



Creating CACFP Materials in a Low Literacy Format

CACFP sponsoring organizations, afterschool programs and State agencies are undertaking a broad range of activities to attract, retain, and assist low-income providers, center staff and parents with low levels of literacy. Many are developing brochures and fact sheets that are written in a low literacy format. Others are working to create modified CACFP record-keeping forms and nutrition education materials.

If your organization has decided to create your own low-literacy outreach and training materials, there are a number of basic guidelines to follow. Often, following these guidelines will help you create clear, more concise materials that even proficient readers will find useful.

- To write low literacy text you need to know the needs and reading ability of the child care providers, center staff or parents you are serving. Once you have determined their reading level, you should write your educational materials with their needs in mind. For example, using words that the child care providers are familiar with, and examples they can relate to, will make your materials more understandable.
- Often people who have low literacy levels have trouble recognizing letters and uncommon words. Therefore, materials written in a low literacy format are characterized by easy, common words and short sentences. There are ways to use sentence structure and style to make writing easier to read.
- The formatting and layout of materials written for lower reading levels is also very important. Even what illustrations are used and where they are put in a document can make it easier or more difficult to understand the point.

This section consists of three parts:

- The first is a fact sheet that provides the specific guidelines to follow when creating materials for child care providers who are not proficient in reading English.
- The second is a list of resources that provide more detailed information on creating materials in a low-literacy format.
- The third is a checklist for creating CACFP materials in a low-literacy format

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Tips For Creating CACFP Materials in a Low Literacy Format

The following tips are broken down into categories to help guide you through the creating training and outreach materials for CACFP providers, center staff and parents. The sources in which these tips were found are listed on “Resource List: Creating materials in a low literacy format” at the end of this section.

Information

- Only include what the provider, center staff or parents NEEDS to know. Leave out things that you would like them to know but that are not necessary for getting your point across.
- The message should be short, direct and specific.
- Apply the material to the provider’s typical situation to make it more meaningful.
- Try to provide direct, how-to information.
- Avoid statistics.

Organization

- Be consistent in the way the material is organized and formatted throughout the document.
- Sequence information logically. This can be done using numbers or categories of information.
- When possible, organize the material using simple, clear headers.
 - Break complex ideas down into sub ideas and sub headings.
 - Short explanatory headings are better than single word headings, which may be confusing.
 - Single Word Heading: Breakfast
 - Explanatory Heading: Breakfast Meal Plans
 - Put the first bullet or point on the line directly below the header.
 - If desired, underline or bold the header. Do not use italics.
 - Use a mix of lower and upper case letters. DON’T USE ALL CAPS!
- Present only one idea at a time.
- Try to keep each idea to one page.
- Put important information either first or last.
- Summarize and repeat important information.

Visuals

- Whenever possible, use visuals to explain headings and important information.
- Use visuals that directly relate to the information. Visuals should be direct and informative, not just attractive.
- Place the illustration next to the text it is describing.
- Use simple illustrations. Line drawings that do not contain extra detail work well.
- Illustrations should be realistic so that the provider, center staff or parents can identify with them.
- Use captions or text to tell readers what to look for in the illustrations. Different people may interpret the same picture differently.
- Circles and arrows are very useful in pointing out key information.



Format and Layout

- Use capital and lower-case lettering; using all capital letters is difficult to read.
- Do not use right justification (where all words on the right side are aligned).
- Avoid putting the first word of a sentence as the last word on a line. Also, (that was an example), avoid putting the last word in a sentence as the first word on a line.
- To highlight a word or passage, bold or underline it. Italics are hard to read.
- Use at least 12 point font.
- Use a light background with darker text.
- Use thin lettering without curls.
- Avoid lengthy lists.
- Start each paragraph on a new line and skip lines between paragraphs. Do not indent paragraphs.
- Paragraphs should not be more than 60 words.

Wording

- Use everyday language, including phrases and words that the provider would use, whenever appropriate.
- Clearly define any new words.
- Repeating new words at short intervals can help make them familiar.
- Use short, non-technical words of two syllables or less.
- Use words with single meaning. For example, “poor” could mean having little money or it could mean unskilled.
- Avoid abbreviations, contractions, acronyms, unfamiliar spellings of words, and quotation marks.



Sentence Structure

- Use the active voice instead of the passive voice. Active sentences place the doers before the action and typically leave out words like went, am, have, etc. For example,
 - Active – I ran.
 - Passive – I went running.

 - Active – Mary found the penny.
 - Passive – The penny was found by Mary.
- Sentences of 8-10 words are best. Never use sentences longer than 25 words.
- Use positive statements. For example,
 - Positive: Always eat breakfast.
 - Negative: Do not skip breakfast.

Pretest

- Pretest your materials with provider, center staff or parents.
- More information on how to pretest can be found in:
 - “Clear & Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low-Literate Readers.” National Cancer Institute.
<http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/oc/clear-and-simple/allpages/print>
 - Gaston N, Daniels, P. Guidelines: Writing for Adults with Limited Reading Skills.
<http://www.cyfernet.org/research/writeadult.html>
- These articles contain formulas that are helpful in determining the reading level of your materials.



A Resource List for Creating CACFP Materials in a Low Literacy Format

The following is a list of the sources from which the tips were taken. Refer to these resources for more detailed information on creating materials in a low literacy format.



- National Cancer Institute. Clear & Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low-Literate Readers. www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/oc/clear-and-simple/allpages/print
- Guidelines: Writing for Adults with Limited Reading Skills. Gaston N, Daniels, P. <http://www.cyfernet.org/research/writeadult.html>
- How to Write Low Literacy Materials. Miller, JE. The Ohio State University Cooperative Extension. www.joe.org/joe/2001february/tt2.html
- Writing for a Changing World: Reaching Low Literacy Audience with Print Material. Schuster ER, McAllister DW. University of Minnesota Cooperative Extension. www.exension.umn.edu/distribution/communications/DL6052.html

Other Great Resources:

- Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills. Doak CC, Doak LG, Root JH,. Philadelphia, Pa.: J.B. A book that includes a number of case studies that includes information on techniques and approaches for distributing information without using the written word.
- Nutrition Education for Low Literate Teens and Adults. Food and Nutrition Information Center. A data base of articles, books, kits and web sites. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/lowlit.html>

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Tips for Creating CACFP Materials in a Low Literacy Format: A Checklist

Information

- Only vital information is included
- Message is short, direct and specific



Organization

- Material is formatted and organized consistently
- Information is broken into ideas using short, explanatory headings and subheadings that are more than 1 word
- Only 1 idea is presented at a time
- The most important information is written either first or last
- The most important information is summarized and/or repeated

Visuals

- Visuals are used to explain headings and most important information
- Visuals are simple, and clear with text describing them

Format

- Text is written using capital and lower case letters
- Bold or underlining is used to highlight a passage, not italics
- Font is at least 12 point with thin lettering without curls like Arial and Times

Wording and Sentence Structure

- Wording used is the everyday language the provider would use
- Almost all words only have 1 or 2 syllables
- Paragraphs are no longer than 60 words
- Sentences are no longer than 8-10 words whenever possible
- Words used have a single meaning
- Abbreviations, contractions, acronyms, unfamiliar spellings of words, and quotation marks are not used
- Sentences are written in the active voice
- Most, if not all, statements are written in the positive