

Tip Jar for PHSA web & POD editors

In this issue

Learn the best way to set up a hyperlink based on a user's context and needs.

The golden rule: links should open in the same tab

As web editors, our goal is to help users find the information they need quickly and without interruption. Generally, setting hyperlinks to open in the same tab helps a user get to their next destination or piece of information without interruption. It also helps to reduce digital clutter, as managing multiple tabs can be overwhelming.

In almost all cases, it's better to open a link in the same tab but it's important to think about context. Thinking about user needs and workflows with tabs can help us create a seamless experience for them.

Mobile devices

Setting links to open in the same tab helps those using smaller screens like mobile phones or tablets. It's reported that [mobile users are actually annoyed](#) when links open in a new tab because they can't click the "Back" button to navigate easily between pages.

Accessibility

Opening links in the same tab is better for visually impaired users on both mobile devices and desktop computers. Assistive devices like screen readers don't always alert the user that they are in a new tab, which can cause confusion and disrupt the user's typical workflow.

For those with cognitive disabilities (or even just distracted or less-technical users), opening a link in a new tab can be disorienting and requires the user to spend time finding their way back to their original tab without the "Back" button. For users completing time-sensitive tasks, this can be quite frustrating.

The exception to the rule

The only time it's better to set a link to open in a new tab is if opening a link in the same tab would **interrupt a user's task or process**. Tasks or processes could include filling out a form, cross-referencing information in two windows while studying or printing a short instruction manual or poster.

Filling out forms

Imagine that it's April 30 and your provincial income tax is due by the end of the day. This year, you decided to file your taxes yourself using online guides and free web software. You've heard

that it's easy, but you procrastinated so you're a little stressed that you need to figure it out so quickly.

You start to go through the web software and fill things out. Eventually, you get to a section near the end that you find confusing. There's a link to a "Learn more" page that you click – it opens in the same tab.

After reading the "Learn more" page and getting the info you need, you hit the "Back" button to find that the form page has refreshed and all your progress from the past 10 minutes is gone. After a moment of frustration and stress around the time deadline, you scroll to the top of the form and reluctantly start again.

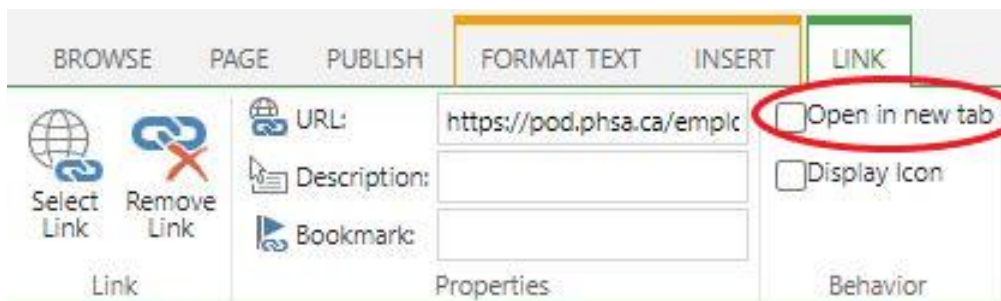
In this situation, opening the "Learn more" page in the same tab caused frustration. Setting the link to open a new tab would be the better option, as the user can flip back and forth between tabs to complete their task.

Cross referencing information

In scenarios where users need to compare information between sources, set the link to open in a new tab. For example, a user might be referencing an instructional document in one tab and performing the steps in another. The person can then close the second tab themselves when they are done.

Your action this month

Go through one of your pages and click each link. Pay attention to how each one opens and think about how someone might use the link. If opening a link in the same tab would interrupt a task, change the settings by selecting the "Open in a new tab" checkbox.



Created by the Web Strategy Team (PHSA Communications)

No longer a POD or web editor? Questions or comments? Please email webhelp@phsa.ca

[Resources for PHSA web editors](#)

[Read past Tip Jar articles](#)