

Plain Language for Public Health Checklist



Using plain language in your public health communications can help your audience **find** what they need, **understand** what they find, and **use** the information. Whether you're working proactively on a campaign or crafting an urgent message on a quick turnaround, this checklist will help ensure the messages you're sharing with your audiences are clear, accessible, and useful.

Step 1: Prepare Your Communications

- Have you defined the audience for this message? *Get specific. Consider age, language, cultural background, occupation, etc.*
- Are your goals for this message identified? *Aim to meet community members with the information they need to better understand this topic.*
- Have you considered what your audience already understands versus where they need more information? *Ensure your message fills existing information gaps.*
- Have you identified the questions your target audience likely has about the topic? *In your message, answer these questions clearly and directly.*
- Have you determined when and where you'll share this message? *Share your message when and where your audience is most likely to see it.*

PRO TIP: Think about your audience in specific terms, and not just as the "general public." The more you know about your audience and the more specific you can be, the better you can tailor your message.

Step 2: Develop and Organize Your Communications

- Does your message use everyday words? Is it jargon-free? *If you need to use scientific terms, make sure you define them in plain language. Aim to write at a fifth-grade reading level, which you can measure using a [readability calculator](#).*

- Are your sentences short? Do they lead with the bottom line? *Make sure your sentences open with the most important information.*
- Did you use the active voice? *Start your sentences with the subject followed by the verb and object.*
- Did you write your message in the second person? *Use "you" to address your audience, like we do in this checklist.*
- If your content is text-heavy, do you use strategies to make the copy more digestible? *This can include organizing your content into headers and lists.*
- Does your message use descriptive links? *Example: To learn more about plain language in public health, [read this guide by the Public Health Communications Collaborative](#).*

PRO TIP: You will likely address community members differently than you would your public health colleagues. You should center your audience when communicating about public health.

Step 3: Review and Testing

- Did colleagues review your content? *Seek feedback from colleagues who are not familiar with the subject material.*
- Did you test your message with members of your target audience? *User testing is the most direct way to understand whether your message resonates.*

PRO TIP: Test your materials as early as possible, revise based on the feedback you receive, and then test again.