

Reviewer's Guide to Evaluating Health Information Materials

by Sandra Smith, MPH, CHES

The purpose of this Guide is to aid the reviewer to check the fit between health information material and the learners who will use the material. The first step is to profile the learners. Next, the Guide asks you to visualize the learners using the material so you can work from their point of view. The Reviewer's Checklist guides you to consider attributes that make materials suitable and effective for a particular learner population.

Learner Profile

1. The age range of learners who will use this material is ____ to ____ years.
For example, since *Beginnings Guides* are for pregnant women and parents of children 0 to 3, the age range of learners is 15 to 45 years.
2. The ethnic and racial backgrounds represented in the learner population are:
Check the groups represented in your population.
 African American
 Asian American
 Caucasian
 Hispanic
 ___ Mexican American
 ___ Puerto Rican American
 ___ Cuban American
 ___ Other Hispanic _____
 Native American _____
 Immigrants or refugees from _____, _____, _____
3. Languages that learners and their families speak and read are:
 English
 Spanish
 Russian

4. The portion of the learner population with less than high school education _____%.

Take the Learners' Point of View

1. Now that you have essential information about who will be using the material under consideration, make a mental picture of a representative group of learners.
What do they look like?
How do they talk about the subject?
Where do they live?
What are their jobs?
What is their experience with the topic?
What is their experience with the health care system?
Why would they be interested in the material?
To what problem(s) might they seek a solution in this material?
2. Next, picture the your imaginary representative learners receiving and using the materials.
Where, when, how and with whom will learners get, use, read, refer to, carry, store, share the material?
3. Final Preparation: Take a minute to check out your own assumptions and your point of view. If you are a health care professional, it is very unlikely that your learners think about health the same way you do. Your training and experience give you a unique perspective. Step out of your professional role and into the learners' shoes.

The central question is not *Do you like the material?*, but rather, *How well will the material serve the wants and needs of the learners?*.

Ready to Review

Gather the materials you will evaluate. Make a copy of the following Reviewer's Checklist for each piece or each set of materials. The Reviewer's Checklist asks you to consider 25 attributes. (Some might not apply in every case.) These attributes are factors in the suitability and effectiveness of particular materials for a particular audience of learners. In addition, some practical considerations are presented.

Sitting in the learners' seat, follow the instructions on the Reviewer Checklist to review the materials. As you go through the checklist, check off each of the attributes you find in the materials. Missing checks will indicate a potential deficiency. You might find that the attributes are present in some parts of the material and not in others. For example, when considering item 8, you might find that some illustrations have captions and some do not. Judge the importance of the illustration(s) missing a caption. If it is not essential, it does less harm and you might check the attribute even though one or two illustrations are not captioned.

Reviewer's Checklist for Health Information Materials

Appearance: The Cover(s)

First just look at the cover.

1. The cover is attractive *to the learners*. It captures their attention and moves them to pick up the material.
2. The cover makes the purpose of the material clear and readily understandable. The purpose conveyed by the cover matches the purpose for providing information.

Appearance: Type & Graphics

Now look through the pages - still not reading yet - just looking at appearance.

3. The overall appearance conveys the importance of the information.
4. The overall appearance reflects the quality of your service.
5. The material looks easy to read and use, not difficult, overwhelming.
6. Sentences are short. Paragraphs are short with frequent headings.
7. Lists are short or divided by headings.
8. Illustrations are simple with little or no background. Each has a caption.
9. Bold type, boxes, bullets lead your eye to important points.

Content: Topics

Now read the material. At least skim all the pages; read several sections closely.

10. The focus is on desirable behavior and action, rather than on facts.
11. Key points jump out.
12. Information is essential, immediately applicable, actionable.
13. Key points are reviewed, summarized, repeated.

Content: Writing

14. Readability testing shows material does not exceed learners' literacy skills. Skilled readers learn more quickly and remember more from simply written materials. Unskilled readers may learn nothing from complex materials and may lose self-confidence.

15. [] Writing is conversational and friendly. It sounds like something you would say to a person sitting in front of you.
16. [] Active voice is used throughout.
For example, *when you see swelling*, rather than *when swelling is observed*.
17. [] Common words are used throughout.
Where technical terms are unavoidable, they are explained in common language.
18. [] Judgment and value terms are explained.
For example, *pain that does not go away in five minutes*, rather than *persistent pain*.
19. [] Sentences start with what the reader knows.
For example, *If swelling does not go down after a night's rest, call you doctor*, rather than *Call your doctor if swelling persists*.
20. [] Text invites interaction such as questions to answer, choices to make, actions to consider, tasks to perform. There are opportunities for small successes.

Content: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate

21. [] Illustrations, references, descriptions fit the learners' experience.
22. [] Material is available in other languages for learners' not proficient in English.
23. [] Translated materials are tailored to the culture, not simply a direct translation.

Content: Accuracy

24. [] Information is certified scientifically accurate, evidence-based, and reflects current national standards and practice guidelines.
25. [] Information is current. Materials are updated regularly, at least every three years.

Practical Matters

26. [] There is no direct or implied endorsement of products.
27. [] You can personalize materials with your organization name, phone numbers, messages.
28. [] Learning aids reinforce key messages.