

Health Literacy Checklist to Develop Patient Education Materials

Background Information

The main components of health literacy in written materials are: **plain language, organization, layout and design**. Addressing these components will allow the reader to easily understand the document and make informed decisions when necessary.

Instructions

Use this checklist to apply the basic tenets of health literacy in the development of patient education materials.

Plain Language

- Use everyday words (use the CDC Plain Language Thesaurus by clicking <http://goo.gl/jAFpni>)
- Use the active voice.
- Avoid the use of multisyllabic words (more than 2 syllables should be kept to a minimum).
- Avoid jargon.
- Spell out acronyms if you must use them.
- Use 1st or 2nd person pronouns whenever possible.
- Define technical and medical terms.
- Aim to write document at a 5th or 6th grade reading ease.

Organization

- Provide needed context.
- Group information into meaningful sections.
- Keep paragraphs and sentences short.
- Use Q & A style format whenever possible.
- Summarize main points.
- Keep list short (six items is preferable).

Layout and Design

- Provide headings and subheadings.
- Avoid clutter (allow sufficient space on background).
- Select pictures that are relevant to the content and target audience.
- Use appropriate line spacing (1.2 to 1.5 spacing).
- Use readable **serif** style fonts that are 12 to 13 point size (e.g., Times New Romans, Cambria)
- Use upper and lower cases (avoid all caps).
- Avoid printing words on shaded areas.
- Use captions underneath pictures when necessary (never around pictures).

Health Literacy Resources

AHRQ Health Literacy Toolkit: http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy_toolkit/healthliteracytoolkit.pdf
Readability Calculator: <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>
CMS Toolkit: <http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/index.html?redirect=/WrittenMaterialsToolkit>