

What is Plain Language?

- According to the federal government's plain language website, plain language (also called Plain English) is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. Language that is plain to one set of readers may not be plain to others.
- There are many writing techniques that can help you achieve this goal. Among the most common are:
 - Logical organization with the reader in mind
 - "You" and other pronouns
 - Active voice
 - Short sentences
 - Common, everyday words
 - Easy-to-read design features
- No one technique defines plain language. Rather, plain language is defined by results—it is easy to read, understand, and use.
- We as health care professional must be cognizant of our audience's health literacy and communicate in plain language. As pharmacy students, you may have been trained to do this. However, as most of us may not be practicing pharmacy on a full-time basis, we often times forget to do this.

Plain Language Resources

Emphasis on Health Literacy

1. **U.S. Federal Government's Plain Language Website:** www.plainlanguage.gov
 - *Plain Language in Spoken Communication:*
<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/verbal.cfm>
 - *NIH Plain Language Training Module for Medical Writing):*
http://www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/take_training/index.cfm
2. **DHHS' Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's Plain Language Brief:** <http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/plainlanguage/IssueBrief.pdf>
Describes why plain language is used to communicate health information and improve health literacy; also provides a very good list of references at the end of the document.
3. **Plain Language at NIH:**
<http://www.nih.gov/icd/od/ocpl/resources/clearcommunication/plainlanguage.htm>
4. **Plain Language Thesaurus:** http://www.nphic.org/files/editor/file/thesaurus_1007.pdf
Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Marketing; offers plain language equivalents to some medical terms, phrases, and references.
5. **Pfizer's Principles for Clear Health Communication:**
<http://www.pfizerhealthliteracy.com/pdf/PfizerPrinciples.pdf>
A handbook for creating patient education materials that enhance understanding and promote healthy outcomes.
6. **Words to Watch:** list of words to watch out for when it comes to health literacy.
 - *Pfizer's Clear Health Communication Initiative:*
<http://www.clearhealthcommunication.com/media/words-to-watch.html>
 - *National Patient Safety Foundation/Partnership for Clear Health Communication's AskMe3:* http://www.npsf.org/askme3/pdfs/Words_to_watch_EN.pdf
7. **Journal Article on Health Literacy and Pediatric Health:**
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B7584-4P8858K-6&_user=861681&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000046147&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=861681&md5=e409e77338a402f26b64cfdc6c41b680
A comprehensive article on pediatric health and health literacy; also touches on ways to improve patient health knowledge and outcomes, including oral communication strategies
8. **Plain Language in Oral Presentations:**
<http://www.cherylstephens.com/professional/communication/plainlanguageinoralpresentations.html>
Suggestions for using plain language in oral presentations (not specific to healthcare); information provided was developed for tape-recorded messages, but can be adapted for oral presentations.