Digital Presence Standards

Document summary

Effective date	July 2025	**Last updated**	June 2025
Document owner	Communication and Marketing Department (CMD)		
Approved by	CMD	**Reviewed by**	
Enquiries	Rethea Deetlefs		

Revision

Review period: These standards must be reviewed every five years.

Version	Revision Type	Amendments	Approved by	Signed	Review date

Table of contents

Purpose 1
Definitions 2
Applicable to 3
Standards details 3
1. Branding 3
2. Inclusivity 3
3. User first 3
4. Accessibility 3
5. Metadata 4
6. Responsiveness 4
7. Reusing rather than duplicating content 4
8. Content style and formatting 4
9. Editorial standards (text) 5
10. Media 5
Related links 6

Purpose

The purpose of these standards is to ensure that UCT's Digital Presence is consistent, accessible (both to its audience and search engines, and across platforms), and understandable. The standards comprise best practice with regards to the use of Semantic Markup, usability, and accessibility, alongside UCT-specific styles and practices.

Please note: This document must be read in conjunction with the Digital Presence Policy and Digital Presence Guidelines.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Absolute vs Relative URLs	Absolute URLs include a domain name. Relative URLs do not and indicate a location on the site the link occurs on. E.g.: https://ebe.uct.ac.za/url/ (absolute; to load another site) and /url/ (relative to the current site, to load local content)
Accessibility	Refers to making content accessible to those with disabilities by catering for assistive technology as well as accessibility features built into browsers
CMS; Drupal	Content management system; an ICTS-hosted UCT-specific instance of Drupal is UCT's official web CMS
Digital Content	Text, audio, or imagery on an official UCT website, blog, intranet, extranet, portal, mobile app, chatbot, social media account, and any other application that displays UCT content via a web interface; excludes published scholarly content
Digital Content Authors	Writer of UCT Digital Content, responsible for its accuracy and currency
Digital Content Manager	The person formally tasked with maintaining the content on a UCT website or in a UCT application accessible online
Digital Presence	Comprises Websites, Social Media sites and Accounts, including their Digital Content, and the Digital Content on UCT Web Applications, mobile apps, chatbots, and other internet-enabled products and services, etc., whether hosted internally or externally to UCT
Metadata	Data about data: "used for describing Web pages and accessible components of Web pages as well as associating alternate versions of Web content to each other. These descriptions in turn allows users to locate specific information they need or prefer." (From W3.org.)
Responsiveness	A site's ability to adapt and display properly across various devices, screen sizes, and varying connection speeds. It ensures optimal user experience by adjusting layout, content, and functionality for seamless interaction, regardless of the device used.
Screen Readers	Software used by the visually impaired
Semantic Markup	Semantic markup helps the audience and search engines understand the structure and meaning of web pages and web content. It includes structural markup (e.g. headings, paragraphs, lists), links, text formatting (e.g. bold), etc.
SEO	Search engine optimisation

Usability	How easily and effectively users can interact with a digital product or website to achieve their goals. It involves aspects like intuitiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction, ensuring a positive user experience.
User-First Principle	End users and consumers are prioritised; websites, web and other applications and Digital Content are created with their needs in mind. There is no assumption that the user has any institutional, organisational, system, procedural or process knowledge. User journeys determine information architecture.
WYSIWYG	“What You See Is What You Get”; web-based software that allows a user to edit content in an interface that displays that content the way an end user will see it on a web page; may also allow the user to access and edit the content via a “source” view that displays the source code

Applicable to

The standards are applicable to all UCT Digital Content on UCT websites and in all applications that expose UCT content on the web. They must be followed and implemented by all Digital Content Authors and Digital Content Managers.

Standards details

Some of the standards below, such as support of screen readers, are built into modern content management systems. Developers and administrators should take care not to compromise compliance with standards when implementing and customising such systems.

1. **Branding**
   - 1.1. All websites and web applications must display the UCT logo at the top.
   - 1.2. The UCT logo positioned at the top left on the official Drupal design template may not be moved or removed.
2. **Inclusivity**
   - 2.1. Digital Content must use inclusive terminology and visuals to reflect societal and institutional diversity and support transformation objectives.
     - 2.1.1. In support of the above, “they”, “theirs”, and “them” must be used as gender-neutral collective pronouns when referring to groups or individuals whose pronouns are not known.
       E.g.
       - The student left their test on the table.
3. **User first**
   - 3.1. All role players in the creation, management and editing of websites, applications and Digital Content must strive to adhere to the User-First Principle. In particular:
     - 3.1.1. The structure of websites and Digital Content must be intuitive, enabling expected and encouraged user journeys to and through content. Knowledge of UCT and UCT entities’ organisational structure must not be a requirement for users to find content.
     - 3.1.2. UCT terminology and jargon that may not be understood by users must be avoided in public-facing content; if unavoidable, the necessary explanations must be provided.
4. **Accessibility**

As per the Digital Presence Policy, Digital Content Managers must strive to make their content compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guide, version 2.0. Minimum standards are listed below:

4.1. Assistive technology

4.1.1. Websites and digital content must strive to cater for and be compatible with assistive technology such as screen readers as well as accessibility features built into browsers.

4.2. Colour contrast

4.2.1. There must be sufficient contrast between text and background to ensure legibility.

4.2.1.1. Digital Content Managers can consult online tools such as WebAIM Contrast Checker to ensure their content's compliance.

4.3. Metadata: see #4 below.

4.4. Content style and formatting: see #7 below.

4.5. Visual elements: see #9.3.1 – 9.3.2 below.

5. Metadata

5.1. Descriptive, specific metadata must be assigned to uploaded content, and media such as documents and images to:

5.1.1. make them easy to find in the CMSes

5.1.2. provide descriptions for screen readers (alt text in the case of images)

5.1.3. allow search engines to properly index content.

6. Responsiveness

6.1. The necessary measures must be taken to ensure that websites and Digital Content are responsive across different device resolutions and connection speeds.

6.1.1. Responsiveness must be catered for in web CMSes and other applications.

6.1.2. Responsive grids must be used for content layout where necessary and possible.

7. Reusing rather than duplicating content

7.1. Content must be embedded from or linked to on original, authoritative sources rather than locally duplicated.
E.g
- Linking to the UCT handbooks page on the Applicants & Students site rather than uploading local copies which may become outdated

7.2. If available, Content Managers must use CMS functionality allowing the sharing of content without duplicating it.

7.2.1. If manual duplication of content is unavoidable, Content Managers must remember to update all locations when required.

8. Content style and formatting

8.1. Content Managers must implement Semantic Markup for text correctly to ensure better user comprehension and SEO. This includes headings, paragraphs, links, and lists.

8.2. Headings

8.2.1. Heading styles must not be used to add emphasis to text.

8.2.2. Headings must not be assigned additional styling such as bold, underline or italics unless there is a semantic requirement to do so.
E.g.
- Using italics for the title of a book quoted in a heading

8.2.3. On Drupal, Heading 1 (H1) is reserved for system use. The heading hierarchy must therefore start with H2.

8.3. Links

8.3.1. Link text must not be self-referential (e.g. “Click here.”, “Download.”).

8.3.1.1. Linking descriptive keywords that explain where the link is going enhances SEO and informs readers.
E.g.
- View the Employment Equity Policy.
- Download the 2018 Annual Financial Statement.

8.3.2. Absolute URLs must only be used for links to other sites or content on other sites. Relative URLs must be used to link to content on the site the links appear on (local content).

8.3.3. Mimecast URLs must not be used in Digital Content.

8.4. Any content pasted into a WYSIWYG editor must be cleaned of unwanted styles and formatting.

8.4.1. Unwanted styles and formatting can be removed using the functionality built into such editors to clean content or by using online HTML code cleaners (e,g, HTML Cleaner).

8.5. Text alignment

8.5.1. Justified text must not be used on web pages as it results in inconsistent word spacing.

9. Editorial standards (text)

See the Digital Presence Guidelines as well as the CMD Editorial Style Guide for additional guidance and information.

9.1. General

9.1.1. Textual Digital Content must be concise and scannable.

9.1.1.1. Scannability is achieved using, for example, headings, paragraphs, and bulleted or numbered lists.

9.1.2. ALLCAPS must not be used in headings or any other text other than for acronyms, as they are a barrier to legibility and scannability.

9.1.3. Page titles, navigation text and content headings must be descriptive but concise.

10.Media

10.1. Filenames

10.1.1. Filenames must be brief, descriptive, and unique.

10.1.2. Spaces must not appear in filenames; they must be replaced by hyphens.

10.2. Media entities

10.2.1. On Drupal, media entities are created when documents, images and other files are uploaded. All uploaded files must be linked to by these media entity URLs and not the direct file URLs.

10.2.1.1. Replacing the media entities’ files does not change the entities’ URLs, which helps to avoid broken links.

10.2.2. On sites and in content hosted on other platforms, equivalent functionality must be used where available.

10.3. Images

10.3.1. Images must be assigned brief and descriptive alt text.

10.3.2. Images of text must not be used on web pages, in web applications or in PDFs unless they are for decorative purposes. They do not scale well on different screen resolutions, are not indexable by search engines and cannot be read by most screen readers.

10.3.2.1. If unavoidable, e.g. in the case of logos featuring text, the images must be assigned appropriate alt text.

10.3.3. Images must be optimised to the minimum file size compatible with good quality.

10.3.4. Images must not appear distorted, squashed, or stretched due to manually assigned heights and widths. They must be resized or cropped to the desired size.

10.4. Video and audio media

10.4.1. Content managers must strive to make video and audio content disability accessible.

10.4.2. Autoplay must not be used for video or audio recordings. Viewing or listening to the media must be the reader's choice unless video is used as background/header

10.4.3. Flashing elements must be avoided as they could lead to users having seizures.

10.5. Documents

10.5.1. Documents must be optimised to the minimum file size compatible with good quality.

10.5.2. Documents must be structured correctly and have appropriate titles and metadata.

Related links

- Drupal Demo/Manual site
- Digital Presence Governance Framework (ratification process underway)
- Digital Presence Policy (ratification process underway)
- Digital Presence Guidelines
- UCT Social Media Policy (ratification process underway)
- UCT Inclusivity Policy for Sexual Orientation
- UCT Disability Policy
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0
- CMD Editorial Style Guide