

# Health Literacy and Plain Language

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# Defining health literacy

## Personal Health Literacy

The degree to which individuals have the ability to **find**, **understand**, and **use** information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others

## Organizational Health Literacy

The degree to which organizations **equitably enable** individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others

# Why universal precautions?

- Only **12 percent** of English-language speakers have proficient health literacy skills.
- Start with the assumption that **most** patients and caregivers will need help finding, understanding and using health information and services.
- Build practices and communications around this assumption
- Build an understanding of individual and family needs

# Goals of Health Literacy Universal Precautions

- Making communications simpler and ensuring that patients and caregivers understand, so there is less risk of miscommunication
- Helping patients and caregivers navigate the healthcare system
- Supporting patients and caregivers as they work to improve health

# Strategies for health literate organizations

## **Accurate, accessible and actionable**

- Written, family-facing materials
- Language used in conversation
- Follow-up communications and EMR
- Facilitating effective navigation

## **Strategic and intentional**

- Apply improvement methods
- Improve verbal interaction
- Improve written communication
- Links to supportive systems
- Engage patients as partners in care and improvement efforts

# Talking Points About Health Literacy ([CDC](#))

- Clear communication means presenting words, numbers, and images in ways that make sense to the people who need the information.
- Test and ask for feedback before releasing information to the public.
- Clear communication builds trust with your audience.
- Choosing to use jargon is an act of exclusion.
- Using clear communication advances health equity.
- Clear communication streamlines the translation process.

# Best practices for health literacy-friendly language

## Tools

- CDC Plain Language guidance
  - Word use
  - Arrangement of text and spacing
- Visual aids and graphics
- Readability calculators

## Engagement

- Test readers
- Child Life
- Health librarian
- Patient and Family Advisory Councils (PFACs)
- Translation services



# Plain Language Principles and Considerations

## Principles

- Clear, concise language
- Design and organize documents for easy reading and understanding
- Test materials with intended audience
- Makes translation easier
- Key element of health literacy

## Considerations

- Reading and vocabulary level, sentence length
- Layout of written information
- Use of images/symbols
- Accessibility vs. “dumbing down”
- Adapted and personalized



# Tools for Assessing and Building Organizational Health Literacy

1. [AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd Edition](#)
2. [The Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals and Health Centers 2](#)
3. [Checklists and handouts | plainlanguage.gov](#)
4. [Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective | CMS](#)
5. [Clear & Simple | National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)
6. [Checklists and handouts | plainlanguage.gov](#)
7. [Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective | CMS](#)





# Thank you!

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