



SAM

Suitability Assessment of Material Score Sheet

Acknowledgement

The SAM Suitability of Materials assessment method was developed by Doak, Doak and Root in 1993 and published in the book: *Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills*, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 1996. This book is out of print, the full text is available online, viewed 21 July 2014, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/resources/teaching-patients-with-low-literacy-skills/>

Instructions:

1. Read through the SAM factor list and the evaluation criteria on the score sheet, below.
2. Read the material you want to evaluate and determine its purpose(s) and key points.
3. For short documents (for example a pamphlet or single page of text), evaluate the entire piece.

For longer documents (for example a booklet) select samples of key sections to evaluate, or three pages that cover topics central to the purpose of the booklet.

For documents longer than 50 pages, increase the sample size to six pages.
4. Evaluate and score each of the 22 SAM factors using the evaluation criteria provided, and circle the appropriate score on the score sheet. The scoring system provides:
 - 2 points per factor for superior rating
 - 1 point per factor for adequate rating
 - 0 points per factor for not suitable rating.



As you evaluate each factor, you are likely to find wide variation in different parts of your material. For any one factor, some parts may rate high (superior), while other parts may rate low (unsuitable). Resolve this by giving most weight to the part of your material that includes the key points that you identified in step 2 above.

5. If the factor to be rated is not relevant to your document, write N/A across the score column for that section.
6. Calculate the total suitability score. When you have evaluated all the factors and circled a score for each on the score sheet, add up the circled score to get the total score. The highest possible total score is 44 points (100 per cent), which almost never happens. A more typical score is 34/44 (77 per cent).

To account for SAM factors that may not apply to your material, revise your highest possible total score by subtracting 2 points for each N/A from the 44 total.

Interpretation of SAM percentage ratings:

- 70–100 per cent: superior material
- 40–69 per cent: adequate material
- 0–39 per cent: not suitable material.

7. Decide on the impact of deficiencies and what action to take. Review any areas where the rating is 'unsuitable', especially in the sections about readability level and cultural appropriateness. This is essential even if all other ratings are superior.

SAM Score Sheet

SAM FACTOR TO BE RATED	EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORE	
1. Content	a. Purpose It is important that readers understand the purpose of the materials. If they don't they may miss the main point.	Purpose is explicitly stated in the title, cover illustration or introduction.	2
		Purpose is not explicit. It is implied or multiple purposes are stated.	1
		No purpose is stated in the title, illustration or introduction	0
	b. Content topics Adult learners usually want to solve their problem, rather than learn facts. The content of most interest and use is likely to be behaviour information to help solve their problem.	Thrust of material is application of knowledge/skills aimed at desirable reader behaviour rather than facts.	2
		At least 40 per cent of content topics focus on desirable behaviours or actions.	1
		Nearly all topics focus on non-behaviour facts.	0
	c. Scope Scope should be limited to the purpose/objectives of the material, and to what can reasonably be learned in the time typically allocated to reading the information.	Scope limited to essential information directly related to the purpose. Experience shows it can be learned in the time available.	2
		Scope expanded beyond the purpose of the document, but no more than 40% is non-essential information. Key points can be learned in the time available.	1
		Scope is far out of proportion to the purpose and time available.	0
	d. Summary/review A summary offers readers a chance to see the key points in other words or examples. They are important; readers often miss the key points when they first read them.	A summary is included and retells the key message in different words and examples.	2
		Some key ideas are reviewed.	1
		No summary or review is included.	0
2. Literacy demand	a. Reading Grade Level The text reading level will be an important factor in whether your target group understands your document. Reading formulas, like SMOG, provide a reasonably accurate measure of reading difficulty.	5th-grade or lower (5 years of schooling).	2
		6 th – 8 th - grade level (6 – 8 years of schooling).	1
		9 th -grade level and above (9+ years of schooling).	0

SAM FACTOR TO BE RATED		EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORE
2. Literacy demand (continued)	b. Writing style Conversational style and active voice lead to easy-to-understand text. E.g. <i>'Take your medicine every day'</i> (active voice) is more effective than <i>'Patients are advised to take their medicine every day'</i> (passive voice). Embedded information – long or multiple phrases included within a sentence – slows down the reading process and often makes comprehension harder.	Both of the following are present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the text is mostly conversational style and active voice simple sentences are used extensively few sentences contain embedded information. 	2
		About 50 per cent of the text uses conversational style and active voice. Less than half of the sentences have embedded information.	1
		Passive voice is used throughout. Over half the sentences have extensive embedded information.	0
	c. Vocabulary It's best to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use common, explicit words, e.g. <i>'doctor'</i> rather than <i>'specialist'/'physician'</i>. avoid words that express general terms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> categories, e.g. <i>'a disability unit'</i> versus <i>'a unit that's specially designed for people with disabilities'</i> concepts, e.g. <i>'normal range'</i> versus <i>'15–70 metres'</i> value judgements, e.g. <i>'excessive pain'</i> versus <i>'pain that makes it hard to think about anything else'</i> use words that create an image, e.g. <i>'brown bread'</i> versus <i>'dietary fibre'</i>; a <i>'runny nose'</i> versus <i>'excess mucus'</i>. 	All three of the following are present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> common words are used nearly all the time technical, concept, category and value judgement words are explained by examples imagery words are used as appropriate for content. 	2
		Common words are frequently used. Technical concept, category and value judgement words are sometimes explained by examples. Some jargon or math symbols are included.	1
		At least two of the following are present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uncommon words are frequently used in lieu of common words no examples are given for technical, concept, category and value judgement words extensive jargon is used. 	0
	d. Context We learn new facts/behaviours more quickly when told the context first. E.g. <i>'To find out what's wrong with you (the context first), the doctor will take a sample of your blood for testing in the lab.'</i>	The material consistently provides context before presenting new information.	2
		Provides context before new information about 50 per cent of the time.	1
		Context is provided last or no content is provided.	0

SAM FACTOR TO BE RATED	EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORE
2. Literacy demand (continued)	e. Advanced organisers Headers or topic captions tell very briefly what's coming up next. These 'road signs' make the text look less formidable, and prepare the reader's thought process to expect the next topic.	Nearly all topics are preceded by an advance organiser (a statement that tells what is coming next). 2
		About 50 per cent of the topics are preceded by advance organisers. 1
		Few/no advance organisers are used. 0
3. Graphics	a. Cover graphic People <i>do</i> judge a booklet by its cover. The cover image is often the deciding factor in a reader's attitude toward, and interest in, the information.	All three of the following are present: 1. The cover graphic is friendly 2. The cover graphic attracts attention 3. The cover graphic clearly portrays the purpose of the material. 2
		The cover graphic has one or two of the superior criteria. 1
		The cover graphic has none of the superior criteria. 0
	b. Type of illustrations Simple line drawings can promote realism without including distracting details (photos often include extra details). Visuals are accepted and remembered better when they portray what is familiar and easily recognised.	Both of the following are present: 1. Simple, adult-appropriate line drawings/sketches 2. Illustrations are likely to be familiar to readers. 2
		One of the superior factors is missing. 1
		None of the superior factors are present. 0
	c. Relevance of illustrations Non-essential details such as room background, elaborate borders, unneeded colour can distract the reader, whose eyes may be 'captured' by these details. The illustrations should tell the key points visually.	Illustrations present key messages visually so the reader can grasp the key ideas from the illustrations alone. There are no distracting illustrations. 2
		Illustrations include some distractions and/or there are insufficient illustrations. 1
		There are confusing or technical illustrations (non-behaviour related), no illustrations or an overload of illustrations. 0
	d. List, tables, graphs, charts Many readers do not understand the purpose for lists, charts, and graphs. Explanations and directions are essential.	Step-by-step directions, with an example, are provided that will build comprehension and self-efficacy. 2
		'How-to' directions are too brief for reader to understand and use the graphic without additional counselling. 1
		Graphics are presented without explanation. 0

SAM FACTOR TO BE RATED		EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORE
3. Graphics (continued)	e. Captions Captions can quickly tell the reader what the graphic is all about and where to focus within the graphic. A graphic without a caption is usually an inferior instruction and a missed learning opportunity.	Explanatory captions are provided with all or nearly all illustrations and graphics.	2
		Brief captions used for some illustrations and graphics.	1
		Captions are not used.	0
4. Layout and typography	a. Layout Layout has a substantial influence on the suitability of materials.	At least 5 of the following are present: 1. Illustrations are on the same page adjacent to the related text. 2. Layout and sequence of information is consistent, making it easy for the reader to predict the flow of information. 3. Visual cuing devices (shading, boxes, arrows) are used to direct attention to specific points or key content. 4. Adequate white space is used to reduce clutter. 5. Use of colour supports and is not distracting to the message. Viewers need not learn colour codes to understand and use the message. 6. Line length is 30–50 characters and spaces. 7. There is high contrast between type and paper. 8. Paper has non-gloss or low-gloss surface.	2
		Three+ superior factors are present.	1
		Two (or less) superior factors are present. The material looks uninviting or discouragingly hard to read.	0
	b. Typography Type size and fonts can make text easy or difficult for readers at all skill levels. For example text in ALL CAPS slows reading comprehension. Also, when too many (six or more) type fonts and sizes are used on a page, the appearance becomes confusing and the focus uncertain.	The following four factors are present: 1. Text type is in uppercase and lowercase serif (best) or sans-serif. 2. Type size is at least 12 points. 3. Typographic cues (bold, size, colour) emphasise key points. 4. No ALL CAPS are used for long headings or running text.	2
		Two of the superior factors are present.	1
		One or none of the superior factors are present, or six or more type styles and sizes are used on a page.	0

4. Layout and typography (continued)	c. Subheadings ('chunking') Few people can remember more than seven independent items. For adults with low literacy skills, the limit may be three- to five-item lists. Longer lists need to be broken into smaller "chunks".	Lists are grouped under descriptive subheadings or "chunks". There are no more than five items presented without a subheading.	2
		No more than seven items are presented without a subheading.	1
		More than seven items are presented without a subheading.	0
5. Learning stimulation, motivation	a. Interaction When a reader responds to an instruction (i.e. does something in response) chemical changes take place in the brain that enhance retention in long-term memory. Readers should be asked to solve problems, to make choices, to demonstrate, etc.	Problems or questions are presented for reader responses.	2
		Question-and-answer format is used to present problems and solutions (passive interaction).	1
		No interactive learning stimulation provided.	0
	b. Modelling of behaviours People often learn more readily by observation, by doing something for themselves rather than by reading or being told, and when specific, familiar instances are used rather than the abstract or general.	Instruction models specific behaviours or skills, e.g. for nutrition instruction, emphasis is given to specific behaviours like reading produce labels.	2
		Information is a mix of technical and common language that the reader may not easily interpret in terms of daily living (for example, Starches: 80 calories per serve; High fibre: 1–4 grams of fibre per serve).	1
		Information is presented in non-specific or category terms such as food groups.	0
	c. Motivation People are more motivated to learn when they believe the tasks/behaviours are do-able by them.	Complex topics are subdivided into small parts so that readers may experience small successes in understanding or problem solving, leading to self-efficacy.	2
		Some topics are subdivided to improve the readers' self-efficacy.	1
		No partitioning is provided to create opportunities for small successes.	0

6. Cultural appropriateness	<p>a. Cultural match</p> <p>A valid measure of cultural appropriateness of material is how well its logic, language, and experience (inherent in the instruction) match the logic, language and experience of the intended audience. For example a nutrition instruction is a poor cultural match when it tells readers to eat asparagus if asparagus is rarely eaten by people in that culture and is not sold in the readers' neighbourhood.</p>	Central concepts/ideas of the material appear to be culturally similar to the logic, language and experience of the target culture.	2
		Significant match in the logic, language and experience for 50 per cent of the central concepts.	1
		Clearly a cultural mismatch in the logic, language and experience.	0
	<p>b. Cultural image and examples</p> <p>To be accepted, an instruction must present cultural images and examples in realistic and positive ways.</p>	Images and examples present the culture in positive ways.	2
		There is neutral presentation of cultural images or foods.	1
		Negative images are used, such as exaggerated or caricatured cultural characteristics, actions or examples.	0
		Total SAM score	
		Total possible score	
		Per cent score	