Links - Basic style and etiquette

Why link?
--Offer additional information: Previous stories can provide context that you may not have room for in print. People who are interested in a rail project might want to see a complete study of the project.
--Transparency: Linking to a full study, bill or court opinion gives readers a chance to see that we're not quoting things out of context.
--Actionable items: Signing up for unemployment benefits, registering for a service...links give readers a chance to act on items they just read about.
--Searchability: Links further weave us into the World Wide Web, giving us better ranking in Google and other search engines.

Link etiquette:
--Don't link to one tiny word (is, the, a), as it's difficult for readers to see.
--Don't link long strands of text, as it can overwhelm the reader.
--Links are a way of highlighting text. Use that to your advantage.
--Link words that will make sense to the reader, i.e. "the bill" should link to the bill.
--Make sure your wording makes sense in print, i.e. don't use "link here."

Contextual vs. Endnote vs. Sidebar links:
-- If there isn't a place into the story text for your link, you can still use endnotes and the online folks can still use online sidebars to provide links. In fact, this may be preferable in some cases, since endnotes and sidebars can highlight links that may get buried in text.

What kinds of information should we link to?
--Information directly related to the story. Source information is great. Our past coverage is good, as long as it's done in moderation. Related Web sites can also be helpful, if it's information that JSOnline doesn't provide (winter parking rules, etc)

What should we avoid linking to?
--Don't link to every single story we've ever written on a topic. Link to major, centerpiece-type stuff rather than procedural drips and drabs.
--Don't link to third-party site if JSOnline has the same information. That said, if another site has better/more complete/etc. info, by all means link there.

Be careful about:
--Partisan political links: Are we unfairly giving one side publicity over the other? That said, if we're already writing about it, it's probably worth including a link.
--Paid subscriptions: Don't link to items readers would have to pay to access (PACER)

Examples of links in action:
Slate.com: http://www.slate.com/id/2210336/
Frank Rich's columns: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/opinion/15rich.html
Salon.com: http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2009/02/25/obama_speech/
JSOnline's Badger blog: http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/sports/40041197.html