

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS: DRAFTING EFFECTIVE MICROCOPY

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HI, I'M MEGAN

- Words are my love language
- Major bookworm
- Studied Writing for Performance in undergrad
- **Background in software engineering**
 - Worked with some really cool brands, including Converse and Reformation
 - Fun Fact: SWEs argue about **word choice** A LOT
 - Collaborated closely with UX Designers
- Currently working in **Communications**, where I manage socials, design copy for external communications, website, marketing materials, and more





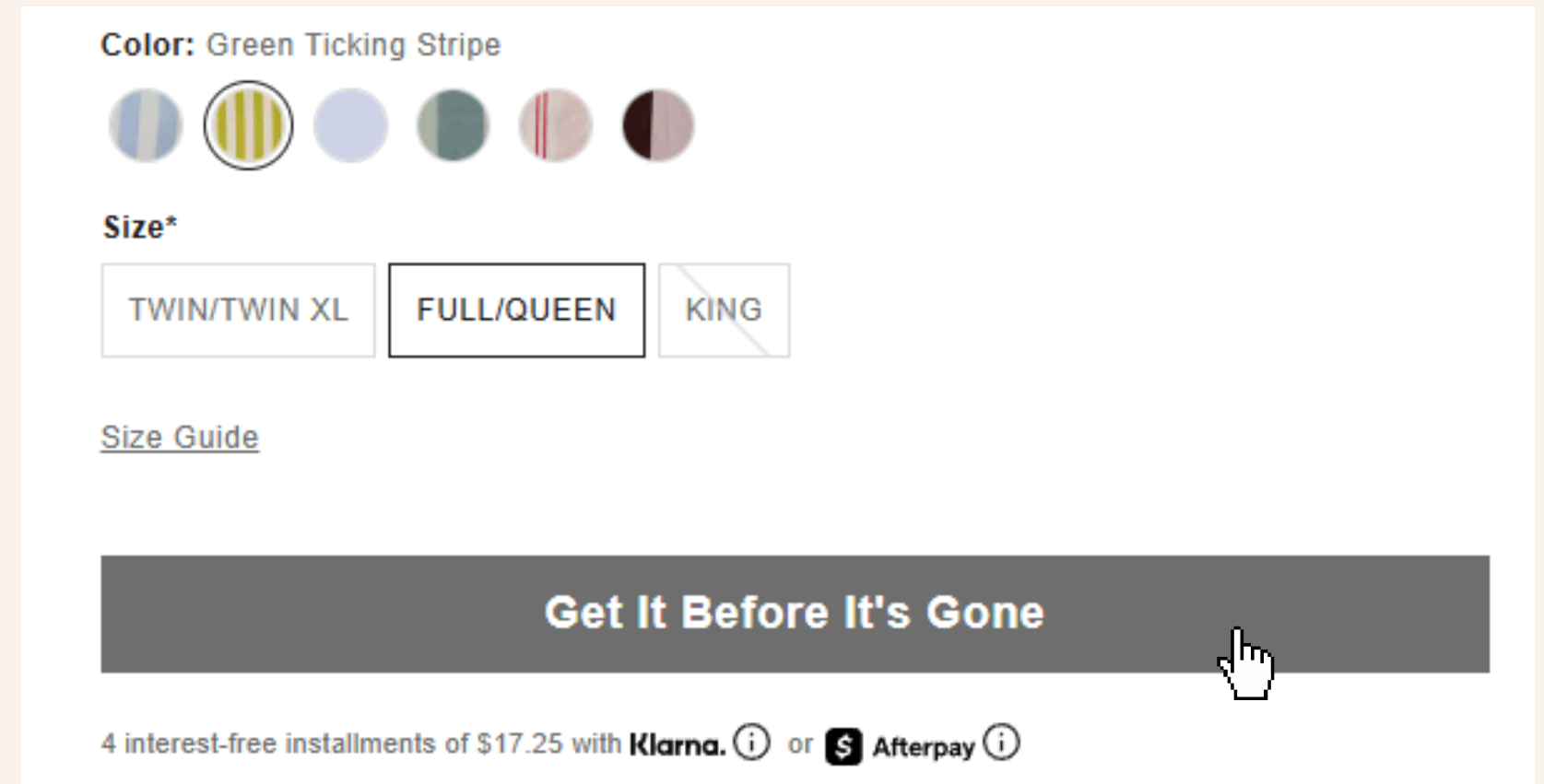
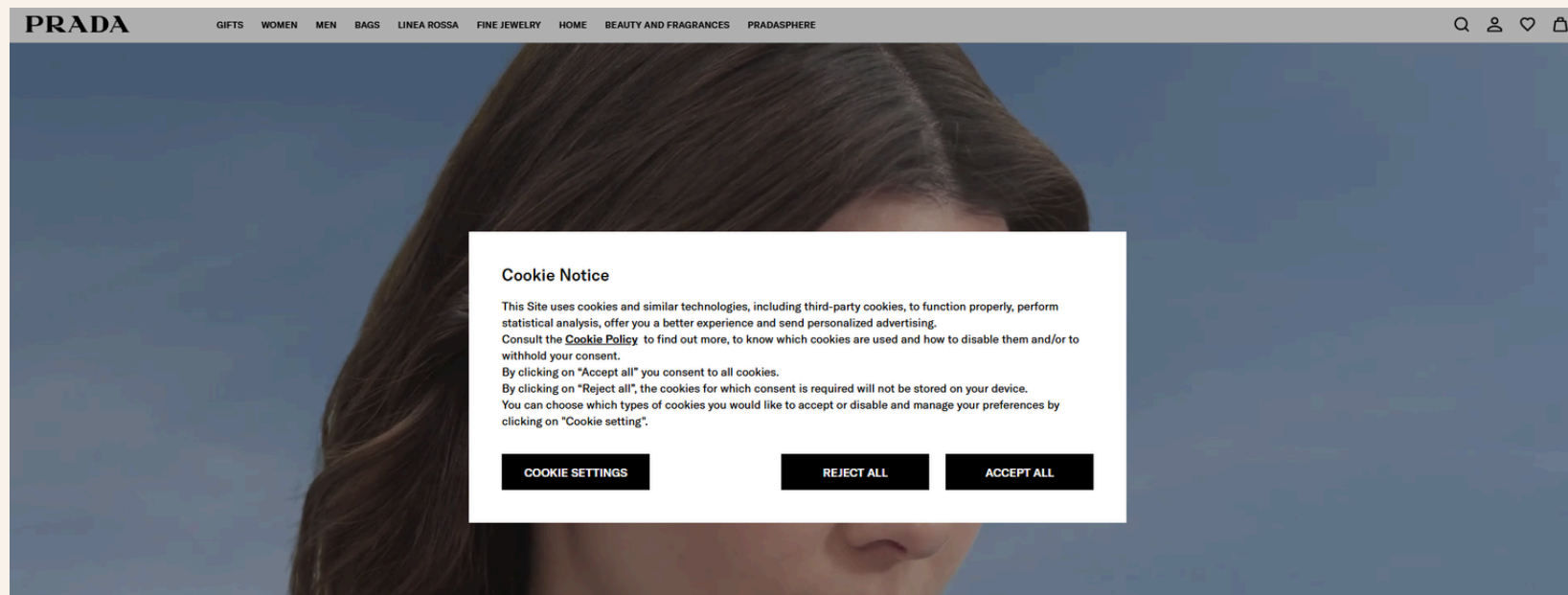
IN THIS SESSION:

- What is microcopy?
- How is it different from regular copy?
- Why is it an important part of the User Experience?
 - And how bad microcopy impacts users
- 4 standards for drafting effective microcopy:
 - Clear
 - Purposeful
 - Helpful
 - Concise
- Discover how UX Writing is tested & learn about additional resources
- Practice what we learned with a short activity (if time allows)

SO...



WHAT EVEN IS MICROCOPY?



MICROCOPY (AKA UX WRITING) = THE SMALL BITS OF TEXT THAT GUIDE USERS THROUGH AN EXPERIENCE

It helps users:

- understand what's happening
- know what to do next
- feel confident navigating an experience

YOU MIGHT BE THINKING...



**ISN'T THAT THE SAME
AS COPYWRITING?**



**THE MAIN
DIFFERENCE
IS THE GOAL**



UX WRITING VS

COPYWRITING



MICROCOPY GOALS:

- Guide the user
- Reduce friction
- Build confidence
- Establish trust
- Provide clarity

COPY GOALS:

- Persuade
- Entertain
- Inform
- Create desire

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE:



THE PLAZA

Experience New York's Iconic Luxury Hotel on Central Park South

Since its debut on October 1, 1907, The Plaza Hotel has remained a New York icon hosting world leaders, dignitaries, captains of industry, Broadway legends, and Hollywood royalty. As an established staple for lavish society affairs and blockbuster films, The Plaza has welcomed guests from around the world to enjoy its magic at the castle on Central Park South for more than 100 years. Ideally situated on Fifth Avenue, The Plaza's prestigious address continues to define elegance with unmatched service and an ever-evolving modern sensibility.

[Read More](#)



Share your Plaza story, and cast your vote in the CNT Readers'



Save up to 20% off your stay this



Celebrate Spring with our Cherry



111SKIN SPA/CLINIC: The Plaza's

WHY IT MATTERS:

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Kayak website. On the left is a hamburger menu icon. In the center is the 'KAYAK' logo. On the right are three circular icons: 'Ask AI' with a star icon, a heart icon for favorites, and a user profile icon. Below the navigation bar is a large grey banner with the headline 'Find the right flight from 100s of sites.' Underneath the banner are five category buttons: 'Flights' (orange with a plane icon), 'Stays' (white with a bed icon), 'Cars' (white with a car icon), 'Packages' (white with a palm tree icon), and 'Cruises' (white with a ship icon). Below these is a search form with three tabs: 'Round-trip' (selected), 'One-way', and 'Multi-city'. The search form contains a text input with 'Champaign, IL (CMI)' and a close button, a destination input with 'To?' and a swap icon, a departure date input with 'Departure', and a return date input with 'Return'. Below the date inputs is the text '1 adult, Economy, 0 bags'. At the bottom of the search form is a large orange 'Search' button.

☰ **KAYAK** ✦ Ask AI ❤️ 👤

Find the right flight from 100s of sites.

✈️ Flights 🛏️ Stays 🚗 Cars 🌴 Packages 🚢 Cruises

Round-trip One-way Multi-city

Champaign, IL (CMI) × ↔ To?

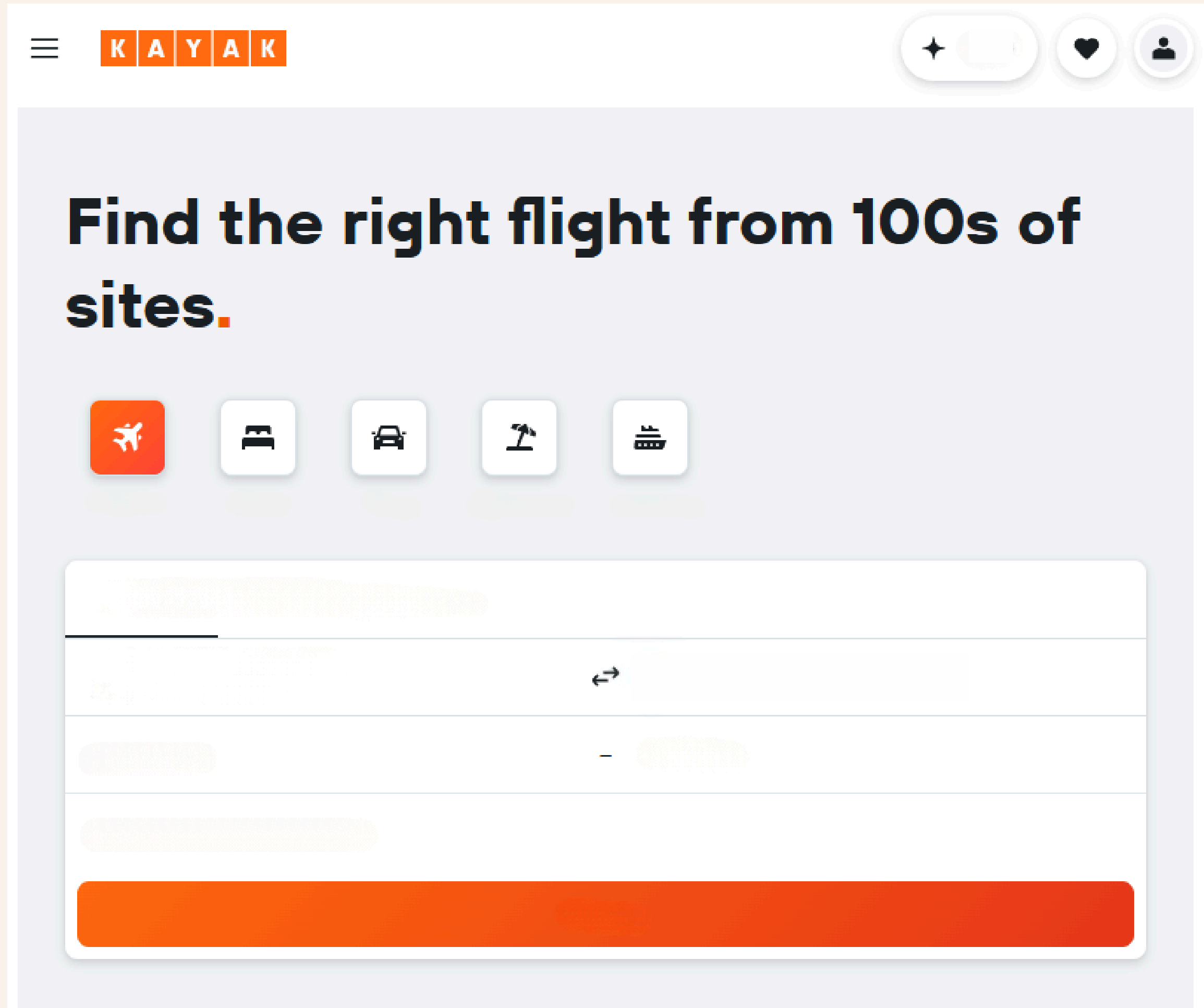
Departure - Return

1 adult, Economy, 0 bags

Search



WHY IT MATTERS:



BUT...



**THERE'S A
PROBLEM...**



MICROCOPY IS OFTEN AN AFTERTHOUGHT

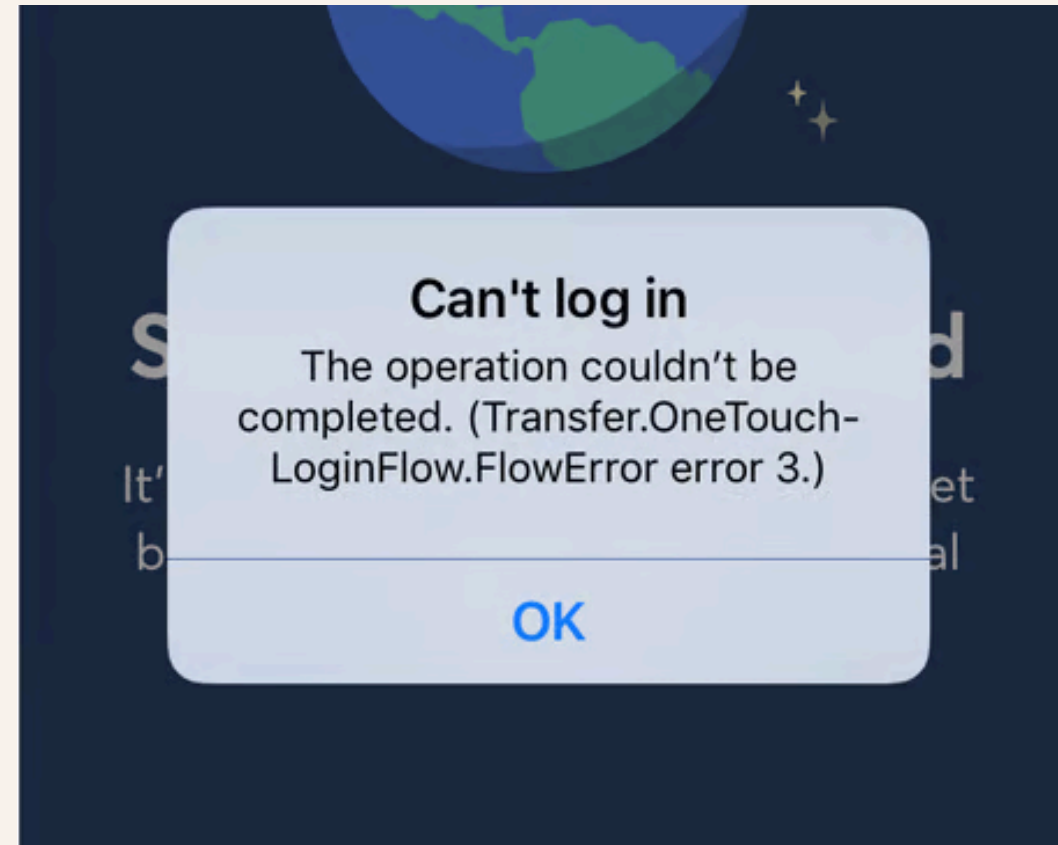
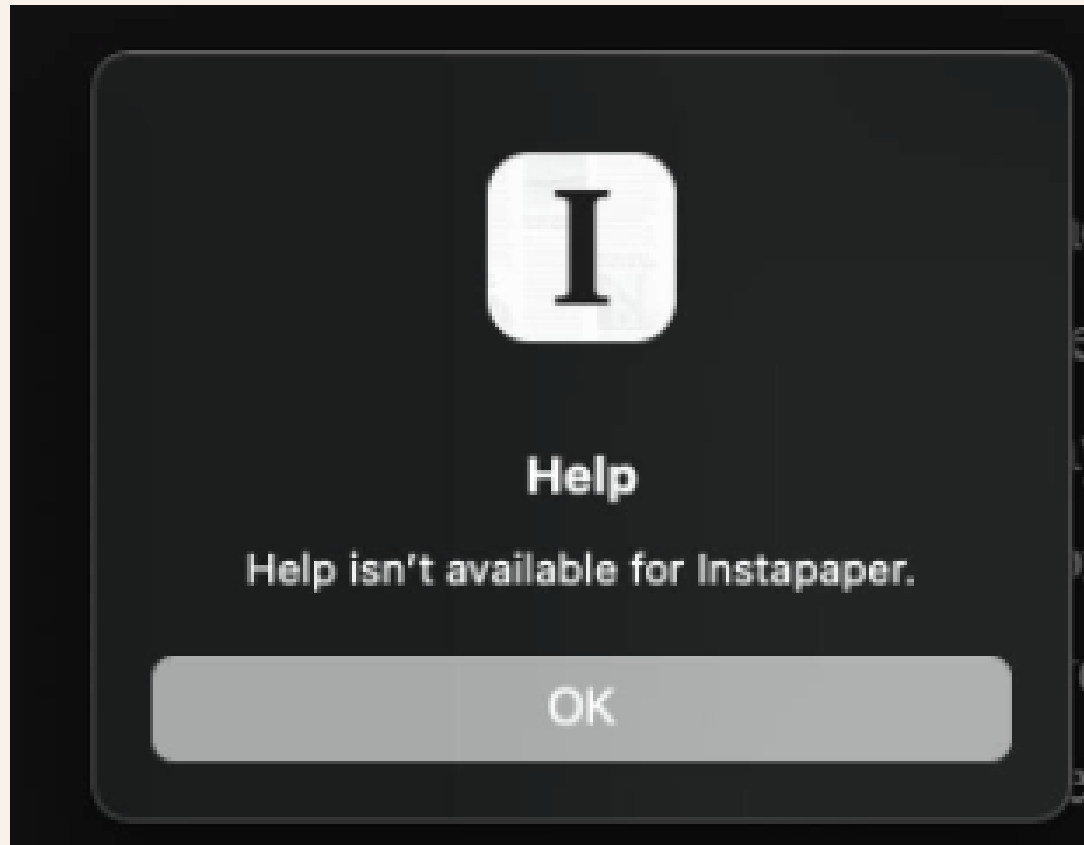


Microcopy is often:

- added at the end of the design process
- written by whoever is available
- treated like filler

EVEN THOUGH it directly impacts:

- completion rates
- trust
- accessibility
- usability



My Medic Gear is a huge value for the dollar, my kits has more gear than other competitors that cost much more.

RESULTING IN...

- Tech jargon heavy alerts
- Confusing messaging
- Reliance on “confirm shaming”

THE GOOD NEWS?



WE CAN AVOID THIS BY LEARNING

WHAT MAKES

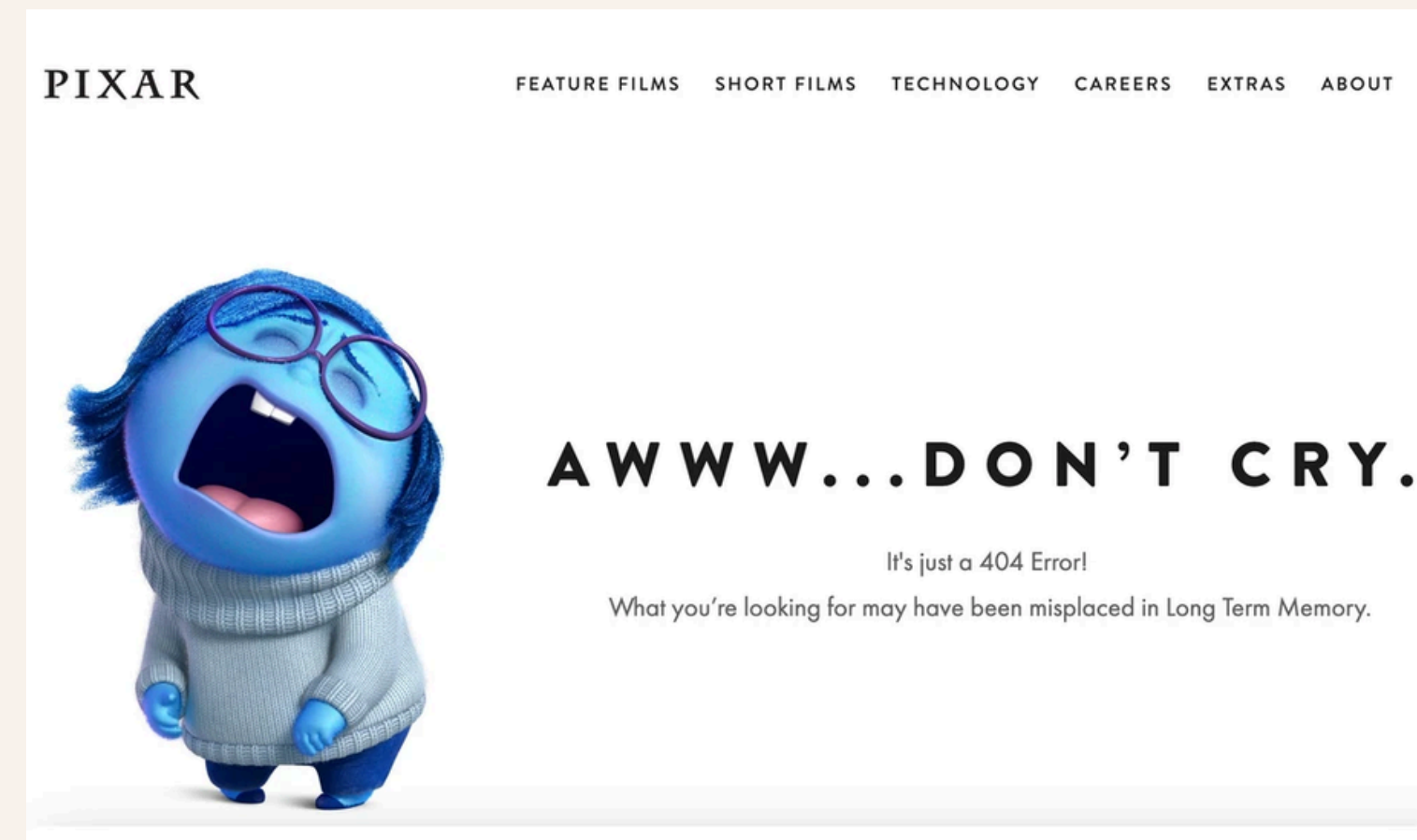
MICROCOPY

EFFECTIVE



THE BEST MICROCOPY IS...

1. CLEAR
2. PURPOSEFUL
3. CONCISE
4. HELPFUL



LET'S WALK THROUGH EACH BY IMPROVING AN EXAMPLE TOGETHER!

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF A 404 PAGE THAT COULD USE SOME IMPROVEMENT



We're sorry! This page is currently unavailable.

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?



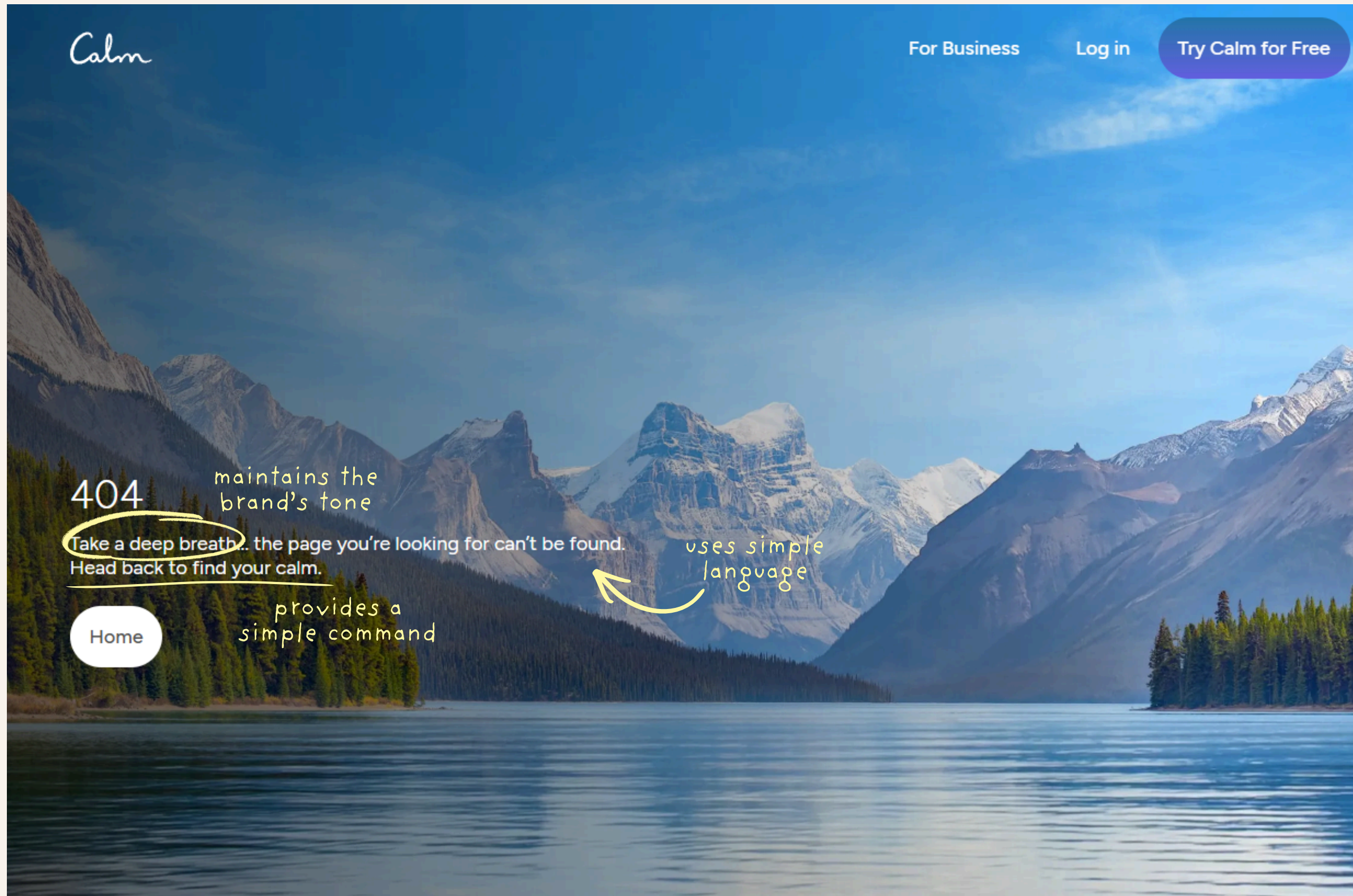
THE BEST MICROCOPY IS...

CLEAR

Uses **familiar, unambiguous** language and **commands**

Ask yourself “Can the user understand this immediately?”

CLEAR MICROCOPY MIGHT LOOK LIKE:



HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE FOR CLARITY?



this logo is a link, but I wouldn't know just from looking at it...



will it be available in the future?

We're sorry! This page is currently unavailable.

why apologize?

no commands... what should the user do next?

HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE FOR CLARITY?



removed ambiguous language

The page you're looking for is unavailable.

Return Home

provide next step
as a command





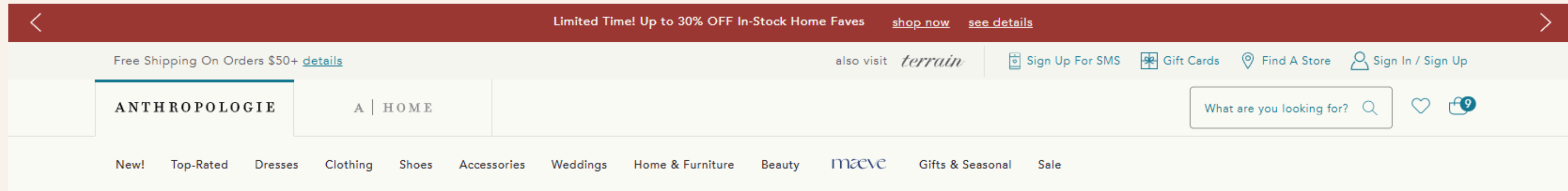
THE BEST MICROCOPY IS...

PURPOSEFUL

Is **necessary** to the user journey and **aligned with a goal**

Ask yourself “What am I trying to achieve with this message?”

PURPOSEFUL MICROCOPY MIGHT LOOK LIKE:



supports the user by not blaming them for the error

we can't seem to find what you're looking for...
care to keep exploring?

subtle encouragement

purpose:

1. support the user
2. keep the user on the site longer
3. encourage them to shop



SHOP NEW ARRIVALS

HAVE A QUESTION?

2 CTAs that encourage the user to stay on the site

HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE TO BE MORE PURPOSEFUL?



purpose = continue shopping!



The page you're looking for is unavailable.

Return Home

is this what we want the user to do? why?



maybe add a second CTA to give the user options to explore?

HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE TO BE MORE PURPOSEFUL?



The page you're looking for is unavailable.

Check out our new arrivals or return home to

continue shopping.

provide 2 alternate
next steps that align
with the purpose



clarified purpose: we want the
user to stay on the site and
continue shopping



THE BEST MICROCOPY IS...

CONCISE

Uses as **few words** as possible to get the point across

Ask yourself “Is this the simplest way to say what I mean?”

CONCISE MICROCOPY MIGHT LOOK LIKE:



Walmart logo

Search everything at Walmart online and in store


Reorder My Items

Sign In Account

\$0.00

Departments

Services



Uh-oh...

This page could not be found.

Return to home

10 words in total, including a CTA!

HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE TO BE MORE CONCISE?



“This page is unavailable.”
achieves the same message!

~~The page you're looking for is unavailable.~~

Check out our new arrivals or return home to
continue shopping.

this could probably
be shortened!



HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE TO BE MORE CONCISE?



This page is unavailable.
Ready to continue shopping?

*shortened copy while
maintaining meaning*

New Arrivals

Home

*converted links to
buttons*





THE BEST MICROCOPY IS...

HELPFUL

Guides the user to a solution, removes uncertainty, and establishes **trust**.

*Ask yourself “Does this actually **help** the user move forward?”*

HELPFUL MICROCOPY MIGHT LOOK LIKE:



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Expedia website. The main content area features a large error message: "Sorry, it seems we've taken a wrong turn." The phrase "taken a wrong turn" is underlined in yellow. Below the message, there are three options: "Head Home", "Find travel deals", and "Sign in or register". Handwritten yellow annotations include: "maintains brand tone" pointing to the error message; "provides reassurance & multiple options for the user to continue" with an arrow pointing to the "Find travel deals" link; and "maintains brand tone" pointing to the "Sign in or register" link.

Expedia More travel ▾

English List your property Support Trips Sign in

Sorry, it seems we've taken a wrong turn.

Get your journey back on track with one of the following options.

- [Head Home](#)
- [Find travel deals](#)
- [Sign in or register](#)

maintains brand tone

provides reassurance & multiple options for the user to continue

maintains brand tone

HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE TO BE MORE HELPFUL?



This page is unavailable.
Ready to continue shopping?

*was the user searching
for something specific?
try adding a search bar!*

New Arrivals

Home

*maybe add a link to
the help page?*



A LITTLE REMINDER OF WHERE WE STARTED...



We're sorry! This page is currently unavailable.

HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE THIS MESSAGE TO BE MORE HELPFUL?



This page is unavailable.
It's easy to get lost in the aisles.
Let's get you back on track.

tweaked language to feel more supportive & on brand

New Arrivals

Home

Get Help

3 clear solutions are provided to the user!



What can we help you find?

added a search bar for a more custom experience



PUTTING MICROCOPY TO THE TEST

- **Conduct User Research**
 - Interviews
 - Surveys
 - Observation
 - A/B Testing

LET'S REVIEW!



Microcopy = words that guide the user through an experience
UX Writing and Copywriting have different goals:

UX WRITING GOALS:

- Guide the user
- Reduce friction
- Build confidence
- Establish trust
- Provide clarity

COPYWRITING GOALS:

- Persuade
- Entertain
- Inform
- Create desire

Without a clear understanding of UX Writing, you risk losing trust

The Best Microcopy is: **Clear, Purposeful, Concise, & Helpful**

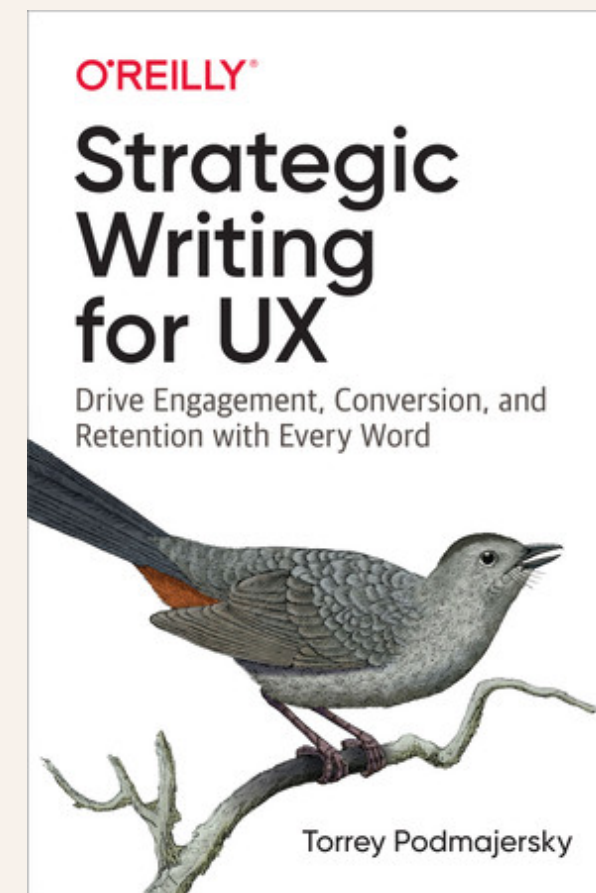
UX Writing can be tested with user research

WANT TO LEARN MORE?



- Practice!
- Observe microcopy in the wild
- Follow message boards & blogs:
 - UX Writing Hub
 - UX Content Collective
 - r/uxwriting (Reddit)

recommended reading:





404. That's an error.

The requested URL /404 was not found on this server.
That's all we know.



**THANK
YOU SO
MUCH!**

**WANT TO
CONTINUE THE
CONVERSATION?
ADD ME ON
LINKEDIN**



WEBSITES REFERENCED:

- urbanoutfitters.com
- prada.com
- theplazany.com
- kayak.com
- pixar.com
- target.com/404
- calm.com/404
- anthropologie.com/404
- walmart.com/404
- expedia.com/404