

More Than Meets the Eye

Writing for how people read

Presented by Yossi Nachemi

Thanks for attending the UX Salon Words 2022. Here are the key points from today's presentation. Questions? Message me on [LinkedIn](#)

- Everyone scans*
- The eye jumps around a lot, which allows us to take in a lot of information at once
 - BUT only 15% of the eye is used for reading (the fovea)
- People scan in order to understand what's happening on the page
- They also scan when they are looking for specific information

*Except readers with a 3rd - 4th grade literacy level

6 types of scanning most relevant for UX writers:

1. **F pattern** - this is most people's default scanning pattern

- Writing tips:
 - i. Break up long text into smaller, more digestible blocks
 - ii. Have the most important information first. Remember the inverted pyramid

2. **Layer cake** - when a reader looks at the subheads

- Writing tips:
 - i. Make subheads stand out visually (color, bold, plenty of white space)
 - ii. Subheads should be specific - avoid puns, overly cute language, etc.
 - iii. Consider adding a table of contents at the top of the page to make it easier for people to find the content

3. **Spotted** - looking for specific words, but usually lands on the most visually distinct

- Writing tips:
 - i. Text decorations are your friends
 - ii. Use bold, italics, underlining for info you want to stand out

- iii. Use numerals instead of writing out numbers
 - iv. Isolate quotes
 - v. Use acronyms, abbreviations, etc.
4. **Lawn mower** - when a page is arranged in a grid, readers will scan it in a very ordered manner (as if they're mowing the lawn)
- Writing tips:
 - i. Make sure info on the screen is valuable and useful.
 - ii. Write clear, accurate titles, descriptions, etc.
 - iii. Work design to ensure the images relate to the content.
5. **Zigzag** - a sign that users aren't getting all the info on screen, they bounce around between different columns
- Writing tips:
 - i. Front load content
 - ii. Break long passages into smaller chunks
6. **Bypass** - will automatically ignore repeated info or sections
- Writing tips:
 - i. For lists:
 - 1. Avoid repeating terms at the beginning of lists
 - 2. If that's not possible, don't put any crucial information there since readers might not even look at it
 - ii. For sections:
 - 1. Put the most important ideas first
 - 2. Use accurate subheads

Resources

Dehaene, Stanislas. *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read*. Penguin Books, 2010.

Eye Movements in Skilled Readers - Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSEWrbcF0>.

Kukoleva, Olesya, et al. "Media Use Habits: What, Why, When, and How People Read Online." *UXmatters*, 24 July 2017, <https://www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2017/07/media-use-habits-what-why-when-and-how-people-read-online.php>.

Moran, Kate. "How People Read Online: New and Old Findings." *Nielsen Norman Group*, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-people-read-online/>.

Pernice, Kara. "Text Scanning Patterns: Eyetracking Evidence." *Nielsen Norman Group*, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/text-scanning-patterns-eyetracking/>.

Pernice, Kara. "The Layer-Cake Pattern of Scanning Content on the Web." *Nielsen Norman Group*, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/layer-cake-pattern-scanning/>.

Plus, Wired. "The F-Shaped Reading Pattern - Wired plus Marketing Hub." *Medium*, Medium, 12 June 2018, https://medium.com/@marketing_72553/the-f-shaped-reading-pattern-wired-plus-marketing-hub-8729911545a5.

3 recommendations

- *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue - The Untold History of English* By John McWhorter
- *The 7 ½ Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* By Stuart Turton
- [You're Dead to Me](#) BBC4

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