

Web Writing for Beginners: Top Ten Tips

This is the 2-page handout version of a [post on K4Health's Medium publication, The Exchange](#).
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Consider Your Audience

1. Think about your readers.

Before you begin writing, put yourself in a reader's shoes. People read to find solutions to problems, get information, be entertained, or be moved or supported emotionally. What are you trying to convey? Is it **useful, interesting, motivating, or energizing**? Make reading worth their time.

2. Be careful with jargon.

Jargon and abbreviations can be useful shortcuts with the right audience. With the wrong audience, they are actively alienating. (They can also be hard to translate, if translation is a concern.) **Use plain language, and spell out your abbreviations.** This is not to say “avoid all jargon”—but try to stay aware of words and phrases that could make your audience feel like outsiders.

Write Clearly

“Writing clearly” is a huge undertaking, far beyond the scope of these tips. Many public health and knowledge management professionals have advanced degrees; they are used to writing in an academic style, intended for readers with similar expertise. Writing for a general online audience—especially one that includes people who speak English as a second language—means simplifying style without diluting the core meaning.

3. Find your own voice, and use it.

In academic or scientific writing, it can be important to maintain objectivity—to erase the author, leaving the ideas to speak for themselves. But in a blog post or a story, a personal voice creates connection. Imagine reading your piece out loud: Does it sound like **you**? If you read it aloud, would people listen? Readers recognize authenticity when they see it.

4. Condense your sentences.

Keep sentence length down (**15–20 words** is a reasonable average, depending on your target audience). Break up strings of long sentences with shorter ones. ([Write music.](#)) Try using dashes and parentheses, too—they help create rhythm and visual space, dividing a long sentence into manageable chunks.

5. Watch the details.

This includes using proper **grammar and punctuation**. Small mistakes will distract some readers from your ideas. Also, [double-check sources and quotations](#). Illustrating a point with a supporting aphorism from a famous person or a quote from a colleague can make that point memorable—but make sure they really said it. A misattributed or inaccurate quotation can be a big embarrassment.

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Web-Writing Specifics

6. Don't paste from Word.

Word is full of background formatting code that does not play well with most websites. If you wrote your piece in Word, paste it into a **plain-text editor** (like Notepad or TextEdit) before putting it into a website content management system. Yes, you'll have to re-do links and headings—but that's less work than cleaning out incompatible code. If you'll be sending your work to a content manager for publishing, it's polite to include the URLs of any embedded links, so the links can be reconstructed once the formatting is stripped out.

7. Be aware of length.

This tip used to be “Keep it brief”: When website load times were minutes long and “above the fold” screen space was king, experts recommended 300 to 700 words as a guideline for blog posts. Over the past ten years, with the rise of Twitter and mobile, very short-form writing became popular—but then there was a backlash in favor of more in-depth writing. Now, the “infinite scroll” of reading on a smartphone is a norm, and it's not uncommon to see posts of 3,000–5,000 words. Choose the length that suits your topic and your readers' likely attention span—and put an **estimated read time** and/or a **summary of the key message** of your post right up front. (Some people call this the “TL;DR”—“too long, didn't read.”) Here's [a tool that calculates read time](#).

8. Make your piece scannable.

[Most people don't actually read on the Web](#). They skim through a page, looking for **headings, keywords, and bullets** that interest them. Would a reader still learn something from your piece if they read only the first few words, and skimmed through the highlights?

9. Make links meaningful.

Links stand out—so make them mean something. Compare these links:

- A video of a [cute kid racing an otter](#)
- [Click here](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9APqLA2YKs>

Which are you most likely to click? All three go to the same item, but the first one is meaningful. Meaningful links also make your piece more accessible to **people with disabilities**, who may be using a device called a “screen reader.” A screen reader literally reads text aloud. In some modes, it only reads menu items, headers, and link text; it skips all the paragraph text until the user asks for a paragraph. Imagine the difference between hearing “a recent study about injectable contraceptives...today's statement by the World Health Organization”, versus hearing “click here ... here ... click here.”

10. Write a good title.

If someone were to try to find your piece with a search engine, what would they search for? What problem are they trying to solve, or what gap in knowledge are they trying to fill, that your piece will help them with? Are those words in your title? Are they in your piece? Search engines tend to give higher rank to a post if the words in the title are also in the text. (Read K4Health Content Lead Elizabeth Futrell's [“To Click or Not to Click: The Art of a Good Title.”](#))