

Website Guidelines

Essential Best Practice

Text Alignment & Readability

Why it matters?

Centre-aligned text forces the eye to search for the start of each line, dramatically slowing reading speed and causing fatigue.

✓ **All body text must be left-aligned. Only centre-align short, standalone elements like:**

- Pull quotes or statistics
- Image captions (where appropriate)

✓ **Paragraph Length**

- Keep paragraphs to 4-6 lines. Shorter fragments break up the reading flow and make content feel unfinished.

Information Hierarchy

Why it matters?

Users scan pages in an F-pattern. If critical information is buried, they'll leave before finding it.

✓ The Rules

1. Top third: Page purpose, key message, primary CTA
2. Middle: Supporting information, benefits, details
3. Bottom: Secondary actions, contact information

Remember: *make the sections on each page look different from one another, so that it's clear to the user that they are looking at different types of information and keeps the page looking visually interesting.*

One Page, One Purpose

Why it matters?

Pages trying to do everything end up achieving nothing. Users become overwhelmed and leave.

✓ **Every page should have ONE clear objective, for example:**

- Search for a course
- Apply for this course
- Register for an event
- Understand this process

Remember: *Everything on the page should support that objective. If content doesn't serve the goal - ask yourself why you're putting it there?*

CTA Visual Hierarchy

Why it matters?

When all buttons, links, PODs look the same, users can't distinguish between "search for a course" and "register your interest." Decision paralysis increases bounce rates.

✓ The Rules

- Primary CTA: Large, bold, prominent placement
- Secondary CTA: Smaller, outline style
- Tertiary links: Text links only, no button styling
- Maximum 2-3 CTAs per page: One primary, 1-2 secondary maximum

Strategic Link Management

Why is matters?

Every link is an exit opportunity. Too many options scatter users across the site instead of guiding them toward your goal.

✓ The Rules

- Limit to 7 links maximum per page (excluding mega nav)
- Every link must justify its presence - remove "just in case" links
- In-text links should be essential reference points, not conveniences
- Group related links together rather than scattering through text

Component & Pod Usage

Why is matters?

Using the wrong component for the job creates confusion and inconsistency. Repeating the same component type creates visual monotony and user fatigue.

✓ **Choose components based on content type and purpose:**

- Hero Banner: Page introduction with primary CTA (one per page maximum)
- Pods: Key messages or features (2-4 per page)
- Accordions: FAQ content or optional detail that would otherwise clutter the page
- Video Pods: Storytelling, testimonials, complex concepts
- Statistics/Pull Quotes: Highlighting key data or testimonials

✓ **Vary your components down the page**

- Don't use multiple pods of the same design in a row. Mix components to maintain visual interest and guide users through different types of information.

Image Guidelines

Why is matters?

Poor quality images damage credibility. Oversized files slow page load, harming SEO and user experience. Incorrect aspect ratios cause awkward cropping on mobile.

The Rules:

✓ Image Quality:

- Use high-resolution images (minimum 1920px wide for full-width components)
- Ensure images are sharp, well-lit, and professionally composed
- Avoid pixelated, blurry, or stretched images

✓ File Optimisation:

- Compress images before uploading (aim for under 500KB per image)
- Use .jpg for photographs, .png for graphics with transparency

Content Strategy

Why it matters?

Overly long pages overwhelm users. Inconsistent tone damages trust. Content that could be consolidated creates unnecessary navigation complexity.

✓ Content Length:

- Aim for pages that take 2-3 minutes to read
- If content exceeds 1,200 words, consider splitting into multiple pages or using accordions
- Use the "inverted pyramid" - most important information first

✓ Create separate pages when:

- Topics are distinct enough to warrant their own URL
- Users are likely to bookmark or share specific sections
- Content serves different user needs or stages in the journey

SEO Essentials

Why it matters?

Poor SEO means your content won't be found. Inconsistent metadata damages search rankings. These elements directly impact whether prospective students find your pages.

✓ Page Titles:

- Keep to 50-60 characters (including "Northumbria University")
- Front-load with keywords: "MSc Computer Science" not "Learn about our MSc..."
- Make each page title unique across the site

✓ Meta Descriptions:

- 150-160 characters maximum
- Include primary keywords naturally
- Write to encourage clicks - this is your search result sales pitch

✓ Heading Structure:

- One H1 per page only (this should be your page title)
- Never skip heading levels (don't jump from H2 to H4)
- Use headings to structure content, not to style text

✓ URL Structure:

- Keep URLs short, descriptive, and keyword-rich
- Avoid dates or parameters in URLs where possible

Form Guidelines

Why it matters?

Forms are conversion points. Poorly designed forms lose applicants. Every additional field decreases completion rates. GDPR violations carry serious consequences.

✓ **When to use forms:**

- Only when you need to collect information to progress the user's journey
- Never use forms as a barrier to information that should be freely available

✓ **Form accessibility:**

- All fields must have clear labels
- Ensure forms work with keyboard navigation

✓ **Form length:**

- Only ask for essential information - every field reduces completion rates
- If a form has more than 8 fields, use a multi-step form
- Use smart defaults and conditional fields to reduce user effort

✓ **GDPR & Privacy:**

- Every form must include a link to the relevant privacy notice