Important tips for writing for the web

People don’t usually read for pleasure on the website. They are looking for a specific piece of information, and they don’t want extraneous junk to get in their way.

People scan, rather than reading everything, so they need short paragraphs and good headings. Headings are also good for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) because the search engines scan pages for content with an emphasis on the headings.

Formal text is harder to read, so it's important to choose an eighth grade reading age and friendly conversational tone. Visitors look for information-rich content and they can lose interest in a page quickly, so put the key facts at the beginning.

People respect authoritative sources, so it's good to link out to other people's content when applicable. People look for supporting evidence, which means providing detailed information, testimonials and useful images that help them make a decision.

Readers are wary of out of date content, so it's important to actively manage the information you publish.

People scan; they don't read

Because people tend to be in research mode rather than entertainment mode, they typically only read about 20 percent of the content on an average page. They are skimming for information they think is relevant to the problem they're trying to solve. Web readers skim across most text and can miss information if it isn't apparent.

Start each paragraph with the key idea, using words that will tell the story for the rest of the paragraph. These words are the ones that people's eyes rest on when they're skimming, so they should really indicate what the rest of that paragraph is about.

If your paragraphs run on too long, or contain more than one concept, then readers might completely miss the subsequent ideas that you've buried in the paragraph. The best way to avoid this problem is to use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.

Use the simplest, cleanest and shortest way to get your message across. Often the best way to accomplish this is to convert part of your content into a list. Lists are easier to scan, are written telegraphically, and break up text. Use lists wherever you can in your online text. They help people to quickly find the relevant information, and when they've found it, the information easy to digest.

Bulleted lists are used when the items have no set order. Use numbered lists when the items have a determined order, like steps to enroll in classes.

Remove text that doesn’t add to the story. Writers often use 10 words where one would do, or use long, complicated words where a short, simple one would be better. When you remove all the extra text, readers are much more likely to find the key concepts.

Remember, you’re writing to get information across to our students or prospective students as quickly and painlessly as possible by making use of their natural scanning behavior.
Overall page look

- There should be at least one photo or graphic on every page
- Some graphics (e.g.: banner/promotional graphics at top right-hand corner of index pages) are updated by marketing/graphic staff
- Marketing office will provide image support as requested
- Use frequent headings to break up long blocks of text whenever possible using the “heading” pull-down. (See headings below.)
- It is preferred that all the information about one topic is contained on a single page
- A jump menu to a new heading on the same page is preferred to opening to a new page in a single topic. (Also easier for reader to print the page for future reference.)

Headings

- All headings must be created using Heading 4 from the drop-down menu (under paragraph).
- Bolding text is for emphasis only, not for headings.
- Always begin a new page with a proper heading at the top of the page
- Use frequent headings to break up long blocks of text using the “heading” pull-down. (ADA and SEO issue)
- Use sentence case for headings
- Do not use ALL CAPS for headings
- Do not use title case headings
- Title case is used for page titles and page navigation only
- Do not use colons after headings (unless otherwise required)

Text color

- All body text is black
- Headings are currently red, but can be globally changed in the style sheets
- NO other color may be used for type unless there is an emergency message, in which case red is used. Changes in dates, hours and phone numbers are not emergencies.
- Active links are in green.

Capitalization

- Follow the DVC Style Guide (www.dvc.edu/communication/marketing/pdfs/DVC-style-guide.pdf)
- Proper names and places are capitalized
- DVC departments, programs, areas, and divisions are capitalized
- In most cases, the word "Office" is part of the place name and is capitalized
- Use title case on page titles and page navigation only (only applies when creating new pages)
- All other headings are treated as sub-headings and are sentence case
- When in doubt use lowercase (or contact the marketing office)

Position on page

- All content should be flush left including headings (no centering)
- Skip a line between paragraphs
  - Press the enter key twice
- Do not indent paragraphs
- Tables should be used only for tabular data, not to control page layout
  - Office hours, list of services, etc. is considered tabular data, and may be in an invisible table
- Okay to center tabular data

Last updated by LLeong: Friday, January 16, 2015
Symbols
- Do not use "&" - spell out "and"
- Do not use "%" - spell out "percent"
- Do not use "@" except in email addresses, otherwise "at"

Telephone
- Spell out "Telephone"
- Do not use "phone"
- Do not use "Tel."
- For telephone numbers, use hyphens, no parentheses 925-685-1230
- Extensions are: ext. 24253 (lower case abbreviation, no #’s)

Days, dates and months
- Do not abbreviate the days of the week
- Do not abbreviate the month unless it is used in a date
  - The party was in January
  - Jan. 1, 2010
- The months March, April, May, June and July are never abbreviated
- Do not use “st”, “nd”, or “rd” following the day in a date
  - Use Jan. 1, Feb. 2, March 3
- Indicate a series of years with the full first year and last two numerals of the second year
  - 2010-11 academic year

Time
- Use periods (no spaces) for a.m. and p.m.
- Do not use colons or 00’s when the time is on the hour
  - 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
  - 9-10 a.m.
  - 9-10:30 p.m.
  - 11 a.m.-12 p.m. - not 11 a.m.-noon
  - 12-3 p.m. - not noon-3 p.m.

Emphasis
- To emphasize a word or phrase
  - bold is preferred
  - italics is acceptable
  - underlining, highlighting or CAPS is not acceptable
- Italics are used for emphasis or titles of published works, not for headings
- CAPS are used for acronyms (EOPS), and not for emphasis
- Do not use colored type for emphasis
Web links
- Links to external websites (outside the DVC site) should open in a new window ( _blank)
- Associated DVC sites, including WebAdvisor, Portal, sister colleges, and district office, are considered external websites
- Links to a pdf always open in a new window
- All links within the DVC website open in the same window (except pdfs)
- Include links (within the DVC website) to content referenced on your pages as often as possible to make it easier for the reader
- Links outside the DVC website should be used only when it is necessary
- The text used for a link must be descriptive of where the link refers. Never use “click here” for a link.(ADA and SEO)
- Links should be created purposefully. The text for the link should be understandable within the context of the topic. Never use ‘Click here', 'Learn more', or 'More' as these are ambiguous phrases.
  - An example of a bad link is: For more information about our products, click here.
  - A better link would be: Read information about our products.

Navigation
- All new content areas (folders) must contain at least two pages. Otherwise stick with a single page in the existing folder.

Tables
- Tables should only be used to organize tabular data on a webpage
- Tables are not used to control the layout of the page

Images
- Banner images are created by the graphic designers. Please contact them for updates or requests.
- Acceptable images are one of three widths:
  - 700px (full page),
  - 350px (half page), or
  - 175px (quarter page).
  - Height is determined by the image dimensions
- Image placement depends on the text. When placing images of people the general rule is to have the subject looking towards the center of the page or area. You want to draw in eye in towards the text not what is on the next page.
- For readability add a left or right margin to the spacing around the image. 10px is a good margin. This is added under the ‘Appearance’ tab in the ‘Style’ box when inserting an image.
  - Use ‘margin-left: 10px;’ to add space on the left side of the image.
  - Use ‘margin-right: 10px;’ to add space on the right side of the image.

Filenames
- Filenames should be descriptive but brief
- Consider readability when requesting a new filename.
- Filenames, including PDF filenames, may not contain spaces.
- Filenames are all lowercase and use hyphens or run the words together

PDFs
- PDF documents for the web should include the last updated label and date in the footer.
Special ADA Considerations
- Non-distinguishable links – The same link text cannot be used for links going to different destinations on the same page. Links with the same descriptive words, must go to the same place.
- The following are examples of typical non-distinguishable links:
  - Read more…
  - Click here
  - For more information…

Miscellaneous information
DVC Website Style Guide - for the most up-to-date style information please visit:
http://www.dvc.edu/communication/marketing/pdfs/DVC-web-style-guide.pdf
This guide is an ongoing work in progress and should be updated frequently as questions arise and decisions are made.

For questions, clarifications, or style guide additions, please contact the Marketing Office at: DVCWebWorkGroup@dvc.edu

If a page is checked out or in workflow for more than 72 hours (three days), the Marketing Office will check in the page if needed. If the page was in workflow, the Marketing Office will publish and notify the approver.