

## Tech Ease 4 All

### Writing for the Web, Usability and Web Accessibility

Jakob Nielsen is a respected usability expert whose research has focused on all aspects of web usability, including how people read online content. In a 1997 post on his Alertbox website, Nielsen reported on research showing most people scan online content rather than read it word for word. As a result of these usability studies, Nielsen recommended the following guidelines for writing on the Web:

- aim for about **half the word count** of conventional writing.
- use an **inverted pyramid style** of starting with the conclusion or a quick summary followed by supporting points.
- use **bulleted lists** to indicate related items.
- split long passages into more manageable sections using **meaningful headings and subheadings**.
- use bold or other styling to **emphasize keywords** that can serve as pointers to key points or concepts.

In addition to improving usability for everyone who uses the Web, Nielsen's recommendations have several unintended accessibility benefits which

demonstrate the close relationship between web usability and web accessibility:

- using **bulleted lists** benefits users of screen readers. Most screen readers will announce the number of items in a list when they come across it on the page. Just as bullets organize related information visually for sighted people, this behavior can help organize related information for someone listening to the information with a screen reader.
- **Meaningful headings** provide additional navigation for screen reader users. Most screen readers support a keyboard shortcut for quickly moving through the headings on a web page, and this method of navigation is often faster for people with visual impairments.
- **Keywords** can help people with cognitive or learning disabilities quickly identify the most important information on a web page.

For additional tutorials, please visit our website at <http://etc.usf.edu/techease/4all/>.