

Writing Guidelines

THE BRAND BOOK OF
COVENANT HEALTH





DATE	NAME	STATUS
11/11	John Doe	OK
11/11	Jane Smith	OK
11/11	Bob Johnson	OK
11/11	Alice Brown	OK
11/11	Charlie Davis	OK
11/11	Diana Prince	OK
11/11	Edward Nigma	OK
11/11	Fiona Glenanne	OK
11/11	George Costanza	OK
11/11	Helen Hunt	OK
11/11	Ian Somerhalder	OK
11/11	Jessie Montgomery	OK
11/11	Karen Sisco	OK
11/11	Laura Palmer	OK
11/11	Marty Stouffer	OK
11/11	Nancy Drew	OK
11/11	Oliver Queen	OK
11/11	Peter Dinklage	OK
11/11	Quinn Collins	OK
11/11	Rachel Watson	OK
11/11	Samuel L. Jackson	OK
11/11	Tina Turner	OK
11/11	Uma Thurman	OK
11/11	Victor Krumpholtz	OK
11/11	Wendell B. Williams	OK
11/11	Xosha Roze	OK
11/11	Yara Shahidi	OK
11/11	Zoe Lister-Jones	OK

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Writing Tone and Voice

Tone

“Tone” refers to the word choices that create a specific mood or feeling in the consumer. For Covenant Health and our member organizations, we want to reflect our mission and Pledge of Excellence in our writing:

Covenant Health’s mission statement is: “We serve the community by improving the quality of life through better health.”

Our Pledge of Excellence states:

- The patient always comes first,
- Excellence in everything we do,
- Covenant Health will be the first and best choice.

The palette of “tone words” that might be used directly or reflected in content related to Covenant Health includes trustworthy, caring, compassionate, dedicated, reliable, strong, stable, etc. You may have other “tone word” ideas for content that create positive responses to Covenant Health information.

Voice

Do you have a favorite author, blogger or influencer? If so, you may recognize their material by words or phrases they use frequently, or by their overall style. “Voice” refers to the combination of vocabulary, tone, point of view and word arrangement (syntax) that creates a recognizable style. As we use shared tone words and the Writing Guidelines, we will move toward a recognizable style for content created by Covenant Health and our member organizations. This consistent style will move us closer to our overall branding goals for the organization.

Consider the Audience

Always keep the target audience in mind for each piece of writing. Remove internal or industry abbreviations and medical jargon. Remember the purpose of the writing and how you want the audience to respond when reading it.

Covenant Health primarily follows the Associated Press Style Guide (“AP style”), with some exceptions. Frequently used guidelines, reference points and exceptions are listed in this document.

Writing Tone and Voice

Be Brief

Write clearly and concisely. Aim for a fifth-grade reading level. Whether you are writing a news release, blog post, email communication or social post, keep the writing short and to the point. Proofread and reword to get the point across in fewer words when possible. Tell a story in 400-600 words and link to other relevant information if necessary.

Tighten up the flow of content:

- Break up long phrases.
- Look for and eliminate unnecessary or repetitive words and phrases.
- Avoid jargon, especially medical jargon.

Inclusive Writing

The tone of our materials should be welcoming and non-discriminatory. The Integrity-Compliance Office offers guidelines for inclusive and non-discriminatory communications, and the Covenant Health Public Relations department has a media reference guide covering topics such as gender, sexual identity, religion and faith, etc. When preparing documents and messaging for the public, use these guides to create content and messaging that is inclusive and welcoming. See Pronouns section for specific guidelines related to gender identity.

Referencing Covenant Health Organizations

Covenant Health

Use the full name of the health system on all references unless “Covenant” appears by itself in a direct quotation. Outside the region, use Covenant Health of East Tennessee to differentiate the health system from other health organizations in the U.S. that are named Covenant Health or Covenant Healthcare.

Names of Covenant Health Member Organizations (excluding medical practice names)

Covenant Health	Covenant Health South
Covenant Health Claiborne	Covenant Health West
Covenant Health Cumberland	Covenant Medical Group, Inc.
Covenant Health Fort Sanders Regional	Covenant HomeCare and Hospice
Covenant Health Fort Loudoun	Claiborne Health and Rehabilitation Center
Covenant Health LeConte	Nanny’s Edu-Care Center
Covenant Health Methodist	Peninsula, a division of Parkwest Medical Center
Covenant Health Morristown-Hamblen	Thompson Cancer Survival Center
Covenant Health Parkwest	Thompson Proton Center
Covenant Health Roane	Thompson Oncology Group
Covenant Health Fitness Center	

Referencing Covenant Health Organizations

Hospital Names in Text

Hospitals providing acute-care services may be described in text as “medical centers” or “acute-care facilities.”

Do not use initials to identify hospitals in internal OR external reference (e.g., FSR, PW, CMC.)

Fort Loudoun includes a “u” before the final “n” in “Loudoun.” The county where it is located (Loudon County) does not.

Some clinical services are hospital divisions or departments and must include the information in the name.

Examples Peninsula, a division of Parkwest Medical Center
Thompson Infusion Services-Downtown, a department of LeConte Medical Center

Other Facilities and Member Organizations

Use the full name of the facility, member organization or physician practice.

Examples Covenant Health Fitness Center
Covenant Therapy Center - West
Cardiology Associates of East Tennessee

Covenant HomeCare is the correct way to refer to home care services. Covenant HomeCare and Hospice is the full name of the division offering these two services.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Covenant Health Variations to AP Style and Standard Style

Do not use periods after listing a credential or degree following an individual's name. (This is a variation from AP Style which does use periods.)

Example Jane Jones, RN, MSN, led a new nursing initiative at Covenant Health.

Although "health care" is preferred, "healthcare" is acceptable. Be consistent throughout the document.

Capitalization

Avoid overuse of capital letters in body copy.

Do not use capital letters for departmental, service or specialty names that are common to the medical field; e.g. laboratory, sleep center, surgery, emergency room, obstetrics, pulmonology, etc.

DIRECTIONS AND REGIONS

Lowercase directional or area descriptions. Capitalize the words when they designate regions.

Examples She will be traveling west on her vacation.
Most of her travels will be in northern Arizona.
Covenant Health primarily serves the East Tennessee region.

HEADLINES/SUBHEADS (TITLE CASE)

In general, capitalize the first letter of the first word of the headline or subhead, then capitalize the first letter of all other words (except a, an, the) or conjunctions and prepositions that are four letters or fewer (examples: with, an, in).

Examples Bariatric Surgery Gives Patient a New Outlook
An Event to Remember

Editorial Style Guidelines

Capitalization

TITLES

Avoid long titles before a name. Place them after the name instead. Do not capitalize titles that follow a person's name. Don't capitalize a title before a name if the title reflects the person's responsibilities.

Examples Joe Jones, marketing manager
Sandra Smith, club president
The award was presented to radiology manager Carol Smith.

Capitalize formal titles when they come before a person's name.

Example President and CEO John Smith

ACADEMIC DEGREES

Capitalize the formal name of the degree when referenced in full. Do not capitalize "bachelor's," "master's," etc. when used in a sentence unless the full degree is listed.

Examples Susie Jones has a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.
My son earned his master's degree in engineering last summer.
She has an associate degree from Roane State Community College.
(rather than associate's)

SEASONS

Lowercase unless part of a formal name.

Examples She had surgery at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center in fall 2021.
Allergies often can worsen in the springtime.
We will be traveling overseas to the Winter Olympics.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Dates

Use numerals for dates, unless you are spelling out ordinal numbers (first, second, etc.) under 10.

Examples Oct. 4, 2022
Independence Day is July Fourth.

Abbreviate August through February if used with a date. Do not abbreviate March through July.

Examples His birthday is Nov. 21.
We went swimming on June 22, 2022.

Spell out months with no specific dates. Do not separate months and years with a comma.

Examples October is everyone's favorite month.
He graduated from college in May 2014.

If there is a specific date and the text continues, set off the year with commas.

Example Their wedding date was April 23, 2015, and they celebrated with an anniversary party.

Locations and Addresses

STREET ADDRESSES

Abbreviate St., Ave., Blvd. and directional cues when used with numerical addresses. All other words must be spelled out.

Examples The shop is located at 100 S. Gay St.
The hospital is located at 9352 Park West Blvd.
The hospital is located at 550 Fort Loudoun Medical Center Drive.

If no numeric address is included, capitalize and spell out the street name and directional cue.

Example The parade route follows South Gay Street.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Locations and Addresses

CITIES

Include the accompanying state name if the city is not well-known or needs clarification. Do not include the state if the city is well-known.

Examples Clarksville, Tennessee; Athens, Tennessee
Chicago, Los Angeles, Nashville

STATES

States should be spelled out in body text. If the sentence continues, add a comma after the state.

Examples He is from Knoxville, Tennessee.
A native of Charleston, South Carolina, he was far from home.

State abbreviations can be used with the city in datelines.

Numbers

AP Style spells out numbers one through nine and numbers that begin a sentence.

Examples Eighty-seven people came to the event.
There were 87 people in attendance, but only five were in the front row.

Always use numerals for ages, distances, dimensions and weight.

Examples My brother is 6 feet tall. His daughter is already 5 feet 6 inches tall.
We bought a 9-by-12 rug.

Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun, but do not hyphenate when the age is after the noun.

Examples My cousin has a 4-year-old boy.
The girl is 4 years old.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Numbers

Use hyphens in phone numbers in text. (For address information on business cards or stationery, the area code may be placed in parentheses.)

Example The main number is 865-555-1212.

Use figures and words to express large numbers.

Example The earth has a population of 8 billion people.

Time

Use figures followed by a.m. or p.m. Do not use :00 if the time is “on the hour.” Use a space after the numeral and before a.m. or p.m.

Examples 8 p.m.
8:30 p.m.

Use “noon” for 12 p.m. and “midnight” for 12 a.m.

Example The luncheon will begin promptly at noon and will end by 12:30 p.m.

Write Daylight Saving Time, not Daylight Savings Time.

Capitalize the full name of time zones. Capitalize only the region when not referring to the full time zone. Use abbreviations only with clock times.

Examples Today is the day we change to Eastern Daylight Time.
California is in Pacific time.
The meeting will be at 3 p.m. EST (or EDT, depending on the time of year).

Editorial Style Guidelines

Pronouns

They/them/their is acceptable as a singular pronoun to describe some transgender, nonbinary and gender-fluid people. Be sure that the phrasing does not imply more than one person; rephrase if needed. Explain if the concept is not clear.

Example Morales, who uses the pronouns “they/them,” said they will retire in June.

They/them/their take plural verbs even when used as a singular pronoun. The singular reflexive “themselves” also is acceptable when referring to people who use they/them/their.

Don’t refer to “preferred” or “chosen” pronouns; instead say “who uses the pronouns” or put the preferred pronouns in parentheses after the subject’s name: Morales (they/them) said they will retire in June.

Don’t make assumptions about the pronouns used by a person. If you are not sure of the preferred pronouns, use “they” rather than he/she, or reword the phrase so no pronoun is necessary.

Punctuation

COLONS

Use a colon at the end of a sentence to introduce a series, list or specific text.

Examples He had three favorite foods: chocolate ice cream, vanilla ice cream and strawberry ice cream.

Here are some of our benefits:

- Insurance
- EAP
- Retirement planning

Editorial Style Guidelines

Punctuation

COMMAS

AP Style (the journalism style used for news releases, publications or web posts from news/media organizations) typically does not use the Oxford comma (also known as a “serial comma”) that comes before the final “and ____” in a series. However, it can be added in non-media writing or if the sentence is complex and the word series would be confusing without additional clarification. The Oxford comma is also used frequently in legal documents. If you are writing or proofing a legal document or reference, check to see if the Oxford comma should be used.

Here’s a simple list that does not require the Oxford comma:

Example Covenant Health Methodist offers classes for subjects like weight loss, cancer support, childbirth preparation and healthy nutrition.

These examples do require an Oxford comma because of their complexity or for clarity:

Examples I like peanut butter and jelly, bacon and eggs, and steak and potatoes. (The comma after “eggs” will separate a complex list and define the pairings)
I met the coaches, Peyton Manning, and Eli Manning. (Without a comma after Manning, the sentence would state that Peyton and Eli are the coaches.)

If a formal title is in front of a name, do not use a comma before the title or after the name. If the title follows the name, use a comma after the name and after the title.

Examples The group welcomed Vice President Cindy Smith to the stage.
Fred Sanders, treasurer, addressed the group.

In general, use a comma to separate an introductory clause or phrase from the main clause.

Example After the guests left the party, we began a long clean-up process.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Punctuation

COMMAS

IMPORTANT: Use a comma to separate independent clauses within a compound sentence. An independent clause has its own subject. Do not use a comma if the subject of the two clauses is the same and is not repeated.

Examples We visited Washington, and our senator greeted us personally. (Subjects are “we” and “our senator.”)
We are visiting Washington and plan to see the White House. (“We” serves as the subject of both clauses.)

Do not use a comma before “that”:

Example The book that fell off the shelf broke the cup on the table.

Do not use a comma before “too” or “yet” at the end of a sentence.

Examples We visited my aunt and saw my grandmother too.
We’ve been waiting an hour and the plane hasn’t arrived yet.

When the information provided by a clause starting with “which” or “who” is required in order to define the person (or thing), there are no commas. If the clause only provides additional information, use a comma:

Examples The fruit which I bought on Tuesday is already spoiled. (The phrase “which I bought on Tuesday” is essential in order to indicate the specific fruit.)
This is my friend Susan, who lives in Delaware. (The phrase is not required in order to define Susan, so a comma is needed.)

In general, use commas to set off places, ages and full dates as part of text:

Examples He will travel from Dublin, Ireland, to London, England, and back.
Maggie Smith, 67, had surgery last fall.
On Jan. 1, 2022, he made 22 New Year’s resolutions.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Punctuation

PARENTHESES

If the information inside parentheses is a complete sentence, place the period inside the closing parenthesis.

- Put the period inside parentheses if the sentence inside the parentheses is complete. (Check Grammarly if you are not sure about the complete sentence.)
- If the phrase inside the parentheses is not complete, place the sentence punctuation outside the parentheses (like this).

In general, use hyphens in phone numbers. However, when combined with other contact information (e.g., business cards and stationery), parentheses can be placed around the area code. (Note: Some of our dynamic web information defaults to parentheses around the area code.)

QUOTATION MARKS

Periods and commas go inside quotation marks. If there is a quotation within a quotation, i.e., the speaker references another direct quote, use single quotation marks within the standard double quotation marks.

Example “I specifically remember telling my sister, ‘Don’t open that door.’ She did it anyway.”

If a quote ends a paragraph and the same speaker continues in the next paragraph, no closing quotation marks are required at the end of the first paragraph. Place quotation marks at the indentation of the next paragraph. Place closing quotation marks at the end of the quoted material.

SEMI-COLONS

Use a semi-colon to express related independent clauses in a single sentence when no conjunction (and, but, etc.) is present:

Examples The package was due last week; it arrived today.
Many websites are interesting; many are not accurate.

Editorial Style Guidelines

Punctuation

SEMI-COLONS

Use a semi-colon to separate elements of a series when the items already contain commas.

Examples The photo includes, left to right, Susan Smith, RN, critical care; John Jones, MD, East Tennessee Cardiology Associates; and Betty Boop, administrative assistant.

EM DASH, EN DASH

Dashes are different from hyphens (described below), and there are two “lengths.” The en dash is shorter, and is frequently used to connect two points:

Example Take the Nashville–Memphis route. (No spaces used around an en dash)

The em dash sometimes substitutes for a colon, or otherwise interrupts or adds information to a sentence.

Example The sun, the sand and the surf — that’s why I love a beach vacation. (AP style uses a space on either side of an em dash.)

To create these dashes in Word:

- En dash: Ctrl + - (Use the minus sign on the number pad; number lock must be on.)
- Em dash: Ctrl + Alt + - (Use the minus sign on the number pad; number lock must be on.)

HYPHENS

Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words. Frequently the word combination creates a compound adjective.

Examples He recovered his health. He re-covered the leaky roof. (“Re-covered” avoids misinterpretation of the word.)
Our hospital offers robotic-assisted surgery. (“Robotic-assisted” is a compound adjective that represents a single idea.)

Editorial Style Guidelines

Punctuation

HYPHENS

Do not use hyphens after words that end in “ly.”

Examples Minimally invasive, robotically assisted

OTHER PUNCTUATION

For additional guidance, refer to the full AP Style Guide or to the Harbrace Handbook.

Health-Related Terms

Medical Terms and Procedures

Always look up/verify the correct spelling and meaning of a medical term or procedure. Do not guess. If you are mentioning a medical term or procedure in text, a brief, reader-friendly description. The description should be verified/approved through clinical review of the material.

Referencing COVID

Coronavirus is acceptable on first reference and also can appear in subsequent text (for example, coronavirus cases, coronavirus tests). COVID-19 is acceptable on second reference and in subsequent text.

Use “recovering from COVID-19” for a patient whose condition is improving. Lowercase names of variants (delta, omicron).

COVID is allowed in headlines and direct quotes.

Do not use the term “anti-vaxxer” to describe someone who has chosen not to be vaccinated.

Use pandemic, not global pandemic.

Immunization and vaccination can be used interchangeably.

Frequently Used Health-Related Terms

Acronym Use:

- Centers for Disease Control; CDC is acceptable on second reference.
- Cesarean section; C-section is acceptable to use on second reference.
- Emergency Medical Services; EMS on second reference.
- Emergency Medical Technician; EMT on second reference.
- Emergency Department/Emergency Room; ED or ER used on second reference. Emergency Department is becoming the preferred term, but both are still acceptable. Be consistent in your document.
- In vitro fertilization (no hyphens); IVF acceptable on second reference.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration; OSHA on second reference.
- OB-GYN is acceptable for all references to a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder; PTSD on second reference.
- Seasonal affective disorder; SAD on second reference.

Addiction is the preferred term; substance abuse disorder is appropriate in some cases.

Antiviral should be used rather than antivirus (no hyphens).

- Use antiviral in medical references (i.e. an antiviral drug).
- Use antivirus in general references (i.e. antivirus measures and antivirus controls).

Use "bleed" rather than "hemorrhage" in most cases.

Do not use "senile" or "demented" to describe someone experiencing cognitive decline.

Rather than using the phrase "committed suicide," say "killed himself," "took her own life," or "died by suicide."

Avoid expressions like "He is battling cancer" or "She is a stroke victim." Instead, say "He has stomach cancer" or "She had a stroke."

Avoid using a disease or condition to describe a person. Say "he has diabetes" rather than "he is a diabetic."

General Guidelines

A, an – When using before initials, use “an” if the sound of the first initial is a vowel.

Example Susan Smith is an RN. Her father is an MD. (“R” and “M” are consonants, but the initial sounds are the vowel sounds “are” and “em.”)

If you want the reader to read “registered nurse” or “medical doctor,” spell use words rather than initials.

Active sentence style is preferable. This typically means the subject leads in the sentence and the verb is active: Dr. Williams performed the surgery. Avoid the passive form that uses “is” or “was” as part of the verb: The surgery was performed by Dr. Williams.

Attributions that are simple and consistent are best. Choose either “said” (past tense) or “says” (present tense) for most attributed quotes. Acceptable alternatives are stated/states, added/adds, noted/notes, concluded/concludes, etc. Stay consistent with tense throughout your content.

Bulleted list items should have periods at the end if they are full sentences. If not, no punctuation is necessary unless the list concludes in a sentence format. If that’s the case, use commas or semi-colons at the end of each item. Most importantly, punctuation (or the lack thereof) should be consistent in a bulleted list.

Businesses and Organizations – Always check the names of any businesses or organizations mentioned in your content. Visit their websites to be sure you are referencing them correctly. The business name may not follow AP Style or other guidelines. If referring to an award or recognition from the organization, follow the organization’s guidelines regarding the award description and publicity.

e.g., i.e. – Both should be lower case and followed by commas. Use “e.g.” when you want to say “for example”. Use “i.e.” when you are adding additional explanatory information or noting “in other words”.

Example You can put school supplies in the backpack, e.g., pencils, pens, calculators and paper. My sister was grounded (i.e., no phone or TV) because she didn’t do her homework for a week.

Email (no hyphen), but e-commerce, e-reader, e-business, etc.

General Guidelines

HIPAA (not HIPPA) stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Passed in 1996, the federal law required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without a patient’s consent or knowledge. HIPAA includes two main “rules”: the Privacy Rule, which includes standards related to the use and disclosure of individuals’ health information (PHI), and the Security Rule, a subset of the Privacy Rule which applies specifically to the creation, maintenance and transmission of electronic health information (e-PHI).

Initials and acronyms – Do not follow a full name of an organization or procedure with initials or an acronym in parentheses, e.g., Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR). Simply use the initials/acronym on second reference.

Nonprofit, not-for-profit – A nonprofit organization raises money for a charitable purpose. A not-for-profit organization is also mission-based but can use revenues to reinvest in the organization’s services and operations. Covenant Health is a not-for-profit health system.

OK (rather than “okay” or O.K.)

“Over” is an acceptable substitute for “more than.”

People vs. Things – Use the relative pronoun “who” with individuals and groups of people. Use “that” and “it” with facilities or inanimate objects.

Examples The nurses were the ones who made the biggest difference in patient care.
The hospital was the only one that received an award based on its lobby design.

Organizations Registered/Trademark symbols are only needed on first reference.

The Joint Commission is the organization that accredits healthcare organizations. Capitalize “The” in the formal name.

Examples Using the formal name: The hospital is accredited by The Joint Commission.
Using the adjective form: The hospital is Joint Commission-accredited.

General Guidelines

Singular/Plural Nouns and Verbs – Make sure that singular nouns are used with singular verbs and plural nouns with plural verbs. Sometimes a noun can use either a singular or plural verb depending on whether they are acting together or separately.

Examples The staff are meeting in the conference room. (They are together for a “collective” action.)
The staff is working from home. (They are working individually.)

Tense – (regular text) Check your document to make sure the tense (narrative representation of time) is consistent, unless you have a specific reason for changing within the text. Writing in past tense? You’ll use words like “said,” “went” and “saw.” In present tense you would use “say,” “go” and “see.”

Underway is one word.

Widows and orphans – Avoid! A widow is a single word or short phrase of continued text that appears at the end of a column. It can make the bottom of the page look uneven. An orphan is a single word or short phrase at the beginning of a column that should be placed at the end of the previous column.

Words Which Are Often Confusing

Compliment vs. Complement

If a statement is a verbal positive affirmation, it is a compliment.

If something is free of charge, it is complimentary.

If an item enhances something, it complements or is complementary. Example: Acupuncture is often considered to be a type of complementary medicine.

Copywriting vs. Copyright

Copywriting refers to the creation of copy.

Copyright refers to legal, exclusive ownership of written words, songs or scripts.

Insure vs. Ensure

Insure should only be used when referring to insurance. In all other instances, use ensure.

Examples “He was insured by Blue Cross Blue Shield.”
“He ensured the document would arrive on time.”

Its vs. it’s

Use “its” as a possessive. “It’s” is a contraction for “it is.”

Example The dog lost its collar.

Login vs. Log In

Login is the noun term for a username/password; log in is a verb and is the act of signing in.

Example “Use your login or credentials to log in to your account.”

Nauseous vs. Nauseated

Nauseous traditionally means to cause nausea.

Nauseated is a feeling you experience when you feel sick.

There vs. they’re vs. their

Use “there” to describe a location. “They’re” is a contraction for “they are.” “Their” indicates possession.

Vaccine vs. Vaccination

Vaccine is the noun referring to a substance or medical preparation designed to increase antibodies and protect against illness. Vaccination is the administration or treatment of a vaccine.

Who vs. Whom

“Who” is used as a subject. “Whom” is used as the object of a verb or preposition.

Examples Who wants to go to the movies?
Whom do you believe? (“You” is the subject word; you’re actually saying, “You believe whom?”)

Writing for the Web

Writing effectively for the web requires the writer to get into the audience's mind. Someone comes to our website with a specific need in mind, and not only must our content solve the problem, but the delivery must also penetrate the noise surrounding that visit. If the content doesn't immediately resonate, the user will move on.

This guide aims to give a few tips to be the relevant result for our consumers, not a bridge to another provider. Covenant Health aims to be the relevant result.

Communication is about being understood, period. It is the writer's job to ensure the intended message is communicated to the audience, not the reader's job to understand the author's intent.

Answering the following questions helps guide the process:

Begin with the end in mind:

1. Why am I writing this?

SEO

Provide information

Transactional (in our case, lead generation)

Comparative (compare physicians, hospitals, procedures)

Location finding

2. Who is going to read this?

Primary

Google

Consumers, potential patients

Patients

Job seekers

Secondary

Board members

Employees

Governing bodies

3. When is this content relevant?

Make sure each page addresses a specific instance in the consumer's healthcare decision-making journey in as few steps as possible (make it easy to find information and take action).

4. What action do I want the person reading this page to take?

Find directions

Recognize Covenant Health as expert

Make a decision for treatment

Apply for a job

Fill out a contact form

Creating Content

On Writing

Readers scan web pages in a rough “F pattern,” keeping their eyes on your page’s left-hand margin as they dart along each line before dropping to the beginning of the next line. Make your page’s first dozen or so words – the lines at the top of the F – strong and engaging for your readers!

“A sentence should contain no unnecessary words,
a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same
reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary
lines and a machine no unnecessary parts”

–The Elements of Style

1. Write with purpose. Know who, what, where, when and why you create content.
2. Think mobile. Most users will access your website via their mobile devices. Keep these users in mind as you prepare content.
3. Organize your content by writing clear headlines and subheads. Questions that use pronouns are particularly effective, e.g., Should You Consider Spine Surgery?
4. Effectively use HTML markup. See below.
5. Front-load the information. Start with the most important content to your audience, then provide additional details. Journalists call this approach the “inverted pyramid,” where the most critical information is at the top.
6. Make it skimmable. Click, scroll down to see how long the page is, hit the headings and bullet points, and move on to the next page. That’s how we use the web, right? Our web content must be delivered in the format our consumers/patients need in their journey. Visitors only read about 20 percent of the page content in an average visit.

Creating Content

Style

1. Write how people talk. When writing for the web, use plain language. Write clearly and directly, with your audience in mind. The average reading level for the average internet user is third to fifth grade.¹
2. Use active voice. Write “Dr. Jones performed the surgery” rather than “The surgery was performed by Dr. Jones.”
3. Make your content friendly. Address the user as “you.” Refer to your organization as “we.”
4. Be empathetic. We may admit, treat and discharge most of our cardiac patients. Our consumers, however, are likely dealing with some of the most challenging situations of their lives. These aren’t procedures to them; they are seeking solutions to terrible problems.
5. Select images thoughtfully and use them effectively.
6. The web has no appreciation for nuance. Write in concrete, definite language.

Editing

1. Ruthlessly remove grammatical and spelling errors. Use the “Grammarly” downloadable plugin as an aide.
2. Eliminate jargon.
3. Use bulleted items and numbered lists, even if you only have a few items. One sentence with two bullet points is easier to read than three sentences.
4. Break long sentences into two. With a more casual writing style, starting a sentence with a conjunction (e.g., and, but, or) is OK if it makes things clear and brief.
5. Limit sentences to 20 words; limit paragraphs to five sentences. Another approach is to think of the 1–2–3–4–5 rule: 1 idea, expressed in 2–3 sentences that take up 4–5 lines on the screen.
6. Omit needless words.

¹ When possible, use the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Scale as a reference. The higher the score, the better. A score of 70 or higher is recommended for general content. A suggested score for medical content would be 50 or higher. To learn more about the scale and to access a free calculator for text readability, visit <https://readabilityformulas.com/flesch-reading-ease-readability-formula.php>

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

You are not expected to be an SEO expert. That said, the content you publish should follow general SEO best practices. **Review SEOMOZ'S DEVELOPER SEO CHEATSHEET.**

Our goal is to establish Covenant Health's Search Engine dominance by being:

1. Relevant
2. Authoritative
3. Trustworthy

Defining Keyword Focus

One of the first steps in optimizing the content for search is determining what someone may be searching to find that page. This is the thinking about what "the moment of need" is – defining the searcher's intent.

A great place to start is with Google. Take a piece of content and think about who, what, why and when would someone be searching for this page. Here, for example, is the **BARIATRIC SELF-ASSESSMENT.**

- **Who:** likely someone who is evaluating if they are a candidate for treatment
- **Why:** they are researching treatment options (likely higher funnel)
- **What:** may start with "bariatric" but also see what suggestions Google autosuggest makes. After searching, "bariatric surgery," "bariatric surgery requirements" is the next autosuggest.
- **When** are they searching

Here is a helpful guide to **KEYWORD RESEARCH.**

- **DETERMINE POPULARITY OF THE KEYWORD** or compare queries using Google Trends.
- Include topically created keywords. (i.e. If it is a bariatric page, include descriptions of weight loss options, obesity definitions, etc.)
- A comprehensive discussion of a topic creates authority over the subject matter. Addressing ALL questions a visitor may have on the topic will increase relevance and authority.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Writing for Links

1. Build inbound link opportunities from powerful linking root domains. Creating content worthy of linking from high-authority websites like CMS.gov, CNN.com, etc.
 - Creating shareable content
 - Expand **DOMAIN AUTHORITY** through Keyword Relevance
 - Relevance: Healthcare > Service Line > Procedures > Physicians > Locations
2. Not all content is created equal. We want a proper balance of highly relevant content to our Domain Expertise and limit the amount of offbeat content.
3. Publish excellent link-worthy content. We should **only** be publishing content where we can be the best in the world.
 - Before writing the piece, Google the terms that someone may use to navigate to your content.
 - Identify who is in the top four positions and determine whether we can create content that has more authority, relevance or likability. If not, don't waste time.
 - When writing web content, consider the following:
 1. Is it free of errors? Check all spelling and grammar before publishing.
 2. Review layout and appearance. Even if you have the right words, how is the overall page displayed?
 3. Is the content "evergreen," meaning it does not become irrelevant after a certain time has passed, but rather can remain relevant for future users?
 4. Add internal links where possible. If a physician, service or procedure is mentioned in a web article, and further detail is found elsewhere on our site (a physician profile for example, or service line page), then link it on the anchoring keyword.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Most Important HTML Tags

1. Title tag 20-60 characters
 - `<title> </title>`
 - Most important keyword(s) first
2. Meta Description
 - `<meta name="description" content="Accurate description of the content on this page">`
3. Heading Tags (H1, H2, H3, H4)
 - **Never** use style elements for headings.
 - H1 should not be the same as the title tag.
 - Write each as if it were that section's page title.
 - Emphasis, not italics ` ` . Strong, not bold ` `
 - Use "nofollow" links appropriately.
 - Google image search accounts for as much as 30% of organic search traffic.
 - Alt Text - When associating an image with content, always describe the image as precisely as possible:
 1. John Smith standing in front of Parkwest Medical Center's main entrance.
 2. Surgeon using hand controls to manipulate robotic equipment.
 3. Do not say "Image of" or "Photo of" at the beginning of the phrase.
 4. End your alt text with a period. This will be used for the alt tag, image title and image description to provide better SEO and to comply with disability guidelines.
 - Use images, diagrams or multimedia to represent ideas visually in your content. Videos and images should reinforce the text on your page.
4. Accessibility – Make your content universally accessible. Americans with Disabilities Act standards play an important role, but they are not the only part of accessibility. Web content should meet two accessibility standards: WC3 and WCAG2 (WCAG3 is in draft). To read more about accessibility standards, visit <https://www.w3.org/>.

Formatting Text

Do not underline text; underlining is only used to indicate a hyperlink.

To add emphasis, use `` `` rather than italics. Use `` `` instead of bold.

Phone numbers should be written with hyphens: 865–374–1000. Do not use parentheses around the area code or periods between the numbers.

Rather than instructing readers to “click here,” make the link part of the text. Use keywords in the link text when possible:

- More information is available on Covenant Health’s virtual care page.
- The “anchor text” signals to Google’s algorithm the value of the linked page. “Click here” signals nothing.
- If you must share a URL use camel case to make the URL more readable where capitalization is used in lieu of spaces. CovenantHealth.com, for example.
- Include a period in a web address if it is at the end of a sentence. (But don’t include the period in the hyperlink.) Do not insert a hyphen mid-URL if a long URL extends beyond a single line.

URL Web Addresses

In general, you should always hyperlink strong anchoring text rather than displaying a URL. In the rare instances where you would use the URL follow these best practices:

- Use camel case when writing URLs, which is capitalizing the first letter of each word.
- Avoid using the fully qualified URL, meaning drop `https://www` and just use: “CovenantHealth.com.”
- The exception is Covenant Health Methodist, which is all lowercase: `mmcoakridge.com`.
- With lengthy URLs consider using a URL shortener.

There are many free online resources to help you write robust web content. As you are creating web pages and posts, the Yoast tool that is part of our WordPress platform can help you evaluate and maximize your web writing. Search, explore and practice!

Appendix A - Checklist

- The page has a defined keyword theme
- The title is 20–60 characters
- H1 is descriptive of overall page contents
- Page is divided into a logical outline using H2, H3 and H4 tags that are relevant to that section
- Links are using the appropriate, keyword-focused anchor text (i.e. white paper)
- The images are relevant to the content of the page
- Images have relevant, descriptive alt tags
- Images have quality captions
- All CovenantHealth.com interlinks have been added
- The content has been checked by Grammarly and is free from spelling and grammar issues
- All content that can be bulleted is in bullet form
- No paragraphs longer than three sentences
- Every link has been tested and is properly working
- Every phone number has been tested and works properly
- Emphasis, not italics ` `. Strong, not bold ` `
- Information on page is accurate and up to date
- Before publishing, check to see if the URL is as concise as possible



REVISION 1 - 5/31/2023