

Medicare Learning Network® Content Standards

PCG communications follow U.S. Government, Department, or other established CMS standards.

This document provides information specific to content created as part of the Medicare Learning Network (MLN).

Resources:

- [CMS Brand Strategy & Graphic Standards Guide*](#)
- [Plainlanguage.gov*](#)
- [Medicare Web Writing Style Guide*](#)
- [MLN Tone of Voice Guidelines](#)

Language

Use	Don't Use
Affordable Care Act	ACA
contact your Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC)	Review Contractor Directory – Interactive Map
copayment	Co-payment
CY 2016	CY2016
electronic mailing list	LISTSERV
email	e-mail, E-mail
ET, CT, MT, PT	EST, Eastern Time
Fee-For-Service	Fee-for-Service
for example	e.g.
HCPCS	Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System
health care	healthcare
ICN	ICN #
January 1, 2015	Other formats
mobile device	iPad, Kindle, smart phone
percent	% (unless it's in a table, then use %)
post-assessment	post-test
Recovery Audit Contractor	RAC
that is	i.e.
The CMS Innovation Center	CMS' Innovation Center
web	Internet
website	Web site, web site, Website
webpage	Web page, web page, Webpage
web-based	web based
1 am, 1:30 pm, 1-2 pm	1am, 1:30pm, 1-2pm, AM, a.m., A.M.
800-123-4567	(800) 123-4567

Mechanics

Acronyms:

1. Use common acronyms in titles
2. Spell out the term(s) with the acronym the first time you use it in the body of a document. Use the acronym for the rest of the document. Don't spell out terms with acronyms in parentheses in titles.

Example:

EHR Incentive Programs: Recording from Final Rule Webinar Available

The [presentation](#) and [webinar recording](#) from the Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Programs webinar on the final rule are available on the [2015 Program Requirements](#) web page.



Bullets: Don't use punctuation in bulleted lists, unless one of the items contains two or more complete sentences. In that case, use punctuation on all bullets in the list. Bulleted lists do not continue the punctuation of the preceding sentence.

Example:

The hospital is substantially in compliance with the following SNF participation requirements:

- Admission, transfer, and discharge rights
- Discharge planning
- Patient activities
- Social services

Compound modifiers: Hyphenate modifiers when you have more than one modifier. Example: active-duty service members.

Disclaimers: See [MLN Disclaimers, Trademarks, and Taglines](#)

Disease names: Use lowercase, unless the disease name contains a proper name that would be capitalized. Examples: lung cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Headings: Use sentence case (capitalize all the elements except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions unless it's the first word of the sentence). Example: Get Ready to Use ICD-10

Numbers:

1. Spell out numbers under 10 unless you are expressing money, pages, percentage, measurement, or time (age, weeks, months, years, hours).
2. Spell out ordinal numbers (numbers that reference their position in a series) that are less than 10 (Example: first, second).

Quotes:

1. Use only when quoting a direct source or defining a specific word
2. Don't use quotes around publication titles for messaging and web content

Titles: see Headings

Trademark symbols:

1. Use the registered trademark symbol the first instance a trademarked name appears as text in a document only. It is not necessary to use the trademark symbol for subsequent times the term appears in the document.

URLs:

1. Use blue and underlined URLs and embedded (inline) hyperlinks in all electronic materials. Example: Complete [Form CMS-855B](#) to register for the program.
2. It's okay to have a link at the end of a sentence as long as when you link the text, you don't capture the punctuation after the linked text in the hyperlink you're creating. Example: Learn about [National Provider Calls & Events](#). (When you set the link for this, the URL in the link wouldn't include the period.)
3. Don't add context-setting language such as "on the CMS website", "on CMS.gov", "click here", "on the web", or "on the Internet" before or after a URL.
4. Use descriptive inline hyperlinks. (Use "Visit the [CMS website](#)", not "Visit www.cms.gov", or "Visit [cms.gov](#)".)

Plain Language Basics

We must write using plain language in our documents to the best of our ability. See Resources for more information:

1. Organize for your readers
2. Use "you" and other pronouns
3. Use active voice versus passive voice unless citing a direct quote (You can spot passive voice when a form of the verb "to be" (am, is, was, were, be, been, being, are) is used.)
4. Write short sentences
5. Use common, everyday words
6. Design for easy reading