

Write for Health Literacy

Best practices

We use strict health literacy guidelines, for both copy and design choices, to create all patient education materials. This allows all patients and caregivers to understand and use our materials.

People of any background can have low health literacy. Even people with strong reading skills can struggle to learn new health information.

As you work with our team to create health literate patient education materials, it may be helpful to keep these best practices in mind.

We use a conversational tone

Our documents are written to feel like a conversation. We use:

- questions patients may ask as headers
- contractions
- simple words
- short sentences
- 1st and 2nd person voice. For example:
 - “We’ll teach you how to care for your wound.”
 - “We’ll teach you how to care for your child’s wound.”

As you review it may help to:

- think about how you might say something to a patient, rather than how you would write it
- read the document out loud.

We keep it simple

Text

We don’t use complex grammar. We keep our sentences short and to the point.

To help do this, we:

- use active voice (“We’ll do the procedure.” instead of “The procedure will be done by us.”)
- break up concepts into 2 or more sentences
- start sentences with conjunctions, when needed
- group like items (chunking technique)
- use bulleted lists
- limit the number of words that end with -ing. This helps keep sentences short and simple.

You may notice we format our bulleted lists differently than you’ve seen before. When we have a list where each bullet would make a complete sentence with the copy above it, we put 1 period at the very end of the list.

Design

Simple design with lots of white space makes it easier to read and use any material.

We use photos, graphics, and charts when they help support and explain the written material. We limit the number of elements, colors, and concepts we use in a single document.