Checklist for Low Literacy Design

This checklist applies when materials need to communicate:

- quickly—are people willing to read?
- across languages
- to lower–literacy audiences
- with pre–literate audiences (younger children)

Does your piece…

- ☐ Communicate clearly to a single audience?
- ☐ Explain or eliminate any new terms, jargon, or technical phrases?
- ☐ Use ideas and language that are consistent with existing messages directed at the same audience about the same topic?
- ☐ Help readers absorb the right information quickly?
- ☐ Visually explain each key message?
- ☐ Use illustrative images?
- ☐ Avoid reliance on icons or symbols?
- ☐ Avoid charts, grids, and graphs?

Pro–Tip: Test!!!!!

- ☐ Did you test your piece with the intended audience? Even just 3 - 5 people?
- ☐ Did you test just the visual elements with the intended audience? Did you do it separately, without any explanation or context?
- ☐ Did you ask open-ended questions? Independent of your topic or context? For example, "what do you see in this piece?" "what do you think this means?"

Tips and hints

If you have more than one audience, then you need more than one piece. Design each piece for one primary audience. If it happens to also meet the needs of a secondary audience, great!

If you can't explain your concept in plain language, you might be trying to do too much in a single piece, or you might be targeting the wrong audience. Consider carefully what each audience needs to know.

Use clear headings that are "enough" of a prompt without the fine print. Limit the number of concepts introduced per page, using generous spacing between items.

The right visuals can help bring ideas to life, while also supporting visual learners. Use illustrations and photographs that are specific to your message and to your primary audience. Avoid clip art.

Icons and symbols are an advanced form of written language. While these are a visual, they are often high-level abstractions that are not "readable" without high levels of comprehension. Symbols are not universal.

Stories and metaphors are often a way to make the intangible more understandable.

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