

Health Literacy Primer

1. What are some barriers that might get in the way of good communication and understanding?
 - a. With concordant language?
 - b. Without concordant language?
2. What is the goal of any health communication?
 - a. Understanding
 - b. Engagement/partnering between providers and patient
 - c. Application & adherence to treatment plan Some considerations:
3. Health Literacy defined
 - a. Low health literacy impacts nearly half our population. At some point in their lives, 9 out of 10 patients will have trouble understanding and using health information
 - b. Is complex: The degree to which individuals have the **capacity** to:
 - i. obtain, process, and understand
 - ii. basic health information and services
 - iii. needed to make appropriate health decisions.
4. 4 domains: fundamental (reading, writing and numeracy); scientific [Science not communicated is science not done]; civic (using the system); cultural (familiarity with allopathic medicine and concepts such as patient autonomy, preventive care ...)
5. Capacity v. skill – our job is to help develop skills
6. Communication skills
 - b. Slow down!
 - c. Organize the information
 - i. Most important info first
 - ii. Limit the amount of information: Small chunks
 - iii. Use active voice
 - iv. Specifics, not hypotheticals
 - v. Use plain language & define 'technical terms'
 - d. Reinforcement through multiple channels (modalities/media)
 - e. Help patients ask questions
 - i. Do you have any questions? (perhaps least effective)
 - ii. What questions do you have for me?
 - iii. It's your turn: What questions do you have for me?
 - iv. Confirm comprehension
 - f. Confirm Understanding
 - i. Ask – Tell – Ask
 1. Ask – what does the client/patient know already? Want to know?
 2. Tell – See Organize the information above in b.
 3. Ask – see Questions above in d. AND How will you explain this to _____ at home?

ii. Teach Back

- a. Ask the client to repeat back – using their own words
- b. Be sure **You** own any confusion – don't 'blame' the client:
"I've given you a lot of information and I want to make sure I was clear."
"This information is confusing for everyone."

iii. Application

1. What will you do when you go home?
2. How will you [remember to take your medicine?]

Plain Language: Keys to Success

What is plain language?

When you write in plain language, readers can understand what you write the first time they read it. When you write in plain language, readers can

- find what they need,
- understand what they find, and
- act appropriately on that understanding,
- in the time and effort they are willing to spend.

Can legal and technical information be in Plain language?

Yes. When you write in plain language, you are more likely to be accurate, precise, sufficient, and unambiguous. Plain language is especially important in legal and scientific documents to ensure they are both technically precise and legally sufficient while also being as clear as possible for the intended audience.

How can I be sure I am writing in plain language?

Use this Plain Language checklist to be sure you've used good techniques

Does document meet the readers' needs?

- Do I have a clear idea of who will read this document?
- Does the format match the readers' needs?
- Does the content meet the readers' needs?
- Does it answer the readers' questions in the order they will ask them?
- Does it include only what the reader needs to know, omitting unnecessary information?

Is the message clear?

- Is the main message up front?
- Will the message be clear to my readers?
- Have I logically arranged each section?
- Is the document an appropriate length?
- Will my reader know what to do with the information?

Are the paragraphs effective?

- Do the paragraphs begin with the main idea?
- Are the paragraphs the right length?

Are the sentences effective?

- Are any sentences too long or too short?
- Have I used active voice most of the time?

- Have I used concise, well-constructed sentences?
- Have I kept the subject, verb, and object together?
- Have I used action verbs instead of nouns made out of verbs?
- Have I used a conversational tone and the reader's words?
- Have I defined words when necessary?

Are the words effective?

- Does the word choice match the readers' needs and skills?
- Did I use concrete and familiar words?
- Did I avoid jargon and other unclear words, such as concept and value words?
- Did I use pronouns to speak to the reader?
- Did I eliminate extra words and unnecessary information?
- Did I define all acronyms?

Have I used headings effectively?

- Does each page have at least one heading?
- Do the headings clearly describe the information that follows?
- Do the headings cover all the ideas in their section?
- Is the heading format consistent throughout the document?
- Are the headings close to the information that follows, so they don't "float?"

Did I use list and tables?

- Can I turn any information into a bulleted list?
- Did I consistently punctuate my lists?
- Do all the items in the list follow logically from the list introduction?
- Can I turn any information into an "if...then" table?

Have I checked the spelling and grammar?

- Have I checked the spelling with more than Spellcheck?
- Have I checked to be sure it's all grammatically correct?
- Have I checked the punctuation?

Does it look easy to read?

- Have I used enough white space to make it look uncluttered and inviting?
- Have I used effective emphasis techniques – such as bold and colors NOT ALL CAPS?
- Have I added graphics where they will illustrate the message?
- Is the font at least 12 points?
- Is the text both upper and lower case –?
- Is there enough contrast between font color and background color?

<http://centerforplainlanguage.org/plain-language-checklist/>

Familiar Words List: Health Insurance

▼ Replace these words... ▼ with familiar words

accurate	true, correct
additional	other, more
alter	change
ascertain	find out
assist	help
be eligible for	qualify
complete an application	apply
comply	follow
currently	now
determine	find, decide
discontinue	stop, end
disenroll	drop
effective	on
eligible	qualify
employment	work
enroll	join
exceeds	is more than
excess	too much, too many
expired	ended
failure to	does not
following	after
indicate	show
individuals	persons
ineligible	does not qualify
inform	tell

▼ Replace these words... ▼ with familiar words

initial	first
is allowed to	may
notify	tell
obtain	get
optimum	best
option, opt	choice, choose
physician	doctor
prior to	before
provide	give, send
receive	get
recover	take, take back
redetermination	renewal
reduce	lower
reenroll	join again
repay	pay back
requisite	needed, necessary
retain	keep
reveal	show
sequentially	in order
submit	send
subsequent	next
sufficient	enough
terminate	end, stop
valid	true
verify	get proof

Fry Readability Graph: Directions for Use

Step 1: Choose 3 text passages of 100 words each. Choose one passage near the beginning, one from the middle, and one near the end, starting at the beginning of a sentence each time. Do **not** include titles, headings, or bulleted text, unless the bullets are complete sentences.

➤ **A word is defined** as a group of symbols with a space on either side. So, a hyphenated word (heart-healthy) is *one* word. A proper name (Jennifer), abbreviation or acronym (IRS), and numeral (1978) are each considered one word.

Step 2: Count the number of sentences in each text passage. First, count the number of whole sentences. Then, for the last sentence in each passage—which is probably not complete—calculate the fraction of the sentence included up to the 100th word. Then round it to the nearest tenth.

Example: Here's the last sentence in a passage, with a // mark after the 100th word.

Talk with your // doctor about things that are still not clear to you.

In this case, 3 words out of a total of 13 are part of the 100 word count. If you divide 3 by 13, you get .23. Rounding to the nearest tenth, you get .2. The total number of sentences will be a whole number plus .2.

Step 3: Count the total syllables in each text passage. Here's an easy way. Skip all one syllable words and the 1st syllable of other words. For all longer words, put a mark over each syllable beyond the first, like this syllable. Then count the marks and add 100 for the skipped syllables. That's your total count.

For abbreviations (IRS) and numerals (1978), each *symbol* or *digit* is *one syllable*. So, IRS is 1 word with 3 syllables and 1978 is 1 word with 4 syllables.

Step 4: Find the average number of syllables and sentences. Add the numbers from each of the 3 passages and divide by 3.

Example

	Number of Sentences	Number of Syllables
1 st 100 words	5.9	124
2 nd 100 words	4.8	141
3 rd 100 words	<u>6.1</u>	<u>158</u>
TOTALS	16.8	423

Totals Divided by 3 5.6 average 141 average

Step 5: Plot the averages on the Fry graph. Find average number of syllables on the horizontal axis and the average number of sentences on the vertical axis. The intersection of these two points will fall inside a diagonal dark band. Read down inside that band to find the grade level of the material.

Quirks in Using the Fry Readability Formula

Do NOT count bulleted lists of words or phrases

Hyphenated Words = 1 Word

Dates

2004 = 1 word
4 syllables

Abbreviations

CDC = 1 word
3 syllables

HIV = 1 word
3 syllables

AIDS = 1 word
1 syllable

Phone/Web Addresses

Do not count OR count as 1 word 1 syllable
(original formula had no recommendation and experts use either system)

Do not count titles or subtitles - running phrase only

Graph for Estimating Readability—Extended

