

Guidelines for Writing Low Health-Literacy Literature

The Written Content

1. The material should be written in a manner similar to day to day speech (a.k.a. plain language).
2. Use personal pronouns (i.e. you). However, this does not mean gender specific words such as “waitress”.
3. Try to use the active voice when writing.
4. Action verbs get to the point faster.
5. Always repeat new or unfamiliar information.
6. Sentences should be short and simple (i.e. 15-20 words).
7. Any unnecessary words should be eliminated so the reader does not become overwhelmed with information. In turn, this will aid the reader to focus on the important details and avoid distractions.
8. Do not use synonyms; rather use the same words consistently. This will also decrease confusion and uncertainty.
9. Give examples to explain words the reader may have difficulty understanding. For example, when explaining appendicitis, inform the reader that it means a “swelling of the appendix”. Medical terminology can be better understood by translating the Greek or Latin prefixes.
10. Be specific with your examples. Such as, instead of saying keep your glucose levels at a normal range, give them the specific numbers which are considered normal.

Displaying the Information

1. Context should always come before the content. Organize information around major points (headings) and leave out less important information.
 - Headings should be noticeably larger than their subtopics.
 - Headings should be in a bolder print so the main topic “pops out” to the reader.

- Headings are also more effective if used in a question format. (i.e. What is heart disease?) .
2. Incorporate blank spaces to visually transition between main topics.
 3. The key points should be placed in the first and last section of the display to help the reader remember them.
 4. Choose fonts carefully.
 - Words should be bold and block style as opposed to cursive.
 - One font should remain constant throughout the material.
 - Font that is 12 point or larger is preferred.
 5. Avoid distracting graphics or unnecessary designs on the display.
 6. Pictures and graphs can be used to aid the reader in understanding the information better as well as motivate them. However, be sure that the illustrations are consistent with the material.

Getting Feedback

1. Allow the reader the opportunity to receive feedback should they have any questions. Help them feel comfortable enough to ask questions by letting them know that you and/or a doctor would not object to answering questions.
2. While communicating with the individual ask them in a non-demeaning manner to reiterate what you just explained. This will ensure their understanding, while giving the instructor a second chance to explain the material.