




## Improving Written Communication

Objective: Learn to transform complicated information into effective written materials clients can relate to and understand

### **Readability**

Formula that shows if you are in the right ballpark on a range from easy (grade 4 – 6)  very hard (college and above)

Tools to determine reading level:

- Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test
- Fry Readability Graph
- Gunning 'FOG' Readability Test (FOG)
- Simple Measure of Gobbledygook Readability Formula (SMOG)

[http://wordcount.info/wc/jsp/clear/analyze\\_smog.jsp](http://wordcount.info/wc/jsp/clear/analyze_smog.jsp)

To calculate SMOG

1. Take a number of sentences from the beginning, middle and end of a document.
2. Count the number of words with 3 or more syllables.
3. Check the chart below to determine the grade level.

Even people with higher health literacy skills want health information that is understandable, meaningful to them, and easy to use.

Total Polysyllabic Word Counts	Approximate Grade Level
0-2	4
3-6	5
7-12	6
13-20	7
21-30	8
61-42	9
43-56	10
57-72	11
73-90	12
91-110	college-level

Developed by Harold C. McGraw, Office of Educational Research, Baltimore County Schools, Towson, MD.

## Health Literacy Design Principles

1. Use simple language for clear communication.

Which of these sentences uses simple language?

- The bandage was wound around the wound.
- The farm was used to produce produce.
- The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.

A. Short words

- Cardiovascular = heart
- Intramuscular = in the muscle
- Morbidity = disease

B. Short sentences

- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a half hour or more of moderate physical activity on most days, preferably every day. The activity can include brisk walking, calisthenics, home care, gardening, moderate sports exercise, and dancing.
- Do at least 30 minutes of exercise, like brisk walking, most days of the week.

C. Conversational

- Exposure to the chemical could cause adverse health effects.
- You could get sick if you are near the chemical.

D. No jargon or acronyms

- Hypertension
- High blood pressure
- PRN
- When you need it

E. Clear meaning – not ambiguous

Which of these sentences is not ambiguous?

- Miners Refuse to Work after Death
- Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
- Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
- New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group

F. Action statements rather than passive statements (What should I do?)

- Smoking causes heart disease and lung cancer.
- Heart disease and lung cancer are caused by smoking.

G. Small practical steps

H. Positive Statements

- Wear your helmet every time you ride your bicycle.
- Do not ride your bicycle without wearing a helmet.

I. Benefit to client

2. Organize your document in a way that facilitates learning.

- 3 main ideas
- Chunk with subheadings
- Most important information first
- Short bulleted lists
- White space
- Columns of 40 – 50 characters
- Key information in a shaded box to make it jump out
- Invite your audience to participate

3. Choose design elements that make reading easier

- Serif fonts
- Font size of 12 – 14 for text and 2 points larger for sub-headings
- No All caps
- No fancy fonts, no italics
- Limit bolding to highlight key words
- Use dark letters on a light background
- No watermarks or busy backgrounds
- Left align and left justified

4. Use visuals to support the text

- High quality
- Match your audience
- Show action you want them to take
- Use captions under pictures
- Number a series of pictures or images
- Use arrows to point out key information in your visual
- Use only symbols that are familiar to everyone
- Use pictographs to represent words or ideas simply
- Draw small objects next to known objects to show scale

**Evaluate:** self-evaluate and audience test

**References:**

National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Simply Put. Retrieved from

[https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/simply\\_put.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/simply_put.pdf)

Unity Point Health. Building Health Literate Communities: A Guidebook to Achieving Organizational Change. Retrieved from

<https://www.unitypoint.org/filesimages/Literacy/Health%20Literacy%20Guidebook.pdf>

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: Author. Retrieved from

[https://health.gov/communication/HLActionPlan/pdf/Health\\_Literacy\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://health.gov/communication/HLActionPlan/pdf/Health_Literacy_Action_Plan.pdf)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Clear Communication Scorecard or widget

<https://www.cdc.gov/ccindex/>

“This is bad enough” YouTube video 2:20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3tJ-MXqPmk>