Health Literacy Innovations™

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Creating Clear, Accessible, and Search-Friendly Web Content

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Health Literacy Innovations
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About Health Literacy Innovations (HLI)

Mission –
Knowing that "literacy" is the single most important indicator of health outcomes, HLI was founded to create tools to help eliminate medical mistakes and confusion due to low health literacy.

Health Literacy Advisor

Flagship Product –
The Health Literacy Advisor (HLA), the nation's first interactive health literacy software program.

Goals –
- Streamline the health literacy review process
- Replace inefficiency with technology and knowledge
- Empower communicators with the tools to create, produce, print, display, share, and advertise clear health information

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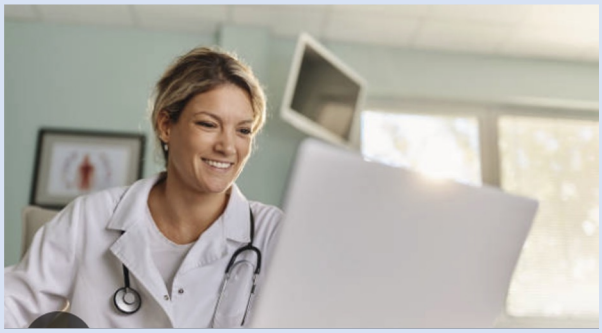
Today's Webinar Goals

Explain	the connection between health literacy and improved SEO
Explain	how health literacy strategies can help to improve a website's SEO
Demonstrate	health literacy techniques to improve a website SEO

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Connecting Health Literacy and SEO



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Health Literacy



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What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is a consumer's ability to:



Obtain

Read

Understand

and act

on health information and services

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The Health Literacy Problem



People with low health literacy:

- Misunderstand discharge instructions
- Have more problems taking medications and navigating the health care system
- Died early

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The Health Literacy Problem

Low health literacy dramatically impacts the health care industry



Healthcare cost goes up!



Quality of care goes down!



Affects health outcomes!

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A lack of understanding of health information makes it more difficult to access and manage health care.

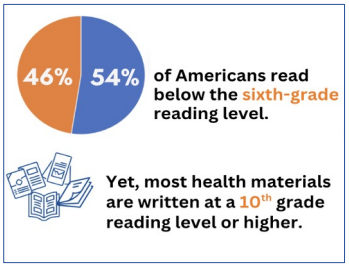
This is called:
LOW HEALTH LITERACY

Health Literacy Levels

12% Proficient

52% Intermediate
36% Low

88% Under the proficient health literacy level



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Search Engine Optimization (SEO)



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What is SEO (search engine optimization)?

What is SEO?

- SEO is the process of improving a website so it shows up higher in search results, and more people can find it
- SEO is part of digital marketing and works for any website—whether you sell bread or health insurance

What is the goal of SEO?

- Helps a website show up on the first page of search results for the keywords your audience uses
- Brings the right people to your site -- the more visible your pages are, the more people will find and visit your site



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What is SEO (search engine optimization)?

How does SEO work?

SEO works by making your website easier for search engines to understand and show to the right people (your target audience) using:

- Keywords: Use the words people search for
- On-Page SEO: Make your content, titles, and headings clear and helpful
- Off-Page SEO: Get other trusted sites to link to yours
- Technical SEO: Fix speed, mobile use, and other technical issues
- User Experience: Make your site easy to use so visitors stay longer

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Connecting Health Literacy and SEO

Health literacy practices can help SEO by making a website easier to understand, use, and trust

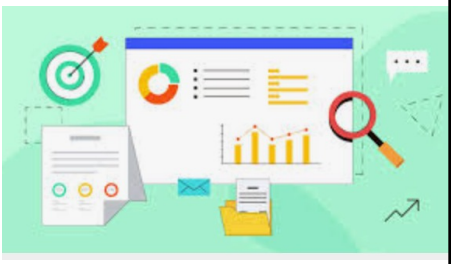
Clear and simple content attracts more visitors and helps health care organizations connect with potential consumers

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Proactive Strategies to Boost SEO:

- Use Plain Language
- Understand Readability
- Understand Legibility
- Understand Eye Tracking
- Use Health Literacy Strategies

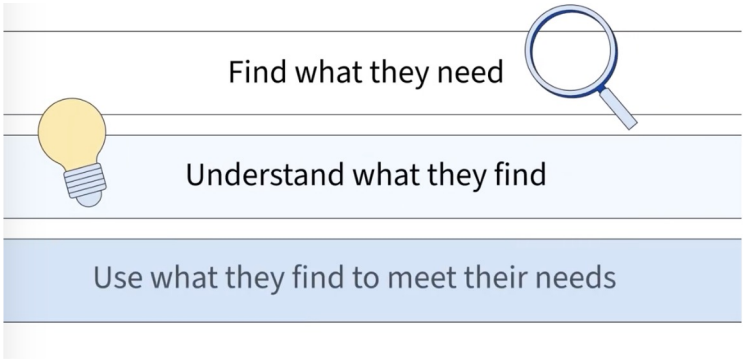


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Understanding Plain Language

Plain language is clear, concise, and well-organized writing that allows readers to:



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Understanding Readability

- Readability refers to how easy it is to read the text
- You can check a text's readability with indexes, such as the ones available in the **Health Literacy Advisor**

Understanding Legibility

- Legibility means how easy it is to see and read letters. If a font is legible, consumers can quickly tell letters apart

Good Legibility

Poor Legibility

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Eye Tracking

Eye tracking shows what areas of a page grab the readers' attention and what areas they're ignoring

According to eye tracking research, consumers with limited literacy skills generally:

- Read more slowly
- Reread and skip words, sections, or elements on a website (like buttons or menus)
- Start reading in the middle of a paragraph
- Try to read every single word because they can't effectively scan and get the meaning from the content

This happens more when the content is critical, because they feel the stakes are high—e.g. health diseases and conditions

https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/barriers-accessing-understanding-and-using-digital-health-information/reading-and-cognitive-processing-challenges-online

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Strategies to Boost SEO

Encourage Sharing:
Shared content earns visibility

Increase Engagement:
Engaged consumers interact more with your content, signaling to search engines that it is useful

Support E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness:)
Demonstrating expertise and trustworthiness

Increase Keywords and Topic Coverage:
Adding related terms, captions, and transcripts helps SE index your content better

Boost Conversion Rates:
When consumers complete actions on your site, SE views the page as helpful and high-quality

Reduce Bounce Rates:
Clear, relevant content keeps visitors from leaving immediately

Boost Dwell Time:
The longer consumers stay on a page, the more search engines interpret the content as valuable

Improve Scannability and Structure:
Well-organized text helps consumers—and search engines—quickly find and understand your content

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Eye Tracking

- Eye tracking shows how people read and understand health information. By seeing where readers focus, designers can fix confusing or hard-to-read parts, making materials easier to read and understand.

- Eye tracking can help SEO by showing how people use your website:
  - **Better Content Placement:** Put important words or buttons where people notice them most.
  - **Easier to Use:** Fix confusing or ignored parts so visitors can navigate easily.
  - **More Engagement:** Keep visitors looking and clicking, which helps your ranking.
  - **Better Layout:** Arrange content and links in a way people naturally read.

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Eye Tracking of a Reader Study

Figure 1.1:

- This study shows where a person looks on a webpage
- The person who can read well, read from left to right
- They do not jump around or go back a lot
- Their eye moves smoothly over the page



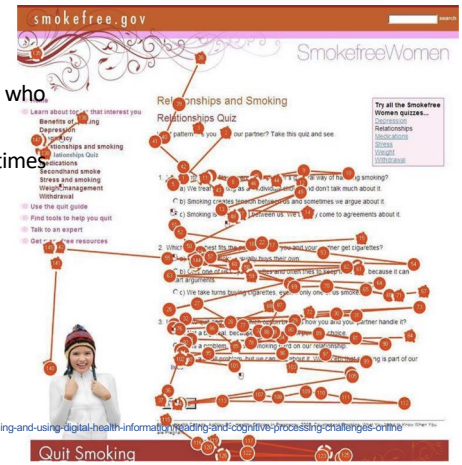
https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/barriers-accessing-understanding-and-using-digital-health-information/reading-and-cognitive-processing-challenges-online

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Eye Tracking of a Reader Study

Figure 1.2:

- This picture shows where a consumer who has trouble reading looks on a page
- They read and read each word many times
- They jump back and forth often



https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/barriers-accessing-understanding-and-using-digital-health-information/reading-and-cognitive-processing-challenges-online

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Health Literacy Strategies that Help Boost SEO:



- Write for Your Audience
- Write Actionable Content
- Simplify Content
- Organize Content
- Display Content Clearly
- Simplify Navigation
- Evaluate and Revise

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Write for Your Audience:

Helps Improve Search Visibility for Everyone

Find out about consumer demographics, interests, and preferences.

Write or adapt your content to your consumers:

- Specific age and gender group
- Information needs—Find out:
  - ✓ **What challenges do they face**
  - ✓ **What they know and need to know**
  - ✓ **What myths and misinformation they may have**
  - ✓ **What helps them learn**
- Cultural background—Find out:
  - **What words do they use**
  - **What do they do to care for health problems and access care**
- Language:
  - **What tone do they prefer-formal or informal**
  - **What words do they use to call health problems**



https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/usersgoals.htm

SEO strategy:

Knowing your consumers helps answer common questions to improve search intent matching and visibility. **This helps with better keyword targeting—improving SEO**

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Write for Your Audience

Find out what technology helps consumers use the websites:

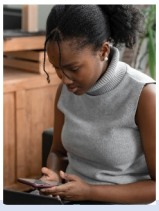
- Do they have broadband access at home?
- Do they have a home computer?
- What do they use to access online information?
  - Would they use social media platforms, applications, streaming media, videoconferencing, or other web-based options?
  - If consumers don't have home internet, graphics and other features on the phone will take a long time to load

Find out what motivates them to search for health information

- Understand their goals
- What are they looking for or want to learn?
- Then decide how to give them that information

https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/usersgoals.htm





SEO strategy:

Help consumers find the information they look for, where they look for it.

This helps enhance accessibility, dwell time, reduce bounce rates, and increase engagement

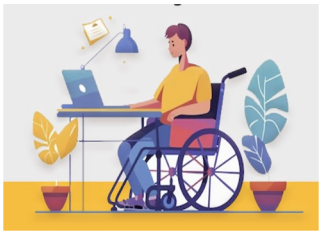
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Write for Your Consumer:

Make your website easy for all consumers with disabilities:

- ✓ Learn and apply the Section 508 compliance rule
- ✓ Design your site so everyone can see it and use it well
- ✓ Make sure screen readers can scan your website
- ✓ Use colors that are easy to see
- ✓ Check that all software works for everyone



To learn more, visit the website about accessibility:
www.section508.gov/

https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/usersgoals.htm

SEO strategy:
Helping people find themselves makes websites acceptable, attractive, and engaging.
This helps increase trust, and dwell time-staying on the website

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Write Actionable Content



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Write Actionable Content

Make content actionable:
✓ Describe the health behavior

Help consumers take action:
✓ Include the benefits of taking action
✓ Provide specific actions to take
✓ Break up big tasks into small steps to help consumers feel more confident
✓ Use words consumers type when looking for health info
- Put these words in your writing and titles



https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.htm#p1

EXAMPLE:
Start with the prevention behavior:
Instead of: Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of your arteries. You need to check your blood pressure.
Start with the action: Check your blood pressure every year if you are 40 or older.

SEO strategy:
Consumers often search for how to do something.
This helps increase relevance, engagement, clarity, and consumer satisfaction—what search engines use to rank pages

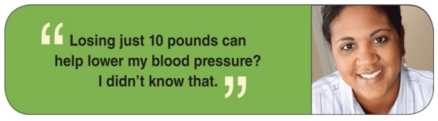
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Write Actionable Content

Write Positive and Realistic Messages:

- Most consumers want to see:
  - ✓ Happy and positive words
  - ✓ Helpful tips
  - ✓ How to stay motivated
  - ✓ Ideas to beat health problems not just learn about the health problem



Clear, encouraging messages reduce confusion and build trust

https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.htm#p1

SEO strategy:
Search engines reward pages that support positive user actions and successful task completion.
This helps increase engagement, lower bounce rates, and improve SEO ranking

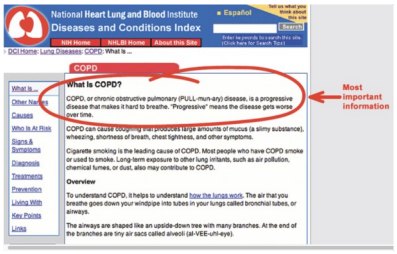
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Write Actionable Content

Put the most Important information first:

- Many consumers with limited literacy read only the first few words on a page
- If they think the webpage might be too difficult to read, they will skip to a different spot on the page



https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.htm#p1

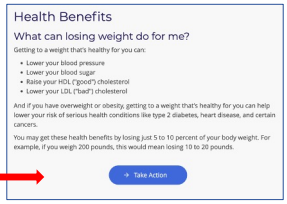
SEO strategy:
Actionable content encourages consumers to slow down and read instructions carefully—especially when steps are clear and easy to follow.
This boosts conversion rates improving SEO

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Write Actionable Content

Position of the content:

- ✓ Summarize key points
- ✓ End with action words – tell the reader what to do next
- ✓ Tell the reader where to find resources



https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.htm#p1

SEO strategy:
Actionable content—steps, instructions, checklists—directly answers these queries.
This increases relevance, consumer engagement, and visibility in search results

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Simplify Content



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Simplify Content

Aim for health content that is:

- ✓ Brief and to the point
- ✓ Focus on what your consumers **need**
- ✓ Consumers prefer to learn "just the basics" about a health topic

https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.htm#p1



Easy-to-read content makes it easier for search engines to crawl and for consumers to skim.
This helps improve scannability and structure of the site—increase keywords and topic coverage

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Simplify Content
Apply Health Literacy Principles

Assess the reading level of the content:

- ✓ Make sure information is at least at a 6th-grade reading level
- ✓ Make sure your scores:
  - Are accurate
  - Are assessed by a tool that applies health literacy best practices:
  - **Try the Health Literacy Advisor https://healthliteracyadvisor.com/login**







SEO strategy:
Consumers read and stay on the site when the content is clear and easy to understand.
Better consumer experience (UX), lower bounce rates, and increased dwell time

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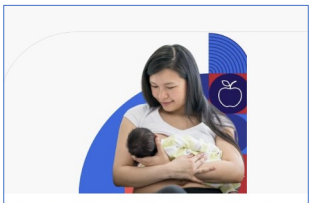
Simplify Content
Apply Health Literacy Principles

Use illustrations that the consumer can relate to:

- They can see themselves represented

Include consumer-centered videos:

- ✓ Make sure video scripts are written in layman's terms and easy to understand
- ✓ Provide captions and versions for diverse consumers:
  - Other languages
  - Other versions: braille, sign language, etc.
- ✓ Present cases and scenarios that are relevant to the consumer's background and culture



SEO strategy:
Videos with consumers grab attention and are more likely to be shared on social media.
More shares = more backlinks and visibility, both of which boost SEO

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Simplify Content

Apply Health Literacy Principles

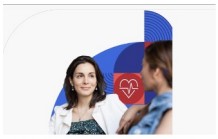
Include stories to convince consumers:

"Storytelling can help engage consumers, make science more relatable, and promote inclusivity. It can also convey accurate science."

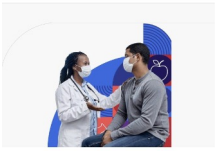
https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1914085117

Stories:

- Make complex information relatable and easier to understand
- **Doctors and other health care professionals** are believable figures: Use them in stories



Quitting Smoking: Conversation Starters



Talk with Your Doctor About Drug Misuse and Substance Use Disorder

SEO strategy:

Relevant stories motivate the consumer to read and stay on the page.

This helps increase consumer satisfaction and dwell time

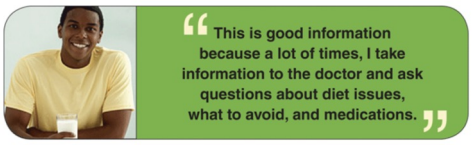
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Simplify Content

Apply Health Literacy Principles

Engage consumers with interactive content:

- ✓ Menu planners
- ✓ Printable checklists
- ✓ Questions to ask a doctor



https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.htm#p1

SEO strategy:

Interactive encourages consumers to follow steps that are clear and easy to do.

Search engines track positive consumer behavior and reward pages that help consumers complete meaningful tasks

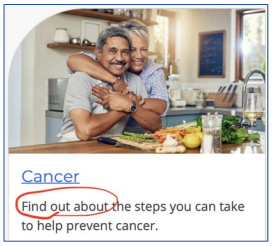
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Simplify Content
Apply Plain Language Principles

Write health content for the consumer:

- ✓ Write in everyday language and the way consumers talk
- ✓ Write directly to the consumer using "we" "you"
- ✓ Write in active voice – **the person does the action**

Active: Check your blood pressure every 2 years.
Passive: Blood pressure should be checked every 2 years.



Chunk text, use headings and subheadings to create new sections:

- ✓ Write meaningful headings
- ✓ Make your headings specific
- ✓ Use **active verbs** in your heading

Avoid statistical facts:

- ✓ Limit quantitative information
- ✓ Explain the concept that includes numbers **like health text results**

SEO strategy:
Simple words help consumers find the searchable words and what they are looking for. **Increases consumer engagement and lowers bounce rates**

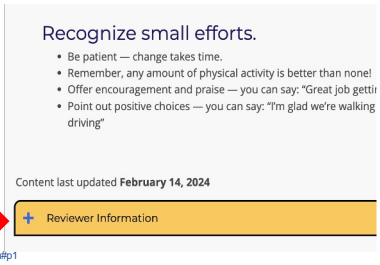
https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder

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Simplify Content
Apply Health Literacy Principles

Make sure your health content is correct and up to date:

- ✓ Ask experts to check content often
- ✓ Write the date when it was created and checked
- ✓ Include the expert's name—this builds confidence in your content
- ✓ Include contact information—this helps consumers trust your content more

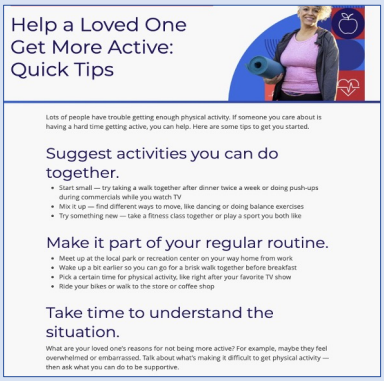


https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/content.html#p1

SEO strategy:
Health content reviewed by experts builds trust and credibility. Up-to-date, accurate information meets search engine standards.
This helps create stronger E-E-A-T signals
(Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness)

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Display Content Clearly



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Display Content Clearly
Apply Plain Language Principles

Display content clearly and legibly on the page
- ✓ Limit paragraph size
- ✓ Use bullets and short lists (no more than 6-7 items)
- ✓ Use white space and avoid clutter

The following triggers web consumers with limited literacy skills to skip over content:
- Dense text
- ✓ Long sentences
- ✓ Paragraphs with multiple numbers in the text
- ✓ Long words
- ✓ Paragraphs with more than three lines

Position text for visibility and readability:
- ✓ Put content in the middle and top of the screen
  - Many consumers with low literacy skills do not scroll down
  - They only see what is in the middle of the screen
- ✓ Keep important words above the fold—this means no need to scroll
- ✓ If more text is below, show a clear sign to scroll—help consumers know there is more content to read

SEO strategy:
Better legibility leads to stronger engagement signals—**important for SEO**

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Display Content Clearly

Label links are easy to see and use:

- ✓ Underline links
- ✓ Use action words that tell what the link does

Example
Instead of: Visit this website to search for heart-healthy recipes
Try: Find heart-healthy recipes your whole family will enjoy

- ✓ Avoid links to pages with the same content (redundant)
- ✓ Create links to go to more details if they want
- ✓ Limit the number of links on one page
- ✓ Make links long (one line) so consumers can click and copy them well
- ✓ Make links go to resources, and provide more details

https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/diabetes/quit-smoking



Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation

What is wrong with these link labels?

- **Click here**
- **Print**
- **Learn more**

- Type 2 diabetes
- Vision loss
- Rheumatoid arthritis

Learn more about how smoking affects different parts of the body.

SEO strategy:
Simple navigation makes pages easier for search engines to crawl.
When visitors immediately see the information they can use, they are less likely to leave the page.
This lowers bounce rates and tells search engines your page is helpful and high quality.

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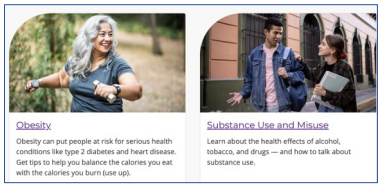
Display Content Clearly

Use images that facilitate learning:

- ✓ Include pictures and graphics that support the written content
- ✓ Include a descriptive caption that explains the picture
- ✓ Use simple, realistic pictures to illustrate health behaviors and medical concepts
- ✓ Web consumers prefer photographs of "real" consumers who look like them
- ✓ Avoid busy or animated graphics that are distracting. These often can be mistaken for advertisements

Use colors that provide contrast:

- ✓ Avoid dark backgrounds
- ✓ Use black text on a white or very light background
- ✓ Keep the background clear (avoid patterns and images over or under text)



Obesity

Obesity can put people at risk for serious health conditions like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Get tips to help you balance the calories you eat with the calories you burn (use up).

Substance Use and Misuse

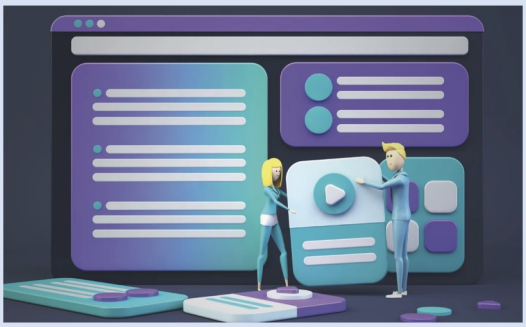
Learn about the health effects of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs — and how to talk about substance use.

SEO strategy:
When visitors easily see the information they can use, they stay on the page.
This lowers bounce rates and tells search engines your page is helpful and high quality—increasing SEO ranking

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Simplify Navigation



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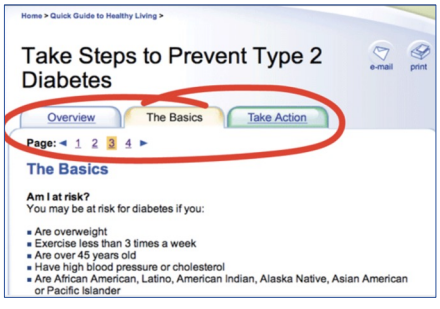
Simplify Navigation

Make a simple home page:

- ✓ Make the home page easy to see and use
- ✓ Use only a few things on the home page
- ✓ Use white space and big buttons
- ✓ Keep the words simple and sentences short

Link home page to other pages and back:

- ✓ Create language links and buttons on the home page
- ✓ Use big buttons to go back to the home page or main menu
- ✓ Add page numbers to help consumers read and move through the website
- ✓ Use tabs at the top to organize content



A good home page has a few links and short descriptions

https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/2010/organize.htm#p1

SEO strategy:
Simple navigation makes pages easier for search engines to crawl.
This improves scannability and structure and boost SEO strength

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Putting It All Together

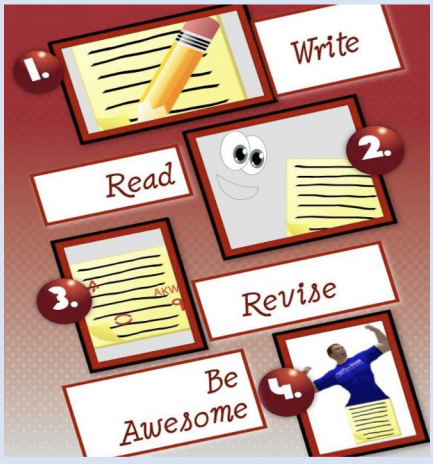
When consumers say:

I can understand this online information	I can read this online information	I can see this online information	I can find this online information	I can take action on this information
Plain Language What you write	Readability How you write	Legibility How you design it	SEO How you make it accessible	Health Literacy How you help consumers take action

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Evaluate and Revise



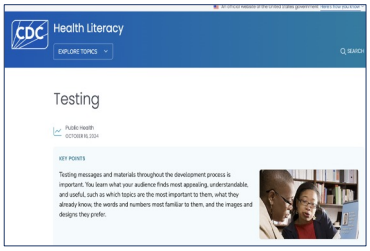
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Evaluate and Revise

Let's not forget the last important step:
Test with the consumer!

The best way to know if we've reached our consumer with the right message is through field testing:

- ✓ Talk to consumers who might use your website-target consumer:
  - Include consumers with limited literacy skills
- ✓ Use a representative sample of at least 10 consumers
- ✓ Assess:
  - Understanding
  - Readability
  - Accessibility
  - Relevance
  - Emotional response



https://www.cdc.gov/health-literacy/php/develop-materials/testing-messages-materials.html#:~:text=Do%20background%20research%20on%20your,and%20implementing%20health%20communication%20efforts.

SEO strategy:
Testing reveals whether users understand and find what they're looking for.
This helps match real search queries, which improves SEO

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Evaluate and Revise

Consider talking to professionals who serve the target consumer

Professionals who work with your target consumer could be:

- Public librarians
- Health care providers
- Adult educators
- Case /social /community workers

Ask them how your website could help them serve their clients better:

- Relevant content
- Priorities
- Needs

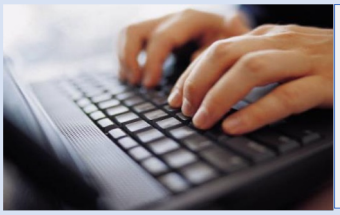


SEO strategy:
Testing helps fix identified problems that would otherwise cause users to leave quickly—increasing bounce rates and lowering SEO rankings

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A Tool to Assess and Improve

Readability + Suitability + Health Literacy + More



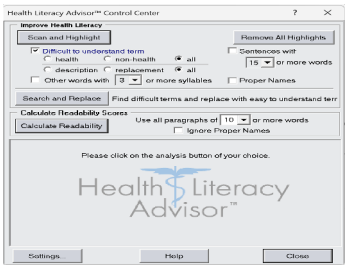
One comprehensive solution!

Health Literacy Advisor

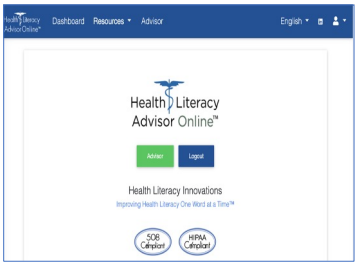
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The Health Literacy Advisor

HLA Desktop (Add-in to Word)



HLA Online (Web-based version)



Cleans documents before scoring readability, assuring accurate readability scores

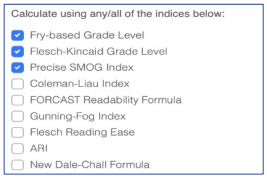
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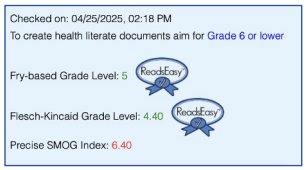
Health Literacy Advisor Features

Calculates Readability:

- Uses nine different readability indices in English and six in Spanish.
- Creates detailed reports
- Stamps results on the document
- Rewards users with a "ReadsEasy" stamp for achieving the 6th-grade reading level or lower

Assesses principles of plain language using the REDA – Reads Easy Document Assessment, a suitability tool.



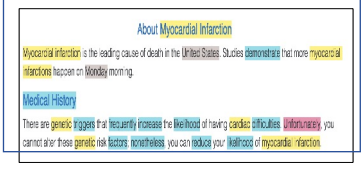


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Health Literacy Advisor Features

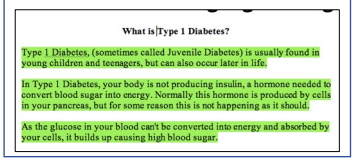
Highlights Words

- Long words by database
- Long words by syllable count
- Medical terms and jargon
- Proper names/nouns



Highlights Long Sentences

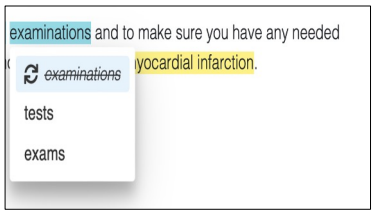
Long sentences with 10 words or more

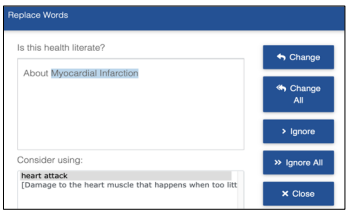


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Health Literacy Advisor Feature

- **Search difficult terms and replace** them with easy-to-understand choices right on your document
- Includes definitions for health terms and non-health terms





On average, it lowers the reading level with replacements at least 4 grades

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Summary



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Summary

We need to improve online health information:

- ✓ Make sure your content is consumer-centered and evidence-based
- ✓ Write easy-to-read health content – simple words, short sentences
- ✓ Make sure the text is indeed easy to read at least at 6th-grade reading level
- ✓ Create action-oriented and interactive messages
- ✓ Create content that is accessible and acceptable to your consumers, including those with disabilities
- ✓ Build credibility and trust for your content and website
- ✓ Adopt a simple navigation design
- ✓ Assess and evaluate content with the consumer

Apply techniques that directly support SEO by improving consumer satisfaction, engagement, and clarity—key signals search engines use to evaluate and rank pages

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Remember!!

- Applying health literacy and plain language techniques helps make website **content:**
  - ✓ **Easy to read**
  - ✓ **Easy to see**
  - ✓ **Easy to find and use**
  - ✓ **Easy to understand**
  - ✓ **Easy to relate to relatable**
- When consumers can understand health content, **they find what they are looking for and will trust the website**
- Consumers who trust the **website visit more and stay longer**



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Sales@HealthLiteracyInnovations.com

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