

### Writers' Center for Excellence

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## Writers' Center for Excellence

Our brand is our voice, our promise and our values. This site is dedicated to the work that goes into our brand voice. Writers can find tools to make their work better and easier to understand. Business partners can learn how the writing and review process works. This site also has information to share with vendors to ensure the Aetna brand is upheld outside of the company.

### Become an Aetna certified writer

No matter what kind of writing you do, you can become a title. If you write anything that reaches an external audience, you should be an Aetna-certified writer. [Get started today.](#)

### Learning tips

[Because you asked: that or which?](#)

[Jargon Alert: solutionize](#)

[Brand voice makeover](#)

### Quick links

[Aetna Copy Style Guide](#)

[Brand Voice](#)

[In Plain Language newsletter archive](#)

[Plain language: Before and after](#)

["Because you asked" archive](#)

["Jargon Alert" archive](#)

### A video from Tom Young, Aetna's Chief Compliance Officer

See why plain language is a compliance issue and how you can make a difference.



### A word from our executive sponsors



*"We have to put ourselves in the shoes of the people we serve. This means talking and*

*writing in ways people can understand. This is most critical with consumers and members. But all our customers - plan communication."*

#### Robert Mead

Senior Vice President, Marketing, Product and Communications



*"There can be legal and compliance consequences when we do not communicate*

*clearly. Unclear communications pose increased risk. We can get more customer calls, we can lose business, and we can even face legal action."*

#### William Casazza

Senior Vice President, General Counsel

### Spotlight on a writer



Learn more about Erin Winker and the role that writing plays in her current position at

Aetna.

### What's all the buzz about plain language?

Plain language is a way to better communicate with everyone. [Learn more about plain language](#) and techniques you can use to write plainly.

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## Plain language

Plain language is a way to better communicate with everyone. It is:

- Grammatically correct.
- Clear, simple writing that tells the reader exactly what he or she needs to know without any extra words.
- Language your audience understands the very first time they hear it or read it.

Plain language is not a method of "dumbing down" or "talking down" to the reader or listener.

The ability to use plain language is a valuable skill. It helps you deliver a more engaging, effective message.

### Which of these messages is the most effective?

A. *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a half hour or more of moderate physical activity on most days, preferably every day. The activity can include brisk walking, calisthenics, home care, gardening, moderate sports exercise, and dancing.*

This message is difficult to read. It has too many words (36) and the reading grade level is 15. The average American reads most effectively at 6th grade or below. The reading ease is only 19.3 out of a possible 100.

B. *Do at least 30 minutes of exercise, like brisk walking, most days of the week.*

Message B is more effective. It is concise and gives the reader clear directions. The reading grade level is 5.9. The reading ease is nearly 80 out of a possible 100.

### Plain language tips

There are many techniques you can use to write plainly. They are:

- Write the way you speak.
- Address the needs of the reader.
- Focus on one topic.
- Anticipate reader questions.
- Use short words.
- Use familiar words.
- Write short sentences.
- Avoid jargon.
- Use an active voice.
- Use personal pronouns.
- Use informative headings.
- Use lists & bullets.

### What about reading grade level?

According to the Aetna Copy Style Guide, write at a 5th grade reading level (5.0 - 5.9) for employee and member materials. For plan sponsors, doctors, brokers and consultants, write at a 9th grade level (9.0 - 9.9). [Find out how to check reading level.](#)

To get more plain language writing tips, sign up for our newsletter. Just send an e-mail to [inplainlanguagenewsletter@aetna.com](mailto:inplainlanguagenewsletter@aetna.com).

### Related Links

[AMA Health Literacy Toolkit >](#)[AskMe3 >](#)[Center for Plain Language >](#)[communityvitality.com >](#)[HHS National Action Plan for Health Literacy >](#)[Plan for Your Health >](#)[The High Cost of Low Health Literacy >](#)