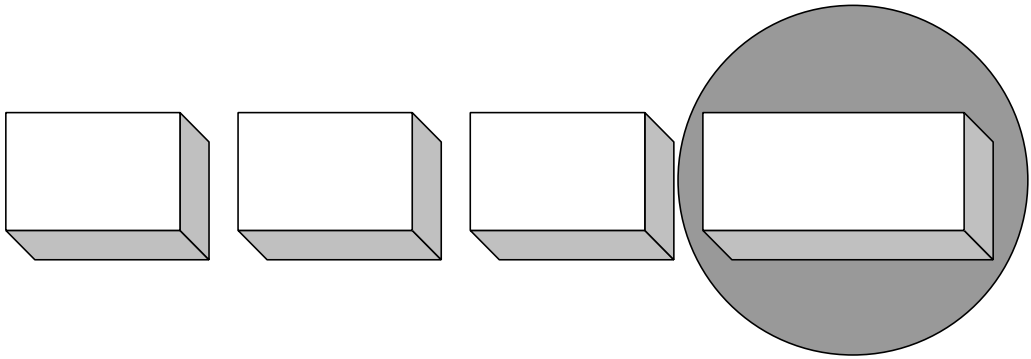


Within a Sentence, Make the Link the Emphatic Element



BACKGROUND |

Put the most important item last

If you are embedding links within your text, rather than gathering them into lists or menus, then you face the challenge of writing the actual sentences that contain the links. In an English sentence, we habitually stress the last phrase. So put your link last where it plays a double role as a link and a clincher.

There are three ways to revise a first draft to make the key idea end the sentence:

- Trim the end, getting rid of unnecessary rambling.
- Move less important information to the left.
- Move the important stuff to the right.

Of course, on the Web, the important information is the link.

The hyperlinks stand out by virtue of being colored, so they should be written to do double duty as highlighted keywords. Highlight only key information-carrying words. (Sun, 2000)

Putting important words in positions in a sentence that normally get relatively heavy stress can help provide emphasis; so sometimes can repetition and redundancy.

—Kenneth Wilson, *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English*

Don't disrupt your sentence

Because any link draws attention to itself, a link placed in the middle of the sentence tends to take over, rendering the continuation of the sentence ineffectual.

If authors want to place links inside sentences, they should place them at the end of the sentence where they will least disrupt the syntax of the sentence. Notice how the embedded link...immediately grabs the reader's attention. (Spyridakis, 2000)

Move links to the beginning or end of the paragraph

"Too many links within a block of text can disrupt continuity and understanding," notes IBM in its Web guidelines. Solution: move links to the beginning or end of the paragraph.

If you put the link at the start of the paragraph, consider the rest of the paragraph a gloss on the target, explaining what it offers. Otherwise, put the sentence with the link at the tail end of the paragraph and make the link its last phrase.

EXAMPLES

Before

As a member of this discussion list, you have legal rights, and so do other members, so you may not defame, abuse, harass, stalk, threaten, or otherwise violate their rights.

After

As a member of this discussion list, you may not defame, abuse, harass, stalk, threaten or otherwise violate another person's legal rights.

Before

You can personalize your welcome page by clicking the Personalize button at the top right, and then entering your ZIP code and favorite stocks, to get headlines for your area, and the latest prices. This personalized information appears in the center of the page.

After

You can personalize the center of your welcome page by adding headlines for your area and the latest prices on your stocks. You just need to tell us your ZIP code and favorite stocks. Ready to personalize?

Before

The Knowledge Schema is a list of particular topics relating to the effort to re-engineer our business processes. The schema, then, is a set of categories of information—broad topics of interest to change managers. For instance, the topics of benchmarking, change management, leadership, and teamwork appear within the Knowledge Schema as individual categories in the List of Topics.

After

When you want to look up information about a particular topic relating to the effort to re-engineer our business processes, you should turn to our Knowledge Schema. The schema is a set of categories of information—broad topics of interest to change managers. For instance, the topics of benchmarking, change management, leadership, and teamwork appear within the Knowledge Schema as individual categories in the List of Topics.

AUDIENCE FIT

If visitors want this...

TO HAVE FUN

How well does this guideline apply?

Hey, breaking up a sentence with a link might be a kick. Then again, why throw people out of your sentence before you're through?

TO LEARN

Good practice, just because this way your links are less distracting. Also, students don't leave the room until they know what the link will contain.

TO ACT

Users have itchy click fingers. Make sure they know what the link will do before you give them something to click.

TO BE AWARE

This approach is calmer than throwing links into the middle of the sentence, so take a deep breath and rewrite.

TO GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE

This way of handling links seems natural, so in an e-mail or discussion message you might just end your sentence, press Return, and put the link in its own line. Then it's easier to copy and paste into the address line of the browser or to click as a separate hot spot.

See: Bricklin (1998), IBM (1999), Levine (1997), Nielsen (1997b), Spyridakis (2000), Sun (2000), Williams (1990).

For your review only.

Excerpt from *Hot Text: Web Writing that Works*.
(New Riders).

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