

Assessing Tobacco Cessation Materials for Health Literacy

When assessing a printed piece for health literacy principles, evaluate the material using the criteria described below. This review will create a critical assessment to determine how well the piece incorporates health literacy principles.

Health Content

Having a clear goal for your materials will help focus the content and clarify your messages. Your materials should aim to persuade the reader to adopt a quitting behavior or take a specific action.

Purpose

Is the purpose of the material clear from the title, cover and introduction?

Quitting Behaviors

Are the desired quitting behaviors or specific action steps clearly identified for the reader?

Health Benefits

Are the specific health benefits of quitting smoking described (from the reader's point of view)?
Are these health benefits proven to spur behavior?

Scope

Is the content limited to 3 to 5 key messages?
Is information that is "nice to know" – but not necessary – left out?

Health Language

Has jargon and technical language been removed?
Are the remaining health terms clearly defined and explained?

Use of Illustrations/Photos

Are key quitting behaviors and benefits shown with illustrations/photos next to relevant text?

Reader Interaction

Are there opportunities to engage readers (checklists, etc.)?
Are there opportunities for readers to tailor the material to their situation?

Organization

Low-level and busy readers give up reading more easily, and need guidance to read longer sections.

Set up

Is the purpose and content of the piece described in the introduction?

Headings and Subheads

Are action-oriented headings and subheads used?

Grouping

Are complete ideas presented on a single page or on two facing pages?

Summary

Does the summary reiterate the key messages?

Language

Determine the reading level of the text. Follow other language recommendations to make the text as easy to read as possible.

Readability score

Is the Fry reading level score below 5th grade?

Writing style

Are active voice and a friendly, conversational style used?

Are short sentences (8-10 words) and short words (one or two syllables) used?

Vocabulary/Word choice

Are lay terms used to discuss cessation and health effects of smoking/quitting?

Are abbreviations, acronyms and statistics avoided?

Appearance

A simpler, less complicated design will aid comprehension. The reader's eye follows text more easily if blocks are broken up with cues and space.

Typography

Is the type size large enough to read (at least 12 point)?

Is a serif font used for body text?

Are ALL CAPS and other type treatments avoided?

Is the line spacing adequate so that text doesn't appear too dense?

Layout

Is there adequate white space (margins at least ½ inch)?

Is the right margin unjustified?

Is the line length appropriate (40-50 characters)?

Design organizers

Are visual cuing devices used (bold, shaded boxes, icons)?

Are bullets used effectively (no more than 5 items, appropriate size, spacing)?

Color

Is color used to aid readability (avoiding color overload)?

Is reverse type avoided?

Illustrations

Is the meaning of each illustration clear? Are captions and labels used?

Are multi-step illustrations used to convey processes?