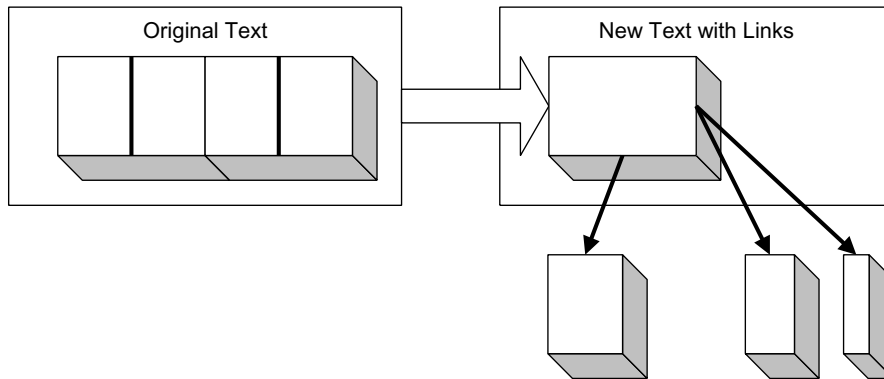# Move Vital but Tangential or Supplemental Material

BACKGROUND |

If most people know it, move it

To let your readers know that you, too, belong to their community, mention ideas they are familiar with. But even more convincing proof that you are a member of the community is what you leave out. You understand what can be taken for granted as part of the shared knowledge of the community, so you omit it.

Unfortunately, on the Web, you cannot always tell how knowledgeable a visitor may be. So you take your best guess at the audience, and, instead of omitting the basics, or the extras, you put them elsewhere on the site and link to them. That way, a beginner can find out more, an eager learner can explore at will, but the impatient or experienced visitors do not have to stumble over the material.

> If your product is complex enough that you cannot provide all the information someone needs in one presentation (and most of ours are that complex), make it easy for them to get more information.
> (Rick Levine, *Sun Guide to Web Style*)

Move the baby talk, and the esoterica

When looking for passages to pull out of your page and move to secondary pages, grab:

- Basic background
- Laborious history
- Abstract theoretical discussions
- Information of interest only to a small fraction of the audience
- Advanced arguments for the benefit of the cognoscenti
- Important topics that do not belong here

But don't just carve up a single long article into a bunch of short takes, just because you can. Downloading a bunch of little segments slows up the process of reading, and makes printing a headache.

Let's go to the sidebar

In the O.J. Simpson trial, we learned that when the prosecutor and defense lawyers huddled with the judge, they were "having a sidebar."

Magazines run extra information in boxes next to the main article, and those boxes are also called *sidebars*.

Web designers have adopted the sidebar as the place for a quick digest of a long story and links to supplementary information. Usually, the Web page sidebar shows up on the far right, near the top of the story, just below some annoying ad.

Both the summary and the links let users know what the whole story centers on, so they help people decide whether or not to bother reading on. In some cases, people like the links more than the story, and jump right to the secondary pages.

Remove the irrelevant

If users bump into irrelevant info, it blinds them to the info they want. Unnecessary info actually keeps them from finding what they are looking for.

Of course, you have to be psychic to know what information your visitors will consider most relevant. But if you can figure that out and move the rest elsewhere, visitors will voluntarily sharpen

One who uses many periods is a philosopher; many interrogations, a student; many exclamations, a fanatic.

—J. L. Basford

their focus on your ideas, understand them better, and remember more. When readers find content to be relevant, they give it more attention. So figure out what most visitors will find intriguing and relevant to their own interests, and then put any other info into a sidebar or links.

EXAMPLES

Before

Another benefit of TAPI is that it accommodates multiple applications on a single phone line. (The Telephone Application Programming Interface, or TAPI, is the standard proposed by Microsoft for making the computer work as a telephone.) TAPI lets several applications use the same phone line, so one can be waiting to receive a call while another places one. So you can leave a fax program running, waiting for a fax you know is coming, while using dial-up networking to pick up your e-mail. In the past you had to cancel the first program, to free up the modem, before you could launch a second program using the modem. With TAPI, the fax program simply recedes into the background, like background printing.

After

Another benefit of <u>TAPI</u> is that it accommodates <u>multiple applications</u> on a single phone line.

Pop-up text:
The Telephone Application Programming Interface (TAPI) is the standard proposed by Microsoft for making the computer work as a telephone.

Moved to another window:
TAPI lets several applications use the same phone line, so one can be waiting to receive a call while placing another call. So you can leave a fax program running, waiting for a fax you know is coming, while using dial-up networking to pick up your e-mail. In the past you had to cancel the first program, to free up the modem, before you could launch a second program using the modem. With TAPI, the fax program simply recedes into the background, like background printing.

Before

Following Montaigne, Emerson studies his own mind at work. He describes composing a speech by assembling a series of sentiments, facts, and illustrations that work together to fire the audience. "Every link in this living chain he found separate; one, ten years ago; one, last week; some of them he found in his father's house or at school when a boy; some of them by his losses; some of them by his sickness; some by his sins."

Montaigne's essays strengthened Emerson's conviction that he would be his own best subject, and when he reflected on the way a writer goes about creating, he recognized "a multitude of trials and a thousand rejections, and the using and perusing of what was already written." In this interest in the internal give and take, the subjective piling up of associations, he imitates Montaigne, "the grand old sloven."

After

Emerson studies his own mind at work following Montaigne. Emerson describes composing a speech as assembling a series of sentiments, facts, and illustrations drawn from different eras in his life. He calls these links a living chain.

Separate window on Montaigne's influence on Emerson:

Montaigne's essays strengthened Emerson's conviction that he would be his own best subject. When Emerson reflected on the way a writer goes about creating, he recognized "a multitude of trials and a thousand rejections, and the using and perusing of what was already written." With this interest in the internal give and take, the subjective piling up of associations, he imitates Montaigne, "the grand old sloven."

Pop-up quote:

"Every link in this living chain he found separate; one, ten years ago; one, last week; some of them he found in his father's house or at school when a boy; some of them by his losses; some of them by his sickness; some by his sins."

AUDIENCE FIT

If visitors want this...	How well does this guideline apply?
TO HAVE FUN	Jumping around can be a game in itself. But people want time to immerse themselves in your personal point of view, so give them an uncensored rant before linking out to supporting evidence, background, or additional opinions.
TO LEARN	Good teachers work hard at figuring out what ideas they must present first, second, and third—postponing the advanced ideas for later. Learning is a gradual climb up the mountain, so separate each stage of the journey, so that students can absorb it fully before moving on.
TO ACT	Pull together only what people need to carry out the immediate action. Move anything else.
TO BE AWARE	One idea at a time, even though each one connects with all the others.
TO GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE	Think of this guideline as advocating patience. Take it easy. Slow down the pace of new ideas, unless you just want to give the effect of a total brain dump.

See: Asher (1980), Baldwin, Peleg-Bruckner and McClintock (1985), Bricklin (1998), Celsi and Olson (1989), Horton (1990), Levine (1997), Morkes & Nielsen (1997b), Rajani & Rosenberg (1999), Slatin (1988), Spyridakis (2000), Stevens (1980).

For your review only.

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

theprices@theprices.com

The Prices
918 La Senda Lane, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87107