Some Basic Considerations and Design Guidelines When Building Web Sites

I. Planning (before you code anything):
   A. Business objectives:
      i. Main purpose of site.
      ii. Important user categories.
      iii. Budget
      iv. What types of pages/info are required (structure of pages/heirarchy)
   B. Users:
      i. Purpose in coming to your site
      ii. Frequency of visits
      iii. Experience/expertise
      iv. How will they use info?
      v. Types of browsers
   C. Use scenarios: Specific examples of tasks users will want to achieve on your site.
      i. Supplemental markets/interests/value added areas which can be supported without additional (major) investment.

II. Site Structure & Content:
   A. Ask users how they group/organize info. Follow their lead.
   B. Use terminology familiar to user.
   C. Tip: Paper-prototyping - card or sticky note for each page. Physical layout.
   D. Writing style:
      i. People don't read your page. They scan.
      ii. Use heading, bullets etc. to increase scannability
      iii. Start with most crucial info (what you want them to remember)
      iv. Be concise & objective
      v. Don't use unnecessary white space (impedes scanning)
      vi. Provide downloads if large amounts of text.

III. Navigation:
   A. Follow user conventions/expectations
   B. Use appropriate metaphors
   C. Show users where they are and where they can go
   D. Have a consistent page layout
   E. Minimize clicks for users to accomplish their goals
   F. Beware pages that appear complete, but aren't.
   G. Search facility for larger sites (make sure it works)
   H. Navigational buttons: easy to use, frequent (top/bottom of page)
   I. Page titles which make meaningful bookmarks
   J. Avoid dead ends.
   K. Tool tips
   L. Site map
   M. Any changes to default link colors/styles better be for good reason
   N. Don't use "click here!" as your text for links. Be descriptive.
IV. Page Design:
A. Effective home page (first page users see when they visit www.yoursite.com):
   i. Establish site identity
   ii. Fit info on one page. Users are lazy.
B. Design for efficiency:
   i. Minimize download time.
   ii. Use graphics wisely/sparsely.
   iii. Reduce size of graphics if needed.
   iv. Use alt tag
C. Make text easy to read and use:
   i. Don't use animations or flashing elements
   ii. Don't use patterned backgrounds
   iii. Don't use frames
D. Different browsers:
   i. Test pages in latest browsers (at minimum)
   ii. If intl. readers is consideration, check printing of pages on different formats.

V. Maintenance:
A. Indexing: search topics, searching engines, etc
B. Ensure new pages adhere to site standards
C. What skills do future developers/maintainers need?
D. Monitor feedback from users
E. Monitor search terms
F. Monitor most heavily used/searched pages
G. Check for broken links
H. Check comparable websites. Keep tabs on your competition.