WRITING FOR THE WEB

Helping you improve your online communications

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Good Writing Helps Users

- Find the information they need
- Understand it
- Use it to meet their needs

Get to Know Your Reader
(Hint: It isn't *you*.)

- Why are they coming to your web page?

- What do they already know?

- What is the average reader's expertise?

Guidelines for Web Writing

1. Organize for your readers
2. Use pronouns
3. Use active voice
4. Keep it short
5. Use common words
6. Use links
7. Consider lists and tables

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1. Organize for Your Reader

1. Keep content meaningful and user-focused

2. Help your reader scan

3. Write effective headlines

4. Modularize and recycle content

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Keep Content Meaningful and User-focused

- Delete fluff
- Don't editorialize
- Show, don't tell
- Limit introductory text or instructions

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Is this content saying something meaningful or adding new information?

"The links provided below offer information to help you better understand Medicare claims."

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Help Your Reader Scan
(Got 3 seconds to spare?)

- Use **visual cues** to emphasize important content
- Answer reader's questions
  - In the order and language they will ask them
  - By placing the right text where they need it
- Use "signposts" to guide visitors
- Put important content first

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Help Your Reader Scan

- Break long paragraphs (2-3 sentences max)

- Add subheadings for more than 2 paragraphs in a row

- Use numbers for steps or a process

- Bullet lists with 2 or more items

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RULE:
The Rule of Twos

The first 2 words in a headline, first 2 lines in a paragraph, and first 2 paragraphs on a page are what users look at first.

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Write Effective Headlines

- Always use title case

- Aim for 8 words or less

- Make them independently meaningful

- Strong, descriptive, clear

- Avoid weak words

- Use numerals ("3 Steps to File a Claim")

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Write Effective Headlines

- Choose clear communication over creativity

- Remember the "Rule of Twos"

- Use the keywords your reader puts in Google

- Use active voice and keep it positive

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Does this headline make sense if it's all the user sees?

- Introduction to Medicare
- Things to Do as a New Beneficiary
- Welcome to Medicare
- Eligibility Tool

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Modularize and Recycle Content

- Write in chunks that make sense out of context

- Address one issue per chunk

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2. Use Pronouns

- Pull the reader in

- Make your readers do less translation

- Get rid of unnecessary words

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✳ Do pronouns make this easier?

WITHOUT PRONOUNS	WITH PRONOUNS
If applicant purports to represent an organization, a letter or other documentation that the applicant has authority to represent that organization is required to be submitted with this form.	You must include a letter or other document from your organization that says you are allowed to represent them.

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3. Use Active Voice

- Makes it clear who does what
- Is more direct and less awkward
- Cuts down on the number of words

Medicare covered the wheelchair.

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Use Active Voice
(Hint: You need to fix the passive voice)

How to spot <u>passive</u> voice:

- The person doing the action follows the verb

- Always uses a form of the verb "to be" (am, is, was, were, be, been, being, are)

The wheelchair was covered by Medicare.

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Can you put the person doing the action and the action closer together?

Eligibility will be determined by your state.

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RULE:
Keep it Close

Keep the doer and the action near each other in the sentence.

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4. Keep it Short

- Headlines: 8 words max
- Sentences: 30 words max
  - 1 main point per sentence
- Paragraphs: 2–3 sentences max
  - 1 or 2 ideas per short paragraph
  - Start with a topic sentence or a conclusion
- Put important information first

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Keep it Short

- Make short pages with compact paragraphs and lists

- Help your readers scan (especially for pages with scrolling)

- Break up long information across multiple pages

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Can you make this shorter?

A performance system will allow for the development of new and innovative training techniques and methodologies and allow components added flexibilities in tailoring their training to the specific job duties of their employees.

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RULE:

Shorter is Better

If a sentence goes over two lines on a standard page, it's probably too long.

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5. Use Common Words
(Hint: Just avoid confusing words)

Always:

- Define abbreviations and acronyms

- Use consistent terms

If possible:

- Avoid legal or technical jargon

- Avoid quoting regulations

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Use Common Words

USE	AVOID
Use	Utilize
Help	Facilitate
Method	Methodology
Needs	Necessitates
Limits	Parameters
Issue	Promulgate
Do	Implement
Get	Receive
To	In order to

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Which is easier to understand?

The applicant will be the primary source of information regarding his circumstances for the purposes of determining eligibility and need. If the Secretary needs to secure information from other sources, the Secretary will ask the applicant to authorize the release of information. The Secretary will inform the applicant of the kinds of information needed and the source to be used.

You're the first person we will contact to get information about your income and resources, so we can see if you're eligible for the program. If we need to get information from other sources, we'll ask you to sign a notice giving us permission to contact them for specific information only.

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Make These Better with Common Words

- This memo is applicable to all employees who utilize the training room.

- We are of the opinion that additional funds will be required.

- The Director made a request that everyone attend the All-Staff meeting.

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6. Use Links

- Make content easier to read and navigate
- Make content more accessible
- Help search engines find your content

Use Links
(but only if they add value)

- Highlight all hyperlinks
- Un-highlight everything else
- Write short, meaningful hyperlink text
- Avoid generic text/instructions
- Use the URL only if you're referencing a site's address

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RULE:
Do a "Content Critical?" Check

If content is important but not critical to understanding, consider linking to it.

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Links and Capitalization

- **Navigational hyperlinks**
  - Capitalize first word, then use title case.
  - In a sentence, capitalize the link like a sentence.

- **Embedded hypertext links**
  - If it's a title (like a publication), match the capitalization of the publication's title.
  - Don't capitalize embedded links that are not proper nouns or titles.

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Link Examples

- Visit [the **Medicare Supplier Directory**](#) to find the most up-to-date list of Medicare contract suppliers.

- Under a [**new coverage decision**](#), anyone who smokes or uses tobacco can get counseling from a doctor to help them quit.

- [6 Things to Know about the "Welcome to Medicare" Exam](#) ~~– this resource will help consumers understand the key elements of the "Welcome to Medicare" physical exam benefit. Download PDF.~~ *Since the title is descriptive, the explanation and instructions are redundant.*

- [Closing the Prescription Drug Coverage Gap](#) tells you more about the one-time $250 rebate check.

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7. Consider Lists and Tables

- Make it easy to take in complex info fast
- Help reader identify items or steps
- Save words
- Make your logic and structure clear

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Using Bullets

- Use numbers to describe steps or a process

- List most important items first

- If the list needs an intro, use a sentence fragment or a sentence ending in a colon

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Can you put this into bullets?

As outlined in the manual, contact centers are required to submit a primary point of contact, a high level organization chart, disaster recovery/contingency plans, a list of all planned closures, and requests for additional closures if applicable.

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Can you put this into bullets?

Contact centers must send the following:

- A primary point of contact

- A high level organization chart

- Disaster recovery/contingency plans

- A list of all planned closures

- Requests for additional closures, if applicable

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RULE:
Break for Bullets

If a sentence has more than two items (or a series), break the items into a list and use bullets.

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Using Tables

- Use small, compact tables that fit on the page

- Use concise, descriptive headings

- Limit data tables to:

  - 4 columns

  - 6 rows

  - 500 words

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Which one is easier?

We must receive your completed application form on or before the 25th day of the month if you submit your application electronically, or the 15th day of the month if you do not **submit** your application electronically.

How to submit your form:

IF YOU SUBMIT YOUR FORM…	WE MUST GET IT BY…
Electronically	The 25th of the month
By mail	The 15th of the month

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Doing It Differently Online

- Give web users web solutions

- Use contractions when they sound natural

- Ampersands are okay (sometimes)
  - in headlines, titles and labels
  - with two parallel items in a series (think "apples & oranges")
    - Eligibility & Enrollment
    - Items & Services
    - Publications & Products

- Use numerals

- Avoid italics

- Be sparing with bold

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