

UIS Office of Web Services

Best Practices for UIS Web Sites and Multimedia Production

At this point in the development of the Internet, there are many conventions and standards that have been agreed upon by professional Internet-related organizations and Web developers.

If you are not a professional Web developer, you may not be aware of these conventions. It will be helpful for you to read and follow these guidelines:

- **CSS:** Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) are now recognized as the industry standard for page layout and style. The official UIS Web Site Templates are constructed with CSS.
- **Document Structure:** Use Heading tags, bulleted or numbered lists, and a consistent structure for your text.
- **Tables:** Limit the use of tables in Web sites. When using tables, make line-by-line reading sensible. Do not use nested tables (a table inside a table).
- **Images and Animations:** Use the *Alt* attribute to write a text description of each visual element.
- **Multimedia:** Provide text alternatives for audio and video.
- **Hypertext Links:** Use text that makes sense when read out of context. For example, in this sentence, “Click here to download our Student Handbook,” do not make the words “click here” the link. Make “Student Handbook” the link; or, make the entire sentence a link.

Do not underline words on web pages unless they are hot links. When a word is underlined on the Web, users think it is a clickable link. Instead of underlining, use Heading tags, boldface, and spacing to make words and phrases stand out.

- **Meta Tags:** All of our official Web Site Templates include Meta Tags embedded in the hidden code of the Web pages. Users do not see them, but they are very important to search engines like Google. They help search engines find your Web pages in a Web search. There are two particularly important Meta Tags: Description and Keywords; these include a 25-word description of the site and 8to10 separate words that describe the content.

- **Page Titles:** Always put a Page Title on each web page. The Page Title appears in the top bar of an Internet Browser window and is used by search engines like Google to locate Web pages. The standard UIS format for Page Titles is:

Name of Page – Name of Department – University of Illinois Springfield – UIS.

- **Email Links:** An email link may be embedded with code (i.e., a *Mailto* tag) to make it automatically open an email application, but it should also be written out. We should always include the text of the actual email address in addition to making a person's name "hot" – That way, users who do not have an email application like Outlook configured on their computer, can write down the email address and use it later with their email client (like Yahoo and other web based email programs).
- **Word Documents as Downloads:** Except in rare instances, you should not include a Word document as a link on your Web site. Here at UIS, we all use Word. But many home users do not have this application. You should convert Word documents to HTML pages or PDF files for use on your Web site.
- **PDF Files as Downloads:** Use PDF appropriately. Whenever possible, put content into regular HTML Web pages. Never put hot news or other important info into a PDF file unless absolutely necessary. PDF files should be used for large documents such as a Student Handbook, or for "pretty" documents like brochures which cannot be easily transferred to Web pages. When you have a link to a PDF file, be sure to put a note in parens beside the link. For example, "Click here to download our Student Handbook (pdf)."
- **File Size of Images:** A Web page, particularly a home page, should be no more than 60 K total file size for all pictures and information - then it will download in less than 30 seconds on a modem, and that is our target. If a page contains many images, try to keep the file sizes around 20 K each if possible.
- **Physical Size of Images:** As a general rule, web page images should have a resolution of 72 pixels per inch, and measure a maximum of 300 pixels wide by a maximum of 300 pixels high. The larger the physical size of an image, the larger the file size, and the longer it takes to download.

Use a professional image editor, such as *Adobe Photoshop*, for best results when editing images.

- **Don't Recreate Content:** A very basic and important principle of website development is the notion of Ownership.

This concept often trips up Print-oriented producers of information. In Print, we do not have the capability of Hyperlinking as we do on the web. Unlike print, on the web we should always LINK to any information produced by official owners

of information, rather than recreate it.

We always want to let the Owners of information create and maintain their own web page content. Owners of information are the correct people to make sure the content is always accurate.

If we link to their information rather than recreate it, then we never have to worry about the accuracy of the information.

This also eliminates the possibility of two different versions of the same material appearing on the UIS website. Differing versions create confusion, cause mistakes, and can even threaten UIS reaccreditation.

UIS Links:

UIS Office of Web Services: <http://www.uis.edu/webservices/>

UIS Campus Web Policy: <http://www.uis.edu/webpolicy>

Related Links:

World Wide Web Consortium: <http://www.w3.org/>

Usability and Web Design: <http://www.useit.com/>

Web AIM Guide to Web Accessibility: <http://www.webaim.org/>