

Idea to Impact

Material Development Guide

Writing a Draft

Writing a draft takes all your planning and development stages and finally puts it into words. Your draft lets you see how all the pieces fit together and if the material makes sense, flows from one topic to another, is easily understandable and conveys your key messages and information.

IN THIS GUIDE YOU WILL LEARN TO:

- Write in a simple, but active style tailored to your audience
- Create interest through the use of headers and pull quotes
- Use an appropriate tone for your audience
- Write to the reading level of your target population

Based on your main message, tailor the draft specifically for your audience. Although your draft will be different according to the particular audience you are writing to, there are some basic rules that apply to any material. When writing a draft consider the following:

Create an Outline

Using your main messages and key points, create a simple outline to guide your writing process. All text should support the main message.

Keep it Simple

Try to use simple, everyday language that speaks directly to your audience. The scientific or expert approach which uses medical terms or jargon is not effective for most populations. In fact, that approach can be very confusing and a barrier to getting the message to your readers. Develop clear and concise statements that correspond to and support your objectives and key messages, and use language and terminology that will be easily understood by the intended readers.

- Keep sentences short and concise
- Use words that your audience knows
- Use only one or at most two paragraphs to describe a major idea and keep paragraphs short (1–3 sentences)
- Use headings and subheadings to communicate the main messages

- Use bullets to list a series of points or important statements
- Repeat important information
- Use appropriate visuals to reinforce your points

Use Active Voice

Writing in the active voice means that the subject of the sentence is the doer. The active voice makes your material more interesting and more action-oriented. It is also more likely to motivate the reader than the same statement in a passive voice. Here are some examples:

Active Voice	Passive Voice
Smoking increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease.	The risk of lung cancer and heart disease is increased by smoking.
Breathing secondhand smoke hurts babies and children.	Babies and children are hurt by breathing secondhand smoke.
Tobacco chewing harms your health.	Your health is harmed by tobacco chewing.

Use Appropriate Tone

Clear, effective writing has a tone or “voice” that impacts your audience. Decide which tones suit your objectives and your audience. It may be serious, informative, humorous, positive, alarming, or encouraging. Whatever tone you use, keep it respectful and friendly.

- **Use a conversational style**
Write in a friendly tone that speaks directly to your audience.
- **Stay away from jargon and slang**
Jargon and slang change rapidly. Be aware that any piece written with slang will more quickly go out-of-date.
- **Avoid “health educator speak”**
This is easy to fall into as a health writer. Use words, phrases and ideas that your audience is familiar with and understands.

Health educator speak: “The presence of smoking in the home normalizes the behavior and increases youth smoking rates.”

Conversational style: “Children are more likely to smoke if their parents smoke.”
- **Use fear tactics sparingly**
Excessive use of fear tactics can backfire and make your audience feel repelled or helpless.

■ Don't be judgmental

Remember that you are criticizing tobacco, not the people who use it. Avoid “putting down” or “talking down” to your audience.

■ Test humorous pieces

Writing funny or humorous pieces can be tricky. Make sure you test all your pieces, but especially test the use of humor to make sure the audience gets the joke or sees what is funny.

Create Emphasis and Interest

There are many ways you can emphasize a point or pull in your reader. Try using testimonials, pull quotes, examples, facts or stories to create interest. Also using compelling headers can attract your audience. (For examples, see TECC Guide *Building Blocks of Design and Layout*.)

Ho-hum headline: *Secondhand Smoke and Pregnancy*

Compelling headline: *Protect Your Unborn Baby from Secondhand Smoke*

Use Headers and Headlines that “Sell” Your Message

Emphasize benefits of your idea/behavior to your reader. Headlines and headers should tell them why they should care about your idea/behavior and how they can benefit from it. Remember that sometimes the headers are the only thing read. (For examples, see TECC Guide *Building Blocks of Design and Layout*.)

Target the Reading Level

A common mistake is to write your material at a higher reading level than your audience can handle. Nearly 50% of U.S. adults read between the 8th and 9th grade level or lower, and one out of five read below the 5th grade level. Millions of others struggle with literacy issues, including those who are learning English as a second language or have a reading disability. And, of course, if your audience can't read or understand the material, you are not getting your message across.

Many experts suggest a general rule of a reading level of 6th grade or below, but target the level according to the needs of your population. Remember not to confuse reading level with developmental level. An adult that reads at a 3rd grade reading level is different than a 3rd grader reading at that level. Graphics, references and examples should still be appropriate for the age and experience of the reader.

Examples of Reading Levels:

■ **12th Grade Reading Level**

There are over 4,000 chemicals in secondhand smoke, and 43 of those chemicals are carcinogenic. Secondhand smoke affects newborns adversely because their lungs have not reached full maturity, and newborns have a higher respiratory rate than older children causing inspiration of maximum quantities of chemicals from secondhand smoke.

■ **8th Grade Reading Level**

Secondhand smoke has 4000 chemicals that cause cancer. Secondhand smoke hurts a newborn or small baby because their lungs are still growing. Newborns breathe more rapidly than older children and breathe in more of the dangerous chemicals from the smoke.

■ **4th Grade Reading Level**

Secondhand smoke has lots of harmful chemicals that can hurt your children. Some of the chemicals can even cause cancer. Secondhand smoke is very bad for newborns. Their lungs are still growing. Babies breathe faster than older children. They breathe in more chemicals from the smoke. The smoke hurts your baby.

Tools that help measure reading levels:

■ **Flesch-Kincaid/Word**

This formula is easiest to use because it is built into Microsoft Word and many other word processing programs. To learn how to turn on this feature, see your program's Help menu.

■ **SMOG Readability Formula**

The SMOG is a good tool for quickly measuring reading levels of several materials, but is not very good for evaluating short documents or documents with under the 4th or 5th grade reading levels. For details on using the SMOG, see:

http://www.cdc.gov/od/ads/smog.htm#N_3.

■ **FRY Formula**

Used by many literacy professionals, the Fry is an excellent formula for measuring the full range of reading levels. It is also appropriate for shorter documents. For instructions on using the Fry, see: **<http://www.cdc.gov/od/ads/fry.htm>.**

Cultural Considerations

Involve the Community

Keep an open dialog and communicate with your target population. Ask them for their opinions and feedback about materials and types of materials you are considering as well as ideas for content. Involve the target audience as much as possible and use their opinions and beliefs to create material that addresses their needs and behavioral styles.

Testing Your Material

A peer review of the material is crucial at this point. Colleagues working with your target audience may find things that need to be added or changed in your text. It is also useful to test your draft with your target audience before beginning your design process. This can be as casual as asking a few members of your target audience to read the piece and comment. You can also ask them about design considerations such as what images they would like to see accompany the text and which format they think would be most effective. Ultimately you will save time and money by having your text finalized before creating a layout of the piece.