

## Health Literacy Writing Tips October 2020

### 1. Three Types of Words to Watch

Types	Definition	Examples		The Fix
<b>Medical, technical jargon</b>	Words, phrases and concepts with meaning only in a clinical context	Abdomen AVS Cardiologist Chronic	Growth Hypertension Lesion PCP	✓ <b>Common words</b> ✓ <b>Explain</b>
<b>Concept</b>	General terms to describe a concept without being specific	Abnormal Clear liquids Empty Stomach Fever Increased risk	Low, normal, high Twice daily Unlikely	✓ <b>Be specific</b> ✓ <b>Explain</b> ✓ <b>Use Examples</b>
<b>Value Judgement</b>	Have different meanings based on the individual's perception of the word	Excessive Heavy Negative Positive Persistent		✓ <b>Be specific</b> ✓ <b>Explain</b> ✓ <b>Use Examples</b>

### 2. Online Plain Language Dictionaries

- University of Michigan Plain Language Dictionary: <https://www.lib.umich.edu/taubman-health-sciences-library/plain-language-medical-dictionary>
- United Health Group Just Plain and Clear: <http://www.justplainclear.com/en>

### 3. Tips for Presenting Risks:

- Absolute risks (3 out of 1,000 will have a stroke) increases comprehension over the use of relative risks (50 percent higher chance of stroke).
- Results are mixed as to whether percentage (13 percent) or frequency (13 out of 100) formats promote the greatest understanding. Use with explanation.
- There is general agreement that decimals (its likelihood is .03) should not be used.

#### 4. Tips for Email Communication

	To Do	Examples
Patient Centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize question, concern or needs</li> <li>Be friendly and empathic</li> <li>Personalize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sounds like you are worried about...</li> <li>Sorry you're not feeling better</li> <li>Thank you for your message (opening). In good health (closing)</li> </ul>
Plain Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use common words, explain medical, concept and value words</li> <li>Use short sentences &amp; paragraphs</li> <li>Paragraphs cover one topic</li> </ul>	Bronchitis is when your airways swell and make mucus. That's what makes you cough. Your coughing and sore throat can last about 3 weeks.
Actionable and Motivating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does the patient need to know and do?</li> <li>Break down tasks, use bullets</li> <li>Why is it important?</li> </ul>	<p>Bronchitis almost always gets better on its own without antibiotics. Using antibiotics when there aren't needed can be risky.</p> <p>To feel better:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get rest</li> <li>- Drink plenty of liquids</li> <li>- Use a humidifier or cool water vaporizer</li> </ul>
Connection and Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What should the patient do if they feel worse, better or have more questions</li> <li>Close the loop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you still have a fever in 2 days...</li> <li>If you continue to feel better, I don't need to see you for 6 months</li> <li>If you have more questions, call my office for a visit.</li> <li>I'm not sure what is going on, but we can figure this out together.</li> </ul>

#### 5. Sutter Health Desktop Medicine Support

Check out this WIKI for more support with desktop medicine. You will find tips managing your inbox, links to plain language smartphrases, etc.

<http://sutterapp/sites/Education/OPE/OPE%20-%20Desktop%20Medicine%20Home.aspx>

#### 6. Readability Calculators

Want to test your writing to see what grade level it is? Remember, the average reader reads at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.

<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>