

5. Selecting Online and Print Health Resources: Some Words of Caution

Fortunately, there is an abundance of material available on the Internet and in printed brochures about health topics. Teachers need to be selective, however, in using these materials with learners. Here are some reasons for caution:

Using websites

Always check the URL (web address) on the day you plan to teach with computers! Sites move around or disappear without warning. Sometimes if a website moves, you can find it again by going to the homepage and searching for the name or topic from there.

Language and literacy level appropriateness

Although some materials are described as “Easy-to-Read” or “Plain English,” their levels of vocabulary and grammatical complexity vary. Always preview sites or printed materials to make sure they are appropriate for your learners’ reading levels. For lower literacy levels, language and grammar need to be simple.

- Sentences and blocks of text should be short and not complex.
- Verbs should be in active voice. (Bad: Medicine is to be taken with food. Better: Take medicine with food.)
- Don’t assume that low literacy learners have a good knowledge of anatomical vocabulary and understanding of body system functions. Choose materials that explain these as simply as possible.
- Often materials are available in different languages. However, if learners have low literacy or lack medical vocabulary in their native language, the translated materials are not particularly helpful. Giving a translated brochure to someone who can’t understand it in their first language might make them feel worse about their literacy level.
- Some simplified materials, particularly those designed for children and adolescents, may contain some colloquialisms that make them confusing for many non-native speakers of English.
- Layout of materials for people with lower literacy should be simple, without too much information or clutter on a page or screen. Reading bulleted text may be easier than finding information in paragraphs.
- Make sure there is not too much information for your learners to absorb in a brochure or other health education material. Keep the message simple.

Pictures

- Pictures should be simple. Too much detail in a picture can be very confusing for low literacy learners. Sometimes a simple drawing is preferable to a photograph because a photograph can look cluttered or confusing
- If your learners have experienced the trauma of war or other violence and pictures in which body parts are depicted as if detached from the rest of the body might cause them discomfort, choose a different picture.

Cultural sensitivity

Some materials may be written with one cultural group in mind, so they might contain cultural references or illustrations that could be considered insensitive or just plain confusing to others.

- If learners have religious or cultural beliefs such that they would be uncomfortable seeing pictures of body parts unclothed, or reading about particular health topics, choose materials without those pictures or reading sections, or arrange a way for the students in question to do some other productive work as the rest of the class uses the materials. You might want to consult with those students as to how they would like to use the class time.
- If all the people depicted in a brochure are of one race or ethnicity, and your students are of others, try to find a brochure that depicts people more reflective of your student population, or at least a diverse population.
- Look for materials on nutrition which allow for variations in diet across cultures. If your students prefer rice or potatoes to bread or cereal in their daily diet, for example, see if you can find information which mentions their preferences or is general enough to include them. Also, be mindful of dietary restrictions in some cultures and religions.

Relevance

In addition to being culturally relevant, materials should be relevant to learners' life situations. For example:

- If a brochure suggests something like going to the gym several times a week and your learners don't have access to a gym or don't have time to go to one between jobs and family responsibilities, look for a more appropriate brochure.
- If a brochure refers to regular check-ups with your family physician but your learners don't have the luxury of a family physician or regular check-ups, choose another brochure. Look for materials that refer to clinics as well as doctor's offices.

- If you are presenting printed information in a brochure that stresses the importance of seeing a health care provider to test for or check on a condition, make sure you bring information to class about a low-cost provider in your area for students who might need it. Receiving information on what care to get with no information about how to access that care may frustrate some students.