How to Write for the Web – A Guide  
By Jim Witkins 11/30/2006

Research* shows that Web users don’t read Web pages. They scan them!

If you care about the success of your Website, you should write in a style useful to your audience.

**DO**
- Keep it short - use half the word count (or less) compared to conventional writing
- Use bulleted lists – this increases scanability
- Use meaningful subheads - skip the marketing speak. Use keywords to help visitors find relevant information
- Highlight keywords - hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others
- Use one idea per paragraph - if visitors are not caught by the first few words in a paragraph, they will skip over any additional ideas contained within
- Use the Inverted Pyramid style – start with the conclusion
- Use common language - speak the audience’s language. Use words or phrases your audience will understand. Keep it simple.
- Write to be found - use words your audience will be searching for in search engines. If they can’t find it, it doesn’t exist

**DON’T**
- Write long paragraphs – you’ll be the only one reading them
- Use marketing speak and jargon – it’s confusing, distracting, and won’t get you noticed in the search engines
- Repurpose content from other sources without editing for the Web – Writing for the Web means writing for the Web, not cutting and pasting to the Web
- Bury important information in pdf’s or other documents – it’s less likely to be found in search engines or site searches. (Provide a detailed summary with a link to the document if nothing else)
- Use the phrase “click here” – hypertext links should be descriptive phrases identifying the expected content. This helps visitors quickly identify content that meets their needs and improves search findability and ranking

**Style Guidelines:**
UW Communications General Style Guide  
http://www.uc.wisc.edu/styleguide/search.php?searchcode_id=1  
http://www.uc.wisc.edu/styleguide/search.php?searchcode_id=2 (Internet terms only)

*More resources:*
How Users Read on the Web - by Jakob Nielsen, 1997  
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html

Inverted Pyramids in Cyberspace - Jakob Nielsen, 1996  
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9606.html

Use Old Words When Writing for Findability - Jakob Nielsen, 2006  
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/search-keywords.html

F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content - Jakob Nielsen, 2006  
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html

Web Writing for Many Interest Levels - by Nathan Wallace, 1999  
http://www.e-gineer.com/v1/articles/web-writing-for-many-interest-levels.htm

Lower-Literacy Users - Jakob Nielsen, 2005  
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20050314.html