<u>Action Plan for the Provision of Useful</u>
<u>Prescription Medicine Information</u>
(1996)

http://www.keystone.org/Public_Policy/FinalActionplan.pdf

(From: Action Plan, Appendix G – Specific Language and Format Guidelines with Samples)

The following guidelines reflect widely recognized standards used by designers and publishers of written information to ensure that the materials are legible and readable. Legibility and readability cannot be reduced to a precise formula; rather, they depend on a combination of factors. The pages that follow are examples of information material s that adhere to these guidelines.

- **Prescription medicine information should be printed in no smaller than 10-point type**. Type size is very important to readability. Newspapers are usually printed in 8-point type, while 12-point type is generally recommended as the smallest type size to use for materials intended specifically for older persons, who are significant consumers of prescription drugs.

- **Ornate typefaces and italics, which are hard to read, should not be used**. Too much curve or detail obscures the letters and slows reading. A bolder type should be chosen over a thin version of the same style. Opinions vary on whether a "serif" font or a "sans serif" font is more readable. Many experts recommend that sans serif should be used for headings, while serif style should be used for text.

- **Upper and lower case lettering should be used.** Upper and lower case letters have more variation in shape and are easier to identify than all upper case lettering.

- **Use bold-face type or a box to call attention to important information**. Highlighting or underlining for this purpose can impede readability.

- **Adequate space between letters, lines, and paragraphs enhances readability**. If the lines of text are too close together, the material will be difficult to read. Generally, text should have no more than -3 "kerning" (i.e. space between letters). With 10-point type, 12-point "leading" (i.e. space between lines) is generally recommended. Adequate space between paragraphs and space above and below headings can facilitate reading.

- **Line length should not be too long**. Optimal line length is approximately 40 letters long (in 10-point or 12-point type).

- **There should be good contrast between the ink and paper colors**. Good contrast will facilitate reading. Black, dark blue, or brown ink on pale yellow or white paper provides the best contrast. Combinations that provide insufficient contrast should be avoided (e.g., brown on gold, blue on green, red on pink). Also, material should be printed on uncoated paper.

- **Short paragraphs and bullets should be used where possible**. This increases the readability of prescription medicine information.

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[34] M.R. Boyce, *Guidelines for Printed Materials for Older Adults* (Lansing, MI: Michigan Health Council, 1981); Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons (AARP), *Truth About Aging: Guidelines for Accurate Communic ations* (Washington, DC: AARP 1986); C, Baker, *Just Say It!: How to Write for Readers Who Don't Read Well* (Washington. DC: Plan Incorporated, 1992)