**Designing Effective Printed Health Education Materials**

**(adapted from WHO** [http://archives.who.int/PRDUC2004/RDUCD/Session\_Guides/designing\_effective\_printed\_material\_session\_guide-2.htm#](http://archives.who.int/PRDUC2004/RDUCD/Session_Guides/designing_effective_printed_material_session_guide-2.htm)**)**

**PURPOSE AND CONTENT**

Printed health educational materials can be valuable tools in intervention programs. Printed materials may take many forms: posters for display in health centers or public places; pamphlets for physicians, health workers, or patients; or materials for use in one-to-one educational encounters.

However, many printed health education materials are not designed in a way that increases their chances of being read and understood, and acted on. Based on research and experience in many countries, the below guidelines will enable you to discuss and implement the key principles of designing effective, printed educational materials.

**1. FIRST UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR AUDIENCE**

- what will get the reader to follow your advice?

**2. TARGET DECISIONS AND ACTIONS**

- what do you want the reader to do?

**3. EMPHASIZE ONLY A FEW KEY MESSAGES**

- keep your message simple and focused

- educational materials developed should focus on two, three, or at most four *main* messages to communicate. If possible, these messages should include:

• The *behavior you wish to promote*

• The *behavior you wish to modify* (if applicable).

• Key *information*

If resources and time are available, it is fine to give more details to back up the main messages; if not, the primary messages may suffice.

 **4. HEADLINES AND TYPEFACES**

Major headlines with the largest type should be reserved for the most important behavior-change message. Headlines should *capture the attention of the audience*, and *encourage them to read the rest of the text.* Headlines can be interesting questions or statements.

Secondary headlines can be used to emphasize other important messages (e.g., the facts supporting the recommended behavior and to lead to eye down into the body of the text or illustration.

**5. ILLUSTRATIONS**

Visually stimulating, humorous, or otherwise striking pictures can often capture attention and awaken the interest of readers. Illustrations are also an effective way to visually reinforce written messages. If possible, show the behavior you wish others to adopt.

**6. BRIEF, SIMPLE TEXT**

The text and language should be brief, simple, and appropriate (reading level and culturally informed) for the intended audience.

**7. REPETITION INCREASES MEMORY AND LEARNING**

Repetition of the most important messages is a foundation of advertising and communication. Repetition increases memory and learning. If possible, the main behavior-change message should be included in the major headline at the front of an educational material AND repeated in the concluding section.

**8. CREDIBILITY**

Credibility of the information presented is usually very important in convincing a target audience to change their behavior

Ways to enhance credibility include:

* Sponsorship of a respected medical school, medical society, or other professional organizations.
* Referencing respected medical evidence supporting the main messages.
* Referencing international publications, or materials produced by CDC or WHO.
* Referencing community leaders, or, for public education materials, popular sportsmen/women or entertainers.

**9. RELEVANCE AND INVOLVEMENT**

Successful printed material is relevant to the user. If possible, include reader participation in the development process or test the material with the intended audience and incorporate feedback into the final version of the printed materials.

**SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES OF PRINTED EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS**

1. Most important principle: *always* **pretest** materials on the target audience.
2. **Simplify** the illustrations and avoid extraneous details. When possible, present only one main message per page.
3. Expressions, activities, clothing, buildings, and other objects which are **familiar** to the audience help to communicate messages more effectively.
4. Drawings that **realistically portray** people or objects as they occur in day-to-day life are often the easiest to recognize.
5. **Avoid unusual angles** and drawings with too much perspective.
6. In general, objects should be in **scale** and in context. Enlargement of detail may have a negative effect on understanding of the message.
7. **Pictures** should be large enough for people to see. Some kinds of pictures are easier to recognize than others. Stylized drawings can be difficult to understand.
8. People look at printed material in different ways, especially people who are not used to reading. Ask several members of the target audience to arrange the individual messages in a **sequence** that seems most logical to them.
9. **Symbols** must be used with caution. Crosses, arrows, check marks, inserts, and balloons that represent conversations and thoughts may be misunderstood. Such symbols, when used, must be very carefully tested.
10. Whenever possible, use a **positive approach**. A negative message may be alienating or discouraging, rather than motivating.
11. **Cartoon figures** may not be well understood by some audiences. Humor should be used with care.
12. Be sure that ***colors***are carefully tested with audiences, as colors can have different connotations in different cultures.
13. The print should be **clear and simple** so that people not accustomed to reading can decipher it without difficulty.