

# Library Web Standards

Recommendations of the SCIS Web Standards Working Group  
Prepared by L. Jacobs, J. Head, L. Steinke (1997 February 8)

Revised by Web Page Working Group, a sub-committee of Collection Development, Liaison & Information Literacy [R. Graham, R. Hazelwood, L. Jacobs, R. Stevens, J. Vogt, G. Westwood] (2001 November)

Ratified by members of CDLIL (2001 December 4)

## **Mission Statement:**

In support of research, teaching, and public service, the mission of the University of Lethbridge Library Website is to facilitate effective online access to the resources, services, and academic programs of the Library.

## **Goals of Library Web Pages:**

- ❑ To facilitate access to Library resources
- ❑ To supplement access to Library services
- ❑ To complement/enhance the academic programs of the Library
- ❑ To disseminate accurate and current information on Library resources and services.

The Library Web pages will achieve the above goals through an attractive, accurate, intuitive, technically efficient, and flexible presentation.

## **Assumptions:**

- ❑ Most of the Library's audience will be those people within the University community. The Library community is defined as including users with diverse knowledge, experience, and needs, both on- and off-campus.
- ❑ The public computer stations (the Windows/PC platform running Netscape) that we make available are "convenience-based". Therefore, we must be concerned with the plethora of available user platforms and software (e.g., processor speeds, monitor sizes, modem speeds).

- Members of the University community will be using some type of graphical Web browser (e.g., Netscape) when accessing the Library Web pages.

### **Principles:**

- Library Web pages will work equally well, regardless of platform (Macintosh, Intel-based microcomputers).
- Library Web pages will work equally well across the different types of graphical browsers.
- We will learn from our own Web crawling experiences and will not unduly annoy the users of the Library's Web pages with those things that have annoyed us such as:
  - pages that are very graphics intensive, obviously being built with high-end workstations for users with high-end workstations,
  - pages that are very large and take a long time to load,
  - pages that require the user to scroll down through many screens or across because the page is too wide for the user's workstation monitor,
  - pages that display an element that detracts from the content or pages that play music without giving users the option of turning it off,
  - links to sites under construction
  - excessive animation
  - other such observations as we have made during our Web travels
- As much as possible, Library Web pages will adhere to the principle of simplicity, both in design and in the process of development and maintenance of pages.
- Library Web pages will be developed keeping in mind the intended audience and use.

### **Vision of the Library's Web Pages and Recommendations**

The Library's Web pages will be attractive, accurate, intuitive, technically efficient, and flexible in presentation.

The Library's Web pages will not deviate significantly from one another in appearance although some deviation is expected based on the objective of the various pages. Web pages within the Library's domain will be "authorized" with a "stamp" to let users know that they are "within" the Library. Pages will be "signed" and dated with the last revision/review made.

In essence, the logo provides the virtual walls of the Library's Web domain.

To this end, it is recommended that the standard elements on Library Web pages include:

- ❑ a logo (to link Library Web pages and denote those Library-authorized pages),
- ❑ a title, or "header" (to identify the page),
- ❑ "return-to" links to the "University Home Page", the "Library Home Page", and "breadcrumbs" to allow the user to navigate as efficiently as possible,
- ❑ a quick, short-cut "control panel" made up of jargon-free, key terms from the links within the content of the page (to provide quick navigation to the "expert"),
- ❑ the content of the page (e.g., menu of items or links),
- ❑ a "signature" (to provide a contact for the page for the user), and
- ❑ the date of last revision or review for the page (to communicate the currency of the information contained on the page).

***Original Rationale:*** After full consideration of the issues, the Group arrived at this list of standard elements that it feels should be included on every Library Web page. A logo was recommended because it was felt to serve two purposes: to communicate the authority of the page to the user and to indicate to the user that s/he was still in the Library's domain.

*The title/header concept acts to denote specific areas of the Library's Web domain, while the "return to" links and the "control panel" facilitate quick navigation. The need for content is rather self-explanatory. However, with respect to both the content of the page as well as the control panel, the Group agreed that words or phrases that may be "jargon-ish" should be avoided at all costs.*

*It was the sense of the Group that a "signature" was required to provide a contact for the user in case of questions or problems. Finally, having the pages dated with the last date of revision or review communicates to the user information about the currency of the information on the page.*

Further it is recommended that, in general:

- ❑ Library Web pages be no more than two (2) screens long,

- ❑ Library Web pages be no more than 575 pixels wide (and use a borderless table to maintain this width),
- ❑ any colours used in the Library Web pages fall within the 216 colours common between the Macintosh and Windows-based platforms, and
- ❑ Library Web pages be no more than 30-50K maximum in size, including text, graphics and backgrounds.

**Original Rationale:** *These are general guidelines that address the principle that Library Web pages should function the same regardless of user platform. The Group agreed that it is annoying to have pages that required the user to scroll down and down and down in order to see the whole page. However, it was recognized that the standard elements being recommended, while required, would take up valuable space on that first screen. Therefore, a page that is two screens long was the compromise reached by the Group.*

*The second annoyance was having pages that were wider than a user's monitor could handle which required the user to scroll back and forth across the screen in order to see the whole page. Therefore the width of 575 pixels is recommended because it would fit the smallest screen likely to be used to read the Library's Web pages. The idea of using a "borderless table" to maintain this width was struck upon as a means of maintaining the formatting of the page regardless of user platform.*

*Maintaining the spectrum of colours used for the Library Web pages within the 216 common colours is another way of ensuring that the presentation of the Library's pages on one platform is the same as their presentation on a different platform in those situations where colour monitors are being used.*

*Finally, the recommendation of pages being no more than 30-50K maximum in size was struck upon as the optimal size for the purposes of downloading.*

Specifically, it is recommended that:

with respect to backgrounds, Library Web pages be:

- ❑ non-patterned, and
- ❑ off-white (or, if the objective of the page requires a different colour from off-white, that the colour be muted or pastel in shade).

**Original Rationale:** *The Group experience was that patterned backgrounds detracted from the content of the page and made it hard to read and therefore should be avoided at all costs. While the colour white is the professional standard, the Group agreed that off-white reduced glare for the user. It was noted that the objectives of some Library Web pages may call for a colour other than off white and this was acceptable as long as the colour used fell within the 216*

*common colours and was muted or pastel in shade for the purposes of continuity and user-ergonomics.*

with respect to layout, Library Web pages

- will present a uniformity of appearance. To achieve this, specifics of lettering, graphics development, and formatting will be developed by the Web Team and described in detail in an appendix attached to this document. This is to facilitate the evolution of the technology.

***Original Rationale:*** *The Group felt that using the defaults for lettering, graphics development, and formatting would simplify the development of the Library's Web pages, would provide continuity throughout the Library's Web domain and would maintain presentation of the page regardless of user platform. With respect to case/format for the content of the page, maintaining the case/format of the title of the page being linked to (backward compatibility, so to speak) was seen as a means of also maintaining continuity between pages.*

with respect to the use of graphics, Library Web pages:

- use a "linking" graphic on all of the pages (as the "stamp" of the Library),
- use graphics sparingly, and if graphics are used that their use is justified by the objective of the page,
- serve the purpose of providing active links (e.g., the Library or University logo), and
- are "information-rich" (i.e., they are communicating information to the user).

***Original Rationale:*** *The concern of the Group was to avoid the use of "gratuitous graphics", graphics that decorate a page but do not communicate any useful information and complicate the downloading process of the page. While the original idea of the Group was that graphics should be avoided, it was recognized that there were occasions (e.g., marketing a service) that might call for the use of graphics to demonstrate the service. As well, it was recognized that pictures/graphics can actually communicate information. Therefore it is important for any developers of Library Web pages to be able to justify the use of graphics by reference to the objective of the page. The one graphic that the Group was able to recommend was the "linking graphic" to communicate to the user that s/he is still within the Library's Web domain and that the page is "authorized" by the Library.*

with respect to the linking graphic, Library Web pages:

- will use the "graphic" portion of the Library logo,
- will use this graphic only on those pages which are official Library Web pages and documents (i.e., in the case of the documents, those documents endorsed by Library

Administration and which further the operational mandate of the Library), and

- will activate this graphic to link the user back to the Library's home page.

**Original Rationale:** *This graphic represents Library at the University of Lethbridge. It is important to note the use of the logo as a "stamp of approval" for pages within the Library Web domain as well as for documents that are "approved" by Library Administration as contributing to the operational mandate of the Library.*

with respect to the signature, Library Web pages:

- use a generic address as the contact signature for pages within the Library's Web domain except where there is a document specifically authored by an individual to whom responsibility can be attributed.

**Original Rationale:** *For the purposes of facilitating service vis-a-vis the general Library Web pages, the Group felt that a generic address monitored by more than one person (e.g., EWHIZ) was best so that issues or questions raised by users could be addressed promptly as part of the regular responsibilities of some group. The idea of using EWHIZ as this generic address was discussed because the questions asked by users may be either content questions (requiring expertise in Reference) or technical questions which could be handled or forwarded as appropriate. However, in the case of a document for which only one or two people were responsible for the content, it made sense that questions be forwarded directly to this address as they were likely the ones most able to answer the content questions and supposedly, they would know who to forward technical questions to if they could not be answered directly.*

with respect to other considerations:

- in general, desired content is reached within two pages from the Library's Home Page.

**Original Rationale:** *It was agreed that "drilling" down farther than two pages before hitting content was annoying to the user and cumbersome in providing direction to users about access to a particular resource.*

- a document that is to be published on the Web be distinguished as to whether the whole document or just part of the document is to be printed and
- where an entire document is to be printed (e.g., smaller documents or reports), "anchors" be used within the document to facilitate navigation and

- ❑ where a document is used more for reference purposes with only subsections of the document likely to be printed, "directory-based" documents be created where the subsections are stored as files within a directory.

**Original Rationale:** *This recommendation stems from frustrations with loading large documents and an equal frustration at printing smaller documents that are broken into many subfiles. Therefore, the Group came to the conclusion that the use of the document vis-a-vis printing was the issue. Large documents (e.g., policies) need to be broken up to facilitate transmission and loading into the browsers and typically, only subsections of large documents are printed. Therefore, logically breaking the large document into subfiles and forming a directory-based document made sense. In the case of smaller documents (e.g., reports), loading was not an issue and the user would be more likely to want to print the whole thing. Therefore, in the case of smaller documents, the use of anchors as navigational aids was seen as preferable as they allowed the document to remain intact for printing purposes.*

- ❑ display the revision date in the format of 20## MONTH ## (e.g., 2002 January 22) complete with leading zeroes where necessary. (e.g., 2002 December 09)

**Original Rationale:** *This date format is the one currently used by the Library in their correspondence.*

use filenames that are:

- ❑ lowercase
- ❑ as short as possible
- ❑ free of spaces
- ❑ as descriptive as possible
- ❑ as English-like as possible

**Original Rationale:** *The use of lowercase filenames is recommended because of the operating system of the University's Web Server (i.e., UNIX) which is case sensitive. The Group also felt that filenames that were as English-like as possible and as short as possible would make it easier for the user to remember and enter manually, if necessary.*

## Conclusion

The original version of this document was created in February 1997 by the SCIS Web Standards Working Group to address the need for continuity and standards that could be applied to the growing number of Library Web pages and the emerging Library presence on the Web.

In November 2001, immediately after the move to the new library building and after a re-organization and a shifting of responsibilities resulting in the creation of a Web Team, a new Library Web Page Working Group was struck. The Web Standards document was revised and updated to reflect the changes in technology and general philosophy that had occurred in the online environment and in the goals of the Library in the five-year period since the document had first been created.

It soon became clear during the updating and revision process that many of the philosophies and principles relative to Web pages and their effective use had not changed. It was decided that it was important to leave the original statements of rationale in the revised document to provide those who use and revise the document in the future with the necessary background to understand the origin and evolution of the Library Web standards.

Two significant changes to the Web Standards document were made in the November 2001 revision.

- A Mission Statement and Goals were added. The Group felt that it was important to define the purpose of the Library Website and the attached Web pages. In other words, it was necessary to identify the mandate of the Library Website before it was possible to describe the characteristics of effective Library Web pages.
- Technical details relating to files, directories, and Web page creation were moved from the main Web Standards document into an attached appendix. Responsibility for the creation and frequent updating of this appendix was given to the Web Team. The Group felt that this arrangement would allow Web page developers the flexibility to incorporate new technology into their work while still ensuring a reasonable level of consistency in all Library Web pages.

This revision of the Library Web Standards document supports the general philosophies and principles of the original document. The objective of this document is to build upon the foundation of the first document in order to:

- reflect the current online environment in which the Library operates,
- update Web page standards in areas where technology has improved and/or changed, and
- recognize and facilitate the shift toward a constantly increasing online presence for the Library.

This group believes that the recommendations contained in this document will provide a useful framework for the continued development of an effective Library Web presence.



## Appendix

### General Principles of Style, Aesthetics, and Accessibility

- The Library Web pages will be constructed in a semi-formal, user-friendly style, while still maintaining the academic perspective of the University and the University Library.
- As much as possible, Library Web pages will project a clean, sleek look with minimal “clutter” and sufficient white space.
- Library Web pages will use graphics where effective, while maintaining the principle of minimal download times for users, both on and off campus.
- Library Web pages will make minimal use of animated images (.gifs, etc.).
- All Library Web pages will be constructed with reference to standards that ensure maximum accessibility to all types of users, including those with disabilities. When changes are made to improve access for people with disabilities, all users benefit. Information is more available to everyone when attention is given to clarity, consistency, and content of Web pages.

### Appearance

- All pages will incorporate cascading style sheets
- Pages will incorporate a four-colour scheme consisting of:
  - #000000 (black)
  - #666699 (dusty blue)
  - #9966cc (butterscotch)
  - #666666 (pale grey)
- Background Colour in the body of Web pages will be as follows:
  - Body Background = #ffffff (white)
- Text Colour Definition will be as follows:
  - Headers #9966cc (pale butterscotch)
  - Body Text=#000000 (black)
- Font Definition will be as follows:
  - Arial or Helvetica
  - Sans-serif

- Font Size will be as follows:
  - Headers 12pt
  - Sub-headers 10pt
  - Body text 8 pt

### *Web File Naming and Arranging Conventions*

- All file names will be in lower case.
- Wherever possible, file names will describe or indicate the content or subject of the file.
- Numbers and cryptic abbreviations will be avoided.
- Files will be placed in appropriate “subject” directories, with attention to the logical arrangement and display of the navigational breadcrumbs.

### **Navigation**

- The Library Website will incorporate a combination of static and drop-down navigation menus.
- The drop-down menu system will have a consistent location and be available on every Web page.
- All pages will utilize a system of “bread crumbs” to aid in navigation and to help users maintain “location perspective” while “surfing” the Website.

### **HTML/Coding**

- All Web pages will contain a brief but descriptive <title> tag.
- All Web pages will contain the following meta information tags:
 

<code>&lt;meta name="keywords"&gt;</code>	(search/indexing keywords)
<code>&lt;meta name="description"&gt;</code>	(one line describing page content for index display)
<code>&lt;meta name="author"&gt;</code>	(author/person responsible for content maintenance)
<code>&lt;meta name="date"&gt;</code>	(date of last content update)

- In conformity with XHTML 1.0 Transitional standards:
  - all tags will be closed. (e.g., <p></p>, <li></li>, <br />).
  - all html coding will be in lowercase
  - relative links will be utilized within the Library's Web space

## Images

- For ease of accessibility, all image tags will include the "alt=" option, containing a brief text description of the image.
- Where possible, images will conform to the cross-platform 216 Web colour palette, preferably in gif format.

## Miscellaneous

- The current date will be displayed on the home page of the Library Website.
- The Web team will strive to have the coding of all library pages verified through a coding verification program/service (<http://w3.org> preferred)
- As much as possible, Web pages will be analyzed by site analysis software like "Bobby" <http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp> to determine their level of accessibility to people with disabilities.
- Pages will be optimized for a 800 x 600 resolution, using Internet Explorer 6.x, Netscape Navigator 6.x, or Mozilla 1.6
- The following information will be displayed at the end of all content Web pages on the Library Web sites:
  - *Maintained by*      Person or group responsible for maintenance of content of Web page
  - *Content Revised*    Most recent date on which content of Web page was changed
  - *Content Created*     Date on which Web page content was posted to the Library Web site

(Appendix – Content Created: 02/11/01; Content Revised: 05/06/17)



## Creating Effective Webpages

1. **Be concise.** Reading from screen is 25% slower than reading from print.
2. Users **do not like to scroll**. Provide **essential information on the initial page**, perhaps adding a **Table of Contents with links** to appropriate sections on the pages. Move detailed information to secondary pages.
3. **Write for scannability.** Most Web readers scan pages for relevant information rather than reading through a document word by word. Use these tricks:
  - **Subheadings** (meaningful, not "clever" ones)
  - **Bulleted lists** rather than paragraphs, if appropriate
  - **Highlighted keywords** via
    - **hypertext links**
    - **typeface variations**
  - **Short paragraphs, one idea per paragraph** with first few words catching attention of reader
  - **Inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion.** Put the main points of your document in the first paragraph, so that readers scanning your pages will not miss your point
  - **Simple writing style, half the word count (or less)** than conventional writing. Use **simple sentence structures**. Convoluted writing and complex words are even harder to understand online
  - **Avoid "marketese"**, promotional writing style with boastful subjective claims. Give the straight facts without exaggeration
4. **Limit graphics** to shorten load time. If using images, use small inline images and link large versions to small thumbnails. Use image compression available with the JPEG format - 50% looks OK.
5. If your page is going to be posted on the Library websites, **please conform to the colors of background and font used on Library Web pages.**
6. **Review and update your page frequently** to ensure accuracy and credibility. Links need to be working. Statistics, numbers, and examples should be recent.
7. Documents are easier to print from a single Web page. Don't break your narrative into small segments if users will be printing the information. If usage is difficult to predict, offer both a Web version and a link to an easy-to-print page or printing alternative (e.g., PDF file).
8. **Refrain from using excessive linking.** Readers should not have to follow links to gain an understanding of the information. Links are for those who wish to pursue the topic further. Too many links can disrupt narrative flow in several ways:
  - Visual distraction - Users will click on links directly without ever reading the text that forms its context.
  - Disruption of narrative - Users may follow links and never return to your site.
  - Lack of context - Readers move into unfamiliar territory and may become frustrated and bewildered.
9. **Avoid using abbreviations or acronyms** unfamiliar to the general user.
10. Adhere to **copyright** restrictions that apply to both graphics and text.
11. Use the **active** rather than passive **voice** in your writing.

Maintained by [Library Web Team](#)

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