

National Health Education Week
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Health Literacy: Do your materials measure up?

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Today's Objectives

1. Apply the Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) to objectively assess the suitability of health education materials for a particular audience.
2. Describe specific strategies for field-testing health education materials with the intended audience.
3. Review best practices in clear communication and health information design.

Agenda

- + Why evaluate your materials?
- + Assessing the suitability of health education materials
- + Field testing materials with your intended audience

Why should I evaluate my health education materials?

Top 5 Reasons

1. Just because **you** think your materials make sense doesn't mean that they do.
1. You can waste a lot of time and money developing materials that nobody reads.
2. Evaluation → more funding.
3. It's the only way you can be **sure** that your materials will be understood.
4. It will make you a better health educator.

The Numbers

- + Approximately 1 in 2 adults struggle with literacy
- + Nearly 9 in 10 adults struggle with health literacy

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Improving health literacy

- + There's a good chance that members of your target audience struggle with health literacy.
- + You can help by making health education materials easier to understand.

Assessing your materials

(from the safety of your desk)

What to measure

- + **Readability:** reading difficulty of printed text
- + **Usability:** ease of use (and satisfaction with) a product or material
- + **Suitability:** appropriateness (for a specific target audience)

What makes things readable (or not)?

- + Word length and familiarity
- + Number of syllables
- + Number of clauses in a sentence
- + Use of acronyms and jargon
- + Active voice

Limitations of readability formulas

- + Readability formulas do not measure how well people understand your material.
- + Grade level scores for the same text differ greatly depending on the formula you use.
- + Editing text to reduce the number of syllables may not make it easier to read.
 - + The important thing is that the words are **familiar** - not necessarily shorter.

Usability

+ Good for:

- + websites
- + tools
- + products
- + forms & charts

+ Watch people try to use your product. Note where they run into problems or get lost.

+ Goal = make it easier for people to use

What makes things usable (or not)?

- + Attractive design
- + Intuitive (can be figured out easily)
- + Good labels
- + Little/no background “noise”
- + Tailored to the audience
- + Feedback

Suitability

“All of the above” and then some...

- + Content
- + Readability
- + Color and graphics
- + Layout
- + Typography
- + Cultural appropriateness
- + Motivation

The SAM

Suitability Assessment of Materials

- + Developed and validated by Doak, Doak & Root in the 1990s
- + *Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills* 2nd Edition (1996)

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/resources/doak-book/>

- + Available online as a PDF

How the SAM works

- + Evaluate and score each of the 22 SAM factors
 - + Factors fall into 6 categories:
 1. Content
 2. Literacy Demand
 3. Graphics
 4. Layout and Typography
 5. Learning Stimulation, Motivation
 6. Cultural Appropriateness
- + Each factor includes an explanation and criteria for scoring



Scoring the SAM

2 points for superior

1 point for adequate

0 points for not suitable

N/A if it does not apply

Example

Layout and Typography: Subheadings

Few people can remember more than 7 independent items. For adults with lower literacy skills, the limit may be 3-5. Longer lists need to be broken up into small “chunks.”

Superior: Lists are grouped under descriptive subheadings; no more than 5 items are presented w/out a subheading

Adequate: No more than 7 are presented w/out a subheading

Not suitable: More than 7 items are presented w/out a subheading

Interpretation of SAM score

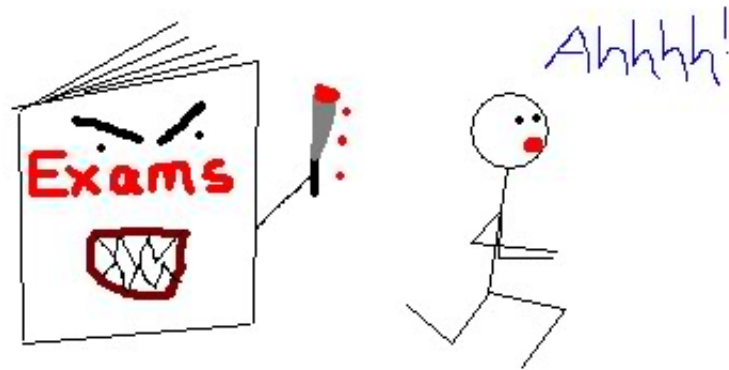
Maximum possible score is 44 points (100%)

- 70-100% superior
- 40-69% adequate
- 0-39% not suitable

+ Look closely at “unsuitable” ratings in any of the 22 factors

Field Testing Your Materials

It's not really a *test*...



It's co-creation

- + Work with your target audience to develop or improve your materials.
- + If you are evaluating existing materials, think of it as quality assurance.
- + Field testing is an evaluation of your materials – NOT your users.

Why should I field test my materials?

- + All materials have problems. (Some more than others.)
- + They may not be obvious to you. But your users will almost always find them.
- + Watching people read/use your materials makes you a better health educator.



Who do I test with?

- + Almost anyone.
- + Try to find users who reflect your audience (a.k.a. “real users”)
 - + Demographics
 - + Knowledge and context
 - + Culture and language

How many people do I need to test?

- + It depends.
- + 1 is better than none.
- + Between 3 and 8 is great.

Where do I test?

- + Hospitals and health clinic waiting room
- + WIC waiting room
- + Senior centers
- + Adult education classes or literacy centers
- + Libraries and community centers

Getting started

- + “Do you have a few minutes to take a look at this? Can you tell me what you think this is trying to say / what this is for?”
- + “I’m helping the clinic with a new factsheet. We want it to be interesting and easy-to-use. Do you have a minute to look at it and tell me your opinion?”

Sample Questions

- + What catches your eye? Who do you think this factsheet is for? (first impression)
- + Tell me in your own words what this is trying to say. What does this list tell you to do? (comprehension)
- + What do you think of the pictures? Do these people look like anyone you know? (graphics/ cultural acceptability)
- + Do you see any words that you think some people might have a hard time understanding? The word “sample” means different things to different people – what does it mean to you? (individual word choice)



Getting at self-efficacy

- + Do you think you could do what this brochure suggests?
- + After reading this factsheet, do you feel prepared to child-proof your home?
- + After reading something like this, do you think you would try any of these exercises in the next month?
- + Did this brochure give you specific ideas of what you can do to control your blood pressure? Do you think people will take any of these steps after reading the brochure?

The fine print

- + If you are in an academic or government setting, you may need to get approval from an IRB (Institutional Review Board).
 - + Test plan
 - + Informed consent form
- + Informal tests are often exempt.

Iterative Design

- + Test. Revise. Repeat.
- + Don't wait until you have already developed your materials to test them with your target audience. You can test a draft!
- + Periodically test existing materials and improve them.

Example: Before Testing

Make your home safe from lead dust.

1. Cover 2. Clean 3. Block

What you need:

- Paper Towels
- Spray Cleaner
- Garbage Can & Bags
- Duct Tape

- + Confusion over block – as word choice (and concept)
- + Confirmed use of English words with graphics
- + Change woman's outfit – (skirt or dress) with patterned fabric
- + Circles and numbers – challenging to follow call outs
- + 2 messages, not 3

Example: After Testing

PREVENT LEAD POISONING

Make your home safe from lead dust.



What you need:



Paper Towels



Spray Cleaner



Garbage Can & Bags



Duct Tape



Wrap Up

+ From your desk:

- Try a checklist
- Play around with readability formulas
- Apply the SAM

+ In the field:

- Test it
- Listen and observe

Then revise and repeat!

Thank You!!

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