

# Web writing guide for barnet.gov.uk - January 2016

## Start with user need

Always ask yourself: what is the user need for this webpage?

This is the need the user has of the council, not the need of Barnet Council to impart information to the user. This is a shift in emphasis in how we wrote web pages in the past.

It's also an important distinction, because it means that you'll be able to more accurately measure the success of your services.

We want residents to leave our site happy that they've found their information in the clearest and easiest way, and happy with the council's services.

## Inverted pyramid writing

The most important information goes first.



## Clear writing

### Active voice

Try to use the active rather than passive voice. This will help you write concise, clear content.

**Active voice:** Contact us if you have a question about...

**Passive voice:** The council can be contacted if questions arise....

## **Action orientated/call-to-actions**

All webpages must be written to be useful for customers and what our customers/users want or have to do.

Test case – Registrars

The text tells users what the Barnet Registration and Nationality Service is, but it should concentrate on what users want or have to do (actions).

In this case, users have a legal obligation. So tell them that ‘you must register all births, still births and deaths in Barnet’.

Then hand off to the relevant pages:

[Register a birth](#)

[Register a still birth](#)

[Register a death](#)

- **Second user need**

“We also register civil marriages and civil partnerships in Barnet and provide a Nationality Checking Service, Settlement Checking Service and Citizenship ceremonies.”

## **Plain English, short sentences + paragraphs, front loading keywords**

Use plain English words so that information is easy to understand by the broadest audience.

GOV.UK has a handy list of plain English words <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design/writing-for-gov-uk> for you to use.

Short sentences and paragraphs are easier to scan (people scan; they don’t read when they’re online)

Front load keywords in titles and headings. This makes it easier for your customers to find information and helps with search and discoverability of the page.

## **Remove clutter and old content**

Just as important as adding well-written content, is making sure you remove clutter, old and out-of-date content.

## **Think Google**

80% of our traffic comes from Google searches rather than people clicking through the page structure.

Barnet.gov.uk needs its search to work both internally and for anyone searching in Google.

Use the words our customers use.

Find out what they are through Google Analytics keyword report + Google Trends.

### Google Analytics keyword report

**Test case - [Registrars page](#)**

We've already run analytics to find the most popular pages. These are the ones we are going to re-write.

Now we can run a report to look for search terms on those pages and analyse which we want to add to the text of the page:

Registrar	Searches
barnet registrar	100
barnet registrar service opening hours	362
barnet registrar office	75
barnet marriage registrar	62
barnet borough registrar	12
barnet council registrar	125
<b>Registry</b>	
barnet registry office	2,285
burnt oak registry office	812
barnet marriage registry office	350
hendon registry office	112
barnet registry office burnt oak	75
edgware registry office	62
barnet registry	137
registry office burnt oak	37
burnt oak registry office opening hours	50
registry office	150
registry office barnet	25
<b>Birth</b>	
registering a birth barnet	150
barnet births deaths and marriages	75
barnet register birth	150
egware register birth	62
register birth barnet	62
barnet . government.co . uk copy birth certificate	200
barnet birth registration	75

how to get full birth certificate burnt oak	75
registering a birth in barnet	50

There were 736 keyword searches around 'registrar' and 4,095 around 'registry'. Half of the registrar searches were for opening hours.

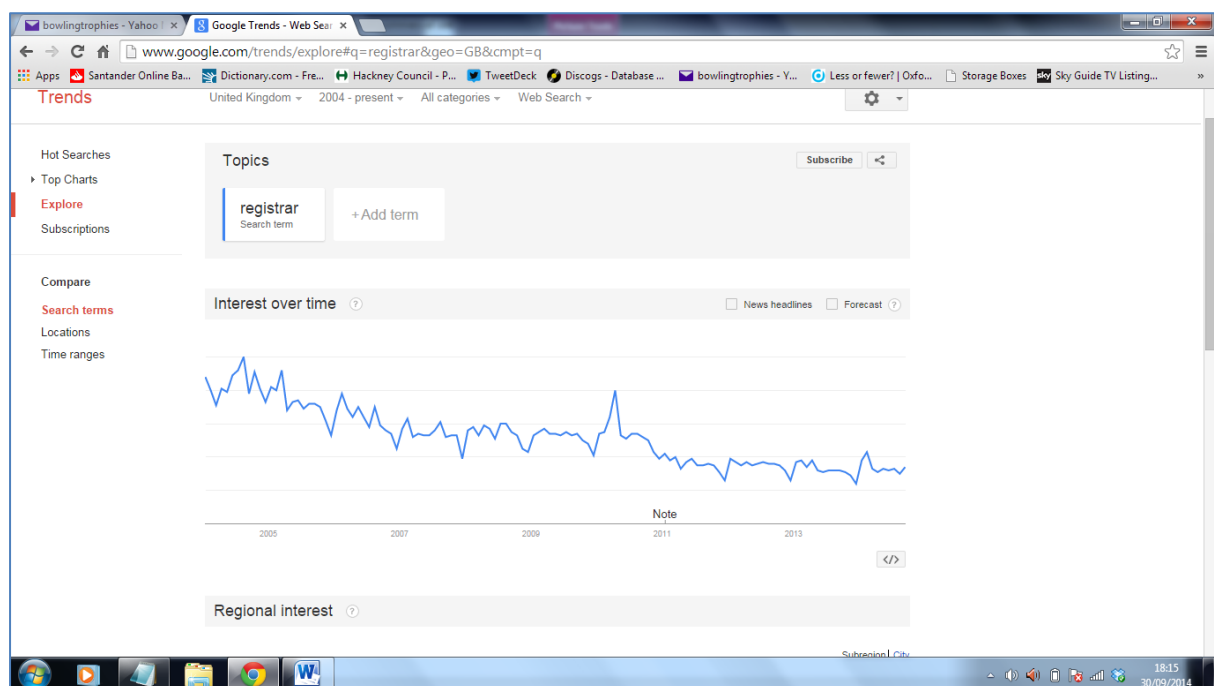
Users aren't looking for "registrar" – they want to know about the services a registrar provides. So front-load your page headings with the user actions, e.g. 'Registry office – marriage'

## Google Trends report

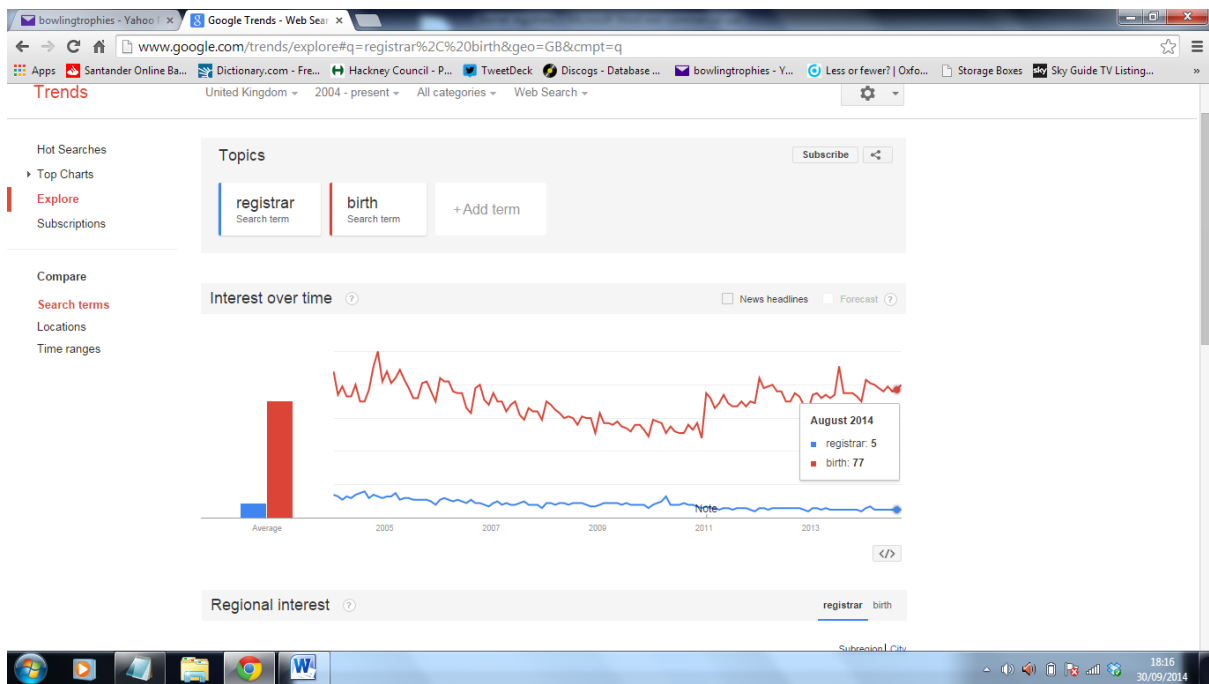
<https://www.google.com/trends/>

Google trends shows you the popularity of terms people are searching for.

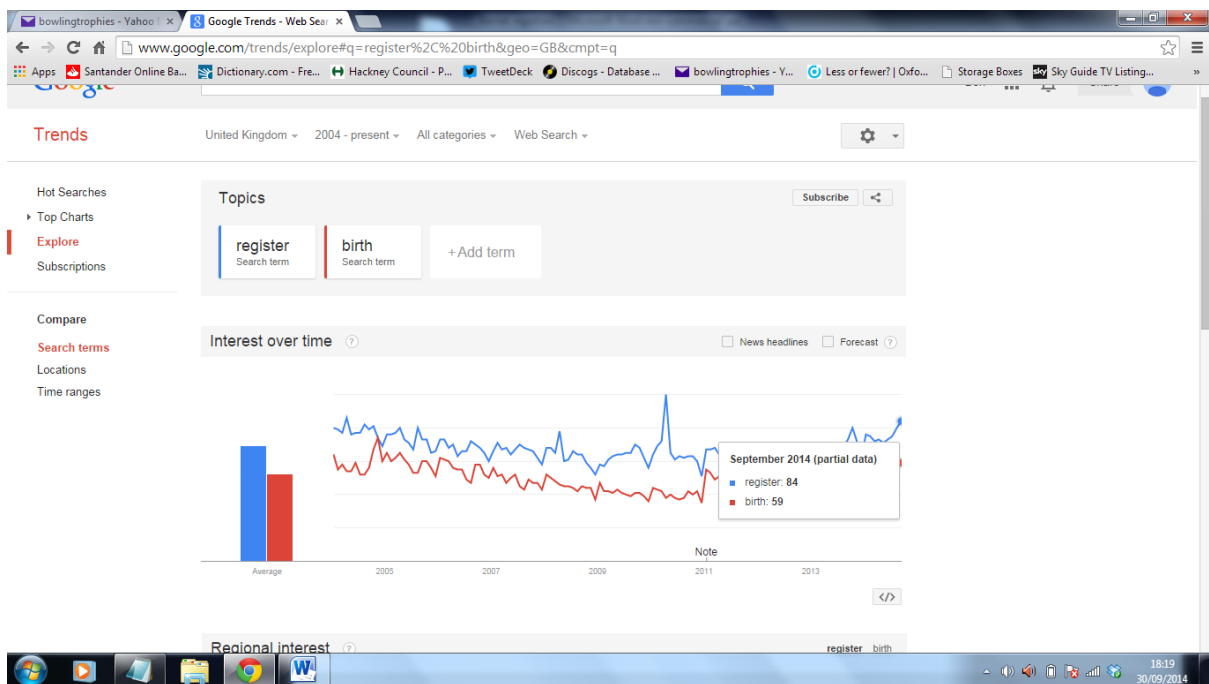
Registrar is decreasing in popularity:



Registrar + birth has 500 monthly searches in the UK:



Register + birth has over 10 times as many searches:



Therefore: 'Registrars' as a page title doesn't help the user. The action is 'register a birth'. Barnet analytics show that 'birth' and 'registrar' are never searched for together; Trends show there are more popular search terms. Use these terms in your text to drive traffic to the page.