical web search by target users. These can be checked using Google's free [Keyword Tool](#)¹
- Bear in mind that each news headline may also be displayed in a list of headlines elsewhere, such as on a news archive page. Try to vary the overall format of your headlines over time so that, for example, “Maynooth University” or your department name is not the first item in headline after headline

For news pieces, your web content management system may also have the option to include **excerpts**, or optional hand-crafted summaries of your content. Again, these deserve extra care and attention if they are to draw readers into reading the full piece.

Intros

After the main headline, concentrate on the **first paragraph** of your piece, and get your key message across in this early section of the page. Most readers will abandon what you've written if you haven't captured their attention in the headline and first paragraph. Keep it short – a maximum of 30 words is best.

Calls to action and link text

Remember to include active **calls to action**. These describe how users should act and match their tasks and goals. Phrase these calls to action so the reader is actually called to do something – *Find out, download, learn about, read about, talk to, apply for, check out, discover...*

Consider links among the most important parts of your content. Poor **link text** may annoy and confuse users, and is bad in terms of accessibility. Carefully created link text will make your links – and therefore your content – much more effective by:

¹ The Google AdWords Keyword Tool is at: <https://adwords.google.com/o/KeywordTool>

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

- Increasing the likelihood of clickthroughs
- Making the most important information jump out of the page and easy to grasp quickly
- Giving search engines a better idea of what the link (and what it is pointing to) is about – this can be important for search engine optimisation

In creating links, also consider the text surrounding the linking text. Sometimes you may also need to provide a description of the destination. However, don't construct the sentence around the link phrase – write the sentence normally. The following examples show how to make the linking text easy to scan, with calls to action.

Examples of linking text and text surrounding it	
Wrong	Right
The latest press releases are in the News section of this website	Check out our latest press releases
The annual report can be downloaded	Download the annual report (PDF, 530KB)
Prospectus: Undergraduate Prospectus Entry 2012	Download Undergraduate Prospectus Entry 2012 (PDF, 530KB)
The document is at http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/publications/admissions/Prospectus-2011-AW-lo.pdf	Read the prospectus for entry (PDF, 530KB)

The following are key rules for creating link text.

1. The text should, if possible, be preceded by a **call to action**
2. Try to link from **real words and phrases**, not from a web address (such as <http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/calendar/index.html>). Users will recognise and act on words more rapidly as they scan the page
3. Linking text should ideally be **two to four words** and never more than eight words
4. The link text on its own should carry some meaning and be the **most relevant** part of the text
5. If the link is not to another webpage but to a **non-HTML file** (for example a PDF), always give users advance warning about the file type, and if possible the file size (especially if it is a large file)
6. **Never use “click here”** as link text

There are several reasons for avoiding “click here”:

- If people are using the Web, they do not need to be told to [“click here”](#) or “follow this link”
- Some users may not be using a mouse. For accessibility reasons, they may have an alternative means of following links

- A user who scans links – visually or using adaptive technology – will not be able to assess the relevance of the link text “[click here](#)”. It is much harder for users who are quickly scanning a page with several links to distinguish between multiple [click here](#) links dotted throughout the page (as these last three list items have just done)
- Search engines won't be able to assess the relevance of the link text either

Quality assurance: spell checking and proofing

The first stage in quality assurance is to spell check the entire document. This is a quick way to pick up mistyped words and punctuation. It is never a substitute for careful reading and good spelling skills, but is a valuable tool which everyone should use, regardless of how good their spelling is.

For the final proofing it may be best to edit on paper and not on screen. Most people are quicker and more accurate on paper. To make this proofing process more effective:

- Try to leave a reasonable gap (24 hours if possible) between finishing your text and proofing it
- Get away from any distractions
- Consider double spacing your paper, printing it off, and correcting the printed copy. It is generally much easier to spot a mistake in a printed document than on the screen
- Read the words aloud. This can be a good test to see (and hear) whether the content is in plain language and sufficiently informal

By this stage you may feel that your content is ready for publication, but a second pair of eyes is always helpful. They can spot mistakes and find ways to improve even the best-written content. Ask a colleague – preferably a non-specialist – to read and proof your document. If it confuses or bores them, it will probably have the same effect on your target audience.

A piece of content should never go online unless and until it has also been checked by someone other than the original author. This is both good governance and best practice in publishing. In addition, any legally or otherwise sensitive material must have approval by senior management prior to publication.

2. House style

What is it?

Maynooth University has a "house style" to help us communicate with our audiences online. It is a relatively short set of rules that brings a level of order to our language, to ensure that the language we use is consistent and does its job in communicating with our audiences online. It maximises the impact of our Internet content, and minimises irritating inconsistencies in spellings or formatting, and any other potential distractions and obstacles for readers.

Language is never static. A quarter of a century ago, for example, most people in Ireland had never heard of "electronic mail". When it entered common speech it became popular as "e-mail" (with a hyphen, or even "E-Mail"), then "email" (no hyphen).

Just as language isn't fixed, our house style needs to be flexible and evolve too. So while this guide sets out the main style rules, it doesn't claim to be comprehensive or fixed in stone. It is a starting point for ongoing reviews and updating of our editorial style.

Departments and other organisational units have the choice of developing their own subset of style rules which are complementary to this overall house style. If so, these further style rules need to be applied consistently in their content.

How to refer to ourselves

The name of the university is "Maynooth University" and it should always be referred to as such on first mention on a page. Where appropriate, use the less formal "we"/"us". The university's name should never be abbreviated to "MU", except as part of a URL (web address), in file names such as PDFs, in news headlines, or on Twitter if brevity demands it.

In certain circumstances – for example when writing for an international audience – it is appropriate to use "National University of Ireland Maynooth", as the phrase "National University of Ireland" in full can carry great weight with international audiences.

See also "Organisations and collective nouns" below.

Many visitors may come to a particular page on the site via a search engine. It may be the first page that the visitor sees on the site, so never assume that a visitor has travelled down through the site structure from the home page to arrive at this page. Look at the page in isolation – as these users will be doing – and see whether it needs specific references to the university, office or department for these first-time visitors.

Names of organisational units

Always refer to names of departments, offices and other organisational units in a consistent way. For example, “the Department of Geography” rather than “the Geography Department”. In subsequent mentions on a page this can be shortened to “the department” (lower case).

Similarly, offices should use consistent titles. For example: “the Graduate Studies Office” on first mention, then shortened to “Graduate Studies” or “the office”.

Navigation labels

Subsections of a site should be labelled in a consistent manner to follow house style. The following are examples of the preferred site labels for a department or centre.

Use this...	Not these....
“About us”	“About the department”, “About”
“People”	“Staff” “Staff information”, “Our people”
“Research”	“Research groups”, “Research areas”
“News”	“Latest news”
“Prospective students”	“Potential students”, “Future students”
“Contact”	“Contact us”, “Contact information”

Organisations and collective nouns

For consistency, organisation and company names are singular. For example, Maynooth University is (not are) one university, one organisation. RTÉ *is* (not *are*) one broadcaster, one business or brand, so it is a **collective noun**: it is singular, not plural.

Nouns such as *audience, committee, union, institute, research centre, dozen, flock, group, jury, public, staff* take a singular or plural verb depending on the construction. When the noun is being considered as a single unit, the following is correct: “The group *was taken* on a trip.” But when writing about the group as a collection of individuals, the sentence becomes: “The group *were sitting* at a table drinking *their* soup.”

Similarly: “A dozen [eggs] *is* probably not enough. But “A dozen [planning permissions] *were* passed.” “The committee delivered *its* verdict.” But “The committee came in and *took their* seats.”

Capitalisation

Avoid overcapitalisation. There is a temptation to believe that this gives *Words* more *Importance*. All it does is add inconsistencies and obstacles for readers.

Headings should be in sentence case ("This is the main headline") rather than having the first letter of each word capitalised ("This Is The Main Headline").

Text in ALL CAPS is harder to read, single words are less easy to distinguish and the whole text blurs into a block. Text in upper case is also perceived as "SHOUTING", amateurish and unprofessional. Therefore only use all caps for appropriate abbreviations/initials (see below), and make moderate use of **bold type** (rather than *italics*, which can be harder to read online) for emphasising words within the main body text.

Abbreviations and acronyms

No full stops or spaces in abbreviations or initials: *MU, FOI, USA, Mr, kph, 4am, agm, PJ O'Donnell, PhD*

There is no need to spell out very widely used abbreviations such as "RTÉ", "PDFs", "kg", "7am", "DNA". But these are among the exceptions.

In particular, avoid starting with abbreviations of technical terms or acronyms for course titles or department names. Spell out the title/name of an organisation at the first mention, followed by its abbreviation in brackets straight after. Only then is it safe to use the abbreviation in the rest of the page.

To follow plain English guidelines, avoid Latin abbreviations. For example, use:

- "For example" instead of "e.g."
- "That is" instead of "i.e."
- "Such as" or "including" before a list instead of "etc" after it

While you should generally avoid the ampersand, it is permissible in "R&D", and is required in brand names where "&" is part of the brand ("Marks & Spencer").

Numbers, dates and times

Numbers

- Spell out from one to nine inclusive, and then use numerals (10, 11, 12, 13...)
- Spell out ordered numbers from one to ten (fifth, tenth)
- Use numerals for a range ("5-10 litres") or for percentages: "3%", "30%"
- Don't start a sentence with a figure – either write the number in words instead, or rewrite the sentence so that the figure comes later in it (For example, a full sentence should read "Fourteen students took part" rather than "14 students took part.") This rule does not apply to headlines

Currency

Use currency sign rather than words: €3 not 3 euros, £10 not 10 pounds.

Dates

Use the following hierarchy: **(Day name) dd month yyyy**

Examples:

Tuesday 20 June 2006; 12 July 2006; September 2006.

Do not:

- Insert a zero before a single-digit day (use *5 June 2006*, not *05 June 2006*)
- Include commas or number qualifiers (th, rd, nd)
- Abbreviate the month
- Shorten the year
- Use figures only (*19/11/04*)

Telephone and fax numbers

The format for a phone or fax number is:

- *Tel: +353 (1) 708 6000* – using the international code for an international audience, or if the phone number is abroad (such as a British organisation).
- *(01) 708 6000* – for an audience in Ireland

Breaks within a long series of numbers make them easier to scan. These breaks should be as follows:

(062) 12345 – five digits

(051) 234 567 – six digits

(01) 234 5678 – seven digits

1800 234 567 – free number

Times

- Write times in the 12-hour clock, with no leading zeros or punctuation: *12pm, 4pm, 12am, 12.20pm, 3.45am, 4.50pm*
- No following zeros for the hour, so *7pm* (never *7.00pm*)

- Avoid redundancies: use “noon” or “midday” rather than “12 noon” or “12 midday”

Punctuation

Use **double quotation marks** for quotes. For a quote within a quote use a single quotation mark.

Examples:

“She told me my work was rather good.”

“In fact she told me my work was ‘exceptional’.”

End all sentences (apart from list items) with a **full stop** or **question mark**. Do not use **exclamation marks** except in very rare circumstances. Don't use full stops with initials or abbreviations.

Lists

Bullet-point lists (and numbered lists) should have a consistent style (like this):

- Introduce the list with a colon
- Then capitalise the first letter of each line
- Don't have punctuation at the end of each item

There is no firm rule about the maximum number of items in a list, but readers can lose track in a long list. At the other extreme, don't use single-item bulleted lists, and try to avoid ones with just two items. Also bear in mind that:

- Numbered lists can be more appropriate if a particular order is warranted, such as giving step-by-step instructions
- Bullet lists tend to work best when the items do not contain an inherent sequence, order, or rank
- Notwithstanding this, it's often best to place a bullet list's most important items at the top

Which version to use

Do we use “judgement” (with an “e”) or “judgment” (no “e”)? The following list gives the version to use when there is more than one correct spelling of a word or phrase, including questions of capitalisation and instances where hyphens should be used.

While our house style avoids US spellings, this is acceptable when giving the titles of US institutions (“The Center for...”) and US course programmes (“The Program”)

adviser

Not “advisor”. House style is to use “-er”, where there is a choice. But *advisory* and *imposter*.

cannot

Rather than *can not*.

centre

Not center (US) – but see the note on US spellings above. The verb is followed by “on”, not “around”. The wrong phrase “centre around” probably stems from a confusion with “revolve around”.

colour

Not color (US).

co-operate

Hyphenated. Also *co-ordinate*.

email

No hyphen, lower case. Capitalise first letter at start of sentence.

enquiry / inquiry

A public inquiry, a tribunal of inquiry. But “There have been several enquiries by students.”

government

When referring to the current Government the “G” is always upper case. Only use “Irish Government” where confusion would otherwise arise. Past (and future) Irish governments are lower case.

hi-tech

Not high tech.

judgment

And *acknowledgment*. Not *judgement*, *acknowledgement*. But *knowledgeable*.

online

One word, lower case.

organisation

And *organised*. Not *organization*, *organized* (US).

program

Use this spelling in the computer context only. “A software program”. Otherwise “programme”: *a one-week residential programme*.

re-

Use a hyphen with “re-” when it is used with words that begin with “e” or “u” which is not pronounced as “yu”: *re-entry*, *re-examine*, *re-urge*, but *reunited*, *reuse*. Also use a hyphen where confusion would arise

with another word (*re-form* as opposed to *reform*; *re-creation* instead of *recreation*). Otherwise: *rearrange*, *rebuild*, *reopen*, *reinforce*, *reunify*, *reinstate*.

Further reading

BBC News alphabetical checklist

A useful A-Z of words, phrases and grammar issues (HTML)

http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/radio_newsroom/1099593.stm

Guardian Style Guide

The newspaper's relatively long A-Z of style (HTML)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide>

The Elements of Style

A classic reference book, William Strunk's overview of plain English style and rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly violated (HTML version)

<http://www.bartleby.com/141/>

Essential English for Journalists, Editors and Writers

By Harold Evans and Crawford Gillan (Pimlico, 2000 – paperback, ISBN 13: 978-0712664479)

3. Accessibility

Our aim is to make the content and functionality of Maynooth University's websites within reach and usable by the broadest range of people, including those of advancing years, those with disabilities, and those with other conditions that potentially limit web access and usability. This section of the guide looks at **accessibility**, while Section 4 deals specifically with how to address **usability** issues.

The goal of web accessibility is to ensure that the information and services delivered through websites are available to and usable by the widest possible audience:

- Being accessible **maximises the audience** for a website. A significant proportion of the population – including current and potential students or staff – have long-term disabilities, and many others may have short-term disabilities. Visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, and neurological disabilities can all affect access to the web
- With **ageing populations** in many countries there may be resultant combinations of accessibility issues due to changes in vision, hearing, dexterity and memory
- Accessibility provisions are **best practice**. They benefit all website visitors, and what works well for human readers of your content also works well for search engines
- Accessibility is a **legal requirement**: as a public body, Maynooth University must comply with accessibility standards, the requirements of the Disabilities Act 2005, and the organisation's responsibilities as an equal opportunities employer
- Accessibility is **Maynooth University's policy** and vital for the effectiveness of its websites





To maximise accessibility, the website must take into account the fact that the ability to see, hear, make inputs, read text or process information varies from user to user, across time and across situations of use.

Images and accessibility

Images can frequently present obstacles to accessibility. Remember that this includes not only photographs but also other graphical elements such as images of tables/graphs.

Images on Maynooth University websites must be used wisely and comply with accessibility requirements. They should always include an **"Alt" tag** giving brief **alternative text** – a phrase or sentence that conveys the same information as the image it accompanies. This must be done in the content management system when selecting the image file to upload.

The Alt text needs to convey **equivalent information**. In the following examples an image contains an important phone number or email address; the Alt tag needs to be more specific and say more than "Important information" or "Phone number" – it should be more along the lines of "Emergency phone number, 01 612 345" or "Very important: email vital@urgent.com now":

Don't do this...	Do this...
	
	

Bad (left) and good (right) examples of Alt text for images

Alt text for images is not just important for accessibility. It also adds further information for search engines to latch onto. **Captions** can also be a useful additional way to explain what an image is about.

Tables and graphs

Data within tables needs to be presented as clearly and simply as possible. Techniques to improve table accessibility and usability include:

- Splitting single, large, complex data tables into multiple, smaller, simpler ones
- Designing a table so that it reads out logically row by row and the data values themselves are indicative of their values (for example in a column about years, the data values "3.5 years" and "8.2 years" are more understandable than "3.5" or "8.2")
- Adding a caption or short summary to describe the nature of the table

PDF accessibility

Best practice is to publish information in a way that is usable by all our intended users, taking into account their differing capabilities. To a web publisher, files created in PDF can appear to be a quick and convenient way to put existing documents onto a website. But while PDFs are good for printing they can be very poor in terms of accessibility.

As a result, most experts advise against overusing PDFs on the web. In particular PDFs have:

- **General usability problems.** Loading the Adobe Reader program can be slow and PDF text is often designed for print rather than to be read on a screen by web users. PDF documents can detract from the user's navigation of the website
- **Download problems.** PDF files tend to be significantly larger than other types of file conveying the same information. This can make it difficult or impossible for users with low-bandwidth connections to view them
- **Search problems.** The text content in PDF files is not always indexed by search engines, so having major parts of a site available only as PDFs can hurt the site's search engine rankings
- Major accessibility concerns. PDFs can present problems for users of **screen reading technology** that converts text into synthetic speech or electronic Braille
- Other usability concerns for those using **mobile devices** with small screens to view large (typically A4) documents
- Other **obstacles to accessibility.** A common problem is a PDF that is inaccessible because it is one large image of text, rather than the text itself. This can happen where a report or advertisement has been prepared with print publication rather than online use in mind, or where a report has been scanned. The PDF can be printed, but cannot be accessed by someone with visual disabilities using a screenreader, because the screenreader has no text to read

Therefore HTML web pages (rather than non-HTML formats such as PDFs or MS Word documents) are the preferred way of presenting key information on Maynooth University websites. This is good for usability, accessibility and search visibility.

When to use PDFs and Word documents

Remember that PDFs should be used to benefit the end user, not the content publisher. Therefore **there must always be a compelling reason to justify putting a PDF or Word document onto an Maynooth University website.** It should never be based on a decision that "it's handier".

Never use non-HTML files for the most important and frequently visited content on the site. PDF and Word documents should be the exception rather than the rule, and should be used to supplement – rather than as a substitute for – the information in HTML pages. The primary exceptions would be for:

- Documents that must be in a precise format for offline use (such as application forms)
- Long documents that are likely to be printed for reading

4. Usability

Leading usability expert Dr Jakob Nielsen defines "usability" by five quality components². While he describes these in terms of "design", think of design here in the specific sense of how our websites help their audiences to complete common tasks such as finding a piece of information or making a transaction.

Usability component	What it means
Learnability	How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?
Efficiency	Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?
Memorability	When users return to the design after a period of not using it, how easily can they re-establish proficiency?
Errors	How many errors do users make, how severe are these errors, and how easily can they recover from the errors?
Satisfaction	How pleasant is it to use the design?

Another key quality attribute alongside usability is **utility**, or the design's functionality: does it do what users need?

As web users, we have all experienced websites that fall down when it comes to these usability and utility principles, such as a site that:

- Looks very fancy, but makes you spend ages finding out the unique way that it works
- Gives very poor signposts to information that you need
- Has far too much clutter and distractions on pages
- Describes its services, products or processes in ways that its target readers don't understand
- Doesn't have content that they are likely to need
- Puts important elements of a page in places where you'd least expect them – such as a search box in the bottom left instead of the much more common convention of top right
- Has a form with many mandatory fields that are totally unnecessary
- Has another field in the form that asks you for a phone number, but doesn't allow spaces or brackets (for area codes) and treats this type of input as an error – and, worse still, it doesn't explain why this is an error

² Nielsen, Jakob (1994). Usability Engineering. Morgan Kaufmann Publishers. ISBN 0-12-518406-9.

Many of these mistakes stem from taking an "**organisation-centric**" point of view instead of **audience-focused publishing**.

How to address usability

The starting point for audience-focused publishing is how your audiences actually behave when using the Internet.

You can draw on your own experiences in using other websites and try to take a more objective stance with your own web content. For example, ask yourself what the experience would be like if a particular new element on your website was on another site that you use regularly.

Better still, **get your users involved**. For a new element – such as a subsection of content or an online form – these real-life users can test its usability at an early stage:

- Get a small sample of users who are representative of the target audience (not your friends or colleagues), and who don't know anything about your project
- Emphasise to them that *they* aren't being tested – *the site* is
- Ask them to complete some real tasks on the site
- Do not give them a demonstration first of how things are supposed to work, or prompt them with instructions along the way
- Wherever possible, let them use any common web browser they usually use (not just the one you yourself use all the time) – or use their own mobile phone if you are testing how the site works on mobile devices
- Do the listening and let them do the talking. Respect how they actually find and use the content, especially if it gets rough treatment in these real, everyday situations rather than the nice way it was "supposed to work in theory"
- Note any obstacles they encounter along the way, including the "errors" they make while trying to complete the task
- Ask them for suggestions on specific changes that would make the task easier and simpler to complete
- Finally, consider whether the new element passes in terms of utility – whether it does what real users need – and in terms of the five quality components of usability

The results may be surprising, but will mean the new element is much more audience-focussed.

For example, the new pages that you thought were "obviously" easy to find may have problems when users try to get to them in a real-life situation, via search or the main navigation. The content may be far too complex and not easy to scan. The online form that you thought was simple enough may need to

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

become much shorter and reordered to become more logical, and may need to avoid common input errors and give more useful prompts for any likely errors that still remain.

You only need about four or five participants to do this type of testing, to uncover valuable insights into the usability of your content.

5. Search engine optimisation

It is essential to ensure that your web content is found by commonly used search engines (such as Google, Yahoo and Bing) and by your website's own search facility.

Studies and site metrics show that the vast majority of web users find content primarily through search engines. Once on a site, many users ignore the site's navigation and try to use the search function to find what they want.

There are several ways in which content authors and editors can help make their content more searchable, and therefore more effective. This process of improving search visibility is known as search engine optimisation, or **SEO**.

Key phrases and metadata

Before you start to write the content for a web page, you need to identify key phrases – the words and phrases likely to be used by your target audiences in searching the web. This may sound counterintuitive, as it's not the normal way most of us write content. But it gives an important focus in how you build up various elements within the page that are important for SEO.

The key phrases will then need to be incorporated in these elements, which include:

- The main headline
- Subheadings
- The opening paragraph of the page
- The metadata page Title
- The metadata Description
- The navigation label (which appears within the navigation and the breadcrumb trail)
- The URL (also sometimes called the "permalink")
- Alt text for images
- The metadata Keywords

Long-tailed key phrases

"Long-tailed key phrases" refers to phrases that are more targeted and relevant to specific searches by your potential audience. The following example shows how a key word such as "chemistry" may be too general in search terms, and needs to be refined by using a longer key phrase.

Key word or phrase	What it does	The problem
<i>chemistry</i>	Concentrates on a single key word.	You will be trying to compete with all other content that has "chemistry" as its key word. This will be a very crowded space, from chemistry products and chemical companies to chemistry resources for primary or secondary schools.
<i>chemistry courses</i>	A longer key phrase – it narrows things down considerably and targets people searching for chemistry courses.	Even so, this is still quite broad – you will be competing against content about chemistry courses around the world, and at all levels in the education system.
<i>chemistry courses in ireland</i>	A long-tailed phrase, which becomes much more focused on your target audience of potential readers, and is more aligned with the types of searches they are likely to do.	

Identifying key words/phrases

In a sense, what you are doing by shaping and seeding your content in this way is to reflect what your target audience does in searching for this information. It's about getting into their mindset and looking at your content from their point of view. Bear in mind that they may not use your terms or university/department jargon: a classic case from low-cost air travel is that consumers don't search for "low-cost air travel" or "no-frills airlines": they want "cheap flights".

To choose the words and phrases that are most specific to your content, use tools and techniques such as these:

- **Ask your target audience** (such as prospective students) what words they are likely to use to search for this particular content
- **Brainstorm:** ask yourself if you had to choose just four or five words or short phrases to take the place of the remainder of the content, what would these be?
- Look at your **site traffic metrics** – use Google Analytics to identify the long-tailed phrases that people do use to find your content, then extrapolate on two or three of these

- Use the free **Google AdWords Keyword Tool** - <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>
- Use **search engine results pages** to see which primary key words have the highest rankings, then examine the content surrounding the key phrase in the top pages, including their metadata (see below)
- Even **Google Suggest** – the autocomplete function in Google that suggests longer possible phrases as you type – can give you some good ideas for long-tailed phrases, as it uses data from the most popular searches

The screenshot shows the Google AdWords Keyword Tool interface. At the top, it says "Find keywords" and "Based on one or more of the following:". Below this is a form with three fields: "Word or phrase" containing "chemistry degree", "Website" containing "www.google.co.uk/page.html", and "Category" set to "Apparel". There are checkboxes for "Only show ideas closely related to my search terms" (checked) and "Advanced Options and Filters" (expanded). Below the form are filters for "Locations: Ireland", "Languages: English", and "Devices: Desktops and laptops". A "Search" button is present, along with a yellow banner that says "Sign in with your AdWords login information to see the full set of ideas for this search." Below the search area, there are options for "Download", "View as text", and "More like these", along with a "Sorted by Local Monthly Searches" dropdown and a "Columns" dropdown. The main content area is divided into two sections: "Search Terms (1)" and "Keyword ideas (27)".

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches	Local Monthly Searches
chemistry degree	Low	27,100	140

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches	Local Monthly Searches
degree in chemistry	Medium	27,100	140
degree chemistry	Medium	27,100	140
a degree in chemistry	Medium	27,100	140
jobs with a chemistry degree	Medium	3,600	22
jobs for a chemistry degree	Medium	3,600	22

Above: the Google AdWords Keyword Tool is a free tool for finding key words and phrases. The tool is free, and searches can be refined by location, language and devices

What is metadata?

Metadata is "information about information". In other words, metadata is data that describes information resources. It enables information to be "tagged" and classified in search engines. While much of the time it works behind the scenes and isn't noticed by the typical user reading the page, good metadata is essential if a site is to be found easily in search engines, and is an important element of SEO.

A key part of writing for the Web is writing effective metadata, particularly:

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

- The page **Title** – this is the line of text that appears in the bar at the top of a web browser window. More importantly, it is also used as the headline for the page when it appears in search results pages
- The metadata **Description** – this is often displayed in search results under the (page Title) headline as a summary of the page content.

Therefore the Title and Description metadata can be very important information – often they are among the first things about your site that potential visitors will see in a search engine's results page.



```
Source of: http://www.googleearthireland.com/ - Mozilla Firefox
File Edit View Help
"http://www.w3.org/TR/html4/loose.dtd"
<html>
<head>
  <title>Welcome to the World... - Google Earth Ireland</title>
  <meta name="description" content="This site aims to map the ongoing
  developments Google Earth is bringing to geographic education in Ireland." />
  <!-- Render IE8 like IE7 -->
  <meta http-equiv="X-UA-Compatible" content="IE=7" />
  <style type="text/css" media="screen, projection, tv"/*![CDATA[*]
@import "http://static.wetpaint.com/scripts/CSSApplication
Line 7, Col 147
```

Above: an example of how the Title and Metadata (highlighted) are working away behind the scenes in the HTML code for a web page. Below: how this same information is used by Google for a search results page – each result consists of a headline (taken from a page's metadata Title), its URL and a short summary (which is often based on the page's metadata Description).

[Google](#) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google

Google Inc. is an American multinational public corporation invested in Internet search, cloud computing, and advertising technologies. **Google** hosts and ...

[Google Ireland / Irish Google](#)

www.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/europe/.../google-ireland/

31 May 2011 – **Google** Search Engine. **Google** around the globe. Africa. **Google** Algeria ~ **Google**.dz · **Google** Angola ~ **Google**.it.ao · **Google** Benin ~ **Google**. ...

[Google Global Firefox & Chrome Extension - Addon For Search ...](#)

www.redflymarketing.com/internet-marketing-tools/google-global/

Google Global is a Firefox Extension/Add-On that installs quickly and allows you to easily see what any **Google** search results look like in outer countries, cities ...

[Welcome to the World... - Google Earth Ireland](#)

www.googleearthireland.com/

This site aims to map the ongoing developments **Google** Earth is bringing to geographic education in Ireland.

[Google](#)

www.google.com/

Search the world's information, including webpages, images, videos and more. **Google** has many special features to help you find exactly what you're looking ...

[Show stack quote for CDDC](#)

Metadata Titles

In terms of these search results pages, metadata Titles are your biggest key phrase to draw visitors. For each page Title:

- Make the first word the most important descriptor for the page
- Ensure that the title makes sense as a standalone phrase
- Avoid generic terms ("Welcome to", "News update") and superfluous words ("the", "an")
- Remember to create variations on the titles for different web pages, even though the topic may be similar – search engines don't like duplicate Titles on a site
- Keep below 70 characters, including spaces (about eight words)

In Western languages, people read from left to right, so try to "front-load" key words and phrases so that they are at the start of the Titles and other metadata.

Example – metadata Title for a department's home page

Department of Chemistry – chemistry courses in Ireland – Maynooth University

Metadata Descriptions

A good metadata Description can bring users to you before sites that rank higher if it is written in a way that catches the eye. Make sure that the Description:

- Is factual and accurately reflects the content
- Uses terms that are likely to be used by your website users and potential visitors
- Includes important keywords at the beginning of the description, but only if this is logical
- Keeps to a maximum of 156 characters, including spaces (about 18 words)

Example - metadata Description for a department's home page

Undergraduate and postgraduate courses in chemistry and pharmaceutical and biomedical chemistry, and chemical research at the university in Ireland

Metadata Keywords

(NB "metadata Keywords" as it is used here is not the same thing as the key words and phrases on a page)

Nowadays search engines such as Google give much less importance to metadata Keywords than page Titles and Descriptions, but they can be important for your site's own internal search engine. When researching and identifying metadata Keywords, try to identify words and phrases that are likely to be typed in typical searches by your target audience, such as:

- Singular and plural words
- Reverse word order, such as *energy management, management energy*
- Common misspellings
- Words with and without apostrophes
- US/UK English spelling, for example *optimize/optimise, color/colour*

You can give up to 40 Keywords. Any more than that, and a search engine may penalise you for "keyword stuffing" or spamming. In practice it is better to concentrate on about 10 to 12 words and phrases. Separate each word or phrase with a comma.

Example – metadata Keywords for a department home page

chemistry degree, chemistry courses, study chemistry, undergraduate courses, chemical research, pharmaceutical, biomedical chemistry, pharmaceutical and biomedical, pharma courses,

Social media and metadata

So far this section has concentrated on SEO of content within Maynooth University websites. The same underlying techniques for improving your content's search visibility can be used in social media channels too.

Section 8 below ("Social Media") gives examples of how to tag and optimise content on social networks, even when the starting point for the content is video (YouTube) or very short messages in microblogging (Twitter).

6. Naming conventions

Naming URLs

URLs or page addresses, sometimes called "permalinks", are an important element in the user experience and in improving search visibility. Maynooth University seeks to implement a consistent web naming convention to make the navigation throughout its sites as straightforward as possible. The aims of this convention are to make URLs:

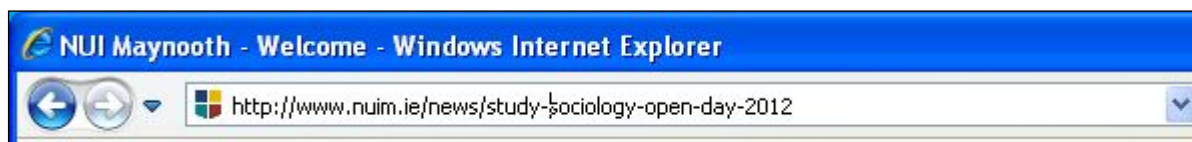
- **Easy to communicate** (both verbally and in writing)
- **Intuitively obvious** and **understandable** both by visitors and by search engines – this is also important in terms of optimising your content for search engines.
- **Consistent** within and across Maynooth University sites, by following common naming rules

You should therefore try to:

- Keep the URL fairly short
- Get some of the page's key phrases (see previous section) into the URL
- Use all lower-case, no capitals
- Never have spaces in the URL (use hyphens to separate words – "*media-studies*" not "*media studies*")
- Keep to the 26 letters of the alphabet, numerals and hyphens. Never use other characters such as "!" "/", "?", apostrophes, quotation marks, brackets, commas or full stops



The difference between an unfriendly URL (above) and a friendly one (below)

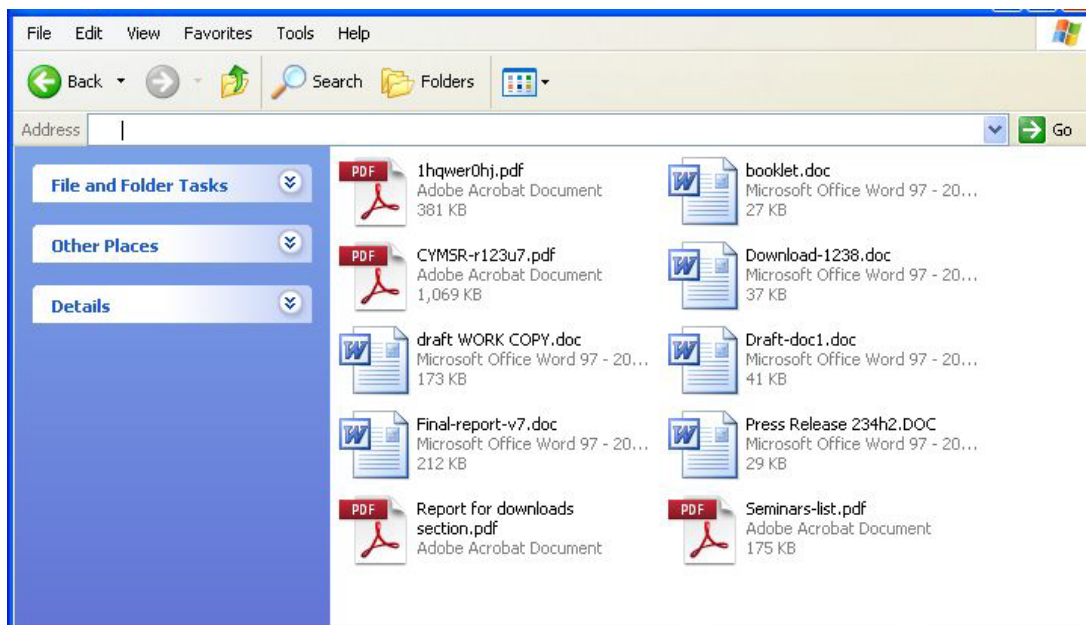


Naming files

A key aspect of the usability of PDF and MS Word documents and other files on our websites is to have useful, understandable file names. Files downloaded from our sites may end up among a much larger

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

collection of downloads on a typical user's PC, and a file name such as "FileUpload,9177,en.pdf" or "Report-FINAL-version.doc" gives no indication of what the file contains or where it came from.



Above: Badly named file names will make little sense in a user's downloads folder

To ensure consistency and accessibility for visitors, we use the following style for naming files on Maynooth University websites. The examples are for PDFs but also apply to MS Word, PowerPoint and MS Excel files.

MU-annual-report-2012-part3.pdf

The filename above has up to five elements, each separated by a *hyphen only* (or a full point before the file type) rather than spaces:

Element name	Example	Role
1: Organisation identifier	MU-annual-report-2012-part3.pdf	Gives users a useful indication that this may be part of a set of documents from Maynooth University. Use all caps, then hyphen
2. Descriptive title	MU-annual-report-2012-part3.pdf	Gives a clear idea of what is contained in the document. Keep names as brief but as

		<p>meaningful as possible, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All lower case • Use letters and numbers • Hyphens instead of blank spaces • Avoid potentially illegal punctuation (apostrophes, question marks etc)
3. Date	MU-annual-report- 2012-part3.pdf	<p>Optional indicator of date such as the year(s) covered by the report if it needs to be distinguished as part of a series (such as an annual report, or a series of research reports covering particular periods). Do <i>not</i> include year of publication if this is different to the year that is the subject of the document. If necessary indicate a year range, such as -2009-2012</p>
4. Part	MU-annual-report-2012-part3.pdf	<p>Indicates part or chapter (if relevant). Use where appropriate, again lower-case</p>
5. File extension	MU-annual-report-2012-part3.pdf	<p>Tells computer that this is a PDF file, again lower case. Other file extensions would include ".doc" (for a Word document), ".xls" (Excel) and ".ppt" (PowerPoint)</p>

Naming image files

Even though search engines cannot read words inside images and graphics, the file name of the image and other contextual information can be used to increase relevancy and boost search visibility. One of the biggest missed opportunities is not naming images with search engine optimisation (SEO) in mind.

As with all SEO, context is everything. It's not just about naming your image files correctly, and using good Alt text or captions for accessibility. It's about making sure that all the content elements on the page work together to build up a picture for search engines and potential visitors of what the page and its contents are about. Even so, image file names are a small but important element within this.

File name	How good is it for SEO?
"image.jpg"	Very poor – the name is sufficient to display the image in a browser, but gives no information about what the image is about
"media-studies.jpg"	Fair – it begins to give search engines a general idea of what the image is about
"media-studies-students-at-Maynooth.jpg"	Excellent – naming an image like this may a little more time and effort but it gives a much more specific idea of what the image is about

Bear in mind too that searches for images can be a significant source of incoming site traffic, and the same principles of adding relevant file names apply to other image formats besides JPEGs, such as GIFs of graphs and tables.

The international dimension

Much of our content is aimed at an international audience, so you need to be aware of this wider international dimension, as there can be subtle differences – and sometimes major ones – in terms used in the English language by different audiences around the world.

This holds true for many words about higher education. To take a simple example, "faculty" generally refers to two very different concepts in "US English" and in the "UK English" used on this side of the Atlantic. These differences also crop up in many other basic terms such as "majoring in chemistry" (US), or "visiting day" (US) rather than "open day" (UK).³

	What the word "faculty" means....
In UK English...	An organisational division within the institution, such as " <i>Faculty of Social Sciences</i> "
In US English...	One or more individuals who are academic staff members, as in " <i>Dr O'Brien is a faculty member</i> ". "Staff" In US English would mean "non-academic staff" in UK English.

³ For more examples of differences in higher education terms in US English and UK English, see <http://insidewcity.com/blog/view/translating-higher-ed-speak-from-us-to-uk/>

7. Images and video

Images and video can make a substantial difference to a website. Properly selected and presented, they can communicate information directly, or support communication by surrounding text.

As most users scan web pages rather than read them fully, images are one of the cues that direct their eyes. Images provide visual variety as users move from page to page. But badly chosen or presented photographs can undermine communication, puzzle readers, delay downloading or devalue the surrounding content.

Ask yourself key questions about a new image or video and whether it justifies its place on your website:

- Does it contribute to an improved experience for web users?
- Does it assist the university's communication goals?
- For images (rather than embedded videos), are file sizes too big, creating long download times?

Sourcing images

When sourcing images for the website, bear in the mind the following:

- Avoid using photographs or graphs that are unrelated to the content
- Individual faces are the subjects that people look at most instinctively, rather than buildings or equipment
- A good close-up of two or three faces is generally better than a group shot which has lots of faces but where individual faces are very small and it's hard to make out who's who
- Where photographs do not originate within the university (for example, if they have come via news sources), make sure the images are legally sound for use on the website, for example that copyright clearance has been granted (or the image has been properly ordered through a stock images library) and that they do not breach privacy guidelines

See also the next subsection on "Commissioning photographs for online use"

Commissioning photographs for online use

There are many advantages in commissioning original photography for online projects:

- You can fashion the photography to the piece, instead of fashioning the piece to the photography
- Original images can feature real staff, students and places within the university – with stock photography this isn't an option

- While images from stock libraries can often be excellent quality, they can also have a sameness about them. This can become especially apparent on the web, where an identical image (or the same person in slightly different poses) can pop up on many other sites

Besides using any general guidelines for commissioning photographs, you need to bear in mind the following specific questions when ordering photography for online use.

Do you actually need photographs?

Photographs are not the only way to illustrate a story and communicate with your audiences. Sometimes there may be other more appropriate formats such video or audio, so these too should always be considered at the planning stage.

Have you created a brief?

The brief that you give the photographer is a description of the project and the type of photographs you need. This is an important document, as it can be used when you are sounding out possible photographers, and used again in giving guidance to the selected photographer about what the assignment entails. It will also go a long way in spelling out what the deliverables will be.

So the brief should be broad enough to give an idea of overall context of the job, but specific enough so that there is no room for misinterpretation by either party.

For example, you might indicate:

- The **type of content** that the photographs will be used to illustrate, such as web pages about a course or a department
- The content's **target audience**, such as prospective students, business or the public
- The **style of photograph** required – adjectives might help, such as "official portrait" or "offbeat" – while giving the photographer some leeway to be creative and bring his or her vision and expertise to the assignment
- Other **specific requirements** for the content, such as "Group shot of 3-4 people involved in the research project, including [name] and [name]"

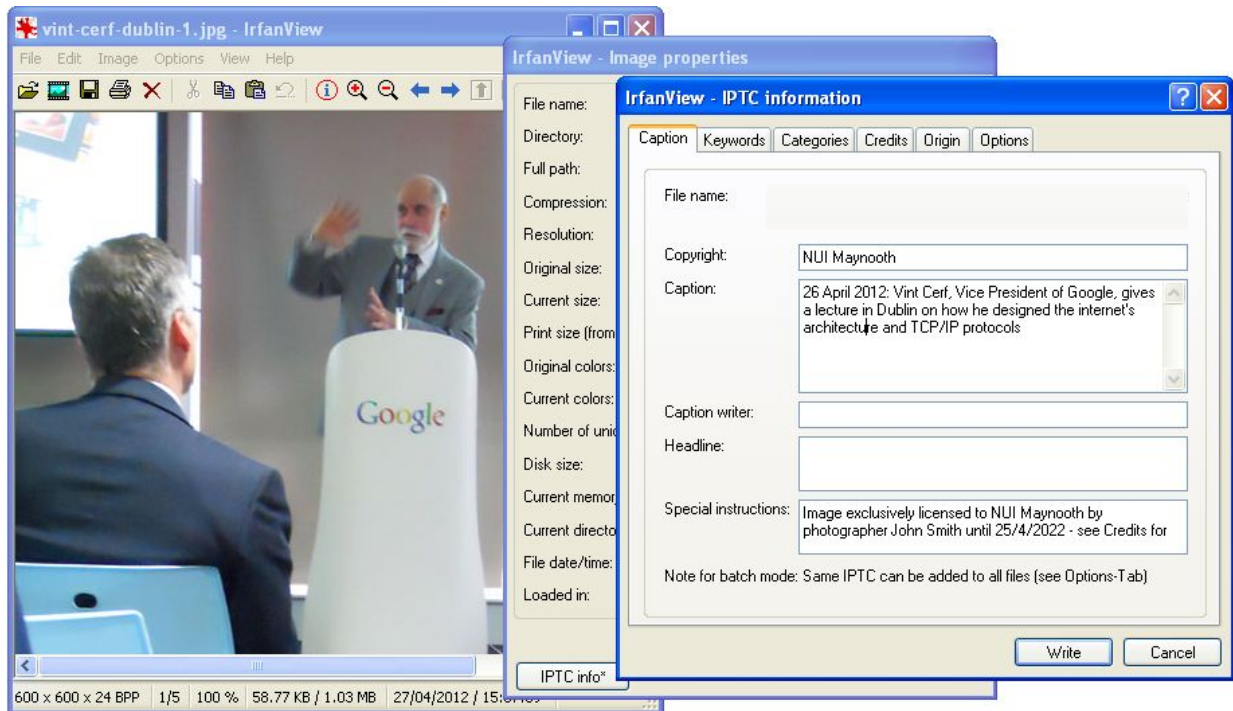
As part of the brief, always spell out the need for both "portrait" (deep) and "landscape" (wide) shots of the subjects. These different shapes are essential in order to provide flexibility at the design stage.

Your brief should also specify that full information about each image's caption and credits (including licensing rights) must be included in the IPTC fields within the image file. These fields can be viewed and edited using applications such as Adobe Photoshop or the free IrfanView⁴.

⁴ IrfanView is available to download at: <http://www.irfanview.com>

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

While some photographers may be reluctant to type this information into the IPTC fields, it is the best way to ensure that this important information is always associated with each image – even if the image's filename is changed or a separate list of captions is mislaid.



Above: viewing the IPTC information about an image using IrfanView

Finally the brief should include the main contact point – the person to contact for the shoot itself, with their name, email address and phone number.

Did you get a quote?

Always get a written quotation (rather than an estimate) before work starts. This should clearly specify what deliverables you will get, based on the information you have provided such as the assignment brief, as well as the licensing rights and the format for the deliverables (these are both explained in more detail below).

The quote should be an all-in cost for the job, and include processing costs and some basic image enhancement (such as removal of minor blemishes or distractions). More complex digital retouching such as digital landscaping or replacing skies would not typically be included in these basic enhancements.

The quote should also specify whether "extras" such as travel and materials are included in the price.

What are the licensing rights?

Make sure that your contract with the photographer covers online use of the images. The default position under Irish copyright law is that a professional photographer still retains ownership of an image even though he or she may have been commissioned and paid a fee to take the picture. Therefore the preferred arrangement would be get the photographer to assign the image rights permanently (in other words, sell them completely) to the university.

Alternatively, arrange for the photographer to license the right for the university to use the images online. The licence should preferably be for multiple usage of the images, and give you the option to re-use them in other media – not only online but also in printed material and multimedia. Make sure that the period covered by the licence is appropriate for the maximum length of time that the images are likely to be used online. Bear in mind that some web content such as news articles (including their photographs) may be archived online for several years

For major projects, especially if the photographs are likely to play a critical role, you may need to arrange more extensive rights, such as the right to re-use the photographs several times in other projects for a much longer period, and for other media besides the Internet, such as print material.

It is essential that you clarify these copyright and usage issues as part of the contract for the photography assignment.

Did you agree on the delivery method?

The contract should also state how the images must be delivered:

1. "In digital format (rather than film or slides)"
2. "In high resolution" – 300 dpi (dots per inch) is a reasonable standard to allow for substantial cropping
3. The preferred delivery method. For example, while email may be fine for a small number of images, substantial attachments could soon fill your inbox. Therefore for a large number of images with big file sizes a DVD disk may be more appropriate

Have you made all arrangements for the shoot?

Time (the photographer's) is money (yours), so do as much forward planning as you can make the best use of his or her time on the day, to ensure the best results and keep costs down:

- Make sure that all staff or students essential to the assignment will definitely be available and present at the date and time of the shoot
- Arrange access to any locked areas
- Ensure that areas to be photographed are cleaned and tidy in advance. All this will also minimise tensions if the photographer requires co-operation from busy staff or students

- If you require exterior photographs, try to plan your deadlines to allow for sustained poor weather. This increases the chance of the photographer being able to shoot under ideal lighting conditions
- If you need to seek permission from people or places to be photographed, make sure that these permissions also cover online use of the photographs

Handling images

These are some general tips on using images successfully in the content you handle, and what to be particularly wary of:

- To reduce page file sizes and download time, always edit images to the final size *before* uploading
- The content of photos should not be manipulated to create a false impression. If images are combined, it should be very clear to the user that the resulting image is a montage or mock-up rather than a photograph of reality
- Never flip an image left to right. There are many reasons why this should be avoided (for example, text somewhere in the picture is reversed)
- If using Jpegs on web pages, they should be in RGB format, never CMYK format (RGB format is for screens such as web browsers, while CMYK format is for print. Some web browsers cannot display CMYK images)
- Images on the site should comply with accessibility requirements. Any photograph should always include "Alt" text – a short text, usually one sentence, that conveys the same information as the image it accompanies. This can be done in the CMS when selecting the image file to upload
- Alt text for images is not just important for accessibility. By adding alt text when editing/adding images via the content management system, you are also adding more information for search engines to latch onto

Make backups

Accidents happen, computers go wrong and important images or information can be lost. Therefore you should:

- Always back up the original and work on a copy
- Store backups safely on backed up hard drives and/or on filed DVDs

Optimising images

Optimising images for the Web means reducing the file size as much as possible, while getting the right balance between **file size** and **picture quality**.

Some of the quickest and easiest ways to decrease an image's file size are to:

- Use the right file format in the first place – Jpeg (JPG) for photographs, GIF or PNG for images that contain blocks of solid colour (such as graphs, bar charts and logos)
- Reduce its dimensions – crop out irrelevant details and make sure its width will not cause problems in terms of how text wraps around it, or break tables within the layout
- Reduce its resolution – always use a 72 dpi (dots per inch) resolution for web images, not higher. Having an image with a higher resolution has no benefits; it just means the file will take a longer time to download.
- Use compression of Jpegs to reduce file size – but make sure the quality of the image doesn't suffer
- Do a final check that the image is still effective at its final size and compression rate, and that it has not lost all impact or become squashed



This picture has been compressed too much and become "blotchy"



The height of this picture has been resized far more than its width, making it look squashed



This picture is much more acceptable than either of the other two

Video: when to use it

While video on the Web involves technology, it is not about technology as such – it is about **effective storytelling**. There can be a temptation to use video simply "because we have it", but the decision on whether to publish a particular piece of video content should ultimately be based on editorial considerations – though technical questions will need to be considered too:

- Video content is often best for motivational and inspirational content, rather than for heavy detail
- Videos with good production values generally require more planning and effort than text-based content, they cost more to produce and require more technical knowledge/support
- There is a need to vary formats and presentation to avoid the "talking head" cliché (for example, simply recording a lecturer from a fixed angle)

Consider what formats are most appropriate and tell the story most effectively. For example:

- Instead of having a video of a relatively long speech without any major demonstrations/illustrations, provide the full speech as an audio podcast, perhaps with a small intro video clip as well (in order to give a flavour of the proceedings)
- A long video could be replaced by a “comic strip”-like sequence of still images with captions
- If a lecture relies heavily on a presentation, flip-chart or whiteboard, there may be little point in showing video only of the speaker

Legal issues and video

Video has specific copyright clearance and privacy issues. If the video includes content that is **copyright** to anyone other than Maynooth University, that content must be cleared for online use by the university. Bear in mind that “content” here includes not just images but sound and text used within the video. Be particularly careful of music.

For each individual whose personal information (name, image, speech) is included in the video, you should **obtain consent** to use that information online. Use a simple permission form, then store this as part of the project documentation. People aged 18 and over can give their own consent. For those under 18 the consent of a parent or guardian is also required.

See also the main section of this document on “Legal Issues”.

Shooting and editing

When shooting and editing video, watch out for common quality problems, such as:

- Image too bright, too dark or out of focus
- Unsteady camera (unless this is a deliberate style)
- Sound problems
- Sound out of sync
- Scruffy or distracting backgrounds that take from the message
- Poor editing

Once you have finished editing a video, make sure that it's the right length. For videos of **educational material** such as lectures or talks, the full presentation may need to be captured, but for **promotional videos** the length will probably need to be much shorter. With general accounts on YouTube the maximum length of videos is 10 minutes – some channel videos can be longer again. But even 10

minutes may be offputting or too long to retain a viewer's attention. The optimum time for short promotional videos is under three minutes.



Above: an opening frame of a YouTube video with titles and play button

It is best to show an opening frame from the video with the play button on it, rather than an icon.

Captions, including subtitles if you are adding them, should always be big enough to read at the default display size – not just in full-screen mode. In addition, you may consider adding your **website URL** within the video as a frame of stationary text, putting it after the closing credits about 20 seconds before the end of the video. This can be an important part of giving calls to action and attracting website traffic.

Converting and quality

Each time you convert (“**transcode**”) a video from one file format or size to another, there will be some loss in quality – it's similar to making a photocopy of a photocopy.

Avoid transcoding a highly compressed video. You will get better results by going back to your original video-editing software (where you initially edited the video) and re-exporting in a format such as MPEG4 with MP3 audio. If that is not an option, consider exporting the file in a RAW (uncompressed) video format, then encoding it in an external program.

Accessibility for videos

Videos also need to address accessibility issues and include suitable alternatives such as a text equivalent and/or an auditory description of the content.

YouTube allows you to provide **transcripts** for your videos. Typing up a transcript can be quite time-consuming, but it's good for user accessibility and also provides much more textual hooks for users, search engines and automatic language translation facilities to latch onto. To do this:

1. When logged on to your YouTube account, click "My Videos"
2. Find the video to which you want to add a transcript, then click the "Captions" button
3. Click the "Add New Captions or Transcript" button
4. Click the "Browse" button and find the transcript file to upload. If you are uploading a transcript (no time codes), select "Transcript file", otherwise, select "Caption file"
5. Select the appropriate language.
6. Click the "Upload File" button

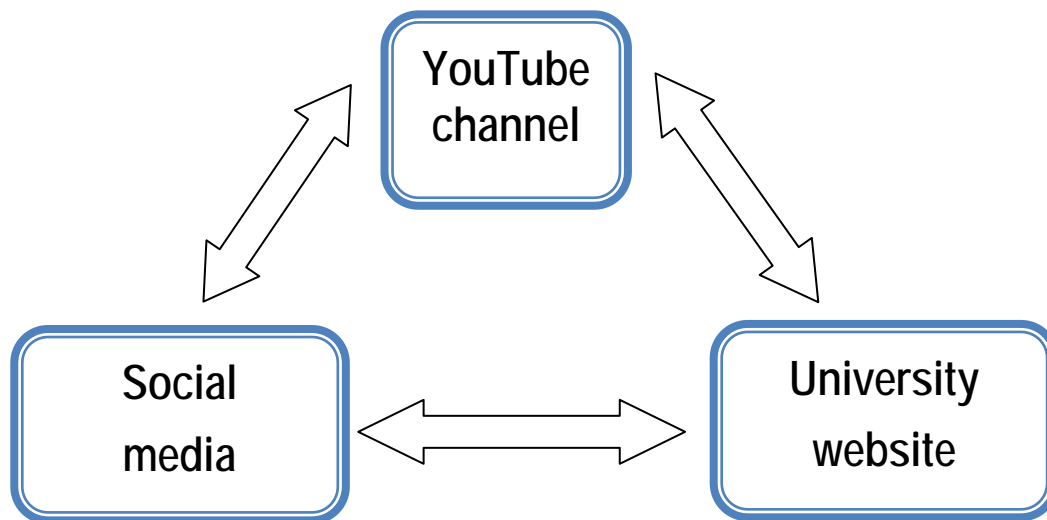
Bear in mind that:

- Your transcript file must be saved as a plain text file (".txt")
- It shouldn't have any special characters such as smart quotes or em-dashes
- You can also add tags such as >> at the beginning of a new line to identify speakers or a change of speaker
- YouTube uses experimental speech-recognition technology to provide automatic timing for English transcripts, but you should identify long pauses (3 seconds or longer) or music in the transcript by using a double line break
- Descriptions inside square brackets, such as [music] or [laughter] also help people with hearing disabilities to understand what's going on in your video

An alternative to a transcript file is to provide a caption file. The method is similar to adding a transcript – see YouTube's help files⁵ for details.

⁵ At <http://support.google.com/youtube/bin/static.py?hl=en&topic=2734694&guide=2734661&page=guide.cs>

Linking and integration



One of the strengths of embedded content such as videos is that they can be shared across online channels and give opportunities to boost web traffic. For example, while a video might be hosted on a content sharing site such as YouTube, Vimeo or Daily Motion, the same video can also be embedded in the university's web pages, or within other social media such as blogs.

Therefore it is essential to provide relevant links at key points in the video itself, in order to bring an extra level of integration between the video and your website or other relevant online channels. *See also YouTube in "Social Media" section*

8. Social media

Social media are an increasingly important part of our daily lives, whether for work or personally. Maynooth University sees social media as a positive opportunity to communicate and engage with its audiences. We recognise the importance of participating in these online conversations, for engaging and opening up dialogues with these audiences on many different levels, and for staff to use social media in their personal lives.

Standards and best practice

Educational institutions can use social media in three main ways⁶:

- **"Administrative use"** is use by the Communications Office and other staff and students on behalf of the university – to provide official information about activities, courses, issues and news about the institution
- **"Professional use"** by staff and students to engage in a work-related capacity. A simple example would be a lecturer's review in an online journal or on a blog of a peer's book. Professional use in this context is different from administrative use, because the person does not act on behalf of the institution
- **"Personal use"** includes managing your own personal profile and accounts on one or more social media platforms. The boundaries between personal and professional use are not always clear, but if you can be directly or indirectly recognised as an employee of the university, the university's relevant social media policies apply

The following are policies and standards for administrative and professional use – for employees and students who either work in social media in an official capacity on behalf of the university or are using social media as part of their work, though much of this can also be applied when participating personally:

1. **You are representing Maynooth University**, and you should bear this in mind at all times. How you conduct yourself in social media not only reflects on you – it is a direct reflection on the university. So be professional and courteous, with an open and approachable tone that projects a positive image of the university and reflects its values
2. **Always disclose your affiliation** with Maynooth University and your name. It is never acceptable to use aliases or otherwise deceive people

⁶ These classifications are similar to those used by Gartner in *Social Media Strategies in Education*, March 2012

3. **Keep your work and personal life separate** – in your official capacity, any content about you should be in your business role for the university rather than what you are doing on a day off
4. **Write what you know.** If you don't know the answer, don't pretend to – find someone else who does
5. **Try to add value** – both for the university and its audiences. If it helps people in completing relevant tasks and improves their knowledge and understanding of the university and its work, then it's adding value
6. **Respect your audience.** Keep calm, don't pick fights or use personal insults, and respect their privacy. Point out factual misrepresentations by all means, but do not create an argument
7. **Watch out for personal and sensitive information.** If you need to discuss a person's personal details (such as address, telephone number, student number), take the conversation away from the public channel and deal with it via email or phone – Twitter and Facebook also have DM (direct messages), which are private. Similarly, do not cite or reference specific staff without getting their approval first
8. **If you make a mistake, be upfront about it** and correct it quickly to help restore trust. If this also means modifying an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. Once your post is online, it is essentially part of a permanent record – you may compound the problem rather than solving it by trying to remove it later or slipping in an amendment
9. **If in doubt, do not post.** Always ensure that your posts are accurate, not misleading, and do not reveal private, sensitive information about the university. Exercise sound judgment and common sense, and if there is any doubt, do not post it
10. **Know the rules.** While social media can sometimes be very informal, bear in mind that the same legal rules and responsibilities that apply to online publishing on Maynooth University websites (see next section) also apply to social media channels

The bottom line is that social media conversations should be treated as any other communications channel, with students and members of the public spoken to and interacted with in the same manner as they would be over the phone or face-to-face.

Listening and responding

Social media are a **two-way conversation** with our audiences, so you need to listen regularly to what is going on, and then respond. Don't just talk *at* people in a one-way flow.

While the following guidelines refer to Twitter, these general principles of listening and responding are equally applicable to other channels such as Facebook and YouTube.

What you are saying

In general, you need to:

- **Think wider:** tweet about what your followers would be interested in, rather than only sharing about the university in general or specific courses or events all the time. Mix up the tweet types to include retweets (RT), @replies, original thoughts, and links to other people's content (not just your own)
- **Emphasise positives:** consider retweeting whenever anyone says anything positive about you and the university. This includes mentions, Follow Fridays (#FF), and @replies. But non-stop retweeting of people's praise of you can come across badly – just thank them
- **Help people:** point them to useful content on your website (or elsewhere) that can explain things in more depth. Try to have a balance in your tweets, such as 80% content your audience will find helpful and 20% self-promotion. A good mix will get you much further than 100% promotion.
- **Encourage your followers** and don't be afraid to ask a question – “What do you think about...” – or even ask for help

How you are saying it

In social media, it's very important to get the right balance when it comes to tone. Make your comments friendly and casual as possible – don't sound like a corporate machine. Be honest, be real, be quick, and have a light touch. Where possible, address people by their names or social media account names (their "handles").

Keep a focus – don't be all over the place. Be known as the go-to person for a specific range of topics, and as a reliable source for information on those topics. Forget the “Like” button in social media – **sharing** is the most critical thing, so create content that is shareable.

- The same basic rules of writing for the web apply in specific social media channels. Use plain language, and keep your messages short, simple and to-the-point. Draft your message before posting, and take care over it: write as directly as possible, then remove any frills.
- On Twitter in particular, avoid shorthand or “textspeak” if at all possible by tightening up the sentence. If required due to character limits, abbreviations can be used – but only if they will be understood by the vast majority of your audience.
- Again on Twitter, don't write in 139 or 140 characters all the time: 110 to 120 characters are a better maximum if you want to leave room for retweets.

When you are saying it

Social media is real time, 24-7. It doesn't fit neatly into a 9-5 office day. So you need:

- A procedure in place for out-of-office hours (for example, don't simply ignore all weekend messages until Monday morning), and
- A fairly standard rhythm within office hours. There are often clear peak times when student and business audiences are likely to use social media (within their time zone), such as:
 - First thing in the morning
 - Around lunchtime
 - After the evening meal

You could also consider setting aside a short period for Q&A style conversations through the channel on topics of interest, bringing in other experts. For example: "Jane Smith from Graduate Studies will be online from 10-11am this Wednesday to answer your questions about studying at Maynooth University".

Some people are on social media all the time, but for most of us this is unfeasible and not the most productive way to engage. Find the right balance between the quantity of your tweets versus the quality. In particular, avoid the following:

- Being a "tweet hog" – 10 tweets in a row gets irritating
- Posting numerous thank-you tweets back-to-back. These will clog up your profile timeline (Twitter features the three most recent tweets in the user profile preview pane, so prospective followers viewing your profile won't have much to go on). So never do more than two consecutive thank-you messages. It's also OK not to comment back for every single comment you receive
- Posting RT thank-yous during peak times (retweeting a RT is the exception). Instead, try to target off-peak Twitter times instead (mid-morning, mid-afternoon) so as not to bore your following
- Tweeting the same message (or variants on it) over and over again. It's acceptable to promote the same thing two or three times in the same day on a social network, so that you hit all the time zones and activity peaks appropriately, but don't overdo it

Using Twitter

Once you have set up an official channel on Twitter you need to post regular, timely updates and build up a following among your target audience. You then need to ramp up your presence on Twitter in stages, such as:

- Adding your Twitter bio
- Customising your background to include Maynooth University messaging and branding
- Using hashtags tactically



- Creating lists
- Integrating Twitter with your website, LinkedIn and other online channels

Twitter bio

The Twitter bio is a maximum of 160 characters. It should explain what your organisation is and what it does on Twitter. The bio is edited in the "Profile" screen of your Twitter account's settings, and to avoid confusion it should generally be static information. Besides filling out your organisation's bio in your Twitter profile, don't forget to fill out your location as "Ireland".

If several people look after the official Twitter feed during the working week, you may want to personalise this to some degree, using the bio to explain a shorthand that will be used at the end of messages, so that these extra characters are kept at a minimum. For example, *"Three of us manage this account: John Smith (JS), Anne O'Logue (AOL) and Susan Jones (SJ)"*.

Twitter background image

The default Twitter background is a clean design but it doesn't stand out when the majority of Twitter users also have the same look. There are three main approaches when it comes to customising your Twitter background:

1. **Repeating a background pattern.** A repeating pattern will work at any monitor resolution.
2. **Using an exceptionally large background graphic** that fills the whole screen. While this approach gives the widest options in terms of visual creativity, it brings up the issues of image file size (and download times) and the fact that the image will inevitably cut off on a certain monitor resolution.
3. **Background graphic fading to single colour** – this may be the best option. Use a single graphic which is faded out from left to right, so that it blends into a single colour, which is then specified as the background colour. This allows for different screen sizes and resolutions, and extra text information can be included in a left-hand sidebar. This should not be the only place where critical information is available on the screen, as it may still become obscured by the central message area.

Your background needs to reflect the university's branding. It is also an opportunity to add contact details, and other information to supplement your 160-character bio. Building your ideal background often requires trial and error in order to settle on a design that works.

A quick way to test this background image is by creating a separate Twitter account and changing its privacy settings so that it can only be seen by you (and anyone else you give permission to view). To change your background, go to Home >> Settings >> Design, and then use the "Customize your own"

options to change the background image. You can now browse your computer and add any image you'd like, so long as it's under 800k in size.

The dimensions of the image are important: an improperly sized image can be covered up by your Twitter profile or can start to "tile", which often leads to an undesired effect. A background of about 1,600 pixels wide by 1,200 deep can work well: it is large enough not to tile on most screen resolutions.

The background's left-hand column tends to be a critical area in the design. Make sure that this column is narrow enough not to be covered up by the central Twitter content – many designers suggest keeping it under 220 pixels wide.

Use hashtags

One of the most important types of tagging on Twitter is called **hashtags**. Users put a hash symbol ("#") at the start of topic names in order to identify them as a theme. Nobody "owns" these tags – anyone else can use them – but there are ways of using them to your advantage within your tweets.

Once you add a hash to a keyword such as "CAO", the word "#CAO" becomes a clickable link in Twitter. Then somebody reading your tweet can simply click that link to get all the latest posts on Twitter containing the "#CAO" hashtag. This can be a useful way to help organise and spread information on Twitter.

Tweets containing "#CAO" (with a hash) enjoy the best of both worlds – they will appear within hashtag searches by more specialised (or Twitter-savvy) users, and also within general search results for "CAO" (without a hash).

While they can be a little irritating, when used properly hashtags allow people who aren't following you on Twitter to see tweets by you that they might be interested in. For example, hashtags can be useful and popular if you are planning, organising or attending events such as open days or conferences (a hypothetical example would be "#MUnano2012"), or running an online campaign on a particular theme (such as "#gomaynooth").

Bear in mind that the hashtag cannot contain spaces, so "#CAOresults" will work as 11 characters, but only the first four characters in "#CAO results" (two words) will be recognised by Twitter as a hashtag.

Create Twitter lists

The "Lists" feature of Twitter provides ways of grouping together other users' content on Twitter to get an overview of what these users are saying. A Twitter list isn't just a static listing of users, but an ongoing Twitter stream of the latest tweets from a specified set of users.

So you can create a list that groups together people for whatever reason, then your list gives a snapshot of what those users are saying – a complete tweet stream for everyone on the list, updated in real time.

Once you create a public list of people, then anyone else can visit that list and follow it too. The benefits of creating and maintaining your own lists include:

- Providing extra resources for students, staff and other audiences on particular themes
- Increasing your online footprint – once people are listed, they are more likely to become aware of you (via your list). Be sure add yourself to your own public lists (via your profile page) – this means that your own Twitter updates will appear in any of your lists being followed by other people
- Acting as a research tool and listening channel for reputation management
- Streamlining your "Following" list – Twitter lists also allow you to include people even if you're not following them on your main (Following) list

Integrate Twitter with other channels

Among steps you can take to integrate Twitter with other online channels:

- You can set up your LinkedIn profile to get automatic updates of your latest tweets
- You can get an RSS feed of news headlines from your website automatically added to your Twitter channel by using a free service such as <http://www.Twitterfeed.com>

Further reading

A good set of basic guidelines for Twitter is available at: <http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/>

Using Facebook

Facebook has the following main business options for organisations including universities:

- Pages: use Pages to create a presence on Facebook that will let others join your page as a fan
- Connect: Lets users seamlessly connect their Facebook account and information to your site
- Facebook Share: Design a button for your site to make joining your Facebook Page easier for your target audience
- Advertising: create adverts that will run on Facebook pages



Customise applications and business details

On your Facebook page you will see applications that you can include on the page. Use the “Edit Page” link on the left to customise all options from a single admin screen. Each Application has a small edit option by the title, letting you remove any of the available applications or customise the application to your liking.

The basic Facebook Applications for Business pages include:

- Discussion Boards: Enable your "fans" to get their ideas out into the open. Discussion boards let you know exactly what your fans think and want. You should not enable this option until you have proper procedures in place on how you will moderate the discussion board. A good starting point is Enterprise Ireland's guide to moderation for its own staff⁷
- Events: Organise your upcoming university events
- Notes: Share course news and other news content
- Photos: Upload photos to your page and allow your fans to share photos on your page too
- Reviews: Fans and customers can leave opinions about your organisation
- Wall: This is an open forum for your fans or friends to leave comments, thoughts and ideas about you on your Page or Profile

The “Settings” area (top right) is where you edit country restrictions, place age restrictions and change the published status of your business page. When you are happy with the way your Business page looks, click the “Publish This Page” link.

What your Facebook page should include

The Facebook page should include:

- General details about Maynooth University or your organisational unit
- New items in the News section of your site, which can be RSSed onto the page
- Videos and photographs
- Discussions on the discussion board
- The university logo, in keeping with branding guidelines

Build visibility

Find relevant discussions on Facebook and post comments referencing the university and your organisational unit. Tag posts with links to relevant groups/interests to stretch your content across Facebook; for instance if you reference an event in a comment the organisers will get a notification from Facebook that you have mentioned their page.

⁷ <http://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/About-Us/Services/Social-Networking/Guidelines/>

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This gives the comments more credibility as you are not just plugging your own page but referencing another, relevant page. It also builds the university's profile.

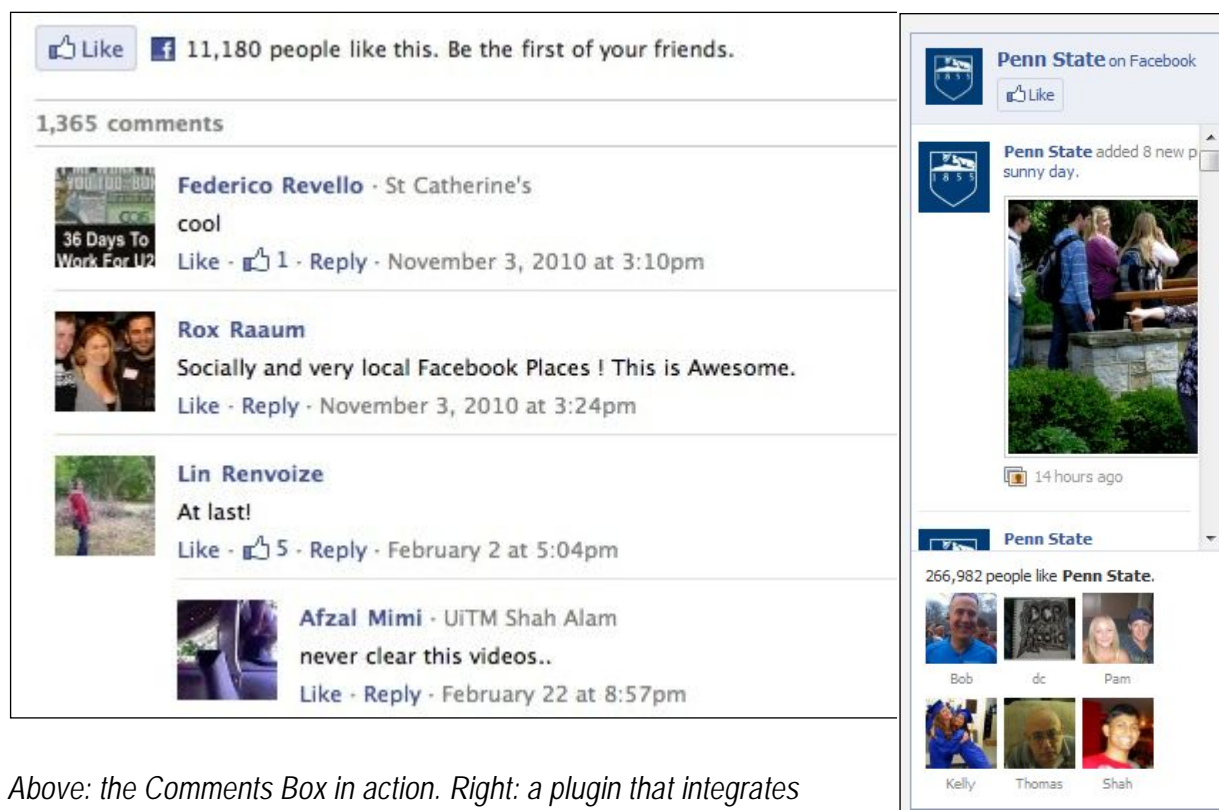
Do not overpost to Facebook. If you post dozens of times a day, you will irritate fans so they may "unlike" your page or hide your feed.

Social integration

Once the Facebook audience is starting to build up, consider integrating a comments box on the main website. Comments Box is a social plugin that enables user commenting on your website.

Comments are shared with friends or with people who "like" the Facebook page. If users leave the "Post to Facebook" box checked when they post comments, a story appears on their friends' News Feed indicating that they have made a comment on the website, which will also link back to your site.

Friends and people who like your Page can then respond to the discussion by liking or replying to the comment directly in the News Feed on Facebook or in the Comments Box on your site. Threads stay synced across Facebook and on the Comments Box on your site regardless of where the comment was made.



Above: the Comments Box in action. Right: a plugin that integrates Facebook posts and likes into a university's website

Further reading

A good set of basic guidelines for Facebook is available at: <http://mashable.com/guidebook/facebook/>

Using YouTube

A separate section of this document explains how to produce and edit videos for your YouTube channel. Besides these technical requirements, though, it is vital that you:



- Create video content that is interesting, engaging, and compelling enough to make people watch it, rate it, and comment on it
- Optimise your YouTube entries with the right tagging information to make them much easier to find
- Give further calls to action including links as part of a video's description information

Customising your channel

There are many options to brand your YouTube channel and customise its look and feel:

- Login to your YouTube account
- Click your username (in the top right corner)
- Click "My Channel"
- Click the "Edit Channel" button in the top right corner of the page

The Edit Channel view is divided into three tabs.

In the **Appearance** tab you can choose an "avatar" (a profile image such as a logo). Click "Choose File" and upload the image. It can be up to 1,600 x 1,600 pixels. If using the Maynooth University logo, make sure it will still be recognisable when resized to 36 x 36 pixels.

You can also upload a channel background image and select whether or not to repeat it by using the "Repeat Background Image" dropdown. If you do not choose to repeat, the image will appear centred on your channel.

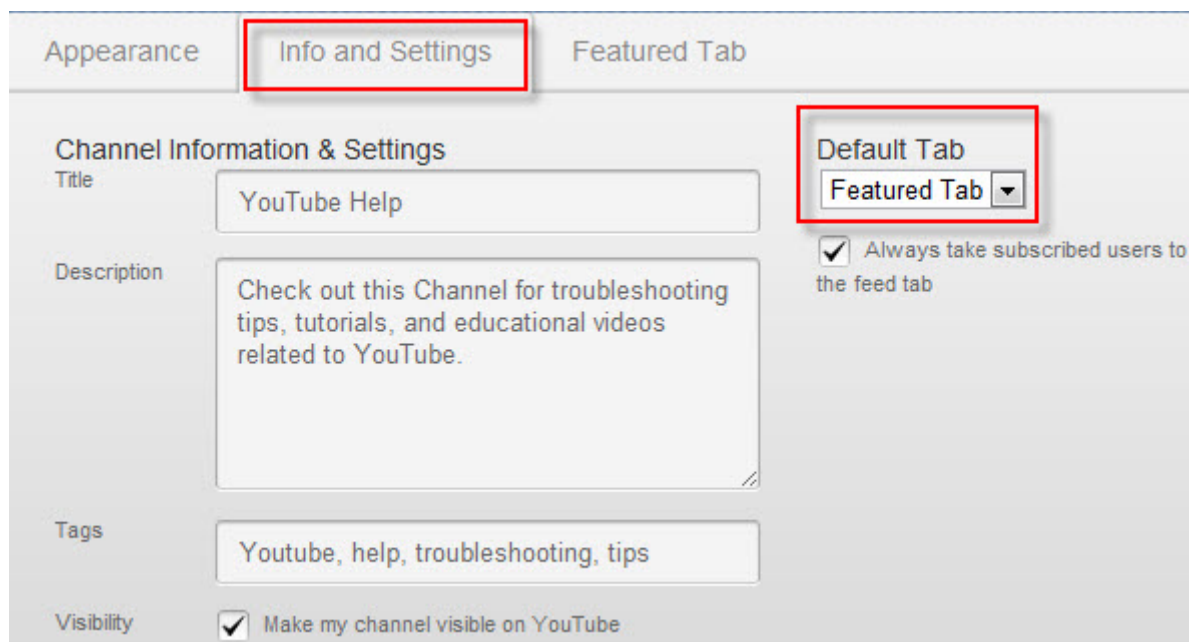
In the **Info and Settings** tab, customise your channel's Title, Description, Tags and Visibility, and also set which tab that users will see by default when they visit your channel.

Make sure to give your channel a name and description that make sense:

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

- These will be displayed not only in the "About" section on your channel but also wherever your channel is found on YouTube – such as in search results
- The title will be shown at the top of your channel, next to your avatar (logo)
- The channel description can be up to 1,000 characters, but only 250 characters will be shown by default in the "About" section, with the remainder available behind a "More" link, so concentrate key information in these opening 250 characters
- Also give your channel descriptive tags – these will be displayed in search results

To change what tab users see when they first visit your channel, use the drop-down under "Default Tab" to choose between setting the Featured, Videos, or Feed tabs as your default. If you do not change this setting, your default tab is the Feed tab.



The screenshot shows the YouTube Channel Settings interface. The 'Info and Settings' tab is selected and highlighted with a red box. Under 'Channel Information & Settings', the 'Title' field contains 'YouTube Help', the 'Description' field contains 'Check out this Channel for troubleshooting tips, tutorials, and educational videos related to YouTube.', and the 'Tags' field contains 'Youtube, help, troubleshooting, tips'. The 'Default Tab' dropdown menu is also highlighted with a red box and is set to 'Featured Tab'. Below it, the checkbox 'Always take subscribed users to the feed tab' is checked. At the bottom, the 'Visibility' section has the checkbox 'Make my channel visible on YouTube' checked.

The **Featured Tab** is an optional tab that can be used for displaying your Playlists, Channels, and/or videos from a Playlist in a straightforward and easily editable way. You can enable the Featured Tab by clicking Edit Channel then Featured Tab, and selecting the check box next to Enable featured tab.

If you decide you do not want a Featured Tab, simply uncheck the box next to Enable featured tab. Remember to click "Done Editing" to save your changes.

Creating playlists

Playlists are a good way to categorise videos by theme or audience but keep them under an Maynooth University branded channel.

Adding metadata

YouTube videos can be tagged in a similar way to the metadata on pages of your website. Remember that your videos will be indexed by Google, Yahoo, and Bing as well as YouTube's search engine. So the more information you provide about a video, the easier it is for users – and search engines – to find it.

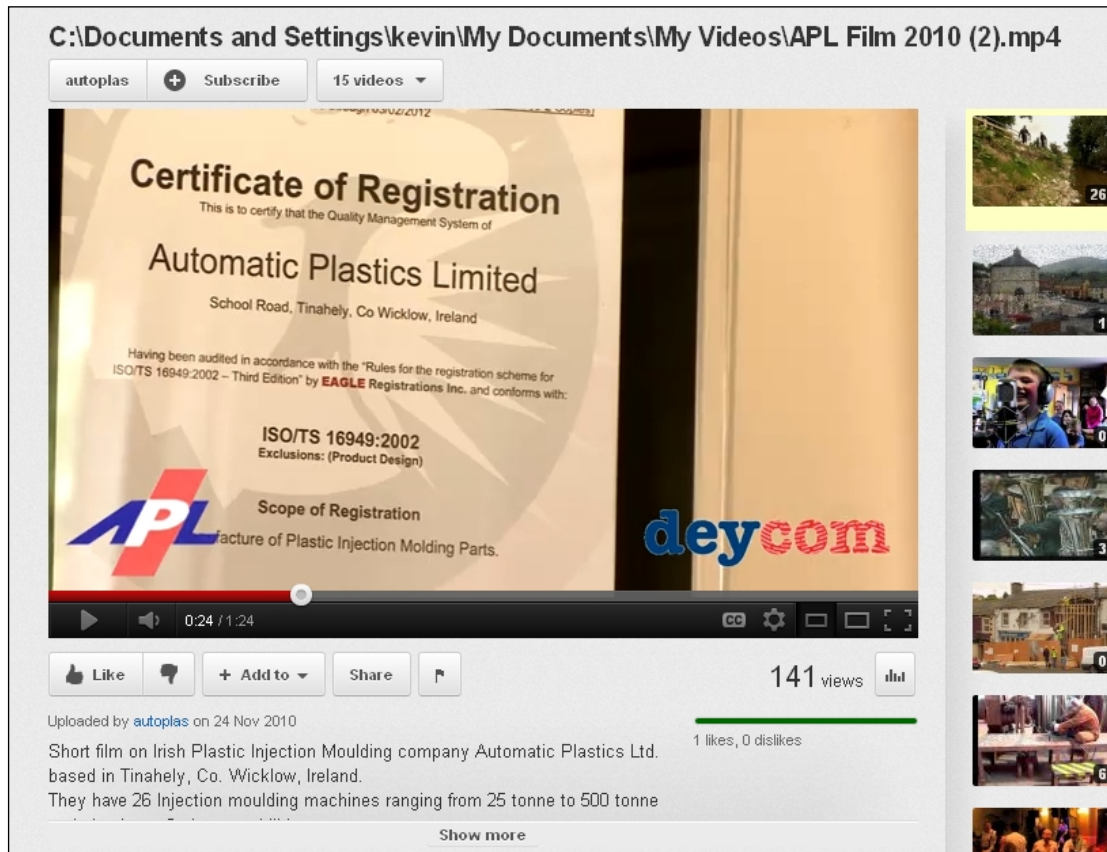
On YouTube, you should apply key words and phrases to the video's title, description and tags. The more information you provide about the video, the easier it is for users to find it via search. While your video file is still being uploaded to YouTube, enter as much information about the video as possible in the following four fields:

Field	Tips on what to use	What to avoid
<p>Title</p> <p>Your main headline. In search engine optimisation (SEO) terms this is among the most important elements of your video</p> <p><i>Maximum 120 characters</i></p>	<p>Just as in website SEO, if key words and phrases are close to the front of the Title this can help the ranking.</p> <p>One way to encourage content syndication by viewers is to use a Title which acts as a teaser or a call to action, such as "How to..." or "Learn about..."</p>	<p>Titles that use the video's filename, which is not user friendly (such as "videoshoot.mov") – if you don't specifically provide a Title, YouTube will use the filename for it, and this is a wasted SEO opportunity.</p>
<p>Description</p> <p>A summary of what the video is about</p> <p><i>Maximum 1,000 characters (about 140 words)</i></p>	<p>Try to include a clear call to action, with the word "video" somewhere in the text (someone doing a search will often put that in the search query if they want video included).</p> <p>Don't forget to include adjectives, as searchers often use these to find what they are looking for.</p> <p>Always make sure to include a link back to the relevant university website. This needs to be given as a full URL (with http:// at the start of it).</p> <p>While the full Description can be up to 1,000</p>	<p>"No description available" messages – because no Description has been added.</p> <p>Descriptions that are slightly too long and don't work well when truncated.</p> <p>Not including the http:// in web addresses in the Description, so they don't</p>

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

	<p>characters when it is fully expanded in the "Show more" view, bear in mind that YouTube truncates this to three lines in the default ("Show less") view that is initially displayed below the video. The amount of the Description that will be displayed in YouTube's search results pages is likely to be even shorter again.</p> <p>So concentrate on the initial sentence, giving a good hook to users that will make them want to read more.</p>	<p>turn into clickable links when published. This is a missed opportunity to draw traffic to your site.</p>
<p>Tags</p> <p>Help users to find your video when they search the site.</p> <p>When users type keywords related to your tags, your video will appear in their search results.</p> <p><i>Maximum 120 characters</i></p>	<p>Be as detailed as possible, and keep them short and highly targeted.</p> <p>Include: topics, subject areas, "Maynooth University", "university" or "Ireland" (where relevant).</p> <p>Consider including slang and synonyms, but do not include misspellings or keystroke errors.</p> <p>Enter many different "tags" for the video, as long as you keep within the maximum character count.</p>	
<p>Category</p> <p>The range of categories to choose from is pre-set and rather limited.</p>	<p>Bear in mind the target audience for your video, and the process or overall theme that the video is about. For example, while many Maynooth University videos would be under the "Education" category, a video about a technical subject might use the "Science & Technology" category.</p>	

Note in particular that the Description should always include a link back to the most relevant part(s) of the university website.



Example of a Title based on a file name rather than giving a meaningful headline, and a Description that is cut off in mid sentence in the default "Show less" (rather than "Show more") view.

Once your video has been uploaded and processed, three video thumbnails are automatically generated. Either select one of them as your video thumbnail, or upload your own custom thumbnail. You can also give the video's location (where appropriate), using a pointer on a Google Map. This is called **geotagging** – so that information is classified (and can then be found) by location. Geotagging is likely to become an increasingly important way of tagging information, particularly for mobile device users.

Integrating YouTube with other channels

As with other social media, your YouTube channel should not exist in isolation from your other online channels but should be fully integrated into your social media mix.

For example, videos can be embedded in news items on your website or blog, and you can use your LinkedIn and Twitter channels to promote video content and draw visitors to your YouTube channel. Your YouTube pages in turn can point users to more detailed information back on your website about courses, events and other relevant content.

9. Legal issues

This section must be read in conjunction with the Maynooth University "Internet Publishing Governance" document. It is general guidance and does not constitute legal advice.

Maynooth University is a large-scale publisher, placing information before the general public. Therefore it has to operate within a framework of laws and regulations relating to all publishers. Publishing on the Internet is not exempt from these laws and regulations. This legal framework for publishing consists of a set of laws and rules that govern:

- What information is published
- How it is published
- What processes and checks it should be put through

All employees and students involved in online publishing are expected to be familiar with the framework, and to avoid exposing Maynooth University to legal risk through their work.

On the one hand this legal framework offers some rights and protection to publishers: for example, it provides copyright protection for their original work. On the other hand, it imposes certain duties and restraints on publishers – in what they can say about individuals, companies and other organisations, for example.

The consequences of legal problems can be extremely serious, in financial terms and damage to reputation. **Never ever take chances with legal issues – even ones that are not covered here. If in any doubt, do not be afraid to ask for further advice from the web team.**

Defamation (libel)

A damaging and false statement about a person, a group of people or a company is known as defamation. When someone is defamed in written or broadcast form, including on the Internet, it is called libel (when spoken it is called slander). Someone who is defamed can take action through the courts to win an apology and damages. A successful libel action can be extremely expensive for the publisher, with damages up to hundreds of thousands of euro – and even larger amounts for legal costs.

For content to be a libel danger, it generally must:

- Identify one or more people, or a company. The subjects do not have to be named if there is enough other information in the content to identify them
- Make a false statement, or one that cannot be proved, about those named
- Be defamatory. That is, that the content lowers their reputation among ordinary people, holds them up to hatred, ridicule or contempt, or causes them to be shunned

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

- Lower their reputation in the eyes of right-thinking people (individuals cannot sue for having their reputation lowered in the eyes of, for example, other members of their criminal gang)
- Not have privilege or another clear defence. Statements in the Houses of the Oireachtas, for example, have absolute privilege and publishing them cannot give rise to a libel action. Similarly, judges may not be sued for anything they say in court cases

Besides privilege, other main defences to a claim of libel are:

- Justification – that the defamatory statement is true, although the onus is then on the publisher to prove this
- Fair comment – which broadly means criticism made in good faith and without malice on matters of public interest. Fair comment is the principle which allows newspapers, for example, to criticise politicians or the civil service

Bear in mind that just because something has already been published elsewhere does not make it legally sound. Repetition of a defamatory remark can give rise to a separate legal action – and the complainant may sue everybody who repeats the libel.

Defamation is possible not only in text but also in photographs and graphics. For example, one senior barrister settled a High Court action against a TV station for an undisclosed amount after it used a photograph of her car in a story about drunk drivers. So care must also be taken in what images are used online.

Copyright, intellectual property

Be wary of republishing content from other sources. Copyright applies to almost all content published elsewhere, such as in newspapers and other websites. Individuals or organisations cannot copyright an idea as such, but they can copyright the particular expression of that idea – the words, graphs, tables, images or sounds that express the idea.

Copyright legislation affects editorial content on Maynooth University websites in two main ways. The first is that the site's content is protected by copyright legislation. If you believe that the content copyright of the university itself or that of staff members is being infringed somewhere outside the website, please inform the web team.

The second obligation is to avoid breaching the copyright of others. This means that any piece of content which is not the intellectual property of Maynooth University can only be published with the express permission of the copyright owner.

Among the main ways that content may be republished are:

- **Rewrites:** A substantial rewrite avoids copyright problems because you have now expressed the ideas differently.
- **Short extracts:** Quoting a short portion of a copyright work may be considered "fair dealing" in copyright law. An example would be to use key results from a survey in one of your reports or studies or in a news piece. Make sure that the statistics are correct and that your report credits the source.
- **Substantial republication:** If you do intend to publish a substantial amount of content from another organisation you must first obtain permission (though this may not be required for *some* information of public sector organisations – see next subsection about "Re-use of public information"). Also ask the copyright owner how the content should be attributed.

Various types of original work are protected by copyright law. This means that someone who creates a text, graphic, photograph, video or soundtrack has certain rights over that material. These rights are similar in some ways to ownership of an object, and are often referred to as "intellectual property" rights.

So always bear in mind that copyright does not relate just to text. Images, music, software and databases are protected by the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000. A component part of multimedia or a video such as its soundtrack may contain music whose copyright belongs to someone else.

Copyright may belong to an individual, or to a company. If a work is created by an employee, it is customary for copyright in that work to belong to the employer. This is not always the case, however. If in doubt, check.

The owner of copyright may "assign" the right, selling it to another person or company that in turn becomes the copyright owner. Alternatively, the owner may license the right, permitting another to reproduce the work, but retaining ownership.

Re-use of public sector information

Government departments, local authorities and many state bodies in Ireland are covered by Directive 2003/98/EC on the re-use of public sector information. (Third-level colleges are not defined in this context as public sector, so the directive does not apply to re-use of the university's own information.)

Under the directive you may be entitled to re-use publicly available information from certain public sector organisations. For more about which organisations is covered and how their information can be re-used, either contact the organisation directly or go to <http://psi.gov.ie>

Breaches

You cannot "assume" that a copyright holder "won't mind" you reproducing substantial pieces of their work. You must always obtain their express permission to use it.

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

A clear example of a breach of copyright would involve cutting and pasting, say, an article found on the Internet into a news piece for an Maynooth University website without seeking permission or crediting the source of the information.

Copyright applies to almost all content published elsewhere, from newspapers and magazines to articles in academic journals and even personal websites and blogs. It applies to images, charts and graphics as well as to words. It applies to material in hard copy, online or in other media such as radio.

To infringe a copyright holder's rights, a "**substantial**" **portion of the work** must be reproduced without permission. The Copyright Act 2000 does not define "substantial" portions. It is probably safe to quote relatively short passages from a long work, duly credited to the original author(s). If in any doubt, check with the web team.

If you want to use any substantial content that you have not written yourself, you must satisfy yourself that either Maynooth University holds the copyright, or:

- The university has concluded an agreement to use the content
- The party that has licensed to the university has full rights to do so
- The content is being used in accordance with that agreement. For example, that the current usage is within the agreed time period
- The content is properly attributed

When permission is granted, there may be limits on how the content is used. Permission may include conditions about how the content is **attributed** to the copyright owner. A typical attribution line might read: *Reproduced by permission of The Irish Times* or *Photo credit: NASA*. Do not alter these attribution lines unless you know that you are allowed to do so.

External services

External services that supply information for Maynooth University to use internally may not necessarily permit that information to be republished. Often it is very unlikely that permission to republish will be included.

One typical example is a press cuttings service that provides the communications department of an organisation with copies of articles about the organisation or its field of operations. The provision of the information does not automatically include permission to republish, either internally (on, say, an intranet) or externally on the Internet.

To overcome such difficulties, newspapers in Ireland require the clients of these cuttings services to take out a copyright licence. Further details are available on www.newspaperlicensing.ie.

Image copyright

Particular care is needed if you handle photographs or other images for use on Maynooth University websites. In addition to the general rules on copyright above, you must remember the following points.

The Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000 reverses the previous situation, where someone who commissioned a photograph became the copyright owner. Under the 2000 Acts, professional photographers still retain ownership of an image even though they may have been commissioned and paid a fee to take the picture.

The photographer can then license the right to use the photograph or image. The licensing to the client may be for a single usage or multiple usages of the image, usually for a period of a year. The photographer may also assign all rights permanently, as noted above.

It is important that anyone using a photograph or image on an Maynooth University website knows what rights are attached to it. When using archived or stock images, always ensure that the university has permission to use them. Full information about an image should be stored in the internal fields within the image file and kept up to date. These fields have slots for caption, copyright and usage information. They can be viewed and edited using applications such as Adobe Photoshop or the free software IrfanView⁸.

See also guidelines on "Commissioning photographs for online use" in the section above on "Images and video"

Public domain and creative commons

In terms of copyright and creative works, **public domain** generally refers to works whose intellectual property rights have expired, been forfeited, or are inapplicable. Examples include the works of Shakespeare and Beethoven, mathematical formulae, the inventions of Archimedes and the Bible (but note that copyright may exist in translations or new formulations of these works).

If the rights expire, the works are commonly said to be "out of copyright". For example, on 1 January 2012 copyright restrictions expired on much of James Joyce's published writings, placing them into the public domain.

Some authors will also waive some or all of their rights to their work. In recent years collaborative and content-sharing websites such as Wikipedia.org, Flickr.com and Slideshare.net have begun to make extensive use of a copyright licensing system called **Creative Commons** for their authors to grade their work and communicate which rights they reserve, and which rights they waive for the benefit of recipients or other creators.

⁸ IrfanView is available to download at: <http://www.irfanview.com>

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards


Creative Commons licences do not replace copyright, but are based upon it and use a grading system to make the rights easier to understand. While the system has been designed with the Internet in mind, it also applies to non-digital and offline work.

Creative Commons licences consist of four major “condition modules”:

- Attribution (BY), requiring attribution to the original author
- Share Alike (SA), allowing derivative works under the same or a similar licence
- Non-Commercial (NC), requiring that the work is not used for commercial purposes
- No Derivative Works (ND), allowing only the original work, without derivatives

These modules are then combined to form six major licence types:

Licence type	What it allows you to do
 Attribution (CC BY)	Distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the author for the original creation. The most accommodating of the licences.
 Attribution Share Alike (CC BY-SA)	Remix, tweak, and build upon the work even for commercial purposes, as long as you credit the author and license your new creations under the identical terms.
 Attribution No Derivatives (CC BY-ND)	Redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, as long as the work is passed along unchanged and in whole, with the author credited.
 Attribution Non-Commercial (CC BY-NC)	Remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially. Although your new works must also acknowledge the author and be non-commercial, you don't have to license your derivative works on the same terms.
 Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike (CC BY-NC-SA)	Remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as you credit the author and license their new creations under the identical terms.

 <p>Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND)</p>	<p>Allows you to download the works and share them with others as long as you credit the author, and you cannot change them in any way or use them commercially.</p>
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In addition, CC0 “No Rights Reserved” is used to waive copyright and database rights “to the extent you may have these rights in your work under the laws of at least one jurisdiction, even if your work is free of restrictions in others. Doing so clarifies the status of your work unambiguously worldwide and facilitates reuse.”

Creative Commons licences are sometimes used by universities as authors and publishers. For example, the UK Open University’s OpenLearn initiative uses the CC BY-NC-SA licence for its materials. A growing number of educational institutions have also adopted **Open Educational Resources (OER)** – learning materials that are freely available to use, remix, and redistribute⁹.

If you wish to re-use content from the Internet such as images or videos that have a Creative Commons (CC) licence, make sure you understand exactly what the type of licence entitles you to do with it.

Disability legislation

Web accessibility means making a website usable by as many people as possible, regardless of ability or disability. This is a matter of fairness and equality, makes good sense in terms of usability, and is both Irish government and EU policy. But it is also a matter of law.

The Disability Act 2005 is a positive action measure designed to advance and underpin the participation of people with disabilities in everyday life. The National Disability Authority (www.nda.ie) is responsible for codes of practice for the legislation. These include guidance on website accessibility.

Official Languages Act

The Official Languages Act 2003 places legal obligations on State and public bodies to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. Among the university’s goals under the current scheme are to have more bilingual content online and to increase the amount of online forms available in Irish.

⁹ For OER case studies, see http://wiki.creativecommons.org/OER_Case_Studies

Note that under the Act, **requests for information** – including emails or submissions via online forms on Maynooth University websites – must be replied to in the language in which it was written, English or Irish.

Other legislation relevant to web publishing

Employment Equality Act (1998)

- Employment of persons with disabilities
- Provision of accessible technologies to employees
- Making information about job opportunities accessible

Equality Act (2004)

- Reasonable accommodation: undue hardship

Equal Status Act

- Categorises discrimination under nine grounds, one of which is disability
- Reasonable accommodation: case law

Data protection laws and regulations

- Govern what can be done with personal information, and how it is collected
- For example, any email addresses collected via www.maynoothuniversity.ie must never be used for unsolicited commercial communications (“spam”). You must always obtain people’s consent for any secondary uses of their personal data
- The Data Protection Commissioner has also provided guidance¹⁰ on the use of persistent cookies, saying that “websites placing cookies on user equipment that are not deleted when the user leaves their website must identify a means of obtaining user consent”

Freedom of Information Acts (1997, 2003)

- All FOI requests must be processed under the FOI Act as amended

Court rules

Court rules limit what can be published about court proceedings and how it may be recorded. For example, it is generally considered inappropriate to comment publicly on an ongoing case (it is said to be

¹⁰ http://www.dataprotection.ie/documents/guidance/Electronic_Communications_Guidance.pdf

"sub judice" – Latin for "under judgment"), as it may interfere with due process. Some proceedings may be held "in camera", which means many details may not be published, even when the case is concluded.

Further reading

To learn more about defamation, copyright and other legal issues see:

- The Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000:
<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2000/en/act/pub/0028/index.html>
- The Copyright Association of Ireland's useful FAQs about copyright:
http://www.cai.ie/?page_id=11
- Andrea Martin, "Quick Win Media Law Ireland" (Oak Tree Press, 2011) ISBN 9781904887461
- Creative Commons licences: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses>
- The National Disability Authority's IT accessibility guidelines: <http://accessit.nda.ie>
- The Data Protection Commissioner's website, which includes introductory guides for "data controllers", those who collect personal data and who are subject to the Data Protection Act:
<http://www.dataprotection.ie>

Appendix A: checkpoints for plain English

The following checklist is based on the National Adult Literacy Agency's "Plain English Guidelines"¹¹.

1. Be personal

Consider your reader's needs and use "we" and "you" where you can.

2. Use active verbs

Be direct to make your message clearer. For example, use, "We will decide on your application soon" instead of "A decision on your application will be made soon."

3. Have an average of 15 to 20 words in each sentence

Keep sentences manageable. Longer sentences are sometimes acceptable, but only if they contain no more than two distinct points and are punctuated correctly.

4. Avoid jargon – use everyday words

Avoid complicated words or jargon if more familiar words and phrases would do. If you must use specialised terms, define them.

5. Avoid Latin and French expressions

Use "for example" instead of "e.g.", and "that is" instead of "i.e." try to use English equivalents of "pro rata", "inter alia", "in lieu" and similar phrases.

6. Define unfamiliar abbreviations and acronyms

If in doubt, spell out – your reader may not be familiar with the abbreviations and acronyms the university and departments use every day.

7. Remove unnecessary words and phrases

¹¹ For full version, see the PDF at:

http://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/Plain%20English%20guidelines%20at%20a%20glance_1.pdf

Avoid padding. For example, use “before” instead of “in advance of”, “because” instead of “owing to the fact that” and “if” instead of “in the event that”.

8. Avoid nominalisations (nouns made from verbs)

Focus on actions. For example, use “consider” instead of “consideration”, “establish” instead of “establishment” and “discuss” instead of “discussion”.

9. Be consistent with terms

Use the same term for something throughout your document to avoid confusing your reader. For example, if you call something a plan, do not later call it a strategy.

10. Break up dense text

Aim to use informative sub-headings, question-and-answer formats and bullet point lists to break up long or complicated passages of text.

11. Make use of colour and graphics

If appropriate, use colour and appropriate images and photographs. However, keep colours fairly muted and avoid putting text over detailed background images.

12. Use eye-friendly formatting

Only use sentence case bold for emphasis and headings. Block capitals, long phrases in italics and underlining all tend to distort the shape of words, so making them harder to read. Capitals can also make it seem you are SHOUTING AT YOUR READER.

Appendix B: checkpoints for web content

Checkpoint for each page	✓ or X
Make the content easy to scan quickly	
Does the main headline on the page draw users in to read more?	
Do the headline and first paragraph give the main point of what the page is about? <i>Again, provide a good hook at the start of the piece to draw readers in</i>	
Is every sentence as brief and to-the-point as it can be?	
Does the page use "chunking" techniques? <i>Use short paragraphs, bulleted lists and subheads to break up long passages of text</i>	
Does the most important link text stand out in the body of the page? <i>Does the link text focus on the 2-4 words of key information for the user to zoom in on quickly (for example, "Download the student prospectus and read about..." rather than "Download the student prospectus and read about..."), and not use "Click here" as link text</i>	
Make it easy to read	
Does the content use a natural, conversational tone? <i>"We" and "you" where appropriate (informal – but not too "chatty")</i>	
Does it refer to the university, department or organisational unit in the singular? <i>"Maynooth University is...", "The Department has..." (or use techniques such as "At Maynooth University, we...")</i>	
Are the sentences short (up to 20 words or so)?	
Do they use passive verbs when active verbs would be better?	
Do all headings (including subheads) use sentence case?	

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

<i>Not ALL CAPS or Capitalising The Start Of Each Word</i>	
Provide value to the reader	
Does the page support the tasks that the website visitor wants to do?	
Is the information accurate, authoritative and up-to-date?	
Does the page include calls to action – particularly the text around links?	
<i>"Find out, download, learn about, read about, discover, apply, contact..."</i>	

Avoid any other obstacles to the reader	
Does the page use plain English?	
<i>Avoid acronyms and (at higher levels of the site) technical jargon, and bear in mind that the site's language may not be the first language of some visitors</i>	
Does it follow Maynooth University's house rules for content?	
<i>Does the page follow the preferred way for referring to the university, numbers, dates, and any other style rules you may have?</i>	
Does it keep a consistent style for formatting?	
<i>For example, in bulleted lists and paragraphing</i>	
Does the page avoid typographical obstacles such as italics, underlined text (if it isn't a link), all caps or too much bold?	
Is the page accessible?	
<i>In particular, do all images in the page have alternative text – "Alt" tags?</i>	
Has the text been proofed?	
<i>Has a second person read it, and have you given it one final check for grammar, spelling, punctuation and the right style of capitalisation?</i>	
Have you done a link check of every link within the piece?	

Maynooth University - Internet Publishing Policies and Standards

Make sure the content is effective in other pages <i>Think about how the page's content might appear in search results pages</i>	
Does the page have a strong metadata Title, which includes key words and phrases? <i>The Title will form the headline in a search results page – so it may be the first thing a potential visitor will see</i>	
Does the metadata Description have a good summary of what the page is about? <i>This is often used in a search results page too</i>	
Has the page's URL been optimised for search?	