

TheWebStyleGuide.

Because you have nothing . . . if you don't have style.

Web Communications – we've got style.

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What is a Web Style Guide?

Simple. These are the basic rules of what you should and should not do on your websites for the university's web rebuild. This style guide applies only to official university pages — defined as web pages on a university web server that have been created by the university, its schools, departments or other administrative offices. It does not apply to personal web pages created by individuals, such as students or faculty members.

Why is it important?

Every NKU website contributes to the user's perception of the university. To ensure a unified web presence, official pages of the NKU web should appear to be visually related in order to help promote usability and to reinforce the school's brand identity. Although consistency is important, this style guide takes into consideration the fact that design standards may vary for individual departments and colleges/schools. But if you do wish to request creative modifications to our basic templates, please contact Jim Nilson, the Director of Web Communications, at nilsonj@nku.edu. While there is the option to experiment with different designs, there are certain required elements, which are outlined in this guide.

Why is it for me?

The website is NKU's window to the world, the most visible part of the university. By creating a unified brand – and one that is easy to use – we all benefit with a better product, which will aid and attract more students, faculty, staff, parents and other visitors.

For further questions, contact nilsonj@nku.edu.

About the NKU website

The NKU website is a public-facing presence of Northern Kentucky University, and, as such, should always reflect the university in a positive manner.

Updating your website / Creating a website

Not a computer programmer? Still learning how to turn on that new laptop? No worries. To update your site, you will be using what is called a content management system. Here at NKU we are using Serena Collage, which allows you to update your website with minimal training. Really all you need to know is how to enter text, copy and paste, and link pages.

Need help? Unsure of where to go next? Our Service Center (x. 6911) can get you off on the right track. You've probably been to a Serena Training already, but if not, sign up for one by contacting itsctraining@nku.edu or calling ITSC at 859.572.1420.

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Forget what you've previously heard about websites – that there are a maximum number of clicks before arriving at your destination, for instance. At NKU, we think you can have numerous pages, so long as three things are always clear: Users must always know where they are, where they came from and where they are going.

In our minds, if those objectives are met, our site is successful and user-friendly.

We also want the look and feel of the site to remain consistent on most pages. You'll notice we keep the same site navigation (links located on the left side) on the pages, as well as similar font styles and colors.

Layout and Design

While the site must be easy for users to understand and navigate, a clean, tasteful design is also important. The design should showcase NKU's campus, students, faculty and staff through pictures, graphics and text. Websites can often be less effective due to poor design, which tends to turn visitors away.

We have templates available for you to use, but we understand some users may want a more individual look. The system enables you to create the look you would like within your content area, but for those who want even a more individual feel, please send a request to Jim Nilson at nilsonj@nku.edu. For personal faculty and staff pages, the templates are optional and for non-NKU departments, a template is not available.

Parts:

- Framework and bars: The framework of the site, which is the top navigation and logos, plus the bottom links, will remain the same, or static – with the top and bottom bars color coded to represent specific colleges and schools (Except for all administrative departments, which will use gold on the bar).
- Staging area: The staging area (your area – the space you can manipulate) will be non-static, or able to be changed to fit the personality and style of the department or school. This is where you will enter your website content. Still, there are basic best practices to follow.
- Navigation area: The main navigation, located on the left, will always remain consistent, with the first word capitalized, and the font style should be similar throughout the site. Secondary navigation has more freedom, such as “related links” or “spotlight areas,” which incorporate text and graphics. One of these added areas is the Right Bar, gold on upper level academic pages and different colors on college and school pages. Added information can also be added here.

Colors:

A good rule for using color on your site is to use it tastefully. This isn't Vegas. We don't need flashing neon to make our points. Stay with colors that enhance the site, not ones that take it over. No fluorescents needed.

It's good to think of colors that blend well with gold.

Fonts:

For body copy, websites tend to use sans-serif fonts (those fonts without the curved ends). The fonts are easier to read on a computer monitor, and most people have them already on their computers. Here are our top four recommendations for your body copy

(drumroll, please): 1. Lucida Grande, 2. Verdana, 2. Arial (tie), and 4. Helvetica. Copy should always be black or dark red, with links underlined and dark red.

Different fonts – As with colors, designers need to also be consistent with their use of fonts. We realize some may want to emphasize the artistic qualities of a certain font (say, for a subhead, which separates paragraphs of copy), but they should be used sparingly. A different font for a heading is fine, but too many fonts make the site look jumbled. The fewer fonts used, the better.

Size – For body copy, a font size generally should never be smaller than 9-point type, while never exceeding 12-point type. Too big can make a site look unprofessional, while too small will make it difficult to read. For those with limited vision, you will be able to adjust font sizes on your browser.

Web Graphics and photography

In many cases, a website's photos are the first things a prospective student sees when trying to find information about a college. The images need to be clear, of the correct size and representative of NKU.

Best practices

Format – When using photography, be sure to follow copyright regulations and give credit to photographers wherever necessary. Photos should be in JPEG (.jpg) format with a resolution of 72 dpi (if you don't know what any of that means, then contact Web Editor Megan McCarty at mccartym1@nku.edu). Graphic elements such as icons and buttons can be in GIF (.gif) format. You should be able to view the page on a screen resolution set to 1024 x 768 without a horizontal scrollbar appearing. If a scrollbar does appear at this screen resolution, you may be using an image that is too large. Also, try printing out the web page. Does it print with all page elements (including images) visible? It should. If not, we've got problems.

There are two main ways you can incorporate photos into the internal pages of your site. The first is to add a banner image (which stretches across the top of the page) to the top of the page. Banner images must be 735 (width) x 225 (height) pixels in size for type 1 pages (top-level pages with navigation in the black column on the left side of the template) and 725 (width) x 225 (height) pixels in size for type 2 pages (all department and college/school pages).

The heading of the page should appear on the image in a way that does not interfere too much with the image in white text that is Vendetta font, size 48 pts. A black gradient shadow should be used behind the text with enough transparency to make the text readable but the photo behind it still visible. The other option is to include a photo in the copy or in the right bar. These should be smaller than a banner image and framed by a solid white frame with a drop shadow (format available in Serena Collage).

Stock photography – Please avoid using stock photography; images taken of NKU's campus and population can be downloaded at <http://photos.nku.edu>.

Request a photo – If you don't see a photo you like, you can submit a photo request to the university photographer at the same site.

Cropping techniques – Keep crops proportional and consider the focal point. Cropping too much will be noticed by users. Do not manipulate the height and width attributes of the image tag used in HTML markup to make images look smaller than they really are. Users still have to download the large image, and this approach can reduce the crispness and quality of the image.

Borders – A border or frame will be placed around photos that appear inside the text of the page (not at the top for border photos). When the “frame” choice is selected within Serena, a small frame and border will appear. This is our style.

Text over graphics or photos – Text should generally only be placed in the “dead space” of a photo, such as sky, ground or other areas where the subject of the photo is not present. Text in an image should also appear in the Alt tag (which you will see when you set it up. This helps to explain the photo to those students who cannot see it).

Number/size of images: Don’t over-do it. Photos should be limited so as they can be showcased at a large enough size to be readable.

Image selection: Use images that represent the diverse NKU student population. Do not use inappropriate images and do not repeat images throughout your site.

I need a photo! What do I do??? Simple. E-mail Web Editor Megan McCarty at mccartym1@nku.edu.

Logos:

If there is one iconic symbol of NKU, it is the logo, which can only be used as a certain size, color and style.

Any group with an official affiliation to NKU is allowed to use the logo as long as it is not altered, distorted or revised in any way. The logo can be black with a gold flame or all of any single color – no other color combinations are allowed. There are several versions of the logo available. Visit http://www.nku.edu/~midweek/NKU_logos.htm for examples. Contact fraziermi@nku.edu for more information.

Content

Just as photos, graphics and design must mesh to make the website look professional, the site also must feature copy that reads in a professional manner.

Accuracy – First and foremost, please make sure your site's content is accurate and up-to-date. You are responsible not only for maintaining your site but also for ensuring that the information meets NKU's editorial standards. The Office of Marketing + Communications web communications team will also be monitoring content for errors and may modify the text for stylistic or consistency purposes.

Credibility – Remember copyright laws and check sources for credibility. Give credit to other authors where necessary. When including information or statistics that are officially kept by another department within the university, provide a link to that department's website rather than recreating the information on your own site, to make sure the information is always consistent and up-to-date.

The Essentials – Keep in mind that visitors may arrive at your website from anywhere, so it's important that every page include:

1. A link to the department/organization home page (can be an icon)
2. A link to the NKU home page (can be an icon)
3. E-mail address or other contact information

How to Write for the Web

We realize everyone writes in his or her own voice, but here are a few tips to make sure your words are getting across to the person reading your website:

Identify the audience – Who is your audience? A parent? A high school senior? Once you've identified who you're writing to, then decide on your tone and style. Should it be formal or informal? It all depends on the audience. Sometimes you will write for several groups of people at once. Choose a style appropriate for everyone.

Be brief – Write almost like you're taking notes. Use bullet points and lists, while providing links, graphics and other tools (like subheads) to keep the reader moving.

But . . . Brief does not mean boring. Use action verbs to create language that is engaging and fun to read.

Style Guide – The Department of Marketing + Communications has a separate editorial style guide to provide accuracy and consistency throughout your website. The guide can provide answers to questions of spelling, usage, titles and other style points. Need a copy? Have a question? E-mail Web Editor Ryan Clark at clarkr9@nku.edu.

Copyright – Lastly, avoid copyright issues by always getting permission to use content from the web.

Other info:

Handling links – When it is necessary to link to other university information outside your responsibility, link to that page directly instead of recreating that information directly on your site.

Naming the document – When linking to a document, name the document filename without any spaces or special characters.

Titling your pages – For searchability purposes (for instance, so Google can identify your page) we need to title (what you see in the upper left of the browser) our pages in the correct format. If we were creating a page called About Us for the Student Union, we would want the title to be: About Us: Student Union. That way, we have the important words in an area where Search Engines can find them. (You'll see that Serena will automatically put Northern Kentucky University at the end of the page title as well).

Writing Headlines for Your Pages – Please use some important words in the headline. For instance, if we're describing the Student Union About Us page, we could give it a headline like this: "Learn about the people of the Student Union." Again, for searchability purposes, we need the words "Student Union" in the headline. Keep this in mind when headlining pages.

Reviewing and maintaining your site:

You will be responsible for reviewing and maintaining your site by using the Serena Collage Content Management System. But there are a few things you can do to make sure the content is updated, accurate and adheres to the editorial style guide:

Make sure someone reviews the content – Another set of eyes will help keep the content strong for your site.

Content should not be published without making sure how it will be maintained:

1. Do not leave outdated content on the web.
2. Do not publish pages “under construction” or with “more info coming soon.”
3. Regularly check that all links are working.
4. Check spelling and typing and correct all errors.

Multimedia:

This term refers to video, audio, flash and other types of animated graphics that can be used on your site. There are both advantages and disadvantages to using multimedia presentations.

Advantages: Multimedia presentations convey information more quickly than text. They make complex information simple, enhance online teaching and learning and enhance communication with some disabled groups (particularly those with learning difficulties or cognitive impairments.) Multimedia is necessary if you want to show **movement or change over time** or demonstrate **three-dimensionality**.

Disadvantages: These presentations take longer to download, require the use of plugins that the user may not have or may not be able to install and they create accessibility barriers for visually impaired users.

- Of the three main types of multimedia, tutorials on video, audio and flash usage can be found in the ITSC (formerly POD). Look here for some tutorials: <http://it.nku.edu/itsc>.

Guidelines for using multimedia:

Use an appropriate format. Use formats that support animation only where you need to show movement, three-dimensionality or transitions over time. Using an animated format for a company logo is usually not necessary.

Use PDF only where it is critical to preserve the printed format of a document. PDF takes longer to download and may not be accessible to the visually impaired who are using screen readers.

Use common formats and stay a version or two behind. Users are generally slow to upgrade, so save multimedia files so they will be readable by an earlier version of the plug-in.

Don't force it on users. Some sites use scripts to detect whether users have certain plug-ins installed and send them to the multimedia version of the site. Users should be allowed to remain in control of what they want to see and what they're prepared to spend time downloading.

Provide an accessible alternative. Multimedia may not be accessible to some disabled users. All audio and video files should be accompanied by a downloadable text transcript.

Segment larger works into topical sections. Users may only be interested in a portion of your content, and this allows them to download smaller and more relevant files.

Technical Guide

Like everything else, there is a certain way to name your files, folders and URLs.

File naming conventions –

- File names should be no more than 20 characters.
- Use whole words instead of abbreviations (unless the abbreviation is obvious).
- Use only lowercase letters.
- Do not use spaces or special characters.
- Use single words if possible. If multiple words are needed it's preferred that words run together if they appear in a URL. If necessary, an underscore can be used.

Folder structures –

- Folder name should follow the same conventions as file name and will appear in the URL.
- Images should be kept in an 'image' type folder within each site folder that the pages exist in.
- All other documents can be put in a general 'documents' type folder

URL styles – Official NKU department websites use <http://name.nku.edu>

Web accessibility

Please follow the NKU Web Accessibility Policy and Guidelines, located at <http://accessibility.nku.edu>.

FAQs

Why should I redesign my website?

Change, in a word, is good. As NKU pushes on toward its goal of 25,000 students, there are several things we need from the website to help take us to that lofty mark. We need to have a uniform look, so that no matter where a student, faculty or staff member is surfing, they know they are in the NKU site.

We need to put our best face out into cyberspace, to show the world the best of what NKU has to offer.

And we need to use the web as a tool to keep drawing in those students. Redesigning the site will help us benefit in all of those ways.

Why adopt standard templates and styles?

It's all about uniformity, looking good and making it easiest on you, the user. We want a stylish, but easy-to-use look that will help take NKU to the next level in higher education.

Do I have to use these templates to be in compliance with the university's identity standards?

Yes. While some flexibility exists in the staging area, we will work with you to fit your needs.

How do I get access to Serena Collage?

Contact IT through a service request, located under "Forms and Requests" – "Customer Portal" at it.nku.edu.

Do I have to use Serena Collage to create and maintain my site?

Depends on what you mean by "my" site. For your school site, the one housed on NKU's servers, yes – you must use Serena Collage. For your own personal site, no – do not use Serena.

Will I get help from the university to create my Serena page?

Yes. Have a question? Let us hear it. E-mail Jim Nilson at nilsonj@nku.edu.

I'm maintaining the web site by myself and I'm concerned I will not be able to make massive changes alone. What do I do?

Don't worry. Nothing "massive" has to take place on your site. You can do it, because it's an easy process, and we in the Marketing + Communications and Information Technology departments will help you.

Help us, help you

This document is always changing, and – like the rest of the website – constantly being updated. Please let us know if we need to add or change something in this style guide. E-mail Ryan Clark at clarkr9@nku.edu.