

clear and simple

Health Net's Plain Language Initiative

How do I write in plain language?

Here are useful tips followed by a few examples in *italics* to help you write a reader-friendly document.

clear and simple draws on plain language principles to help Health Net associates communicate more effectively with our members. It is our company's way of making sure our members understand the language of health and health care.

clear and simple provides learning opportunities and assistance to departments that are interested in using plain language in their operations.

Webinars, tipsheets, and other resources may be requested from Health Net's Cultural and Linguistic Services Department.

- 1 Identify your audience.** Know your readers' demographics (age, gender, educational background, etc.), attitude toward the topic, and preconceptions. Tailor your writing.
- 2 Structure your writing.** Put your material in an order that makes the most sense to the reader. Put the main message first. Group related ideas together.
- 3 Write in active voice.** A sentence in active voice has its subject as the doer of the action. *Health Net offers many health insurance options to employer groups.*
- 4 Use personal pronouns.** Use "you" and "we" to shorten your document and make it more meaningful for your readers.
- 5 Keep your words simple and short.** Using high-sounding, complex words does not make your piece better if your readers can't understand it. Simplify medical terms and limit your sentence to 15 - 20 words.
- 6 Avoid jargon and acronyms.** If you can't avoid this, spell out the acronym and explain or define the term.
Evidence of Coverage (EOC)
Explanation of Benefits (EOB)
- 7 Use examples.** Sometimes defining a term is not enough. Giving examples helps explain difficult concepts.
- 8 Don't be wordy.** Get rid of excess words.
with regard to → *to*
for the purpose of → *for*
in the event of → *if*

For more information, please email cultural.and.linguistic.services@healthnet.com

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9 Don't use unnecessary qualifiers. They add nothing to a sentence.
What are the ~~needed~~ requirements to be in compliance?
His expectations were ~~totally~~ unrealistic.

10 Avoid redundancy. Don't say the same thing twice. Use the word that sounds more powerful.
summarize briefly → *summarize*
end result → *result*
12 noon → *noon, 12pm*

11 Don't use multiple negatives. Multiple negatives muddle the meaning of a sentence or paragraph. They also lengthen the piece.
No changes will be made unless we find that complaints are justified. → *Changes will be made if we find that complaints are justified.*

12 Use parallel phrasing. State related ideas in consistent grammatical form. For example, if your first bullet starts with a verb,

follow that form all the way down your list.

We will not be able to complete the new facility until you:

-Show funding is increasing

-Make the Board understand the cost benefits of the facility

-Finalize all contracts

13 Write in a visually appealing style. Use headings with informative titles. Divide up your document into short sections. Use bullets when you have a list; numbers when you have steps or procedures.

14 Use graphics and tables. An *appropriate* picture is worth a thousand words. Clear tables and graphs can help explain complex material.

15 Test your document. See Tip #1 and ask your audience for feedback on your piece. Conduct focus groups. Run readability assessments to evaluate the grade level and reading ease of your material.



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