

SAMPLE

GILL ANDREWS



MAKING YOUR WEBSITE WORK

100 COPY & DESIGN TWEAKS
FOR SMART BUSINESS OWNERS

Making Your Website Work: 100 Copy & Design Tweaks for Smart Business Owners

Gill Andrews

(Reading Sample)

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Table of Contents

Below, you'll find the titles of all 100 chapters listed one by one. If you'd like a more compact overview of the topics this book covers, use the Index at the end that organizes the content by topics.

[Introduction](#)

[Before we dive in](#)

[Who is this book for?](#)

[How to use this book](#)

[Glossary](#)

[#1: Why you shouldn't welcome your visitors on your website](#)

[#2: Six questions that will expose the main flaws of your website](#)

[#3: Unless you're an amusement park, there shouldn't be any carousels on your website](#)

[#4: Don't tell your visitors how to feel](#)

[#5: Want people to stay longer on your website? Start with a clear homepage](#)

[#6: Get to the point quickly or risk losing a reader](#)

[#7: Stages of awareness and what your prospects need to hear in each of them](#)

[#8: Hide your "follow me" social icons](#)

[#9: Delete your Testimonials page](#)

[#10: Don't make your headings look like buttons](#)

#11: Nobody's clicking on your CTA button? Try this

#12: Don't overuse one-line paragraphs

#13: When using text on an image, make sure the text remains readable

#14: How to discover (and eliminate) self-centered copy on your website

- #15: Not getting enough client inquiries? Make your service pages longer
- #16: Three things to keep in mind when using images on your website
- #17: This is the main killer of your business message on your website
- #18: Don't make your homepage about you
- #19: How many CTA buttons should you put on your homepage?
- #20: Your copy can only communicate your message clearly if your design isn't in the way
- #21: Have a drop-down menu in your navigation? Kill it with fire!
- #22: Your website doesn't need to have beautiful design to be effective
- #23: Don't neglect your website footer
- #24: Don't make your text lines as wide as the whole desktop screen
- #25: How to make sure your visitors click on your text links and buttons
- #26: Avoid saying this on your website so you don't come across as condescending
- #27: How to make sure your web page will resonate with your prospects
- #28: Treat your website navigation as a part of your business message
- #29: Three things that will ruin the most beautiful and eloquent website
- #30: An ultra-practical way to come up with a great headline when you're struggling to be creative
- #31: How to use (and not to use) your photographs on your website
- #32: This one emotion kills your conversions
- #33: How to improve readability of your content (and keep visitors on your website longer)
- #34: Want more prospects to convert? Build a bridge
- #35: You don't need an FAQ page. Here's what you need instead
- #36: Make the copy of your CTA buttons boring
- #37: One design mistake that ruins all your bullet points

- #38: How to create an effective lead magnet (and grow your list faster)
- #39: How to tell if you should implement that new website tip you just read about
- #40: Don't interfere with the natural reading patterns of your visitors
- #41: How to use (and not to use) questions in your copy
- #42: How to feature your services on your homepage to get more client inquiries
- #43: How to create a newsletter opt-in that actually gets you subscribers
- #44: Three ways to identify your target audience
- #45: Include a call to action on every page of your website (and even in your freebies)
- #46: Five reasons why using a one-page website is a bad idea
- #47: Remove links from your homepage, About and sales pages
- #48: How to lure more prospects to your website from search
- #49: Make your prospects trust you more by being specific
- #50: When you should ditch storytelling and get straight to the point
- #51: Want people to stay on your page longer? Treat headings like a table of contents
- #52: Use social proof that's meaningful to your prospects (and not just your ego)
- #53: How to make sure your contact forms are easy to spot and use
- #54: Use this test to quickly spot vague copy that will confuse your prospects
- #55: Separate the benefits you describe on a page by context
- #56: How to spot vague copy and missing information using Google Autotranslate
- #57: Is using bold font ruining your message?
- #58: Why your footer should have a different color

- #59: Your homepage shouldn't mirror your navigation
- #60: If your prospects can't imagine it, they won't buy it
- #61: How to decide the order of the sections on your homepage
- #62: How to spot fake benefits in your copy
- #63: Don't treat your website like a piece of art
- #64: Don't waste your time on these popular but useless website tips (and do this instead)
- #65: Should you display your latest blog posts prominently on your homepage?
- #66: The most effective tip that will make any website faster
- #67: An ultra-effective way to make more subscribers open your email newsletters
- #68: Want more people to click on your CTA button? Avoid a false bottom
- #69: How to present categories and tags on your website (and keep visitors exploring your content)
- #70: Eight steps to declutter your homepage (and win more business)
- #71: Feeling stuck working on your website tagline? Try this
- #72: A surefire way to find out if your new blog post is any good
- #73: Want more conversions? Remove the noise around your CTAs (real-life example)
- #74: How to choose the right words to call your products and services
- #75: Want to know if your website visitors like your content and offers? Watch session replays
- #76: Why you should remove even minor annoyances from your website
- #77: How to spot sloppy website design
- #78: Why you may want to remove that CTA button from your homepage header
- #79: Don't try too hard to make your prospects like you

#80: Speak directly to your prospects to make it easier for them to relate to what you're saying

#81: Are you being a wuss? Use assertive language to appear confident

#82: Here's what it takes to convert strangers into customers

#83: Convert more prospects by answering the right mini questions

#84: How many people need to see your opt-in pop-up before you get one engaged subscriber?

#85: The more elements you have on a web page, the less attention each element gets

#86: The more complex your topic, the simpler your design needs to be

#87: Want more client inquiries? Make your Contact page more human

#88: Comparing your website to other websites? Here's how to do it right

#89: Five ways you're unintentionally hiding important info from your prospects

#90: To get more people to read your blog posts, go beyond a standard Blog page

#91: How to get more comments on your blog posts

#92: Why a contractor who can't spell is sometimes a better copywriter than you

#93: Don't organize your website like it's a department store

#94: Make sure your text has the right contrast ratio to be easy to read

#95: Why your website should be 80% like everyone else's

#96: When it's better to have two website navigation menus

#97: How to make your copy more compelling by listening to your customers (and using Excel)

#98: Should you use "we" (meaning you and your prospects) in your copy?

#99: How to earn more from your most profitable audience segment

#100: When you shouldn't fix the issues on your website

Your next steps

About the author

Index

Introduction

When I was nine or ten, I saw a movie about a girl from another planet who gets stuck on Earth.

At some point, she has to go to school. Everyone knows she's an alien, but her classmates are still surprised when she tells them that on her planet, if you want to learn something new, they just give you an injection and – bam! – you're an expert.

"Wow", I thought to myself. "I want that, too!"

I've been waiting for a 'knowledge shot' to get invented ever since, terribly missing it during the chemistry lessons at high school – a subject I wouldn't be able to grasp even if my life depended on it.

But alas. We carry a whole library in our pockets and our vacuum cleaner can send us text messages, yet we still have to learn stuff by actually studying it.

"Learning is easy when it's fun", says an inspirational quote on Pinterest. And it's not wrong. But even fun learning is a burden if one feels guilty spending time on it or if that newly acquired knowledge doesn't make any difference in one's life.

Take you, for example.

You want to learn how to make your website earn you more money (if you don't, this is awkward; I hope you didn't draw anything in this book and can still return it to where you got it from).

More money is one hell of a motivation, but when you have a business to run and a life to manage, taking a course or reading a pile of books seem impossible to fit into your schedule.

You can't even finish reading the blog posts you find online! Although I don't blame you. Many of them are boring, vague or both, leaving you with more questions than answers.

Well, I have some good news and some bad news for you.

First, the bad news.

You have no choice.

Whether you take care of your website yourself or hire people to do it for you, as a smart business owner you can't afford not to understand what makes web copy effective, how to spot bad design or what mistakes to avoid in your website structure.

Otherwise, you risk spending years wondering why you don't get enough business through your website, even after you've paid others a lot of money to beautify it.

The good news is that you don't have to take a long course or bury yourself in books for a year to understand what makes a website work and what doesn't.

You can learn it from this very book you're holding in your hands.

It doesn't teach you all the copywriting formulas or make you learn design rules by heart.

Instead, it describes real website problems that freelancers, digital agencies, ecommerce shops and SaaS companies face – the same problems you have with your website – and shows you how to fix them.

You'll learn how to spot (and fix) vague and self-centered copy, how to sound trustworthy even without testimonials or what phrases to avoid not to sound condescending.

You'll learn how to spot sloppy web design, how many call-to-action buttons to put on your homepage and why you should kill your drop-down menus.

You'll learn many practical things you can implement on your website right away, and you'll learn all of that without feeling overwhelmed.

Every chapter in this book is about 200 words – a snack of knowledge you can take once a day, or any time you feel like it, that will help you improve your website bit by bit and make you better prepared for many website challenges to come.

Before we dive in

To clarify: The truly accurate answer to every website-related question out there is “it depends”.

Whether and how to change something on *your* website depends on your target audience, your business model and a dozen of other things that make your website and your business situation unique. Which makes it almost impossible to give you 100% accurate advice without looking at your website first.

So, you shouldn't view the tips in this book as one-size-fits-all solutions but rather the safe choices in the majority of cases.

Every tip comes with a rational explanation of the advice given based on the principles one should be guided by when creating a business website: clarity, value, relevancy and minimal distractions and friction.

The arguments that come with each tip will allow you to make an informed decision as to whether a particular piece of advice is something that, if applied to your website, will improve it.

Who is this book for?

This book is for **business owners who take care of their website themselves** – write their own copy and create their own web pages. You'll learn how to write better copy and how to make sure that your design doesn't kill your message (or, at least, doesn't get in the way).

This book is for **copywriters** who want to sharpen their skill and also learn how to prevent designers from murdering their copy later on. You'll learn to spot bad design decisions and discover powerful arguments to use in conversations with your clients and their designers.

Plus, you'll get to charge more for your services, because after you've read this book, you'll have a better understanding of what makes design convert (and what doesn't).

This book is for **web designers** who want to design not only pretty websites but also websites that convert. You'll learn to distinguish bad copy from good copy to be able to warn your clients in advance that their copy has problems (or, at least, not to be the one to get blamed for the low conversion rate once the website is live).

This book is also for **business owners who are planning to hire someone** to create their website for them. You'll learn how to spot ineffective copy and sloppy design to make sure that the pretty website you're paying for will also convert.

How to use this book

What's your favorite number? You can start with that tip number. Or do the even numbers first. Or the primes.

The order in which you read the tips doesn't matter, but if there are some topics that interest you more than others, pay attention to the icons before each tip.



Blogging: Tips that help you get more people to read your blog posts. Many web design or strategy tips can also be applied to your blog pages, of course. But the ones marked with "B" focus specifically on blogs.



Copywriting: Tips that help you create engaging copy that sells your offers for you and / or avoid copy mistakes that drive your prospects away.



Web design: Tips that show you how to make sure your web design is making your message stronger (or, at least, isn't getting in the way).



Strategy: Tips that help you be strategic with the changes you make to your website to keep people on it for longer, to get more subscribers, to cater to the different segments of your audience better, and so on.



User experience: Tips that help you make it easy for your prospects to find what they're looking for on your website and complete their tasks without frustration or confusion.

At the end of the book, you'll also find an **index** that matches different topics to the book pages to help you find relevant tips faster.

Glossary

To make sure we're on the same page, here are some terms used in this book and their meanings.

A/B testing: A way to compare two almost identical versions of a web page with one thing being different to find out which version of the page performs better with respect to a particular metric (number of clicks on a certain link, sign-ups, sales, etc.)

Above the fold area: The part of your page visible to your website visitors right after they opened it before they scroll down.

Call to action (CTA): A button or a link that asks your website visitors to do something ("Sign up", "Contact me", etc.) that usually leads your prospects further down the sales funnel.

Conversion: A conversion occurs when a website visitor takes an action you wanted them to take (for example, signs up for your newsletter or buys your product).

Friction: Anything that slows down your prospect while they're exploring your website. Bad friction is a pointless hurdle that may irritate your prospects (too many visual highlights, extensive animations, etc.). Good friction makes your prospects pay attention to important things (bold heading that indicates a start of a new section, visually prominent call-to-action button, etc.).

Features vs benefits: A feature is what a product does (for example, moisturizes one's skin) or contains (for example, two on-demand videos), or what a service includes (for example, 30-min website audit). A benefit is how your product or service will improve the lives of your prospects (for example, makes them feel younger, helps them close more deals, helps them sell more through their websites).

Heading: A phrase on a web page highlighted in bold that indicates a start of a new section and tells your prospects what it will be about. It can also refer to a section in a sidebar or a footer.

Interstitial: Pop-ups or full-screen overlays that appear on top of the content of the page you're currently reading and usually contain a sign-up form or an ad.

Lead magnet: A resource (ebook, checklist, quiz results, etc.) that potential clients who visit your website (aka "leads") can download for free in exchange for their email address.

Opt-in: A form that lets prospects sign up for something with an email address (for example, to receive a free ebook, to sign up for a webinar, to sign up for a newsletter).

Sales funnel: A path your prospects take from the moment they hear about you for the first time to the moment they buy your product or service. Here's an example of a sales funnel: Clicked on a tweet => read your latest blog post => signed up for a lead magnet => engaged with your emails => clicked on a link in the promo email => signed up for your paid course.

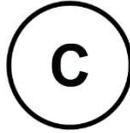
Screen view: The part of your page a website visitor sees on their screen at once.

Social proof: Generally speaking, this is a psychological and social phenomenon where people look at the behavior of others to decide how they should behave in a situation themselves, especially when feeling uncertain. On your website, social proof manifests itself through testimonials, case studies, your certificates, awards, features in famous publications, etc.

Subtagline: A sentence or a short paragraph right after the website tagline.

Unique value proposition (UVP): A clear statement that tells your prospects what you do, how you solve your customers' problems and why they should choose you and not your competitors. Also known as "unique selling point (USP)".

Website tagline: The first sentence or phrase your website visitors see above the fold when they land on your homepage.



#1: Why you shouldn't welcome your visitors on your website

"Welcome to my website! I'm happy you stopped by!"

Phew. Glad we clarified that because your visitors already started to think you really don't want them there.

Joking aside, the time people are willing to spend on your website is limited. Not only might they get bored with irrelevant info or jargon (things you can control), but they also might get interrupted by a phone call, a train stop where they need to get off, or a kid asking for a snack (things you can't control, aka "life").

That's why you need to make every second count. Everything on your website – every word, every button, every image – needs to have a purpose.

This purpose can be different: to entertain, to inform, to spark an emotion, to prompt an action, etc. But if you have elements and text with no purpose, you're wasting people's time and your own money.

It's especially true for meaningless text, such as:

1) Things that are implied, like "Welcome to my website", "I invite you to look around", etc.

Want your visitors to feel welcome? Value their time and offer them relevant information right away.

Want to invite them to look around? Make it easy to browse your website and use clear navigation.

2) Things that don't mean anything concrete.

Your visitors can't imagine anything concrete when they read things like "high-impact solution", "results driven" or "digital space".

Want to inform? Use words that are specific enough to create a clear picture in your visitors' minds. Because if they can't imagine it, they won't buy it.



#2: Six questions that will expose the main flaws of your website

This is a true story of how asking the right questions cost me the job.

A small business owner wanted me to review her website. We agreed on the fees, and she asked me to send her the contract.

Together with a contract, I sent her a questionnaire I always send before I review a website to learn more about her business and target audience.

After a couple of days, she emailed me saying that she'd decided to change her business strategy and will be changing the website, too. So, a review right now won't make sense.

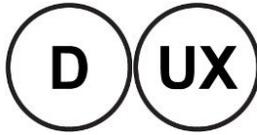
I wasn't surprised. Her website was a mess, and I can imagine that after reading my questions she saw why.

So, what questions exposed the flaws of a website without a review? Here are some of them:

- 1) Could you please explain your offer in a couple of sentences?
- 2) What is your unique value proposition? Why should someone hire you and not your competitor?
- 3) Who is your ideal client?
- 4) What is your strategy for getting new clients through your website?
- 5) What is your current monthly traffic and your main traffic sources?
- 6) Who are your competitors?

Can you answer all these questions confidently? Are you still happy with your website and the way you've structured your offers?

P.S. Needless to say, I now send that questionnaire only after a contract has been signed.



#3: Unless you're an amusement park, there shouldn't be any carousels on your website

"But I really like how my slider looks!", wrote my client to me after I reviewed his website and told him to kill that carousel in the homepage header.

I understand. I like how it looks too, Greg. But that's the only good thing about it.

Fact, proven by numerous case studies:

Sliders, aka "carousels", aren't effective in communicating important stuff (or getting people to click on them, for that matter). They rotate faster than your prospects are able to absorb the info.

Homepage header carousels. Client logo carousels. Testimonial carousels.

They have no place on an efficient website, because self-moving elements ~~drive your visitors crazy~~ harm the user experience:

- Animated post carousels usually result in fewer clicks.
- Testimonial carousels don't give your visitors enough time to read.
- Client logos that fly in and out keep your visitors from reading further, while they stare at your moving logos wondering whether there's more to come.
- Your visitors are likely to ignore the moving elements because they automatically assume they're ads.
- It's just plain annoying for your website visitors to lose control of the user interface when things move around by themselves.

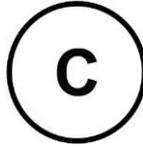
"But <insert a famous website here> uses a slider in its header!"

Sure, but the company that owns this website:

- Is famous (and you aren't) and has many repeated visitors who already know their value proposition (and you don't)

- Has A/B tested that slider and has statistical proof that it's better than a static image with text (have you?)

Want a slider on your website? A/B test it. Or, at least, become famous.



#4: Don't tell your visitors how to feel

I still remember this embarrassing moment as if it were yesterday.

We were practicing our dance moves for a concert in high school. I decided to remember my ballet past and did what was supposed to be a *grand jeté* (a split jump).

As the last time I did ballet was ten years ago at that point, my jump had the grace of a hippopotamus jumping over a puddle.

I was well aware of this but decided to play it cool. "Awesome, huh?", I said to the teacher supervising the practice.

#awkwardsilence

Easy, isn't it?

Isn't it great?

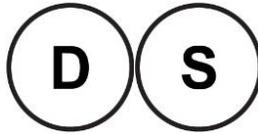
How awesome is that?

This is you making your prospects feel awkward if they don't share your sentiment. And although it's great when your copy evokes emotions, 'awkward', 'patronized' or 'talked down to' is not what you want your prospects to feel.

Want your prospects to feel excited about your offer? Don't tell them how to feel.

Instead, tell them:

- How your offer solves their problems by phrasing features through benefits
- How it makes their lives better by painting the picture of their lives after they buy it
- What your customers / clients think about you / your product by including credible testimonials



#5: Want people to stay longer on your website? Start with a clear homepage

Many of your website visitors don't know what you do. They're checking out your homepage to learn more about you and your offer.

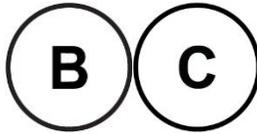
But if you greet them with:

- a cryptic website tagline
- walls of text
- countless images and links that pull their attention in all possible directions
- no or unclear calls to action

... they'll close the browser tab faster than you can blink.

Want people to stay longer on your website? Start with a clear homepage.

- 1) State your name / the name of your company. If you are a one-person brand, place your photograph prominently on your homepage.
- 2) Tell your visitors what you do, what you offer and what's in it for them clearly, using words you're 100% sure your target audience understands.
- 3) Define your homepage goals. What would be an ideal action for your visitors to take on your homepage (subscribe to your email list, check out your Services page, contact you, etc.)?
- 4) Based on your goals, remove everything that pulls their attention in the wrong direction.
- 5) Add more information that may increase the chances of them taking that action (testimonials, quotes from your case studies, videos, etc.).
- 6) Add clear calls to action to tell people what they should do next.



#6: Get to the point quickly or risk losing a reader

You've experienced this before.

You're looking for a recipe for homemade hummus. You click on a link, but before you can get to the instructions, you have to scroll down for two miles through "What is hummus?", "Who invented hummus?" and "28 types of hummus North African Bedouins want you to taste".

You get frustrated, order pizza, and go off to write a "10 copywriting tips" blog post... following the same pattern. Instead of telling people what your headline promised right away, you make them suffer through numerous sections of irrelevant blah blah.

Why?

You may be doing it for two reasons.

Reason #1: Everyone's doing it.

Oh, come on! Don't you think it's a bad idea to copy something not knowing the exact reason behind it?

Reason #2: SEO

It's a tactic some blogs use to rank for the queries of "What is..." with the posts that are actually about a narrower topic. This way they can use their keyword more often, which should be better for ranking.

But Google constantly updates its algorithm. And although you can't predict the algorithm changes, one thing is for sure: it will follow the user's needs.

So, in the long run, you're better off giving your readers what they want. And what they want is for you to get to the point quickly.

Get to the point quickly, or you risk losing a reader

10 Copywriting Tips

What is copywriting?

Why copy is important?

Tip #1



Tip #1

Tip #2

Tip #3





#7: Stages of awareness and what your prospects need to hear in each of them

A prospect on your Contact page doesn't need to hear about the benefits of your offer. She's heard enough and now just wants an easy way to get in touch.

A seasoned businessman doesn't need to read five paragraphs describing his problems. He wants to know if you can solve them.

Defining your audience doesn't end with age, gender or occupation. For every page, think about:

- What do they know about their situation and your offer?
- What's missing for them to convert?

First described by Eugene Schwartz in his book "Breakthrough Advertising", the first question has five possible answers, which he calls "stages of customer awareness".

Here's what you need to tell different prospects with different awareness levels for them to give you their money.

Stage #1: Completely unaware

These prospects don't know anything about your offer / problems you solve.

=> Start by speaking to their state of mind.

Stage #2: Problem-aware

These prospects are aware of their problems but don't know how to solve them or even that a solution exists.

=> Start by showing them that you understand their pain and present them the 'what' of your solution.

Stage #3: Solution-aware

These prospects know what result they want but don't know that your solution can help them achieve it.

=> Show them how and why your solution works and explain its benefits.

Stage #4: Product-aware

These prospects know what you sell but aren't sure it's right for them.

=> Tell them how your solution is different and prove that it works.

Stage #5: Most aware

These prospects know their problems, the result they want and that your product helps. They just want to see the deal.

=> Show them the deal right away.



#8: Hide your “follow me” social icons

“Follow me” social icons that take your visitors to your Twitter, Facebook or Pinterest profile have no place in your website header.

Nor in your sidebar.

Nor anywhere else where your visitors might click on them before they see the rest of the page.

Your visitors have just come to your website, and you should do everything possible to keep them there.

If you give them a chance to leave by showing them those shiny “follow me” icons, they might take it and never come back.

Sure, at first they’ll land on your social profile, but then you’ll lose them to baby pictures, cat memes and cake recipes.

The best place for the “follow me” social icons on your website?

Your website footer.

If someone genuinely wants to follow you on social media, they’ll scroll down to find those links. Everyone else should stay on your website and explore more of your content.

Bonus tip: Make sure you include only the links to the social networks you regularly post on (unless you’re equally active on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Instagram).



#9: Delete your Testimonials page

Do you have a Testimonials page? If you do, check your Google Analytics reports to see how many people visit it. I bet there aren't many.

But that's not your biggest problem.

Every testimonial is more powerful in context, next to a claim you want your prospects to believe, and not in a pile of ten other testimonials on your Testimonials page that your prospects may or may not discover.

Want to persuade more website visitors to take action? Add client testimonials where they matter – on your homepage, About, service and product pages, and anywhere else where you want your prospects to take the next step.

Only use effective testimonials that:

- Are short and direct
- Use full names and, if possible, headshots
- Are specific enough to sound authentic
- Do at least one of these three things:
 - Reinforce your unique value proposition
 - Use data behind the value your service or product delivers
 - Address initial fears of your customers and explain how they were eliminated
- If possible, contain the keyword you've optimized that page for

Anatomy of an effective testimonial

“Better leads, 35% increase in sign-ups” ◀ Main takeaway

We hired John to rewrite our homepage that didn't reflect our value proposition anymore and was barely bringing us leads. We noticed an improvement in lead quality almost immediately after the page went live. The sign-up rate for our free trial is also up 35%. We couldn't be happier with John and his work.

What was done

Specific benefits

Name / company

Rick Miller, CEO, FlyChart





#10: Don't make your headings look like buttons

When someone lands on your page, they first skim through. They pause and start reading only when something catches their eye.

It can be difficult for visitors to skim your page when you direct their attention to the wrong elements or clutter the page with too many things at once.

For example, when your headings look like buttons.

If you use this style for the widget titles in the sidebar or have many headings on your page, the color backgrounds make your page cluttered.

Help your visitors find relevant spots and dive into your content faster by reducing clutter and making all elements look like they function.

Non-clickable text should look like plain text:

- No distinct font color
- No background color
- Not underlined

For headings: Use a different font family, bigger and / or capitalized letters.

Links should look clickable:

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