

Improving engagement and effectiveness by writing for residents



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office of
design & delivery

communications and technology management



**Thank you
for shaping our civic
future!**



What's inside

How we're alike: common challenges and opportunities

Why we're here: putting residents first

How we'll tackle common challenges through resident-focused content



At the end of this funshop, you should:

Goal 1

Understand the importance of focusing content on residents' needs.

Goal 2

Understand writing with service-oriented language and why it matters.

Goal 3

Learn how to make high-quality content easy and accessible for the public.

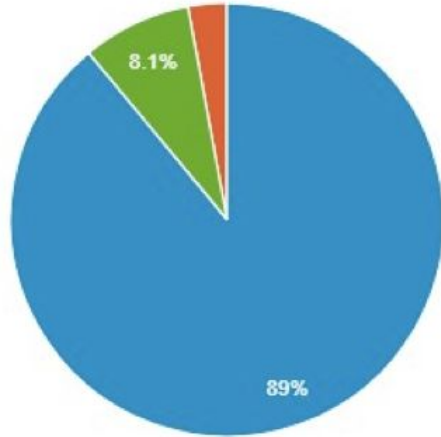


1

How we're alike

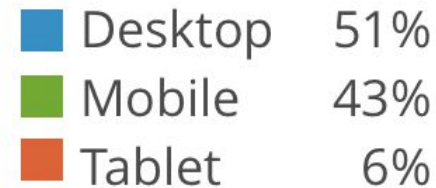
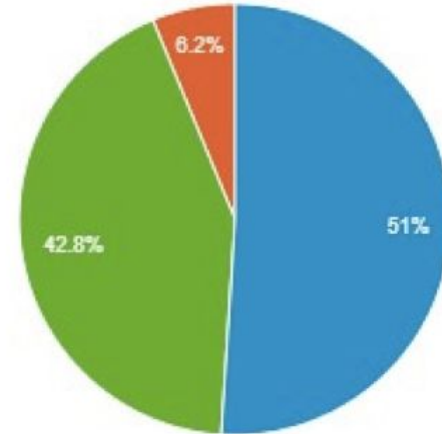


2012



11% total mobile

2018



49% total mobile



Look and Feel



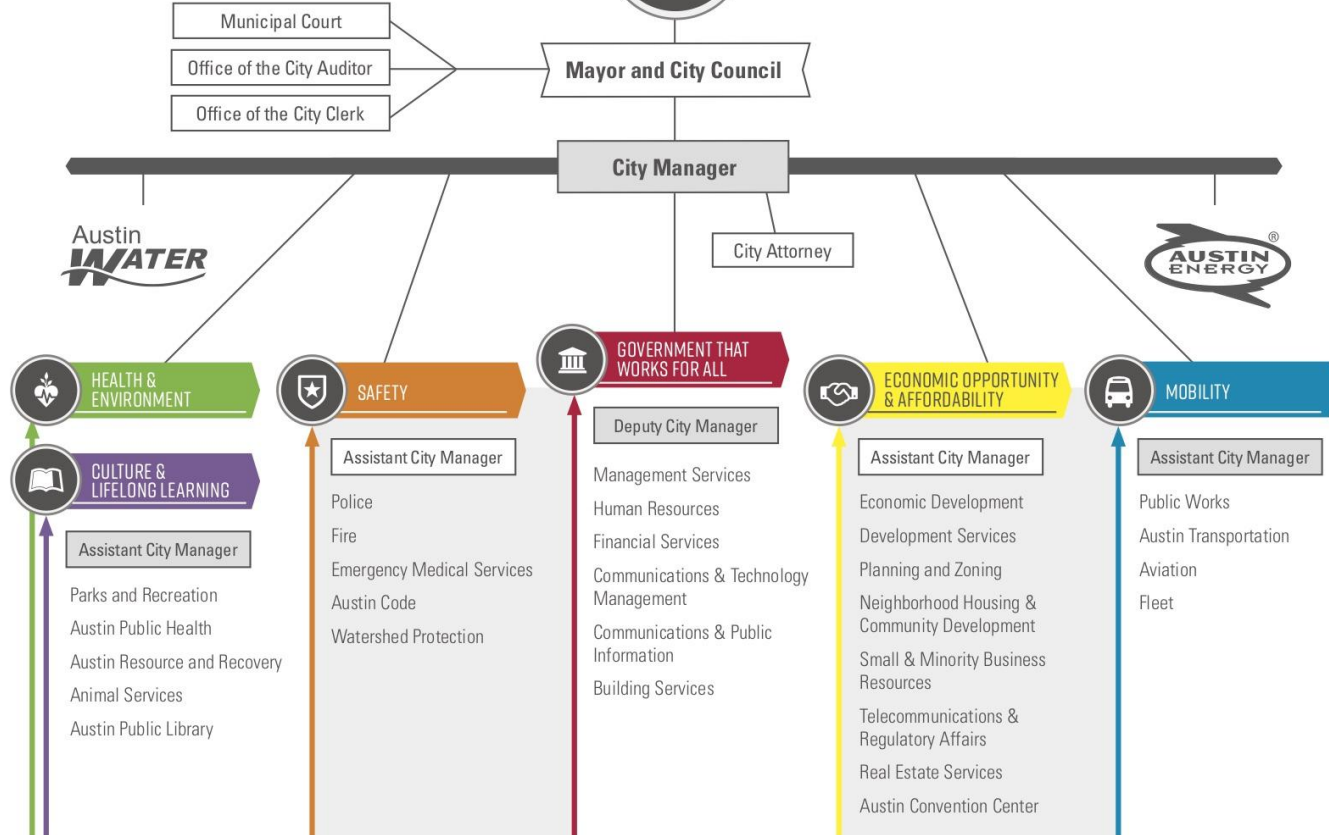
Technology





1

**Why we're here:
Putting residents first**



OUR VISION: Austin is a beacon of sustainability, social equity, and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its community members; and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all.

CITY OF AUSTIN
STRATEGIC DIRECTION

／ **We're not the
only ones**

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
([mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov))

City of Indianapolis ([my.indy.gov/](https://www.my.indy.gov/))

City of Boston ([boston.gov/](https://www.boston.gov/))

City of Philadelphia ([phila.gov/](https://www.phila.gov/))

The United Kingdom ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

Government that works for all

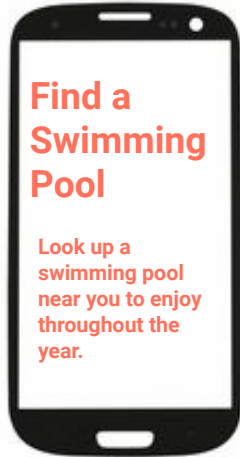
If you want to come to City Hall to do business with us, we'll be here for you.

But if you have to come to City Hall to do business with us, then we're not doing our job.

- Joshua Gee, a.k.a. the PDF killer

<https://github.com/CityOfBoston/Forms/>

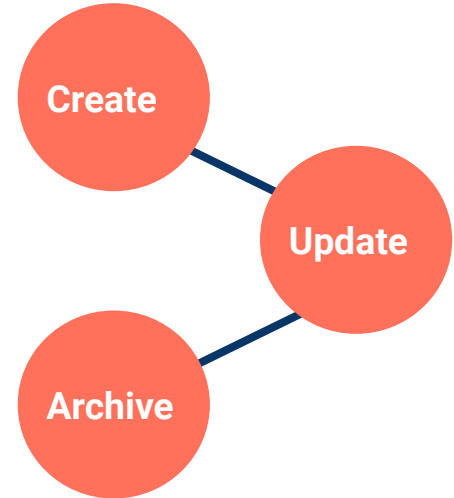
Content



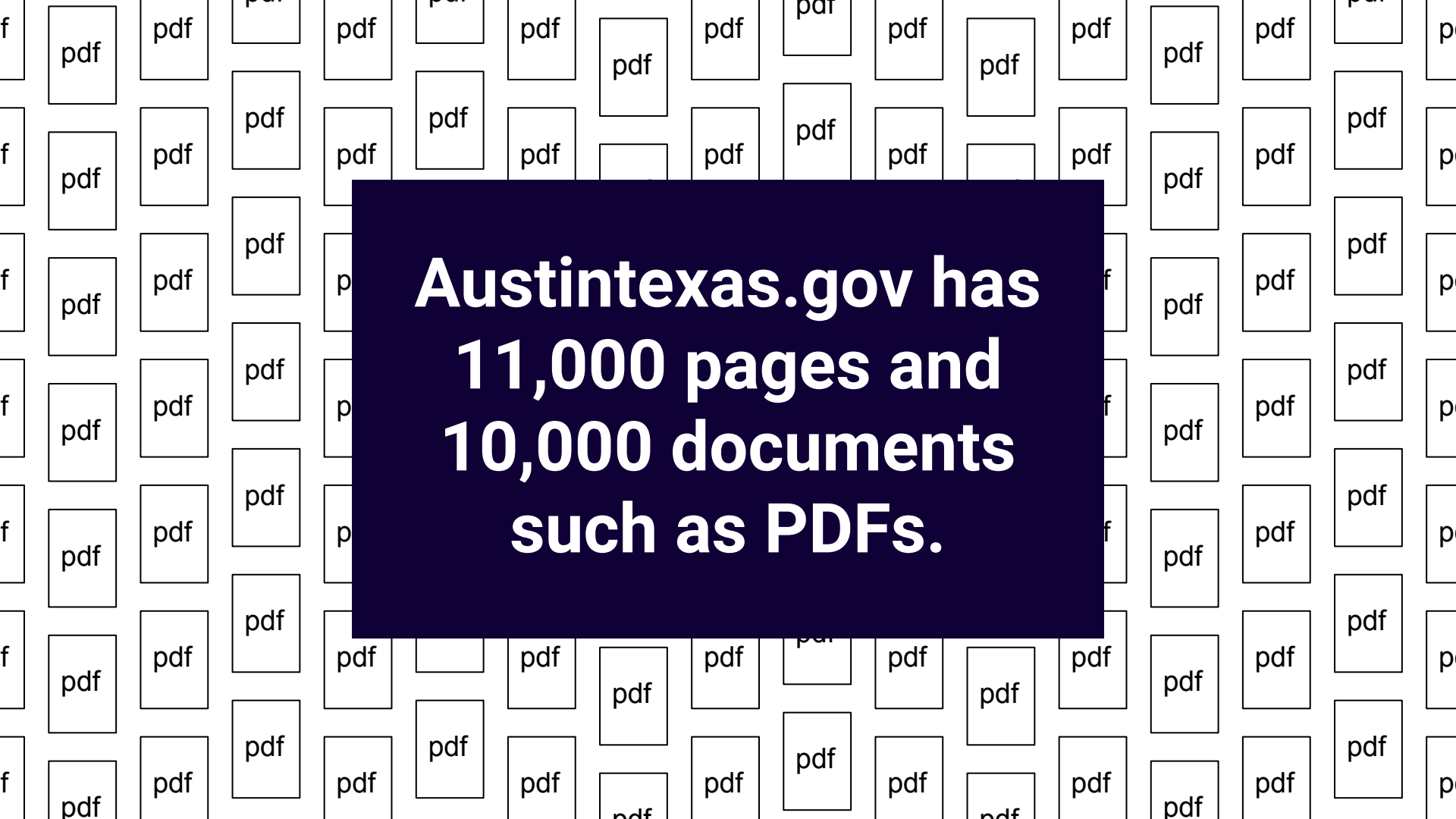
People



Workflow



**Residents find current
content too lengthy and
complex, and content is
not accessible to all.**



**Austintexas.gov has
11,000 pages and
10,000 documents
such as PDFs.**

**Residents find outdated
content because it is
difficult for staff to
manage existing content.**

Staff want to provide better content, but they need more guidance, training and tools to do so.

We are making content writing easier by providing staff with the training and tools they need.

How?

By making:

- Decoupled architecture
- Resident-focused content
- An author interface that supports content creators and multiple stakeholders.

By doing:





Pages

Maps

Locations

Contacts

Users

Images

Content

TITLE ▾

Plan a smoke-free event

EDIT

VIEW DRAFT

MORE ▾

WIC benefits

EDIT

VIEW DRAFT

MORE ▾

Help prevent diabetes in your co

EDIT

VIEW DRAFT

MORE ▾

Job search help at neighborhood

EDIT

VIEW DRAFT

MORE ▾

Select a content type

Content pages [Topic or topic collections](#)

Service Page



A step by step guide to a particular city service.

Information Page



Provides supplementary information and resources to support service delivery

Department Page



Basic information and contact details for a department.

Guide



A collection of pages for a complicated process, organized into sections



Annie ▾

CREATE NEW CONTENT

Search



TYPE ▾

AUTHOR ▾

STATUS ▾

Service page

Dwyer

DRAFT

Information page

Gonzalez

DRAFT

Service page

Dwyer

DRAFT

Information page

Dwyer

DRAFT

3

**Resident-focused content solves
common challenges**



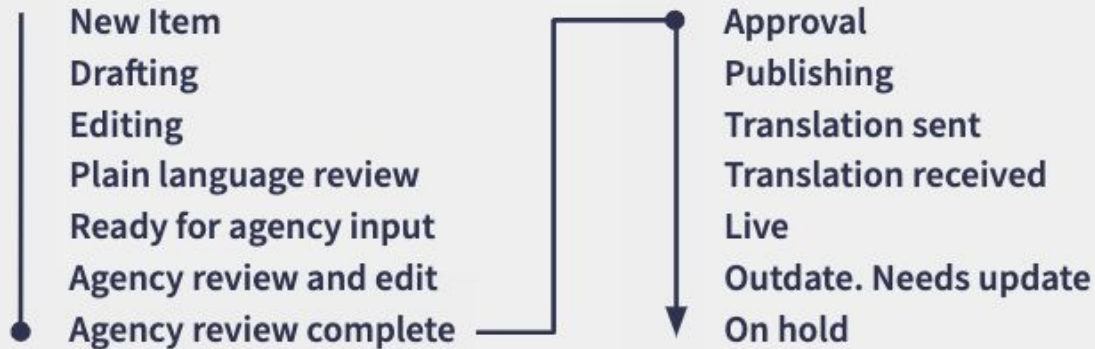
How we work

1. Put residents first
2. Prioritize equity when planning features and functionality
3. Recognize that digital services require teams and competencies, not just software
4. Cultivate a community of learning
5. Champion iterative, data-informed methods
6. Support vendors that can prove value to residents



Flexible workflows

Content Editorial Workflow

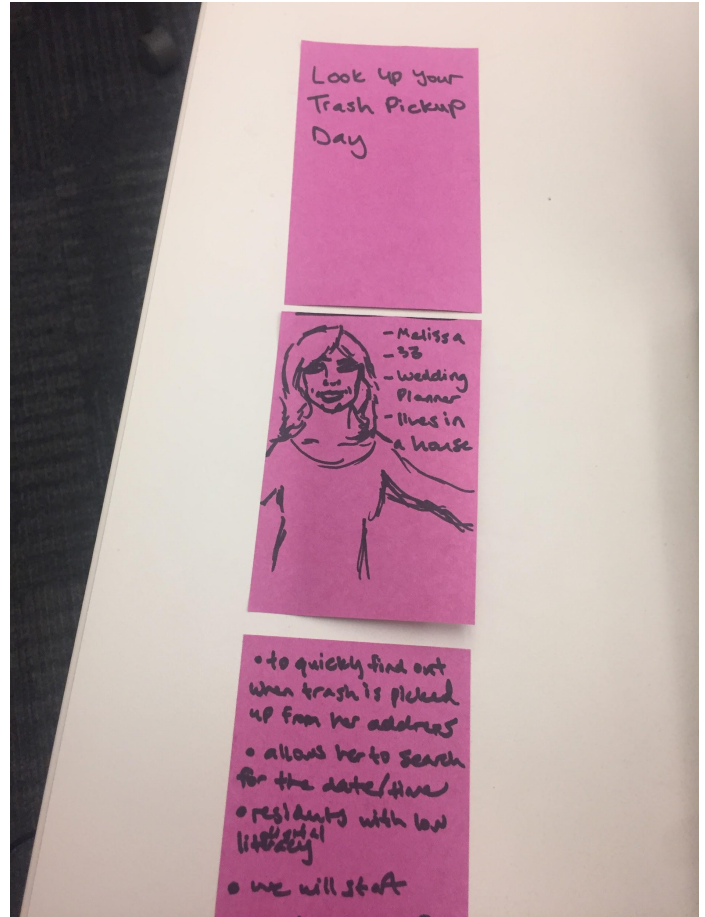




1. Focus on the public and their needs.



Know your users



Write down one of the most-used services your organization offers residents.



Hint: Start your sentence with a verb to make it actionable.

Examples:

Take a ceramics class

Find your trash pick-up day



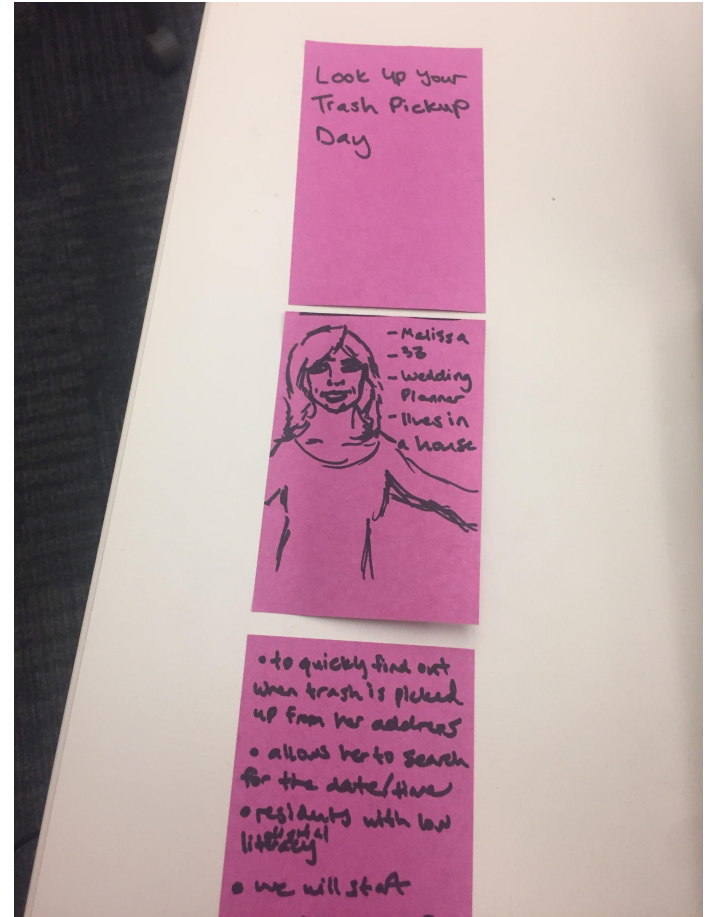
／ **Now, think of the primary user of this service.**

- **Who are they?**
- **Why do they need this service?**
- **How do they use it?**



Focus on your user's needs

- How will the service address the user's need?
- Who are the residents that currently find this service most difficult to use?
- Do you test the effectiveness of this service with residents? Do you get feedback? If not, how will you?
- How do you/will you use the findings and feedback to improve the service?



 **Share!**



／ Funsheet: Know your users action plan

2. Use service-oriented language

Service-oriented language

Service-oriented language focuses on the services available to residents instead of highlighting the departments providing the services.

- Department-oriented language sheds light on the department providing the services.
- While that can be important, most websites with department-oriented language are not easy for residents to understand, and typically include a lot of jargon and acronyms.

Department-oriented vs. service-oriented

Department-oriented language	Service-oriented language
Certification for MBE/WBE	Get Certification for Your Minority or Woman-Owned Business

／ **Understand writing principles, voice,
and tone.**

Why we need plain language:

Administered by the city's Neighborhood Housing and Community Development (NHCD) Department, the CPP is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to describe the process by which broad public input—particularly from low- and moderate-income residents, local and regional institutions and other organizations—is included in developing the Five-Year Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan, and the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER).

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Complex language

Acronym

Wordy or unnecessary information

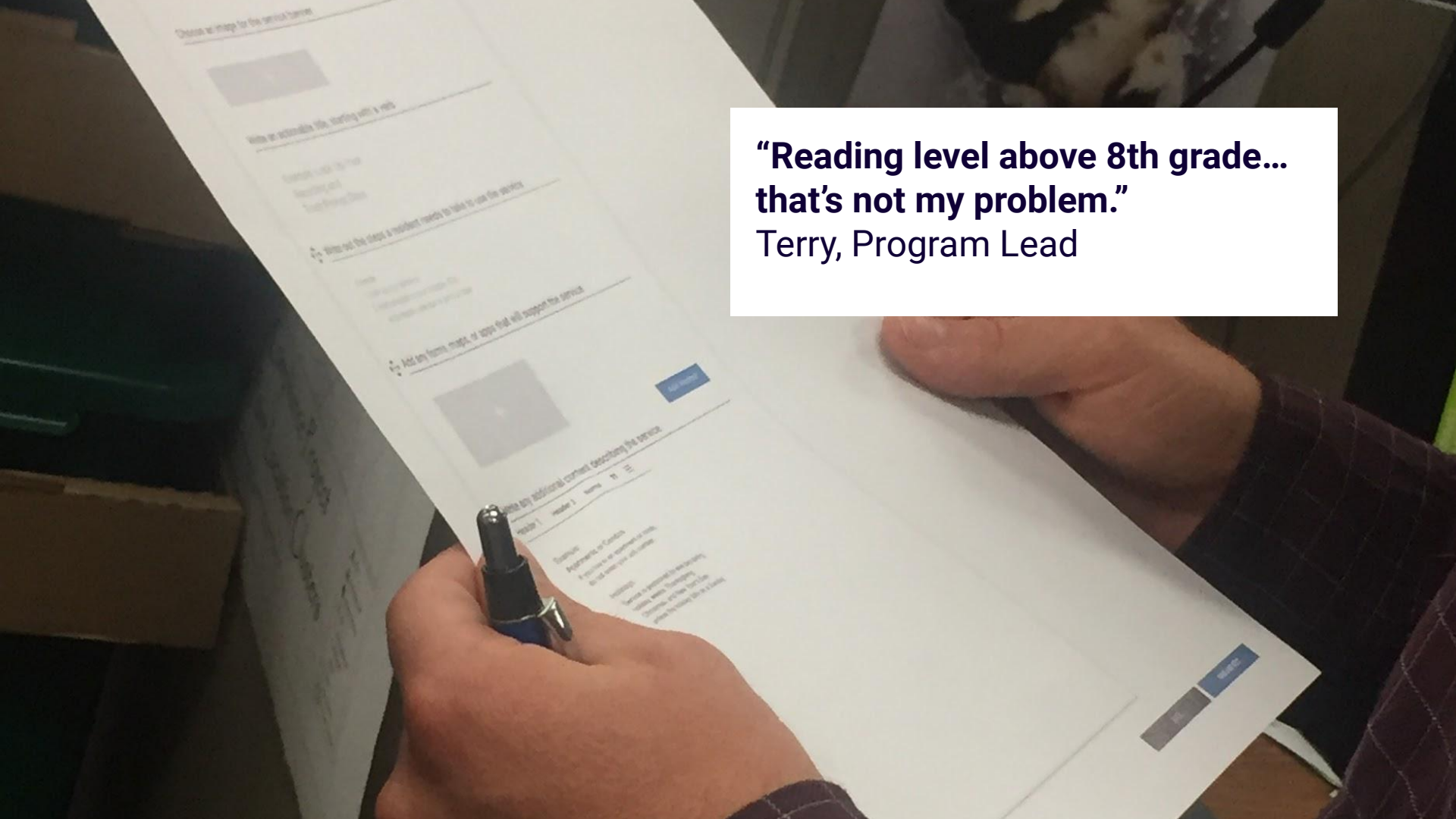
Poor structure

This citizens participation plan must describe how we gather input from low or moderate-income residents, institutions and organizations and how input will be included in the Housing Department's:

- Five-year consolidated plan
- Annual action plan
- Consolidated annual performance
- Evaluation report

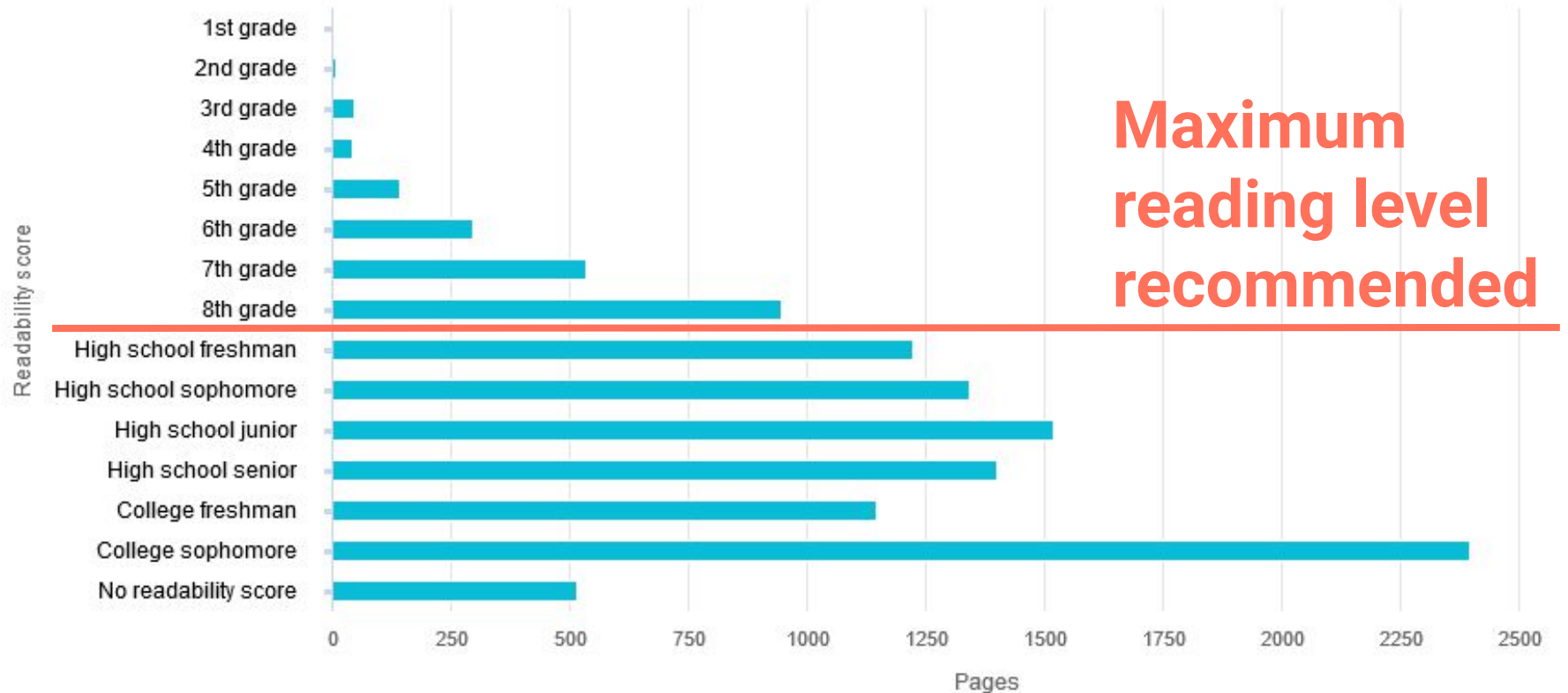
**“Reading level above 8th grade...
that’s not my problem.”**

Terry, Program Lead



AustinTexas.gov pages reading level

Readability score based on: Flesch Kincaid Grade Level [?](#)



Check Reading Level

Grammarly

[Go to Grammarly](#)



Your writing, at its best.

Grammarly makes sure everything you type is clear, effective, and mistake-free.

every thing you write

Miswritten word

everything

Add to Firefox It's free

Log in

Hemingway App

[Go to Hemingway](#)

Feedback | Help

Desktop App

Just Released! Version 3.0!

Like 50K

Trust

Write Edit

Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear.

The app highlights lengthy, complex sentences and common errors, if you see a yellow sentence, shorten or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red.

You can utilize a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over them for hints.

Adverbs and weakening phrases are helpfully shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick words with force, perhaps.

Phrases in green have been marked to show passive voice.

You can format your text with the toolbar.

Paste in something you're working on and edit away. Or, click the Write button and compose something new.

Readability

Grade 6

Good

Words: 133

Show More

- 2 adverbs, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer
- 1 use of passive voice, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer
- 1 phrase has a simpler alternative
- 1 of 11 sentences is hard to read
- 1 of 11 sentences is very hard to read

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Created by Graham & Helen
2016

 **Make your content findable.**



"I don't actually read everything. I just go through and I see if there's an easy answer."



THE LOST WORLD

FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions: The Lost World

Frequently Asked Questions are:

- Hard to read and search.
- They often duplicate other content on your site.
- Many times information is updated on the webpage, but not the FAQs.
- Located where users don't expect to find it—content needs to be in context.

／ **The website is not a filing cabinet!**

Less is more, especially when it comes to web.

- Avoid creating pages unnecessarily.
- Save it, share it.
- More content does not make the department more important.

- ✓ **Scenario: A rush of residents have been calling the Very Important Department, voicing their difficulty finding information on the department's site.**



✓ Very Important Department offers 15 services for residents.



- Very Important Department has over 300 pages on their site.
- 50% of their content hasn't been updated by anyone in 4 years.
- 75% of their content has less than 500 pageviews for an entire year.



／ What would be the best way Very Important Department should address the resident complaints and concerns?



Raise your hand for all that apply:

- Nothing. Residents will learn to deal.
- Keep all 300 pages, but rearrange them.
- Archive the outdated pages, decreasing the amount of pages.
- Archive low-traffic pages, decreasing the amount of pages.
- None of the above



 **Make content easier to read.**





Play the acronym game:

Every time you see an acronym, think of something else it could be.

Unlock the acronyms!

"PIR"

- Personal Information Request ●
- Public Interest Reporting ●
- Public Information Request ●
- Probation Investigation Retainment ●

"OPM"

- Office of Performance Management ●
- Operational Program Methodology ●
- Organizational Pride Manual ●
- Organizational Product Misuse ●
- Office of the Police Monitor ●

"ODD"

- Organizational Design and Development ●
- Office of Design and Delivery ●
- Organizational Development Delivery ●
- Office of Development Design ●

"EOC"

- Emerging Opportunities Communications ●
- Executive of Communications ●
- Executive Operations Consultant ●
- Emergency Operations Contact ●
- Emergency Operations Center ●

 **Write with brevity, please.**



“I don’t want to read a lot. Can I find the information easily? Oh... I have to read through all of this first.” - R

Collection Schedule

Trash is collected curbside every week. Use the [My Schedule](#) tool to get a personalized collection calendar for all residential curbside services. You can add your schedule to Google, iCal or Outlook, or you can print it. You can also sign up for text, email or phone call reminders and alerts.

Choose Your Cart Size

Austin Resource Recovery provides bundled services to manage your trash, recycling and yard trimmings. Save money on your utility bill by recycling as much as possible, setting aside yard trimmings for composting collection, and choosing a smaller trash cart.

Costs are based on your trash cart size. We offer four trash cart sizes; choose the size that best fits your household's needs. [Learn more](#) about pricing and size options.

Administrative Rules require that each household have a 96-gallon trash cart before requesting an additional cart. The City also requires that customers have the same capacity for recycling as you do for trash. To change your cart size, call 512-494-9400.

Keep Out!

Keep the following items out of the brown trash cart:



／ Write for all languages, please, por favor, xin vui long, رجاء, 請.



There are 8 main languages for Austin. There are over 11,000 pages on AustinTexas.gov.



1,000 pages (125 words or less) = \$53,000 Spanish translation!



Department-oriented vs. service-oriented

Department-oriented language	Service-oriented language
Certification for MBE/WBE	Get certification for your Minority or Woman-Owned Business



You can make translation easier and cheaper!

- Service-oriented language makes it easier to translate content into other languages, and therefore easier to access by all residents.
- Both Google Translate and a translation service would have a tough time creating a clear translation for MBE/WBE.
- Department jargon is also difficult to translate, and because many departments opt for a lengthy description of what they do. It can be expensive to translate all of that content.



3. Make content accessible.

Our digital services must be accessible to every single resident.

Save the public time

Because people don't have to try to figure out what the department-specific jargon means and how it affects them.

Serve those with visual disabilities

If your Austin neighbor has a visual disability and uses adaptive-screen reading technology to read websites, it's easier for them to navigate through pages with simple content.

Be understandable regardless of education level

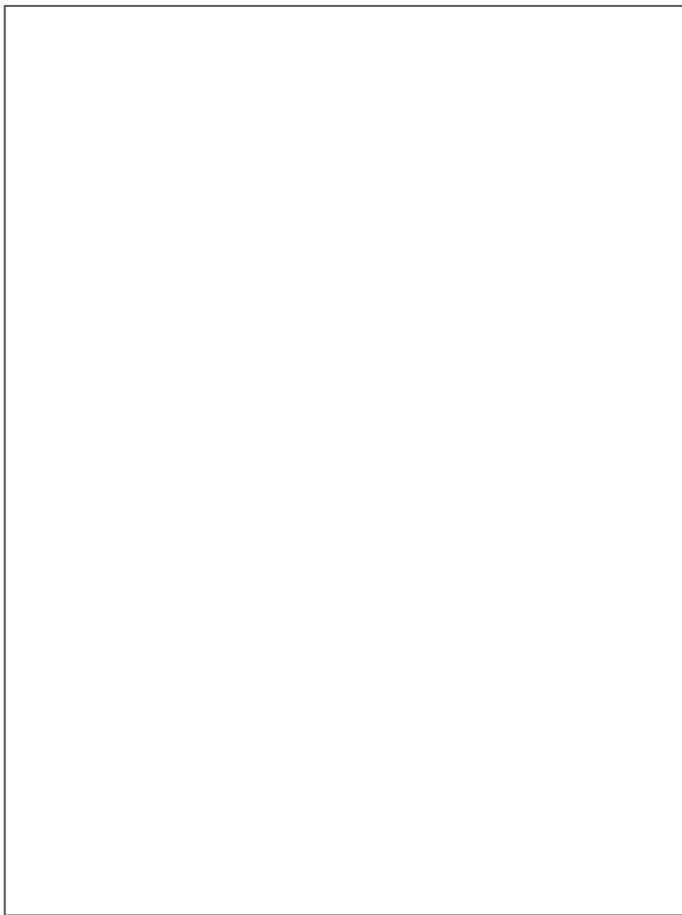
The language should be so simple that someone in middle school should be able to understand it. Regardless of a resident's educational background, service-oriented language strives to make the content clear for everyone.

Make language translation easier and cheaper

If someone is translating information for a friend or family member, using simple words will make it easier for the message to be delivered clearly in another language.

 **Alternative text**

／ **What do you see in this image?**





 **Color**

INDEX-PAGE-LINKS - In All Seven (7) RogerART.com Web Site - HOME PAGES

1. [RogerART.com](#) - Multi Media, Social/Environmental/Environmental, Local & Global, Artist, Sweeps Up, Down & All Around
2. [OneGlobalCommunity.com](#) - Creating OUR, One Global Community of (E.C. = Earth Citizen)
3. [EarthEa.org](#) - Live Cool, E.C. (Planet & Greenhouse) | Little Pollution, FOOTPRINT, SET OF OUR Negative GRID, Life Styles
4. [EarthCitizenNEWS.com](#) - OUR Global, United Earth Citizen, Shared, Owned and Operated (E.C. NEWS) | (V) Audio / Video Art
5. [StepAheadE.C.](#) - [Step Ahead](#) | University, E.C. Global Network, where, All E.C.s, R Students & All E.C.s, R Teachers
6. [PresidentOfPlanetEarth.com](#) - I Am & You Too CAN I Should, RUN A Pk PE. Your OGAS R HIGGED, World
7. [Rabarevolution.org](#) - GO FORTH - ALL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS - [Rabarevolution.org](#) - [Rabarevolution.org](#)

NOTE: [EarthCitizenNEWS.com](#) - now on FACEBOOK - If Can ADD your best - Day By

[Link Below to 500 Four F/News Using Link Of Main 1 \(400\) Web Other Earth Cit](#)

[CLICK HERE to add your F/News...](#) <http://www.facebook.com/pages/EarthCitizenNews/11700115>

RogerART.com - VIDEO LINK <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6b...more&from=embed&list=PL...>

NOTE: [EARTH NEWS](#) 14, 2010 - [World Sites R Change Model Construction](#) - [ON LINE](#) 5/26/2 - 2012 - and On In 2012

ABOUT... SHORT bits of INFO ABOUT EACH OF SEVEN (7) RogerART.com Web Sites...BELOW

HOW Under Construction, APRIL 22, 2012 Edit #1 X

Danger - EYE & OPEN-MIND CANDY - Below

NOTE: If U Want 2, Think of My Web Site as an (ARTISTS STUDIO) | Where I R WE LIVE | It is the New - Fake Artist - Take Your Time - Lots of Staff read - Look @ - Text - Sing - Dance - Post - Enjoy the Correct Errors - E.R. - John In

SHORT-INDEX-EACH-LINKs - In All Seven (7) RogerART.com Web Site - HOME PAGES - BELOW

EARTH CITIZENS UNITE

ALL OVER OUR PLANET - NOW - TODAY

4 WE R ALL ONE PEOPLE...

recent global online posts - & EGYPT UP-DATES by Roger Drowne E.C. (Earth Citizen)

Choose your color palette wisely.

- Certain colors are not visible to colorblind users, making the site inaccessible.
- To maintain accessibility, a standard color palette has been set and adjustments to colors on the site are not permitted.



What does 4.5:1 look like? See for yourself.

- [Accessible Color Palette Builder](#)
- [Color Safe](#)
- [Colorable](#)
- [Hex Naw](#)

 **PDFs**



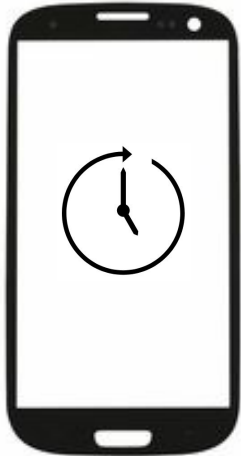
PDFs: A quick way to lose residents

“PDF is great for one thing and one thing only: printing documents... For online reading, however, PDF is the monster from the Black Lagoon.”

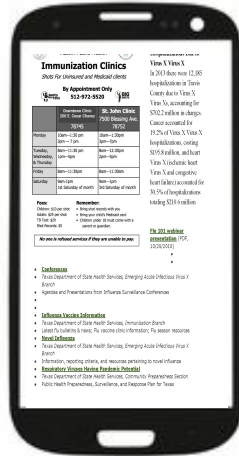
- *Jakob Nielsen*
Principal, Nielsen Norman Group
[*PDF: Unfit for Human Consumption*](#)



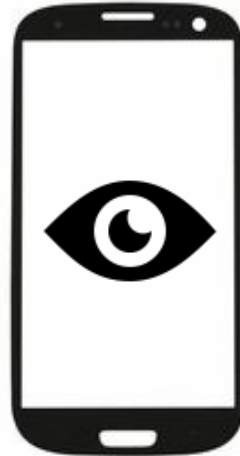
Slow to Load



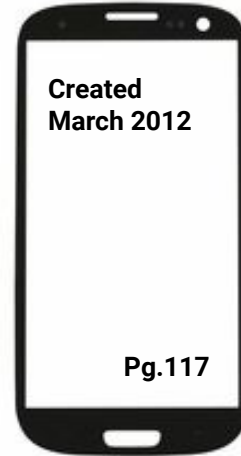
Hard to Read



Accessibility Issues



Lengthy and Outdated





As page load time goes from:

1s to 3s the probability of bounce **increases 32%**



1s to 5s the probability of bounce **increases 90%**



1s to 6s the probability of bounce **increases 106%**

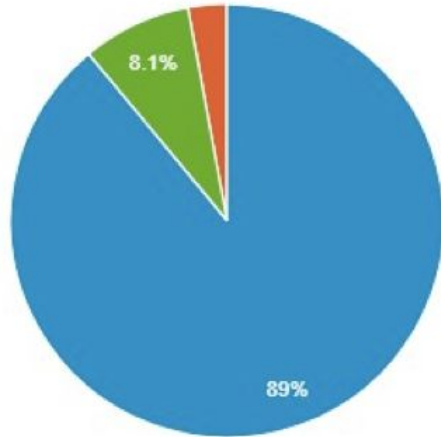


1s to 10s the probability of bounce **increases 123%**



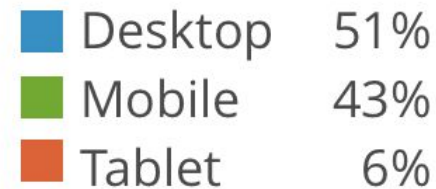
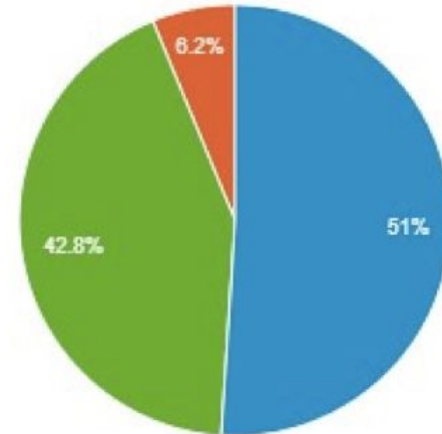
 **Mobile first**

2012



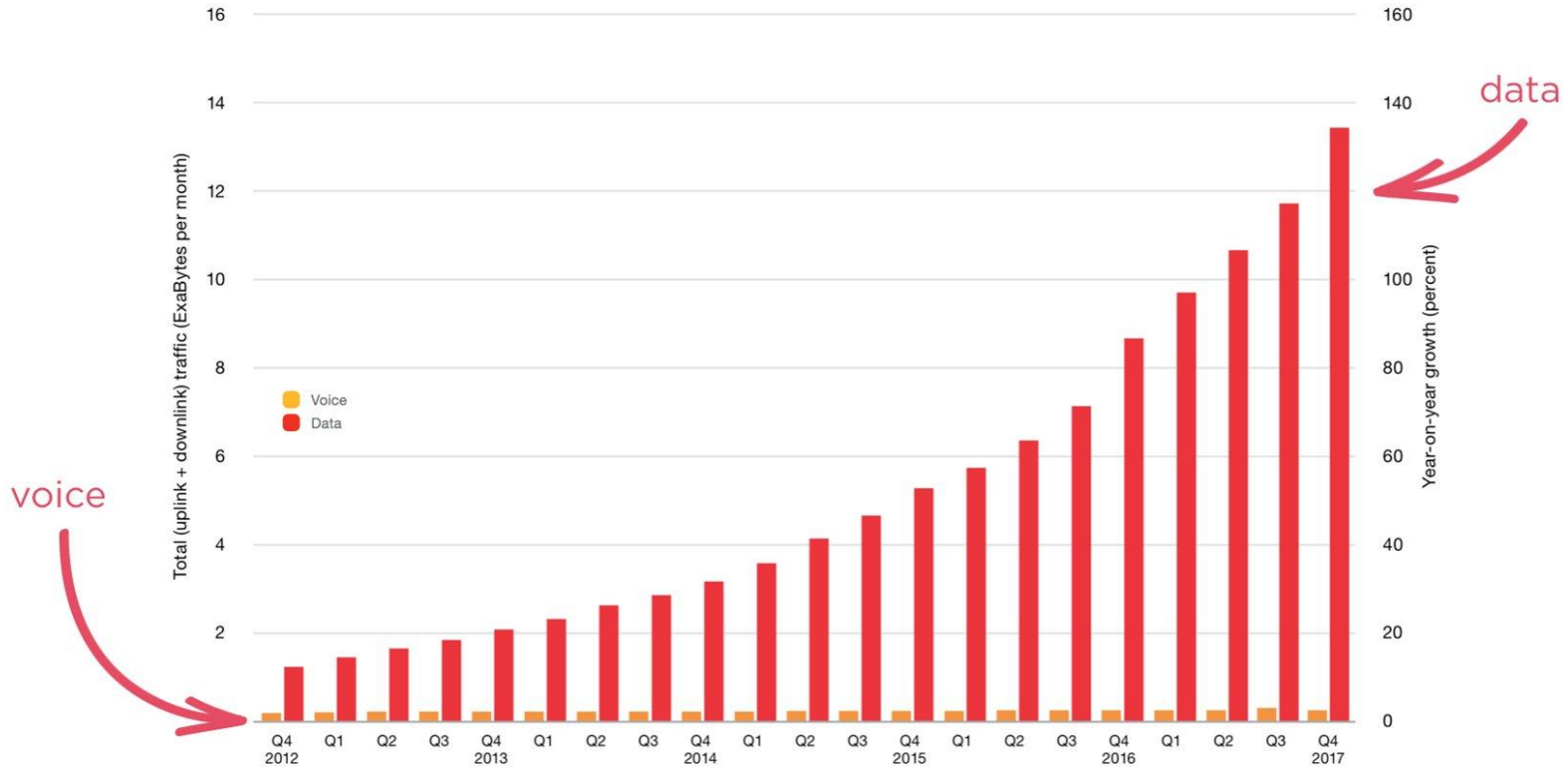
11% total mobile

2018



49% total mobile

When do we stop calling it a phone?



THANKS YOU!!

Welcome to
Austin, Texas

qwertyuiop
asdfghjkl
zxcvbn

 **Questions?**



Tools

- Writing
 - City of Austin [Digital Style Guide](#)
 - [Hemingway app](#)
 - [Grammarly app](#)
- Accessibility
 - [WAVE](#)
 - [Tota11y](#)
 - [Accessible Color Palette Builder](#)
 - [Color Safe](#)
 - [Colorable](#)
 - [Hex Naw](#)
- Analytics
 - Moz's [Beginner's Guide to SEO](#)
 - Code for America's [Digital Outreach Playbook](#)

Thank you!

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