

Tips for Clear Health Communication

Planning

Content

Writing

Design

Tailoring

Writing Easy-to-Read Documents

Writing should be clear and concise. To be easily understood, documents need to be short and simple. Follow these tips to create well-written documents.



Tips for Clear Writing

- Use short, familiar words such as “doctor” instead of “physician.”
- Define new words and concepts in simple language. Clarify with concrete examples.
- Use sentences of 15 words or less. Eliminating unnecessary words and phrases breaks up compound sentences.
- Use active language. For example, instead of “she was called by the doctor,” say “the doctor called her.”
- Use personal pronouns, like “you” and “we,” to interact with your readers.
- Focus on being clear and consistent, rather than on the reading level. Use readability scales only as a guide.
- Edit. Read your document aloud to spot errors. Leave time for yourself and others to review your documents.

Common Writing Mistakes

1. Too much jargon

Instead of: Contact your Primary Care Physician.
Try: Call your main doctor.

2. Unclear pronoun references

Instead of: The patient needs to talk about *his* health problems with *their* doctor.
Try: The patient needs to discuss *his* health problem with *his* doctor.

3. Non-parallel construction

Instead of: Buy *some apples*, pears, and *a few figs*.
Try: Buy *some apples*, *pears*, and *figs*.

4. Use of singular and plural

Instead of: A reader likes clear writing to help *them* take action.
Try: A reader likes clear writing to help *her* take action.

5. Passive voice

Instead of: The document *was written by* Jane.
Try: Jane *wrote* the document.

Want more information?

To learn more about clear writing, materials assessments, and on-site health communication trainings for your staff, please contact **Beccah Rothschild** at beccah_rothschild@berkeley.edu or (510) 642-0415.