

# Provider Partner Readability Guidelines

As a SCAN Health Plan® provider partner, you are responsible for ensuring that all member-facing materials meet the cultural, social and health literacy needs of our beneficiaries. SCAN follows the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Department of Healthcare Services (DHCS) language readability requirements.

All member-facing materials must be at no higher than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. SCAN recommends the use of software programs and/or the development of tools that will support the readability evaluation process and have been vetted through a review process. Using a mix of readability tools along with inter-rater reliability for content validation is best practice.

## Recommended Calculators and Tools

### Free online readability calculators:

- [PerryMarshall](#)
- [Datayze](#)
- [ReadabilityFormulas](#)

### Plain Language Resources:

<a href="#">Plain Language - CDC</a>	<a href="#">Assessment of Suitability of Material - SAM</a>
<a href="#">Clear and Effective Writing - CMS</a>	<a href="#">Other Health Literacy Tools</a>
<a href="#">Patient Education Material Assessment Tool (PEMAT)</a>	<a href="#">Medical Terminology - Mayo Clinic</a>

## Calculating Reading Level

### When calculating reading level the following wording should be excluded:

- State-mandated legal language and group or vendor legal disclaimers.
- Proper nouns - Example: DHCS, ABC Health Plan, phone numbers, and website addresses.
- Medical terminology and technical higher level words that cannot be replaced by plain language should only be counted once.
  - Example: *diabetes* and *arrhythmia* are multi-syllable words that will increase grade level. These words can be either defined or replaced with a simplified version
  - High blood sugar (diabetes)...
  - Arrhythmia, a problem with the rate or rhythm of your heartbeat...

### Note:

- Keep your audience in mind. A word like *caregiver* will increase grade level, but it is a word that is very familiar with older adults and does not have a simplified substitute. In this case the word *caregiver* should only be counted once.
- Replace all excluded words with the word “test” when calculating.

References: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS); Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) APL18-016.

# Provider Partner Readability Guidelines

## Plain Language Writing Checklist

- Technical or higher level words are defined using plain language.**
  - Plain language word written first, then higher level word immediately following in parentheses. Example: “high blood sugar (diabetes)”.
  - Or, word is defined using plain language immediately following. Example: “Arrhythmia (a problem with the rate or rhythm of your heartbeat)”.
- Abbreviations and acronyms are not used, unless defined *and* familiar with audience.**
  - Example: kg (kilogram); Example: MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) \*This is a technical term that would require definition.
- Variations of the same word are not used.**
  - Example: Canceled, stopped, ended, terminated - Pick one.
- Key information and take-aways are at the beginning of the document.**
  - This helps facilitate comprehension. Readers tend to interpret as they read, not at the end of the document.
- Long sentences are broken down and only have one direction at a time.**
- There are no more than 3 concepts/messages per page.**
- Document does not contain unnecessary wording or information.**
- First and second person is used for directness.**
  - Using “you” for individual messaging instead of “the patient” and “we” helps patient understand who is responsible for needed action.
- Active voice is used.**
  - Be direct. Words like “should” and “may” can be interpreted as a suggestion, instead of an instruction. Make it clear: “*You must* check your blood sugar daily”.
- Math is calculated for the reader.**
  - Numbers should not have to be interpreted by the reader. Don’t write “between 2 and 5”. This can be interpreted different ways. Instead say “2 or more, 5 or less”, or just “2-5”.
- Illustration, pictures and graphs are used to reinforce information where appropriate.**
- Headings and subheading are used where needed.**
  - These help readers navigate through topics and make information easy to find.
- Bullets and numbering are used when more than two items are listed.**
  - Do not use more than 7 bullets. If more are needed, try to break up content or focus only on the “need to know”.
- Pages are numbered if multiple.**
- This document has been reviewed and found to be clear and effective.**
  - A mix of readability tools and inter-rater reliability was used for content validation.
  - If message can be interpreted more than one way, then it needs to be rephrased.
  - It is best practice to use reviewers *without* a clinical background as part of the plain language review process. What seems like plain language to someone with a clinical background can be too high level for someone without.
  - Be prepared to justify given grade level

HCSprov101220