

Writing for the NHSGGC Website

Overview

Our website users

Our website is aimed at three main audiences: Our staff, patients and public. This guide will be mainly aimed at how we write for external audiences (patients and public). However, unless writing directly for your peer group, it can also be just as relevant for our staff.

We need to assume that anyone coming to our site will have no medical knowledge and no understanding of how things work within NHSGGC. We need to write in a way that gives them the information they are looking for in an easy to understand format.

We also need to remember that not everyone reads or understands text content at the same level. This needs to be reflected in how we write and structure our content. Keep it clear, simple and to the point.

Online behaviours

When visiting a website, most people will 'scan and skim' the page to see if it meets their search criteria. They will pick out headings or lists and look for clues on whether the page matches what they are looking for. This process will only take a few seconds. If they don't find what they're looking for within those few seconds, they will give up and move on.

Research has shown that clear headings, short, concise paragraphs and bulleted lists work best to help the web user quickly find what they are looking for.

What devices do our audience use?

More than 70% of website browsing is now done on mobile phones. This trend will only increase. This means we need to take small screens into account when writing content and constructing a web page.

Content should be kept clear and concise and avoid the use of unnecessary graphics.

Writing for the website

To help make information clear and easy for **everyone** to read and understand, and to help our website visitors find the information they need quickly, we have pulled together some **good practice tips** and list of the key **do's** and **don'ts**.

Good practice tips

Avoid the passive voice

Passive voice is defined as a verb form that creates a sense of indirect action in a sentence and often conceals the subject of a sentence.

Using the passive voice can make text seem weak and less direct. An example would be: "**Jill was handed the bucket by Jack.**" However, using the active voice "**Jack handed the bucket to Jill.**" helps create more succinct, user-friendly sentences.


































Other examples: The active voice '**the team decided**' is far more engaging, and direct, than the passive voice '**it was decided by the team**'. As is '**You can do it**' (active) rather than the more passive '**It can be done**'.

Use the readability analysis tool

The readability analysis tool on the website will analyse your text and make suggestions to help improve the readability of your content. It will flag up any overuse of the passive voice, as well as analysing paragraph and sentence length and subheading distribution.

It will help you when you are writing, give an analysis of any areas that could be adapted, changed or improved.

Examples of the readability analysis are shown below:

Good	Could be improved	Poor
<p> Readability analysis ^</p> <p>Analysis results ?</p> <p>^ Problems (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition words: Only 15.7% of the sentences contain transition words, which is not enough. Use more of them.  <p>^ Good results (6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flesch Reading Ease: The copy scores 65.7 in the test, which is considered OK to read. Good job! Passive voice: You're using enough active voice. That's great!  Consecutive sentences: There is enough variety in your sentences. That's great! Subheading distribution: Great job! Paragraph length: None of the paragraphs are too long. Great job! Sentence length: Great! 	<p> Readability analysis ^</p> <p>Analysis results ?</p> <p>^ Problems (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consecutive sentences: The text contains 3 instances where 3 or more consecutive sentences start with the same word. Try to mix things up!  Transition words: Only 0.8% of the sentences contain transition words, which is not enough. Use more of them.  <p>^ Good results (5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flesch Reading Ease: The copy scores 63.6 in the test, which is considered OK to read. Good job! Passive voice: You're using enough active voice. That's great! Subheading distribution: Great job! Paragraph length: None of the paragraphs are too long. Great job! Sentence length: Great! 	<p> Readability analysis ^</p> <p>Analysis results ?</p> <p>^ Problems (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subheading distribution: You are not using any subheadings, although your text is rather long. Try and add some subheadings. Sentence length: 68.2% of the sentences contain more than 20 words, which is more than the recommended maximum of 25%. Try to shorten the sentences.  <p>^ Improvements (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flesch Reading Ease: The copy scores 50.8 in the test, which is considered fairly difficult to read. Try to make shorter sentences to improve readability. <p>^ Good results (4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passive voice: You're using enough active voice. That's great!  Consecutive sentences: There is enough variety in your sentences. That's great! Paragraph length: None of the paragraphs are too long. Great job! Transition words: Well done! 

Use informal language

Informal language is more engaging and easier to understand. For example, use 'you're' instead of 'you are', 'don't' instead of 'do not'. However, avoid very colloquial language, such as 'gottae' instead of 'got to', as this may make it more difficult for those whose first language is not English, or for those with literacy issues, to understand.

Speak directly to your audience

Avoid using abstract or general language and intangible qualities, ideas, or concepts. It can be vague, open to interpretation and the user may find it hard to pin down the exact meaning. Instead of phrases like 'committed to excellence' say something more meaningful that your audience can relate to.

So instead of 'Our team provides flexible care options for our patients' (abstract), use more concrete language such as, 'Our team will build a care package based around your specific health and support needs'.

Use a combination of first and second-person pronouns for your web content. This will help your users connect with the content as you're addressing them directly.

- **First person** is from the writer's point of view and uses pronouns such as 'I' and 'we'
- **Second person** focuses on the user and uses pronouns such as 'you' and 'your'.

Example: If **you**, or someone **you** know, needs urgent help or is in crisis, call NHS 24 on 111 (second person) or if you just need to talk with someone, **we** can help (first person).

Check your information is easy to understand, complete and accurate

- **Have someone else read your content**, just to make sure it's as clear to the user as it is to you. As the writer, you already know what you are trying to say but it may not be so obvious to the end user. Use language that is easy to understand and keep it short and to the point
- **Remember to spell check**. We suggest you draft your page in a Word document, then run the spell check before you upload. The built in spell check on the website will also highlight any spelling errors but watch out for it trying to replace UK English spelling with American English spelling
- **Check any information is accurate and current** such as phone numbers, contact names, opening hours etc
- **Check any links** used on the page are working.

Make use of other departments and organisations

Sometimes it's helpful to hyperlink to other content either within the website or to one of our healthcare partners, such as NHS Inform or NHS 24, to give additional information. At other times it's just helpful to avoid duplication.

As a rule of thumb, if the information exists somewhere else on the site, or on the website of a trusted partner, then hyperlink to that content, rather than rewriting it for your page. This helps to avoid duplication and keeps the information consistent. It also ensures that you do not have to actively and regularly review an external organisation's content, which may change over time, so the correct information is replicated on our website. By using links, the content is automatically updated and little, if any action is required.

Keep it tight

Can you make the text any more succinct? When you think you're finished, check again to see if you can cut it further to allow users to get straight to the most essential message as quickly as possible.

For example, if you can include the 'who, what, where, why, when and how' in the first one or two opening sentences, this will help the user understand the salient points quickly. For example; Our GP practices (who) in Glasgow City (where) are open (what) during office hours and some evenings (when) to offer face to face and virtual consultations (how) to patients who need support and medical treatment (why).

Don't forget your page

Revisit your page regularly to check that the content remains up to date.

Do's and don'ts

Do's

- **Name your page clearly.** The page name should describe the subject of the page and should not include extra 'padding'. Instead of 'Welcome to Cardiology Services', the page heading should simply read 'Cardiology Services'.
- **Structure your web page with the most important information first.** Place the most important information at the top of the page, in the first paragraph, and extra information toward the bottom. Each paragraph should be relevant, brief, clear and to the point.
- **Use short sentences and short paragraphs.** It is absolutely fine to use a one sentence paragraph.
- **Use easy to understand words.** When you do have to use medical terminology please also explain what the terminology means, in the simplest possible terms. Where possible try to use terms the public are familiar with such as 'x-ray' rather than 'radiography'.
- **Deal with one subject at a time.** Stick to one key piece of information or idea in each paragraph.
- **Break text up into manageable sections.** Use headings and bulleted lists to make content more manageable. Subheadings can be used to clarify the subject of each section on the page and bullets help users skim and scan for the information they need.
- **Use a question and answer format where appropriate.** This can be a really clear and simple format to use. For example, if someone is visiting your department you could include things like, 'What will happen when I arrive?', 'How long will it take?', 'How do I find the department?'. You can break up the FAQ's either by using subheadings or accordion panels.
- **Use links to share new or extra information.** If reputable sites provide the information you need, use a link instead of rewriting content.
- **Use a user friendly url.** When you add a website link or a link to a document to your page, it can often be quite cumbersome, such as https://www.diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/coronavirus. This can be made more user friendly by:
 - Including the name of the site or document as text within a normal sentence and hyperlinking that text to the website/document url. For example 'and [Diabetes UK](#) provide specific advice for...'
 - Add a button which links to the hyperlink
 - Or include the website address in a simplified format and hyperlink to the specific information www.diabetes.org.uk.

Don'ts

- **Don't waste space welcoming people to the page.** The page title has already told them where they are. Get to the point as quickly as possible.
- **Don't tell users to 'click on the link'**, users understand what a link does. When you add a link to your page, the website will automatically change the colour of the text and add an underline. You don't need to add any more emphasis (please do not bold the text).

Instead of 'click the link' make the link text about the actual information you are linking to, for example: '[Glasgow and Clyde Weight Management Services](#) are targeted at adults, aged 18 and over...' The link is part of the sentence, it's obviously a link and you have an understanding of what it's linking to.

- **Don't use unnecessary 'fluff' in the text.** Avoid using any text that does not serve a purpose. Unlike writing for the printed format, you need to get to the point as quickly as possible with your website text. Keep the text succinct, avoid filler fluff and unnecessary words.

- Can you replace two words with one? For example, use 'boring' instead of 'not interesting.' Use 'to' instead of the wordier 'in order to.'
- Try to eliminate any meaningless phrases. Avoid terms like 'committed to excellence'. Instead say something specific and meaningful.
- **Don't overuse bold.** Bold should be used sparingly for emphasis. If it is used too much the text becomes difficult to read and the bold loses its impact.
- **Don't underline text.** On the website, an underline = a link. Adding an underline is misleading as users expect it to link to somewhere else.
- **Don't use all caps or italics.** Both are hard to read online. If you need to emphasise a piece of text, use bold instead, but use it sparingly.
- **Avoid exclamation points.** Exclamation points on websites can make it look unprofessional. Let the content speak for itself.