

# Experiment in Web Article Style

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created Wednesday, 11 February 2004  
updated Wednesday, 11 February 2004

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Bad Style</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Better Style</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Extrapolated Style</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Everyman</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>human immortality</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>hypertext</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>inalienable rights</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>Microthought</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>Ted Nelson</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>Wiki</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>H</b>	<b>Other File Formats</b>	<b>5</b>

## 1 Bad Style

It's a common style for web pages to mention a thing & then provide links in parentheses after it. I don't like that style. It interrupts the flow of the text, & if you print it, those links become plain words which are useless.

Here's an example using text that I've made up:

Today, the megalithic Microthought (quotes, search) organization announced that they are beginning a project, code-named Destiny, to achieve human immortality (search). According to their project schedule, immortality will be for sale within a year to all humans with several million dollars to spare or willing to give up most of their inalienable rights (search).

## 2 Better Style

For a better style, what if each important term was a link to a short page that could provide the customary search & quotes links, plus a definition & links to other relevant web resources? Then you wouldn't have extra words to break-up the flow of the text, & the article would probably translate to paper better.

Here is the previous example, reformatted to use this technique. I write most of my web articles in L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, & I've made the link pages be appendices in this article.

Today, the megalithic Microthought (Appendix E) organization announced that they are beginning a project, code-named Destiny, to achieve human immortality (Appendix B). According to their project schedule, immortality will be for sale within a year to all humans with several million dollars to spare or willing to give up most of their inalienable rights (Appendix D).

The targets of the links can be short pages that might offer a brief definition of the term as it relates to the article, plus links to search for it on many search engines, links to stock quotes on many services, other important news articles, commentary, & whatever else the article's author thought would be of interest to his readers. I'm tempted to call these targets "intermediate pages". A term in the body of the article links to an intermediate page which links to resources elsewhere in the world.

## 3 Extrapolated Style

If I imagine a site with a lot of articles that used this style, most of the intermediate pages might be in a database shared by the articles. Most of the articles would have brief bodies which provided a brief statement by tying together a bunch of intermediate pages from the database.

If the intermediate pages can link to each other, then there would be no need to distinguish between an article & an intermediate page. They could all be entities in the same database, & the result would resemble a Wiki (Appendix G), though not necessarily editable by Everyman (Appendix A).

The Wiki analogy has its limits because all the articles in a Wiki must share a set of terminology because they share the database of terms. Articles which are not closely related might be best if they are not constricted to use the same database of terms. So it's possible that articles on a web site should not share a database of intermediate pages, & there definitely should not be a single database of intermediate pages that all articles in the world are required to use.

A useful convention for intermediate pages to follow might be to provide links to a one-sentence localized definition, a link to an article in an encyclopedia such as Wikipedia, & one or two links to search the web for the term.

## 4 Advantages

A nice thing about this style is that it removes the clutter from the body of the article. The flow of the text is not interrupted (unless the reader is distracted by the fondly bits his browser uses as decorations on links). The article should translate to paper better than does the style in which links are separate words following their terms in the body.

The intermediate pages can show more information than can links embedded in the body of the article. They aren't limited to one or two links, such as "search" & "quotes". They can link to a lot of other web pages & provide other information, too.

If writing this article is an indicator, it is fun to write articles in this style.

## 5 Disadvantages

If writing this article is an indicator, there is a temptation to create intermediate pages for too many terms in the article's body. There is also a temptation to provide a cheeky comment in many of those intermediate pages.

An article could degenerate to a collection of scraps. On the other hand, my gut tells me that this is unavoidably the main advantage & worst disadvantage of hypertext (Appendix C). It certainly makes for low-quality literature, but maybe it is appropriate for factual information which is meant to be absorbed quickly.

## 6 Conclusion

In spite of its disadvantages, I would be pleased if more articles linked their important terms to intermediate pages instead of embedding "quote" & "search" links within their bodies. A single news organization could use a database of

terms & quote-producing programs; the disadvantages I listed for the Wiki analogy would not apply to news articles from a single organization.

## **A Everyman**

Everyman was a character in a sixteenth century morality named “The Calling of Everyman”.

Sadly, it appears that someone, somehow, still owns the copyright to the play because I could not find it on Project Gutenberg.

Everyman was also the name of the company which produced the British television series “The Prisoner” (1964).

## **B human immortality**

1. Defined on Wikipedia
2. Search Google
3. Search Yahoo

## **C hypertext**

The term “hypertext” was coined by Ted Nelson (Appendix F), & mentioning it in this context reminds me that his books have been on my reading list for years.

## **D inalienable rights**

1. Search Google
2. Search Yahoo

## **E Microthought**

When writing derogatorily about software companies, I often poke fun at the fictitious company named “Microthought”. I’ve done that since 2003, maybe earlier. To construct the Search Google link below, I actually searched Google for it. I was amazed to see that there really is a company named Microthought. My Microthought is purely fictitious & meant to conjure an unflattering image of a software company. When I talk about Microthought, I don’t mean the real Microthought Network company.

1. quotes
2. Search Google

## **F Ted Nelson**

1. Biographical information at The Electronic Labyrinth. <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hff0155.html>
2. Personal web site. <http://xanadu.com.au/ted/>

## **G Wiki**

A Wiki is a web site that is editable by pretty much anyone. The first Wiki was Ward's Wiki Wiki Web.

## **H Other File Formats**

This document is available in multi-file HTML format at <http://lisp-p.org/was/>.

This document is available in DVI format at <http://lisp-p.org/was/was.dvi>.

This document is available in PostScript format at <http://lisp-p.org/was/was.ps>.

## **References**