

When things go wrong... *

Christopher Murphy, @fehler

Workshop Components · 2019

* Designing Delightful Experiences: Writing helpful error messages.

Write for clarity and helpfulness.

“Writing should be a part of every designer’s toolbox. **Words are an interface component.** Learning to work with words will help you to improve as a designer.”

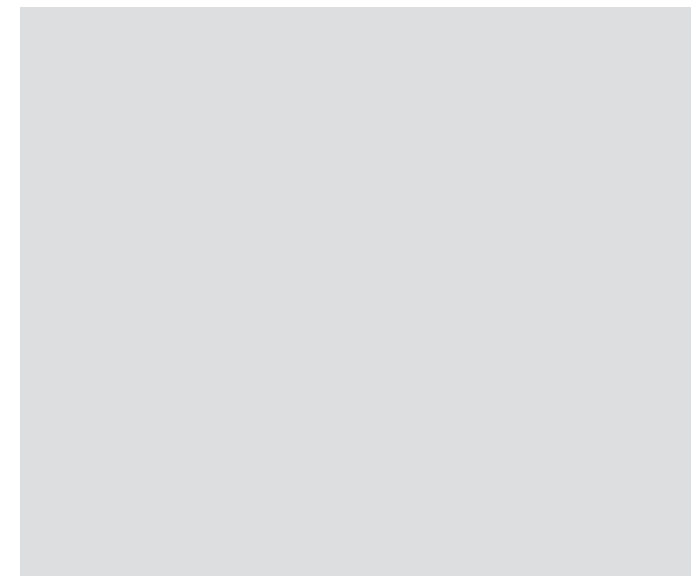
—Christopher Murphy, @fehler



03.14.17

Forget Coding: Writing Is Design's "Unicorn Skill"

In a new report, John Maeda explains why writing is a must-have skill for designers.



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John Maeda highlights this in his 2017 Design in Tech Report.

“Fast Company’s Katherine Schwab highlights the value of writing in the design process asserting, **‘Forget coding: writing is design’s unicorn skill.’**”

—Design in Tech Report, 2017

“Users depend on copy to interact with apps and other products.
If designers don't know how to write well, the final product – be it a physical or digital one – can suffer as a result.”

—Design in Tech Report, 2017

More than Design:

Code is not the only
unicorn skill

Programs

Design Schools that include Writing
degrees or offer Writing and Content
Strategy focused coursework

1. School of Visual Arts IxD MFA [↗](#)
2. Otis College of Art and Design MFA [↗](#)
3. Ringling College of Art and Design BFA [↗](#)
4. Savannah College of Art and Design BFA/MFA [↗](#)

Verbal Design

“We talk about the power of words – both content and style – all the time. When it comes to friendships, romance, work dynamics, and, dare we even mention it – though nothing is more telling, more relevant – politics, words have the power to change our opinions, incite action, divide or unify us, move us. Words can shape reality.”

JENNIFER VAN [↗](#)

Words as Material

“I think of design as a process of articulation. We join together to express an idea in a coherent form. We bring ideas to life. We connect the dots or build bridges for our users. That often means being specific about what a product does, who it’s for, why it matters, and how it works. We have to trek through a pile of ambiguity to do this.”

NICOLE FENTON [↗](#)

Why UX Design is a Lot Like Writing

“Here’s where I’d like to draw the parallel with writing – because a core skill of the interaction designer is imagining users (characters), motivations, actions, reactions, obstacles, successes, and a complete set of “what if” scenarios.”

SUSAN STUART [↗](#)

bit.ly/dit-report


Words can – and should – be helpful...

- Software is fragile. When things break, use easily understandable error messages.
- Communicate clearly when things go wrong (and say you're sorry).

Adobe XD



Web 1920 - 1

 **Can't create document (Error code: 3623)**
 Learn how to fix this issue [here](#).

OK

Repeat Grid

W 0 X 0
H 0 Y 0

RESPONSIVE RESIZE

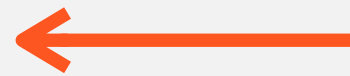
APPEARANCE

0%



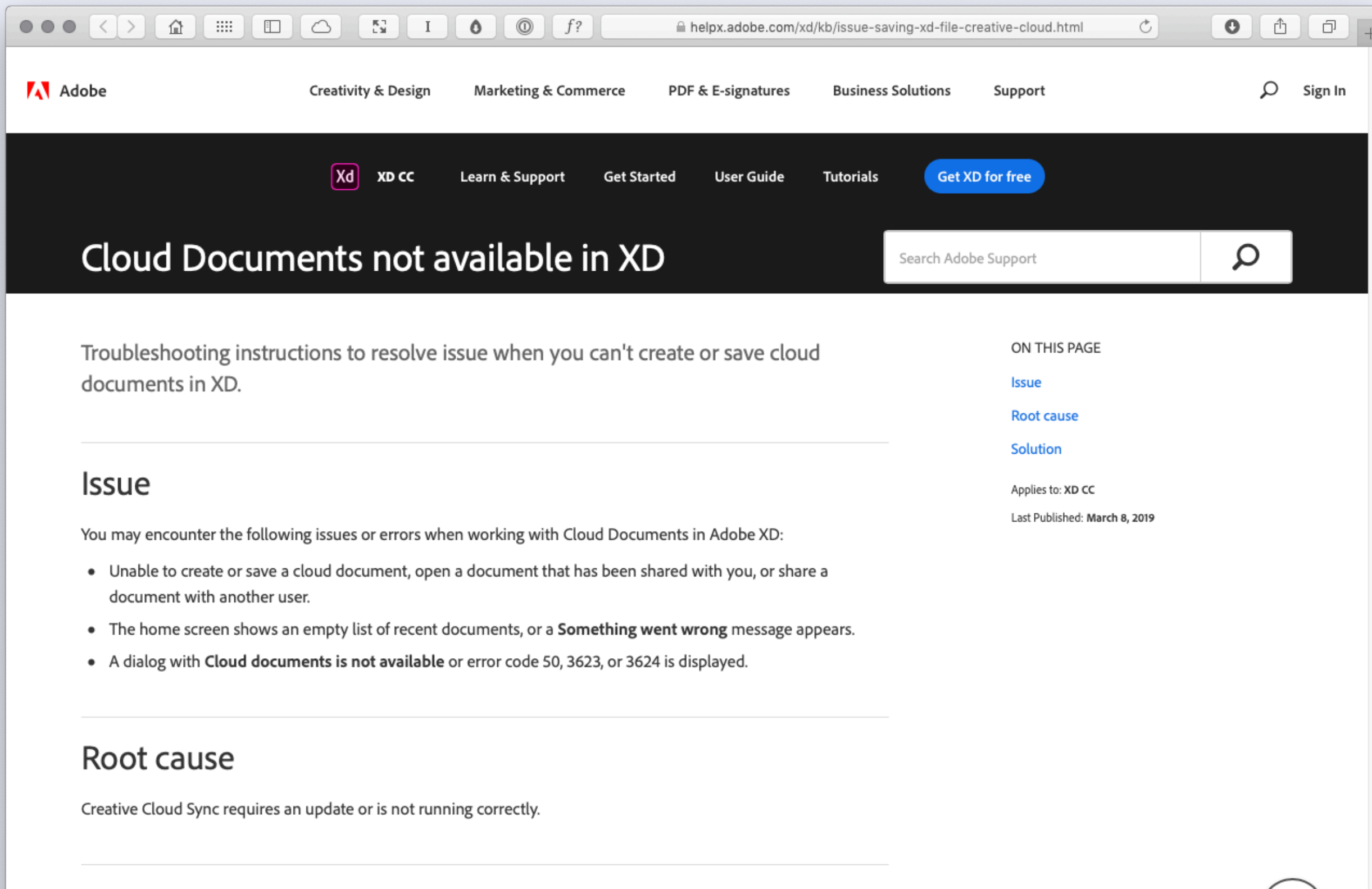
**Can't create document
(Error code: 3623)**

Learn how to fix this issue [here.](#)



OK

This error message isn't very helpful. It's written in 'programmerspeak'.



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XD CC

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Cloud Documents not available in XD

Search Adobe Support



Troubleshooting instructions to resolve issue when you can't create or save cloud documents in XD.

ON THIS PAGE

[Issue](#)

[Root cause](#)

[Solution](#)

Applies to: XD CC

Last Published: March 8, 2019

Issue

You may encounter the following issues or errors when working with Cloud Documents in Adobe XD:

- Unable to create or save a cloud document, open a document that has been shared with you, or share a document with another user.
- The home screen shows an empty list of recent documents, or a **Something went wrong** message appears.
- A dialog with **Cloud documents is not available** or error code 50, 3623, or 3624 is displayed.

Root cause

Creative Cloud Sync requires an update or is not running correctly.

Solution

Update Creative Cloud Sync by following the steps.

Clicking the link takes me to this page.

Cloud Documents not available in XD

Search Ado

Root cause

Creative Cloud Sync requires an update or is not running correctly.

Solution

Update Creative Cloud Sync by following the steps:

Check for any pending updates

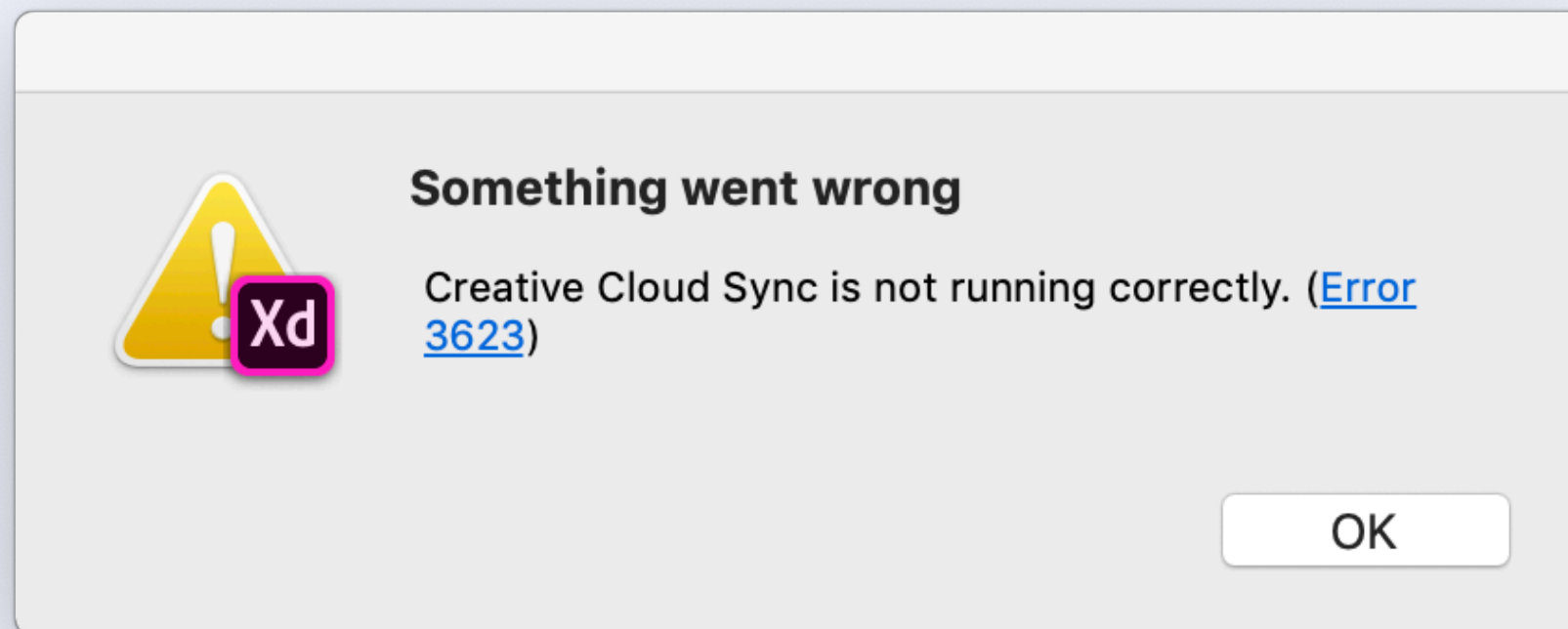
- 1 Quit Adobe XD.
- 2 Open Adobe Creative Cloud desktop app.

On Windows:

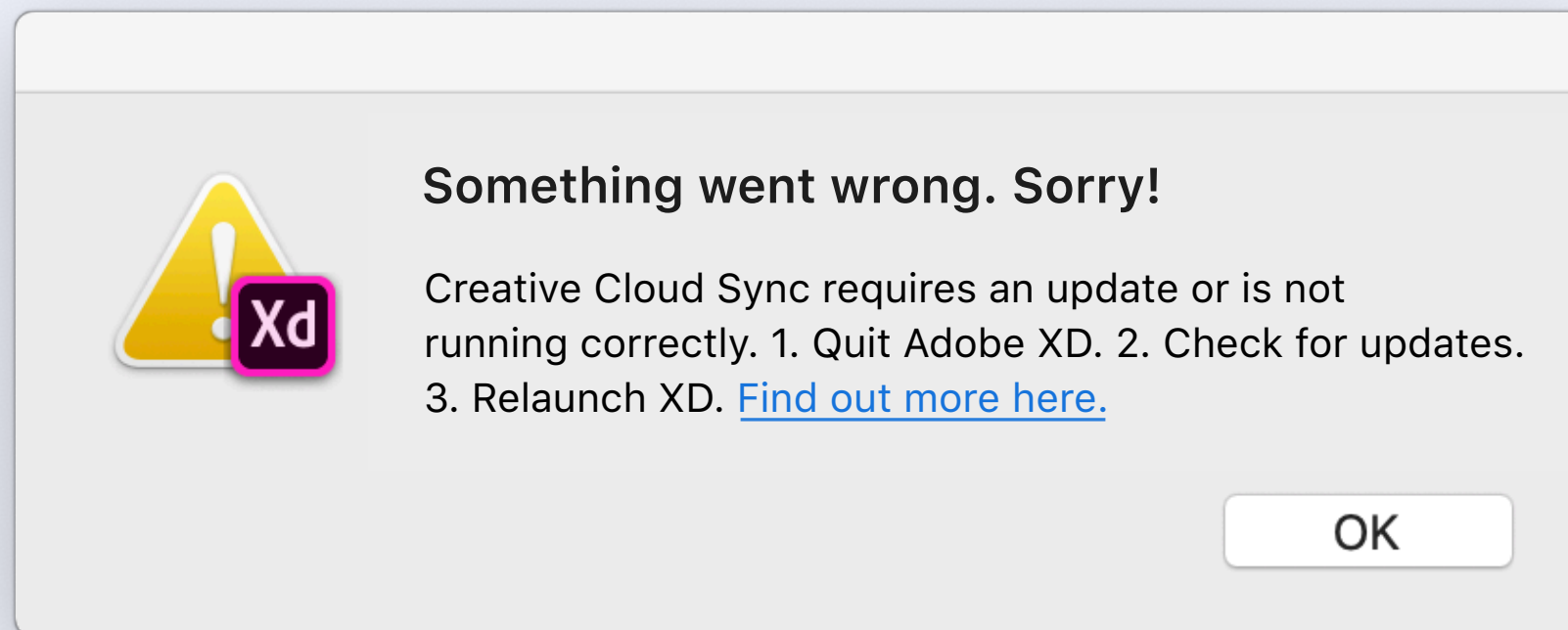
There's helpful content we could use on this help page to improve the error message.

Write a better error message...

- This is dry debugger language: 'Error code: 3623'
 - Say sorry.
 - Tell me what went wrong and tell me what to do to fix this.
 - Save me clicking through.

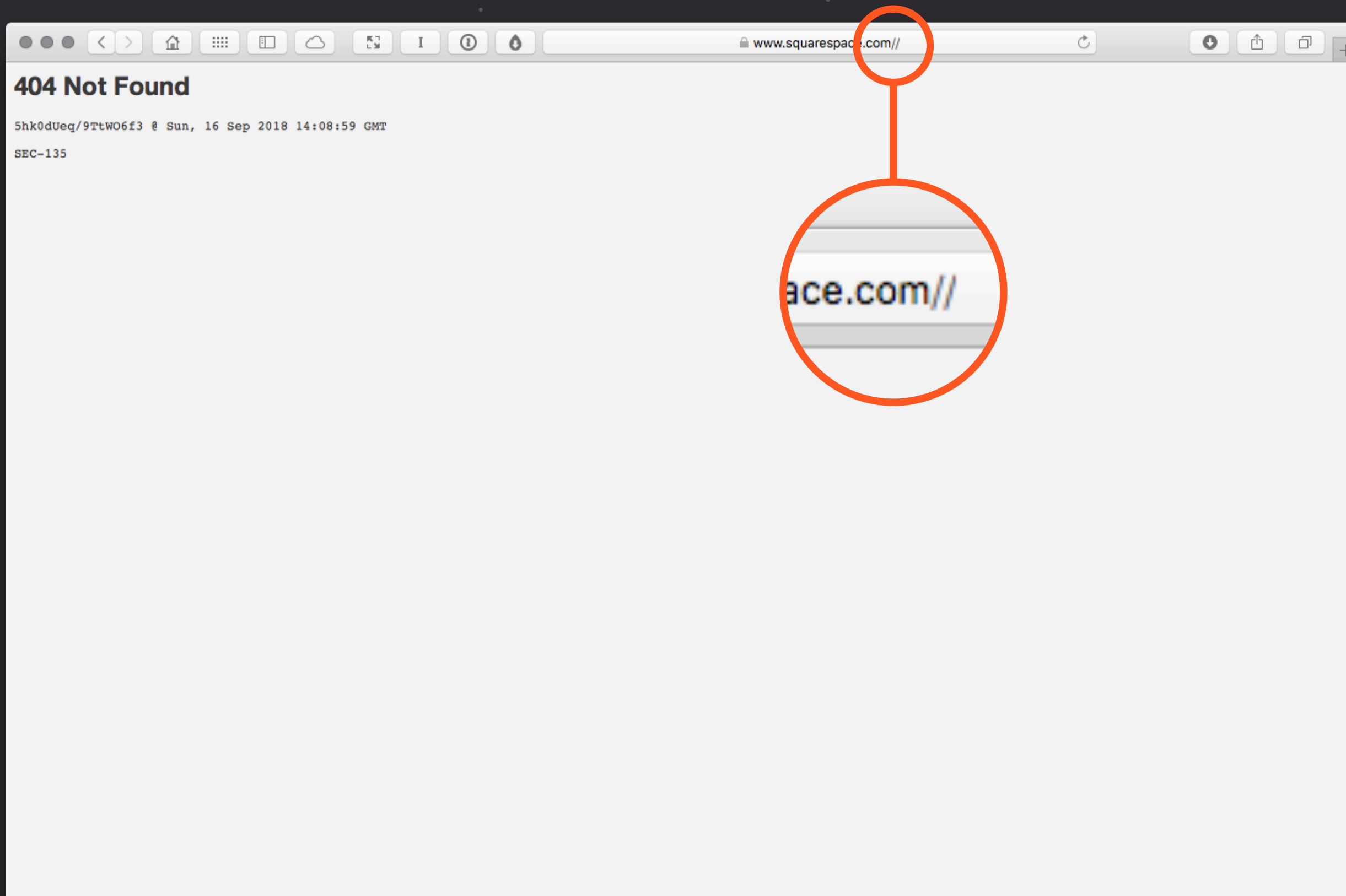


Here's another XD error message. It's better, but we could use the space in the dialog to provide a suggested solution.



Here's the error message re-written based upon the help page content. (Notice the link's still there, it's just humanised.)

Squarespace

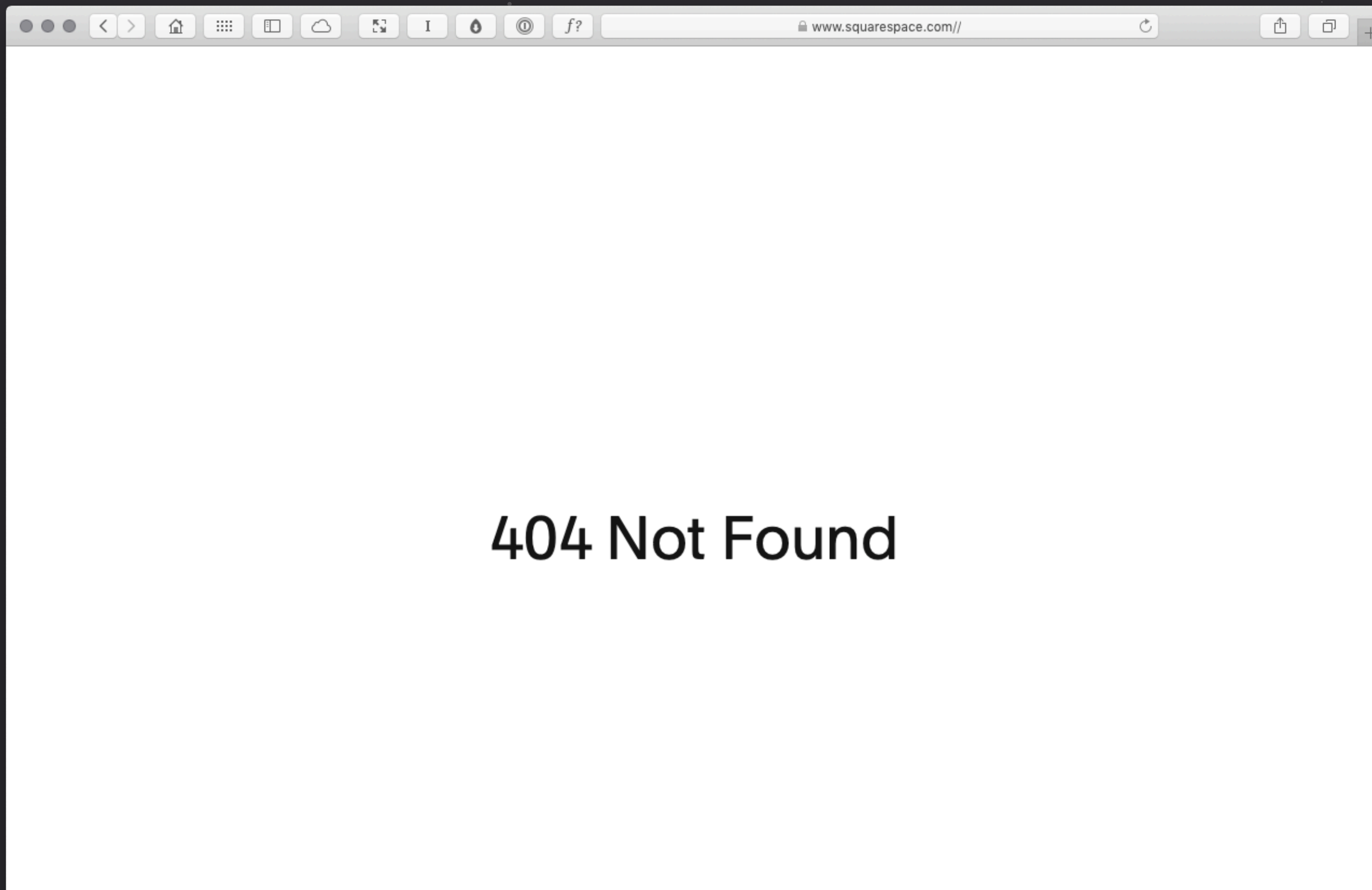


Here I typed '//' (two slashes) by accident after the web address. An easy mistake to make. (2018 Screenshot)

404 Not Found

5hk0dUeq/9TtWO6f3 @ Sun, 16 Sep 2018 14:08:59 GMT

SEC-135



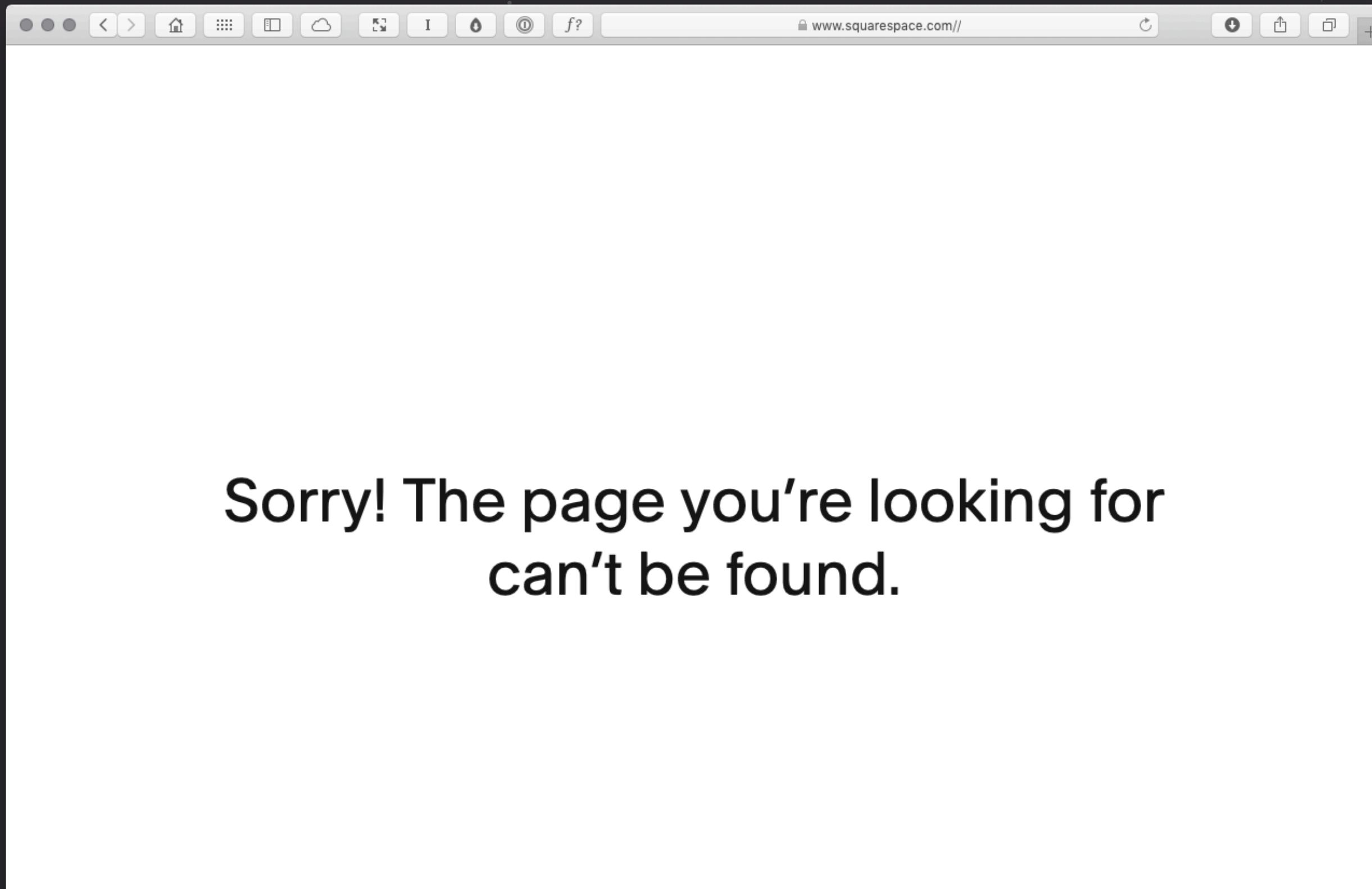
This is slightly more helpful although most humans won't know what '404 Not Found' means. (2019 Screenshot)

TwbO6oxa/vBEv5J28 @ Wed, 20 Mar 2019 11:18:16 GMT

SEC-135



The useful debugging content is kept, but it's de-emphasised at the base of the page. This is much better.



Here's the content re-written so that it makes sense to everyday humans.

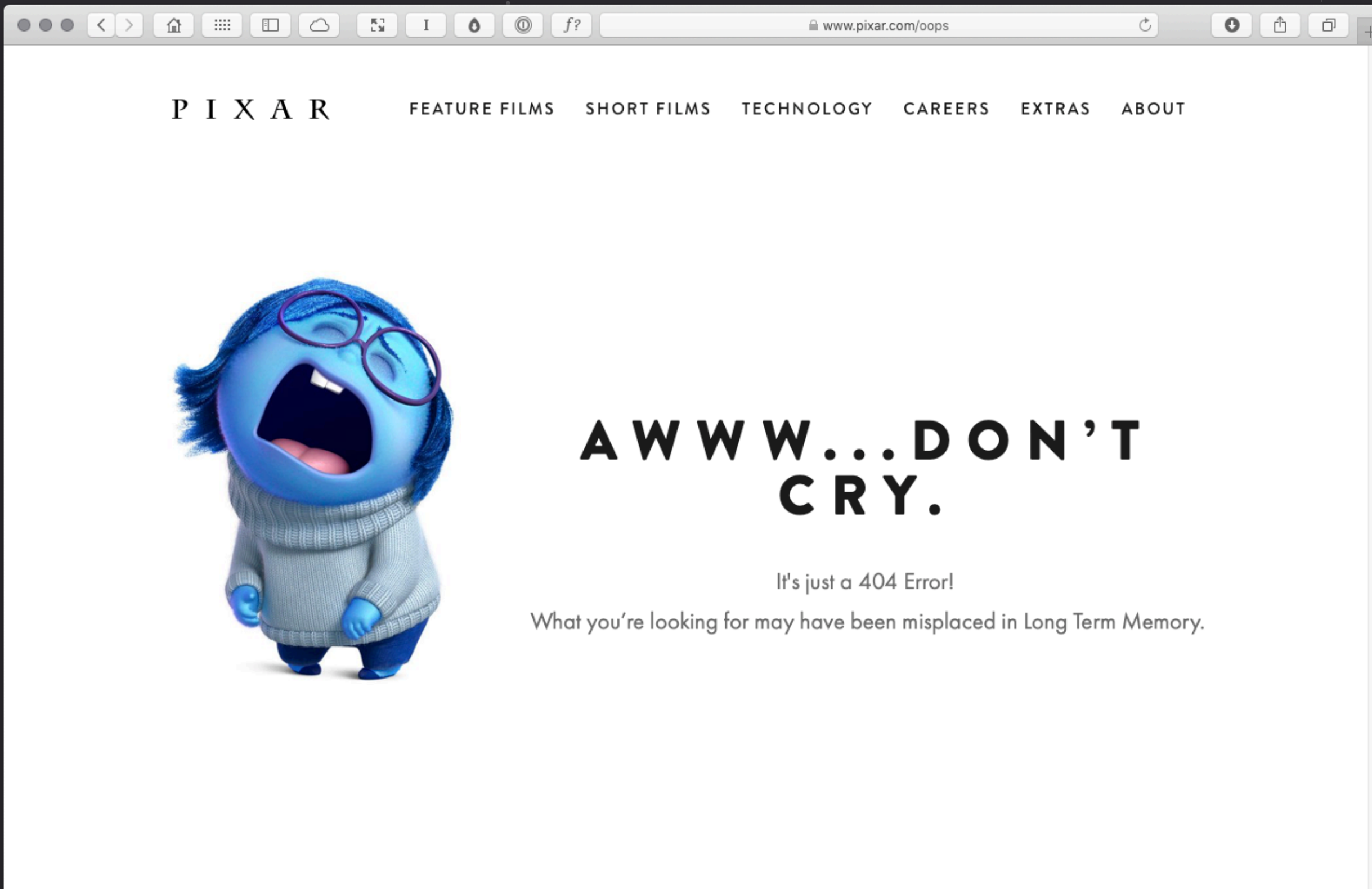
However, we could do more...

- Provide some suggested links.
- Add a search box.

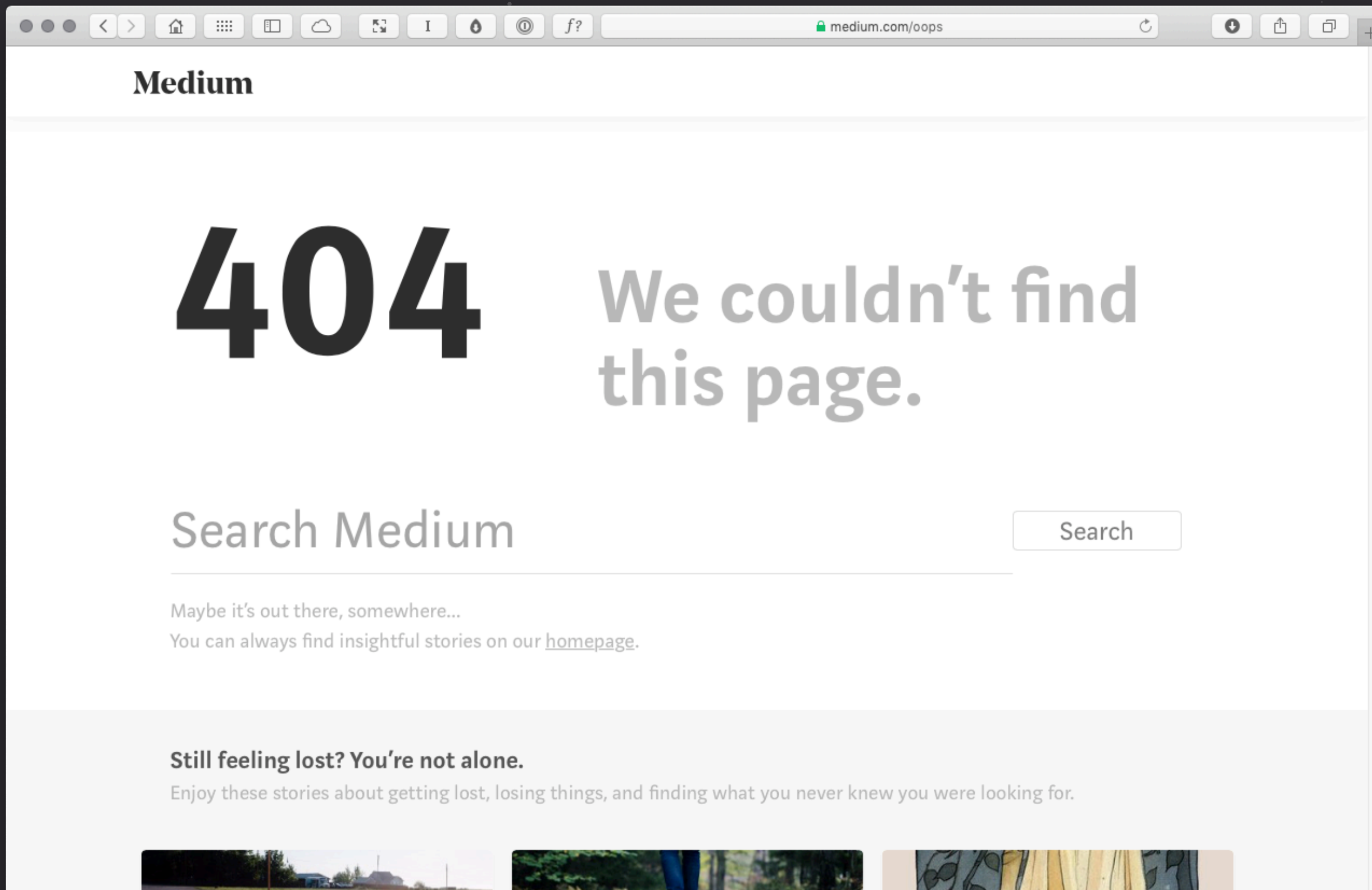
When things go wrong... delight.

“When things go wrong **you have an opportunity to turn frustration into delight**. Just because something breaks doesn’t mean you can’t rescue the situation with empathy.”

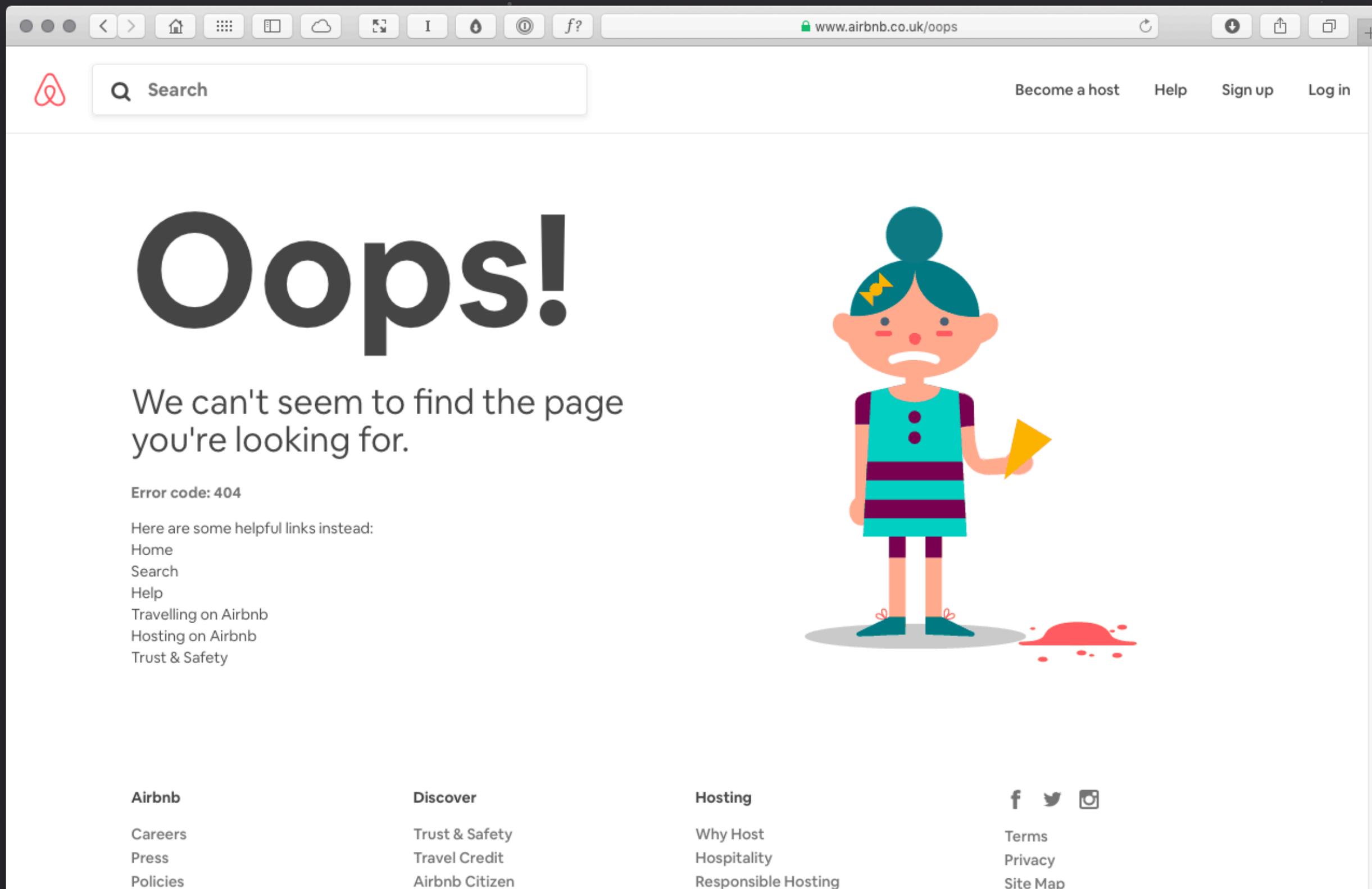
—Christopher Murphy, @fehler



Pixar's 404 page shows character, as you'd expect. It also provides links to the site's navigation so you can get back on track.



Medium's 404 page enables you to search Medium or, if you prefer, read a story about getting lost (a nice touch).



Airbnb's 404 page features a delightful animation of an unfortunate girl dropping her ice-cream on the floor. Oh dear!

Macrocopy and Microcopy

- Macrocopy establishes the tone, microcopy satisfies functional requirements.
- Consider both, they're equally important.

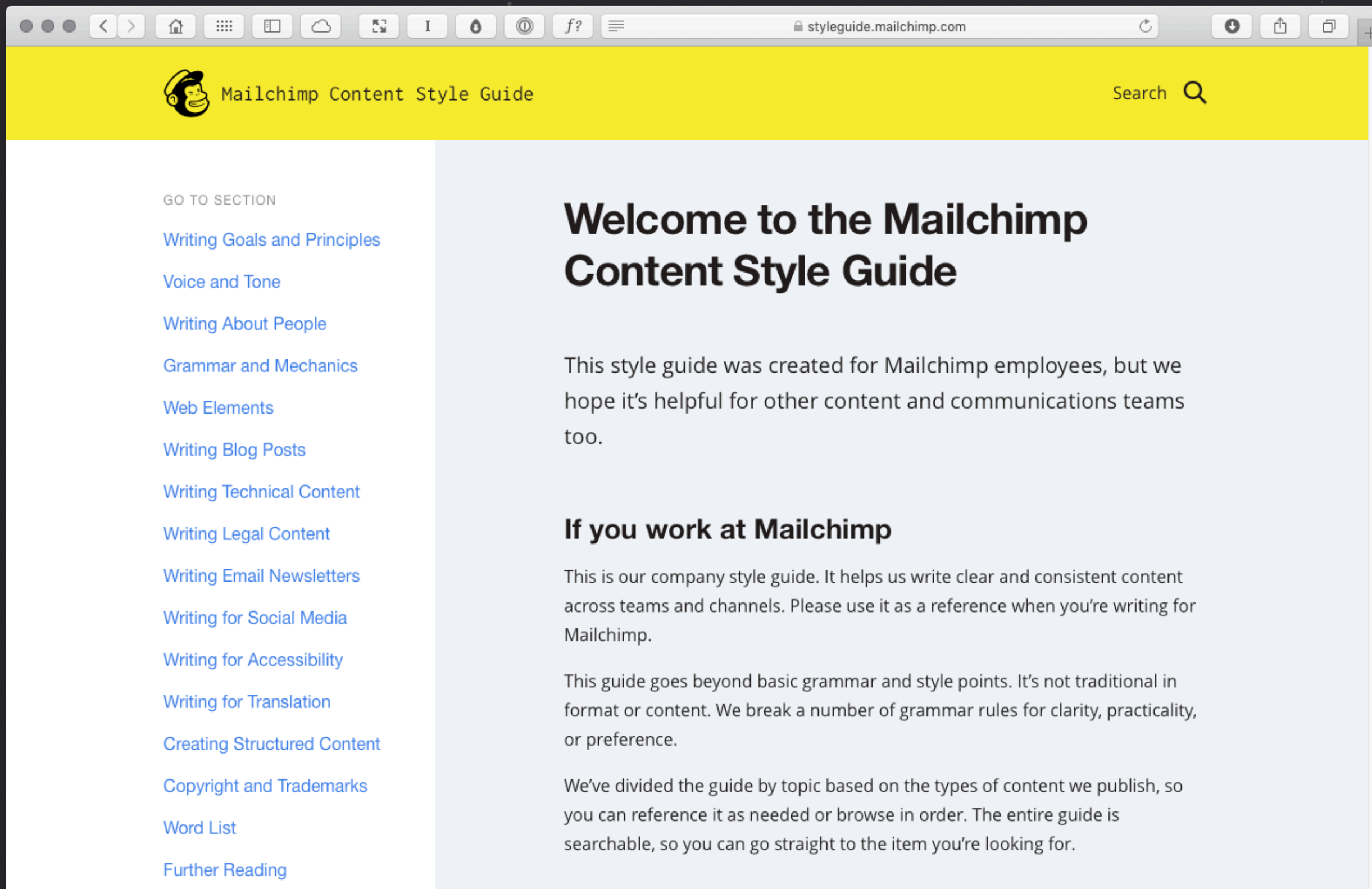
Words help define your brand.

- Improving macrocopy leads to clearer brand messaging, which underpins your communication.

Words help in interface components.

- Improving microcopy leads to a better experience and can rescue a situation when things go wrong.

Other helpful resources...



MailChimp's Content Style Guide is an excellent guide to writing well and writing for humans.

styleguide.mailchimp.com



I also co-wrote these two books for Five Simple Steps on the topic of words as a critical design component.

gumroad.com/standardistas

* Get both books for the price of one with discount code 'onefree', for less than the price of a coffee.

“If you found this deck useful, follow me on Twitter: **@fehler**. I’m in the process of breaking down 15+ years of workshop content into small, easily consumable components. I’ll be tweeting as I’ve finished and shared these components. Cheers!”

—Christopher Murphy, [@fehler](#)



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