

# CDC'S GUIDE TO *Writing for Social Media*



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## What Is Social Media?

Beginning in the early part of the 21st century, Web applications began to change the way we communicate. A single person—who before had been limited to a “point-to-point” communication method such as face-to-face conversation or a telephone call—can now reach an audience of hundreds or thousands of people with a single click. “One-to-many” communication channels, such as television or radio advertising, had previously been expensive and their reach limited to a general audience. We have since seen a dramatic increase in the use of online and other electronic tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and texting) for sharing and creating content, which in this document are collectively called *social media*. Companies and government agencies are discovering how to harness the power of social media to expand the reach of their marketing and communication messages.

For those of us in health communication, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging allow us to expand our reach, foster engagement, and increase access to credible, science-based health messages. Social media can help organizations achieve the after goals:

- Disseminate health and safety information in a timelier manner.
- Increase the potential impact of important messages.
- Leverage networks of people to make information sharing easier.
- Create different messages to reach diverse audiences.
- Personalize health messages and target them to a particular audience.
- Engage with the public.
- Empower people to make safer and healthier decisions.

When integrated into health communication campaigns and activities, social media can encourage participation, conversation, and community—all of which can help spread key messages, influence decision making, and promote behavior change. Social media also helps to reach people when, where, and how it’s convenient for them, which improves the availability of content and might influence satisfaction and trust in the health messages delivered.

Social media is also a key tool in building awareness and credibility. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project report in 2011, “Social Networking Sites and Our Lives,” nearly half of adults (47%) used at least one social networking site in 2010. That number is growing quickly, nearly doubling from 2008 (26%). Social networks are places where people gather information from experts and peers to help them make health decisions.

## What Is This Guide For? How Should It Be Used?

As a health communicator, you craft health and safety messages that can have a profound impact on the public. Using social media, these messages can reach more audiences and have an even greater impact on the public. This Guide aims to assist you in translating your messages so they resonate and are relevant to social media audiences, and encourage action, engagement, and interaction. It is largely tactical, giving you specific ways to write for social media channels.

Although a wide variety of social media tools exist, this Guide will focus on three specific channels: Facebook, Twitter, and text messages (short message service, or SMS). For information on other channels, social networking sites, and microblogs, visit CDC's Social Media Tools, Guidelines and Best Practices at <http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/>.

## Social Media and Communication Strategy

Keep in mind that social media is one tool in a larger communication strategy. Always consider your overarching communication goals when developing social media activities.

As with all media outreach, the keys to an effective social media presence are to

- Identify your target audience.
- Determine your objective.
- Select the appropriate channel for your message.
- Decide upfront how much time and effort you can invest.

You can learn more about social media strategy in *The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit* at

[http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit\\_BM.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf).

# Chapter 2: Before You Start

## Target Audiences, Health Literacy and Plain Language, and Social Marketing

Social media presents a particular challenge for communicators because the users don't focus on a single document. A reader often sifts through an onslaught of information, skims topics, and browses sites to determine where to focus his or her attention. If content is dense, long, and jargon-filled, the reader probably won't find it appealing. To ensure that the reader does take the time to read your messages, social media writers should

- Understand the audience they are trying to reach.
- Apply health literacy principles.
- Follow plain language best practices.
- Use social marketing concepts to improve communications.

### Know Your Target Audience(s)

One benefit of using social media is audience segmentation. You can develop messages that are specific to the concerns, needs, and desires of a particular demographic. Understanding what's important to your audience will increase the effectiveness of your social media efforts.

Likewise, understanding your audience will help you select the best channels for reaching specific audiences with your messages. People access information in different ways, at different times of the day, and for different reasons. Using market research, metrics, and other data to define your audience needs will be important in selecting the most effective channels. Each social media channel is different in the way it engages communities and manages content. Understanding how people naturally use or participate in different social media channels will help you determine your engagement strategy. If limited literacy skills are an issue for the audience you are trying to reach, then find out if and how they use social media. They might be more attracted to audio-visual content than written messages.

Appendix A provides key points on several of the audiences the CDC reaches. For more information, review the Audience Insights documents at the Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice section at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/>.

## Health Literacy

Now more than ever, health literacy matters. Laws such as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 and the Plain Writing Act of 2010 require government communicators to make their messages easy to understand, so people can more easily act upon information and make effective decisions about their health.

Research indicates that most health information is not presented in a way that is usable by most adults. Here are some examples:

- Nearly 9 in 10 adults have difficulty using the everyday health information that is routinely available in health care facilities, retail outlets, media, and communities.
- Without clear information and an understanding of the information's importance, people are more likely to skip necessary medical tests, end up in the emergency room more often, and have a harder time managing chronic diseases like diabetes or high blood pressure.
- About 1 in 3 adults has below basic or basic health literacy skills, which means they would find it difficult to read and follow instructions on a prescription medicine label.

In response to these findings, CDC provides resources to help writers improve communications materials and focus on health literacy issues. For help crafting social media communications, please see <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/>.

## The Importance of Plain Language

Often, we in health communication create health literacy problems for our audiences when we present information that makes it difficult for them to understand what they should know and do. Some of the most common mistakes follow:

- Using jargon or words and phrases that are not commonly understood by most people.
- Writing dense and long content that overuses the passive voice and doesn't give clear and concise directions or "calls to action."
- Including too many distracters (for example, visuals and text don't match or the font is too small).

Using plain language helps to correct these problems. Studies show that when writers use plain language, readers discover information more quickly, understand it better, and find it more compelling. When you think *plain* language, think *everyday* language, and you will help your readers. You can learn more about plain language from the federal

Plain Language Action and Information Network and can find the federal government's plain language guidelines at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>.

Here are some basic principles of plain language:

- Quickly engage the reader.
- Limit use of jargon, technical, or scientific language.
- Write in active voice.
- Keep messages short.
- Write in a friendly but professional tone.
- Choose words with one definition or connotation.
- Use measurements that are familiar to your audience.
- Choose familiar terms, and use them consistently.
- Use acronyms with caution.
- Use numbers when they help you make your point.
- Consider using alternatives to words expressing mathematical concepts, such as *risk*, *normal*, and *range*, if those words do not have meaning to your audience.

## Examples of Plain Writing to Promote Health Literacy

### **Quickly engage the reader, and tell them what to do (don't be ambiguous)**

- Give the most important information first.
- Tell what actions to take in clear, easy-to-understand language.
- Explain why the action is important.
- Use concrete nouns (things you can see, hear, smell, taste or touch).

#### ***Example of a clear message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Always wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Food can carry germs that might make you and your family sick.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Gifts from your kids like a yummy mud-pie, a timid turtle, and a dandelion bouquet are cute, but they all have germs. That's why it's important to wash your hands before preparing dinner.

***Example of an action message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Follow these rules to avoid getting sick from food:

Cook meat until it is not pink in the middle.

Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds after touching raw meat.

Wash fresh fruit and vegetables completely before you eat them.

Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Following safety precautions can reduce food-borne disease transmission.

 **Limit use of jargon, technical, or scientific language**

Unless you are communicating with experts in the subject, avoid using jargon and technical language as much as possible. If technical information is essential to help the audience understand the action steps, define the terms first and explain them in everyday language your readers will understand.

***Examples of alternatives to scientific language***

GOOD EXAMPLE: high blood pressure

WEAK EXAMPLE: hypertension

GOOD EXAMPLE: birth control

WEAK EXAMPLE: contraception

 **Write in active voice**

In active voice sentences, the subject is doing the action of the verb. Active voice sentences are often easier to understand.

***Example of a message written in active voice***

GOOD EXAMPLE: The nurse took a sample of the patient's blood.

WEAK EXAMPLE: A sample of the patient's blood was taken by the nurse.

### **Keep messages short**

Use words with one or two syllables when you can.

#### ***Example of a short message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Stress is normal. It's a mental or physical reaction to problems people have in their lives.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Stress is a prevalent psychological and physical consequence of the ever-increasing demands of life.

### **Write in a friendly but professional tone**

A conversational style is easier to understand. Use personal pronouns as often as possible.

#### ***Example of a conversational style with personal pronouns (you)***

GOOD EXAMPLE: You could get sick if you are near the chemical.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Exposure to the chemical could cause adverse health effects.

### **Choose words with one definition or connotation**

People with limited literacy skills might not be able to figure out the meaning of ambiguous words.

#### ***Example of a message using words with only one meaning***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Workers who earn less money are less likely to seek medical help when they feel sick.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Poor workers are less likely to seek medical help when they feel sick.

*"Poor workers" could mean workers with poor performance or workers with limited income.*

 **Use measurements that are familiar to your audience**

Consider using a comparison if a measurement is not familiar.

***Example of using a comparison in a message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Feel for lumps about the size of a pea.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Feel for lumps about 5 to 6 millimeters in diameter.

 **Choose familiar terms, and use them consistently**

Pick the most familiar words and use them throughout your text.

***Example of consistent word use***

GOOD EXAMPLE: “Mad Cow Disease,” which captured public attention in the 1990s, is a disease of the nerves that affects the brain and spinal cord of cattle.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Mad Cow Disease captured public attention in the 1990s. Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis is a neurological disease that affects the brain and spinal cord of cattle.

 **Use acronyms with caution**

- Provide the term before the acronym.
- Define all terms, even those you believe might be obvious to the reader.
- Avoid beginning a sentence with an acronym.
- Do not spell out familiar acronyms, such as HIV or AIDS.
- Omit the article “the” when referring to CDC or when the acronym is pronounced as a word.

***Example of messaging with acronyms***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Breathing smoke from someone else’s cigarette or pipe (secondhand smoke) can cause sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

WEAK EXAMPLE: Breathing secondhand smoke is a known cause of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

 **Use numbers when they help you make your point**

It is clearer to write “3 in 4 people” rather than “75% of people.” However, because of character limitations (and to make the message stand out), it’s okay to use % rather than “percent” and to use numbers rather than spelling them out in letters when creating social media messages.

***Example of message using statistics***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Researchers found that 90% of Americans believe the possible harm from vaccines is very small.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Researchers found that 90 percent of Americans believe the risk from vaccines is very small.

 **Consider using alternatives to words expressing mathematical concepts, such as *risk*, *normal*, and *range*, if those words do not have meaning to your audience**

If possible, use words such as “chance” or “possibility” instead.

***Example of an alternative to a mathematical message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Most Americans believe the chance that something bad can happen to them after getting a vaccine is small.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Most Americans believe there are very few risks associated with vaccines.

## Use the Tools of Social Marketing in Your Communications

Take a look at these sentences. What do the **bold** words have in common?

**Fasten** your seat belt. **Eat** more fruit.

**Pull over** to use your cell phone.

**Don't** litter. **Get** a mammogram.

**Talk** to your doctor.

These action words (verbs) are behaviors that promote health. Social marketing is the use of marketing principles to influence human behavior to improve health or benefit society. Social marketing is about identifying the specific target audience segment(s), describing the benefits, and creating interventions that will influence or support the desired behavior change.

Social marketing planning requires understanding and incorporating the "The Four Ps of Marketing" (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) into program planning. Social marketing looks at providing health services from the viewpoint of the consumer. Research can help to describe what an audience is now doing or thinking, which will help shape realistic goals for behavior change.

Below are some guidelines for incorporating social marketing into your communications.

- Highlight the positive aspects of your health message.
- Answer the audience's question, "What's in it for me?"
- Respect your audience.
- Encourage your readers to take a particular action or to learn more.
- Tie messages to specific products or services when possible (such as "Find out where to get tested" or "Know your status").



### **Highlight the positive**

Tell your audience what they should do rather than what they should not do.

#### ***Example of a positive message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Wear your helmet every time you ride your bicycle.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Do not ride your bicycle without wearing a helmet.

 **Answer the question “What’s in it for me?”**

Tell your audience how your message will benefit them.

***Example of a benefit-driven message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Learn ways to have a healthy pregnancy and how to prevent possible complications.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Pregnancy can have all sorts of complications that range from routine to fatal.

 **Respect your audience**

Don’t talk down or preach. People are less likely to act on information if you make them feel bad about their current behavior or health situation.

***Example of a respectful message***

GOOD MESSAGE: Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is a condition that occurs when a baby is exposed to alcohol during pregnancy.

WEAK MESSAGE: Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) occurs when the mother consumes too much alcohol during pregnancy.

 **Encourage your readers**

Emphasize small, practical steps. Offer concrete examples of successful action steps.

***Example of an encouraging message***

GOOD EXAMPLE: You can live a healthy, tobacco-free life. The first step is deciding to quit. Set a quit date and mark it on your calendar.

WEAK EXAMPLE: People who use tobacco are more likely to develop disease and die earlier than people who don’t use tobacco. Quit today.

 **Tie messages to specific products or services**

Give specific directions or links to services that allow people to personalize their search or get information that will be useful for them.

***Example of a message that specifies a personalized service***

GOOD EXAMPLE: Get Tested for HIV. Visit [XXXXXX@yyy.Gov](#) or contact your local health department to find the testing site nearest you.

WEAK EXAMPLE: Everyone should get tested for HIV. Your state health department or CDC can help you get started.

# Chapter 3: Principles of Effective Social Media Writing

## Creating Content

It's easy to get wrapped up in the technology when talking about social media, but flashy tools alone won't make a campaign effective—good content does. Social media content should be

- Relevant, useful, and interesting
- Easy to understand and share
- Friendly, conversational, and engaging
- Action-oriented

Social media is most effective when the content relates to a particular interest or desire of a specific group of people. Because your target audience can receive multiple messages from multiple sources every day, try to make your messages *relevant*, *useful*, and *interesting* so your audience will interact and be engaged.

### Relevant

Relevant social media content makes people think “This matters to me.” Relevant information can be based on

- Time
- Geography
- Audience
- Interests

### Useful

When people can use social media information to see their lives in new ways, change behavior, or learn something they didn't know before, it's useful. Make information useful by suggesting practical steps or citing convincing statistics or report findings.

### Interesting

To capture a reader's attention, create content that piques curiosity. Interesting social media content is more likely to be shared. Of course, content should always be professional and relevant to a health topic.

## Examples of Relevant, Useful, and Interesting Messages

### Messages that are relevant by time

#### *Example of a time-relevant Facebook post*



CDC

Celebrate this 4th of July by declaring freedom from nicotine addiction. Learn how today's cigarettes are even more addictive and how you or a loved one can quit.



CDC – Tobacco Control Events Calendar – July – Declare Your Independence – Smoking & Tobacco Use  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Independence Day theme related to the damaging health effects of smoking and secondhand smoke.

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

---

#### *Example of a time-relevant tweet*



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

School's out for summer! Read tips on how to keep kids healthy and safe. <http://example.gov/xyz>

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

---

#### *Example of a time-relevant text message*

CDC: This 4th of July, celebrate your freedom from tobacco. To get tips on how to quit, reply ICANQUIT

## Messages that are relevant by geography

### *Example of geography-relevant Facebook post*



CDC

XYZ continues to monitor an outbreak of XYZ infections going on in Europe. For updates and resources, subscribe to Dr. Joe Smith's blog. <http://XYZhealth.gov/drjoe>

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

---

### *Example of geography-relevant tweet*



@CDC\_XYZProgram

25 states ban smoking in public places. See if your state—and lungs—are protected. Visit: <http://example.gov/xyz>

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

---

### *Example of geography-relevant text message*

CDC: Red River flooding expected (in ND and MN). During flood warning, gather emergency supplies, turn off electricity/gas & stay tuned for local updates. CDC 800-232-4636

## Messages that are relevant by audience

### *Example of audience-relevant Facebook post*



CDC

Learn how to protect your baby. More children have disabilities due to a congenital CMV infection than many other conditions. Pregnant women, follow these simple tips to reduce your risk of getting a CMV infection. <http://example.gov/cmV>

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

---

### *Example of audience-relevant tweet*



@CDC\_XYZProgram

#Disability is not inability. Take it from the famous physicist Prof. Stephen Hawking. Watch the interview: <http://XYZhealth.gov/blog>

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

---

### *Example of audience-relevant text message*

CDC: Thinking about having a baby? Take folic acid daily before & during pregnancy to help prevent brain & spinal cord defects in baby. More: <http://m.cdc.gov/folic>

## Messages that are relevant by specific interests

### *Example of specific-interest-relevant Facebook post*



CDC

Now open at the XYZ health museum! Malaria: Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Photographer Douglas Parker uses a variety of media to demonstrate the global effect of malaria. Schedule your visit today: <http://XYZhealth.gov/museum>.

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

---

### *Example of specific-interest-relevant tweet*



@CDC\_XYZProgram

Gardeners - spring has sprung! Stay healthy and safe in the garden by following these tips: <http://example.gov/garden>

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

---

### *Example of specific-interest-relevant text message*

CDC: Ready for the big game but not the weight gain? Learn how to control what you eat while watching TV. Reply HEALTHYSNACKS to learn more.

## Messages that are relevant by their usefulness

### *Example of useful Facebook post*



CDC

An XYZ health study shows a decline in spina bifida. Why? An increased folic acid intake from taking vitamins and eating foods with folic acid is a likely contributor. Learn more about spina bifida:

<http://XYZhealth.gov/sb>

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

---

### *Example of useful tweet*



@CDC\_XYZProgram

10 reasons why fast weight loss is not healthy:

<http://XYZhealth.gov/wl>

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

---

### *Example of useful text message*

CDC: Be safe this winter. Use a helmet while skiing on the slopes. Think you have a concussion? Don't hide it, see a doctor. For concussion signs, reply HEAD.

## Messages that are relevant by their general interest

### *Example of a generally interesting Facebook post*



CDC

What do Zombies and Hurricanes have in common? Emergency preparedness. CDC and the XYZ emergency agency are busy preparing. Learn how you can, too! Hurricane season starts June 1.



**Public Health Matters Blog – First there were Zombies; then came Hurricanes!**  
blogs.cdc.gov

First there were Zombies; then came Hurricanes!

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

---

### *Example of a generally interesting tweet*



@CDC\_XYZProgram

Squinting to read this tweet? Schedule an Eye Exam Today. Learn about keeping your eyes healthy: <http://example.gov/eyes>

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

---

### *Example of a generally interesting text message*

CDC: Cooking turkey this Thanksgiving? Test your turkey knowledge with this quick quiz. Reply TURKEY to start.

## Easy to understand and share

In social media channels, your message competes fiercely with others for your readers' attention. That is why it's important to use plain language and craft your message so the information you present is easy to understand. Also, consider how easy your message is to share or "like" on Facebook or "retweet" on Twitter. If users must modify your message to share it, they might get frustrated and quit or change the message so it's not as accurate as the original.

Here are some ways to ensure your messages are easy to understand and share:

- Put relevant, intriguing information at the beginning of your post. Can you ask a question?
- Use fewer characters than allowed to make sharing easy.
- Keep messages short but relevant.
- Test your message on a cold reader. Could someone "get it" in less than 2 seconds?
- Provide enough context so your message can stand alone.

## Example of an easy-to-share message

### GOOD EXAMPLE:

10 tips for keeping your independence when suffering from memory loss, Alzheimer's, or dementia: [go.usa.gov/XYZ](http://go.usa.gov/XYZ)

*(At 111 characters, this message provides room for RT—retweet—or a hashtag or @ mention.)*

### WEAK EXAMPLE:

We're offering you 10 practical tips for keeping your independence when you suffer from memory loss, Alzheimer's, or dementia [go.usa.gov/XYZ](http://go.usa.gov/XYZ)

*(At 140 characters, this message should be edited for conciseness to be shared on Twitter.)*

## **Friendly, conversational, engaging**

It's no surprise that social media is, well, social! Social media content generally has a more informal tone than other communications. That's not to say social media messages are not also professional. Here are some ways to help you achieve a balanced, conversational tone.

- Use contractions (can't, don't, haven't).
- Write in first or second person (I, we, you).
- Avoid colloquial language (y'all, ain't, you guys).
- Avoid trendy abbreviations (UR for "you are").

## **Example of a friendly tone**

### GOOD EXAMPLE:

Thanks to our followers, new and old. You are one of the 100,000 followers who are using our info to make healthier lifestyle decisions. Thanks for coming back and letting us know what we can do better.

### WEAK EXAMPLE:

CDC has reached the 100,000 follower milestone. With 100,000 fans, CDC is reaching more people to help them make healthier lifestyle decisions.

## Action-Oriented

You can use social media tools to help build awareness and direct readers to take action or find more information. Social media messages should have a call to action, urging people to take the next step. Here are some ways to make your messages action-oriented:

- Use action verbs such as “learn,” “watch,” or “join.”
- Include links to Web content that offer more detail or supply a phone number or e-mail address, but not e-mail addresses for individuals.
- Use ALL CAPS sparingly, for emphasis only.

### Example of an action-oriented message

GOOD EXAMPLE:

Help ease itching from mosquito bites: wash the bitten area, rub gently with ice, or apply anti-itch cream.

WEAK EXAMPLE:

When bitten by a mosquito, washing the area can be helpful. Also using an ice cube or itch cream to put on the bite might also help ease the itch

# Chapter 4: How to Write for Facebook

Facebook is the largest and one of the most prominent social networking applications today. At the time of this writing (Fall 2011), Facebook claims 700 million active users, half of whom log into Facebook on any given day. For current statistics, visit Facebook's statistic page at <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>.

## Profiles and Pages

Facebook is structured with two different audiences in mind. 1) Individuals have profiles where they upload status updates, pictures, videos, and links for others to view. Individuals grow their networks by adding friends or liking pages. 2) Public-facing organizations, such as nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government agencies like CDC, have special profiles designed for the public. These two Facebook audiences can update their pages with new posts that display in the “news feed,” which is the main page a user sees after logging in.

For more information, read CDC's “Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices – Facebook” (PDF) at <http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/FacebookGuidelines.pdf>.

To see what other agencies are doing, go to Government on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/government>.

## Best Practices for Writing CDC Facebook Posts

### Length

Facebook offers more space to create content than Twitter or text messages. Each Facebook post can be a maximum of 420 characters plus a link. However, a shorter length is recommended; CDC recommends that Facebook posts be 250 characters (or shorter) to allow the post to be viewed completely in the newsfeed.

### Content

All posts written for Facebook should use consumer-friendly, action-oriented messaging. The posts should be interesting and compelling and include a specific call to action. Posts should include one link to a Web page, photo, or captioned video.

### Tone

Because Facebook is a platform for people to share what's going on in their lives, the tone is naturally casual but professional. Use a consumer-friendly voice when crafting your messages. If your post is directed toward lay people, avoid or define jargon.

## Tagging

The next time you're typing a public health partner's name in your post, add the @ symbol in front of it. This will trigger the tagging feature in Facebook, automatically creating a link and displaying the post on the partner's page. Encourage partners to tag CDC, too.

### ***Example of CDC NPIN's Facebook post that includes a tagged partner: @SAMHSA***



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the page 'CDC NPIN', which is identified as a Government Organization in Atlanta, Georgia. The post features a banner with logos for SAMHSA and National HIV Testing Day (June 27). The main content of the post is a text update: 'Twitter Chat (#NHTDchat) with Gretchen Stiers, PhD, HIV/AIDS Policy Lead, Office of Policy, Program and Innovation, Substance Abuse'. The text continues: 'Twitter Chat (#NHTDchat) with Gretchen Stiers, PhD, HIV/AIDS Policy Lead, Office of Policy, Program and Innovation, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (@SAMHSA) Mental Health, Substance Abuse and HIV Friday, June 24, 2011 ...'. The post was made '2 hours ago' and includes a 'Share' button.

### ***CDC NPIN's Facebook post appeared on the SAMHSA's wall***



The screenshot shows the Facebook wall of the page 'SAMHSA', identified as a Government Organization in Rockville, Maryland. The wall displays the same post from CDC NPIN as seen in the previous screenshot. The text of the post is: 'Twitter Chat (#NHTDchat) with Gretchen Stiers, PhD, HIV/AIDS Policy Lead, Office of Policy, Program and Innovation, Substance Abuse'. The text continues: 'Twitter Chat (#NHTDchat) with Gretchen Stiers, PhD, HIV/AIDS Policy Lead, Office of Policy, Program and Innovation, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (@SAMHSA) Mental Health, Substance Abuse and HIV Friday, June 24, 2011 ...'. The post was made '2 hours ago' and includes a 'Share' button.

# Sample CDC Facebook Posts

## Facebook Post–Sample 1



CDC

Walking is good for your health and the environment too. Stay safe while you walk: In the next 2 hours, 27 pedestrians will be injured in a traffic crash, and 1 pedestrian will die of those injuries. Read tips for how to stay safe while walking about town.



[Walk This Way! Taking Steps for Pedestrian Safety  
www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

This Facebook post demonstrates how writing short, consumer-focused messages can better reach a social media audience:

- The message is brief and practical (“...Read tips for how to stay safe...”).
- The message integrates data in a natural and meaningful way (“... in the next 2 hours, 27 pedestrians will be injured...”).

---

## Facebook Post–Sample 2



CDC

Clostridium perfringens (C. perfringens) is one of the most common causes of food poisoning in the U.S. Anyone can get food poisoning from C. perfringens. Learn how to prevent getting sick from this germ.



[Tips to Prevent Illness from Clostridium Perfringens  
www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

This Facebook post is effective because it

- Explains the scientific term Clostridium perfringens by referring to it as a germ and identifying what it causes (food poisoning).
- Provides a call to action (“...Learn how to prevent getting sick...”).

### Facebook Post – Sample 3



CDC

If you are HIV positive and unaware of your infection—what you don't know CAN hurt you—and others. People who don't know they are HIV infected can give the virus to others and cannot access life-extending treatment. Take the test. Take control. Find a testing site at <http://www.hivtest.org/> or text your ZIP code to KnowIt (566948).



[Get Tested on National HIV Testing Day, June 27  
www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

This Facebook post is effective because it

- Uses emphatic, engaging language (“...Take the test. Take control ...”).
- Offers readers two ways to take action (find a testing site or text your ZIP code).
- Includes a link to the CDC website.

# Chapter 5: How to Write for Twitter

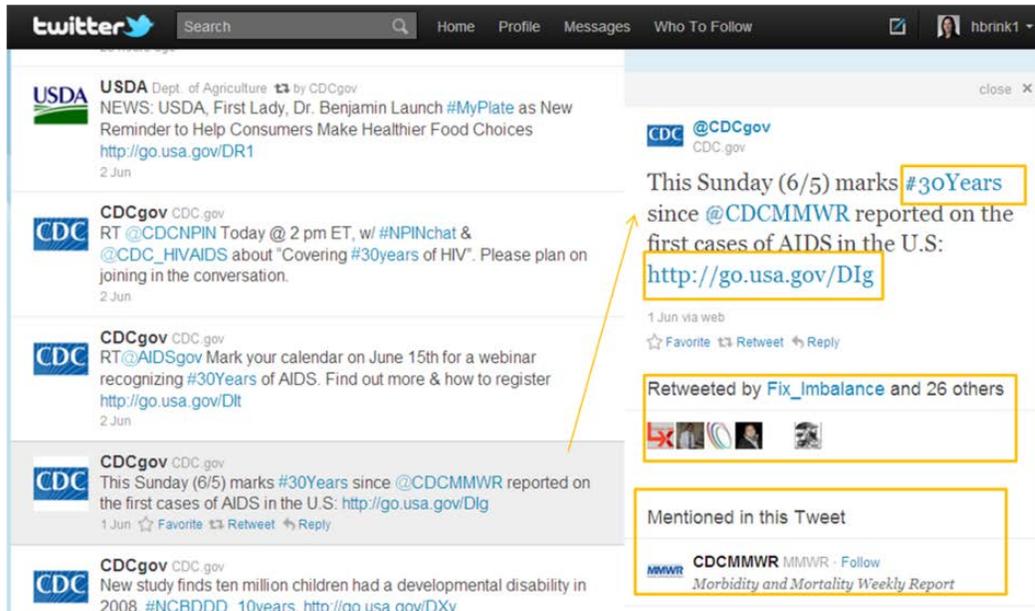
What can be expressed in 140 characters or less? More than you would expect. Twitter has grown to become the largest “micro-blogging” platform, with a reported 200 million registered users as of June 2011. Twitter helps CDC share health and safety information and promote events in real time.

## Twitter Syntax

The Twitter community has created its own short-form syntax. When communicating on Twitter, you’ll need to know several essential terms:

- **Message (or tweet):** Messages are composed of up to 140 characters of text or links.
- **Username (or handle):** Twitter users identify themselves by their username or “handle.” CDC has several usernames, including @CDCgov, @CDC\_eHealth, and @CDCespanol.
- **Retweet:** If a tweet (or message) from another Twitter user is relevant, the retweet function allows you to forward their message to your network.
- **Mention:** Twitter enables users to automatically link to each other by putting the @ symbol in front of the username in a message.
- **Hashtag:** Similar to a mention, a hashtag is created automatically when you put the # symbol before a word. Using a hashtag enables other people to join in a larger conversation on a topic or find information quickly.

## Anatomy of a Tweet



The yellow boxes on this screenshot of a tweet by @CDCgov show

- A hashtag (#30Years).
- A mention of another CDC profile (@CDCMMWR).
- A shortened URL (<http://go.usa.gov/DIg>).
- A list of Twitter users who retweeted this CDC tweet.

For more information, read CDC’s “Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices—CDC Microblogs (Twitter)” (PDF) at <http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/microblogging.pdf>.

For information on Twitter terms, visit The Twitter Glossary at <http://support.twitter.com/entries/166337-the-twitter-glossary>.

## Best Practices for Writing CDC Tweets

### Length

Although Tweets can be up to 140 characters (including spaces and punctuation), CDC recommends that tweets be less than that to allow for other text to be added when the tweet is retweeted. Keep tweets to 120 characters or less including a shortened URL (around 20 characters). This leaves about 100 characters for your message. Writing tweets of 120 characters or less makes it easier for followers to retweet your message without having to edit it to make it briefer. To calculate the number of characters in a draft tweet, use the character counting tool in Microsoft Word.

## Abbreviations

Try to write concise tweets that don't require abbreviations. Sometimes, because of the character limit, abbreviations are necessary. Only use standard abbreviations that are easily understood, and do not change the clarity of the message. Some appropriate abbreviations follow:

- US for United States
- Info for information
- & for and
- 1PM for 1 p.m.
- **IMPT** for important

Limit abbreviations to commonly recognized abbreviations such as those listed above and avoid "text speak." Research and message testing indicate that CDC audiences had a strong negative reaction to abbreviations in messages that were not seen as professional.

**It's best to avoid abbreviations such as:**

- 2 for to
- 4 for for
- U for you
- UR for your

## Hyperlinks

Tweets should include a hyperlink back to CDC.gov or a trusted partner website. In a tweet, the link is typically shortened before posting; if full links are being used, be sure to include the "http://" in front of the URL to make it clickable within the tweet.

## Tone

As with all social media, messages crafted for Twitter should be reader-friendly and action-oriented. Ask a question, highlight a key statistic, or provide a specific call to action.

## Sample CDC Tweets:

*Tweet–Sample 1*



@CDCemergency

After a [#tornado](#) or other disaster, flood water may contain sewage. Protect yourself & your family by these steps: <http://go.usa.gov/b9A>

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

This tweet is effective because it

- Includes a hyperlink (steps to protect yourself from contaminated flood water).
- Includes a hashtag so followers can see what others are tweeting on the topic (tornado).
- Uses a familiar symbol (&) to shorten the message.

---

*Tweet–Sample 2*



@CDCgov

On June 27, National HIV Testing Day, take control of your health and get tested for HIV. <http://go.usa.gov/WJG>

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

This tweet is effective because it

- Uses an action-oriented and reader-friendly tone (“...take control of your health ...”).
- Is specific and timely.

---

*Tweet–Sample 3*



@CDCFlu

RT@CDCgov The #CDCFluAppChallenge is now open! Support, share with a friend, or enter to win \$35,000 in prizes. <http://fluapp.challenge.gov>

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

This tweet is effective because it

- Promotes an opportunity for followers (develop an app and win a prize).
- Retweets a message from another CDC program (RT@CDCgov).
- Uses action words to build motivation-oriented and reader-friendly tone (“... Support, share with a friend, or enter to win...”).

# Chapter 6: How to Write Text Messages

Just as Facebook and Twitter can help an agency expand its reach, mobile technologies can provide new ways to communicate with audiences and give users new ways to interact with content. Currently, 98% of cell phones can send and receive text messages. With more than 292 million Americans (or 93% of the U.S. population) owning mobile devices, mobile communication is helping to close the digital divide.

## Best Practices for Writing CDC Text Messages

### Length

Text messages should be less than 160 characters, including spaces and punctuation. As a general guide, CDC recommends writing messages that are around 140 characters because the branding links, and information about how to get help or opt-out will typically consume the rest of the character count.

### Abbreviations

Because text messages are limited to 160 characters, abbreviations are often used. However, use abbreviations only if they are easily understood and do not change the meaning of the message. Some appropriate abbreviations include

- **US** for United States
- **Info** for information
- **&** for and
- **1PM** for 1 p.m.
- **IMPT** for important
- **Msg** for message
- **Rply** for reply
- **Emg for emergency**

Limit abbreviations to commonly recognized abbreviations such as those listed above and avoid “text speak.” Research and message testing indicate that CDC audiences had a strong negative reaction to abbreviations in text messages that were not seen as professional. **It’s best to avoid abbreviations such as**

- 2 for to
- 4 for for
- U for you
- UR for your

## Message Components

- **Action-oriented:** Invite readers to do something or suggest actions they can take. Subscribers to CDC’s text messaging program reported that the most effective messages were both actionable and relevant.
- **Customized content:** Tailor text messages based on the characteristics of subscribers. To better segment users, CDC asks users to provide some information about themselves when they sign up. The questions, which are optional, help CDC tailor content by a subscriber’s role, age, gender, health condition, or ZIP code.
- **Timely:** Develop messages that are tied to a season, observance day, or current event.
- **Strong start:** Write text messages that have an interesting lead or a catchy beginning to entice the reader to open and read.
- **Branded:** Because users will receive a message from your short code (i.e., 87000), the first word or two of your message should identify the sender. Each message from CDC begins with “CDC:” so users can easily determine who sent the text.
- **Access to more information:** Text messages should include a way for users to follow-up or respond to the message, such as a phone number or URL to a mobile website. All phone numbers should be numerical and formatted, so users can click-to-call the number automatically from their cell phones. For example, do NOT use the number 1-800-CDC-INFO. Use 800-232-4636.
- **Opt-out and help instructions:** Ensure that users can easily opt out of your campaign by replying STOP or QUIT. Also, provide a help message to users who reply HELP. Talk with your service provider to ensure that messages comply with regulations for opting out of a program.

For more information on CDC’s text messaging guidelines, read “Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices – Text Messaging” (PDF) at <http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/textmessages.pdf>.

## Sample CDC Text Messages

### *Text Message–Sample 1*

CDC: Get your kids moving this summer! Try swimming, hiking, baseball, soccer, walking, running, etc. Find fun ways to be active 60 min a day. 800-232-4636

This text message is effective because it

- Is branded (CDC).
- Allows access to more information (includes a phone number).
- Is specific and action-oriented (suggests sports activities and a specific amount of time to spend per day).

### *Text Message–Sample 2*

CDC: Ready for the big game but not the weight gain? Control portions when eating in front of TV. Put snacks in small bowl & resist eating from bag. 800-232-4636

This text message is effective because it

- Starts strong. (The opening question is personal and casual.)
- Offers access to more information (by phone).
- Is timely (football season).

### *Text Messages–Samples 3 and 4*

CDC: Be prepared on & off the ice/slopes. Wear a helmet & protective gear. Think you have a concussion? Don't hide it, report it. For concussion signs reply HEAD.

CDC: About 1 in 110 kids have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Monitor your child's development & act early if there is a delay. More: <http://m.cdc.gov/milestones>

These text messages are effective because they

- Offer access to more information (by reply and by hyperlink to a specific page).
- Start strong.

Here are examples of other messages you can use to add some variety to the document:

- CDC: Put vaccines on your back-to-school checklist. Make sure kids have the protection they need. Learn more: <http://m.cdc.gov/school>
- CDC: Test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detector when you turn your clocks back on Nov 1; replace batteries if needed. 800-232-4636.

- CDC: Ready for winter? Prevent frost bite by dressing warmly. Pack an emg. kit in your car and stock up on supplies for your home in case of power outages.
- CDC: Buckle up! Keep babies rear-facing til 1yr & 20lbs. Front-facing seats til 4yrs & 40lbs. Kids 4-8 or 4'9" in boosters. All kids <13 in backseat. [m.cdc.gov/belt](http://m.cdc.gov/belt)
- CDC: Happy Earth Day! It's easy to be green. Walk, bike, carpool to work. Use recycled paper. Plant a tree or garden at home. More tips: <http://m.cdc.gov/green>
- CDC: Do you smoke? Smoking causes about 1 of every 5 deaths each year in the U.S. That's about 443,000 people. Quit now: call 800-784-8669.
- CDC: Protect your skin when having fun outdoors! Use sunscreen, wear hats/sunglasses, find shade during peak hrs (10-4) when UV rays are strongest. 800-232-4636
- CDC: Hiking outdoors? Avoid wild animals to prevent rabies. Report animals acting strangely (drooling, biting, trouble moving) to animal control. 800-232-4636

# Chapter 7: How to Use Your Web Content as Source Material for Social Media Content

Writing for social media can be a demanding task. One way to cope is to tweet, post, and text about Web content you've already created.

## Make Social Media Writing Easier by Repurposing Web Content

Any kind of Web content can provide the source material for a tweet, Facebook post, or text message, including

- News articles
- Fact sheets
- FAQs
- Outbreak notices
- Research reports
- Event or conference content
- Guidelines

Repurposing Web content for social media communication is efficient, because this content has been developed, edited, and cleared through the appropriate channels. Use social media to promote Web content or start a conversation with community members who have joined your social media channels.

## Plan to Rewrite Your Web Content for Use in Social Media

It's a good idea to use Web content as *source* material for social media communication, but it's not a good idea to use the Web content verbatim as tweets, posts, or texts. Rework the Web content to make it engaging and brief enough to be successful social media writing.

### Allow time to rewrite these elements of Web content, so they'll work in social media

- **Main heading for the Web page.** What works on a Web page probably won't work in a tweet, post, or text. On a Web page, the heading helps orient readers and tells them what the page is about. If your social media message is intended to send readers to the Web page, it should be more message-oriented than most Web page headings. It might have to be shorter or longer than the heading.

For example, the Web page heading [Fall Risks for Older Adults](#) does not make a good tweet, post, or text without some rewriting.

- **Title of a news article.** Most news article titles do a good job of explaining what happened and when. Many titles forecast why you should care. A title of an e-newsletter article such as “[Teens Develop Job Safety and Health Awareness Posters](#)” will require some rewriting before it’s suitably engaging for social media.
- **Title of a research report.** Authors of research reports often give their documents neutral, factual titles. But, readers of CDC’s social media content will want to know why they should click through the link in the tweet, post, or text to read a report online. If, for example, you want to use social media to promote the research report [Recent Decline in Births in the United States, 2007–2009](#), you’ll probably want to highlight some reasons for the decline in births in your social media message.

Type of Web Content	Ideas for Creating Tweets, Posts, or Texts Based on Web Content
Features	Features that appear on CDC’s homepage are a great place to find topics and content that can be repurposed for Facebook, Twitter, and text messages. Visit <a href="#">CDC Features</a> to find a catalog of current and past features.
News articles	Repurpose news article content for social media by using elements of the article as material for tweets, posts, and texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lead</li> <li>• Quotable quotes</li> <li>• Photos and other graphics</li> </ul>
Fact sheets	Fact sheets are good sources for content that can be repurposed for social media messaging: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announce a new fact sheet.</li> <li>• Communicate about an already-published fact sheet that’s relevant because of the season or an event. For example, tweet about the <a href="#">Teen Drivers: Fact Sheet</a> (October 2010) in the pre-prom season of late April/early May.</li> </ul>
FAQs	Use a question as a tweet, post, or text.
Outbreak, notices, travel notices, or health advisories	The information in notices and advisories is urgent, timely, and rapidly changing, thus ideal for social media. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announce an outbreak, travel notice, or health advisory.</li> </ul>

	<p>For example, use social media to share information about the health advisory <a href="#">High Number of Reported Measles Cases in the U.S. in 2011—Linked to Outbreaks Abroad</a>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announce the end of an outbreak or restriction.</li> </ul>
Research reports	<p>Review published research reports for social media-worthy content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An interesting "Did you know?" fact.</li> <li>• A research finding that comes with strong recommendations. For example, revisit a report such as <a href="#">Human Rabies Prevention—United States, 2008</a> to feature the recommendation that people exposed to but not bitten by bats should receive rabies treatment.</li> </ul>
Event or conference content	<p>Collect event-related information for social media uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feature individual speakers or topics before the conference.</li> <li>• Collect and tweet interesting quotes from presenters during the event.</li> <li>• Share photos or presentations after the event.</li> </ul>
Guidelines	<p>Use social media to increase awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let people know about guidelines, such as <a href="#">Physical Activity Guidelines</a> for older adults.</li> <li>• Feature an individual guideline, one that has recently changed or one that is an old standard.</li> <li>• Compare guidelines for different groups of people. For example, tweet, post, or text about how the physical activity guidelines recommend 60 minutes of aerobic activity per day for children and 150 minutes per week for older adults.</li> </ul>

# Chapter 8: Hands-On Practice in Revising Social Media Content

In this Guide, you’ve read lots of advice about writing for social media. Now it’s your turn to give it a try. Each of the draft posts, tweets, and texts in this chapter needs to be rewritten to be more engaging, concise, or action-oriented. (These aren’t real CDC social media messages; they have been invented or altered for this practice chapter.)

When you’re done revising the text, compare your writing to the revised versions in this chapter.

## Improve These Draft Facebook Posts

### Too Much Scientific Jargon



CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Prevent squamous cell carcinomas by seeking midday shade, avoiding tanning booths, wearing sunscreen every day, and wearing protective clothing. While many squamous cell carcinomas can be treated with simple excision or Mohs surgery, sun-cautious behavior can prevent them before they begin.

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

Your revision:

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## Flat, Lifeless Writing



CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Has anyone ever told you that your heart stops when you sneeze? Is this true or false? Let us know what you think here. Then learn more. Read our [Fun Medical Facts for Kids](#).

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

Your revision:

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## Improve These Draft Tweets

### Too Long

*(At 140 characters, this tweet is too long. It needs to be cut to 120 characters, which includes an allowance of up to 20 characters for a shortened URL.)*



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Waterproof sunscreen lasts twice as long as water-repellent, but both kinds need to be reapplied if you use a towel to dry off after a swim.

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

Your revision:

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## Impersonal Tone



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Good Food 4Baby, an online program, teaches mothers how to feed toddlers a healthy diet so they maintain a healthy weight.  
go.usa.gov/XYZ

 Favorite  Retweet  Reply

Your revision:

---

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## Improve These Draft Text Messages

### No Call to Action

High Blood Pressure—Almost 75M Americans (about 1 in 3 adults) have high blood pressure (HBP) & greater risk of heart disease or stroke. Many people don't realize they have it!

Your revision:

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### Flat, Lifeless Writing

Plan for pet safety in an emergency. Pack supply kit with items they'll need. Ask relatives in advance if they can care for your pets. 800-123-4567

Your revision:

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## Improved Facebook Posts

### Before: Too Much Scientific Jargon



CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Prevent squamous cell carcinomas by seeking midday shade, avoiding tanning booths, wearing sunscreen every day, and wearing protective clothing. While many squamous cell carcinomas can be treated with simple excision or Mohs surgery, sun-cautious behavior can prevent them before they begin.

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

### After: Plain language



CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Prevent skin cancer before it starts by seeking shade in the middle of the day, when the sun is at its peak. Wear sunscreen every day and avoid tanning booths. While many skin cancers can be treated with minor surgery, sun-cautious behavior can prevent them before they begin.

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

### Before: Flat, Lifeless Writing



CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Has anyone ever told you that your heart stops when you sneeze? Is this true or false? Let us know what you think here. Then learn more. Read our [Fun Medical Facts for Kids](#).

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

### After: Lively Writing



CDC\_XYZ\_Health

True or False? “Your heart stops when you sneeze.” Share your guess with us (A for myth; B for fact) then check out our [Fun Medical Facts for Kids](#).

 about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Share

## Improved Tweets

### Before: Too Long



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Waterproof sunscreen lasts twice as long as water-repellent, but both kinds need to be reapplied if you use a towel to dry off after a swim.

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

### After: 122 Characters plus URL



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Don't get burned! Reapply all sunscreens (waterproof or water repellent) if you towel off after a swim. [go.usa.gov/XYZ](http://go.usa.gov/XYZ)

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

---

### Before: Impersonal Tone



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Food 4Baby, an online class, teaches mothers how to feed toddlers a healthy diet so they maintain a healthy weight. [go.usa.gov/XYZ](http://go.usa.gov/XYZ)

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

### After: Personal Tone



@CDC\_XYZ\_Health

Moms: Enroll in an online class to learn to feed your toddler a healthy diet & keep baby at a healthy weight. Food 4Baby: [go.usa.gov/XYZ](http://go.usa.gov/XYZ)

☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

## Improved Text Messages

### Before: No Call to Action

High Blood Pressure - Almost 75M Americans (about 1 in 3 adults) have high blood pressure (HBP) & greater risk of heart disease or stroke. Many people don't realize they have it!

### After: A Call to Action

CDC: Be heart healthy-Get your blood pressure checked. Nearly 75M adults have high blood pressure & higher risk of heart disease or stroke. <http://m.cdc.gov/hbp>

OR

CDC: Be heart healthy-Get your blood pressure checked. 1 in 3 adults have higher risk of heart disease/stroke because of high blood pressure. <http://m.cdc.gov/hbp>

### Before: Flat, Lifeless Writing

Plan to keep your pets safe in an emergency. Pack a supply kit with items they'll need. Contact relatives in advance to ask if they can care for your pets. XYZ Health 800-123-4567

### After: Lively Writing

CDC: Do you have an emergency plan for your pet? Pack food, leash & vet records. Find kennel/relative who will care for your pet while you are away. 800-123-4567

# Chapter 9: Checklist for Writing for Social Media

All Social Media	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clearance:</b> If you work at CDC or other federal agency or office, you must clear all social media messages through the channels determined by the Health Communication Science Office at your Center, Institute, or Office. Be sure to budget enough time for this clearance review.</li> </ul>
Facebook	
	1. <b>Length:</b> Posts can be up to 250 characters (including spaces).
	2. <b>Access to more information:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyperlink to a CDC.gov Web page, photo, or video.</li> <li>• Include information available through other social media channels: a shortcode for texts; a hashtag for Twitter.</li> </ul>
	3. <b>Call to action:</b> Invite followers to do something such as watch a video, attend an event, or use CDC resources.
	4. <b>Tone:</b> Write in a friendly, casual style. Avoid jargon.
	5. <b>Tagging:</b> Use the @ symbol in front of a public health partner’s name in your post to automatically create a link and display the post on the partner’s page.
	6. <b>Abbreviations:</b> Avoid abbreviations, but if they’re necessary, use sparingly and only if easily understood.
Twitter	
	1. <b>Length:</b> Tweets should be 120 characters or less, including a shortened URL.
	2. <b>Access to more information:</b> Include a hyperlink to CDC.gov or a partner website, an @ mention, or a hashtag.
	3. <b>Call to action:</b> Start the tweet with a verb if possible: Use watch, read, learn, etc.
	4. <b>Tone:</b> Write in friendly, action-oriented style.

	5. <b>Mentions:</b> Use the @ symbol in front of a public health partner’s name in your post to automatically create a link and display the post on the partner’s profile.
	6. <b>Abbreviations:</b> Avoid abbreviations, but if they’re necessary, use them only if they are easily understood, do not change the meaning of the tweet, and are not immature or unprofessional.
<b>Text Messages</b>	
	1. <b>Length:</b> Keep messages short (fewer than 160 characters), including spaces, punctuation, branding, links, and opt-out instructions.
	2. <b>Access to more information:</b> Include a hyperlink to a mobile-friendly webpage, keyword (that will trigger an additional message), or phone number. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyperlink to a specific mobile webpage; do not use the generic link to the mobile website. Include http:// to ensure the link will be clickable in the text message.</li> <li>• Format phone numbers so recipients can click-to-call their cell phones. For example, use 800-232-4636 not 1-800-CDC-INFO.</li> </ul>
	3. <b>Call to action:</b> Invite users to do something, such as reply to the text using a keyword or quiz, visit a Web page, call a phone number, etc.
	4. <b>Branding:</b> Begin each message with the name of the program.
	5. <b>Abbreviations:</b> Use them only if they are easily understood, do not change the meaning of the message, and are not immature or unprofessional.

# Chapter 10: Glossary

## Facebook Terms

**Comment:** A person’s written response to a post.

**Friend:** A person you have invited to be a “Friend” or a person whose Friend invitation you have accepted. A Friend will be able to see your Page or Profile.

**Like:** Clicking “Like” under a Facebook post indicates that you enjoyed it. Your “Like” is noted beneath the item and posted to your Wall.

**Page:** An organization’s professional presence on Facebook.

**Post:** To write or publish content on an organization’s or individual’s Facebook page. A Post can include images, text, and hypertext links.

**Profile:** An individual’s personal Facebook page, which may contain status updates, photos, videos, a list of friends, and recent activities.

## Twitter Terms

**Direct message or DM:** A private message sent via Twitter between people who follow each other.

**Follow:** To receive an individual’s Twitter updates.

**Hashtag or #:** A way to categorize tweets on a particular topic.

**Mention:** A Twitter update that contains @username anywhere in the body of the Tweet.

**Retweet or RT:** Sharing another user’s tweets with followers.

**Tweet:** An individual Twitter post.

**Twitter Chat:** A discussion around a set topic taking place on Twitter.

## Texting Terms

**Mobile device:** A pocket-sized computing device, such as a cell phone, smart phone, or personal digital assistant (PDA) with a display screen or a miniature keyboard.

**Short code:** A short telephone number, usually five or six digits, which is used to address text messages from a cell phone. Short codes are used for additional wireless services like voting, polling, ordering, and making donations.

**Short message service (SMS):** A service for sending short messages of up to 160 characters to mobile devices, including cell phones, smart phones, and PDAs.

**Smart phone:** A cell phone with an integrated computer and other features not originally associated with telephones, such as an operating system, Web browser, and ability to run software applications.

# Chapter 11: Social Media Writing Resources

## CDC's Social Media and Writing Resources

- CDC Social Media Tools, Guidelines & Best Practices  
<http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines/>
- Health Communicators' Social Media Toolkit (PDF)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit/BM.pdf>
- Simply Put: A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials (PDF)  
[http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply\\_Put.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply_Put.pdf)
- CDC Facebook Comment Policy  
<http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/CommentPolicy.html>

## Federal Agencies' Social Media and Writing Resources

- AIDS.gov: Using New Media—Guidance on audience, social media strategy, text messaging, and Twitter.  
<http://aids.gov/using-new-media/>
- DoD Social Media Hub—Education and training section includes slides, videos, and computer-based training.  
<http://www.defense.gov/socialmedia/>
- HHS Center for New Media—New media tools, standards, policies, and resources. Specific guidance on Facebook and Twitter.  
<http://newmedia.hhs.gov/>
- HowTo.gov's Social Media Content—Types of social media, using social media in government, challenges and contests, open government.  
<http://www.howto.gov/social-media>
- Plain Language Action and Information Network's Federal Plain Language Guidelines

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/index.cfm>

- National Park Service’s “Twitter 101” (PDF)–Picture and video tools, desktop and mobile applications.  
[http://www.nps.gov/fire/download/pub\\_web2\\_twitterinfo.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/fire/download/pub_web2_twitterinfo.pdf)
- The Social Media Navigator: GSA’s Guide to Official Use of Social Media (PDF)– Sections on writing in plain language and a Requirements Checklist When Using Social Media.  
<http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/staffoffices/socialmedianavigator.pdf>
- The “Ultimate” Small Business Guide to Social Media Marketing (SBA)–Guidance and links to business-related articles on using social media.  
<http://community.sba.gov/community/blogs/expert-insight-and-news/small-business-matters/quotultimatequot-small-business-guide-social-media-marketing>
- USA.gov & GobiernoUSA.gov Social Media Guidelines–Making Content Sociable (PDF) –Advice on writing social media content in Spanish and English that is “Easy to understand, Unbiased, Portable, and ‘Lightweight’.”  
[http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/documents/socmed\\_editorial\\_guidelines\\_010411.pdf](http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/documents/socmed_editorial_guidelines_010411.pdf)

## **State Government Social Media and Writing Resources**

- Oregon.gov Social Networking Guide–Advice about writing for Twitter and Facebook plus a social media glossary.  
[http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/EISPD/EGOV/BOARD/social\\_networking\\_guide/index.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/EISPD/EGOV/BOARD/social_networking_guide/index.shtml)

## Other Social Media and Writing Resources

- Idealware’s NonProfit Social Media Decision Guide (PDF)—a 70-page guide that includes a workbook chapter with worksheets: “A Sample Audience Survey,” “Brainstorming Tool Possibilities,” “Deciding Which Channels Are Right for You.”  
[http://www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/Idealware\\_SocialMedia\\_DecisionGuide\\_3.pdf](http://www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/Idealware_SocialMedia_DecisionGuide_3.pdf)
- How to Improve Your Writing for Social Media (In 140 Characters or Less)—Presented in a series of tweets is Rob Wormley’s advice about how to write tweets.  
<http://www.onesocialmedia.com/2011/05/how-to-improve-your-writing-for-social-media-in-140-characters-or-less/>
- *Social Networking Sites and Our Lives*—Report by Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project.  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks.aspx>

# Appendix A: Audience Segmentation

## Audience Information, by Age

### Tweens (9–12 years old)

- Nearly half (46%) of U.S. tweens 9–12 years old have a cell phone. Most get their own cell phone between ages 10 and 11.
- Brands are critically important because tweens seek to fit in with their peers. Most tweens rely on their tremendous brand sense as their indicator of fashion acceptance.
- The Internet is a major part of the tween culture and is a routine part of their lives.
- Tweens multitask, dividing their attention between cell phones, TV, the Internet, and music.

For detailed information on tweens, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to Tweens (Aged 9–12)* at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_tweens.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_tweens.pdf)

### Teens (12–17 years old)

- Peer pressure influences a teen's behavior in positive and negative ways. It can motivate teens to strive for success and seek conformity, or it can impair judgment and increase risky behavior.
- Girls and boys use media differently. Boys watch more television and share videos online, while girls more often blog, e-mail, or use an instant messaging service.
- In 2005, more than 75% of teens sent or received text messages and were more likely to use text messaging than e-mail. In 2011, this percentage is even higher.

For detailed information on teens, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to Teens (Aged 12–17)* at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_teens.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_teens.pdf)

## **Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1962)**

- Baby boomers are rule breakers. Individuality over conformity is a consistent boomer pattern.
- Baby boomers' first impressions are always emotionally based, more durable, and more difficult to reverse than those of younger generations.
- Baby boomers like to tell their stories, and the Internet has facilitated their "get it all out there and share it with the world" tendencies.

For detailed information on boomers, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to Boomers (1946–1962)* at

[http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_boomers.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_boomers.pdf)

## **Responsible Generation (born between 1926 and 1946)**

- At least 55% say they rely on TV to keep them informed and consider TV their main source of entertainment.
- They value discipline, self-denial, and hard work. They demonstrate obedience to authority, commitment, responsibility, and financial/social conformity.
- They generally prefer face-to-face or written communication.

For detailed information on the responsible generation, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to the Responsible Generation (Aged 64–84)* at

[http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_adult.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_adult.pdf)

## Audience Information, by Role

### Family Physicians

- Medical websites and professional journals are highly regarded sources of health-related information for family physicians.
- The need for family physicians in the United States will nearly double by 2020.
- Recent innovations in family medicine practice include group visits, health care teams, and the medical home.

For detailed information on family physicians, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to Family Physicians* at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_FamilyPhysicians.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_FamilyPhysicians.pdf)

### Internists

- Internists conduct 41% of their research on new drugs and medical devices online, and this percentage is expected to increase to more than 50% soon.
- Most (98%) own or use a high-speed Internet connection in their medical office.
- More than 62% report using an electronic mobile device such as an iPhone or Smartphone, and about a third of medical schools now require new students to have this technology at their disposal.

For detailed information on internists, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to Internists* at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_Internists.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_Internists.pdf)

### Moms

- One of the most effective ways to reach moms is through their peers. Moms are much more likely to follow unsolicited advice from their friends and family than information they see, hear, or read via mass media channels.
- Most moms go online daily, and more than half go online more than 20 times per week. The explosion of social networking sites and blogs for moms allows women to connect with and learn from each other.
- Moms put much time and effort into choosing what is best for themselves and their families, and they want to feel like they have accomplished something meaningful when they have made a decision.

For detailed information on moms, see CDC's *Audience Insights—Communicating to Moms (with Kids at Home)* at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight\\_moms.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/AudienceInsight_moms.pdf)

