



*Mansfield Independent School District*

# 2015 Web Style Guide

Campus & Department Web Managers



Communications & Marketing

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## INTRODUCTION

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Thank you for your willingness to work as your school's Campus Web Content Manager. It is a critical role that further links the District to some of its most important stakeholders. Whether it's searching for contact information or learning more about what's going on at your campus, many people will check a web page before picking up a phone. Because of this increased reliance on the web as a source of information, it is important that all of our websites reinforce the District's brand, are up to date and hold relevant information.

The following manual was developed to prepare you for the responsibilities of Web Content Manager by providing you with current web standards and best design practices essential to developing and maintaining successful and effective websites.

The Web Services Department encourages you to take pride in your campus website and ownership of its content. We will offer training, resources and other assistance to guide you along the way. By working together, we can increase visitors to our website, drive parent engagement and build a greater sense of campus continuity.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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Web Services is a division of the MISD Communications and Marketing Department. In Spring 2012, Web Services deployed a Content Management System (CMS) as the official tool and platform for all of its web pages.

With the launch of the new District and campus websites built with a Content Management System, maintaining a consistent look is easier to create and sustain. Through this new intuitive interface, we can:

- Provide a consistent base for all pages,
- Minimize confusion for new visitors,
- Maximize the efficiency of future visits,
- Ease updating allowing nearly anyone to edit pages

MISD Web Services:

- Provides and maintains online content for Mansfield ISD and designs and manages the structure of the district and campus websites.
- Supports campus websites and other web initiatives through the development of standards, guidelines, best practices and training.
- Maintains district web pages with the assistance of directors or appropriate designees. *Note:* In some cases, department web content managers maintain web pages.

- Supports K-12 campus websites with updated district links and information as well as direct site updates on an as-needed basis. Campus Web Content Managers/Campus Webmasters are responsible for the routine maintenance of campus websites. *Note: Teacher web pages may be created using external website creation tools suggested by Technology.*

## RESPONSIBILITIES

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Campus Web Content Managers are principal-appointed, full-time MISD employees that are responsible for the routine maintenance and upkeep of their school website. Content managers will report to the school principal and are required to adhere to the District's style guidelines overseen by the Director of Web Services.

The District's Web Services division will provide training and supporting documents and may make brief audits of school websites. Each school principal is responsible for the content on his or her campus website and may ask to review your work before publishing it. However, in many cases, the principal will trust the judgment of the designated appointee.

### *Web Content Manager Responsibilities:*

- Create and manage content on a weekly basis for the school's website including, but not limited to, announcements, campus news, calendar events and helpful resources for students, parents and staff.
- Collaborate with various personnel for site content updates.
- Edit and proofread all content prior to posting it on the Web.
- Perform detailed quality assurance checks on campus web pages (i.e. – broken links, accurate information, misspelled words, incorrect grammar, etc.)
- Attend training sessions provided by Web Services as required or needed. *Note: There is only one required training session per year; usually held during Professional Development Week and two mandatory visits with the Director during the fall and spring.*

## APPROPRIATE CONTENT & COPYRIGHT ISSUES

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Mansfield ISD is a public entity; therefore, Webmasters/Content Managers must be very careful to avoid including inappropriate content in their pages. Appropriate links are those that are relevant to the subject matter and enhance the users' experience.

MISD web servers are for educational use only. Site content should provide information and promote only district and campus endorsed activities as outlined in the MISD Acceptable Use Policy (classes, services, staff, departments, sports, school projects, calendars, volunteering opportunities, etc.).

If you are ever concerned about whether or not something is appropriate, it is a good idea to consult with your principal and/or MISD Web Services before making a post.

### **Political Lobbying**

The use of a web page for political lobbying activities is prohibited. Engaging in political fundraising or other political activities is also prohibited. Web pages must not contain political or lobbying messages.

### **Objectionable or Abusive Material**

Web pages may not include access to or contain any objectionable, obscene, defamatory, abusive, profane, sexually-oriented, threatening, harassing, offensive or illegal material.

### **Copyright Issues**

The purpose of copyright (Title 17, U.S. Code) is to protect the right of authors to control the reproduction of their work. Permission must be obtained from the owner of any work that exists in a tangible medium that can be reproduced, including (but not limited to) photos, video, slide presentations, images of art, audio recordings and material found on the Internet.

The following guidelines apply to written content images and links published or intended for publication on the Mansfield ISD website.

- All copyrighted material requires written permission to be republished or must be used in accordance with the fair use code as provided in copyright law (see below).
- Credit lines and bylines must be used for all copyrighted material where appropriate. If no guidelines are provided for credit lines, a standard credit line should be used (i.e., Courtesy John Doe).

### **Fair Use Exceptions**

The Fair Use doctrine in section 107 of the 1976 Copyright Act allows exceptions to the use of copyrighted material without permission. In order to claim fair use, you must apply a four-point test. This test weighs the rights of the copyright owner against public interest in the free exchange of ideas and information. Not all four points must be satisfied, but the factors favoring fair use must outweigh the factors favoring obtaining permission. The four points are:

- 1. Purpose and Character of the Use* – Commonly applies to criticism, commentary, news reporting, parody and non-profit education.
- 2. Nature of the Copyrighted Work* – Factual compilations with little originality may qualify for fair use, such as height and weight charts.
- 3. Amount and Substantiality of the Copying* – Small portions of a copyrighted work can often be used.
- 4. Effect of the Use on the Potential Market for the Work* – Reproduction must not impact the work's commercial market.

The ease with which we are able to access information via the Internet, duplicate and then disseminate that information makes it easy to inadvertently violate copyright law.

Be careful to consider the following before using someone else's work:

- ☐. Who owns this work?
- ☐. Do I have/need permission to use this work? Can I use this work under the Fair Use provision?
- ☐. What limitations/restrictions are there on using this work?

## **COMMERCIAL & EXTERNAL LINKS**

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Commercial and external links are only allowed in compliance with the Mansfield ISD Policy. Links must comply with Board Policy GKB (LOCAL), which states:

### PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

School facilities shall not be used to advertise, promote, sell tickets, or collect funds for any non school-related purpose without prior approval of the Superintendent or designee. Non school-related organizations may use school facilities only in accordance with GKD.

### ADVERTISING

Advertising shall be accepted solely for the purpose of covering the cost of providing materials and equipment, not for the purpose of establishing a forum for communication. The District retains final editorial authority to accept or reject submitted advertisements in a manner consistent with the First Amendment. [See FMA regarding school-sponsored publications]

All other commercials, commercial transactions or advertisements are prohibited on school sites.

Curriculum-based educational links, including commercial links, should be allowed as approved by the principal or department director.

Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) will be allowed to link external websites to campus sites. Any submission created by a non-district employee must be submitted to the Web Services Director and campus principal for approval. The submission can be on portable media (CD, portable disk drive) and in the web extension format or as a URL (Website address) sent via e-mail for review. Links may be removed at the District's discretion if material fails to meet the guidelines outlined in this document and will be reinstated once the external site is updated and sent for review and receives approval.

Booster clubs will be allowed to link websites to campus sites. A disclaimer must accompany each of these links explaining that the MISD is not responsible for the content of the site.

## **ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION**

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It is essential that the Web be accessible in order to provide equal access and opportunity to people with disabilities. The district is committed to providing equal access to web-based information in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These acts help ensure that web pages will be readable by users with visual disabilities. Note that the ADA stipulates that federal funding may be withheld from institutions that fail to adhere to its rules.

Basic accessibility has been built into the website during development, but the proper steps must be taken as new content is added. Although there are many requirements, the easiest way to comply with Section 508 is to:

- Avoid text that blinks, flashes, scrolls, or moves because it is hard to read and may have adverse effects on people with visual disabilities. These may also conflict with screen readers.
- Include alternate text (ALT tags) or descriptions on all images. This allows screen readers to read the description of the image to the user.
- Use language that is simple and clear.
- Make sure that text and graphics make sense without color. People who cannot differentiate between colors or who are using devices with non-color or nonvisual displays will not receive or understand information that relies on color for its meaning.
- Use headings and lists to organize your page and reinforce consistent page structure.
- Use text that makes sense when read out of context. For example, avoid “click here.”
- Test pages in multiple browsers and operating systems.
- Use tables only for tabular data.
- Do not make navigation or other essential information depend solely on images.

More information can be obtained by consulting the latest W3C guidelines at <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>.

## **WRITING FOR THE WEB**

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Writing for the web is very different from writing for print. Users want to find what they are looking for as quickly and easily as possible. With that in mind, content has to be the heart of and most important part of your website. Include and arrange your material in ways that best suit your audience and will reinforce your site’s credibility.

- Good web writing should be concise, clear and written for how people search for information.
  - Users don’t read; they SCAN.
  - Cut unnecessary words from your content. Longer sentences are usually common because the writer uses several words where one (or none) will do.
  - Write in an inverted pyramid style, with the most important information in the first few sentences.
- Grab and go - Visitors come to websites to satisfy goals, to do tasks and to get answers to questions.
  - Give people only what they need.

- A good mantra for the web is less is more.
- Readability – Make sure your pages are easy to read. Facilitate scanning with subheads, bullet points, lists and captions.
  - Visitors won’t know what great content you have if they can’t read it.
  - Some factors to consider are font size and color, website background, white space and alignment of text.
- Good web writing is like a conversation. Write in active voice MOST of the time.
  - Active sentences help people grab information quickly and easily.
  - Sentences in active voice show ownership and tell readers what to do.
    - *Active Voice:*
      - The school board made the decision March 20.
      - The customer must fill out the form.
    - *Passive Voice:*
      - The form must be filled out by the customer.
      - The decision was made March 20.
- Use words that your visitors use. Don’t try to sound impressive by using big words.
  - Define jargon for users (Ex. Eduphoria vs. Help Desk System)
  - Write out acronyms (Ex. STAAR and State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness)
- Avoid all errors and always proofread your work.
  - Typographical and spelling errors send people away from your pages.
  - Read your content out loud. If you hesitate, stumble or have to take too many breaths in one sentence, rewrite!
  - Use dictionaries, handbooks and a style guide. Don’t mislead, misinform or annoy your visitors by misspelling words or using words incorrectly.
  - Run the spell checker, but don’t rely on it.
  - Ask a colleague to review your work before publishing it live.
- Keep pages up to date. Setup a regular maintenance schedule for updating, maintaining and archiving your content.
- When possible, add additional content to a new page vs. linking to a PDF.
  - Research shows that website visitors prefer to read HTML pages over PDF.
  - If you are distributing material that you expect people to print, PDF may be the way to go.
  - In some cases, the best solution is to offer both PDF and HTML versions of your web information.

## HELPFUL DESIGN ELEMENTS

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- Use space effectively. Too little space can make information very difficult to skim. Too much space can mislead people about whether the page is finished.
- Keep paragraphs short; break text into small chunks. On the web, a one-sentence paragraph is fine.
- Turn sentences into more visual forms, like lists and tables.
- When possible, keep content to two screens (1 – ½ printed pages). If you exceed have a good reason and use anchors to improve navigation.
- Keep the most important information “above the fold”, that is visible on the page without having to scroll.
- Avoid writing in ALL CAPS. Use all capitals for a single word or short phrases in specific circumstances where people expect it.
  - Use normal sentences for important information. If you put an entire paragraph in capital letters to make people pay attention you will most likely achieve the opposite.
- Don’t underline anything but links. Most people assume anything that is underlined is a link, no matter what color it is.
- Use italics sparingly. Italics work as a light form of emphasis and to show a book title. Don’t use italics for headings and entire paragraphs.
- Provide good contrast between text and backgrounds. Keep the background clear so that text is readable. You defeat your purpose if you make the page hard to see and text hard to read.
- Use a sans serif font (i.e. Arial or Verdana) as the default for your content. (This option is already setup for all pages in your site)

## USING LISTS AND TABLES

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A great way to write web content that is easy to read and scan without losing essential meaning is to use list and tables.

### Bulleted Lists

- Use lists to make information easy to grab. If you want to tell people about several items, set them out as a list instead of a paragraph.
- Keep most lists short.
  - Short list (5-10 items) is necessary for unfamiliar information.



- Long lists may be okay with familiar information. (Ex. – An alphabetical listing of the 50 states.)

### Numbered Lists

- Use numbered lists for instructions. Instructions imply sequence.
- Turn paragraphs into steps where possible.
- Don't number list items if they are not steps. People might get confused.

### Tables

- Use tables when you have numbers to compare.
- Keep tables simple. Two-column tables fit easily on a web page.
- Format tables so that people focus on the information and not the lines.
  - *Don't* put thick lines between columns or between the rows in a table.
  - *Don't* center text.
  - *Do* make the lines between columns lighter than the lines between rows.
  - *Do* eliminate lines altogether and use shading on alternate rows.

## IMAGES AND GRAPHICS

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Photos and graphics are an excellent way to manage your content, add visual interest to pages and clarify concepts. They should also reflect the district's diverse community and provide an accurate representation of the district, school or program.

When photos are submitted that are of poor quality, use the situation as a teaching opportunity. Communicate your concern or reluctance about the submitted material (i.e. - acknowledging a photo is out of focus; a subject is too far away) and ask for additional photos or several options when photos are submitted.

While great graphics will enhance a page, they will not make up for poor content. Remember, the focus of your web page should be your content, so use and select your images wisely.

- GIF and JPEG are the most common formats for web graphics.
  - JPEGs work better for photos.
  - GIFs are great for graphics.
- Obtain permission to post a photo before uploading it to your campus website. For the safety of all Mansfield ISD students, do NOT publish:
  - Personal contact information, including home address, phone number.
  - Student's photo and name *if permission has been withheld* by a parent or guardian. This information is obtained during registration and can be accessed in Skyward by your school PEIMS/Data Clerk. Request a copy of all students who opt-out of photos.

- Avoid the use of clip art that looks like caricatures or cartoons. They tend to detract from your credibility.
- Do not use animated images or blinking text.
  - Movement is eye-catching and distracts the visitor from their ultimate goal – searching for information.
  - It could have adverse effects on people with disabilities.
- Use animation only to help explain the content. Animation should support and clarify content, not distract or annoy.
- Don't use so much space for pictures that critical content gets shoved down or aside.
- Add the alternative text tag to every photo.
- Always be aware of the size of your files and the amount of time it takes to load the page.
  - Optimize graphics and photos for the web. Images on the web should be less than 100K and 72dpi (dots per inch).
  - Keep in mind, not everyone has a fast Internet connection.

## LINKS

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Navigation is critical within a website. Links should be checked on a regular basis to ensure they are accurate and still work.

- Pages with external links should include the following (or similar) disclaimer:

*Mansfield ISD is not responsible for the content on external sites or servers.*

- Make the link meaningful – Not just Click here.
  - Embedded links in the body of the text should describe what it links to, rather than something non-descriptive. (For example, you should say, “contact us” rather than “click here”.)
  - Click here is not necessary. Most web users today assume that something that looks like a link is a link.
  - Links like More are not enough and give no clue about what will come up if we click on them.
- When referring to an external link, you should list the name of the site, page or link, rather than the full URL.

- For example in the sentence, “Our district website is the ‘public face’ of the school district...” the word district website links to <http://www.mansfieldisd.org>.
- Don’t make NEW program and product names into links by themselves.
  - Cute or made-up program names (Ex. PERKS) that are known only by the people in your organization could be meaningless to visitors.
  - Start with a descriptive link that is meaningful for site visitors followed in parentheses by your name. Ex. – Employee Discount Program (PERKS).

## FONTS AND HEADINGS

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Within your website, the font type, size and all other text formats are applied from a style sheet. This creates consistency throughout all the sections of the website allowing you to concentrate on the content rather than being concerned about the presentation.

- Do not use multiple fonts on your pages. The font face Helvetica is the default font for all web pages.
- Headings improve the look of your pages and allow visitors to scan for relevant information. Break up your text with headings; start by outlining your content.
- Don’t use blue for headings. Save blue for links. Many web users assume that anything in blue is a link, even when it is not underlined.
- Keep to no more than two levels of headings below the page title. You have less room to work with than on paper, so you can’t have as deep a hierarchy.

## Page Title

### Heading Level 1

### Heading Level 2

#### Paragraph

- Distinguish headings from text with type size and bold or color.
  - If you are using size, always make **Level 1 headings** bigger than **Level 2 headings**. People associate size with hierarchy.
  - If you are using placement, you can indent the second level or place **bold** or **colorful** headings.

## DOCUMENT FILE NAMING

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Just like paper files, electronic files need to be well-organized and labeled correctly so that they are easily identifiable and accessible. Efficient management of electronic records begins with accurate file naming. The following file-naming convention incorporates best practices in electronic records management:

- Do not use the following special characters in a file name:

! " # % & ' \* + , ; < > = ? @ [ ] ^ ` { } |

These characters are used frequently in an electronic environment, but may result in an error when using it as file name on the web.

- Use dashes and underscores instead of periods and spaces. Periods already have a specific function in a file name, which is to tell the computer program where the file-name extension begins. Spaces are frequently translated in a Web environment to be read as "%20".
- File names can be a combination of upper and lower case or all lower case. Generally about 25 characters is a sufficient length to capture enough descriptive information for naming a record.
- Include dates (when necessary) and format them consistently. Some documents need to be sorted by date. Develop a standard naming convention to be used and keep it consistent.

*Example:* PTA-Newsletter\_20120327.pdf (naming convention\_YYYYMMDD)

- Be consistent. The most important rule of file-naming is to be consistent.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

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This is your school's opportunity to inform, inspire and share good news about how your campus is making a positive impact on children and education.

Make your position known to everyone at your school. Send out a mass e-mail detailing your new role and asking for content. Make announcements about the campus website on the school intercom and internal printed pieces. Utilize peers to help you edit and proofread your content before publishing it live to your website. Collaborate with your principal for additional ideas.

As always, the Web Services team is available to assist. For training or assistance with web-related issues, contact:

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