

# Writing for your Audience



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# Learning Objectives

## After this session, participants will be able to:

- Consider your specific audience when developing your main message and key points
- Apply plain language guidelines to produce health education and promotional materials that are easy to read, understand and act on
- Access resources and tools on plain language health communication and materials development

# Start with your Audience...

**Who are you writing for?**

**What do they care about?**

- What's in it for them?
- What are their questions?
- Attitudes, beliefs about the topic

**What do they already know?**

- What misconceptions might they have?

**Literacy considerations**

# Consider your Audiences



# What is Plain Language?

*Communication that your audience or readers can understand the first time they hear or read it.*

“I am sorry I wrote you such a long letter. I did not have time to write a short one” Mark Twain

Plain language is for everyone!



# Brainstorm

## What makes something hard to read?

- Too much text/big masses of text
- Long sentences/paragraphs
- Big words/unfamiliar words
- Jargon, “medical-ese”, “legal-ese”, formal tone
- Tiny type
- Poor organization: not in logical order, few headers, no summary
- No visuals, little white space
- Not relevant to me

# Developing the Content

- **Limit** information to “need to know”
- Address **readers’ concerns** and questions.
- Break information or instructions into manageable “**chunks**”
- Focus on **action**: What the reader should do, rather than lots of explanation

# Writing Tips: Tone and Approach

- **Conversational, everyday language**
- **Friendly, respectful tone**
- **Action words & active voice**
- **Phrase ideas positively if possible**
- **Free of stereotypes, use inclusive language**
- **Be careful using slang, statistics and humor**



# Writing Tips: Use plain language

- Use common, familiar words
- Use “you,” “we”
- Define medical terms
  - Give *pro-nun-see-AY-shun* if needed
- Short sentences (10-15 words) and short paragraphs (3-5 sentences)
- Avoid abbreviation and acronyms

# Simplify terms

## Instead of:

- Contraception.....
- Infertility.....
- Referral.....
- Postpartum.....
- Risk factor.....

## Use:

- Birth control
- Can't get pregnant
- Send you to another doctor
- After the baby is born
- Will increase your chance of getting

# Writing Tips: Organization

- Most important information first
- Order main points in a logical way
- Use headers
- Q&A format
- Use bulleted lists
- Summarize key points

# Writing Tips: Make it actionable

- Consider reader motivations and goals.
- Include the benefits of taking action.
- List specific action steps.
- Reader engagement strategies:
  - Mini-quizzes
  - My Questions, My Plan
- For more information/help, go here...

# Let's Try It Out!



# Design Tips: Fonts

- Larger type (12 point or larger)
- Upper and lower case—NOT ALL CAPS
- **Serif font for text, Sans serif for headers**
- **AVOID...*italics, script, fancy fonts***
- **Bold headers in different font**

# Design Tips: Layout

## Use visuals!

- To engage the reader
- To demonstrate action steps
- To show as well as tell

Lots of white space and wide margins

Ragged right edge

Colors that appeal to your audience

High contrast between background and text



# Resources for Writing

- [Simply Put: A guide for creating easy-to-read materials](#)
- [NIH Training: Plain Language—Getting Started or Brushing Up](#)
- [Plainlanguage.gov](#)
- [Plain Language Thesaurus for Health Communications](#)
- [CDC Health Literacy](#)