



**The Ohio State University
AHEC Clear Health Communication Program**

Plain Language Checklist *

Content:

- Title describes content
- Purpose is clearly stated
- Purpose is achieved
- Target group is clearly defined
- Information is accurate and reflects current practice
 - Messages do not contradict themselves
 - Information is evidence-based
- Information is current
 - Date of production shown
 - Expiration or review date shown
 - Sources mentioned are dated and current
- Content includes all essential information
- Procedural steps are clear, single action & observable
- Rationale for steps of procedure is provided
- Material free from bias and commercial endorsement
- Major points limited to 3-5 most “need to know” information
- Material encourages interaction with the reader
- Reader directed to other sources of information or support

Organization:

- Key points emphasized or summarized
- Text organized in a easy-to-follow sequence that is logical to reader
- Key messages are behavior-focused, up front, and repeated
- Sections or paragraphs are short (3-4 sentences), present a single message, distinct, and labeled with subheadings
- Organization of the document is easily identified by reader
- Context precedes new information

Language and Writing Style:

- Active rather than passive voice
- New words / concepts are clearly defined and explained.
- Analogies help explain difficult concepts
- Positive, friendly, conversational tone
- Consistent terms throughout
- Reader referred to in first person and personal pronouns are used
- Jargon and technical words are avoided or explained

- Abbreviations and acronyms are avoided or explained
- Verbs are used to describe action
- Simple, everyday, familiar words
- Sentences are short (15-20 words) and contain only one idea
- Avoids slang
- Free of stereotypes (racial, ethnic, sexual) and inclusive language
- Concrete examples rather than abstract principles
- Important points are separated and listed from the text with bullets

Design and Appeal:

- Cover or masthead includes title and action (behavior) focused message
- Ample white space with generous margins
- Upper and lower case letters used, not all capitals
- Text is left justified and right ragged, without hyphens
- Font size 12 – 14 point with typeface for text serif and san serif for headings. Font size increases from body text to headings and headings stand out
- Bullets used to present lists. Limit 5-7 items in a list
- Key points are emphasized with boxes, rule lines, bolding, color, symbols
- Dark ink on light, non-glare paper
- Lengthy instructions are subdivided with appropriate subheadings
- Graphics and illustrations
 - Simple, clear lines with distracting details
 - Aid learning and retention
 - Clear captions and labels
 - Represent a single concept
 - Color enhances message and does not distract
 - Color is accurate / realistic
 - Images are near text they refer to
 - Charts / graphs avoided
 - Illustrations show people, activities, objects that are realistic, positive, culturally acceptable
 - Body parts shown are within context of whole body

**Adapted from: Review Criteria for New / Revised OSU Materials or Commercial Materials Form – The Ohio State University Medical Center*

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