

## Online Style Guide

All content on our websites and in electronic communications must meet user and business needs, as well as Blue Shield of California brand requirements. This guide is based primarily on the *AP Stylebook* with input from the *Wired News Stylebook*, numerous style and grammar references, and is influenced by best practices for online content development.

As Blue Shield of California’s voice evolves, this style guide will evolve and provide guidelines for content of the highest quality.

### I. General Content Guidelines

All content must be:

- User/audience-focused
- Clear and easy to understand
- Accurate and complete
- As concise as possible
- Grammatically correct
- Without jargon
- Legal and HIPAA compliant (see Legal & Regulatory Guidelines in Section IV below)
- Brand compliant (i.e. Tone, section II below)

### II. Content Tone

The tone of content on the BSC website and in email campaigns should match the tone used in offline print materials in order to maintain the strength and effectiveness of the company brand.

Tone should be straightforward, professional, respectful, friendly, and helpful, and should use simple and concise language.

Tone can and should vary among our different audiences: members, prospective members, providers, producers, employers, press and internal employees.

### III. Language

Whenever possible, language and nomenclature should be tested (with usability testing) so we can gain a greater understanding of how to best communicate with our varied audiences.

Choose language that is audience-appropriate. With providers and producers we can assume some level of familiarity with Blue Shield terms and practices – though acronyms should be avoided if possible and if used, spelled out on first reference.

For prospective members and members, we should not assume any level of understanding or familiarity with Blue Shield terms or the health insurance industry in general. No jargon should ever be used and acronyms should be avoided. Health plans and the insurance business are confusing topics, so our communications should impart clarity and simplify complex information.

### IV. Legal & Regulatory Guidelines

Blue Shield of California is responsible for adhering to legal and regulatory guidelines from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, Department of Insurance, Department of Managed Health Care, and HIPAA.

In addition, for outbound email campaigns, we must follow the guidelines provided in the CAN-SPAM Act (outlined below).

**CAN-SPAM text for marketing emails from the CAN SPAM Act of 2003:**

All outbound emails with advertising or marketing messages **must** include CAN-SPAM text:

- **Preceding email content - at the beginning of the email:**  
The following is an advertisement for Blue Shield of California.
- **Footer at the end of the email:**  
If you no longer wish to receive emails from Blue Shield of California, you can unsubscribe by sending a blank email <link to unsubscribe function> - no need to fill in the subject line. Blue Shield of California, 50 Beale St., San Francisco, CA 94105.

Blue Shield of California is an independent member of the Blue Shield Association. Blue Shield® and the Shield Symbol are registered marks of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, an Association of Independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans.

Please note, the unsubscribe function is implemented by IT/eCommerce Solutions when an email is in development. Specific link/functionality of the unsubscribe function depends on the email distribution service and will be known by IT and/or the email distribution service.

## V. Editorial Style and Writing References

Additional information may be found in the following resources:

- *AP Stylebook* or [www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org)
- *Writing for the Web*, by Jakob Nielsen
- *The Elements of Style*, by W. Strunk and E.B. White
- *Merriam-Webster Online* ([www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com))
- *The Grammar Bible* by Michael Strumpf and Auriel Douglas
- *Grammatically Correct*, by Anne Stilman
- *Essentials of English*, by Vincent Hopper, Cedric Gale, Ronald Foote and Benjamin Griffith

## VI. Content Types

### A. Body Copy

Body copy is content beneath the page title in the main area of the page or in sidebar areas of a page.

- Content should be simple and concise, but not ambiguous or vague.
- Content should suit the target audience, using appropriate words, phrases and concepts.
- Content should be kept current. Old announcements or news items should be archived regularly so that landing pages retain only the most current items.
- Content should be broken into small paragraph chunks and/or bulleted lists to facilitate scanning.