

LIBRARY TIPS #20 HEALTH LITERACY

October is Health Literacy (HL) Month.



HL is the set of **knowledge and personal skills** developed throughout life that facilitate **access → comprehension → assessment → use of health information and services.**

It is mediated by **organizational frameworks, resource accessibility, and social context.**

essential
to

Address fake news, misinformation, and infodemics while fostering **informed decision-making** that promotes and safeguards both individual and collective health and well-being.

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HEALTH LITERACY MONTH
Building Awareness Through Action

World Health Organization. (2021). Health promotion glossary of terms 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240038349>

3 HL levels

Functional

Basic **reading and writing skills to understand** information.

Interactive

Skills in information **interpretation, communication, and contextual application.**

Critical

The ability to **critically analyze** information and its sources in order to **make independent decisions.**

Adapted from Nutbeam, D. (2000). Health literacy as a public health objective: a challenge for modern health education and communication strategies in the 21st century. *Health Promotion International*, 15(3), 259-267.

Challenges in clinical practice



- Medical terminology and specialized language.
- Information overload (infodemics).
- Sources are either absent or lack reliability.
- Challenges in data and probability interpretation.

Beneficial impact



- Enhanced communication between professionals and patients.
- Enhanced clinical decision-making.
- Higher-quality research (selection and evaluation of information sources).

How can HL be promoted?

Strategies and tools for **effective communication** in healthcare:

Plain language summaries

Summaries of studies, reviews, clinical trials, or guidelines written in clear **language** that is **accessible to the general public.**

Key principles

- ✳ Avoid technical abbreviations or medical terminology.
- ✳ Use short sentences and a simple structure.
- ✳ Engage patients and caregivers in the review.

Best practices

- ✳ Publish alongside the scientific article.
- ✳ Share on social media and with relevant organizations.
- ✳ Ensure Open Access whenever possible.

Infographics and visual communication.

Visual representations that make health **information clearer**, more accessible, and easier to understand and remember.

Key principles

- ✳ Simplify complex data.
- ✳ Use concise text and clear visual communication.
- ✳ Ensure readability and accessibility.

Best practices

- ✳ Tailor the content to the target audience.
- ✳ Test users' understanding of the content.
- ✳ Cite the sources and dates of the information.

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✳ National Institutes of Health (NIH)
Plain Language: Getting Started or Brushing Up

✳ Podsada, K., Jones, T. N., & Ryan, J. C. (2025) **Primer on Plain Language Summaries for Advanced Practice Providers With Published Examples and Practical Applications to Practice** Journal of the advanced practitioner in oncology, 1-16. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.6004/jadpro.2025.16.7.20>

✳ WHO
Tactics to apply to make your communications understandable: Make it visual

Library support



➤➤➤ **Validation of scientific information sources.**

➤➤➤ **Enhancing systematic search** to ensure reliable, rigorous, and transparent evidence collection.