

Health literacy practices for the classroom

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Why does health literacy matter?

Barriers to clear communication exist everywhere, everyday, and can affect every person no matter their profession, level of education, or income.

As an educator, you can apply evidence-based health literacy strategies in the classroom to help bridge those barriers with your students.

How do choose or create materials that will appeal to students?

State the purpose in the title and put the most important information first

Use photos and other visuals that will appeal to students and are sensitive to cultural factors such as race, gender, income, and age

Build in levels of information (headings, subheadings, body text, and bullets) and group related information into “chunks” (paragraphs or sections) with descriptive headings

- Example of a health guidance sheet before and after adding a visual, headings, and chunking:

Before

The Hypertension and Dental Appointment Management Recommendations

Blood pressures should be taken on all patients 18 years and older. Blood pressures should only be taken on patients 17 and younger if there is a diagnosis of hypertension. Blood pressure should always be taken with the patient in the seated position with both feet on the floor. Appropriate cuff size should be selected, and patient should not be talking/distractions allowed while taking the reading.

Please follow the below recommendations:

Blood pressure of 139/89 or lower-no contradictions to dental treatment

Blood pressure of 140-179/90-109:

1. Retake and confirm
2. Proceed with dental treatment if patient does not have symptoms and can perform at least 1 of the activities in the chart below
 - a. Symptoms include headache, chest pain, or vision changes
 - b. Pt should not have active cardiac conditions i.e. hx of stroke or heart attack
3. Monitor BP if a longer appointment
4. Inform patient of high reading/ Refer to PCP
5. Consider LA/epi restrictions (under 3 carps)

6. **Box 1 Questions to determine functional capacity of at least 4 metabolic equivalents.**

ACTIVITY of AT LEAST 4 METABOLIC EQUIVALENTS

- Can you do light work around the house like dusting or washing dishes?
- Can you climb a flight of stairs or walk up a hill?
- Can you walk on level ground at 4 miles per hour (6.4 kilometers per hour)?
- Can you run a short distance?
- Can you do heavy work around the house, like scrubbing floors or lifting or moving heavy furniture?
- Can you participate in golf, bowling, dancing, doubles tennis, or throwing a baseball or football?

7. **Adapted with permission of the publisher from Fleisher and colleagues.²²**

After

(Organization logo)

Blood pressure and dental appointments: Recommendations for dental assistants

Use this recommendations sheet with patients to help you decide if the patient can have dental treatment based on their blood pressure. At the start of an appointment, you should take blood pressure on all patients who are:

- ⊖ 18 years and older
- ⊕ 17 years or younger and have a high blood pressure diagnosis

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Why should I check a patient's blood pressure during a dental appointment?

- A patient's blood pressure can give information about their overall health and help you decide if it's safe for them to have dental treatment
- Some medicines taken for high blood pressure (hypertension) can cause dry mouth or other dental symptoms
- High blood pressure can affect which type and dose of local anesthetic to use

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How to check blood pressure

1. Make sure the patient is seated with both feet on the floor and their arm supported so their elbow is at heart level
2. Choose the right size blood pressure cuff:
 - The inflatable part should cover about 40% of the distance around the upper arm
 - The entire cuff should cover 80% of the area from elbow to shoulder
3. Place the cuff on the bare skin of the patient's arm, not over a shirt
4. Ask the patient to sit still and not talk, use their phone, or do other activities while taking the reading
5. Take the blood pressure reading

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How do we make sure the content is clear?

Use clear words and sentences

- Avoid complex words that are unfamiliar to your audience (jargon). To do this:

Replace jargon with a shorter, more familiar word that means the same thing, for example:

Fatigued → Tired

Collaborate → Work together

or

Define jargon using simple words, for example:

Postpartum → After a baby is born

Preventive care → check-up, health care you get before you have a health problem

- Write the way you speak, using direct sentences and contractions, for example:

Before: “We understand that people are concerned about the costs associated with health care in general, and prescription drugs in particular.”

After: “We understand that people worry about the costs of health care, especially for prescription drugs.”

- Use active voice instead of passive voice, for example: “The doctor read the chart” instead of “The chart was read by the doctor.”

Give specific, concrete instructions

- Tell students:
 - What they should do, and when
 - How they should do it – be specific
 - Why they should do it – give them motivation

How do we use materials that are appealing and easy to read?

- Leave 20-30% white space so pages don't look crowded
- Use clear sans serif fonts such as Arial, Calibri, Verdana, and Trebuchet
- Avoid ALL CAPS, *italics*, underlining, condensed fonts, or *novelty fonts*
- Choose visuals that represent your audience
- Use visual cues such as bold font, boxes, and arrows to:
 - Highlight important information
 - Support numbers, such as in icon arrays, graphs, and charts

How do we use numbers clearly?

- Only use numbers that are necessary for students to know
- Use comparisons to give numbers meaning
- Use percentages and natural frequency together, for example: “4 out of 10 (40%) of people...”
- Format charts and tables so they are simple and don't require cross-referencing

Resources

Use online cultural resources

- **Cultural orientation Resource Center backgrounders**
www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders
- **EthnoMed Non-English patient education materials**
<http://ethnomed.org/patient-education>

Use online health literacy resources

- **CDC Health Literacy Resources**
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/resources.html>
- **The Universal Patient Language (UPL)**
<https://www.upl.org>
- **Usability.gov**
<https://www.usability.gov/>

Use a health literacy or plain language thesaurus

- **CDC's Everyday Words for Public Health Communication**
<https://www.cdc.gov/other/pdf/everydaywordsforpublichealthcommunication.pdf>
- **Health Research for Action's Plain Language Word List**
<https://multco.us/file/46697/download>
- **University of Michigan Plain Language Medical Dictionary**
<https://www.lib.umich.edu/taubman-health-sciences-library/plain-language-medical-dictionary>

Use Word's features to help you edit

- **Look up simple synonyms:**
 1. Right-click on the word
 2. Hover over "Synonyms" and click on "Thesaurus"
- **Check your readability statistics:**
 1. To set it up:
 - Go to "File" > "Options" > "Proofing"
 - Check "Show readability statistics" under "When correcting spelling and grammar in Word"
 2. To see the Flesch-Kincaid reading level of your current document:
 - Go to "Review" > "Spelling & Grammar"

Flag passive sentences

- In the "When correcting spelling and grammar in word" section, select "Grammar and more"
- Click "Settings" and scroll down to "Clarity and conciseness"
- Check "Passive voice"