

Health Education Materials Assessment Tool for Spanish Content

Use the items below to figure out if a material can be designated as “easy-to-read.”

See page 5 for an annotated sample material that can be designated as “easy-to-read.”

A few tips before you get started

- If it’s your first time using the tool, read through the items before you begin assessing the material.
- You may find it helpful to read the whole material before you assess it.
- Mark each item as either “yes” or “no.”
- You must **score items 1 through 6** for every material.
- Only score **item 7** if the material has visual aids. Only score **item 8** if the material has numbers.
- Materials must get a “yes” on all required items to be considered “easy-to-read.”

A note on cultural relevance

In addition to using this tool to determine if materials are “easy-to-read,” it’s important to make sure materials are culturally relevant for readers. Any time you’re assessing a material, keep cultural considerations in mind. For example:

- Does the material use language and examples (of activities, foods, etc.) that would be familiar to the audience?
- Are images representative of the audience’s race, ethnicity, age, gender, and ability?
- Does the material avoid perpetuating stereotypes?
- If relevant, does the material include links to resources in Spanish?

1. The material makes its purpose completely evident.

The material has an obvious main message near the top. Think of the main message as the most important thing for the audience to remember after reading the material. You need to be able to tell at a glance what the main message is.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Notes:

2. The material does not include information or content that distracts from its purpose.

The material includes need-to-know information only — it skips the nice-to-know details. The idea is to focus on key information readers need in order to take action. Ask yourself whether any of the information would distract or overwhelm you if you were unfamiliar with the material's topic.

Longer materials are more likely to have distracting information, but there's no set maximum length for materials to get a "yes" on this item. Keep in mind that the material **does** need to include all the content that's relevant to understanding the main message.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Notes:

3. The material uses common, everyday language. Medical terms are used only to familiarize the audience with the terms. When used, medical terms are defined.

The material uses plain language that everyone can understand (e.g., "alta presión arterial," not "hipertensión") and "neutral" terms that are familiar to people across cultures (e.g., "resfrío," not "catarro" or "carraspera"). When unfamiliar terms are necessary, the material explains them in context and provides an in-text definition using easy-to-understand language. (Think: a reader just diagnosed with diabetes probably needs to learn the term "glucosa.") When relevant, the material includes synonyms for terms that may be unfamiliar to people from some countries or cultures (e.g., "gripe o influenza").

Ask yourself whether you'd understand all of the terms in the material if you didn't know anything about the topic.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Notes:

4. The material uses the active voice.

The material mostly uses active voice and avoids passive voice. Ask yourself: Is the subject of the sentence **doing** the action (e.g., “los expertos recomiendan que usted reciba la vacuna contra la gripe o influenza”)? If so, it’s active voice. Or is the subject **receiving** the action (e.g., “recibir una vacuna contra la gripe o influenza es recomendado por los expertos”)? That’s passive voice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Notes:

5. The material breaks or “chunks” information into short sections.

The content in the material is divided into short chunks of information **with headings**. Think about whether you can quickly scan the material and find the information you’re looking for. Does the amount of content in each section feel manageable, or is it overwhelming?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Notes:

6. The material uses visual cues (e.g., arrows, boxes, bullets, bold, larger font, highlighting) to draw attention to key points.

The material signals where to find important information and emphasizes it with visual elements. Scan the material and ask yourself: Is it clear where you’ll find key takeaways before you even read the words? Also check that the material uses these visual cues selectively — they can become less effective if they’re overused.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Notes:

7. The material's visual aids support the main message or represent the intended audience. (score only if material includes visual aids)

Visual aids like photos, illustrations, and graphics can make health education materials easier to understand, more engaging, and more relatable. Think about whether the material's visual aids could help the intended audience understand the content better — or help them relate to the material. For example, in a material with a main message about taking steps to prevent lead poisoning in children, a photo of peeling paint in an older home could help readers understand what to look for. (Keep in mind that it's best for all health education materials to have visual aids.)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

Notes:

8. Numbers appearing in the material are clear and easy to understand. (score only if material includes numbers)

Check that the material uses simple numbers — like whole numbers rather than fractions and decimals. Keep in mind that frequencies (e.g., 3 de 10) are generally easier to understand than percentages (e.g., 30%). And make sure the material uses numerals (e.g., 3, 2°) rather than spelled-out numbers (e.g., tres, segundo).*

Context for numbers — in the form of words or additional numbers, like a range — can also indicate clear use of numbers. So can **visual metaphors** (e.g., “1 onza de queso equivale aproximadamente a tres trozos del tamaño de un dado”).

Finally, check that the material always does the math for the readers. Make sure it doesn't ask them to add, subtract, multiply, divide — or do any other kind of calculation.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

Notes:

Material gets a “yes” on out of relevant items

*Keep in mind that some style guides (e.g., APA style) recommend spelling out numbers under 10. Use your judgment on how to assess materials that include spelled-out numbers for this reason but would otherwise get a “yes” on all items in the assessment tool.

Annotated example

This material gets a “yes” on all items in the assessment tool. The callouts explain why the material gets a “yes” on the items.

Includes need-to-know information only — there’s no content that distracts from the purpose (#2)

The clear main message at the beginning makes it easy to understand the material’s purpose (#1)

Proteja del plomo a sus hijos

Tener contacto con el plomo puede causar problemas con el aprendizaje, la conducta y el desarrollo de los niños. La buena noticia es que usted puede tomar medidas para proteger del plomo a sus hijos.

¿Quiénes tienen un mayor riesgo de desarrollar problemas de salud debido al plomo?

Los niños menores de 6 años tienen un mayor riesgo de desarrollar problemas relacionados con el plomo. Esto se debe a que:

- Los cuerpos de los niños pequeños están aún creciendo y desarrollándose, por lo que son más sensibles a los efectos dañinos para la salud que causa el plomo
- Los niños son más propensos a poner sus manos u otras cosas (como juguetes) en sus bocas, lo que puede causar que accidentalmente traguen polvo de plomo



¿Cómo entran en contacto los niños con el plomo?

La mayoría de las casas construidas antes de 1978 tienen pintura con plomo. Cuando la pintura antigua se agrieta y deteriora, produce polvo de plomo. Los niños pueden respirar el polvo o tragárselo.

A veces, el plomo está presente en el suelo, en el agua potable y en los productos con pintura antigua, como los juguetes, los muebles y las joyas. Pero cuando los niños entran en contacto con el plomo, es usualmente debido a la pintura con plomo en las casas más antiguas.

¿Cómo puedo proteger del plomo a mis hijos?

Siga estos pasos para mantener a su familia segura:

- Si su hogar fue construido antes de 1978, haga un análisis para verificar la presencia de plomo
- Mantenga a sus hijos alejados de habitaciones con pintura descascarada o agrietada
- Lave las manos y los juguetes de sus hijos a menudo
- Cubra la pintura agrietada o deteriorada con cinta adhesiva o papel mural (empapelado)
- Use una toalla de papel húmeda o trapee regularmente para limpiar el polvo, especialmente alrededor de las ventanas y el piso
- Si tiene alguna preocupación, pida a un médico que haga un análisis de plomo a su hijo o hija

El plomo puede causar problemas serios de salud en los niños. Por eso, tome medidas para proteger del plomo a sus hijos.

Uses numerals (#8)

The visual supports the main message and represents the intended audience (#7)

Information is “chunked” into short sections with headings (#5)

Uses active voice (#4)

Uses common, everyday language and neutral terms that are familiar to people across cultures — and includes synonyms for terms that may be unfamiliar to people from some countries or cultures (#3)

Visual cues like bullets and bolding help draw attention to key information (#6)

About the Health Education Materials Assessment Tool for Spanish Content

NLM's assessment tool is based on the understandability items from the Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool for Printable Materials (PEMAT-P), developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

In 2019, NLM engaged health literacy subject matter experts (SMEs) to discuss the development of the PEMAT-P and other understandability assessment tools. The ultimate goal was to create an abridged tool that NLM can use to designate health education materials as “easy-to-read.” The SMEs helped NLM identify a subset of PEMAT-P understandability items that may be the most useful for measuring understandability. To assess and refine the subset items, NLM conducted a series of qualitative studies with consumers who have limited health literacy skills.

In 2020, NLM completed additional research aimed specifically at increasing understanding of numeracy best practices in health education materials. Based on the results of this research and existing best practices, NLM expanded the numeracy guidance in its assessment tool, adding more detailed tips and additional examples.

Then, in 2021, NLM completed research to learn about best practices related to using visual aids in health education materials. Based on the research results and existing best practices, NLM revised the visual aids item and guidance in its assessment tool. NLM also added considerations for assessing materials for cultural relevance.

In 2022, NLM completed research to test whether Spanish-language materials that meet the guidance in the assessment tool are clear and easy to understand for Spanish-speaking readers. Based on the research results, NLM created a version of the tool that reviewers can use to quickly assess the understandability of Spanish health education materials.

Learn more about the PEMAT-P and how it measures understandability in consumer-facing health education materials:

- [PEMAT and User's Guide](#)
- [PEMAT for Printable Materials \(PEMAT-P\)](#)