

Plain Language Tip Sheet

1. Organize information from the learner's point of view.
2. Differentiate between "need to know" and "nice to know" information. We like to explain, give background information that, for non-medical folks, can confuse what they need to know.
3. Use common, one to two syllable words. We work from a 5th grade level word list.
4. Write short sentences, 15 to 18 words. Divide a long sentence into multiple sentences or a list.
5. Each paragraph addresses one idea.
6. Use active voice, identify who is doing the action. Address the learner directly (e.g.: you).
7. Avoid words with more than one meaning.
8. Start sentence with action the person takes rather than condition under which the person takes the action.
9. Give specific instructions, never assume the learner knows what to do.
10. Avoid or explain acronyms, jargon, medical terms. Define them if you must use them. Be on guard for terms you commonly use because of your specialty. (e.g.: drawing blood)
11. Chunk similar items of information together. Use headers to identify new sections and topics.
12. Have enough white space so pages do not look crowded and hard to read.
13. Use easily readable font (Times, Arial, Calibri, nothing "fancy") in an easily readable size (usually 12-point).
14. Include graphics or photos to show key ideas or actions.