Writing for the Web

1. Summarize First

The first paragraph should summarize the entire story.

Example: Using simple software and student help, the UW-Madison Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures (CSUMC) has created a powerful instructional tool that allows students to experience the sights and sounds of Madison’s historic Greenbush community.

In addition, write each sentence and paragraph as if they are the last ones that will be read. This is known as the inverted pyramid style of writing.

2. Be Concise

Cut word count in half. According to web usability expert Jakob Nielsen, the word count for an online document should be half (or less) the word count of the same document written for print.

If you’re used to writing for print, you may wish to write your first draft that way and pare down for the second draft.

3. Write for Scanning

From Jakob Nielsen:

- highlighted keywords (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others)
- meaningful sub-headings
- bulleted lists
- one idea per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph)

Image source: http://www.tangoconnect.com/resources/InvertedPyramid.htm
4. Consult the UW-Madison Editorial Style Guide

Become familiar with the Guide which covers topics like:

- when to capitalize words like professor and department
- how to hyphenate phrases like UW-Madison and e-mail
- how to abbreviate College of Letters and Science (L&S, no spaces)
- when to use login, logon, and logoff (noun) versus log in, log on, log off (verb)

For more information

Web Teaching Series: Writing for the Web
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~webteach/articles/text.html
Sarah Horton
Darmouth College

Be Succinct! Writing for the Web
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9703b.html
Jakob Nielsen
Useit.com

How Users Read on the Web
http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html
Jakob Nielsen
Useit.com

Editorial Style Guide
http://www.uc.wisc.edu/styleguide/search.php?searchcode_id=1
UW-Madison University Communications