

Developing Nutrition Education Materials for Low Literacy Audiences

To better reach your low literacy audience, write at a 5th grade reading level and keep the message short and to the point. Below are additional guidelines to assist you:

Content/Style

- Organize information in a logical manner
- Repeat key words and new information
- Define new, technical, and unfamiliar words with simple definitions
- Avoid abbreviations, acronyms, hyphens, jargon, quotation marks, and unfamiliar spelling of words
- Include how-to-information
- Reinforce ideas with specific, concrete examples
- Use simple, peer language (e.g., buy instead of purchase)
- Use active voice in a conversational manner
- Use direct, positive statements

Format, Organization & Wording

- Balance white space with words and illustrations
- Use simple headers that are close to text
- Use 5-10 word sentences; 60 word or less paragraphs
- Use 2-syllable words or less
- Use capital and lower-case lettering, instead of all caps
- Use at least 12 point font
- Use a simple font that is easy to read (e.g., Arial)
- Highlight a word or passage by underlining or **bolding** it


Visuals

- Use visuals that are relevant to text
- Use simple illustrations
- Use realistic and familiar images

Readability

- Complete readability analysis to determine reading level

Tip: Completing a readability analysis with Microsoft Word:

1. On the **Tools** menu, click **Options**, and then click the **Spelling & Grammar** tab.
2. Select the **Check grammar with spelling** check box.
3. Select the **Show readability statistics** check box, and then click **OK**.
4. On the **Standard** toolbar toward the top of the screen, click  -the Spelling and Grammar icon.

When Microsoft Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document.

Adapted: Microsoft Office Online,
<http://office.microsoft.com/>

Guidelines and information primarily adapted from:

1. Buono, K. "Tips for Creating CACFP Materials in a Low Literacy Format." www.frac.org/pdf/tool_kit.pdf.
2. National Cancer Institute (2003). "Clear & Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low-Literate Readers." www.cancer.gov/cancerinformation/clearandsimple.
3. Nitzke, S., et al. (1986). "Writing for Reading – Guide for Developing Print Materials in Nutrition for Low Literacy Adults." www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition/nutrition/b3545.pdf.

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