

COURSE OUTLINE ON WRITING FOR THE INTERNET

Length of Session: 50 mins 10 - 20 mins for Q&A.

Introduction

Writing for the web is:

- **Brief - Gets to the point:** think of how long you'd want to read a text on your phones or mobile devices.
- **Clear:** avoid jargon, local expressions, and long or complex sentences
- **Accurate:** Remember that it's easy for any reader online to check your facts and sources instantly.
- **Comprehensible On Level:** aim at the general public - assume a 10th grade education

This session we will focus on writing **factual** articles. That means you will **not** be writing about your opinions. We will look at these elements of writing for the web in this session:

1. Structure of web writing
2. The language of web writing
3. The process of web writing

Part One: Structure of writing

Writing for the web is similar to academic papers and other forms of writing. An article for the web has three main parts:

Lead, also know as thesis in academic writing:

Basic facts: "Five Ws" of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, and Why and a sixth one: How, as needed.

Use an anecdote, a small story that readers can relate to.

Supporting paragraphs

Additional details - Associated people or places

Quotes from sources -

a quote should be easy to understand and relevant

Quotes should come from:

An expert

A voice of authority

A person directly associated with story

Statistics - the numbers that support the information in the story

Background information - previous actions or events

Conclusion or Ending

What is the one point do you want readers to remember?

The conclusion may summarize the main point of the story.

An example from a VOA LE article:

Nairobi's Famed Matatu Graffiti Is Back

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/content/nairobi-matatu/2630072.html>

Lede: Five Ws and H

For the last 10 years, the Kenyan government banned any painting on "matatus" --- large public taxis in the capital, Nairobi. The vehicles could only have an identical single, yellow line, or stripe. Recently, however, the President of Kenya ended the ban on matatu art.

Who: President of Kenya - Kenyan government

Where: Capital - Nairobi

What: He lifted a ban on paintings on "matatus"

When: Ban was on for last ten years

Why: Attempt to control industry

How: Presidential power

Supporting paragraphs:

Details: What is on the taxis?

"What we look for, it's the trending things, like movies, musicians and so on. Sometimes we draw pictures of 50 Cent, because guys out there like 50 Cent. A customer may come and say, 'I want mine to have a logo of Puma, Facebook, Adidas, and so on, because it's what he likes.'"

Quotes: What do people involved in the story say?

Expert voice: Artist Nyash

Voice of authority: Kanoru Wambugu is the chief officer of the Matatu Owners Association.

Statistics: How do numbers help tell the story?

There are more than 10,000 matatus in Nairobi alone.

Nyash says owners pay up to \$1,000 for his art.

Background Information: What happened before?

Mr. Wambugu says the matatu industry is better supervised than it used to be. He says there are graffiti rules to make sure that the painting on matatus does not offend people.

Conclusion: Take-away idea

Nyash says he is doing his best to honor the new rules and urges other matatu artists to do the same. But, he says there will be violations, like illegally colored windows and flashing lights. After all, he says, they just look nice. And with over 10,000 moving artworks in Nairobi, who can resist?

Part Two: Language of Web Writing

Use the active voice where possible

Active voice: Recently, however, the President of Kenya ended the ban on matatu art. (12 words)

Passive Voice: Recently, however, the ban on matatu art was lifted by the President of Kenya. (14 words)

Passive sentences can sound boring and may leave out information. Writers use the passive voice when it is not clear who did an action: *The train was bombed.*

Use simple sentence structure

Avoid embedded clauses and meta-commentary.

Example: *Nyash says his themes represent Kenyan pop culture.*

(*Not: Images in Nyash's work are representative of themes in Kenyan and American pop culture.*)

Keep paragraphs short

Each paragraph should have one idea. Write one or two sentences per paragraph.

Example: *Now, taxi drivers have begun the battle for the finest paintings on their vehicles.*

Eliminate unnecessary words

Go back after writing and see if you can make your sentence shorter by getting rid of extra words.

Wordy: The teacher demonstrated some of the various ways and methods for cutting words from my essay that I had written for class.

(22 words)

Concise: The teacher demonstrated methods for cutting words from my essay.

(10 words)

Part three: Process Writing

The first draft you write is the beginning of a *process*. That process involves sharing your work with a peer, getting feedback, and revising it. For our purposes, we recommend that you form a group to help each other with this process and use the checklist to evaluate your peers. This will help you improve your writing skills at the same time you help and learn from others.

Use this checklist for evaluating writing

- Lead** paragraph gives basic information
- Supporting paragraphs** provide details, quotes, numbers, or background
- Sources** are properly attributed
- Conclusion** makes writer's point clearly or summarizes the story
- Language** is simple and direct

How to form and conduct a peer support group

Choose people...

- In your school, you can meet with peers in person or over email

Agree on deadlines

- Deadline 1: Send your article to the group (*Example: Send by Sunday night (date)*)

- Deadline 2: Respond to another group member's article - using the checklist (*Example: Respond by the following Saturday afternoon*)

Send your writing to the group

- Decide: will everyone read every group member's writing or will one person read one person's writing?

Respond to the writing

- Use the checklist
- Give positive feedback - say what is good
- Suggest a change by using highlighting and track changes in Word or inserting comments.

Revise

- Use Word's track changes to show what you have changed or provide the original on one page along with the revised version on another page.
- Read your revised work aloud to see how it sounds

Send for another edit

- Return your writing to your group for a second edit, if time allows.

Submit article for the contest

- Revise and submit to VOA for contest
- If your group agrees, choose the *best* one or two articles from your group to send to VOA for the contest

Contest rules:

- Participants submit a nonfiction news or feature article of 1000 words or less
- Sources of information are included with the article (these do not count in the word limit)
- Article is in electronic format and has been edited by a peer and grammar and spell-checked

Awards:

Three awards will be given: first, second, and third prize. All of the winning entries will be:

- Published on VOA Learning English website
- Published on the US Embassy's American Resource Center website

Certificates will be awarded by the ARC.

Possible writing topics for the contest

Innovations at My School
The Biggest Controversy in My Town
The Hardest Job in Town (Personal profile)

How Technology is Changing Teaching
Meet a Good Neighbor (Personal profile)
Kenya's Biggest Health/Economic Need
What Kenyan Teens are Watching/Listening to/Playing

Sources:

Journalism and Journalistic Writing

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/01/>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/735/> (Printable)

“The Associated Press Statement of News Values and Principles.”

<http://www.ap.org/company/news-values>

VOA Learning English articles:

Top Ten Cities With the World's Worst Traffic:

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/content/top-ten-cities-for-worst-traffic-jakarta-istabul-gridlock-stress-public-transportation/2665040.html>

UN Peacekeeping Report Advises Changes

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/content/united-nations-peacekeeping-review-sipri/2662149.html>

02/06/2015

Nairobi's Famed Matatu Graffiti Is Back



A recent creation from Peter Kanyallu, also known as Nyash, is a matatu dedicated to the movie "Titanic." January 26, 2015. (Hilary Heuler/VOA News)

Nairobi's Famed Matatu Graffiti Is Back

For the last 10 years, the Kenyan government banned any painting on "matatus" --- large public taxis in the capital, Nairobi. The vehicles could only have an identical single, yellow line, or stripe. Recently, however, the President of Kenya ended the ban on matatu art.

Now, taxi drivers have begun the battle for the finest paintings on their vehicles.

Peter Kanyallu, also known as Nyash, grew up in a poor area of Nairobi. When he was young he started making the urban art known as **graffiti** – painted pictures and words on public surfaces, like walls and bridges.

The 29-year-old says he never outgrew his **passion** for the work. However, these days he gets paid for it. And now his art reaches even more people.

Nyash paints matatus. His most recent work includes a bright pink bus painted with images and words from the American movie "Titanic." Another work is all about the shoe company Puma.

Nyash says his themes represent Kenyan pop culture.

"What we look for, it's the trending things, like movies, musicians and so on. Sometimes we draw pictures of 50 Cent, because guys out there like 50 Cent. A customer may come and say, 'I want mine to have a logo of Puma, Facebook, Adidas, and so on, because it's what he likes.'"

Nairobi's matatus were once famous -- or infamous -- for wild driving, loud music and equally loud artwork. Many were also run by organized crime groups, or **cartels**.

In 2004, matatu art was banned as part of a government attempt to restrain the industry. The driving skills of operators did not improve much, and the cartels were not disappearing. But the art was gone from the vehicles.

Now it is coming back. There are more than 10,000 matatus in Nairobi alone. A growing number are painted with pictures of movie stars. There are also words painted on many of the vehicles like, "nuclear," "hurricane" and "repent." One matatu displays the mysterious phrase: "appetizer undecided."

Nyash says owners pay up to \$1,000 for his art. He says the colorful matatus get more customers.

"Owners really enjoy those matatus. It's like a competition. The most decorated, you always find them on top."

Kanoru Wambugu is the chief officer of the Matatu Owners Association. He says whatever appeals to the youth is good for business.

"Young people want to get associated with matatus. The students, the young people and the people in the lower classes do not own cars, and therefore they are going to use them. That's our target."

He also says matatus give young artists like Nyash the rare chance to make some money for their skills.

"That's what we want, those young people to draw. The moment they design those vehicles they are getting their **upkeep**, and you are going to reduce crime."

Mr. Wambugu says the matatu industry is better supervised than it used to be. He says there are graffiti rules to make sure that the painting on matatus does not offend people.

"We want something that is not insulting, that is not inciting. It does not have any beer-related issues or alcohol promotion. We do not want to have **pornography**. We do not want to have things like promotion of war and violence."

Nyash says he is doing his best to honor the new rules and urges other matatu artists to do the same. But, he says there will be violations, like illegally colored windows and **flashing** lights.

After all, he says, they just look nice. And with over 10,000 moving artworks in Nairobi, who can resist?

I'm Marsha James.

Hilary Heuler reported this story. Marsha James wrote it for Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor.

Words in this Story

graffiti – *n.* pictures or words painted or drawn on a wall, building

passion – *n.* a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something

cartel – *n.* a group of businesses that agree to fix prices so they all will make more money

upkeep – *n.* the process of keeping something in good condition: the care or maintenance of buildings, equipment, etc.

pornography – *n.* pictures, magazines that show or describe naked people or sex in a very open and direct way in order to cause sexual excitement

flashing – *v.* to shine or give off bright light suddenly or in repeated bursts

Have you ever made graffiti art? Does it color city life in a good way or does it violate public space? Tell us what you think in the comments section.

Dictionary word lookup v2

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/content/nairobi-matatu/2630072.html>