Web Writing Tips

Keep in mind that:

1. Users are impatient. Most are scanning the page.
2. Users may be viewing your content on tiny mobile devices.
3. Users read about 25% more slowly on a computer screen than in print.

Keep it short: Web copy should have about 50% of the word count of print.

1. Choose shorter words that mean the same thing (e.g., "goal" is preferable to "objective").
2. Get rid of unnecessary words (e.g., "to" is preferable to "in order to").
3. Avoid jargon or terminology the audience might not be familiar with. If using abbreviations or acronyms, write out only the first instance on the page, with the abbreviation/acronym in parentheses.
4. End a sentence with a preposition. It's fine.
5. Put 1 space between sentences, not 2.

Use the inverted pyramid: Write journalism style: conclusion first, details later. (A.k.a., "Put the bottom line up top.") Always lead with the news or the answer to the user's question. Save any background details for the second paragraph, or later.

Make copy scannable: Present your content in a way that lets readers "grab and go."

1. Break up chunks of copy into smaller ones.
2. Break up lists of items into bullets, tables, charts, or graphs.
3. Use headlines and subheads to guide the reader to what they're looking for. Write headlines and subheads that inform, rather than clever ones that tease.
4. Use active voice, rather than passive. Active voice is easier to understand. Generally, passive voice is useful only when you don't want to point fingers at who performed the action, when you don't know who performed the action, or when it's not important who performed the action.
5. Use numerals instead of writing numbers out, where possible. They take up less space, and catch users' attention.

Create useful lists:

1. Put the most important information at the beginning or end of a list. Items in the middle of a list are usually not remembered as well.
2. Keep lists to 7 or fewer items, as users have trouble recalling more than that.
3. Use parallel construction to aid readability and comprehension.
4. Use numbered lists, where possible. They're more useful than bulleted lists, since it's easier to refer to a specific number (e.g., when reviewing a document with coworkers).

Note recommended paragraph and sentence lengths:

1. Sentences should be no longer than 20 words or about 140 characters.
2. Paragraphs should be no taller than 1" on the screen.
3. Copy should not take up more than half a screen, horizontally.

Write for your user: Are you writing in a tone they can relate to? User interviews are a good opportunity to observe how they communicate. Tip: transcribe some of their feedback word-for-word to create a "copy vocabulary."

Check the readability level: Websites with a general audience should read at an 8th-grade level or lower (Flesch-Kincaid reading level). Word can gauge the readability level for you:

http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/test-your-document-s-readability-HP010148506.aspx

Consider ESL and older audiences:

1. Avoid semi-colons if possible. They're hard to distinguish from commas on screen.
2. Avoid reverse type, which is difficult for older audiences to read.
3. Avoid contractions when communicating to ESL audiences.
4. Note that certain numbers, such as 6 and 8, start to look alike for older readers.