

Regional Workshop 2015 Health Literacy: Is your message understood?

Health Literacy Principle #1

Keep sentences short and simple.

How to use principle #1

1. Aim for 15 words or less.
2. Use simple sentence structure.
3. Use bulleted lists instead of long sentences.

Helpful resource:

- Ask yourself: What do the readers need to know?
- Rewrite sentences with simple sentence structure.
- Edit your text again, after you have re-written
- Ask someone else to read the materials. (preferably a test-run with the target audience)

Health Literacy Principle #2

Use familiar words

How to use principle #2:

Choose words that are:

1. Less than 3 syllables
2. Less than 6 letters

OR

3. If you have to use it, teach with it! i.e. – bacteria (germs)

Helpful resource:

- Children’s Writer’s Word Book 2nd Edition
- Use the thesaurus in Microsoft

Health Literacy Principle #3

Use conversation style and active voice.

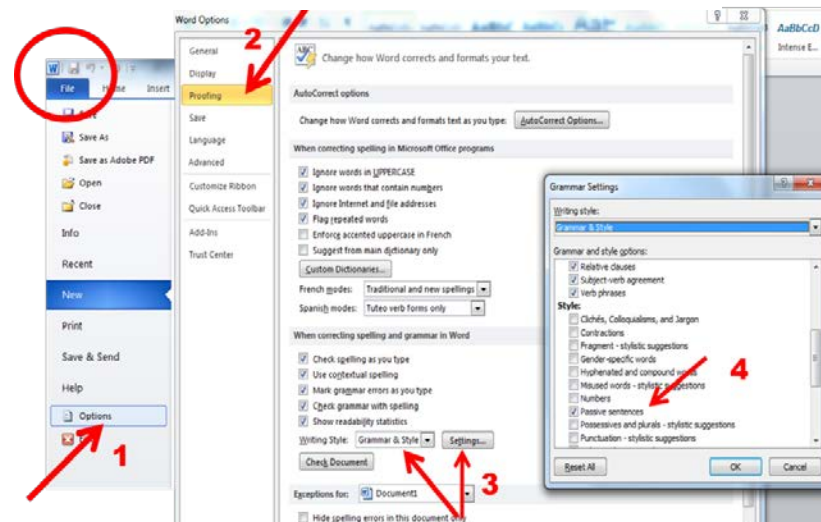
How to use conversation style:

1. Use **you, your, yours** to address the reader of the material.
2. Use **I or we** as the “voice” directing the action in the piece of material.

How to use active voice instead of passive voice:

1. Avoid using –ed or –ing on the end of verbs.
2. Avoid using any form of “to be” or “was” in front of verbs. (i.e. will be, should be, can be)

Helpful resource:



Set Microsoft spelling/grammar check to show passive sentences

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Health Literacy Principle #4

Be direct and specific.

How to use principle #4 for written materials:

1. Use bulleted lists
2. Use less description
3. Know your audience

How to use principle #4 for verbal communication:

1. Allow for short pauses when speaking to let the listener catch up
2. Simply stop and ask: "How are you doing? or You doing ok?"

Helpful resource:

How to use Teach Back

- Use a caring tone of voice and attitude.
- Use plain language.
- Ask the listener to explain back, using their own words.
- Phrase the question, as "How would you explain this to your babysitter?"
- Emphasize that the responsibility to explain clearly is on you, the educator.
- If the listener is not able to teach-back correctly, explain again and re-check.

Health Literacy Principle #5

Aim for a 4th – 6th grade reading level

How to help lower reading grade level:

1. Use Health Literacy Principles #1 – 4
2. Set your Microsoft Word settings to check the reading grade level

Helpful resource:

