



SIUH Health Literacy Program

Plain Language: Universal Principles

Before you begin:

Determine the *audience*, the *need* for the material, and its proposed *use*

1. Writing Style Goals:

- Clear health communication
- Create easy to read print material
- Reduce hard to read health care words
- Cut out unrelated information

2. Overall Layout:

- Title matches content
- Most important information goes first
- Use a clear, easy, speaking style
- 4-6 words per sentence
- Break down compound sentences
- For lists: use bullets not sentences
- Avoid medical jargon

3. Typeface:

- Use Serif or Sans serif
- *Italics are hard to read*
- AVOID ALL CAPITAL LETTERS
- Fancy fonts are hard to read
- Use 14 point size font

5. Photos/Graphics:

- Photos should match key ideas
- People in photos should represent target audience
- Photos should show the **correct** way to do things

6. Formatting:

- Text colors and the paper should contrast
- Leave white space
- Avoid splitting words at the end of sentences
- Use sections, headings, and subheadings
- Keep like information together
- Left justification is easier to read

7. Text Color:

- Too many colors are distracting
- Colors are more expensive to print

Helpful hints for communication:

- Read and explain material to patients
- Aim for under 8th grade reading level
- Ask adult learners to give feedback on material