



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention



# How to Develop Products for Adults with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities and Extreme Low Literacy

## A Product Development Tool

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# Part 1: User Guide

# Introduction

## About the Product Development Tool

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created this tool to help people develop communication products for adults who have intellectual and developmental disabilities and extreme low literacy (IDD/ELL) and their caregivers. The tool reflects findings from a survey of caregivers of adults with IDD/ELL, lessons learned from audience testing of select COVID-related materials for individuals with IDD/ELL, and a review of the research related to increasing access to, use of, and understanding of information by adults with IDD/ELL.

This Product Development Tool has 2 parts. **Part 1 outlines best practices** for developing communication products for adults with IDD/ELL. These evidence-based best practices focus on the following topics:

- A. Behavior
- B. Sentences
- C. Words and Numbers
- D. Text Layout
- E. Visuals

**Part 2 is a score sheet** you can use to check how well your product follows the guidelines. (The score sheet is also available as a separate PDF document.) It takes about 15 minutes to score your product.

### The role of user testing

This tool provides general best practices based on robust research conducted with adults with IDD/ELL and their caregivers — but it's not a substitute for user testing.

**Testing is the only way to make sure that the specific words, images, and messages in your product are clear and appropriate for your audience.**

### Who is this tool for?

We designed this tool for CDC staff and contractors who write, edit, design, and review communication products for adults with IDD/ELL and their caregivers. However, anyone who develops health communication products for people with IDD/ELL can use this tool.

## How can I use the tool?

You can use this tool to do the following:

- Assess how well existing products follow these best practices.
- Guide the development of new products.
- Inform updates or revisions to improve products.

## What communication products can I create using this tool?

This tool includes best practices that you can use to create any type of communication product. Based on audience research, a few materials that often work well for adults with IDD/ELL include the following:

- Social stories (short stories that tell the reader what to expect in a social situation).
- Animated videos.
- Interactive products (e.g., products that ask the reader to answer questions or put a series of pictures in order).

Please note that these practices do not include tips specific to social media or any other communication medium.

## How is this tool different from other communication guidance?

This tool was developed based on a review of research conducted with adults with IDD/ELL, a review of best practices and guidelines for developing materials with adults with IDD/ELL, expert review of items in the tool, a survey of caregivers of adults with IDD/ELL, and audience testing conducted with adults with IDD/ELL and their caregivers. Other communication guidance, such as general plain language recommendations and literacy checklists, weren't created with this specific audience in mind. Other resources that focus on adults with IDD/ELL may not be based on research with and feedback from this audience.

When you are creating materials for people with IDD/ELL, it's especially important to minimize cognitive load—the number of ideas you are asking your audience to hold in their working memory at a time. This tool specifically focuses on best practices that help people with IDD/ELL understand and use health communication products.

## What about readability formulas?

When it comes to clear communication, readability formulas that measure “grade level” aren't enough. These formulas are a mechanical count of syllables and sentences that don't consider many of the communication characteristics that make a material easy to understand, including audience, purpose, actionability, and visual design.

### About the Audience

Adults with IDD/ELL are a diverse audience. Before you start creating communication products, it's important to understand who you are writing for—particularly, how their communication needs and preferences may differ from those of other audiences.

#### What are intellectual and developmental disabilities?

Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are conditions that affect a person's ability to learn, move, speak, interact or take care of themselves. About 1 in 10 adults in the U.S. have an intellectual disability.

There are many conditions that can cause IDD, including the following:

- **Genetic conditions**, such as Down syndrome or fragile X syndrome.
- **Environmental conditions**, such as being exposed to alcohol or other drugs before birth.
- **Injuries or infections** that affect the brain.

Intellectual and developmental disabilities vary widely, and each person is different. For example, some adults with IDD may be able to live independently and take care of their everyday needs with limited support from caregivers, while others may need support with activities, such as dressing and eating.

Communication abilities among people with IDD vary widely. This tool focuses on people with IDD who also have ELL.

#### What is extreme low literacy?

Adults with extreme low literacy (ELL) may fall into any of these 3 categories:

- Can read basic books with pictures.
- Can identify sight words only.
- Can read common signs or pictures only.

**Sight words** are common words that readers may learn to recognize on sight (as opposed to sounding out the letters).

For example, [the Fry sight words list](#) includes 1,000 common words, such as "it," "her," "him" and "was."

#### What is the caregiver role in communicating with adults with IDD/ELL?

While caregivers are not the **audience** for products developed using this tool, they are still **users** of these products because they may read or review products with people with IDD/ELL. For adults with IDD/ELL, caregivers often play an important role in helping to communicate health information.

## How is communication product development for adults with IDD/ELL different than for other audiences?

Many clear communication best practices for general audiences also apply to adults with IDD/ELL—but not all of them. Here are a few key best practices that are unique to adults with IDD/ELL:

- **Focus on a single behavioral recommendation.** For people with IDD/ELL, it's especially important for each product to focus on a single behavioral recommendation—the action you want people to take after reading your product. If you have multiple behavioral recommendations, create a separate product for each recommendation.
- **Cut anything that isn't essential.** Focus on the information your audience needs to complete the behavioral recommendation. For people with IDD/ELL, exclude excess information, words, or images that can take attention away from the main behavioral recommendation.
- **Include only 1 idea or behavioral step per page or screen.** On each page (for a print product) or screen (for a video or digital product), place 1 image and 1 to 2 lines of text that directly relate to the image.
- **Write short, straightforward sentences with common, literal words.** Use the simplest words and sentences possible to effectively convey your message. Avoid idioms and figurative language. For example, say “help you” instead of “give you a hand.”
- **Keep images literal and realistic.** Avoid abstract symbols or representations (such as music notes to represent singing or wavy lines to represent heat). Ensure that images reflect what your audience might see in real life.
- **Use social stories to give step-by-step instructions.** Social stories are illustrated short stories that break behaviors or situations down into concrete steps. These stories can help people with IDD/ELL practice key skills (such as handwashing) and understand what to expect in new situations (for example, getting a vaccine). When you are creating social stories, be sure to use a single main character to help the audience focus on your main ideas.

**The bottom line:** Developing communication products for adults with IDD/ELL requires a different approach and a different way of thinking that goes beyond plain language best practices. It's important to consider your audience's needs early in the process of developing communication products and tailor your communication strategy to meet their needs instead of making a few edits to existing products.

### Writing for and about people with disabilities

Also, keep the following tips in mind as you write:

- **Choose respectful, empowering language.** Use language that emphasizes people’s abilities. For example, “uses a wheelchair” rather than “wheelchair-bound.” Avoid negative terms, such as “victim” or “afflicted by.” Conversely, avoid describing people with disabilities as “inspiring” or “courageous” only because of their disability. To ensure you aren’t using outdated terminology, consult other resources, such as [the CDC Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication](#).
- **Respect your audience’s preferences for identity-first or person-first language.** Many people with disabilities prefer person-first language, such as saying “people with disabilities” rather than “disabled people” or “the disabled”—but this preference isn’t universal. When possible, learn which terms your audience prefers and use them. To learn more, check out [this resource on communicating with and about people with disabilities](#).
- **Avoid “othering” people with disabilities.** If you are writing about people with disabilities, assume that people with those disabilities might read your writing. Avoid using words such as “healthy” or “normal” to describe people who don’t have disabilities.
- **Treat adults like adults.** Adults with IDD/ELL are still adults, so avoid child-like language or images.



# Get to know your audience

Personas are fictional profiles that represent audience segments and provide valuable insights for communication strategy and product development. These personas are based on audience research conducted with real people with IDD/ELL and their caregivers. While they represent only a fraction of the vast diversity within this audience, we hope that they will guide you in considering your audience's needs as you develop products for adults with IDD/ELL.

## Meet Alice

Alice is a 23-year-old woman with autism who lives with her parents, her brother, and her 2 cats. She works part-time at a bakery and volunteers at her local animal shelter.

Alice can read basic books but sometimes has trouble remembering what she has read. Interactive products help her remember information and apply it to her own life.



## Meet Daniel

Daniel is a 44-year-old man with fragile X syndrome. He lives with his father and attends an adult day program. Daniel likes listening to music and swimming at the local pool.

Daniel can only read common signs and pictures. He likes videos because he can watch them without having to ask his dad for help with reading.



## Meet Izzy

Izzy is a 52-year-old woman with Down syndrome. She lives with her sister and works at a grocery store. Izzy loves hanging out with her friends and competing in track and field on her Special Olympics team.

Izzy can read basic books with pictures, but she'd rather watch videos. Reading is slow and she often gets frustrated when there's a word she doesn't know.





### Meet Sam

Sam is a 31-year-old man with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. He lives in a supported apartment with a few friends and attends a job training program. In his free time, Sam likes to watch movies (especially superhero movies) and play basketball with his friends.

Sam can read some sight words, but he loses interest quickly if there are more than a few sentences of text.

### Meet Winnie

Winnie is a 38-year-old woman with an intellectual disability and cerebral palsy. She lives on her own, with the support of her personal care attendants and a case worker. Winnie performs with a wheelchair dance group and is an usher at her church.

Winnie can read basic books with pictures. She prefers videos and other digital formats because it's hard for her to handle pieces of paper.



### Meet Lucas

Lucas is a 29-year-old man with an intellectual disability. He lives with his mother and helps create products for his family's small business. In his free time, he loves to play video games and spend time with his grandparents.

Lucas can read basic books, but he learns best by doing. Interactive social stories and games help him understand what to do in new situations.



## Before You Write

People with IDD/ELL are a diverse group, so there's no single approach or type of product that will work for everyone. Using this tool is just 1 step in the process of developing effective communication products. Before you start writing, answer these questions:

### Who is your audience?

People with IDD/ELL aren't a homogeneous group. Are you trying to reach a specific subset of this audience—for example, older adults with Down syndrome, adults with autism who also have physical disabilities, or adults with cerebral palsy who live in group homes or other supported living situations?

Knowing your specific audience can help you identify what information is need-to-know for them and how familiar they are likely to be with the topic you are writing about.

### What is the most important information your audience needs to know?

For adults with IDD/ELL, it's especially important to focus on the most important information that your audience needs to know and cut everything else. Too many details can lead to frustration and prevent your audience from understanding your main message.

To identify the most important information, ask yourself the following:

- What do I want my audience to **do** after reading this product? This is your **behavioral recommendation**. It may be an action that the reader can take on their own or something that a caregiver can help them do.
- What does my audience need to **know** to take that action?

### Do you have a clear behavioral recommendation?

As noted above, it's crucial for communication products for adults with IDD/ELL to focus on a single, clear action step—your **behavioral recommendation**. If you don't have a behavioral recommendation, you may want to reconsider whether your content is appropriate for this audience.

### How will your audience access the product?

Adults with IDD/ELL and their caregivers have a wide range of preferences for how to access health information. To accommodate as many people as possible, create multiple formats and plan how you will disseminate the products.

Video is a commonly preferred format for people with IDD/ELL, so include a video in addition to a written format if at all possible. Adding interactive elements to a product can also help to promote engagement.

## Description of Items

This section contains descriptions of how to apply each of the 27 items in the score sheet, along with examples where appropriate to help illustrate each item.

In addition to the scored items, we've included tips throughout the document that can help ensure that your communication products are clear and appropriate for your audience.

### Part A: Behavior

#### 1. Does the product include 1 focused behavioral recommendation? For example, "Wear a face mask" or "Get a COVID-19 shot."

For adults with IDD/ELL, it's important to make sure every communication product focuses on a behavioral recommendation—the action you want your reader to take. To avoid overwhelming your audience, limit each product to just 1 main behavioral recommendation. If there is more than 1 important behavioral recommendation, consider creating a separate product for each behavior.



**Important:** Remember, communication products for people with IDD/ELL are most effective when they focus on a clear action step. If you don't have a behavioral recommendation, the information you want to communicate may not be appropriate for adults with IDD/ELL.

#### ✗ Multiple behavioral recommendations in 1 product

##### Stop the spread of COVID-19



#### ✓ 1 product for each behavioral recommendation

##### Stop the spread of COVID-19



##### Stop the spread of COVID-19



##### Stop the spread of COVID-19



**Tip:** Wherever possible, use positive words and framing in your behavioral recommendation. For example, "Keep a safe distance from other people" is a more positive message than "Do not get too close to other people."

**2. Is the behavioral recommendation stated more than 1 time?**

Repetition is especially important for people with IDD/ELL. To make sure your audience understands and remembers your behavioral recommendation, state it at least twice: at the beginning of the product and again later. Remember to use the same words each time.

**Note:** If the product is only 1 page or screen (for example, a poster or digital sign), it may be appropriate to state the behavioral recommendation only once.

**3. Does the product show how to perform the behavioral recommendation by breaking the behavior down into a series of single steps or actions?**

Many people with IDD/ELL benefit from step-by-step instructions that show how to perform a behavior. For example, the images below from a product about handwashing clearly show each step of the behavior in sequence.



**Note:** In most cases, it's best to put each step on a separate page, but there are a few exceptions to this rule. Here are several examples:

- If you are creating an interactive activity that asks the reader to put steps in order, it may be appropriate to show all of the steps on the same page or screen.
- If the product is only 1 page or screen and is intended as a supplement to a longer product (for example, a poster that accompanies a longer social story), it may be appropriate to show only a single step to represent the whole process.

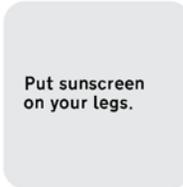
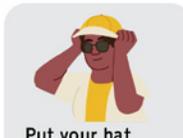
**4. Does the product convey only 1 idea or behavioral step per page or screen?**

For many people with IDD/ELL, it's easiest to learn new information a little at a time. Showing only 1 idea or step at a time can help your audience focus and avoid becoming overwhelmed or missing key ideas.

<p><b>✗ Multiple ideas on 1 page</b></p> <p>Here is how I stay safe from COVID-19.</p> <p>Today I go to the store.</p> <p>When I leave home, I keep a safe distance between myself and other people.</p> <p>I see my friend. I keep a safe distance so I do not get sick from COVID-19.</p>	<p><b>✓ 1 idea per page</b></p> <p>Here is how I stay safe from COVID-19.</p>
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## 5. Does the product use both text and visuals to illustrate each step or action?

People with IDD/ELL may sometimes skip over text that doesn't have an accompanying visual. To make sure your audience doesn't miss any key steps, include a simple, realistic visual to illustrate each step. Make sure to include images that illustrate the main message of your product.

 <b>Text only</b>	 <p>Put sunscreen on your legs.</p>	 <p>Put sunscreen on your arms.</p>	 <p>Rub the sunscreen into your skin.</p>	 <p>Put your sunglasses on.</p>	 <p>Put your hat on. Now you're ready to go!</p>
 <b>Text and images</b>	 <p>Put sunscreen on your legs.</p>	 <p>Put sunscreen on your arms.</p>	 <p>Rub the sunscreen into your skin.</p>	 <p>Put your sunglasses on.</p>	 <p>Put your hat on. Now you're ready to go!</p>



**Tip:** If you include an explanation about why a behavior is recommended, make sure that it's easy to understand and personally relevant to your audience (for example, "so you do not get sick").

## 6. Does the product use one single main character to demonstrate all of the behavioral steps?

Using a single main character helps to make connections between pages and reinforce the continuity of the behavioral steps. You can include other characters—just be sure to keep the focus on 1 main character.



**Tip:** While it's important to focus on a single main character, you can still include a variety of characters to represent the diversity of people with IDD/ELL. For example, within a single product, the main character could interact with people of different genders and races or ethnicities with different disabilities. Or if you are creating a suite of products, each product could feature a main character with a different disability and race or ethnicity. Including a diverse range of characters helps to make your products more inclusive.

## Part B: Sentences

### 7. Does each sentence focus on 1 key point?

When you are writing for people with IDD/ELL, it's important to keep each sentence as straightforward as you can. Sentences that include multiple ideas can be difficult to parse for this audience — so break out each key point into its own sentence.

✗ More than 1 key point in each sentence	✓ 1 key point in each sentence
My doctor says I need to get a flu shot so I do not get very sick.	My doctor says I need to get a flu shot. The shot helps keep me from getting very sick.
After I get the shot, I feel tired and my arm is sore.	After I get the shot, I feel tired. My arm is sore.

### 8. Do all or almost all sentences, headers, and titles use 10 or fewer words?

Shorter sentences, headers, and titles are typically easier to understand. They also help to minimize cognitive load. Whenever possible, aim for 10 or fewer words.

### 9. Are all sentences in the active voice?

Use active voice when writing for people with IDD/ELL. Active voice means that **the subject of the sentence is doing the action**. (The subject is the person that the sentence is about.)

Sentences in active voice are usually shorter, easier to understand, and more conversational.

✗ Passive voice	✓ Active voice
Your heart will need to be checked every year.	A doctor will need to check your heart every year.

In some cases, if you are giving a behavioral recommendation, the implied subject of the sentence is "you." Here's an example of this type of sentence:

✗ Passive voice	✓ Active voice
Vegetables should be washed before they are cut or peeled.	Always wash vegetables before you cut or peel them.

## 10. Are all headers and titles informative statements?

While “question headers” are effective with general audiences, people with IDD/ELL may struggle with them. Choose headers that are informative statements.

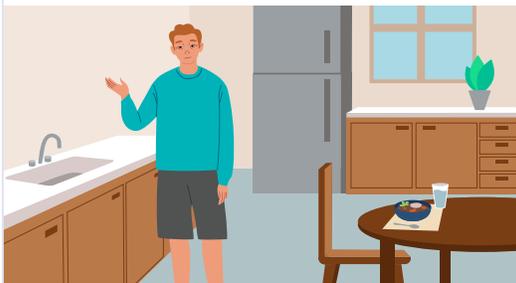
**Informative statements** state facts and/or suggest what to do. They usually include a verb. Most importantly, they communicate the main idea of the content that follows the header.

### ✗ Question or unclear statement

#### Handwashing Steps

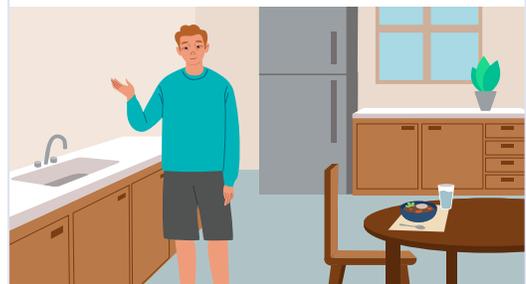


#### How do you wash your hands?



### ✓ Informative statement

#### Wash your hands to stay healthy



## 11. Is a consistent tense used throughout the product?

Switching between tenses can cause confusion—so choose a single tense and stick with it. Whenever possible, choose a tense that doesn’t require extra words, such as the simple present (for example, “I go”).

### ✗ Different tenses

At home, I feel tired.

My arm is sore.

I will feel better in a few days.

### ✓ 1 consistent tense

At home, I feel tired.

My arm is sore.

I feel better in a few days.

## Part C: Words and Numbers

### 12. Does the product always use words the primary audience understands?

Lists of common sight words (like the [Dolch sight words](#) or [Fry sight words](#)) can help you identify words that are more likely to be familiar. Limit the number of non-sight words as much as possible. Use them only when there's no other way to express a concept or when the audience will need to know and use the word later.

Keep in mind that sight words are just a tool, not an absolute rule. Using sight words doesn't guarantee that your content will be easy to understand for all users with IDD/ELL. That's why it's so important to test products with your primary audience.



**Tip:** People with IDD/ELL may take words literally. Avoid figurative language, figures of speech, and metaphors unless they are very common. For example, you might say "help you" instead of "give you a hand."

### 13. Does the product clearly define any need-to-know jargon terms using familiar words?

If you need to use a jargon term, be sure to define it in context using familiar words and an image, if possible. When you are using jargon, it's especially important to test key terms and definitions to make sure your audience understands them.



**Tip:** Find alternatives to medical and public health terms using CDC's [Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#) or National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's [Environmental Health Thesaurus](#). Remember that general plain language resources are a good place to start but not a substitute for audience testing.

### 14. Does the product always use the same word for the same concept?

It may be tempting to use different words to try to "mix it up" or keep your product from sounding repetitive. But repetition is helpful for people with IDD/ELL because they may struggle to connect different words that refer to the same concept.



**Using different words for the same concept**

Get a COVID-19 shot.

The vaccine will help keep you safe from COVID-19.



**Using the same word every time**

Get a COVID-19 shot.

The shot will help keep you safe from COVID-19.

### 15. If the product conveys a quantity or length of time, are whole numbers (e.g., 1 to 10) used?

If you need to use numbers, choose whole numbers. Avoid fractions, decimals, percentages, and other complex ways of expressing numbers.

#### ✗ Decimals

The surgery will take about 3.5 hours.

#### ✓ Whole numbers

The surgery will take 3 to 4 hours.

### 16. Are all numbers shown as numerals rather than spelled out (e.g., 1, not “one”)?

Spelled-out numbers are more likely to blend in to the text, and it takes extra mental effort to interpret them as numbers. Numerals look more distinctive, which can make them easier to identify.

#### ✗ Spelled-out numbers

After surgery, you will stay in the hospital for three days.

#### ✓ Numerals

After surgery, you will stay in the hospital for 3 days.



**Tip:** Make sure that your numbers are needed. Test them to make sure that they're helping your audience. For people with IDD/ELL, it may be easier to show a concept visually instead of relying on numbers.



## Part D: Text Layout

### 17. Is text left aligned?

Left-aligned text is usually easier to read than centered, right-aligned, or justified text.

Keep in mind that left-aligned text is a helpful rule of thumb, not an absolute rule. For example, centered text works well in videos. It all depends on the visual design of your product.

✘ Centered or justified text	✔ Left-aligned text
<p style="text-align: center;">At home, I feel tired. My arm is sore. I feel better in a few days.</p>	<p>At home, I feel tired. My arm is sore. I feel better in a few days.</p>
<p>At     home,     I     feel     tired. My     arm     is     sore. I   feel   better   in   a   few   days.</p>	

### 18. If the product is on more than 1 page, is the text formatted the same way on each page?

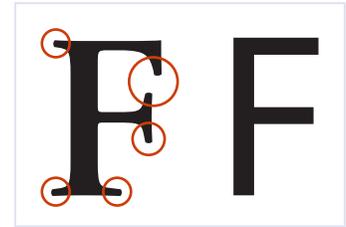
Consistency is helpful for people with IDD/ELL. Make sure to choose a single style for text formatting and image placement across all pages of the product.

### 19. Does every sentence finish on the same page it starts?

For people with IDD/ELL, it's important to be able to see each sentence all at once. Having to remember the beginning of the sentence or flip back and forth between pages increases cognitive load and makes it more likely that someone will misinterpret the sentence or miss a key point.

### 20. Does the product use a single sans-serif font?

Serifs are the “feet” on the letters of some fonts. Sans-serif fonts are those that don’t have “feet.” The simplicity of sans-serif fonts can make them easier to read, especially for adults with IDD/ELL. Examples of common sans-serif fonts include Arial and Verdana.



In addition, switching between different fonts can be challenging for adults with IDD/ELL—so choose a single font that works well for both headers and body copy and use it throughout your product.

#### ✗ Multiple fonts

Stay safe from COVID-19.

Wash your hands with soap and water.

#### ✓ Single sans-serif font

Stay safe from COVID-19.

Wash your hands with soap and water.

### 21. Does the product always use a 14-point or larger font size?

This font size is clear and easy to read for most people.

#### ✗ 12-point font

Stay safe from COVID-19.

#### ✓ 14-point font

Stay safe from COVID-19.

### 22. Is the product free from *italicized* or underlined words?

These types of text styling can be hard to read. Underlined words may be confused with hyperlinks.

It’s best to avoid any type of special text styling in products for people with IDD/ELL, but if you need to emphasize a specific word, **bolding** is the best choice.



## Part E: Visuals

### 23. Is only 1 visual included on each page or screen?

Multiple images can be overwhelming to people with IDD/ELL. In general, keep it to 1 image per page or screen.

### 24. Does each visual have no more than 1 to 2 lines of corresponding text that describe what is happening in the visual?

It's important to make sure that visuals support the text. Large amounts of text can be overwhelming to people with IDD/ELL. Some people with IDD/ELL may not even want to read or engage with your product if they see that there's a lot of text. Use brief content that supports and directly relates to the visual.

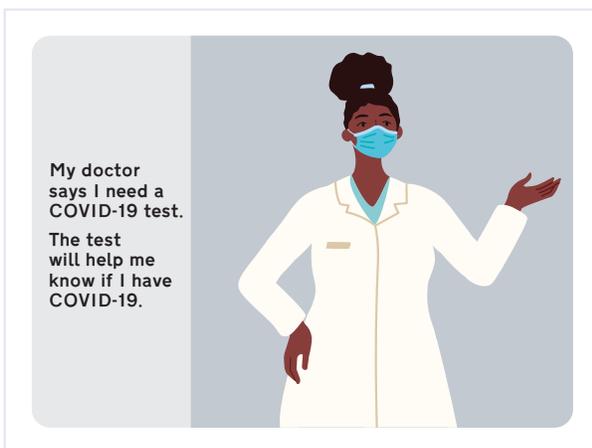


**Tip:** If you are creating illustrations, it's helpful to include visual elements that provide context clues. For example, if the main character is going to a doctor's office, you could include a sign that says "clinic." If they're in line at the grocery store, you could include other characters in line. These details can help the audience understand what's happening in the picture. But it's best to avoid details that are just for decoration, such as paintings on the wall or background characters who aren't relevant to the story.

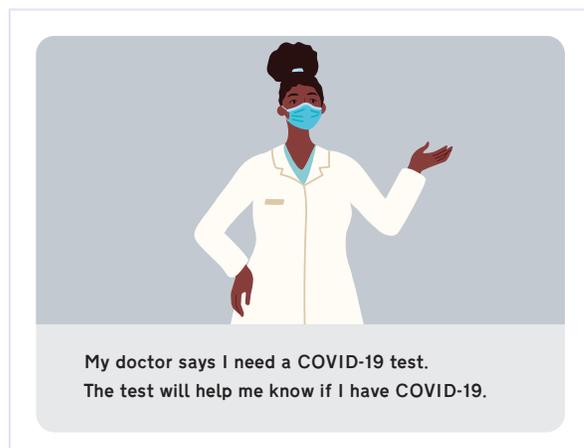
### 25. Is text supporting the visual positioned directly below the visual?

In user testing with people with IDD/ELL, text placed directly below the visual was more effective than text placed above or to the side of the visual.

#### ✗ Text to the side of the visual



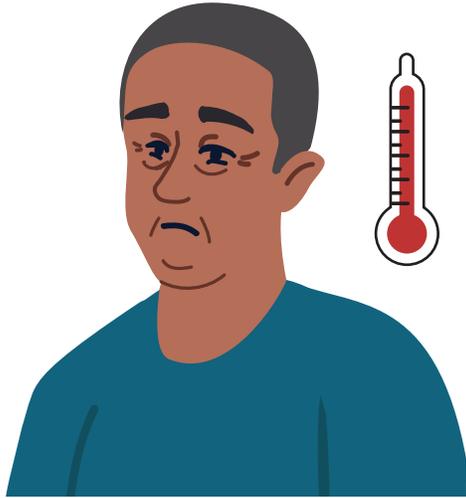
#### ✓ Text directly below the visual



## 26. Are all visuals literal images of the item or action rather than abstract symbols?

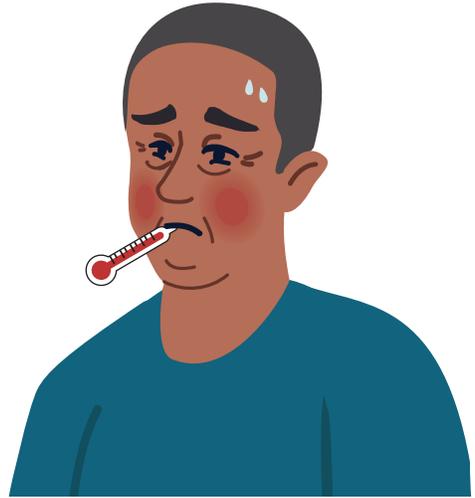
For people with IDD/ELL, it's important to make sure that images look as close as possible to what someone might actually see in real life.

### ✗ Abstract symbols

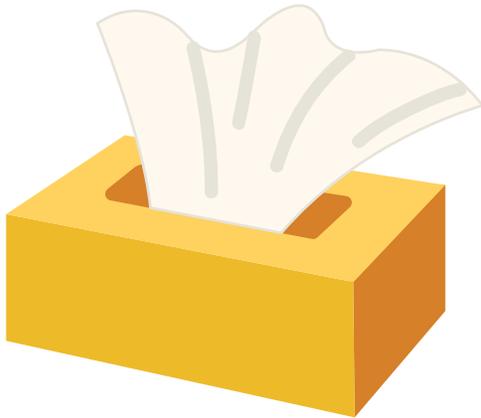


You may have a fever.

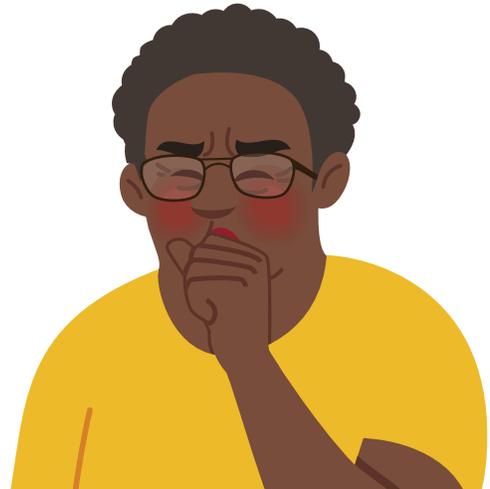
### ✓ Realistic details



You may have a fever.



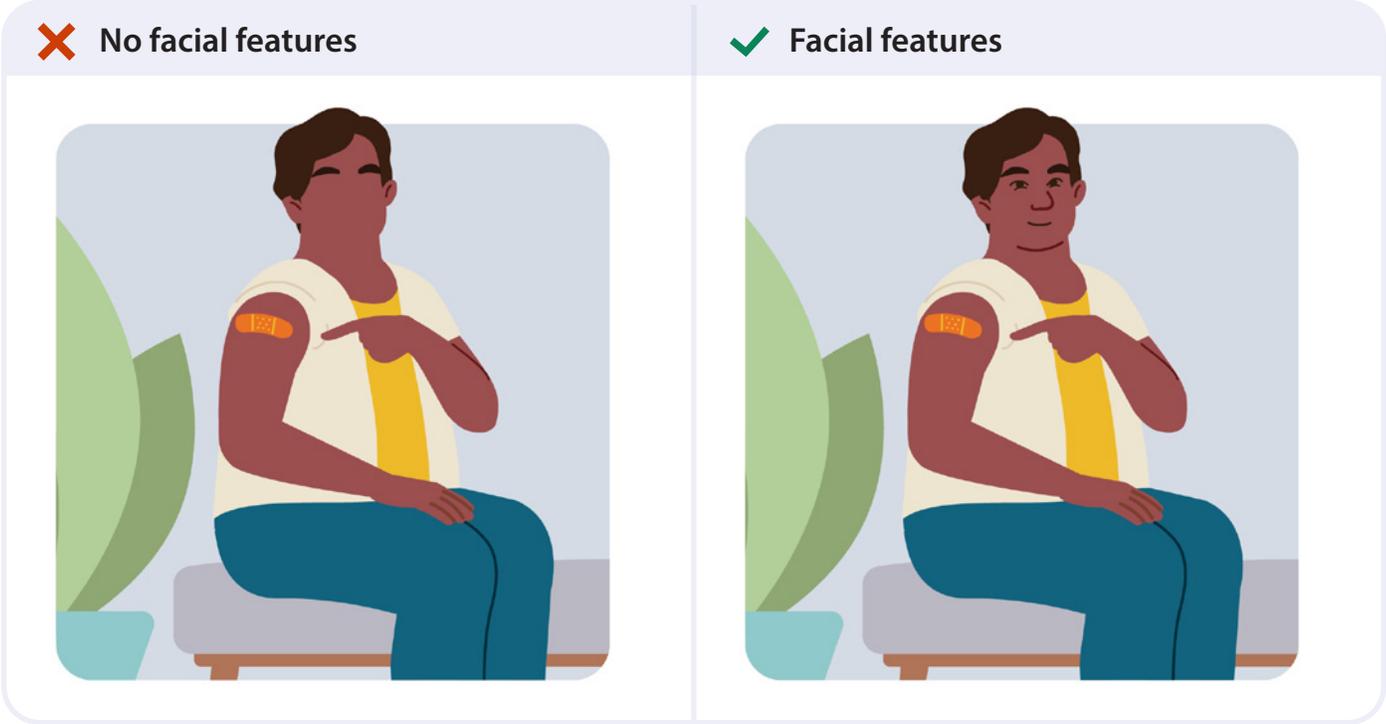
Seasonal allergies can cause sneezing.



Seasonal allergies can cause sneezing.

**27. When using an illustration of a person, are at least minimal facial features included (eyes, nose, and mouth)?**

Faces without features are abstract, and some people with IDD/ELL may not recognize them as faces. Facial features help illustrations to appear more relatable and easier to identify.



# Part 2: Score Sheet

# Score Sheet

**Name of product:**

**Name of person scoring:**

**Date:**

Before you begin, identify your primary audience, main behavioral recommendation, and the types of products you've created to communicate this recommendation. You must know these 3 pieces of information to score the product accurately. If you don't have this information, wait until you do to score the product.

## 1. Who is your primary audience?

Keep in mind that people with IDD/ELL are a diverse group. Are you trying to reach a specific subset of this audience—for example, older adults with Down syndrome, adults with autism who also have physical disabilities, or adults with cerebral palsy who live in group homes or other supported living situations?

## 2. What is your main behavioral recommendation?

What do you want your audience to do after they see your product? The behavior may be an action that they take on their own or something that a caregiver would help them do.

## 3. What types of products do you plan to create to communicate this recommendation?

Adults with IDD/ELL and their caregivers have a wide range of preferences for how to access health information. To reach as many people as possible, try to convey the same behavioral recommendation in different formats or types of products. Video is a commonly preferred format among people with IDD/ELL. Social stories, interactive activities, and posters can also help to communicate information in a visual way.

List the types of products you plan to create:

# Using the Score Sheet

This score sheet includes a total of 27 items in 6 parts. These 27 items are presented as questions.

- Choose 1 answer for each item you score.
- Only select “yes” if all instances of an item in the product meet the criteria.
- Some questions include a not applicable (N/A) option. Selecting N/A will not give your product a lower score. For details, see “Calculate the score for the product” on [page 35](#).

## Part A: Behavior

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>1. Does the product include only 1 focused behavioral recommendation?</b></p> <p>To avoid overwhelming your audience, it’s important to limit each product to just 1 main behavioral recommendation.</p> <p>If the product has more than 1 behavioral recommendation, answer <b>no</b>.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If you answer no to this question, answer no to all the questions in Part A.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 12</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1</p> <p>No = 0</p>
<p><b>2. Is the behavioral recommendation stated more than 1 time?</b></p> <p>State the behavioral recommendation at least twice: at the beginning of the product and again later. Remember to use the same words each time.</p> <p>If the behavioral recommendation is stated more than once using the same words, answer yes. If it’s only stated once, or if it’s stated more than once but uses different words, answer no.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If the product is only 1 page or screen (for example, a poster or digital sign), it may be appropriate to state the behavioral recommendation only once. If this applies to your product, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 13</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1</p> <p>No = 0</p> <p>N/A = 0</p>

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>3. Does the product show how to perform the behavioral recommendation by breaking the behavior down into a series of single steps or actions?</b></p> <p>Many people with IDD benefit from step-by-step instructions that show how to perform a behavior.</p> <p>If the product does not include step-by-step instructions, answer no.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If the product is only 1 page or screen and is intended as a supplement to a longer product (for example, a poster that accompanies a longer social story), it may be appropriate to show only a single step to represent the whole process. If this applies to your product, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>If you select <b>N/A</b> for this item, select <b>N/A</b> for items 4 and 5.</p> <p>If you select <b>no</b> for this item, select <b>no</b> for items 4 and 5.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 13</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>4. Does the product convey only 1 idea or behavioral step per page or screen?</b></p> <p>Showing only 1 idea or step at a time can help your audience focus and avoid becoming overwhelmed or missing key ideas.</p> <p>If the product includes more than 1 idea or step on a single page or screen, answer no.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 13</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<p><b>5. Does the product use both text and visuals to illustrate each step or action?</b></p> <p>Include a simple, realistic visual to illustrate each step.</p> <p>If the product has no visuals, or it does not include a visual for each step or action, answer no.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 14</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>

# Score Sheet

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>6. Does the product use one single main character to demonstrate all of the behavioral steps?</b> Use a single main character to help readers make connections between pages and reinforce the continuity of the behavioral steps. (See <a href="#">page 14</a>)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes = 1 <input type="checkbox"/> No = 0</p>
<b>Part A score</b>	<b>___ points earned for Part A</b>

## Part B: Sentences

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>7. Does each sentence focus on 1 key point?</b> Sentences that include multiple ideas can be difficult to parse for people with IDD/ELL. Break out each key point into its own sentence. (See <a href="#">page 15</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<p><b>8. Do all (or almost all) sentences, headers, and titles use 10 or fewer words?</b> Shorter sentences, headers, and titles are typically easier to understand. When possible, aim for 10 or fewer words. (See <a href="#">page 15</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<p><b>9. Are all sentences in the active voice?</b> Active voice means that <b>the subject of the sentence is doing the action</b>. Sentences in active voice are usually shorter, easier to understand, and more conversational. If some sentences use passive voice, answer no. (See <a href="#">page 15</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>10. Are all headers and titles informative statements?</b>  <b>Informative statements</b> state facts and/or suggest what to do. Most importantly, they communicate the main idea of the content that follows the header.</p> <p>If the product includes headers phrased as questions (e.g., “How do you wash your hands?”) or headers that do not clearly convey what the content is about, answer no.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If your product does not include headers or titles, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 16</a>)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes = 1  No = 0  N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>11. Is a consistent tense used throughout the product?</b>  Choose a single tense and stick with it. Whenever possible, choose a tense that doesn’t require extra words, such as the simple present (for example, “I go”).</p> <p>If the product includes sentences in different tenses (e.g., past and present tense), answer no.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 16</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1  No = 0</p>
<p><b>Part B score</b></p>	<p>____ <b>points earned for Part B</b></p>

Part C: Words and Numbers

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>12. Does the product always use words the primary audience understands?</b>            Lists of common sight words (like the <a href="#">Dolch sight words</a> or <a href="#">Fry sight words</a>) can help you identify words that are more likely to be familiar. Keep in mind that sight words are just a tool, not an absolute rule.             (See <a href="#">page 17</a>)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes = 1  <input type="checkbox"/> No = 0</p>
<p><b>13. Does the product clearly define any need-to-know jargon terms using familiar words?</b>            If you need to use a jargon term, be sure to define it in context using familiar words and an image, if possible.   <b>Note:</b> If your product doesn't include any jargon terms, select <b>N/A</b>.             (See <a href="#">page 17</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1            No = 0            N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>14. Does the product always use the same word for the same concept?</b>            Repetition is helpful for people with IDD/ELL. Readers may struggle to connect different words that refer to the same concept.             If the product uses different words to refer to the same concept, answer no.             (See <a href="#">page 17</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1            No = 0</p>
<p><b>15. If the product conveys a quantity or length of time, are whole numbers (e.g., 1 to 10) used?</b>            If you need to use numbers, choose whole numbers.             If the product includes fractions, decimals, ratios, or percentages, answer no.   <b>Note:</b> If your product doesn't include any numbers, select <b>N/A</b>.             (See <a href="#">page 18</a>)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes = 1            No = 0            N/A = 0</p>

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>16. Are all numbers shown as numerals rather than spelled out (e.g., 1, not “one”)?</b> Spelled-out numbers are more likely to blend in with the text, and it takes extra mental effort to interpret them as numbers.</p> <p>If the product includes spelled-out numbers (e.g., “three”), answer no.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If your product doesn’t include any numbers, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 18</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 <input type="checkbox"/> N/A = 0</p>
<b>Part C score</b>	<b>___ points earned for Part C</b>

## Part D: Text Layout

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>17. Is text left aligned?</b> Left-aligned text is usually easier to read than centered, right-aligned, or justified text.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Centered text works well for videos. If your product is a video, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 19</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>18. If the product is on more than 1 page, is the text formatted the same way on each page?</b> Choose a single style for text formatting and image placement across all pages of the product.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If your product is only 1 page, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 19</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>19. Does every sentence finish on the same page it starts?</b> For people with IDD/ELL, it’s important to be able to see each sentence all at once.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 19</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>

## Score Sheet

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>20. Does the product use a single sans-serif font?</b> Sans-serif fonts are fonts that don't have "feet," such as Arial and Verdana. Choose a single font that works well for both headers and body copy and use it throughout your product.</p> <p>If the product uses serif fonts, answer no. If it uses more than 1 font, answer no.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 20</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<p><b>21. Does the product always use a 14-point or larger font size?</b> This font size is clear and easy to read for most people.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If you didn't create the product and can't check the font size, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 20</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>22. Is the product free from <i>italicized</i> or <u>underlined</u> words?</b> These types of text styling can be hard to read. Underlined words may be confused with hyperlinks.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 20</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<b>Part D score</b>	<b>___ points earned for Part D</b>

## Part E: Visuals

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>23. Is only 1 visual included on each page or screen?</b> Multiple images can be overwhelming to people with IDD/ELL. In general, keep it to 1 image per page or screen.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> In some cases, it may be appropriate to show a few different images on the same page or screen. For example, if you are creating an interactive activity that asks the reader to put a series of steps in order. If this applies to your product, select <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 21</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 N/A = 0</p>
<p><b>24. Does each visual have no more than 1 to 2 lines of corresponding text that describe what is happening in the visual?</b> Use brief content that supports and directly relates to the visual.</p> <p>If a page includes more than 2 lines of text, or the text does not describe the visual, answer no.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 21</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<p><b>25. Is text supporting the visual positioned directly below the visual?</b> Text placed directly below the visual is easier to follow than text placed above or to the side of the visual.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 21</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>

## Score Sheet

Questions	Score (Check 1 per question)
<p><b>26. Are all visuals literal images of the item or action rather than abstract symbols?</b> Make sure that images look as close as possible to what someone might actually see in real life.</p> <p>If any images include abstract symbols (for example, wavy lines for heat or musical notes for singing), answer no.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 22</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0</p>
<p><b>27. When using an illustration of a person, are at least minimal facial features included (eyes, nose, and mouth)?</b> Facial features help illustrations to appear more relatable and easier to identify.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If your product doesn't include images of people, answer <b>N/A</b>.</p> <p>(See <a href="#">page 23</a>)</p>	<p>Yes = 1 No = 0 N/A = 0</p>
<b>Part E score</b>	<b>____ points earned for Part E</b>

# Calculate the Score for the Product

## Step 1

Add up the number of times you answered “yes” in each section. These are your **points earned**.

A: \_\_\_\_\_ + B: \_\_\_\_\_ + C: \_\_\_\_\_ + D: \_\_\_\_\_ + E: \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_ **points earned**

## Step 2

Subtract the number of times you answered “N/A” from 27. These are your **possible points**.

27 points – N/A responses: \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_ **possible points**

## Step 3

Divide **points earned** by **possible points**. Then, multiply your answer by 100 to get the total score.

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ X 100 = \_\_\_\_\_ **total score**  
**points earned**    **possible points**

# How to Interpret the Score

The purpose of this score is to improve the clarity of communication products for people with IDD/ELL.

## If the total score is 90 or above:

Excellent! You have addressed most items that make information easier for people with IDD/ELL to understand and use.

## If the total score is 89 or below:

Note which items scored 0 points. Use the descriptions and examples in the tool to revise and improve the product. Then score the product again to check your work. You can revise and score the product as many times as you need to achieve a score of 90 or above.