

## 9-2 How people read

<http://www.websuburb.com.au/HelpDesk/Content/Habits/tabid/776/Default.aspx>

### 9-2.1 Scanning and Skimming

There is a subtle but important difference between the scanning and skimming of web pages.

#### 9-2.1.1 Scanning

The first thing the user will do when opening a page is a high-level scan to get a “feel” for the page. They will form an impression of the page based on the layout, colours and fonts used. Typically this process is instantaneous – it usually lasts less than one second and the user mostly won’t even read anything. (Reinforcing this point, the latest Yahoo toolbar stores a thumbnail image of favourite web pages because users can instantly recognise an entire page from a thumbnail image.)

#### 9-2.1.2 Skimming

The user follows up the scan with skimming. In skimming, the user will review headings, bullet points, numbered lists, isolated/highlighted text and, to a lesser degree, bold text. Only if they are satisfied with the result of the skimming process will they even bother to start reading the content.

### 9-2.2 Using links

A common usability problem on websites is disorientation, where users fail to understand their current position in a website – that is, how they got to that page, and where they can go next. We suggest using “breadcrumbs” to display location, ie. “You are here: [Help Desk](#) / [Pages](#) / [Add Pages](#).”



Figure: “Breadcrumbs” to display location

### 9-2.3 Eye-tracking heat maps

Eye tracking has been used to identify user behaviour when using search engine results and web pages. The results were used to construct heat maps with the following results.

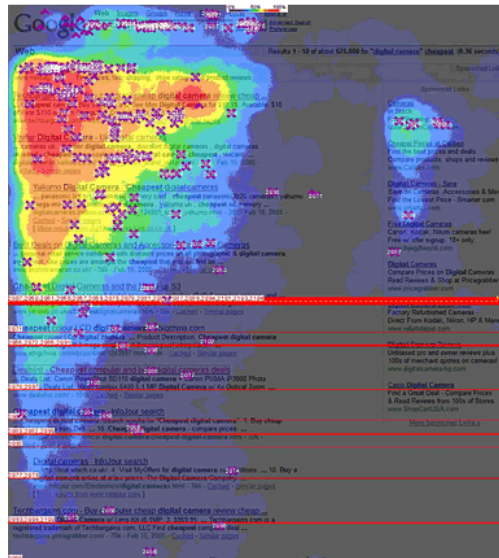


Figure: The Golden Triangle - Eye tracking on Google results  
[<http://www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/tweak/clickstream/>]



Figure: “F” Pattern of user viewing for “About us”, product page and search result page  
Source: [www.useit.com/alertbox/reading\\_pattern.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html)

What does it all mean?

- The top left of page is the most important part, therefore you should position the most important information here in the first two paragraphs.
- Users don't read text thoroughly.

- Start headings, paragraphs and bullet points with information-rich words.

### 9-2.4 Time-related statistics

“Weinreich and Herder analysed users interacting with over 65,000 unique URIs. The average web page had 53 hyperlinks and 551 visible words. Stay times were short, 25% of all documents were displayed for less than 4 seconds and 52% of all visits were shorter than 10 seconds with a peak value located between 2 and 3 seconds (see Figure).”

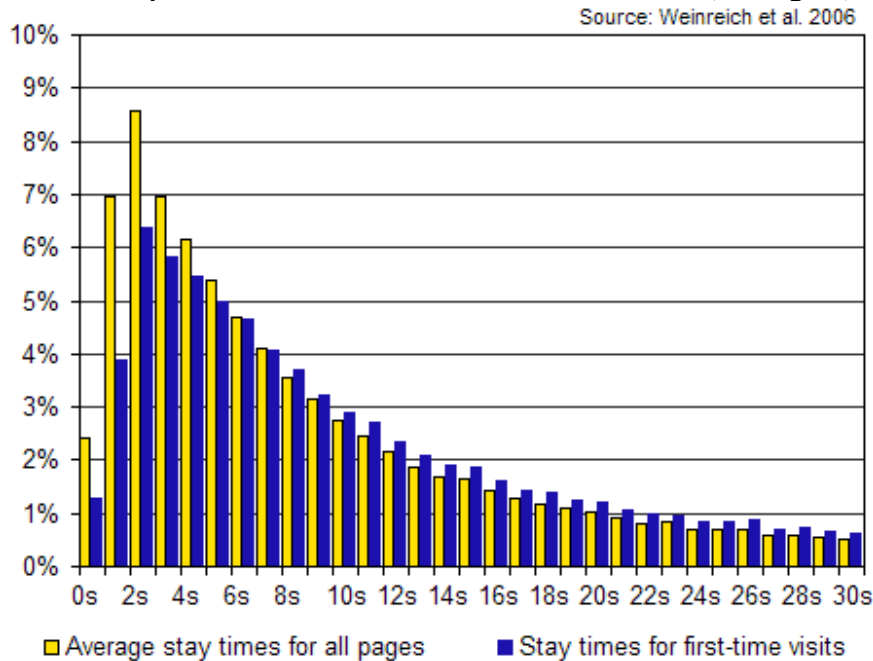


Figure: Distribution histogram for stays of all types

Source: [www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/tweak/clickstream](http://www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/tweak/clickstream)

### 9-2.5 HitWise

HitWise is an internet business intelligence website. One of their publications [[www.hitwise.com/datacenter/rankings.php](http://www.hitwise.com/datacenter/rankings.php)] features the most popular websites based on internet usage. For example, the statistics for February 2007 were as follows:

Rank	Website	Market Share
1	<a href="http://www.myspace.com">www.myspace.com</a>	5.93%
2	<a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a>	4.47%
3	<a href="http://www.yahoo.com">www.yahoo.com</a>	4.16%
4	<a href="http://mail.yahoo.com">mail.yahoo.com</a>	4.10%
5	<a href="http://mail.myspace.com">mail.myspace.com</a>	3.86%
6	<a href="http://www.hotmail.com">www.hotmail.com</a>	1.98%
7	<a href="http://www.msn.com">www.msn.com</a>	1.81%
8	<a href="http://www.ebay.com">www.ebay.com</a>	1.55%
9	<a href="http://search.yahoo.com">search.yahoo.com</a>	1.42%
10	<a href="http://search.msn.com">search.msn.com</a>	0.81%

1 – 10	Sub-total	30.09%
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Important points:

1. In this list there are only 2 publishers of content - [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and [www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com). The other 8 (and the next few in the list) are all content-sharing or participative sites.
2. Users like to participate and do stuff, which includes email, trading, searching, games and blogs or forums.
3. When developing content you should aim to create an environment where users can interact with each other through the medium of your site.

### **9-1.7 User Habits**

The internet, email and text messaging are among the most profound influencers of reading and writing behaviour in the past hundred years.

It's important to recognise that website users have specific characteristics and ensure that your writing and content reflects this.

- **Volume of information**  
There are more pages of information on the internet than anyone can read in a lifetime. Therefore people have become highly selective about what they read and use search engines to hone in on the stuff they want.
- **Criticality**  
Experience has taught people that there is a significant amount of "garbage" on the internet, so they have little patience with poor grammar, spelling or verbose writing.
- **Information Snacking**  
Users are often searching for something specific and tend to scan and skim pages quickly.

The next step is Personas

<http://www.websuburb.com.au/HelpDesk/Content/Personas/tabid/751/Default.aspx>