Tips for Increasing Readability

♦ Avoid cluttered displays
  - Don't be afraid of white space.
  - Use margins or padding around blocks of text.
  - Use margins or padding to prevent text from abutting images.
  - Adjust line height.

♦ Place important items consistently
  - Make sure titles and navigation elements appear in the same place on each page.
  - If used, make sure sidebars and pull-quotes appear in the same places.

♦ Don't use too many fonts
  - Use a sans serif font for body text.
  - Reserve serif fonts for headings and larger text.

    Two fonts were specifically created for on-screen use:
    Verdana and **Georgia**

    Verdana is an extremely legible and readable sans serif font that renders clearly on a computer screen even at small sizes.

    Georgia is a serif font. It renders very well on a computer screen and offers a nice "look" for headings.

♦ Use a readable font size

  - Use "ems" or "%" to declare a font size when using CSS.
  - If not using CSS, use at least a 12-point font.

    Though research indicates that smaller text gets read word-for-word rather than scanned, making your text so small that readers must squint to see the text can defeat your purpose.

    Also, keep in mind how different operating systems and different browsers may render text. Here's an image to give you some frame of reference for those differences

    (See next page.)

Windows

Times New Roman
Each typeface has a unique tone that should produce a harmonious fit between the verbal and visual flow of your content.

Georgia
Each typeface has a unique tone that should produce a harmonious fit between the verbal and visual flow of your content.

Verdana
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Arial
Each typeface has a unique tone that should produce a harmonious fit between the verbal and visual flow of your content.

Trebuchet
Each typeface has a unique tone that should produce a harmonious fit between the verbal and visual flow of your content.

Macintosh

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♦ Use upper and lower case letters

Avoid using all capital letters—even for headings.

All caps is just plain hard to read. As author Robin Williams (not the comedian) explains it in her book, *The PC Is Not a Typewriter*, "We recognize words not only by their letter groups, but also by their shapes... When a word is all caps, we have to read it letter by letter, rather than by groups of letters." These words are identifiable by their shapes…

happy sad big little

Can you see the difference with all caps?

HAPPY SAD BIG LITTLE

♦ Reserve **bold**, *italic*, and brighter colors for emphasis

Using these elements for long stretches of text causes them to lose their effectiveness—in addition to being hard on the eyes.

♦ Reserve underlining for links only

- Underlining is a holdover from the days of the typewriter. Have you ever seen a word underlined in a book or magazine? Probably not. Word processing and web publishing, like print publishing, use either bold or italic type for emphasis. You can also use color. And you can enlarge key words.

    Or simply set the text apart from the rest.

- On the web, links are underlined by default, so any underlined text will automatically be identified as such. Avoid confusing your readers by reserving this embellishment for links only.

♦ Use contrasting text and background colors
- Dark text on a very light background works best.
- Black on white is the most readable.

♦ "Chunk" your content

- Keep pages as short as possible without sacrificing continuity. Provide a print option for longer pages.
- Make sure that blocks of text on a page are not too long or too wide. (Keep line length to 2 times the length of the alphabet of the same font and font size of your content. Maximum width: 80 characters.)
- Break up text with sub headings, sidebars, pull-quotes and similar devices for emphasis.
- Use lists to display itemized strings of text

♦ Tips for increasing retention of information
- Use text for presenting facts.
- Use multi-media graphic formats for new, unfamiliar, and conceptual information
- Use both animation and text to explain processes or procedures.

Though these tips don't strictly fall under the subject of readability, they are nonetheless important when constructing an online course. We want our students to not only read, but retain, the information we spent so much time and effort to prepare.