

# Writing Health Information

The most common flaw in the process of health professionals writing health information is where they write the health information themselves and then ask consumers to comment on the design and content of the existing draft. The most effective approach to developing written health information is where consumers and health professionals work together to write health information or evaluate existing information. The following checklist can assist health professionals and health consumers develop or evaluate health information.

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## Planning

- > What is the purpose?
- > Who is the information being written for?
- > What is the information that needs to be covered?
- > Have you reviewed existing material on the subject?
- > Have you discussed the project with your department head/manager and secured support?
- > Who else needs to be involved?
- > Which consumers will be part of the writing group?
- > What format best suits the information?

## Production

- > In the writing style have you
  - kept sentences short and to the point?
  - expressed only one idea in each sentence?
  - used simple grammatical structures?
  - written in the active versus the passive voice?
  - used the second person YOU instead of the third person such as 'the consumer' or 'individuals'?
  - limited the number of words containing three or more syllables?
  - tried to keep the eye span to no more than 60-70 characters?
  - used adequate spacing to provide the eyes with a rest?
  - used numbers (eg 2) instead of word numbers (eg two)?
  - used font size of suitable size (11 or 12) and Times New Roman or other easy to read font.
  - not used all CAPITAL LETTERS?



## Tool 8: Writing Health Information

- > Has the following been taken into account when writing?
  - Does the information address the message you want to convey as well as what the consumers want to know?
  - Is the information consistent with current evidence and standards/policies?
  - Is the content organised so that the “must know” information comes before the “nice to know” information?
  - Is the content organised so it flows well?
  - Where appropriate have you used illustrations to convey the message more clearly?
  - Is the content free from jargon and abbreviations?
  - Have you used consistent terminology?
  - Is the content clearly communicated through the use of:
- > Question and answer format?
- > Headings?
- > Point form where appropriate?
- > ‘Remember’ boxes, which contain the most important points/action steps?
  - Do you have directions to quality websites for further information?
  - Have you included questions that the consumer could ask the health professional for further information?
  - Have you remained gender neutral, or is it a gender specific topic?
  - Is the information respectful towards the target group?
  - Have you identified your department and organisation and provided contact details?
  - Is the publication dated?
- > Has the draft been analysed to ensure clarity, accuracy and appropriate reading age?
- > Reading age appropriate to consumers going to be using the information. Standard is usually grade 8 reading level (see tool 7).
- > Objective feedback from someone with good writing skills.
- > Final copy edited for printing errors.

### Evaluation

- > How will you evaluate the information and continuously improve it? For example,
  - Check the information with a number of different consumers for readability?
  - Monitor use over time and take note of feedback from consumers and colleagues and use this information to continuously improve the content?

### For more information

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