You Know What You're Talking About, but Does Your Audience? CDC's Clear Communication Index and how to use it

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What is the Clear Communication Index (Index)?

- 4 questions and 20 items based in communication and related sciences that staff can use to develop, assess and score communication products
- Assesses materials in these 7 areas
  - Main Message and Call to Action
  - Language
  - Information Design
  - State of the Science
  - Behavioral Recommendations
  - Numbers
  - Risk

Why Do We Need the Index?

- Explain communication and related sciences
- Standardize practices
- Offer alternative to opinion and readability formulas
- Identify most important items for clarity and understanding

How Can Staff Use the Index?

- Design and develop new communication products
- Assess existing communication products
- Foster discussion before and during review processes

How Was the Index Developed?

- CDC staff and contract team
  - CDC: Cynthia Baur and Chris Prue
  - Contractors: RTI International and CommunicateHealth Inc.
- Multi-step process
- Questions and items based in scientific literature, staff and consumer testing

Today's Task

1. Learn about Index items, what they mean, and how to apply them

CLEAR COMMUNICATION INDEX: 4 QUESTIONS AND 20 ITEMS

4 Questions Before Scoring

- Who is your primary audience?
- What do you know about the health literacy skills of your audience?
- What is your primary communication objective?
- What is the main message of the material?

PART A: CORE

Domains:

- Main message and call to action
- Language
- Information design
- State of the science

The items in this section (1-11) apply to all materials.

1. One Main Message

Does the material contain one main message?

A message is the information you are trying to communicate to another person or group of people. If the material contains several messages, and there is no obvious main message, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

NOTE: If you answered **No** to Question 1, score 0 for Questions 2-4. Continue with Question 5.

2. Main Message on First Page

Is the main message at the top, beginning, or front of the material?

If the material is a single print page, answer yes if the main message is in the top fourth. For a web material, answer yes if the main message is visible without scrolling.

If your material does not have one main message, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

3. Main Message Emphasized with Visual Cues

Is the main message emphasized with visual cues?

If the main message is emphasized with font, color, shapes, lines, arrows or headings, such as "What you need to know," answer yes.

If your material does not have one main message, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

4. Visual Supporting Main Message

Does the material contain at least one visual that conveys or supports the main message?

For example, count photographs, line drawings, graphs and infographics as visuals. If the visual doesn't have a caption or labels, answer no. If the visual has human figures who aren't performing the recommended behaviors, answer no.

If your material does not have one main message, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

5. Call to Action

Does the material include one or more calls to action for the primary audience?

If the material includes a specific behavioral recommendation, a prompt to get more information, a request to share information with someone else, or a broad call for program or policy change, answer yes. If the call to action is for someone other than the primary audience, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

6. Active Voice

Do both the main message and the call to action use the active voice?

If only the main message or only the call to action uses the active voice, answer no. If you answered no to #1 or #5, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

7. Language of Primary Audience

Does the material always use language the primary audience would use? See top of Score Sheet for primary audience.

If all specialized or unfamiliar terms are explained or described (not just defined) the first time they are used, answer yes. Acronyms and abbreviations must be spelled out and explained if unfamiliar to the audience.

Yes = 1 No = 0

8. Bulleted/Numbered Lists

Does the material use bulleted or numbered lists?

If the material contains a list with more than 7 items, and the list is not broken up into sub-lists, answer no. If the list is for additional information or references only or at the end of the material, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

9. Chunks with Headings

Is the material organized in chunks with headings?

This item applies to prose text and lists. If the chunks contain more than one idea each, answer no. If the headings don't match the information chunks, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

10. Most Important Information

Is the most important information the primary audience needs summarized in the first paragraph or section?

The most important information must include the main message.

Yes = 1 No = 0

11. State of the Science

Does the material explain what authoritative sources, such as subject matter experts and agency spokespersons, know and don't know about the topic?

If the material addresses both, answer yes. If the material addresses only one (what is known or not known), answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

Calculate the score for Part A.

Total _____ / 11

Add up the total points for Part A.

Note: If you answered No to Question 1, score 0 for Questions 2-4.

PART B: BEHAVIORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Answer this question to determine if items 12-14 apply to the material.

Does the material include one or more behavioral recommendations for the primary audience?

If **yes** – score items 12-14.

If **no** – skip to Part C.

12. Behavioral Recommendation

Does the material include one or more behavioral recommendations for the primary audience?

Yes = 1

If no, STOP here and don't score Part B.

13. Behavioral Importance

Does the material explain why the behavioral recommendation(s) is important?

If you only offer numbers to explain the importance of the behavioral recommendation with no other relevant information for the audience, answer no.

Yes = 1 No = 0

14. Behavioral Direction

Does the behavioral recommendation(s) include specific directions about how to perform the behavior?

This may include step-by-step directions or a simple description (for example: Look for cereal with 100% daily value of folic acid). If the material includes information about when or how to contact a medical provider or health official, answer yes. If the material mentions when or how often to perform a behavior, answer yes.

Yes = 1 No = 0

Calculate the score for Part B.

Total _____ / 3

Add up the total points for Part B.

PART C: NUMBERS

Answer this question to determine if items 15-17 apply to the material.

Does the material include one or more numbers that convey or support the main message?

If **yes** – score items 15-17.

If **no** – skip to Part D.

15. Numbers Primary Audience Uses

Does the material always present numbers the primary audience uses?

Whole numbers are used by most audiences. The types of numbers used will vary for each audience.

Yes = 1 No = 0

16. Lay Explanation of Numbers

Does the material always explain what the numbers mean?

For example, "The amount of meat recommended as part of a healthy meal is 3 to 4 ounces – it will look about the same size as a deck of cards."

Yes = 1 No = 0

17. Mathematical Calculations

Does the audience have to conduct mathematical calculations?

Adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing involve calculations. Calculating a common denominator for the purposes of comparison is a mathematical calculation.

NOTE: For this item, Yes is scored 0 and No is scored 1.

Yes = 0 No = 1

Calculate the score for Part C.

Total _____ / 3

Add up the total points for Part C.

PART D: RISK

Answer this question to determine if items 18-20 apply to the material.

Does the material present information, including numbers, that describe risk?

If **yes** – score items 18-20.

If **no** – skip to Calculate Your Score.

18. Explain Risk

Does the material explain the nature of the risk?

If the material states the threat or harm and how and why people may be affected, answer yes. If the material has only the threat or harm but no explanation, answer no. For example, if a material indicates that there are 1,000 new cases of a contagious disease in Springfield, does it also explain that people in Springfield may be more likely to get the disease, why they may be more likely, and how serious the threat of the disease is?

Yes = 1 No = 0

19. Risks and Benefits

Does the material address both the risks and benefits of the recommended behaviors?

This includes actual risks and benefits and those perceived by your audience. If the material addresses only risks or only benefits, answer no. If no behavioral recommendation is presented, answer not applicable.

Yes = 0 No = 1 N/A=N/A

20. Probability Explained with Text or Visual

If the material uses numeric probability to describe risk, is the probability also explained with words or a visual?

Examples of probability information in a risk message are numbers (such as 1 in 5 or 20%) . If the material presents numeric risk and also uses text to explain the probability, answer yes. If the material presents numeric risk and also uses a visual to explain the probability, answer yes. If the material only presents numeric risk, answer no. If the material does not include this type of probability information, answer not applicable.

Yes = 0 No = 1 N/A=N/A

Calculate the score for Part D.

Total _____ /3

OR _____ / 2

(if you answered N/A for only **1** item)

OR _____ / 1

(if you answered N/A for **2** items)

Add up the total points for Part D.

Calculate the Score for the Material

Step 1: Add up the total points that the material earned (this is the numerator).

Step 2: Add up the total possible points that the material could have earned (this is the denominator).

Step 3: Divide the numerator by the denominator and multiply by 100 to get the total score.

_____ / _____ X 100 = _____

How to Interpret Your Score

If the total score is 90 or above:

Excellent! You have addressed many items that make materials easier to understand and use.

If the total score is 89 or less:

Note which items scored 0 points. Use the descriptions and examples in the User Guide to revise and improve the material. Then apply the Index again to check your work. You can use the Index as many times as you need to revise the material to get a score of 90 or above.

EXAMPLE

Thimerosal - original

Main message?

Frequently Asked Questions About Thimerosal (Ethylmercury)

There are two, very different, types of mercury which people should know about: **methylmercury** and **ethylmercury**.

Mercury is a naturally occurring element found in the earth's crust, air, soil, and water. Since the earth's formation, volcanic eruptions, weathering of rocks and burning coal have caused mercury to be released into the environment. Once released, certain types of bacteria in the environment can change mercury into **methylmercury**. Methylmercury makes its way through the food chain in fish, animals, and humans. At high levels, it can be toxic to people. For more information about methylmercury: please read "What You Need to Know about Mercury in Fish and Shellfish" from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Thimerosal contains a different form of mercury called **ethylmercury**. Studies comparing ethylmercury and methylmercury suggest that they are processed differently in the human body. Ethylmercury is broken down and excreted much more rapidly than methylmercury. Therefore, ethylmercury (the type of mercury found in the influenza vaccine) is much less likely than methylmercury (the type of mercury in the environment) to accumulate in the body and cause harm.

On this Page

What is thimerosal?

Thimerosal is a mercury-based preservative that has been used for decades in the United States in multi-dose vials (vials containing more than one dose) of medicines and vaccines.

Thimerosal - revised

One main message & message is at the top of the first page

Visual the supports main message

Active Voice

Language of primary audience

Most important information summarized on the first page

Thimerosal: You asked. We answered.

Some parents have questions about the safety of ingredients – like thimerosal ("THY-mayr-uh-sal") – in children's shots (vaccines).

We want you to know that thimerosal is no longer used in children's shots, except the flu shot. You can ask for a flu shot without thimerosal.

Check out these answers to common questions about thimerosal.

What is thimerosal?

Thimerosal is added to some shots to prevent germs (like bacteria and fungi) from growing in them.

If germs grow in vaccines, they can cause illness — or even death.

Why do some people worry about thimerosal in vaccines?

You may have heard that thimerosal has mercury in it. Not all types of mercury are the same. Some types of mercury, like mercury in some kinds of fish, can stay in the human body and make us sick. Thimerosal is a different type of mercury. It doesn't stay in the body, and is unlikely to make us sick.

Is thimerosal safe?

Yes. Thimerosal has been used safely in vaccines for a long time (since the 1930s).

Language of primary audience

Original

Why is thimerosal used as a preservative in vaccines?

Thimerosal is added to vials of vaccine that contain more than one dose to prevent the growth of bacteria and fungi in the event that they get into the vaccine. This may occur when a syringe needle enters a vial as a vaccine is being prepared for administration. Contamination by germs in a vaccine could cause severe local reactions, serious illness or death. In some vaccines, preservatives are added during the manufacturing process to prevent microbial growth.

Revised

What is thimerosal?

Thimerosal is added to some shots to prevent germs (like bacteria and fungi) from growing in them.

If germs grow in vaccines, they can cause illness — or even death.