

Checklist for Promoting Health Literacy and Guidelines for Written Materials

Set out your objective

- ✓ Define what outcome you need
- ✓ Do not aim for more than one or two educational objectives
- ✓ Explain the purpose of all written material from the patient's viewpoint
- ✓ Limit the content
- ✓ Emphasize what you want the patient to DO rather than just KNOW
- ✓ Be specific



Engage the reader/viewer

- ✓ Relate materials to the patient's own experience
- ✓ Create interaction
- ✓ Tell stories to motivate people
- ✓ Provide a familiar context
- ✓ Make documents suitable for culture, age and identity

Make it easy to listen, read or watch

- ✓ Use short words
- ✓ Break up long sentences
- ✓ Avoid unfamiliar words and jargon
- ✓ Give a clear **action** message
- ✓ Use an active, not passive, voice
- ✓ Break up complex topics

Make it look easy to read

- ✓ No dense text
- ✓ Use cueing to direct the reader to key points
- ✓ Use large type, especially for older people
- ✓ Use sharp contrast

Pictures

- ✓ Use pictures and diagrams to clarify text
- ✓ Select realistic visuals
- ✓ Use active captions
- ✓ Explain how to use lists, charts or diaries – give examples

Move beyond the page

- ✓ Consider using audio, video or slide presentations, if appropriate
- ✓ Remember that patients with low health literacy may not have access to the Internet

Test materials

- ✓ Conduct testing on all engagement and education materials
- ✓ Use individual interviews and usability tests to show how people go through the material
- ✓ Consider two rounds of 10 interviews per product
- ✓ Use readability scales such as the Fry test. This formula suggests which level of school grade reading can cope with the text. Long and difficult words and long sentences make for difficult reading. To use this formula, count the number of syllables and sentences in three 100-word passages. Take the average of these numbers and refer to a Fry Test graph to find the grade level equivalent of the text. Other such formulas include the SMOG test and the Flesch test.
- ✓ Generally, do not write at higher than 5th grade level (about 10 year-old reading level)

Educate staff

- ✓ Make sure *everyone* in the organization pays attention to health literacy
- ✓ Look for opportunities to train staff on health literacy

Adapted from: TPN Issue 18, June 2003: Assisting Health Literacy