Website Guidelines for Rutgers University

Introduction

These guidelines outline best practices for all Rutgers websites and ensure a consistent and user-friendly online presence for the university. This guide is designed for anyone creating or managing a Rutgers website. Following these guidelines will ensure your website is professional, accessible, secure, and optimized for search engines.

From website content and navigation to user experience and security, this comprehensive resource will help Rutgers staff and faculty create and maintain effective websites.

Rutgers Website Policy

Rutgers Website Policy outlines the requirements for all websites representing the university. The policy aims to ensure a consistent, on-brand image for Rutgers online and ensure that visitors to Rutgers websites have a consistent and compliant user experience.

Read the full text of the Rutgers University Website Policy.

The policy applies to all websites under the rutgers.edu domain, as well as rutgers.com, rutgers.org, rutgers.info, and any others representing Rutgers and providing official information. Exceptions are made for faculty websites related to research and scholarly work and student organization websites.

Key points of the policy:

- **Content Requirements:** Websites must be accurate, up-to-date, and reviewed regularly. Broken links and outdated information should be removed. Rutgers logos and branding must be consistent across all sites.
- **Accessibility:** In accordance with federal law, and in order for university websites to be viewed and used by the widest audience, all webpages must comply with University Policy 70.1.5: Rutgers University World Wide Web Accessibility Policy.
- **Navigation:** All websites must be user-friendly and easy to navigate. They should include a search function for the specific site and a way to search the entire Rutgers web domain. There should also be a clear link to the rutgers.edu homepage from all official webpages.
- **Management:** The policy outlines procedures for domain name assignment and website administration.
- **Advertising:** Advertising and sponsorships are generally not allowed on websites used for student registration, admissions, or other critical functions.

Overall, the Rutgers Website Policy ensures that all official university websites present a professional and accessible online presence that effectively serves Rutgers' constituents.

Copyright

Per the Rutgers Website Policy, all Rutgers websites must include a copyright statement formatted as:

Copyright ©20XX Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

The copyright year should be updated only if the website has been updated during the given year. This copyright section can link to the university copyright information page.

Website Guidelines for Rutgers University *(continued)*

Website Accessibility

Rutgers is committed to ensuring equal access to information, programs, and activities through its technologies, webpages, services, and resources for all its constituencies.

Per the Rutgers University World Wide Web Accessibility Policy, all webpages newly created, redesigned, or modified by the university, any of its units, or any of its faculty on or after the establishment of this policy must be in compliance with the latest version of the World Wide Web Consortium's standard: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.0 AA conformance level.

This policy applies to all university websites and web content and functionality developed by, maintained by, or offered through third-party vendors or open sources, except when doing so would impose a fundamental alteration or undue burden.

All Rutgers websites must contain the university accessibility statement in the footer of each page:

> Rutgers is an equal access/equal opportunity institution. Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to direct suggestions, comments, or complaints concerning any accessibility issues with Rutgers websites to accessibility@ rutgers.edu or complete the Report Accessibility Barrier / Provide Feedback Form.

Website Privacy

Website users expect a certain level of privacy and transparency when they browse the web. Conversely, using any website or application also comes with the expectation that the data generated by a visitor is not innately private.

The Data Privacy Statement for Rutgers University Websites describes Rutgers' practices regarding the university's collection, use, and treatment of information that may be provided by visiting a Rutgers website, including rutgers.edu and any of its associated subdomains (e.g., newbrunswick.rutgers.edu or admissions.rutgers.edu).

This privacy statement serves as a baseline for the university. Rutgers websites, including those on Rutgers subdomains, may adopt additional processes and/or privacy practices as their specific needs require. It is recommended that all Rutgers units adopt this statement and link to it in the footer of the website. If a different statement is needed due to how the site is collecting and using visitor data, units should work with the Office of General Counsel and the Information Security Office to develop an alternate statement.

Rutgers website administrators may elect to use third-party tools that collect user data, including but not limited to Google Analytics, Microsoft Clarity, and/or various marketing technologies. These tools carry their own privacy statements that website owners should be aware of in advance of implementing on a Rutgers website.

Security

Website security refers to the measures taken to protect a website from cyberattacks, data breaches, and other malicious activities. Rutgers OIT goes to great lengths to ensure Rutgers websites are secure, but it is essential for individual users to be aware of security best practices.

Login credentials

Websites should be set up with a Rutgers authentication service such as CAS or Shibboleth. These tools provide two-factor authentication and federated login functionality.

Using a federated login to access your website is preferred over using a username/password combination.

If using a username/password combination is necessary, ensure your password is long, unique, unobvious, and easy for you to remember.

User roles

User roles are the collection of permissions assigned to website editors. In general, website editors should have the minimum number of permissions needed to do their work effectively. For example, an editor who only adds images to a website likely does not need an administrative role that would allow them to change a website's menus or footer content.

Work with your web and technical team to define, create, and assign appropriate user roles for your site.

Best practices

- **SSL/TLS Certificates:** Implement an SSL/TLS certificate to encrypt communication between your website and visitors. This scrambles data in transit, protecting sensitive information like login credentials and credit card details.
  - Avoid "http." Seek "https."
- **Strong Passwords and Management:** Enforce strong password policies for all website accounts (admin, user accounts, etc.). Avoid password reuse and consider a password manager to generate and store unique passwords securely.
- **Software Updates:** Always keep your website's core software, plugins, and themes up to date. Updates often include security patches that address vulnerabilities exploited by attackers.
- **Secure Web Hosting:** Choose a reputable web hosting provider with robust security features like firewalls, intrusion detection, and regular backups. Reliable backups allow recovery in case of attacks or data loss.
  - Rutgers recommends hosting websites on the enterprise Pantheon account to ensure security and promote streamlined hosting profiles. Learn more about hosting on Pantheon.

Website Analytics

Understanding how visitors interact with your website is essential for creating an effective site that meets both user and organizational needs. Website analytics tools give website owners important insights and even revelations into hidden patterns and behaviors.

Benefits of website analytics:

- **Improved User Experience**
- **Informed Content Strategy**
- **Optimized Marketing Campaigns**

Website analytics equip you with data points to make informed decisions about your website. With the right tools and understanding, you can transform your online presence and achieve your objectives.

Website analytics can tell you:

- **Number of Visitors:** See how many people visit your site and track trends over time.
- **New vs. Returning Visitors:** Understand how well you're engaging your audience.
- **Traffic Sources:** Discover where your visitors come from (search engines, social media, etc.).
- **Pageviews and Time Spent:** See which pages are most popular and how long visitors stay engaged.
- **Bounce Rate:** Track the percentage of visitors who leave after just one page.
- **Click-Through Rates (CTRs):** Measure how effectively buttons and links lead visitors to take desired actions.
- **Form Submissions and Sign-Ups:** Analyze how well your site leads visitors to accomplish desired goals or tasks.
- **Goal Completion:** Track specific actions you want visitors to take (e.g., downloading a file, subscribing to a newsletter).

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These tools will help you make the most out of your web analytics:

Google Tag Manager

Google Tag Manager (GTM) is a popular tool that simplifies adding and managing various snippets of code (tags) on your website. GTM serves as the central hub for all your website's tracking and marketing tools.

A key benefit of GTM is that it allows non-developers (e.g., marketers, website editors) to add and manage code snippets without assistance from developers.

Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a powerful, free tool for analyzing and monitoring user behavior on your website. You can add the Google Analytics tag to GTM for easy management.

Google Analytics provides:

- **Traffic Tracking:** See how many visitors come to your site, where they come from (search engines, social media, etc.), and how they find you.
- **User Behavior Analysis:** Dive deep into user behavior. Discover which pages are most popular, how long visitors stay engaged, and where they drop off.
- **Conversions and Goals:** Track specific actions you want visitors to take, like signing up for a newsletter or making a purchase.
- **Measure Performance:** Analyze the effectiveness of your marketing efforts and identify areas for improvement.

Microsoft Clarity

Microsoft Clarity is a free web analytics tool that focuses on user behavior. Unlike Google Analytics, which provides more general traffic data, Clarity digs into how people interact with your website's elements. You can add the Microsoft Clarity tag to GTM for easy management.

Microsoft Clarity provides:

- **Visual Insights:** Clarity translates user interactions into visual representations like heatmaps and session recordings.
- **Heatmaps:** See where users click, scroll, and hover on your webpages, revealing areas of high engagement and potential drop-off points.
- **Session Recordings:** Watch actual recordings of user sessions, allowing you to pinpoint specific user actions and identify usability issues.
- **Click Analysis:** Analyze clicks, including rage clicks (clicks out of frustration) and dead clicks (clicks on non-functional elements).
- **Scroll Depth:** See how far down a page users typically scroll, indicating which content sections are most engaging.

Looker Studio

Looker Studio, formerly known as Google Data Studio, is a free online tool by Google that allows you to transform your data into informative and visually appealing dashboards and reports.

Looker Studio provides:

- **Data Transformation:** Connect to a wide variety of data sources like Google Sheets, databases, and marketing platforms. Looker Studio can handle complex data and lets you transform it for clear visualization.
- **Easy Reporting:** Build interactive dashboards and reports with a drag-and-drop interface. No coding knowledge is required.
- **Data Visualization:** Present your data through various charts, graphs, tables, and other visual elements to make it easily understandable.
- **Collaboration and Sharing:** Collaborate with others on reports in real-time and share your insights securely with colleagues or the public.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the art and science of improving your website's visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs).

The dominant search engine is Google; most conversations about search will revolve around Google. Other search engines to be aware of include Bing, DuckDuckGo, Baido, Yahoo!, and Yandex.

On-page SEO

- **Quality and Relevance:** Craft informative content that resonates with your target audience. Google loves fresh, valuable content.
- **Keywords:** Research relevant keywords people use to find information like yours. Include them naturally throughout your content. Investigate what people are searching for on your site, and consider adding content to your site that aligns with these popular searches.
- **Structure and Readability:** Break up your text with headings, subheadings, and bullet points for easy navigation.

Technical SEO

- **Mobile-Friendliness:** Most searches happen on phones, so ensure your website offers a smooth mobile experience.
- **Site Speed:** A fast loading website keeps visitors happy and improves SEO ranking. You can improve site speed by ensuring your site uses resources efficiently.
- **Optimizing Images:** Use descriptive filenames and alt text to improve image search visibility.

Important SEO concepts

- **Backlinks:** Earn links from high-quality websites relevant to your niche. These act as votes of confidence for your site in Google's eyes.
- **Internal Linking:** Link relevant pages within your website to improve user navigation and SEO.
- **User Experience:** Prioritize a positive user experience. This includes a clean layout, easy navigation, clear straightforward content, and optimized mobile experience.

SEO is constantly evolving. Stay informed about the latest best practices to maintain a strong presence in search results. By following these practices, you can increase your website's organic traffic and get your content seen by the right audience. Remember, SEO is a marathon, not a sprint. Consistent effort and high-quality content are key to achieving long-term SEO success.

- Search Engine Land is a popular and reliable resource for SEO news and updates.
- Google Search Console (GSC) is a helpful tool for understanding what people are typing into Google when your website appears on a SERP. By analyzing the query, page, impressions, and position data provided by GSC, you can identify areas of opportunity as well as gain an understanding of where you're performing well.
- Microsoft Bing has a similar product called Bing Webmaster Tools.
- Paid SEO tools like Ahrefs and SEMRush are popular and proven resources for SEO.
- Free SEO tools like Google Trends and AnswerThePublic are useful, but limited in capacity.

User Experience

User experience (UX) refers to how visitors perceive and interact with a website. It encompasses everything from the first impression of your homepage layout to the ease of finding information and completing desired actions.

Key elements of positive UX

- **Usability:** Can users easily find the information they need and complete tasks intuitively?
- **User Interface (UI) Design:** Is your website visually appealing, well-organized, and with clear calls to action (CTAs)?
- **Navigation:** Is the website structure clear and logical? Can users find what they're looking for easily?
- **Content Quality:** Is your website content informative, engaging, and relevant to your target audience?
- **Mobile-Friendliness:** Does your website display and function flawlessly on all devices (desktops, tablets, smartphones)?
- **Page Loading Speed:** Does your website load quickly? Slow loading times can significantly hurt user experience.
- **Accessibility:** Can users with disabilities easily access and navigate your website?

Content Management

Content management refers to the practices and technologies used to create, organize, store, deliver, and track information in any form. This information, or content, includes text, images, videos, audio files, and presentations.

Content audit

A content audit is a systematic process of reviewing and analyzing all the content on your website or within a specific content marketing campaign. The goal of a content audit is to assess your website's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.

A content audit is an essential first step in any website redesign process. Mature sites that have grown in size over time also benefit from periodic content audits as a matter of hygiene.

By conducting a content audit, you can gain valuable insights to:

- Make data-driven content decisions.
- Improve the overall quality and effectiveness of your content.
- Maximize the return on investment for your content marketing efforts.
- Attract more qualified visitors to your website.

Completing a content audit and taking appropriate steps to improve and refine your website based on the audit findings will help ensure your website feels fresh and relevant.

Accuracy and timeliness

The accuracy of content on Rutgers websites is critical as sites are developed and maintained. When developing your website, consider what sort of information you can effectively maintain and keep up to date. Proofread all content for accuracy and style; ensure grammatical and spelling errors are resolved before publishing.

An appropriate site manager within the unit should be designated as responsible for ensuring that all content on the unit's Rutgers website is accurate and timely.

Websites should be audited at least annually and ideally every semester. Maintaining accuracy and timeliness includes:

- Unpublishing out-of-date content, including documents that are no longer relevant
- Updating old photos, videos, and images
- Moving older content that must be maintained on the site to an archive and/or clearly labeling it so visitors to the site can tell that the information is for historical reference
    - Consider deindexing archival content so it does not appear in search engine results
- Regularly checking the site for broken links and updating accordingly
- Adding and deleting people from directories as appropriate; look throughout the site for other places where employees might be listed and update accordingly
- Removing old/past events

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Audience awareness

Audience awareness refers to the understanding of who you're creating content for. It's the foundation of any successful content strategy. The goals:

- **Knowing Your Audience:** Understand your target audience's demographics (age, location, interests), needs, challenges, and preferred content formats (articles, videos, infographics).
- **Tailoring Content:** With this knowledge, tailor your content to resonate with their specific interests and address their pain points
- **Right Tone and Style:** Use the appropriate tone and style that aligns with your audience. Remember your content will be consumed on a screen.
- **Writing for the Web:** Structuring your content into chunks, with ample use of headings and bullets, to help your audience, who generally scans before they read.
- **Content Relevance:** Focus on creating content that is relevant and valuable to your audience. This will keep them engaged and coming back for more.

Document management

Website content management systems (CMSs) like Drupal and WordPress are not solutions for complex document workflows. However, CMSs are suitable for organizing and serving basic documentation to website users. Hosting documents like PDFs, DOCs, XLSs, etc. on a website comes with some best practices:

- **Remove Old Versions of Documents:** Any file that gets updated should replace itself. Website content managers must ensure that old versions of files are unpublished and that any links to these files are edited to direct to the current version.
  - Don't just replace links; documents will be indexed by search engines and are still published on your site, even if you're not linking to them.
  - Delete outdated documents from your CMS so they don't appear on Google searches.
- **Clear Versioning:** Documents hosted on your website should be labeled clearly and cleanly.
  - Avoid production artifacts in your file name, such as "Test_Document_v2-JFedits"
  - Don't rely on the file name alone as the only means of versioning.
  - Avoid using spaces in your file name.
  - Use _ (underscore) and - (dash) between words to keep your file URL readable.
  - Avoid using dates or other time references in your file name. Version information should be inside the file or in the revision log field.
- **Consider the Cloud:** Consider whether your document needs to be searchable on Google; if not, consider hosting your document on the Rutgers SharePoint for easier versioning and access control.

Sitemap

A sitemap is a file that lists the important webpages on your website and their relationship to each other. It's serves as a map for search engines, helping them discover and index valuable content you have on your site.

Your CMS or an online tool can help you generate a sitemap for your website. Once you have your sitemap file, you can submit it to search engines like Google via their webmaster tools.

By having a well-structured and up-to-date sitemap, you can improve your website's search engine visibility and ensure search engines can find and index the valuable content you offer.

Editorial style

Websites should maintain a consistent editorial style in order to facilitate understanding, maintain accuracy, decrease confusion, and provide a better user experience.

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Units are encouraged to use the Rutgers Editorial Style Guide to simplify style options and provide naming conventions at the university. Units can tailor the guidelines to fit their website's purpose but should refrain from using organizational jargon and acronyms.

Images

Your website is an essential marketing and communications vehicle for your unit, so use images that represent Rutgers in the best light.

Using Rutgers images

It is preferred that Rutgers websites use authentic images of Rutgers people and places whenever possible and practical. The university requires that model release forms be obtained from people you are photographing or videotaping.

The university's digital asset library (photo and video repository) is available to Rutgers faculty and staff with a NetID.

Using public images

Also consider, when necessary, using images on your website that have a Creative Commons license or that are in the public domain. Taking a copyrighted image from another website and using it on yours without permission from the image owner is not permitted.

Using stock images

Through an enterprise wide license, Rutgers employees have access to Adobe Stock, a repository of images that are free to use. Stock images are an option when you cannot find a Rutgers image that meets your needs. Exercise editorial discretion when using stock images.

Using stock images to represent Rutgers students, staff, or faculty should be avoided.

Using optimization

Images downloaded from a stock provider or the Rutgers digital asset library are typically high-resolution, large-format images. Before uploading any image to your website, ensure the image is optimized for the web. The file size for any image uploaded to your site should be as small as possible, generally less than 1MB.

Videos

Video content can be excellent element on your website. Videos can grab attention, improve user engagement, and effectively communicate information.

Hosting

Avoid hosting video content on your website. Video files are very large and will slow down your page load times, deliver a bad user experience, and negatively impact SEO. Use a video hosting provider like Vimeo or YouTube to host and manage your video content, and then embed these videos on your site rather than hosting the files directly.

Captioning

To meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards for media, all videos need to be captioned. **The auto-captioning provided by YouTube or Vimeo does not meet user needs or accessibility requirements unless they are confirmed to be fully accurate.** Typically auto-generated captions need significant editing.

Ensuring accuracy

When posting a video to your website, consider its longevity. Did you make a welcome video prominently featuring your dean? What will become of that video if the dean moves on to another role? Does your video cite tuition and fees from 2020? Is it still on your website several years later?

There are innumerable scenarios where the information in videos can become outdated or irrelevant, so ensure your videos are future-proofed to the best extent possible. Include video review in the annual audit of your site's content.

Rutgers Website Building Tools

There are thousands of websites in the Rutgers web ecosystem. In an effort to better align the consistency and branding of Rutgers online, units are encouraged to use the Rutgers supplied design resources that will make a website feel and look like it is part of a family of websites.

There are website building tools available to all Rutgers units.

Rutgers Core Component Library

The Rutgers Core Component Library (RCCL) is a website building tool using themes that meet Rutgers' visual identity and web accessibility requirements.

The RCCL is available to Rutgers units for free. Fees for setup, maintenance, and web hosting are applicable.

RCCL benefits:
- Intended to save units money by not having to invest in web design and development
- Low or no code required
- Creates a unified user experience for visitors to Rutgers websites
- Meets WCAG v2.0 accessibility standards and receives regular security updates

Available on Drupal or WordPress content management systems.

[More information about RCCL](#)

Sites@Rutgers

Sites@Rutgers (also known as WCS Sites) is a templated WordPress site-building tool. There are several premade templates to choose from. The Sites@Rutgers framework is ideal for website projects that need to launch quickly with limited resources.

Fees for setup, maintenance, and web hosting are applicable.

The options and functionality of the Sites@ platform are more rigid than the RCCL, however, it is a good choice for websites that need a simple design framework.

[More information about the Sites@ template](#)

Both the RCCL and Sites@Rutgers frameworks meet WCAG v2.0 accessibility standards and receive regular security updates.