Conference Title: **How to Write a Clear and Effective Fact Sheet**

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Derrell Powers: Good afternoon and good morning to our participants on the West coast. Thank you for attending today's training, How to Write a Clear and Effective Fact Sheet. I have a few items to review with you before we start. Today's training is being recorded. Chaz credits are available for this training upon completion of the evaluation at the end of this meeting. Your feedback will help us provide targeted, high-quality webinars and training to you. Follow the instructions on the screen in order to receive your credit. We'll address all questions at the conclusion of the presentation. However, you may submit your questions via the web at any time. To submit a question via the web, simply type your question in to ask a question box and quit the send button. If you dial into today's training, you can wait until the end of the presentation to ask them aloud.

The operator will provide instructions on how to do this. Now I'd like to introduce today's speaker Traci Augustosky leads the team of writer-editors at CDC, ATSDR in Atlanta. She is a plain language expert and experienced instructor. She helped develop an award-winning clear writing website for public health professionals, which can be found at www.cdc.gov/nceh/clearwriting. Before coming to CDC in 2004, Traci was the writing center director at the Savannah College of Art and Design and taught writing classes at Georgia military college. Traci holds a BA in English from Olivet University, and MAIS in liberal studies from George Mason University, an M.A in rhetoric from Valdosta State University, and a Ph.D. in composition from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Traci, take it away.

Traci Augustosky: Thank you, Derrell, and thanks to everyone who is able to join today. I'm going to try to keep this as practical as possible. My commitment to you is that by the end of this hour, you'll feel like you're better prepared to write a clear and effective fact sheet. So, I think it'll take me about 40 to 45 minutes to get through the presentation, and then I'll leave the last 15, 20 minutes for questions. So, feel free to type questions that I'll address at the end. And I'll also open it up at the end for any phone questions that you want to ask along. So here's what we're going to do today.

We're going to do a few things at first. I'm going to talk about some writing basics. Now, these are some foundational principles that apply to all writing situations but especially to situations where you're a fact sheet. And after we do that for a few minutes, then I'm going to focus on 10 tips, 10 specific things that you can do to write a clear and effective fact sheet. And then finally, after we get through those tips, I'm going to spend a little bit of time talking about testing tools and how you can use some simple, free, easy tools to test your fact sheets, to further ensure that they're clear and effective.

All right, so let's talk about some writing basics. There are three important rules of writing that everyone needs to think about before they start writing. These are some preparation rules, and I think everybody probably has some familiarity with these rules already, but I find that even though people know these rules exist, they don't really give them the time that they deserve. And they really can have a profound effect on the quality of your writing. The first is to identify your target audience. Before you start writing a fact sheet or anything really, you need to sit down and think about who's your target audience. There's a few reasons why you need to do this. First, by identifying your target audience. It may reveal to you that you have too broad of a target audience, or you have multiple kinds of conflicting target audiences.

And that may show you that you actually need to write two facts sheets, or maybe you need to write one fact sheet to your primary target audience, send an email to a secondary audience, and have a conference call with a tertiary audience. Teasing out this idea of the target audience helps you figure that out because the more you target something to a particular audience, the more effective it's going to be. You also need to think about the literacy level and the health literacy level of your target audience. And sitting down, spending a few times thinking about this rule, forces you to do that. And if you don't know what the health literacy level of your target audience is, you can safely assume that it's low. And here's why. The national assessment of adult literacy found that only 12% of adults in the United States have health literacy skills.

This is specific to health literacy to be able to understand and use routine medical information, health information, and oftentimes in public health, we're not providing routine information. It's concepts and information that people may be unfamiliar with. So, there is a very strong chance that your target audience is going to have a low health literacy level. And you need to think about that before you start writing. So, you can think about word choice. You can think about tone. You can think about what to include and more importantly, what to exclude, keep out of your document. You also need to think about the target audience because you need to consider what the stress level is of your target audience.

Maybe there's something going on right now that makes people under stress and difficult to receive information or the information that you're going to be providing them, you suspect may be stressful. If people's reading level just their standard literacy level can drop usually, you know, two to four grades under stress. So even if you think you have a moderate literacy level target audience, if it's a stressful situation or stressful information, you need to think about how you can adjust for that. Again, in tone word, choice, and content. So, all of these things make it important to not just have this as a passing thought, but a deliberate exercise, that you sit down and write some things out that you can use when you begin writing. So, after you've thought about the target audience, the next thing you need to do is, determine your specific purpose. What's the communication objective for this fact sheet? What do you want your target audience to do, to know, to think, to feel after they read this?

And you need to have that succinctly articulated to yourself before you begin writing. I find as a professional editor, and I've been doing this a long time for, you know, probably more than 20 years now. Sometimes people use writing as an exercise to determine what they're thinking about this topic, which is fine if that's the way just to brainstorm, but that shouldn't be your process for writing. You should sit down, articulate in writing the specific purpose of the fact sheet before you begin writing so that you can use that as a guide. Again, most importantly, for what is in the fact sheet and what is not in the fact sheet, what you leave out. I also feel like this information about audience

and purpose is important to articulate ahead of time, excuse me, because you can include that in if you have reviewers or some kind of a clearance system, you can include that so that your reviewers and you have the same understanding of what you're trying to accomplish with this fact sheet. And you don't get that kind of armchair editing that seems out of hand or irrelevant.

Okay. And then the third important role is to organize the information in a way that will reach that target audience and clarify the purpose. And the most important thing to remember about this is that organizational patterns should be reader-centered. It should be determined by what is the most important information to the reader, not what you want to say and what order you want to say it. Now, I realize there may be some situations where a chronological order makes best sense if you're doing some kind of a timeline or alphabetical order if you're doing some kind of reference guide that people refer back to. But in most cases, for a fact sheet, you want to have a specific organizational pattern that delivers the most critical information to the reader first. And if you don't know what the most critical information is for the reader, ask them to find a few people, a handful of people who are members of your target audience, or can somehow represent your target audience and ask them. And that will help you determine that organizational pattern.

Okay. So here is a CDC example. It's actually an old example, but I think it's really powerful. A number of years ago, there was a cholera outbreak in Haiti and CDC was concerned about travelers coming back into the United States, bringing cholera, and causing some outbreaks here in the US. So, they put together this health alert notice, this cardstock yellow piece of paper that had information about cholera in English and French on the front. And I think it was Spanish and Creole in the back. And they had some partners with customs and border protection, handing these out at the international airports where they have flights coming in from Haiti, but they realized they weren't being as effective as they needed to be. And if you look at this health alert notice, at first glance, it looks like it could do the trick.

Like they're doing some things that we're told we're supposed to do in terms of effective communication. It's short, they've used headings, they've used short sentences and bullets, you know, some things to highlight information. So I think this is a powerful example to show, even when you think you're doing some things that you're supposed to do for an effective fact sheet if you don't take the time to think about target audience, purpose, and organization, it may not be effective because who's the target audience. Well, it's travelers from Haiti and the United States. But look at the second block of information that, on towards the bottom where it says information for doctors. So why is that information there? And think about the context. I'm a traveler. I've been in Haiti for who knows how long, I'm getting through the airport. Customs, trying to get to my baggage.

I just want to get home. Do I really want to filter through all this information and try to figure out what are you trying to say to me? So, look, when they went back and I thought about, target audience, they thought about purpose, and they thought about an organizational pattern. This is what they came up with instead. Their posters, they could put at the airport at strategic places, and look at the red texts, then to Haiti, if you get diarrhea, see a doctor, you may have cholera. That's the target audience. People who have been to Haiti, that's the communication objective. We want to prevent a cholera outbreak by getting people with diarrhea to call their doctor. Now I'm not suggesting that everything you write can be boiled down to three sentences and some very eye-catching graphics. I know that, but excuse me, I still think this is a powerful example of why you need to think about, audience, why you need to think about purpose, and how it can make our materials much, much more effective.

Okay. So now I'd like to move into the specific tips or specific things that you can do to create an effective fact sheet. Alright. Number one, include a main message at, or near the top and make sure this main message stands out, make the font bold. I suggest even, to make the font larger than the font in the rest of the document and maybe even put a color block around it too, there's no question. This is the most important information. That main message should be one to three sentences that contain the most critical information. What's the most important thing that you want

your audience to remember after they read this? Because, you know, chances are, I hate to be the bearer of bad news. They may only remember one thing. So, you don't want them to have to search for it.

You know, it's not a where's Waldo experience for them, let them know right upfront. The other thing that the main message does, is it provides a really helpful context so that everything else can be interpreted within that context. Let me give you an example. Here's a main message that I used with some scientists that I helped develop a fact sheet about getting kids tested, their blood tested for lead. Our study found that some children in Woodville have elevated levels of lead in their blood. This can cause health problems, children living near the study site should have retained blood lead tests. Now, if I'm the member of the target audience, I read that main message, and then I can interpret everything else within that context. I don't have to read and figure out if there's a problem. I know there's a problem.

I don't have to figure out and try to determine whether I'm going to need to do something. I know upfront, I'm going to need to do something if I have children. So, this is helpful for readers, especially in those situations where it might be stressful or difficult information, or when you have people that have some, either literacy challenges or health literacy challenges. And I have a few other examples that you can take your time later. All these slides will be made available. So, you can read these later to see other examples of some effective main messages that should be at the top of the fact sheet.

All right. Number two, include a visual, but make sure that visually supports the main message or something significant in the fact sheet. We have this phenomenon, CDC, I call a shiny, happy people syndrome where so many of our materials have these images. I shouldn't say so many. Some of our materials have these images of just, you know, happy people going about their day during regular activities, but they don't really reinforce anything. And as a communicator, I would suggest that white space is actually better than a decorative image. A decorative image isn't helping

in any way white space at least would make the document a little less intimidating to read. So, don't feel compelled to put in an image unless you can find one that helps support your main message. And my previous example was about a study. Maybe you might have a picture of a map with the location of the study, or it was also about getting kids blood tested for lead, so you might have a picture of that process happening, something like that is going to reinforce the main message or reinforce what's going on.

And I have some suggestions here. Stock photography is something a lot of people use. Your agency may have a subscription, but you also can look for royalty-free services or royalty-free photography just through Google. Also, CDC has something called PHIL, the Public Health Image Library, and you can download royalty-free images and use them in your fact sheets. For those on the call who are CDC, employees, or contractors, and you have access to CDC's created, they can create custom illustrations, they can do photoshoots and they also have stock photography subscriptions. And then finally you could, anybody could stage your own photoshoots. I knew of a group that was having trouble finding pictures of teenagers wearing seatbelts. So, they did their own photoshoot, but just, you know, to get that image. Just make sure you have a photo release form signed from the people that will be in there. And of course, if they're minors from their parents or guardians as well, and again, you can find easy photo release forms just through Google.

All right. Number three. And I've touched on this a little when we talked about the rules, some of the most important rules of writing. Place the most important information in the first paragraph or the first section after the main message. And I just want to talk about this for a minute, because I don't think people realize how much they don't do this. I want you to think about a minute where you learned to write, in school, right. And what was the purpose of that? It was usually to get a good grade to demonstrate your skill, to demonstrate your knowledge. And so, what just about all of us have developed is this pattern of building to our conclusion. We present all of our facts, all of our knowledge, and then at the end, kind of lay out what all of this ties up to be.

What's this conclusion? And you know, that might've been an effective strategy for your 10th grade English teacher or a professor in college, but it's not effective for fact sheets at all. And, you know, think about, people are busy, they're bombarded with messages. They don't have linear reading patterns as much anymore because of the internet, you know, people skim and scan documents. And so you need to front-load that critical information. Think of it like this. At the top of your paper, you have a hundred percent of your readers, at the end of your fact sheet. You're lucky if you still have 50 or 60% of your readers. So if you wait until the end, maybe half of your readers have already missed your most important information. So, when you're organizing, think about that and how to put that most information first. Resist the urge to, you know, start with a background.

Number four is to use headings. We want you to chunk your information with a meaningful heading. Now, I'd like to say a few things about headings in particular, because again, this is something that everybody does, but I think that we don't pay enough attention to the headings and we're not strategic with the way that we use headings. So, the first thing I'd like you to do is use headings more frequently. You should be using headings for every one to three paragraphs or like short bulleted lists. So, it's okay to have a heading, short paragraph. Heading, short bulleted list. Heading short paragraph. That's, that's a totally acceptable pattern for fact sheets. It's actually an effective pattern. It's a bit of a trick, right? Because you know, that the heading will be bold and probably the font may be larger, maybe even a different color.

And so, you're going to draw your reader's eye to that heading. So, you're going to get them to pay attention to more. You're going to get them to read more, by using headings frequently. But those headings have to be meaningful, they can't be things like overview or risk reduction. They have to contain some meaningful content. So instead of overview, the CDC study looks at lead contamination in Decatur, or how to reduce your risk of stroke. It has some things very specific so that people know what's in that paragraph or section next, but it also draws them in to read a little bit more. The next thing that you should do with your headings is, test them. And here's a really

simple test: create your fact sheet using these tips that I'm teaching you today, make a copy of it, now in the copy, remove everything except the headings.

If I was a reader, and I came in and I just read your headings, what would I learn? What I learn, background, history, findings recommendations, conclusions. I mean, if that's what your headings are, I know nothing about the content. If I'm, you know, one of these skimmers who just looks at headings and maybe the first sentence after the heading. But if you have laid out some meaningful headings that, you know, CDC conducted a study in Decatur looking for lead. We found elevated levels in children in the area. All parents or all children that live in the area should have their blood tested for lead. If those are the headings, then I actually learned something from this document regardless of how much time and attention I put into it.

All right. Number five is to just keep it short. You know, I made a little joke earlier about the bearer of bad news. This is another bit of bad news for you. You have to accept this. The more you write, the less people read. For these kinds of things and fact sheets, in particular, the expectation, this is short and easy to read, easy to understand, easy to use, and the best way you can do that is by keeping it short. Keep the sentences short, keep the paragraph short, keep the list short, and keep the document short. So for sentences, should be about 25 words or fewer. For paragraphs, you want to keep it, you know, again, there are short sentences in the paragraph, but you want to keep the paragraph to about five sentences or fewer, and that's maximum, it's okay to have a two or three-sentence paragraph.

Particularly, if you know that people are going to be reading this fact sheet on a mobile device, you want to really get that paragraph count lower, where it's only two or three sentences because it's a condensed space. And it gives the optical illusion of paragraphs being longer than what they actually are, and that can intimidate readers or just fatigue them, and they move on and don't read the content. And then lists, you know, your bulleted lists or your numbered lists. They shouldn't be seven items or fewer. And this is based on short-term memory research about how much

information people can process at any given time. So, if you find yourself with long lists, look for ways, or there's some items on that bulleted list that are just unnecessary. Maybe you can get rid of them. Another way that you can break it up into two lists or three lists. Maybe some of it can actually be a lead-in sentence and is not actually part of the list, but look for these different creative ways that you can break up a long-bulleted list.

Alright, the number six tip is to use familiar language. Fact sheets, in particular, you want to try to keep them as conversational as possible. Like you're having a conversation with your reader. Really try to avoid using technical terms or scientific terms. However, I understand that there are situations where it's necessary to use that term. But again, going back to that NAAL statistic I mentioned earlier, you know, only 12% of the US adult population has the health literacy skills to process routine and health information. So, if you're giving them an unfamiliar technical term, you really want to explain it. And it's best to explain it first. And let me give you a little bit of an analogy here. Well, let me give you an example first and then I'll explain the analogy.

So, experts can seal up or remove lead paint so it won't harm you. This process is called abatement. Again, I was working with some scientists in my center on some lead-related materials, and they said, you know, we really do need to use this term abatement because some people are going to have to work with contractors that are certified for lead abatement. So, they really need to know this term. So, what we did was we explained the term first, and then we gave them the term. And here's why here's the analogy. Think of like, reading, like driving a car and if somebody's driving their car, and they come to this word, they don't know, think of it like a roadblock. You just stop, you just stop reading. You know, you go somewhere else. You just, you know, abandon that route if you have this roadblock. But if you do this where you explain the term first, it's more like a speed bump instead of a roadblock, because they're coming along, reading, reading, reading, you're learning this new term. And then you've already learned the concept. They've just got this little bump to get over this new word that you're unfamiliar with. That's a much easier way to process unfamiliar terms than to abruptly give the term and then try to explain it.

And I have a couple of recommended resources for you on how to handle this because maybe, you know, we're so steeped in our own discourse community. You know, we use this vocabulary so frequently with each other that sometimes we don't even know how to explain it in plain language terms to other people. So, the center that I work in CDC focuses on environmental health, and we have an environmental health plain language, the ari[?], and the slides, which you will get copies of after the presentation. I have a link to that plain language. The ari[?], it's publicly available online, but CDC also has a broader public health plain language, the ari[?] called CDCs everyday words. And again, the slides will have a link in the note section to that resource. So, you can find ways to explain difficult terms or find alternatives to use instead of the term.

All right. Number seven, use active voice instead of passive voice. And, you know, I could do a whole class on this alone. So, I'm just going to try to quickly describe a little bit about the difference, but I'm going to say this again, as a professional writer and editor. I think that everybody on the phone who's responsible for writing public-facing materials has an obligation to learn the difference between active voice and passive voice that we tend to write way too much in passive voice. It's a habit, it's an academic habit that we've picked up somewhere along the way. And it's been perpetuated by academic writing, but active voice is clear, it's concise, it's direct. And it also approximates speech much more. So, for fact, sheets and public-facing materials that need to be in plain language, they should be an active voice.

So, everybody needs to know the difference between them and make sure that you are using active voice when you can. There may be limited situations when you choose to use passive voice for a specific reason. And that's okay. It's not technically incorrect in terms of grammar. It's just not preferred. But so know the difference, use the active voice. If you're going to use passive voice, use it intentionally, not accidentally. Let me try to quickly cover this topic. And then I'm also going to point you to where you can find more if you feel like you need some help with it.

So, the secret to active voice is it helps us follow this subject, verb, object pattern, which is the way we all learn to speak English. Whether it's your first language or your 15th language, everybody learned English, subject, verb object. It's the way we tend to talk to each other. It's the easiest thing to understand, but it's when the subject of the sentence is doing the action. Okay. It's not just subject verb object, but it's the subject of the sentence. What comes first is the person or the thing that's doing the action of the sentence. For example, CDC analyzed the data. So subject verb object CDC is the subject. They are the ones doing the action. They're the ones analyzing. And then what are the analyzing? They're analyzing data. The passive version of that would be the data were analyzed by CDC.

Now here's a hint on how you can figure out if you have this habit of writing in passive voice. Passive voice usually has a two-part verb, and the first word would be, am, is, are, was, or were. So just look for those words, if you find those words in your sentences that might be passive voice. And if you find next to the am, is, are, was, or were word, is the past tense of another verb, then it's very likely passive voice. If you have anything you can look and see, do you have a missing subject or the person or thing in the sentence that's doing the action, are they at the end of the sentence? So, if you look at my passive example here, the data were analyzed by CDC. I would know that's a passive voice because I have the am, is, are, was, or were word there, right?

We have the word were. I have the past tense, analyzed., that's a past tense of the word analyze. And then I also know that the person or the thing in the sentence who's doing the action, CDC is at the end of the sentence. So that's how I know that that is passive voice, and I would want to rewrite it in an active voice. So, I know this can be confusing and difficult, but I really want to impress upon you the importance of understanding the difference and knowing how to choose in a situation where, for example, maybe you don't know who analyzes the data. So, you would just say the data were analyzed, right? That's a situation where you might have to write in passive voice. So, if you need more help with this grammar girl has a great podcast about the difference between active and passive voice. My slides, I have a hidden slide in here, which you'll be able to see when you get a

copy of the slides, that has a little practice activity. And then lastly, in my slides, I list my contact information. You can reach out to me and I can send you some additional guide sheets that may help.

All right. Oh, well this was my activity. I thought this was a hidden slide, but in the interest of time, I'm going to pass through, but you've got it there to work on your own. All right. Number eight, I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this. I just want to point this out as something to consider. So obviously you're going to explain what you know, or what the science shows in your fact sheet, but at least ask yourself, at least take a moment to ask yourself, do we also need to address what we don't know? Let me give you an example. I was working with a group from our radiation studies program in CDC, and they were doing a fact sheet about the safety of cell phone use. And they were saying, you know, there's just a lot we don't know yet.

There's not the kind of information that can make us say, you know, with absolute certainty that they're safe. We think they're safe and here's why we think they're safe. But, you know, there's, there is a certain amount of uncertainty, and we felt like it was important in that case to say that, so that people didn't think we were hiding something or, you know, in cahoots with the cell phone companies. So, they presented the information about why they think it's safe, but there are also the caveat that this is what we don't know. And if you're concerned, here are some things you can do to enhance your safety using cell phones. So at least take a moment to ask, do we need to address this in the fact sheet.

All right, number nine is, call to action. People want to be able to do something with this information. So, it may be that you have some, you know, behavior changes that you have in the fact sheet. And, you know, make sure you write them succinctly in an active voice of their clear calls to action. But sometimes even a call to action can be something as simple to go here for more information but give them something that they can do or, you know, share this information with others. And the final tip that I want to talk about today is to test it. I don't think we do a lot of testing of fact sheets.

I don't think we do enough testing of fact sheets. And I think part of the reason is there might be this assumption that you need money, you need a lot of time, or you need some kind of special expertise to test. And I'd like to share with you some testing tools that anybody can do.

So first I want to talk about audience testing. For those of you on the line who are with CDC, either CDC employees or contractors, you have access to something called post-check. And if you don't know about it, you absolutely should. This is a great testing system. So, you know, for the Federal government, or even for state governments that are using Federal funds, we have these OMB requirements where we can't do massive audience testing without pretty elaborate approvals, and they take a long time to get. But CDC has found the solution to this for our internal staff because the OMB requirements don't apply to Federal employees. You can ask more than nine federal employees that question without having to get OMB approval. And so CDC went through this very lengthy development and testing and OMB process to set up this post check system, where you can test your messages through the associate director for communications, sorry, I drew a blank there, but I do have in the slide notes, the contact person, phone number and link to all of this.

But so, you can send a fact sheet and you can specify your target audience. Say, for example, you are writing a fact sheet for women. Then they would look at their list of volunteers, CDC employees, who have volunteered to be a part of this post check system, and they could send it to just women. So that you can reach people that can serve as proxies for your target audience and there are questions that they answer very easily and quickly online. And then you get the results. It doesn't take a lot of time, maybe a week or two, and you get all the information back that can really help you get a sense of your audience testing. Now that's just for the folks on the line that are with CDC, but the second item on my list, paraphrase test that's for everybody.

And this is a fantastic test that everybody should be familiar with. It's so simple. So you have your fact sheet, let's say you have a one-page fact sheet. You write stopping points on that fact sheet, and usually, you'd make a stopping point at the end of each paragraph or each small section,

although you technically could do it anywhere, then you get three to five people to look at this fact sheet to read it. You set up phone calls with them individually. And so, I've got this fact sheet. I have you on the phone. I have you read to the first stopping point. You stop. And then I ask you to put the fact sheet down and rephrase, paraphrase in your own words, what you just read. That helps me understand what I wrote. Was it clear? Was it interpreted the way I intended it to be interpreted?

Was it hard to remember? You know, maybe they, they sort of understood it when they read it, but as soon as they stopped looking at it, they couldn't remember it. Then that gives me an indication. You know, let's say I have three people and two or three people indicate the same spots where they can't remember what they read or they're having a difficult time paraphrasing it in their own words. I know I need to go back and work on those sections. And in the notes for this slide set, I give you a link to resources on a paraphrase test, some instructions. Right. Three other testing tools I'd like to mention one is CDC, a clear communication index, and that's available to everybody for free. It's this simple PDF that has 22 questions. They're all. Yes and no questions. The challenge with the index is you can't really test your own fact sheet.

And this assessment tool was designed for a fact sheet. So, it's perfect for fact sheets, but you can't really test your own because of your author bias. Let me give you an example. The first question in the index is, do you have one clear main message? Well, of course, you're going to say yes, because, you know, in your mind, you know, what that fact sheet is about. But the point is to give it to somebody else and to ask, can they identify one clear main message. So, you know, I'd find a colleague that you trust and just try to have a relationship like, Hey, I'll test your documents if you test mine, it's not an intensive process, you know, with fact sheets are generally one to three pages. So, it might take them 10 minutes, maybe 15 minutes to answer these questions. Then the PDF does an automatic calculation.

If you get 90 or above, you can feel confident that you have addressed some of the most important health literacy considerations. For fact sheets, if you get less, fewer points than 90, then you can go back to the score sheet and see exactly where you missed points, and you can fix those particular issues. The clear writing assessment is a very similar tool, but it's, I think, got 17 questions. It's a PDF with 17 questions. But a couple of differences. One, instead of looking at broader health literacy considerations, this looks very closely at kind of line by line writing. So, for example, one of the questions on the clear writing assessment is, have you kept your subject and verb close together in all of your sentences? They should either be next to each other or within four words of each other, because otherwise it's hard for people to keep track of who is doing what in the sentence, and if they can't keep track of who is doing what then they can't understand or remember the sentence.

So, the clear writing assessment looks at those very close line-by-line kinds of things. And what's nice about the clear writing assessment is you can test your own. You will not have a bias because these are pretty straightforward objective, kind of yes and no questions. And again, it doesn't take that long for a fact sheet because fact sheets are short. So that might, this one might take you 15, 20 minutes. And again, you see at the end, you have your score. In this case, if you have 80 or higher, you're in good shape. If you have less than 80, then you can go back and look at what specifically I need to fix. The last testing tool, again, this is for CDC people mostly. Visible thread readability software. I have no affiliation with this software whatsoever.

I just know that the CDC's office of communication uses this software to test materials. So, you can send a fact sheet to them. They will run it through the software and they'll send it back to you. The software scans it and highlights things like passive voice, long sentences, or something called nominalization, where we have this habit of taking verbs and turning them into nouns in our writing. Like instead of saying that I analyzed something, I conducted an analysis, like I change analyze to analysis, and then I have to add another verb to my sentence. It makes our writing sound very academic and stuffy, which is not good for fact sheets. So, this software will catch that and then

you'll be able to fix those kinds of problems. It is publicly available software, although there's a cost associated. So others on the call, you could look into that. I just know that it is a free service available to CDC employees, and contractors.

So, I have - just wrapping up here so that we've got some time for questions. I have some samples that I just wanted to show you, and you can take more time to look at these on your own, but, you know, look at this sample right in the upper left-hand corner, they've called out their target audience. So, people can opt-in or opt-out, you know, is this important for me? And, you know, they've used visuals that relate to the content you know, bolded colored blocks, the main message we've done a lot of really good things that we've talked about. I like to show this one too, I think this is a clever way of handling a fact sheet. They've actually turned it into a quiz to increase the interactivity. So, I think that's a good idea too. And they still have that main message at the front.

They've got the short sections, they've got the visuals that reinforce the messages that they're trying to make, and then the call to action at the bottom. So, I think this is a clever example of how you can do fact sheets. And I wanted to - this was my last sample to show you that, you don't want to give people a wall of words with your fact sheet and just remember that bullets can be a wall of words too. Bullets, you know, that's not necessarily a way to fix heavy text, right? You've got bullets, sub-bullets, sub-sub-bullets. I don't want to read this, just as much as I don't want to read a long dense paragraph. But someone sent that to me and this is what we ended up coming with. What they sent me, I think it was four pages of that kind of dense bullets, sub-bullets, sub-sub-bullets.

And we looked at it and we thought, well, what are we trying to get at here again, who's the target audience? What's our main message? How do we want to organize this? It was really, there were three main points. So, we pulled those out about, you know, the first page and then just about everything else could be condensed down to some other tips that we put on the second page and

then where they could find additional information. So, it takes time to do something like this, but you can see how this is so much more effective than something like this.

So, at this time, it looks like we've got a little bit more than 10 minutes. So, I'm going to address some of the questions that we have in the box. And then we'll see if we have any audio questions. Alright. So, one question I have is about a double column. Does it help with shortlists? And I would say, I do not use columns in fact sheets. And here's why I don't think that they're effective. You know, I mentioned earlier about mobile devices, how it creates a bit of an optical illusion, because you have a smaller amount of space and it makes the paragraphs look longer than what they are, makes the sentences look longer than what they are. So, I do not like using columns for that reason. And it also seems to reduce the amount of white space on a page, which can be important for struggling readers. So, I would say just generally stay away from columns when it comes to a fact sheet. I mean, the one thing that I think is permissible is, if you have an image, a relevant image or graphics somewhere, then the text that's decided is going to be, you know, it's going to have a little bit less space, but it doesn't have to be, half. You know, the image doesn't have to take up half of the page. And then the text is only left on the other half of the page. Let's see.

Please provide the citation for the health literacy study you just mentioned. I believe it's in the slides. If it's not, I'll be sure to send the citation to the webinar organizers so they'll have it. But it's NAAL, National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Okay. Let's see. I'm working on specification sheets for data sets, the audience is CDC scientists, might include a bar chart would probably be more - and that's a pretty specific question to a particular document. So maybe you could reach out to me after the meeting, and I can give you some advice on that. And then someone asked for examples of effective fact sheets. So, I do have some examples in the slides, but I also would encourage you to look at the CDC clear

communication index page. There are some samples on that intranet site as well. I think there might be some on the external site, but I know for sure on the internal site, there are some samples.

Someone asked if you can share these slides. Yes, absolutely. You can share these slides. All right. Someone's asking about a good call to action. Again, that's it's really context-driven, depends on what's the action that you want them to do. And if there are behavior changes, it just needs to be a very clear, short sentence, active voice you know, bold, maybe some of the most important behaviors or actions that you want people to do. Those are some things you can do to make sure that your call to action is effective.

Let's see. The next question is, would a fact sheet explaining a CDC program look different than a fact sheet on a public health topic? Yeah. I mean, depending - your topic is going to determine how this fact sheet looks, and this is one of the reasons I mentioned upfront, why it's so important to think about audience and purpose, because when you have audience and purpose right up front, that helps you make decisions along the way about, you know what kind of reading level I can have, what kind of terminology I can have, what kind of examples I should have, or do I need to have examples? Do we have this baseline shared understanding of some background information or do I need to provide more? So, yeah, I would say that, yeah, that fact sheets could look very different depending on your audience and your purpose.

Someone asked again for the name of the software. I'm going to forget already, but it's on the slide. You'll see. It's on the testing tool. The last bit of information it's, I'm blanking on the first word, but it's readability threads, something readability thread, but it's in the slides, and there's also contact information.

All right, someone's asking a question about grade level. So, I just like to make a quick comment about this. All right. So a lot of us use these readability statistics, you know, very simple to do in Microsoft Word, just check what's the grade level. And, they have some utility. I mean, they have

some use as a gauge but think about this. Those are ultimate, those are just algorithms that are counting the number of syllables per word, and the number of words per sentence.

That's how they're determining what the grade level is. And that doesn't get into so many of the things that we talked about today. That doesn't get into, is there a main message? Do you have the most critical information first? Did you keep your bulleted list to seven items or fewer? Did you use meaningful headings? You know, none of that is taken into consideration when determining the grade level. I'm not saying scrap the grade level. You can look at grade level because it can tell you like, well, I'm way too high here. I need to get this down a little bit, but you also need to be looking at these other things. I would say use readability, you know, grade-level tests in conjunction with the clear communication index and the clear writing assessment. Those in combination with each other will give you a good sense of if your document is clear and effective. And I also think it's good to share those scores with your reader or with your reviewers, because they may be less inclined to muddle around if they know you have these objective scores.

Okay. Let's see. These tests for fact sheets, are they only for English? Yeah. The testing tools are designed for English materials. So, I don't know of testing tools right now for other languages, but I will say that a lot of times if we're translating materials, the clearer an English version is, the more translation ready it is. So even if they're not available to test, say, for example, the Spanish version, if you have an English version, you can test it, make sure that you know, it's where it needs to, with those tools before you go into translation to another language. Somebody's asking about more scientific writing, you know, a lot of these principles apply to all writing scenarios. I mean, they're particularly relevant for fact sheets, but I think you can apply some of these, if not all of these when you're writing scientific journal articles or reports. But CDC also has some resources available for scientific writing. And so, you can check on, OEDC website, the CDC office of the associate director for communication. They have some and there are also the HHS learning portal hosts or advertises some scientific writing classes maybe once or twice a year. I've seen too that you may want to check it out.

All right. I want to give people on the line a chance. So, could I turn it over to Lisa at this point to see if anyone has any audio questions?

Operator: Yes. Thank you. If you would like to ask a question on the phone lines today, you can press star one on your telephone keypad. If you are on a speakerphone, please make sure your mute option is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, that is star one. We do have a question from Kenneth Grant, please go ahead.

Kenneth Grant: Hey, I thought the question I was going to be anonymous, their capability, but I was just going to ask regarding the writing group for the helpful presentations, just want to know regarding P maps. What's your advice for CDC staff conveying their thoughts and accomplishments, things like that? Thanks.

Traci Augustosky: Okay. Thank you. That's a great question. And as I said, a few minutes ago, that, you know a lot of these writing tips can be applied to a variety of writing scenarios. And I think that in particular, because, you know, you want to be clear and succinct to make sure that, that the reviewers understand precisely what you're saying or what you're advocating for in your self-evaluation. So, I would definitely use these same tips, you know, keep the sentences short. Keep, if you are writing paragraphs for any sections, keep the paragraphs short. If you have bulleted lists, keep those to seven items or fewer use headings, you know, help your reviewers or readers understand how you're organizing the content by chunking it up. I mean, I think there are some, you might face some technical challenges with the electronic system, that you might have to figure out ways around, but one of the writing principles, absolutely use these writing principles as well, active voices and another one that would be really important. And I think if you look at the clear writing assessment, you know, I mentioned earlier that that gives a lot of information about kind of line by line ways to approach writing, you know, keeping the subject and verb close together,

making sure you don't use that nominalization of turning a verb into a noun. Look at that testing tool. And that will give you some additional tips that I think you can use in self-evaluation for review.

Traci Augustosky: Are there any other questions?

Operator: All right. And there are no further questions at this time.

Traci Augustosky: Okay. Well, it looks like we're right at the top of the hour too. So, thank you so much for your time. I hope you found this useful and practical, and you will get a copy of the slides, and you'll have links to everything that I mentioned, and I'm always available. My contact information is on the slide. I'm always available for follow-up questions as well. Thank you so much.