

# Guidelines for Creating Materials

## Resources for Developing and Assessing Materials

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Online Resources:

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy)

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## CORE COMPONENTS

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Many guidelines are available for the development of appropriate materials. In general, these guides suggest that it is important to address the following key components:

- *Plain Language*: vocabulary, sentence length, active voice
- *Organization*: presentation of ideas, grouping of like ideas, highlights of key points, summaries, and, in general, attention to what people want to know as well as what professionals think they ought to know
- *Layout and design*: white space, font style and size, bolded headings and sections, use of charts, graphs and illustrations

Below, we draw from various guides and offer key points about plain language, layout and design and formative evaluation to guide you in creating health education materials. We refer you to the additional resources on the Health Literacy Studies website for more detailed guidelines and illustrative examples.

### Plain Language

Plain language is defined as simple, clear, conversational style and one that presents information in a logical order. Recommendations for plain language writing often include the following:

#### Organization

- Provide needed background information or needed context
- Group information into meaningful sections with clear headings
- Emphasize and summarize main points

## **Style**

- Use everyday words
- Explain technical terms and use examples
- Avoid long, complex sentences
- Write in the active voice
- Engage the reader. Suggestions include: making reference to a shared context, using a question and answer format
- Link information to trusted sources

## **Layout and Design**

The design of materials can ease or hinder reading. Recommendations often include the following:

### **Type and Spacing**

- Use a readable type style – generally a footed font [serif] in 12 point size
- Use appropriate space between lines [generally 1.2 to 1.5 spacing]
- Provide good contrast between the paper and the text
- Do not print words on shaded or patterned background
- Use upper and lower case
- Avoid all cap text
- Include ample white space

### **Lines**

- Use appropriate length lines [maximum of five inches]

- Leave right margin jagged
- Do not split words across two lines

### **Overall Design**

- Be consistent
- Avoid clutter
- Provide guide for finding key information
- Clearly label all illustrations and charts
- Offer explanations
- Make legends clear
- Place charts as close as possible to explanatory text
- Avoid wrapping text around illustrations
- Use consistent and easily recognized headings
- Signal main points with bold or highlights

## **FORMATIVE EVALUATION**

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Recommendations for the development of appropriate materials include processes for review, piloting, and revisions.

- Review all materials and use a consistent check list
- Engage members of the intended audience in a critical review process
- Re-work the materials based on reviews
- Pilot materials with members of the intended audience
- Re-work materials based on pilot test findings and solicited suggestions
- Members of the intended audience can offer insight and guidance long before materials are piloted. Many programs use participatory processes for the development and design of materials.