

Pretesting

You put an enormous amount of time and effort into creating educational material and you want it to have an impact. Your material is usually part of a specific campaign or initiative and you have clear goals you want to attain and your material should be effective in helping you reach those goals.

Once the hard work of creating the material is done, one of the last steps you need to take is to pretest your material with your target audience. This will ensure that it is easy to read, that the layout and graphics are appealing and culturally acceptable, and that it will be effective in bringing about the desired outcome.

TOPICS IN THIS GUIDE INCLUDE

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CTCP Testing Requirements

In their Competitive Grantees Administration and Policy Manual, the California Tobacco Control Program includes these testing requirements:

1. *Materials must be pre-tested with the intended target group prior to their use for **accuracy, appropriateness, and effectiveness**. The use of focus groups for this process is highly recommended.*
2. *Materials must be tested for **literacy levels** and developed at the levels appropriate for the intended target group(s).*

To help you meet these requirements, TECC has developed this guide to help you pretest your material before you send it in for inclusion in the Resource Library collection and review for the TECC Sales Catalog.

Choosing a Testing Method

There are several methods for pretesting. The testing method you use will, of course, depend on your time and budget as well as your access to members of your target audience.

Pretesting Methods

■ Focus Groups (recommended by CTCP)

The facilitator meets with a small group of people (8 to 12) from the target population to discuss the material. The group answers questions about the material and gives feedback. Conducting from two to four focus groups for the pretest is sufficient.

■ Individual interviews

An interviewer meets with individual people (10 to 25) from the target population and asks each person open-ended questions about the material and records the results.

■ Intercept surveys

An interviewer intercepts people at a public place such as a clinic, business or shopping center and has them complete a short questionnaire or interview. Usually 50 to 200 people are surveyed.

Testing for Accuracy, Appropriateness, and Effectiveness

Accuracy

It's critical that the tobacco prevention material you develop, be it a fact sheet, brochure, video or PowerPoint presentation, contain up-to-date and accurate information. When your goal is to change behavior and cultural norms, having accurate information gives you credibility and increases your effectiveness.

You can ensure accuracy by:

- Calling TECC's Library Services to get assistance in verifying any data or statistics, and in ensuring that you're using the most current information available. (CTCP-funded projects can call (800) 258-9090, ext. 161 or ext.160)
- Using Spell-check or other programs that check your spelling and grammar
- Asking colleagues to read over the material and provide critical comments and feedback

Cultural Appropriateness

Similar to language requirements, your material should be designed for the audience you intend to reach, and it must be done with respect and an awareness of who they are and what information they need. The effectiveness of your material could be reduced, if, for example, you want to warn young women of the dangers of smoking while pregnant and your graphics include only Caucasian women. California is a multicultural state and a brochure like this would not reach many of the young women of different ethnicities. If you want to reach gay or bi-sexual youth, your material might lose its effectiveness if the language and images presented only heterosexual relationships. Know who you want to reach.



Spending time in the community, consulting with someone from the community, or reviewing other material designed for this audience will provide a general idea of language, design, colors and images that are favored within the culture. Testing for cultural appropriateness can really only be done by asking members of your target audience to review and comment on your material through focus groups, interviews or surveys.

Questions that test for cultural appropriateness include:

- Do you like the design, colors and graphics? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Would you show this brochure (guide, poster, etc.) to your family? Friends? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Do you have any ideas to make the design, colors or graphics better?

Effectiveness

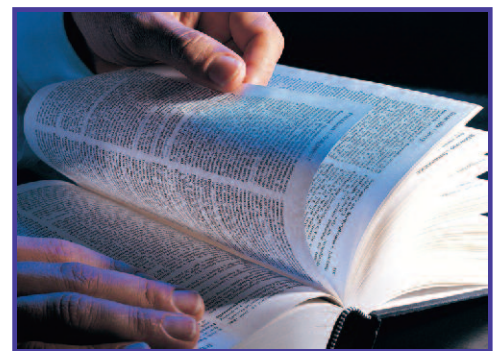
This is one of your overarching goals: to develop material that has a positive impact on your intended audience. You want to reach the right people with the right information; and you want to provide information that is useful and that helps your tobacco control program successfully reach its objectives. Testing for effectiveness is also best done by asking members of your target audience to review and comment on your material through either focus groups or in-person interviews.

Questions that test for effectiveness include:

- What did you learn from the brochure (fact sheet, postcard etc.)?
- What action (if any) is the brochure (booklet, T-shirt, etc.) asking you to take?
- Would you keep and/or use this brochure (manual, DVD, etc.)?

Testing for Literacy Level

A broad definition of literacy states that a person is able to read, write and speak and compute and solve problems at a level that is the norm for both family and public life. The problem is that sometimes people confuse “being literate” to mean that the person’s proficiency must be in English; or, to mean that not being literate in the English language means that the person is not smart. Neither of these misconceptions is true or wholly accurate. A person can have an advanced degree and be an accomplished professional who speaks only one language and is a new or current learner of English as a second language.



Your material must be written and designed for the audience you want to reach. Before you write your text, determine the literacy level of your intended audience. A general estimate can be obtained through speaking with members of the community and with other professionals who

work with members of that community. If unsure, aim for a 6th to 8th grade reading level for material designed for the general public and a reading level less than 6th grade for low literate populations.

See Calculating Reading Level Tip Sheet (on the TECC website) for specific instructions on testing the reading level of your material.

Additionally, because reading level is affected by layout and design, you should also use focus groups, interviews or surveys to confirm that the literacy level is appropriate for your target audience.

Questions that test for appropriate literacy level include:

- Is this brochure (training, sign, etc.) easy to understand?
- What is the main message of this brochure (CD, coloring book, etc.)?
- Are there any words or ideas that you did not understand?
- Are there any words or ideas that you think others might not understand?

Summarizing Your Results

After reviewing all pretesting feedback, summarize the results to determine the consensus of opinion. This will prevent one strong opinion from overwhelming the results from many other opinions and give you a clear idea of what, if anything, needs to be modified.

You will also want to document your testing methods and the demographics of your participants. This information can be gathered in a variety of ways: adding demographic questions to a sign in sheet (for focus groups), including the questions directly on questionnaires, or simply asking and recording the information verbally for each participant.

See Pretesting Summary Form (on the TECC website) for help with this process.

Working with Evaluation Partners

Occasionally you will need assistance reaching your target audience for pretesting. It is helpful to establish a network of agencies, community members, and organizations (such as local churches, health clinics and schools) that work with, or are part of, your target audience and who are willing to test materials for you.

When working with evaluation partners, always start with a phone call to determine their availability and willingness to assist you. Once they agree to help, you can send them the following: a full color mock-up of the material (electronic files can be quickly sent by email), your pretest questions, your testing preferences (who, specifically, you want them to talk to and how many responses you need), a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returning documents (recommended when possible) and your deadline.

Sample Letter to Evaluation Partners

Dear _____,

Thank you for your offer to help with our pretesting for _____
(name of your piece). This brochure (guide, poster etc.) is intended for
_____ (describe your target audience) to address the issue of
_____ (describe your topic and designed outcome).

Enclosed you will find the final draft of this piece for review and a list of interview questions. Ideally we would like to have this piece reviewed by at least _____
(desired number of responses). I would also like to hear your feedback on this material.

Please return the completed questionnaires, along with your feedback by
_____ (desired date) if possible. You can use the enclosed self-addressed envelope or fax all documents to my attention at _____ (fax number).

Thank you again for your help!

(Signature)

Final Steps

Once you have completed your pretesting, you will know what, if any revisions are necessary to ensure that your new material meets your requirements and will achieve your goals. You will also need to document your pretesting process and results to include when you send your material to TECC for review.

Resources

Available from TECC:

Tip Sheet: Calculating Literacy Level

Sample Generic Testing Questions

Pretesting Summary Form

Available from the Tobacco Control Evaluation Center

Writing and Organizing Interview Questions

Conducting Interviews

Focus Group Interviews