

TOOLKIT for Making Written Material Clear  
and Effective

SECTION 2: Detailed guidelines for writing  
and design

## PART 5

Understanding and using the “Toolkit  
Guidelines for Graphic Design”

### Chapter 4

Guidelines for headings, bulleted lists, and  
emphasizing blocks of text

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services



## TOOLKIT Part 5, Chapter 4

### Guidelines for headings, bulleted lists, and emphasizing blocks of text

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This document is the fourth of eight chapters in Part 5 of the *Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective*. The Toolkit has 11 parts. It was written for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) by Jeanne McGee, McGee & Evers Consulting, Inc. The guidelines and other parts of the Toolkit reflect the views of the writer. CMS offers this Toolkit as practical assistance to help you make your written material clear and effective (not as requirements from CMS).

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## Introduction

### ***About the Toolkit and its guidelines***

The *Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective* is an 11-part health literacy resource from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). To help you develop or revise your written material, the Toolkit includes detailed guidelines for writing and design. There are 26 guidelines for writing and 46 for graphic design. For the full list, see Toolkit Part 3, *Summary List of the “Toolkit Guidelines for Writing and Design”*.

### ***About this part of the Toolkit***

Part 5 of the Toolkit focuses on the guidelines for graphic design. These guidelines apply to designing various types of written material intended for use in printed formats (see Toolkit Part 1). (For discussion about material that is read on a computer screen, see Toolkit Part 8, *Will your written material be on a website?*)

### ***What is this chapter about?***

This is the fourth of the eight chapters on design in Toolkit Part 5. It explains how to apply the Toolkit Guidelines for headings, bulleted lists, and emphasizing blocks of text. As with all of the Toolkit chapters on design, this chapter assumes that you have not had formal training in design. For background on things to know about the Toolkit Guidelines for Design, see Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 2, *Guidelines for overall design and page layout*.

### ***What aspects of design are covered in the other chapters?***

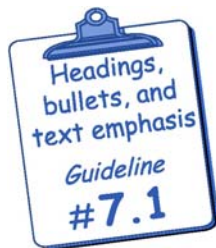
The other chapters in Toolkit Part 5 cover the following topics: tips for learning about design and working with design professionals (Chapter 1); overall design and page layout (Chapter 2); fonts (typefaces), size of print, and contrast (Chapter 3); use of color (Chapter 5); use of photographs, illustrations, and clip art (Chapter 6); tables, charts, and diagrams (Chapter 7); and forms and questionnaires (Chapter 8).

## List of guidelines covered in this chapter

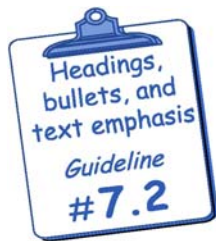
This chapter discusses the four guidelines shown below in Figure 5-4-a. Following these guidelines will help make your written material easy for readers to skim and pick up the main points. (For the full list of guidelines for design, see Toolkit Part 3, *Summary List of the “Toolkit Guidelines for Writing and Design”*.)

### Figure

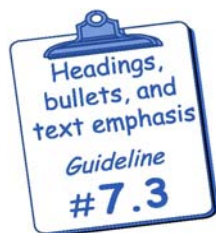
5-4-a. Guidelines for headings, bulleted lists, and emphasizing blocks of text.



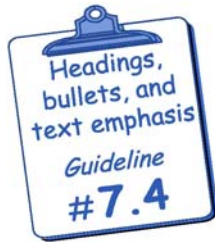
**To make the material easy to skim and show how it is organized, create a clear hierarchy of prominent headings and subheadings.** Left-justify the headings and subheadings, because readers sometimes miss headings that are centered. To emphasize how the material is structured, use contrast in fonts and maintain clear and consistent alignments, indentations, and spacing between headings and the text that follows.



**Use contrast and other devices to make the main points stand out on each page.** Remember that your readers are skimming and looking for information of personal interest. Help them by using devices such as bulleted and numbered lists, captions for illustrations, emphasis on key words and phrases, and summaries of main points. Use design elements or images to accent important information, such as putting a picture of a phone next to the helpline number.



**For ease of reading, use care in formatting bulleted lists.** To set off a list of bulleted points and connect it more closely with the sentence that introduces it, indent the entire list slightly. To make the bulleted points stand out clearly, add extra line space between them and use hanging indents. To set off each point without distracting readers, use bullets that are simple solid shapes. Bullets should be large enough to notice but not so large that they are distracting. Place bullets close to the text that follows them.



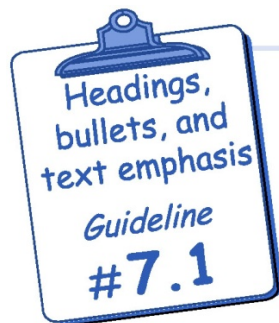
**Choose effective ways to emphasize important blocks of text.** Outline boxes are often used to emphasize text, but they clutter your layout and readers sometimes ignore text that’s enclosed by a box. Shaded backgrounds tend to attract the eye, but they also reduce the contrast, making text less legible and therefore less likely to be read. Instead of using outline boxes or shaded backgrounds, try other methods that tend to work better for emphasizing blocks of text (Figure 5-4-d in this chapter gives suggestions).



Source: Created for this Toolkit. For more about the guidelines and how to use them, see Toolkit Part 3, *Summary List of the “Toolkit Guidelines for Writing and Design”*.



## Create a clear and prominent hierarchy of headings and subheadings



To make the material easy to skim and show how it is organized, create a clear hierarchy of prominent headings and subheadings.

Left-justify the headings and subheadings, because readers sometimes miss headings that are centered. To emphasize how the material is structured, use contrast in fonts and maintain clear and consistent alignments, indentations, and spacing between headings and the text that follows.

Headings are a powerful tool for helping readers understand and use your written material. When headings (and subheadings) are working well, readers can see at a glance what topics are covered and how the material is structured. Effective headings help readers navigate through the material, finding information of personal interest. They are “advance organizers” that help prepare readers for the topics that come next, making it easier for them to understand and absorb new information.

Guidelines discussed in previous chapters cover several factors that have great impact on the effectiveness of your headings and subheadings. These include:

- **The importance of using plenty of headings and making them as informative as you can.** When headings are specific and numerous, readers can skim through quickly and pick up the main points. For more on this, see the discussion and examples for Guideline 2.3 in Toolkit Part 4, Chapter 2, *Guidelines for organizing the content (sequencing, grouping, and labeling)*.
- **The importance of choosing an effective font for headings.** In Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for fonts (typeface), size of print, and contrast*, Guidelines 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 cover recommendations for font choice. These guidelines advise using a combination of easy-to-read fonts with good contrast: a serif font for the regular text and a **sans serif font for the headings**. These guidelines recommend using a “font family” that offers variations in style, weight, and width that can be used to create good contrast.
- **The role of headings in guiding readers through the material.** In Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 2, *Guidelines for overall design and page layout*, the discussion of page gravity shows how headings help readers find their way easily through the material.

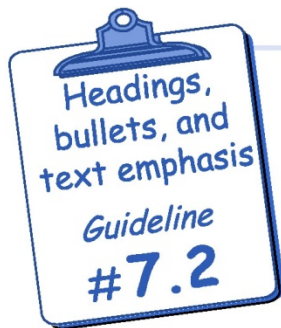
### ***Tips for making headings clear and prominent***

Building on the guidelines and advice covered in previous chapters, here are ways to make your headings easy for people to notice, read, and use:

- **Choose an effective font and use its variations to good advantage in your headings.** For detailed advice and examples, see Guidelines 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for fonts (typeface), size of print, and contrast*.
- **Left-justify all headings and subheadings.** Left justification makes the headings more prominent. Centering makes headings less prominent, and readers sometimes miss a centered heading (see Guideline 6.10 in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for fonts, size of print, and contrast*). Moreover, left-justifying all of your headings creates strong, clear alignment on the page, giving a tidy sense of order to your material (see the discussion of page grids under Guideline 5.4 in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 2, *Guidelines for overall design and page layout*).
- **Use differences in size and font contrast to build a strong hierarchy of headings and subheadings.** A clear hierarchy makes the structure of the material more apparent and helps readers navigate. Experiment a bit to find an effective combination of size and font contrast for your headings and subheadings:

- **Headings and subheadings should differ enough in size to create a hierarchy.** It should be clear at a glance which is a main heading and which is a subheading. Often, a difference of two point sizes in type size will work.
  - **Headings and subheadings both need to be large enough to be easy to read, but not *too large*.** When headings are too large, they are less effective. Making them too big actually makes them harder rather than easier to read, because your eye can’t take in as much of the heading at one time.
  - **Headings, subheadings, and regular text should be in good proportion.** Make the sizes different enough to be obvious, but still in good proportion. Don’t rely on size difference alone to create contrast. Instead, use size together with font contrast, and use enough white space around headings to help them stand out.
  - **Just because a font is used in a heading does not mean it must be in boldface type.** You may not need to use boldface to create good contrast between your headings and regular text. If you do use a boldface version of the font in a heading, make sure that it’s easy to read. Boldface type can differ a lot in ease of reading, especially when it is used for relatively small text, such as subheadings. Some font families include a range of boldface; the lighter versions may be easier to read than the darker ones, and still offer good contrast with the regular text.
  - **If your material includes a header or footer, make sure that the formatting of the header or footer is subdued,** so that it doesn’t “fight for attention” with the headings and subheadings and undermine the hierarchy you are trying to create.
- **For best contrast, use black or very dark colored ink for the text in headings.** Ease of reading should be paramount for headings, and using any color other than black reduces ease of reading. If you use colors other than black for text in headings, choose your colors carefully; many colors are unsuitable (such as yellow and orange). Usually, it works best to use colored text sparingly, for emphasis, and to use color in darker shades.
  - **Format the line space for headings to connect them with the text that follows.** To create a stronger visual link between the heading and the text it introduces, leave a little *less* line space immediately *under* the heading, and a little more space immediately *above* the heading. Maintain enough white space to make the headings stand out, but not so much that you weaken the connection between the heading and text that follows. For details on adjusting line space, see Guideline 6.9 in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for fonts (typeface), size of print, and contrast*.

## Use contrast and other devices to make headings and main points stand out on each page



Use contrast and other devices to make the main points stand out on each page.

Remember that your readers are skimming and looking for information of personal interest. Help them by using devices such as bulleted and numbered lists, captions for illustrations, emphasis on key words and phrases, and summaries of main points. Use design elements or images to accent important information, such as putting a picture of a phone next to the helpline number.

People make quick judgments about what is worth reading. Before they commit to actual reading the sentences and paragraphs, most people want to look the material over to decide if it's worth their time. First impressions are crucial, especially for less-skilled readers. People with low literacy skills find it difficult to interpret and apply new information and they tend to tire quickly. If they can't pick out the topics and main points with ease, many will not make the effort.

If you give people a "wall of words," with no easy way to pick out the main points, it won't matter that the words are simple, the tone is friendly, and the flow of information is smooth.

First impressions are crucial: if it *looks* like it's going to be hard to read, it *is* hard to read.



So make it as easy as you can for readers to skim through the material and pick up the main points. This will help attract and hold their attention, and make the material easier for them to understand and use it.

### ***What makes materials easy to skim?***

It takes a combination of good writing and good graphic design to make material easy to skim. In this Toolkit, many of the guidelines for writing and design are oriented toward making the material easy to skim and helping readers focus on and absorb the main points. To give just a few examples:

- A clean, tidy layout with ample white space makes material more appealing and easier to skim.
- Placing the text and design elements in ways that fit with reader’s usual habits guides them smoothly through the page without diverting or distracting them.
- Using fonts that are easy to read and paying attention to contrast with the paper makes material more appealing and physically easier on the eyes.
- A strong hierarchy of prominent and informative headings helps orient your readers and guide them through the material.
- Devices such as bulleted and numbered lists break the text into smaller chunks, making it easier for people to skim and absorb new information.
- Captions for illustrations, emphasis on key words and phrases, and summaries of main points help people identify and remember the main points.
- Visual elements as a design accent can draw attention to the most important points.

Other guidelines and examples in this Toolkit cover many of these features in detail.

### ***Improving the impact of a design accent***

You can use graphic design accents to help your readers skim and to put special emphasis on your main points. When you use design accents, think about the subject matter of your material and about what you want to encourage your readers to do. You might come up with something new that improves the tone and impact of your words. Figure 5-4-b below gives an example.

Figure

5-4-b. Improving the impact of visual accents.

The two versions below both say the same thing, and both would draw attention because they stand out from the regular text. Which one do you find more effective?

Call today for a  
mammogram appointment

◀ This plain formatting lacks visual interest. The text sounds like a command.



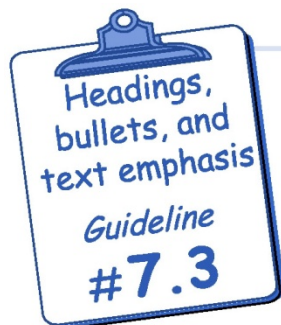
◀ The notepad is much more interesting than a plain box.

The handwriting font (Mayfield) is readable enough to use and adds a personal touch.

Putting the words on this notepad image subtly fosters the impression that a woman has made a commitment to get a mammogram.

Source: Created as an example for this Toolkit.

## Format bulleted lists for ease of reading



For ease of reading, use care in formatting bulleted lists.

To set off a list of bulleted points and connect it more closely with the sentence that introduces it, indent the entire list slightly. To make the bulleted points stand out clearly, add extra line space between them and use hanging indents. To set off each point without distracting readers, use bullets that are simple solid shapes. Bullets should be large enough to notice but not so large that they are distracting. Place bullets close to the text that follows them.

Bulleted lists are an excellent device for helping readers understand and use your written material (see Guideline 2.1 in Toolkit Part 4, Chapter 2, *Guidelines for organizing the content (sequencing, grouping, and labeling)*).

How you format a list of bulleted points can have great impact on ease of reading. Figure 5-4-c below gives guidelines for effective formatting:

- It begins with a series of examples that shows how ineffective formatting can make bulleted lists hard to read.
- Then, at the end, it gives specific tips on how to format your bulleted lists for best impact.

**Figure**

5-4-c. Suggestions for formatting lists of bulleted points.



The examples below are formatted in ways that make the lists of bulleted points harder to read

example  
**A**

Things you can do in your home to help you hear better:

- Move chairs closer together.
- Use bright lights so you can see people’s faces.
- Use carpets, drapes, and chairs covered with cloth. They cut down on background noise.

**Problems with this formatting:**

- The bulleted points are so close together that it’s hard to tell where one bulleted point ends and the next one begins.
- With no hanging indent, the second line of a bulleted point goes back to the left margin, where it competes for attention with the bullets.
- The bullets are too small, and they are placed too low and too far away from the text that follows them.

example  
**B**

Things you can do in your home to help you hear better:

- Move chairs closer together.
- Use bright lights so you can see people’s faces.
- Use carpets, drapes, and chairs covered with cloth. They cut down on background noise.

**Problems with this formatting:**

- There’s too much space between the lead-in sentence and the block of bulleted points, which weakens the connection between them.
- It’s hard to tell one bulleted point from the next because there’s no extra space between them.
- Bullets are too close to the text that follows, making it hard to read.

example

C

Things you can do in your home to help you hear better:

- ☀ Move chairs closer together.
- ☀ Use bright lights so you can see people’s faces.
- ☀ Use carpets, drapes, and chairs covered with cloth. They cut down on background noise.

**Problems with this formatting:**

- Bullets are too large. They overpower the text. They also make the list harder to skim because their large size encroaches on the extra space between the bulleted points.
- The fancy shape of the bullets makes them too prominent and distracts attention from the text.

example

D

Things you can do in your home to help you hear better:

- ✓ Move chairs closer together.
- ✓ Use bright lights so you can see people’s faces.
- ✓ Use carpets, drapes, and chairs covered with cloth. They cut down on background noise.

**Problems with this formatting:**

- Instead of being indented, the bullets are out in the left margin. This placement weakens the connection to the lead-in sentence and to the text that follows each bullet.
- The bulleted points are too far apart. It’s hard to perceive them as a block of related text when they are spread so far apart.
- The expansive shape of the check mark bullet makes it harder to make a direct visual connection between the check mark bullet and the text that follows it.



The formatting shown below helps make the bulleted points easy to read

Things you can do in your home to help you hear better:

- Move chairs closer together.
- Use bright lights so you can see people’s faces.
- Use carpets, drapes, and chairs covered with cloth. They cut down on background noise.

◀ **Much better.** This formatting links the bulleted points to the lead-in sentence and makes them easy to skim.

See below for details on the formatting used in this example.

Indent the entire block of bulleted points slightly.

Formatting and placement of the bullets:

- Use simple, solid shapes for the bullets.
- Use the same style of bullets throughout the material.
- Make bullet size proportional to the text.
- Keep bullets fairly close to the text that follows.

Things you can do in your home to help you hear better:

- Move chairs closer together.
- Use bright lights so you can see people’s faces.
- Use carpets, drapes, and chairs covered with cloth. They cut down on background noise.
- Learn about tools that can help you use the phone.
- Find out about lights that flash on and off when the oven is ready or the washing machine is done.

Watch where lines break (don’t leave one word alone on the second line).

Add extra line space between the bulleted points.

Use a hanging indent on each bulleted point.

### Summary: the bulleted list

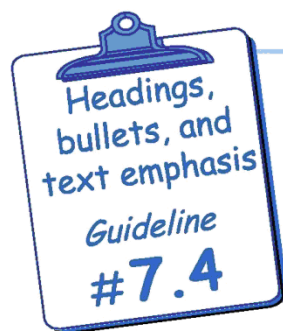
- **Indent the entire block of bulleted points slightly.** This connects the bulleted points more closely to the lead-in sentence, helping readers understand how the material is organized and making it easier to skim.
- **Add extra line space between the bulleted points** to make each one stand out clearly.
- **Use a hanging indent on each bulleted point** to make the list of bulleted points easy to skim.
- **Watch where lines break.** Leave at least two words on the last line of a bulleted point. If there’s only one word, it looks awkward and is hard to read.

### Summary: the bullets

- **Use simple, solid shapes for the bullets to make them stand out clearly.** Squares and circles work well. The bullets should be solid because outline shapes do not stand out clearly. The shapes need to be simple, such as circles or squares, because using busy shapes or special symbols will distract your readers from the text. Using color can help emphasize the bullets.
- **Use the same style for bullets throughout the material.** Using the same style lends unity and avoids confusing your readers.
- **Make bullet size proportional to the text.** Bullets should be large enough to stand out, but not so large that they overwhelm the text.
- **Keep bullets fairly close to the text that follows.** Bullets should be close enough to establish a good connection with the text that follows, but not so close that the bullet and the text blend together.

Source: All formatting in this Figure was done for purposes of this Toolkit. The text used to show variations in formatting bulleted lists is from page 146 of *What to Do for Senior Health*. This book by Barnett, Rushton, & Mumaw (2004) is one of the “What To Do For Health” series of books by the Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) in La Habra, California. Books in this series are available in multiple languages. CMS thanks the Institute for Healthcare Advancement for permission to use this text in this Figure. In the original source, this text appears in a section about hearing loss in Chapter 6, *Normal Changes with Aging*. The formatting of bullets in the source is similar to the model formatting shown at the end of this Figure.

## Use effective ways to emphasize important blocks of text



Choose effective ways to emphasize important blocks of text.

Outline boxes are often used to emphasize text, but they clutter your layout and readers sometimes ignore text that’s enclosed by a box. Shaded backgrounds tend to attract the eye, but they also reduce the contrast, making text less legible and therefore less likely to be read. Instead of using outline boxes or shaded backgrounds, try other methods that tend to work better for emphasizing blocks of text (Figure 5-4-d gives suggestions).

### ***Reasons to avoid putting text inside a box or on a shaded background***

When a paragraph or two of text is especially important, some written material puts a box around it to help draw the reader’s attention. Another popular method for emphasizing a block of text is to print it on a shaded background. For both of these devices, the goal is to get readers to notice the text that’s in the outline box or on the shaded background, realize that it’s important because of this special formatting, and pay special attention to what it says.

However, studies (Wheildon, 2005; Goodman, 2002; Schriver, 1997) and results from field testing of materials with readers by the author and numerous colleagues show that neither of these approaches for



text emphasis is particularly effective. In fact, readers sometimes pay *less* attention, rather than *more* attention, to text encased by a box or printed on a shaded background:

- **Shaded backgrounds are an effective device for *drawing* attention but not for *holding* it: people may give up on reading because text on a shaded background is harder to read.** Shaded backgrounds reduce the contrast between the text and the paper, making the text harder to read. In the preceding chapter, Figure 5-3-c has a series of examples with text of different font styles and color printed on shaded backgrounds that range from very light to dark (see Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3).
  - The examples in this figure show how printing text on a shaded background makes the text harder to read. Specifically, they show that the darker the background, the harder it is to read the text.
  - The font also makes a difference. On a shaded background, the serif font is harder to read than the sans serif font, non-bolded text is harder to read than boldface, and text printed in colored ink is harder to read than text printed in black ink.
- **Putting text inside a box adds distracting clutter and may create a visual barrier that deters readers.** Having a clean and uncluttered layout helps readers skim and find what they are looking for. Regardless of their size or position on the page, putting boxes around text undermines this clean look.
- **Using a box or shaded background to emphasize text can encourage certain types of formatting that further reduce the ease of reading.** For example:
  - **Using a small box around important text can reduce the line length** so that it becomes too small for easy reading (see Guideline 6.11 in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for fonts (typeface), size of print, and contrast*).
  - **Using boldface for text on a shaded background improves contrast but makes it harder to read.** Though the added contrast makes the type stand out better against the shaded background, it is very hard on the eyes to read a block of text in boldface type (see the examples for Guideline 6.6 in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 3, *Guidelines for fonts (typeface), size of print, and contrast*).

### ***What can you do instead to emphasize a block of text?***

Given the many drawbacks to using a box or shading to emphasize important text, it makes sense to consider other options. Figure 5-4-d below suggests some other ways to emphasize important blocks of text, using contrast and other devices to draw the reader’s attention.

Figure

5-4-d. Replacing the shaded background and boxed-in text: ideas for better ways of emphasizing important blocks of text.



Outline boxes add clutter to a layout and can be a visual barrier. Shaded backgrounds reduce contrast and make text hard to read. Both of these ways of emphasizing text can actually make people *less likely* to read it.

The four examples below show how outline boxes and shaded backgrounds are commonly used:

**A-1**

**Warning signs of a possible stroke**

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke. **Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

**A-2**

**Warning signs of a possible stroke**

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke. **Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

**A-3**

**Warning signs of a possible stroke**

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke. **Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

**A-4**

**Warning signs of a possible stroke**

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke. **Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause



The examples below show ideas for better ways of emphasizing a block of text. They maintain good contrast, add visual interest, and avoid the clutter of an outline box.

Below we show a series of options to consider when you want to emphasize a block of text. These options have the following in common:

- **They are easy to read**, because the text is always in black on a white background.
- **They are easy to create** (they can all be done using a word processing program).

Other ways of  
formatting  
# 1

Try using simple lines for emphasis

B-1

### Warning signs of a possible stroke

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke.

**Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

B-2

### Warning signs of a possible stroke

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke.

**Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

Figure 5-4-d, continued.

Other ways of formatting  
# 2

Try adding images and other visual devices to draw attention

C-1

The version below changes the wording slightly by adding a new phrase: “A stroke is an emergency!” The font style for this phrase reinforces a sense of urgency, and the clip art ambulance is positioned to point at this new text. You could choose an urgent phrase that fits your topic, or just say “important!”

**Warning signs of a possible stroke**



*A stroke is an emergency!*

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don’t wait. It could be a stroke.

**Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

C-2

In the version below, the thought bubble draws attention. Putting a soft colored background behind the thought bubble makes it stand out.



If someone has even just *one* of the warning signs listed below, don’t wait. It could be a stroke.

**Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause

Figure 5-4-d, continued.



In the version below, the layout is a little different and the heading has been enlarged. The blue accent was made by putting two white lines on top of a blue “AutoShape” available in Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. The slanted lines are positioned to guide readers toward the text.



### Warning signs of a possible stroke

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke. **Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
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- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause



The version below changes to a more horizontal layout and adds a silhouetted stick figure to draw attention to the warning signs.

---

### Warning signs of a possible stroke

If someone has even just *one* of the signs listed below, don't wait. It could be a stroke. **Call 9-1-1 for medical help right away.**

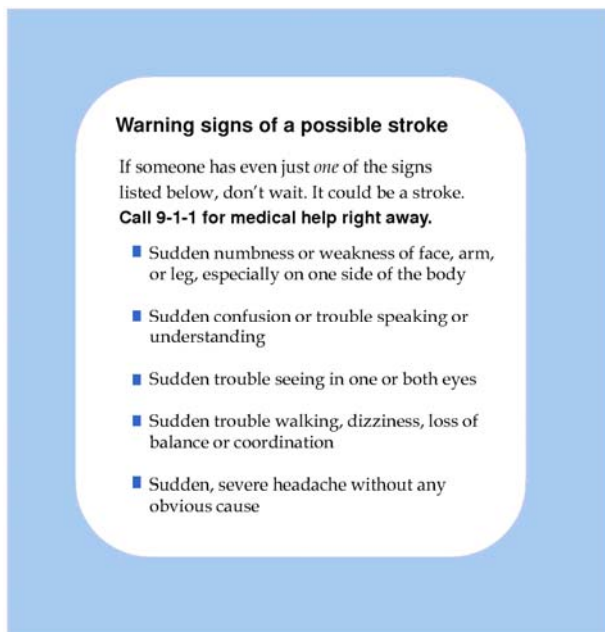


- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
  - Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
  - Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
  - Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
  - Sudden, severe headache without any obvious cause
-

Figure 5-4-d, continued.



This approach does encase the text. But compared to the heavy outline box in A-2 above, using this frame to encase the text would add some style without cluttering the layout. The broad band of color and the contrast of pointed corners on the outside and rounded ones on the inside help accent the text inside the frame.



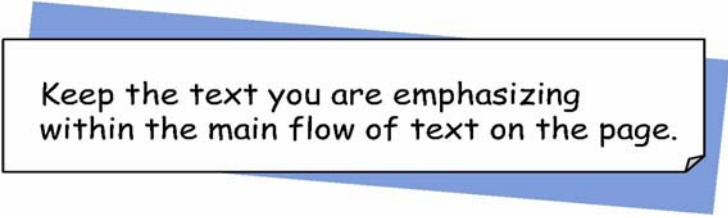
Would this frame be a visual barrier to readers, the way that outline boxes sometimes are? To find out, you could test it with readers.



Source: Created for use as examples in this Toolkit.

### ***Using these devices to emphasize important blocks of text***

Whatever method you use to emphasize a block of text, where you place the text is important. In materials for less-skilled readers, it’s important to have a clear and obvious path through the material, with nothing to divert or distract them.



Keep the text you are emphasizing  
within the main flow of text on the page.

In general, it works best to keep the text you are emphasizing within the main flow of text on the page. **If you set it apart, you may cause some readers to overlook it, and you will interrupt their natural progression through the page.** For more on this, see the discussion and diagrams of reading gravity in Figure 5-2-c (Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 2, *Guidelines for overall design and page layout*). Another figure in Toolkit Part 5, Chapter 2 shows how putting small blocks of text in a narrow column on the outer edge of the page makes reading burdensome for less-skilled readers (Figure 5-2-e).



## **End notes**

### ***References cited in this chapter***

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