

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING HEALTH LITERATE PATIENT MATERIALS

1. Start with the Basics

- Identify up to four key points the document needs to convey, and organize with the most important message first.
- Break down sentences into short bullets, if possible.
 - Use solid nouns and active voice.
 - Focus on the positive rather than the negative.

2. Choose and Edit Words

- Keep it short.
- Use conversational style.
- Show respect and value; don't preach.
- Offer small, practical steps or examples.
- Limit medical jargon or scientific language.
- Be consistent with terminology (e.g., "medications" or "drugs").
- Avoid unnecessary abbreviations or acronyms.
- Limit the use of statistics; use words like "half" instead.
- Limit the use of symbols.

3. Check Readability

- Replace polysyllable (3 or more) words with common 1-2 syllable words, if possible.
- Aim for 5th-6th grade level language.
 - Check current grade level, and then continue to tweak to reduce polysyllable words or simplify text.
 - ◇ Use Flesch-Kincaid (available in Microsoft Word) or another readability test.

4. Format the Text & Add Graphics

- Select the largest font size possible; 12-14 points minimum.
- Consider font styles.
 - Serif fonts are best (e.g., Times New Roman, Cambria, Garamond, Georgia).
- Use **bold type** to emphasize a few key words or phrases.
- Limit italics or underlining.
- Avoid ALL CAPS.
- Select dark-colored letters on light-colored paper.
- Use appropriate punctuation.
- Add headers/subtitles or boxes/sections, if there is a lot of text.
- Use enough white space to allow the eye to focus.
- Add meaningful and culturally appropriate pictures/images.

