

## Plain Language Tips for Writing Research Consents and Study Packages

- Aim to write your package around a Grade 7 to 8 level.
- Write in the second person ('you' and 'we').
- Describe all the information the participant needs to know to make an informed decision in clear and easy to understand 'living room' language.
- Use familiar words as if the reader doesn't know anything about what you do or your research.
- Replace technical language with lay terms. Explain technical terms and concepts you need to use in plain language ('living room language' or using words the general public would understand).
- Be consistent in your use of terms.
- Describe all procedures that are in addition to regular medical care.
- Keep generic drug or device names in lowercase.
- Do not use 'treatment' or 'therapy' if a placebo is involved. Use 'study procedure' or 'study drug or placebo'.
- Use paragraph sub-headings as sign posts to help the reader navigate the content.
- Use a 12 point font size. Use a 13 or 14 point size if the majority of readers are seniors.
- Use upper and lower case. No CAPITALS (these are hard to read).
- Use illustrations that describe a process or treatment. Use simple line drawings.
- Use flow charts or calendar-type tables to show the steps involved.
- Describe volumes and amounts in lay terms. Use both Imperial and Metric amounts (e.g. millilitres and cups).
- Spell out abbreviations. Exception: Abbreviations that have become standard and treated as words such as DNA, HIV, and AIDS.
- Spell out acronyms when first used, followed by the acronym in brackets.
- Do not use mathematical symbols such as > or <, instead use words such as 'greater than' or 'more than'.
- Check the readability using a readability tool such as the one within Microsoft Word (remembering this is only an estimate +/- a grade or two).
- Ask someone who is not familiar with research to read the package. Then ask the person to 'teach back' the information to you in their own words. This helps you to see if your content is easily understood.

### Reference:

Institutional Review Board; II. Informed Consent Guidance - How to Prepare a Readable Consent Form. Baltimore, John Hopkins Medicine; August 2007. Retrieved Oct. 21, 2011 [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/institutional\\_review\\_board/guidelines\\_policies/guidelines/informed\\_consent\\_ii.html](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/institutional_review_board/guidelines_policies/guidelines/informed_consent_ii.html)

Ridpath JR, Greene SM, Wiese CJ; PRISM Readability Toolkit. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Seattle, Group Health Center for Health Studies; 2007 [http://www.grouphealthresearch.org/capabilities/readability/readability\\_home.html](http://www.grouphealthresearch.org/capabilities/readability/readability_home.html)