

Tech Ease 4 All

Writing for the Web and People with Low Literacy

Jakob Nielsen is a respected usability expert whose research has focused on all aspects of web usability, including how people read online content. In his Alertbox column (<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/>), Nielsen reported on research showing how people with low literacy read content on the Web. According to Nielsen, people with low literacy “plow” through the content, reading it one line at a time. Based on this finding, he suggested the following guidelines to make online content easier to understand for people with low literacy:

- Simplify the text so that the most important content is in a single column rather than split up across several sections of the page.
- Ensure the reading level is appropriate. Nielsen recommends a 6th grade reading level for the home page and other important sections of the site.
- Place the most important information at the top of the page, in the area “above the fold.” The fold is the part of the page that is visible without scrolling when the page first loads.
- Avoid moving or changing text, such as text that appears on a flyout menu with multiple levels.

DEMOS	
MENUS	
LAYOUTS	Fixed 1
BOXES	Fixed 2
MOZILLA	Fixed 3
EXPLORER	Fixed 4
OPACITY	minimum width

This text may not appear on screen long enough for someone with low literacy to understand it. Furthermore, the use of flyout menus may cause usability problems for people with motor impairments, because interacting with this kind of menu requires quite a bit of skill. A better option is to make sure all navigation is available on the screen all at once, allowing the person viewing the page to have sufficient time to read it at their own pace.

For additional tutorials, please visit our website at <http://etc.usf.edu/techease/4all/>.