



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

Public Health

Health Education Administration

| A Program of the Quality Improvement Division

**Fourth
Edition**

Say it Right the First Time:

Using Plain Language to Address Health Literacy

| audience | content | design |

Plain Language: A Health Literacy Tool

A Message from the Director and Health Officer

In the 21st Century, health literacy is extremely important. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines health literacy as:

“The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

Nearly 9 out of 10 adults have difficulty using the everyday health information that is routinely available in our health care facilities, retail outlets, media, and communities. Persons with limited reading, writing, and math ability; patients over 65 years old; racial/ethnic minorities; and those with chronic physical and mental health conditions report having lower health literacy than other groups.

Persons with limited health literacy are more likely to:

- Report having poor health
- Have chronic conditions they don't understand and can't manage
- Skip important preventive measures such as mammograms, pap smears and flu shots
- Use emergency services or be hospitalized more frequently

However, even people that are comfortable with science, text, and numbers may not be able to understand or even remember health information when faced with stressful or unfamiliar situations. This means everyone's health literacy will be affected at one point in their life—and this is why we must simplify information for everyone, independent of their perceived health literacy abilities. Simplifying information for all begins by using plain language. Plain language is an evidence-based strategy for making written and oral information easier to understand. By using the three principles of plain language—Audience, Content, Design—we can develop and deliver messages audiences can understand, remember, and use after the first time they read or hear it.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) strongly endorses the use of plain language in both written and oral communication. We demonstrate our commitment to plain language by offering you this guide and its complementary *Say It Right the First Time* training, which aims to help participants improve the clarity of their written communication. If you have questions about this training, please visit our website: <http://ph.lacounty.gov/hea/HealthLiteracy.htm>.



Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer



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The Three Principles of Plain Language

The keys to *Saying It Right the First Time*

- 1** AUDIENCE
- 2** CONTENT
- 3** DESIGN

Say it Right the First Time: At-a-Glance

- 1 AUDIENCE**
- 2 CONTENT**
- 3 DESIGN**

The “Say It Right the First Time” manual was created to help you write messages that are in plain language, meaning messages that are understandable the first time they are read or heard. The three principles of Plain Language are—Audience, Content, and Design. Each section of this manual includes an overview, examples, exercises, and links to other tools. This manual also includes a glossary, thesaurus, and checklist to help you write documents that are clear, simple, and visually appealing.

AUDIENCE

Think about what you want to accomplish before you start writing. Consider the outcomes you, your organization, and your audience want to achieve. Do some background research to clearly define your audience (e.g., age, sex, race/ethnicity, literacy level) and ask them to tell you more about themselves—for example, their prior knowledge and health beliefs. Learn more about their cultural and linguistic preferences. This information makes it easier to develop messages they will understand and use.

CONTENT

Once you identify your purpose and get to know your audience, it’s time to draft your key messages. Use the information you’ve learned about your audience to craft messages that are appropriate and relevant to them. Write brief messages that can be put into action right away. Use correct grammar and language that is positive and familiar to your audience. Be mindful to make each word, sentence, and paragraph you write serve a clear purpose. All audiences—not just those with limited literacy skills—prefer easy-to-read materials to more complex materials.

DESIGN

The way your document is organized affects your customer’s desire to continue reading. When designing and laying out your document, keep your audience and their needs at the forefront. Use text structure, visuals, and a clear layout to maximize attention, accessibility, and impact. Visuals (e.g., pictures, diagrams, charts, tables, graphs) can enhance your message. However, make sure the visuals you use are relevant to the content, easy to understand, and don’t distract your audience.



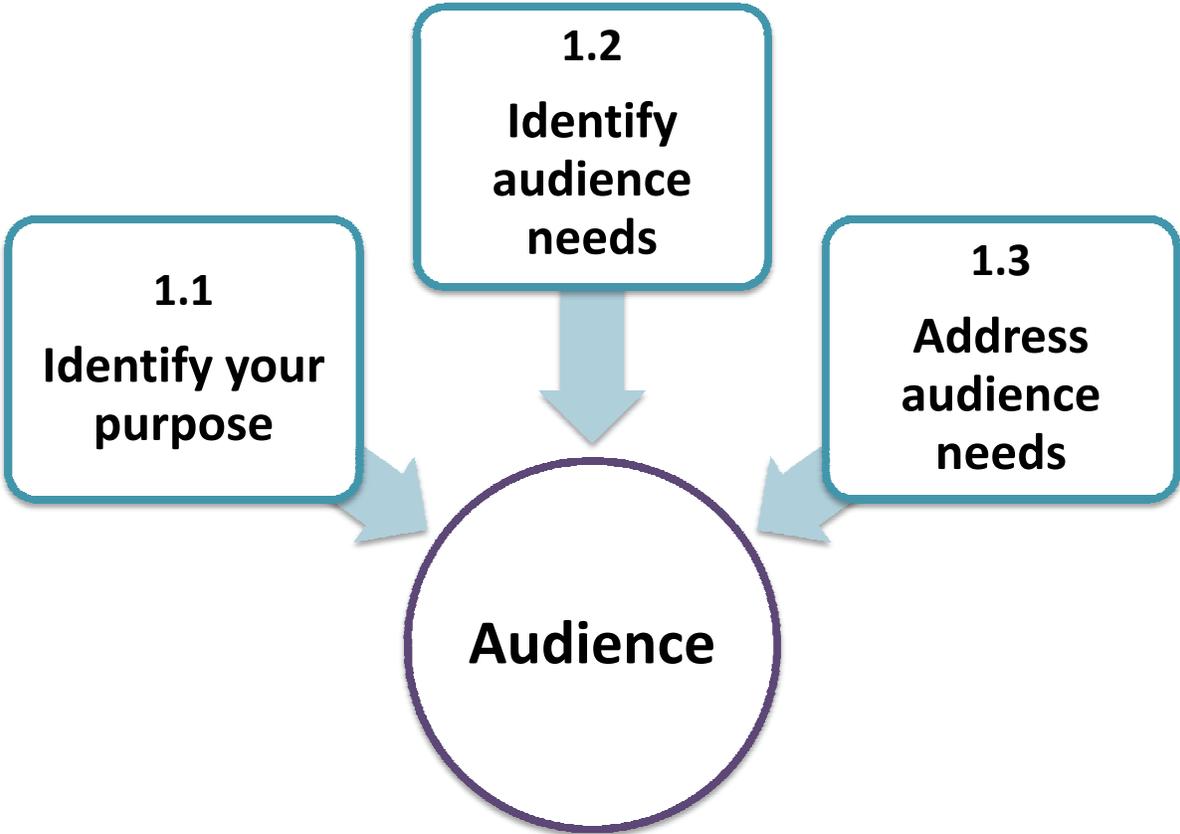
Learn more about plain language, visit Health Education Administration’s website:
<http://ph.lacounty.gov/hea/HealthLiteracy.htm>

Overview

Get to know Principle #1: Audience

Think about what you want to accomplish before you start writing. Consider the outcomes you, your organization, and your audience want to achieve. Do some background research to clearly define your audience (e.g., age, sex, race/ethnicity, literacy level) and ask them to tell you more about themselves—for example, their prior knowledge and health beliefs. Learn more about their cultural and linguistic preferences. This information makes it easier to develop messages they will understand and use.

Figure 1: The Components of Plain Language Principle # 1



Standards

Learn the components of Principle #1: Audience

1.1 Identify the purpose of your communication

Developing effective messages requires planning. Ask yourself the following questions to clarify your intent:

- Is there a need for your message?

Examples	
• Repeated client or staff requests	• New treatments or procedures
• New equipment or service	• New public health alert

- Would this message be part of an evidence-based strategy? (for health related documents)

Sources of Evidence-Based Strategies	
• The Guide to Community Preventive Services	• The Guide to Clinical Preventive Services
• The Cochrane Collaboration	• The Community Toolbox

- What would you like to accomplish with your message?

Examples	
• Give information	• Provide an alert
• Promote a service	• Change attitudes
• Explain a new law	• Teach a new behavior

- How do you want to use your message?

Examples	
• Hand out at a health fair	• Broadcast over the public radio
• Display in a waiting room	

- What’s the best outcome for your agency?

Examples	
• More/less calls or visits	• Increased compliance
• Decreased costs	

- What evidence do you need to prove that your message was successful?

Examples	
• Number of calls or visits	• Focus group results

Complete Exercise 1 to help you identify the purpose of your communication.

1.2 Identify your audience’s needs.

Once you’ve done some initial planning, work with your audience to confirm the need, content, and format of your message. More importantly, get to know key characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, beliefs, behaviors, culture, and literacy skills.

- Convene a group of 4-6 audience members to find out what they want and need.

Questions to Ask Your Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they need or want your information? • What do they already know about the subject? • What’s the best outcome for your audience? • What questions do they have? • What do they care about? • What do they dislike? • What communication methods (print, audio, video) do they prefer?

- Find out more about your audience from trusted sources such as Census 2010 and the Office of Minority Health.

1.3 Address your audience’s cultural and linguistic needs

Audiences have different cultural and linguistic needs. When developing health communication, you want to make sure your materials are culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate.

- Respect and value your audience. Don’t talk down or preach. People are less likely to act on information if they are made to feel bad about their current behavior or health situation.
- If you show people in your visuals, make them the same racial or ethnic group as your target audience. If your audience is the general public, your visuals should show people of various ethnic, racial, and age groups.
- When referring to a group or condition, use preferred and respectful language.

Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One group may want to be identified as “African American.” Another group may want to be identified as “Black.” • Use “a person with diabetes” instead of “the diabetic.”

- Choose words with a single definition or connotation.

Example
“Poor workers” could mean workers with poor performance or workers with limited income.

- When making comparisons, use references that your audience will recognize.

Example	
DO	DON'T
Feel for lumps about the size of a pea.	Feel for lumps about 5 to 6 millimeters in diameter.

- The best way to make sure your materials are culturally appropriate is to talk to your audience and involve them in the development process. Let them review your draft and provide feedback. See Principle #2: Content, for more information about testing your materials.
- Consider translating materials for audiences with Limited English Proficiency.

Before translation, consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of your document. This may help you prioritize translation workload by assigning higher priority to documents with legal implications (e.g. consent forms) • Number of audience members who would use or need the material • Whether audience members read and write in their native language • Who would translate, review, and approve the translation • Costs associated with translations

After translation, make sure:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The message conveys all information on the English document, but is not a word-for-word translation (literal translation) • Language is simple, clear and consistent avoiding jargon, technical language, or multiple meanings. • Documents are written in the target language first, and then translated into English, if possible • Documents are free of spelling and grammatical errors • Documents are at an appropriate reading level • Visuals are familiar and acceptable to the audience

See [Tools](#) page at the end of this section for more Audience-related resources.

Exercise 1

Identify the purpose of your communication

1. What's the need for your communication and how was it identified?
2. Who is your audience and what are some of their key characteristics?
3. How will your audience receive/access your communication (e.g. public service announcement, print materials, website)?
4. What do you, your organization, and your audience want to achieve?
5. How will you know when you've accomplished your goal?

Tools

Find more information about Principle #1: Audience

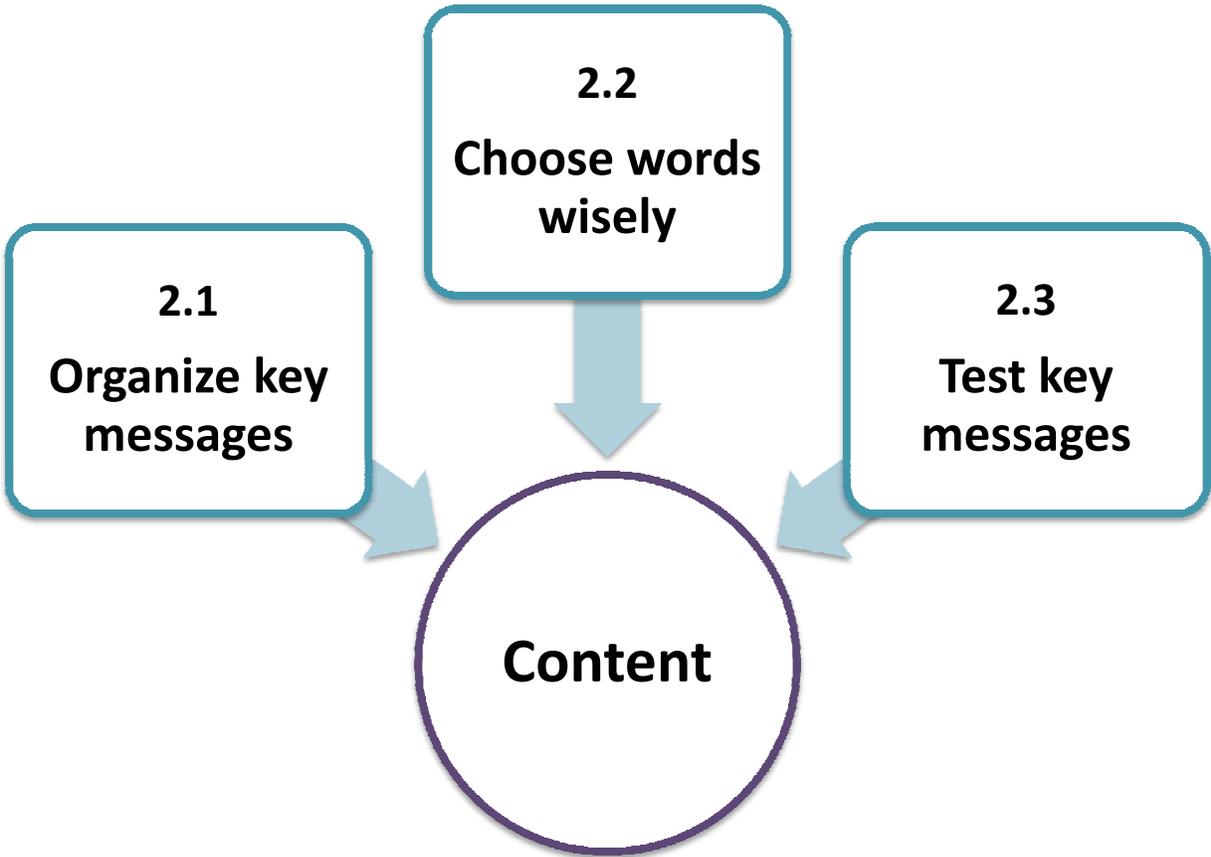
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: Minority Health	http://tinyurl.com/3tzlmlp
A Guide to Choosing and Adapting Culturally and Linguistically Competent Health Promotion Materials	http://tinyurl.com/6qjs4ho
Community Toolbox	http://tinyurl.com/6vfzqoz
Census 2010	http://tinyurl.com/pkyzck
Health Information Translations	http://tinyurl.com/7kuq74k
Key Indicators of Health, Los Angeles County	http://tinyurl.com/7rhywsc
Making Health Communication Programs Work (the “Pink Book”)	http://tinyurl.com/3yqbgdt
Material Development Guide – Translation Considerations	http://tinyurl.com/7zruvt4
National Center for Cultural Competence	http://tinyurl.com/cmh84l2
Office of Minority Health	http://tinyurl.com/yax4ypb
Online Language Dictionaries	http://tinyurl.com/2cz9y
Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills	http://tinyurl.com/3z65o29
Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective - Section 5: Detailed guidelines for translation	http://tinyurl.com/6nreety

Overview

Get to know Principle #2: Content

Once you identify your purpose and get to know your audience, it’s time to draft your key messages. Use the information you’ve learned about your audience to craft messages that are appropriate and relevant to them. Write brief messages that can be put into action right away. Use correct grammar and language that is positive and familiar to your audience. Be mindful to make each word, sentence, and paragraph you write serve a clear purpose. All audiences—not just those with limited literacy skills—prefer easy-to-read materials to more complex materials. Use readability calculators and other testing tools such as focus groups and surveys, to see what your audience thinks about your message.

Figure 2: The Components of Plain Language Principle #2



Standards

Learn the components of Principle #2: Content

2.1. Organize key messages

- Use the Message Map in Exercise 2 to organize your key messages, and limit the number of messages you present.
- Give the most important information first.
- Include only necessary information.
- Tell them what actions to take (actionable messages).
- Repeat key points, as appropriate, and in different ways (e.g. place in text box).

Example

If you're writing a brochure on how to prevent Lyme disease, you don't need to tell the audience how and when Lyme disease was discovered. Instead, tell them what to do to prevent it.

2.2. Choose words wisely

- Use short words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Use simple and familiar terms, not acronyms or technical language (jargon).
- Use frequencies (numbers), not percentages.
- Use active voice.

Targets

Words:	1-2 syllables
Sentences:	15-20 words
Paragraphs:	3-5 sentences

Example

DO	DON'T
The patient had a heart attack.	The patient experienced an acute myocardial infarction.

Example

DO	DON'T
9 out of 10 Americans	94% of Americans

Example

DO	DON'T
Smoking increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease.	The risk of lung cancer and heart disease is increased by smoking.

- Avoid double negatives.

Example	
DO	DON'T
It was so hot, I could hardly breathe.	It was so hot, I couldn't hardly breathe.

- Use same verb-tense (parallel structure).

Example	
DO	DON'T
Public health accomplishments include developing vaccinations, ensuring safer workplaces, and controlling infectious diseases.	Public health accomplishments include developing vaccinations, ensuring safer workplaces, and the control of infectious diseases.

- Avoid using groups of nouns (noun strings).

Example	
DO	DON'T
Children's Hospital has a program to improve employee relations.	Children's Hospital has a hospital employee relations improvement program.

- Use pronouns.

Example	
DO	DON'T
If you have chest pain, sweating, and shortness of breath, call 9-1-1.	If the patient experiences chest pain, sweating and shortness of breath, they should immediately call 9-1-1.

- Use contractions.

Example	
DO	DON'T
When developing educational materials, it's crucial to involve your audience in the process.	When developing educational materials, it is crucial to involve your audience in the process.

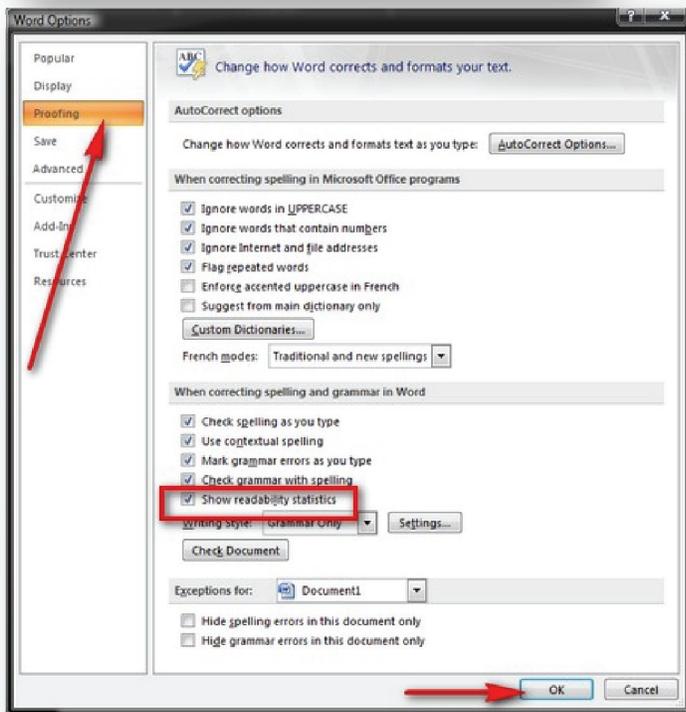
2.3. Test key messages

One way to test your key messages is to assess the readability of your document. There are different readability formulas out there, but one of the most accessible is the Flesch-Kincaid model found in Microsoft Word. Follow the steps below to enable the readability function in Microsoft Word.



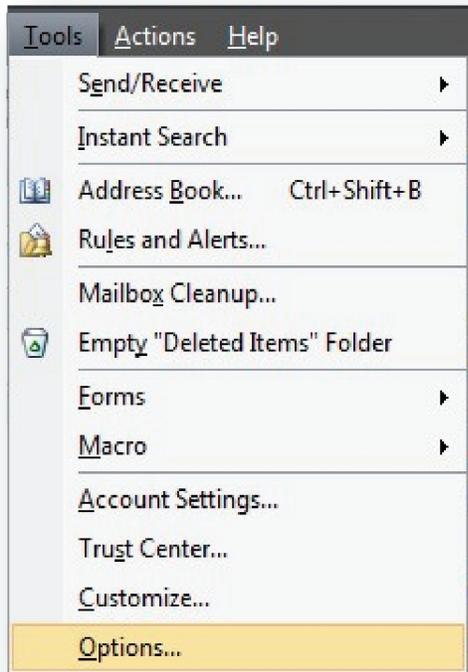
Step 1:

First, click on the *Office Button* and then go to *Word Options*.



Step 2:

In the *Word Options* window, go to the *Proofing* section. In that section, check the option which says 'Show readability statistics' and click on *OK*.



Step 3:

Once this option is enabled, check the readability of any text by pressing the F7 key, or by going to the Review tab and clicking on 'Spelling and Grammar'.

Microsoft Word will display the following readability statistics once the readability function has been enabled. (Note: Words with more than two syllables or medical/technical terms should only be scored once.)

Readability Statistics	
Counts	
Words	259
Characters	1370
Paragraphs	10
Sentences	13
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.8
Words per Sentence	16.0
Characters per Word	4.9
Readability	
Passive Sentences	23%
Flesch Reading Ease	49.6
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	10.3

The *Passive Sentences readability score* provides the percentage of passive sentences found in a text.
Target: Below 15%

The *Flesch Reading Ease readability score* rates text based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. The higher the Flesch Reading Ease score, the easier it is to understand the document.
Target: 60 or above

The *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level readability score* analyzes and rates text on a U.S. grade school level based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence.
Target: 6th grade or below

The best way to know if your material will be an effective communication tool is to test it with members of your target audience. Use the *Sample Survey* found in the Appendices section, for possible testing questions. Testing saves your organization time and money. Further, testing helps you determine the following:

- Does your audience understand your message?
- Is your message effective?
- What parts of your message can be improved?
- Does the audience identify with your material?
- Does your material make the audience uncomfortable?

Several strategies can be used to test your materials with your audience. The method you choose depends on the questions you and your audience want to have answered. It’s important to consider the time and resources you have available when selecting a testing method.

- Some testing strategies include:

Strategies	Definition
Advisory Committee	Group of 5-9 audience members and service providers that meet at regular intervals to review materials
Focus groups	Face-to-face, facilitator-led discussions with a group of 4-6 audience members
In-depth interviews	One-on-one interviews in-person or over the phone
Self-administered questionnaires	Surveys distributed to audience members through the mail, email or in-person for them to complete on their own
Suggestion box	A dedicated space for audience members to provide written feedback

- Testing can take place in a variety of settings, including:

Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support group meetings • Community events • Waiting rooms • Social media networks (Facebook) • Electronic bulletin boards (Craigslist)

See the [Tools](#) page at the end of this section for more Content-related resources.

Exercise 2

Use a message map to limit the number of key messages

The first table is an example of a completed message map. Use the blank message map to identify your communication’s key messages.

Audience: Media		
Question: What should the public know about bed bugs?		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Bed bugs are tiny insects that cause itchy bites, but don’t spread disease.	Anyone can be affected by bed bugs.	You can prevent bed bugs.
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Bed bugs feed on the blood of any warm blooded animal.	Bed bugs move around easily through small openings in walls, clothing, luggage, or furniture.	Keep your home free from clutter.
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Their bites are itchy and look like mosquito bites.	Bed bugs thrive near places where humans and pets sleep.	Look for black spots or rust colored stains on linens, mattresses, and near sleeping areas.
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
		Check any item before bringing it into your home.

Audience:		
Question:		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3

Exercise 3

Practice skills learned in Principle #2: Content

Exercise 3A

Revise the following examples using the Plain Language standards learned in this section. Possible solutions are on the *Exercise Answer Key* found in the Appendices section.

1. **Pronoun:** The Department of Public Health believes that all Los Angeles residents should have free immunizations.

Revision:

2. **Active Voice:** The completed form should be sent to your local health office.

Revision:

3. **Jargon:** The patient is being given positive-pressure ventilator support.

Revision:

4. **Parallel Structure:** The candidate's goals include winning the election, enact a national health program, and improvement of the educational system.

Revision:

5. **Short sentence:** Exposure to hazardous chemicals could cause serious and adverse health effects.

Revision:

6. **Negative Language:** Do not ride your bicycle without wearing your helmet.

Revision:

Exercise 3B

Choose the theme that most properly identifies the plain language problem in each of the examples below. Each answer is used only once.

- _____ 1. Due to the fact that seasonal flu is highly contagious, keep your child home from school if he/she has common symptoms. A. Pronouns
- _____ 2. Misinformation about vaccination side effects was dispelled by community health educators. B. Jargon
- _____ 3. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s automobile seat belt interlock rule. C. Passive Voice
- _____ 4. The Department of Public Health encourages individuals to make exercise a part of their weekly routine. D. Unnecessary Words
- _____ 5. High cholesterol levels can lead to atherosclerosis. E. Noun Strings

Exercise 3C

Simplify the paragraph below using the plain language standards learned in this section.

The flu (influenza) is a common illness caused by a virus that infects the respiratory tract. Every year in the United States, one in five people are infected with the flu. The flu can be spread from person to person through droplets from a sick person’s cough or sneeze. It can also be spread by touching a surface or an object that has the flu virus on it (such as a doorknob), and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. The flu can be prevented by practicing healthy habits.

Revision:

Tools

Find more information about Principle #2: Content

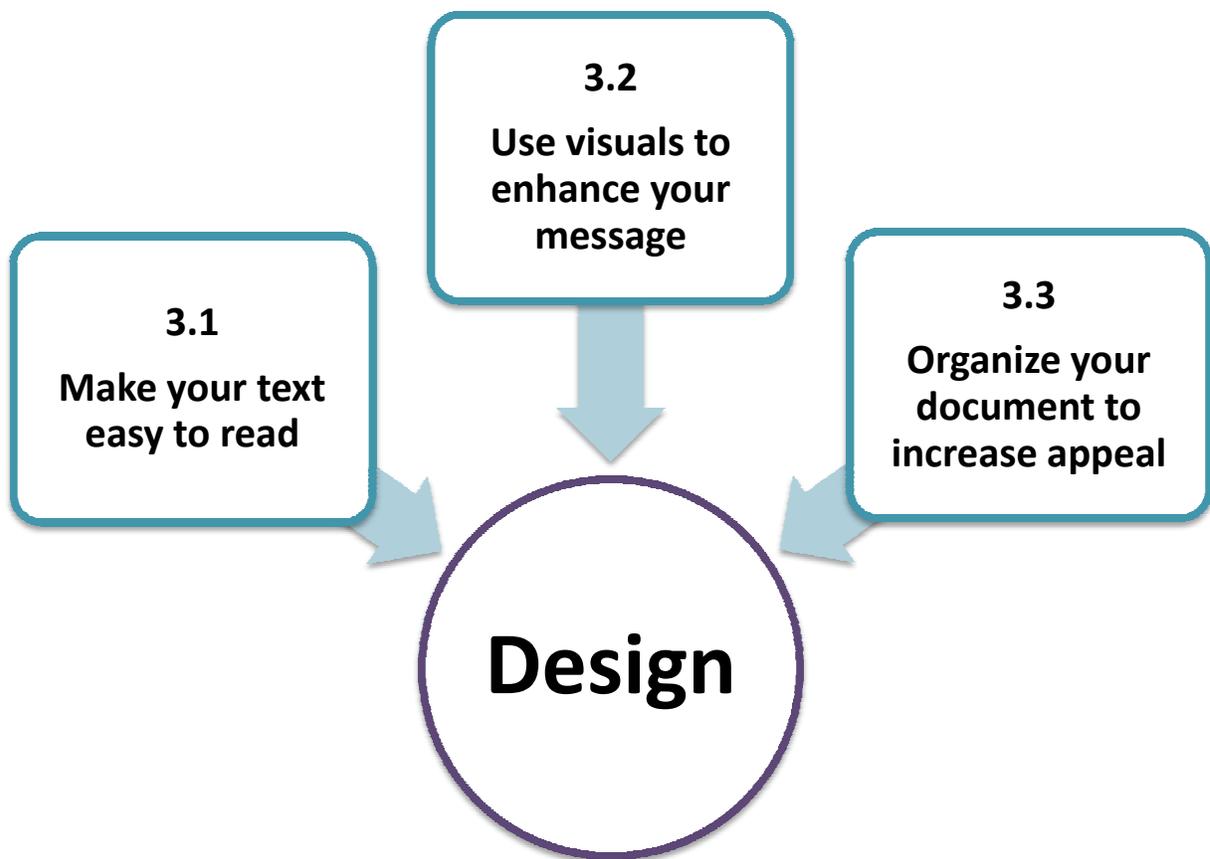
A Guide to Creating and Evaluating Patient Materials	http://tinyurl.com/7sc2qvz
Clear Language and Design Online Thesaurus	http://tinyurl.com/y2ns82
Clear & Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low-Literate Readers	http://tinyurl.com/6uh9pkh
Easy-to-Read Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communication	http://tinyurl.com/75r3te7
Evaluating Health Education Materials: A Toolkit on Meeting the Title X Information and Education Guidelines	http://tinyurl.com/6rbzsdI
Focus Group Facilitation Guide	http://tinyurl.com/7qe89za
Fry Readability Graph	http://tinyurl.com/yhgqb5x
Message Mapping, Risk and Crisis Communication	http://tinyurl.com/7l7eg7k
PlainLanguage.gov	http://tinyurl.com/4y443rr
Plain Language Medical Dictionary	http://tinyurl.com/7xcsspo
Plain Language Thesaurus for Health Communications	http://tinyurl.com/78bx9h8
Quality and Productivity Commission	http://tinyurl.com/6poc5h3
SMOG Readability Calculator	http://tinyurl.com/2wddnr

Overview

Get to know Principle #3: Design

The way your document is organized affects your customer’s desire to continue reading. When designing and laying out your document, keep your audience and their needs at the forefront. Use text structure, visuals, and a clear layout to maximize attention, accessibility, and impact. Visuals (e.g., pictures, diagrams, charts, tables, graphs) can enhance your message. However, make sure the visuals you use are relevant to the content, easy to understand, and don’t distract your audience.

Figure 3: The Components of Plain Language Principle #3



Standards

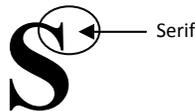
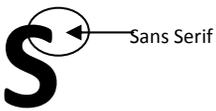
Learn the components of Principle #3: Design

3.1. Make your text easy to read

- Use a minimum of 12-point font for print materials (14-point or larger for older adults); 24-point font for PowerPoint.

Print Material	PowerPoint Presentation
Title: 24-point font	Title: 44-point font
Text: At least 12-point font	Text: Between 24-32 point font

- Use serif font for print materials; sans serif font for websites and PowerPoint.

Serif	Sans Serif
	

- Use left-justified format, leave right side ragged.

Example	
DO	DON'T
This column does not have a right-justified margin. The spaces between words are even. The jagged right edge also makes it easier to distinguish one line from the others.	This column has right-justified margins. The spaces between words are uneven and the lines are all the same length. This can confuse readers, especially unskilled readers, and make it harder to differentiate one line from the others.

- Use both upper and lower case letters. Reserve ALL CAPS for short headings.
- Limit the use of **bold**, underline, and *italics*.
- Do not use **ANTIQUE** or *Script* lettering.
- Use dark letters on a light background. Light text on a dark background is harder to read.
- Avoid splitting words between lines (hyphenation).
- Avoid placing text over pictures or other graphic elements.

See the [Tools](#) page at the end of this section for Design-related resources.

3.2. Use visuals to enhance your message

- Choose the best type of visual for your materials and your audience.



Types of Visuals	
Line drawings	Best for showing a procedure (drawing blood), depicting socially sensitive issues (drug addiction), and explaining an invisible or hard to see event (airborne transmission of tuberculosis).
Photos	Best for showing real life events, people, and emotions.
Illustrations/ Cartoons	May be good to convey humor or set a more casual tone. Use with caution because not all audiences understand them or take them seriously.
Charts and Graphs	Best for showing information over a period of time. Must be used with caution because not all audiences understand them.

- Use visuals that are simple and easy to understand.
- Place visuals near related text.
- Use no more than 1-2 visuals per page.
- Use clear visuals (not distorted, stretched, or pixilated).
- Ensure visuals can be photocopied clearly.
- Include captions, if needed.
- Include same type of visuals throughout document.
- Show people from a variety of ethnic, racial and age groups.
- Use images and symbols familiar to the audience.
- Depict positive examples and cultural norms instead of negative stereotypes.
- Ensure you have permission to use the visuals.

3.3. Organize your document to increase appeal

- Place most important information at the beginning and end of the document.
- Use informative headings and subheadings.
- Organize ideas in the order your audience will use them.
- Leave at least 1 inch of white space around the margins of a page and between columns.
- Place key information in a text box.
- Use bulleted lists to break up text.
- Add revision date on all documents.

Exercise 4

Practice skills learned in Principle #3: Design

Apply the standards learned in this section to highlight what was done correctly in this handout. Possible answers are on the *Exercise Answer Key* found in the Appendices section.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

1

2

3

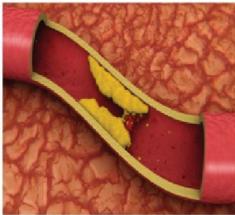
4

5

Cholesterol

Understanding Cholesterol

What is cholesterol?
Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that's found in your bloodstream and in your cells. It's important because it keeps your cells healthy. But too much cholesterol can be bad for your health. Combined with other substances, it can form plaque (a thick, hard deposit), as seen to the right. Plaque clogs your arteries, which can lead to heart attack or stroke.



What are the signs and symptoms of high cholesterol?
High cholesterol has no symptoms. The only way to tell if you have it is by getting a blood test. Ask your doctor for a cholesterol test, and get retested every five years. Your doctor may suggest getting tested more often if you have a family history or other risk factors.

How do you manage high cholesterol?
You can lower your cholesterol by making lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy, exercising, and losing weight. To prevent high cholesterol and maintain a heart healthy lifestyle, follow these tips:

- Eat a healthy diet that includes lots of fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains, and reduced fat dairy products.
- Limit saturated fats, like fatty meats, butter, and whole milk
- Limit cholesterol intake to less than 300 mg each day.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- Control your weight.
- Schedule regular cholesterol tests with your doctor.
- Avoid or stop smoking (call 1-800-NO-BUTTS to get information on how to quit).
- Limit alcoholic drinks to one per day.
- Find ways to manage your stress.



Lifestyle changes are helpful in managing your cholesterol, but they may not always be enough. Some people may need to take additional medication to lower their cholesterol. Talk to your doctor to come up with the plan that's best for you.

Risk Factors
The following may increase your chances of getting high cholesterol:

- Family history
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity
- Overweight and obesity
- High fat diet
- Age
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure

Target Cholesterol Levels

Total cholesterol: less than 200mg/dl
HDL (high density lipoprotein), also known as "good" cholesterol: greater than 60mg/dl
LDL (low density lipoprotein), also known as "bad" cholesterol: less than 100mg/dl
Triglycerides: less than 150mg/dl

2/28/2011

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
www.publichealth.lacounty.gov

County of Los Angeles Public Health
Healthy Way LA
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Exercise 5

Practice skills learned in Principle #3: Design

Apply the guidelines learned in this section to highlight what was done correctly in this PowerPoint. Possible answers are on the *Exercise Answer Key* found in the Appendices section.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

1

How is the Flu Treated?

- What you can do:
 - Stay home when sick
 - Drink lots of fluids
 - Get plenty of rest
- **DO NOT** give aspirin to children or teenagers for flu symptoms
- Over the counter medicine relieves symptoms but does not make you less contagious
- Consult a doctor to find out what medicines are right for you



2

3

4

5



Tools

Find more information about Principle #3: Design

Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Image Library	http://tinyurl.com/8xbs6pe
Cli.gs: Shortens long URLs for easier sharing	http://tinyurl.com/6ehzwq
Johns Hopkins University Image Library	http://tinyurl.com/78vu457
Multimedia and Web Services Anatomy Clip-Art	http://tinyurl.com/7pjlrcd
National Cancer Institute Visuals Online database	http://tinyurl.com/8rxlkhc
Simply Put: A Guide For Creating Easy-To-Understand Materials	http://tinyurl.com/77mfdrd
TinyURL.com: Making long URLs usable	http://tinyurl.com/
Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective	http://tinyurl.com/29633rt

Appendices

Exercise Answer Key

Find the answers to the exercises found in this guide

EXERCISE 1

Exercise 1 doesn't require an answer sheet.

EXERCISE 2

Exercise 2 doesn't require an answer sheet.

EXERCISE 3A

1. We believe that you should have free immunizations.
2. You should send the completed form to your local health office.
3. The patient is on a respirator.
4. The candidate's goals include winning the election, enacting a national health program, and improving the educational system.
5. You could get sick if you are near the chemical.
6. Wear your helmet each time you ride your bicycle.

EXERCISE 3B

1. D
2. C
3. E
4. A
5. B

EXERCISE 3C

The flu can be spread from person to person through droplets from a sick person's cough or sneeze. It can also spread when you touch a surface that has the flu virus on it and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. You can prevent the flu by practicing healthy habits:

- Wash your hands
- Cover your cough
- Get vaccinated
- Stay home when you're sick

EXERCISE 4

1. Informative headings, serif-type font
2. Breaking up information using bulleted lists and parallel structure
3. Logos in correct order, departmental template used
4. Pictures illustrating the content, placed near relevant text
5. Revised date

EXERCISE 5

1. Breaking up information using bulleted lists, parallel structure, appropriate size
2. Engaging heading, appropriate size, mix of uppercase and lowercase letters
3. Clear picture, placed near relevant text
4. Logos in correct order, departmental template used
5. White space used, light background with dark text used

Plain Language Checklist

Make sure your documents meet plain language standards

Use this checklist to see how well you incorporated the three plain language principles into your document. Mark an X in the YES or NO box, based on whether or not you met the standard.

1. AUDIENCE

Standard	YES	NO
1.1: Identify the purpose of your communication		
Purpose is clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2: Identify your audience's needs		
Audience is identified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3: Address your audience's cultural and linguistic needs		
Language that's respectful of a person's culture, beliefs & values is used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Culturally appropriate visuals are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Translations are contextual instead of literal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. CONTENT

Standard	YES	NO
2.1: Develop key messages		
Content is grammatically correct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Words, sentences, and paragraphs are short	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Common words are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Active voice is used throughout	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversational tone is used throughout	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contractions are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pronouns are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2: Organize key messages		
Most important information is given first	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Only necessary information is included	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What a person must know or do is clearly stated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Key points are summarized	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Standard	YES	NO
2.3: Test key messages		
Key messages are reviewed by audience members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Readability is at 6 th grade or lower	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. DESIGN

Standard	Yes	No
3.1: Make your text easy to read		
Appropriate font size, style, and color are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bold, italicized, and underlined text are used sparingly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both upper and lowercase letters are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text is easy to read	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Left-justified format is used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2: Use visuals to enhance your message		
Visuals are placed near related text	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Simple and instructive visuals are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No more than two visuals per page are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear visuals are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Printer-friendly visuals are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Same type of visuals are used throughout material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Captions are included, when appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3: Organize your document to make it attractive		
Most important information is given first	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informative headings and subheadings are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
White space is used (1 inch margins)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bulleted lists are used, when appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Revised date is included	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
County approved templates and guidelines are used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Glossary

Terms found throughout this guide

Acronym:

A word formed from the initial letters or syllables taken from a group of words that form the name of a company, product, process (e.g. DPH for Department of Public Health).

Actionable messages:

Messages that clearly explain what action should be taken.

Active voice:

The voice used to indicate that the grammatical subject of the verb is performing the action (e.g. “The boy threw the ball”).

Contractions:

Shortened form of words or group of words, with the omitted letters often replaced by an apostrophe (e.g. can’t, won’t, shouldn’t, wouldn’t, I’ve, you’ve).

Double negative:

A sentence containing two negative words.

Focus group:

A small group selected from a wider population and sampled, as by open discussion, for its members' opinions about or emotional response to a particular subject or area.

Health literacy:

Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

Hyphenation:

The division of a word especially at the end of a line on a page using a hyphen.

Jargon:

The language, especially the vocabulary, specific to a particular trade, profession, or group.

Left-justified:

A paragraph or block of text in which the first word in all lines is aligned with the left margin, and the last word in all lines is ragged against the right margin.

Literacy:

A person's ability to read, write, speak, and compute and solve problems at levels necessary to function on the job and in society; achieve one's goals; and develop one's knowledge and potential.

Noun strings:

Groups of nouns sandwiched together (e.g. draft laboratory animal rights protection regulations).

Parallel structure:

The repetition of a chosen grammatical form within a sentence (e.g. Ellen likes *hiking*, *attending* the rodeo, and *taking* afternoon naps).

Plain language:

Communication audiences understand the first time they read or hear it. Helps audiences find what they need, understand what they find, and act on that understanding. Comprised of three principles—Audience, Content, and Design.

Pronoun:

Words that are used as replacements or substitutes for nouns and noun phrases (e.g. I, you, and he).

Sans serif font:

Fonts that don't have a tiny stroke or line placed at the top and bottom of the straight lines that make up letters (e.g. Arial and Verdana).

Serif font:

Fonts that have a tiny stroke or line placed at the top and bottom of the straight lines that make up letters (e.g. Times New Roman and Garamond).

Source language:

The language in which a text appears that is to be translated into another language.

Target language:

The language into which a text is to be translated from another language.

Plain Language Thesaurus

Find a simpler way to say it

Consider these words when writing public health-related messages.

Instead of...	Consider Using:
A	
Abdomen	stomach, tummy, belly
Abrasion	scrape, scratch
Acute	sudden, new, recent; intense flare-up, serious; short-term
Ailment	sickness, illness, health problem, complaint
Allergen	something that causes allergies
Alleviate	ease, decrease, lessen
B	
Bacteria	germs
Benign	harmless, not cancer
Biopsy	sample tissue from part of the body
Blood glucose	blood sugar
BMI, body mass index	a measure of body fat based on height and weight
C	
Carcinogen	something that can cause cancer
Cardiac	of/in/related to the heart
Cardiologist	heart doctor
Cessation	ending, stop, pause
Cholesterol	type of fat found in the blood, HDL is good cholesterol, LDL is bad
Chronic	lasting a long time, life long, continuing
Contraceptive	birth control

D

Detect	find out
Diabetic	person who has diabetes
Diagnose, Diagnosis	find the problem or condition
Dilute	add liquid, such as water; make less strong, water down, weaken
Drowsy	sleepy

E

Eliminate	get rid of, remove, cut, end
Enable	allow, let
Enlarge	get bigger, grow
Examine	look at, study, check

F

Fatigue	very tired
Fracture(d)	crack, break, broken
Frequently	often, commonly, normally, regularly, many times

G

Generic	not a brand name, common, general
Glucose	sugar

H

Hazardous	dangerous, not safe
Health	wellness, well-being, wholeness
Hemorrhage	heavy bleeding

I

Immune	safe from disease, ability to fight off an illness
Inflammation	swelling
Ingest	eat, drink, swallow
Infect	to get sick, to make someone sick, to spread a disease
Influenza	flu
Inhale	breathe in

J

Joint	where two bones come together (knee, elbow, etc.)
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L

Laceration	cut, tear, slit
Lactation	breastfeeding
Lesion	wound; sore; infected patch of skin
Lipids	fats in the blood

M

Malignant	harmful, poisonous; cancer that may spread to the other parts of the body
Medication	drug, pill, medicine
Mold	growth on food and damp surfaces
Monitor	check on, keep track of, watch
Morbidity	disease rate, illness rate
Mortality	death rate, death, dying

N

Nausea (nauseous)	upset stomach, feeling like throwing up, feel like vomiting
Neonatal	newborn
Noninvasive	without using surgery, needles, or cutting the skin
Nutrition	food, meal, diet, healthy food

O

Oral administration	given by mouth
Outbreak	sudden increase in number of sicknesses

P

Pharmaceutical	drug
Physician	doctor
Prenatal	before birth
Prevent	stop, put a stop to, to keep from happening
Procedure	something that is done; a move, step or process
Provider	doctor, clinician, person who gives health care

R

Recur	come back, happen again, get again
Relapse	slip, fall back, return of disease
Relief	feel better, ease or lessening from pain or discomfort
Respiration	breathing
Rupture	break open burst

S

Sanitize	clean, wash, clean up, make germ-free, disinfect
Severe	strong, serious, harmful, dangerous, very bad
Specimen	sample
Sucrose	sugar
Surgery	operation
Symptoms	signs, warning signs

T

Terminal	not curable, causes death, going to die
Therapy	treatment
Toxic, toxin	poisonous, poison
Trauma	injury, wound
Treat	give care, take care of, cure, heal
Tumor	growth, lump

U

Ulcer	open sore
Urinate	pee
Uterus	womb

V

Vaccinate	to protect against disease, usually by a shot
Vaccine	shot, flu shot, medicine
Validate	prove, test
Vitals, vital signs	heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, temperature

Health Literacy Resources

Find more information about health literacy

National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy	http://tinyurl.com/3cean6l
Family Health and Literacy	http://tinyurl.com/7nuu2ck
Health Communication, Health Literacy, and e-Health	http://tinyurl.com/6ml42ov
Health Literacy and Patient Safety: Help Your Patients Understand	http://tinyurl.com/7keo58e
Health Literacy for Public Health Professionals	http://tinyurl.com/9hac4yk
Health Literacy Studies	http://tinyurl.com/2ahbowp
Healthy People 2020	http://tinyurl.com/6yj2o29
Overview and Methods for Measuring Health Literacy	http://tinyurl.com/7cpqj8x
Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills	http://tinyurl.com/3z65o29
The Health Literacy Style Manual	http://tinyurl.com/6qes69f
Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective	http://tinyurl.com/6mb97vb

Plain Language in Oral Communication

Find more information about plain language in oral communication

Effective Communication Tools for Healthcare Professionals	http://tinyurl.com/7vjnrx5
Plain Language: A Promising Strategy For Clearly Communicating Health Information and Improving Health Literacy	http://tinyurl.com/8jqcrdw
Presentations and Training Materials	http://tinyurl.com/c4pbvvn
Strategies To Improve Communication Between Pharmacy Staff and Patients: A Training Program For Pharmacy Staff	http://tinyurl.com/9k994uo
Teach-Back	http://tinyurl.com/9724zfz
Teach-back: A Health Literacy Tool to Ensure Patient Understanding, An Educational Module for Clinicians	http://tinyurl.com/8g5olp6
Teach-Back: A Tool to Enhance Patient Understanding	http://tinyurl.com/9x9arzx

Resources for Department of Public Health Staff

Where DPH staff can go for help

A/V Resources	http://tinyurl.com/77rq7hr
Consent Form (e.g. interview & photography)	http://tinyurl.com/7kuyt3s
County Style Guide	http://tinyurl.com/74axt7t
Equipment Checkout (e.g. laptop, projector, video camera)	http://tinyurl.com/cjk5d7a
Print Material Templates	http://tinyurl.com/6mk8veh
Logos	http://tinyurl.com/79hz94m
ODT Video Library	http://tinyurl.com/78kykq4
PowerPoint Presentation Guide	http://tinyurl.com/6q3pbjs
PowerPoint Templates	http://tinyurl.com/79hz94m
Public Health Graphic Identity and Style Guidelines	http://tinyurl.com/7vbwzh2
Public Health Photo library	http://tinyurl.com/6lkncco

Sample Survey

A tool for gathering audience feedback

Use this sample survey to collect feedback from your audience:

We'd like to hear what you think about this material. Please read it and answer the questions below. We'll use your opinion to improve this document. Thank you for your participation.

Please tell us about yourself.

1. Gender: Female Male Transgender
2. Age: _____
3. Highest Grade Completed: _____
4. Which group do you identify with? (Please mark only one box)
 African American/Black Native American/Alaskan Native
 Asian/Pacific Islander Mixed/Multiethnic
 Hispanic/Latino Other: _____

Please tell us about the document you just read.

1. What do you think is the purpose of this material?
-

2. Was anything in the material hard to understand? Yes No If yes, please circle it on the document.
-

3. Would you share this material with your friends and family? Yes No Please explain your answer to #3:
-

4. Would you recommend that we use this material? Yes No Please explain your answer to #4:
-

5. Do you have any other ideas for improving this material? Yes No Please explain your answer to #5:
-

Credible Health Information

Find current information from trusted health resources

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics	www.eatright.org/
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality	www.ahrq.gov
Alzheimer's Association	www.alz.org/index.asp
American Academy of Pediatrics	www.aap.org
American Association of Family Physicians	www.aafp.org
American Cancer Society	www.cancer.org
American Diabetes Association	www.diabetes.org
American Heart Association	www.americanheart.org
American Lung Association	www.lungusa.org
American Medical Association	www.ama-assn.org
Arthritis Foundation	www.arthritis.org
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America	www.aafa.org
California Department of Public Health	www.cdph.ca.gov
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	www.cdc.gov

Environmental Protection Agency	www.epa.gov
Food and Drug Administration	www.fda.gov
Mayo Clinic	www.mayoclinic.com
Medline Plus	www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthtopics.html
National Cancer Institute	www.cancer.gov
National Heart Lung and Blood Institute	www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/pubs/pub_gen.htm
National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases	www2.niddk.nih.gov/
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism	www.niaaa.nih.gov/
National Institutes of Health	www.nih.gov
Pan American Health Organization	new.paho.org/hq/index.php?lang=en
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	http://health.gov/
U. S. Preventive Services Task Force	www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm
U.S. Department of Agriculture	www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome
World Health Organization	www.who.int/en

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