

Resources for Health Literacy

Provided By: Medical Library, Quillen College of Medicine, East Tennessee State University

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COMPREHENSIVE TOOLKITS

These sites generally provide multiple resources and/or address multiple aspects of health literacy, including plain language, design, readability and the limits of readability scales, testing and revision, and other issues. While there are not many separate resources that address numeracy and design, many of these toolkits address those issues.

- **"Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective," Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services,** <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/index.html> - guidelines for writing and design, readability formulas, older adults, web-based materials, before and after examples, and language/translation issues **[make sure to download the PDFs linked from the bottom of each section page for the complete guide]**
- "Health Literacy Online," Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, <https://health.gov/healthliteracyonline/> - focused primarily on considerations for online health materials
- "Health Literacy," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/introduction.html> - addresses the basics of health literacy, suggests training opportunities, provides guidance on culture, developing materials, visual communication
- "Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit," Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/healthlittoolkit2.html> - guide intended for primary care practices, covering spoken and written communication, patient empowerment and self-care, and addressing support systems
- "Plain Language: Getting Started or Brushing Up," National Institutes of Health, <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/plain-language/plain-language-getting-started-or-brushing>
- **"Simply Put: A Guide for Creating Easy to Understand Materials," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,** https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply_Put.pdf - includes clear writing, text appearance, use of visuals, layout and design, culture
- "Health Literacy," Duke University Medical Center Library & Archives, <http://guides.mclibrary.duke.edu/healthliteracy> - guide to online research and reports, assessment, plain language, cultural competency, and tools for educators and trainers
- "Clear Communication," National Institutes of Health, <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication> - addresses health literacy, clear communication, cultural respect, video-based advice which can be shared with patients on talking to their doctors, and plain language, with links to additional training
- PRISM Readability Toolkit, Program for Readability in Science and Medicine, https://www.grouphealthresearch.org/files/1814/1062/9858/PRISM_readability_toolkit.pdf - information on plain language, reading level calculations and their limitations, tips for improving readability, and links to many additional resources
- "Making Health Communication Programs Work," National Cancer Institute, <http://www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf> - Includes some content on literacy, is intended to address effective health communication strategies

PLAIN LANGUAGE EXAMPLES AND SUGGESTIONS

- "Plain Language Checklist," Center for Plain Language, <http://centerforplainlanguage.org/5-steps-to-plain-language/> - quick overview of considerations
- "Everyday Words for Public Health Communication," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/other/pdf/everydaywords-060216-final.pdf> - Provides alternates for health-related terms and before/after example sentences, such as:
 - Original Text:* Adverse event: possible side effect or reaction after getting a shot or taking medicine CDC Original Sentence Adverse events following smallpox vaccination should be reported to state public health authorities and to the national Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).
 - Plain Language Sentence:* You should report any reactions that happen after getting the smallpox shot to state public health authorities and the national Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).
- "Plain Language Thesaurus for Health Communications," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://depts.washington.edu/respcare/public/info/Plain_Language_Thesaurus_for_Health_Communications.pdf - provides common terms and plain language alternates
- "Health Care Quality Plain Language Thesaurus," National Partnership for Women and Families, http://go.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/Health_Literacy_Thesaurus.pdf?docID=5622 - suggestions for plain language alternatives to 60 health quality/administration terms such as "preventive care," "inpatient," "medical home," and "preventable medical error"

ASSESSING PATIENTS' HEALTH LITERACY

- "Health Literacy Tool Shed," collaborative project funded by the National Library of Medicine, <http://healthliteracy.bu.edu/all> - searchable database of health literacy measures for use with patients, with options to limit by specific health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, etc.), number of questions in the assessment, language, type of assessment, and other details. Provides descriptive information of the measures, including whether there is a cost to use the assessment [note: some instruments cannot be used, adapted, or republished without permission from and/or payment to their authors]

HEALTH INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS WRITTEN IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

- HealthFinder, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, <http://healthfinder.gov/> - plain language info on health conditions, nutrition, fitness, sections for targeted audiences (women, teens, seniors, etc.) with Spanish versions also available
- **MedlinePlus, National Library of Medicine**, <https://medlineplus.gov/> - plain language overviews of health topics and conditions, with links to additional information from government and health organization sources [note: information on external organization sites may not be in plain language]
- NIH Senior Health, National Institutes of Health, <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/index.html> - focused on information for older adults
- Other NIH agencies may also have appropriate materials

READABILITY TOOLS

Note: each readability tool has its own formula and limitations. Consider using SAM or PEMAT for a more comprehensive assessment.

- Readability Formulas, <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/> - general site covering several readability measures and related calculators
- SMOG, <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/smog-readability-formula.php> - based on number of polysyllabic words in 3 10-sentence samples
- FRY, <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/IDPHChannelsService/file.ashx?file=64F4AF1E-7B77-472A-A34C-B2E217365470> - based on number of syllables and sentences in sample text
- Flesch-Kincaid, <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/flesch-grade-level-readability-formula.php>, based on average number of syllables per word and words per sentence
- **SAM (suitability assessment of materials)**, <http://aspiruslibrary.org/literacy/SAM.pdf> - focuses less on grade/reading level, checklist focused on literacy, content, graphics, layout, learning stimulation, and cultural appropriateness
- **PEMAT (patient education materials assessment form, from AHRQ)**, <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/prevention-chronic-care/improve/self-mgmt/pemat/index.html> - goes beyond reading level to address understandability, words, numbers, layout, visuals, actionability. PDF User Guide and Tool for Printable Materials are downloadable as PDFs which may be easier to use than html version, note scoring form (Excel sheet) available for download: http://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/professionals/prevention-chronic-care/improve/self-mgmt/pemat/pemat_form.xls

BOOKS

- **Doak, Doak, & Root, *Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills, Second Edition*. 1996.** Scanned copy available for free at Harvard University School of Public Health's Health Literacy Studies website: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/resources/teaching-patients-with-low-literacy-skills/>
- "What to Do" easy-to-read health book series, Institute for Healthcare Advancement, <https://www.ih4health.org/our-products/>
 - Intended for parents/families: teen health, childhood obesity, childhood asthma, senior health, healthy teeth, pregnancy, childhood sickness
 - Offers volume discounts and options to purchase with your organization logo added to cover
 - Grant programs to help non-profit organizations obtain copies for distribution: <https://www.ih4health.org/our-products/grantsdiscounted-books/>
- Health Literacy and Patient Safety: Help Patients Understand: Reducing the Risk by Designing a Safer, Shame-Free Health Care Environment. American Medical Association, 2007, can be ordered from <https://commerce.ama-assn.org/store/catalog/productDetail.jsp?skuld=sku1240015&productId=prod1240006> and may be available online

CONFERENCES

- **Institute for Healthcare Advancement, Health Literacy Conference**, held in May of each year in southern California (Anaheim, Irvine, etc.), <https://www.iha4health.org/iha-conference/>
- Health literacy summits are held in various states at various times. Current offerings can be found by Googling "health literacy summit" and the year. Health Literacy Missouri seems to be regularly held with current information available online, <http://www.healthliteracymissouri.org/summit/>

REPORTS AND RESOURCES:

Useful reports and data for informing grant applications and building support

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2010). National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy. Washington, DC. https://health.gov/communication/hlactionplan/pdf/Health_Literacy_Action_Plan.pdf
- Berkman ND, Sheridan SL, Donahue KE, Halpern DJ, Viera A, Crotty K, Holland A, Brasure M, Lohr KN, Harden E, Tant E, Wallace I, Viswanathan M. Health Literacy Interventions and Outcomes: An Updated Systematic Review. Evidence Report/Technology Assessment No. 199. (Prepared by RTI International–University of North Carolina Evidence-based Practice Center under contract No. 290-2007-10056-I. AHRQ Publication Number 11-E006. Rockville, MD. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. March 2011. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK82434/>
- Proceedings of the Surgeon General's Workshop on Improving Health Literacy, September 7, 2006, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD. Office of the Surgeon General (US); Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (US). Rockville (MD): Office of the Surgeon General (US); 2006. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44257/>
- ACOG Committee Opinion No. 585: Health literacy. Obstet Gynecol. 2014Feb;123(2 Pt 1):380-3. <http://www.acog.org/Resources-And-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Patient-Safety-and-Quality-Improvement/Health-Literacy> (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
- America's Health Literacy: Why We Need Accessible Health Information. An Issue Brief From the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008. <https://health.gov/communication/literacy/issuebrief/>
- Health Literacy, A Prescription to End Confusion. Institute of Medicine (2004), <https://www.nap.edu/read/10883/chapter/1>
- State and County Estimates of Low Literacy, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/StateEstimates.aspx> - includes county data; most recent data is from 2003, addresses general literacy only not health literacy
- Example of a broad, general PubMed (<http://www.pubmed.gov>) search: (("Health Literacy"[Majr] OR "health literacy"[tiab] OR "plain language"[tiab]) AND English[lang])

MISCELLANEOUS

- "Learner Developed Materials," Rudd & Comings, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/healtheducationquarterly/> - Encourages the engagement of learners in the development and refinement of materials and messages
- "Always Use Teach-Back!," partnership including Health Literacy Iowa, <http://www.teachbacktraining.org/home-of-teach-back-training> - Promotes the teach back method of communication for patient engagement and empowerment

- "Ask Me 3," National Patient Safety Foundation, <http://www.npsf.org/?page=askme3> - encourages patients to ask 3 key questions of providers to better understand their health and treatment
- "Accessible Print Materials: Formatting Guidelines to Accommodate All Audiences," Massachusetts Department of Public Health, <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/com-health/healthy-aging/accessible-print-materials.pdf>
- "Making Your Printed Health Materials Senior-Friendly," National Institute on Aging, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-printed-health-materials-senior-friendly>
- "Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines," <http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/resources/Clearprint/Documents/CNIB%20Clear%20Print%20Guide.pdf>
- from a Canadian organization, includes suggestions on design for accessibility