

Design and Layout Tips

1. Use no more than 65 characters per line or ten words.
2. Choose a simple font no smaller than 12 point. 14 point is ideal.
3. Select serif letters - with little “feet”- that are easier to read. Ex: Times New Roman
4. Avoid italics and script that are difficult to read.
5. Justify only left margin.
6. Avoid ALL CAPS that are hard to read.
7. Write descriptive headers.
8. Break up dense copy. Use shorter paragraphs or headers.
9. Leave open white space on the paper.

Test the reading level. Ask clients to read, explain and demonstrate the message. Do this **before** you print and use a health sheet.

Health Literacy Resources

Find easy-to-use health literacy tools on the Internet. Search for:

- Readability tool to check reading level,
- CDC Clear Communication Index,
- Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM),
- Federal Plain Language Guidelines,
- PRISM Toolkit,
- e-Health Literacy Scale, and
- Translation program.

Log onto <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthliteracy.html>. This site includes other websites, articles, research, tools and tutorials.

YouTube – Health Literacy. Find the American Medical Association’s video *Health Literacy and Patient Safety: Help Patients Understand* and others.

read know



access health care safety



decide act

Health Literacy Tools

Health Literacy is the **ability** to

- **obtain, process** and **understand** basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions,
- **apply** it to specific health decisions, and
- **navigate** the healthcare system.

We should strive for health literacy because:

- Half of US adults struggle with **literacy**, and
- 9 in 10 adults have some problem with **health literacy**.

Write To Be Read

A reader should “get it” with one reading. During reading, the eyes scan the print. Eyes stop and start. You read when your eyes are stopped — 3 to 4 words. Readers should read a line in two stops.

Research shows that 9 of 10 patients have health literacy concerns. 50% of all readers read between a 6th and 8th grade level. Experts suggest writing at 3rd or 4th grade reading level so **all** can understand.

To write for **all readers**, follow these tips:

- Use plain English.
- Make every word count. Cut out any unnecessary words.
- Be clear and brief.
- Use positive words - Ex: *do*, not *no* and *don't*.
- Follow grammar rules:
 - Subject and verb together if possible
 - Vivid, active verbs
 - Active voice (has a subject, verb and direct object)
 - Short, simple sentences
 - Personal pronouns (we, you) – “talking” words
 - Few verbals – *ing* words (participles, gerunds, infinitives)
 - Few prepositional phrases
- Short lists or bulleted points, not long sentences
- Concrete, familiar words, except for necessary technical terms
- Charts and pictures
- One or two syllable word when possible – EX: *hard* rather than *difficult*

Test Reading Level

If you use **Microsoft Word**, set your computer to give you the reading level.

1. Click **Tools** on the tool bar.
2. Click **Spelling and Grammar**.
3. Click **Option** at the bottom of the screen.
4. Put a check mark in the last box, **Show Readability Statistics**.
5. If you use ALL CAPS often, you can uncheck the **Ignore words in UPPERCASE** box. This reminds you to stop using all caps.
6. Click **OK**.

As you write materials, check the reading level. Click **Tools** on the toolbar. Then, click **Spelling and Grammar**. The Spelling and Grammar check provides:

- the number of words, characters, paragraphs and sentences;
- the average sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, and characters per word; and
- the Readability - % of passive sentences and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.

This helps keep you at the target reading level you choose to use. Aim for 10-15 words per sentence, 4 or 5 letters per word, 0 passive sentences and 3-4th grade reading level.