SAM
Suitability Assessment of Materials
for evaluation of health-related information for adults

Content

Purpose
SAM, the Suitability Assessment of Materials instrument offers a systematic method to objectively assess the suitability of health information materials for a particular audience in a short time.

How it works
SAM guides you to rate materials on factors that affect readability (the relative difficulty of decoding the words) and comprehension (the relative difficulty of understanding the meaning).

SAM rates materials in these six areas
- Content
- Literacy Demand
- Graphics
- Layout and Type
- Learning Stimulation & Motivation
- Cultural Appropriateness

Easy Scoring
For each factor, rate the materials *Superior, Adequate* or *Not Suitable* based on objective criteria included in the instrument. You can calculate a score for each area and overall. For a panel of reviewers, you might average the ratings. Score the materials by assigning points as follows.

Superior   ~ 2 points
Adequate   ~ 1
Not Suitable ~ 0

Use SAM to:
- Measure how well materials "fit" your clients
- Compare different materials and select those most suitable for your clients
- Tailor existing materials for a particular population
- Guide development and testing of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials
- Set standards

Clients have the last word
SAM is an at-your-desk review. It can help you save time and money and improve program effectiveness by selecting or producing materials that your clients are likely to pick up, read ,understand and act on. SAM cannot substitute for formative research and testing through which clients verify that the information is attractive, useful and persuasive to them**.**

About the Instrument
SAM was developed in 1993 by Leonard and Cecilia Doak and Jane Root, leading experts in health education for adults, under the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine project, "Nutrition for Education in Urban African Americans" funded by the National Institutes of Health. Validation was conducted with 172 health care providers from several cultures as well as students and faculty of the University of North Carolina School of Public Health and Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. For more detail see Doak C, Doak L, and Root J. *Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills*, 2nd Edition, Philadelphia: Lipincott 1996.

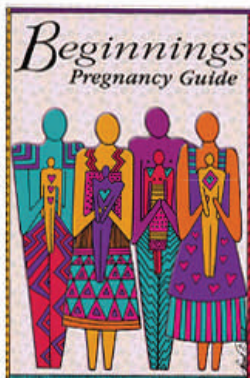# Instructions for Evaluating *Beginnings Guides* with SAM

1. Read through the SAM instrument on the following pages to get a sense of the evaluation criteria.

2. Read all the way through the titles you are considering for your program. You will find the *Beginnings Pregnancy* and *Parent's Guides* are easy to read. As you read the *Beginnings* materials, keep in mind that the materials are distributed one booklet at a time—through the course of their pregnancy and/or the child's first three years. Typically there will be several weeks time between booklets. You may choose to apply SAM to the entire series or choose one booklet.

3. Use the SAM form provided here to rate the materials. For each factor, check the box that best describes your rating. Choose *Superior*, *Adequate* or *Not Suitable*. Write comments in the space provided, in the margins, on the back. Comments can be very useful to the decision makers for your material requisitions requests.

Questions & Assistance

Please call me with questions about your review of the Beginnings Guides or use of the SAM instrument.

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Please share your results with us. Your feedback
will help us continue to improve the Guides.

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$\mathcal{B}$*eginnings Guides*

It matters what a mother knows

Content

Purpose: It is important that readers readily understand the purpose of the materials. If they don't clearly perceive the purpose, they may miss main points.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Purpose is explicitly stated in the title, cover illustration or introduction.

                  ☐ Adequate   Purpose is not explicit. It is implied or multiple purposes are stated.

                  ☐ Not Suitable   No purpose is stated in the title, illustration or introduction.

Comment:

Content Topics: Adult learners usually want to solve their immediate health problem, rather than learn medical facts. The content of most interest and use to readers is behavior information that helps solve problems.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Thrust of the material is application of knowledge aimed at desirable reader behavior.

                  ☐ Adequate   At least 40% of content topics focus on desirable behaviors or actions.

                  ☐ Not Suitable   Nearly all topics focus on non-behavior facts.

Comment:

Summary & Review: A review offers readers a chance to see the key points in other words, examples or visuals and increases comprehension.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Summaries are included and retell key messages in different words or examples.

                  ☐ Adequate   Some key topics are reviewed.

                  ☐ Not Suitable   No summary or review is included.

Comment:

Literacy Demand

Reading Grade Level: Text reading level is a critical factor in comprehension. Readability formulas provide a reasonably accurate measure of reading difficulty. *Beginnings* reading level is 4th grade throughout measured by the Flesch-Kincaid formula. It measures 88.1 on the Flesch Reading Ease scale. For detail see http://www.PrenatalEd.com/readlvl.htm.

Check One: □ Superior: 5th grade or level or lower

                 □ Adequate   6th to 8th grade

                 □ Not Suitable   9th grade or above

Comment

Writing Style: Conversational style and active voice are easy to understand. Passive voice, embedded information and long or multiple phrases slow reading and reduce comprehension. Example: *Take your vitamin every day* is easier to understand than *Patients are advised to take their vitamin daily.*

Check One: □ Superior: 1)Conversational style and active voice are used throughout.
2)Simple sentences are used extensively.

                 □ Adequate   1)About half the text uses conversational style, active voice. 2) Less than half of sentences are complex with long phrases.

                 □ Not Suitable   1) Passive voice throughout.
2) Over half of sentence have long or multiple phrases.

Comment

Sentence Construction: The context is given before new information. We learn new facts/behaviors more quickly when told the context first. Example: *To relieve pain* (context), *put heat on the sore spot* (new information).

Check One: □ Superior: Consistently provides context before presenting new information.

                 □ Adequate   Provides context first about half the time.

                 □ Not Suitable   Context is provided first or not at all.

Comment

Vocabulary: Common explicit words are used. (Example: Use d*octor* instead of p*hysician)*. Few or no words express general terms such as categories (Example: Use m*ilk* instead of *dairy products)* or value judgments (Example: Use *pain that does not go away in 5 minutes* instead of *excessive pain*). Imagery words are used because these are words that people can "see". (Example:Use *runny nose* instead of *excess mucus*).

Check One: ☐ Superior: All three factors: 1) common words are used all the time.
2) Technical, concept, category, value judgment words (CCVJ) are explained.
3) Appropriate imagery words are used.

☐ Adequate   1) Common words are used frequently.
2. Technical CCVJ words are explained sometimes.
3. Some jargon is used.

☐ Not Suitable   1) Two or more factors: 1) Uncommon words are used frequently instead of common words.
2) No explanation or examples are given for technical and CCVJ words.
3) Extensive jargon.

Comment

Learning Enhanced by Advance Organizers (Road Signs): Headers or topic captions tell very briefly what is coming next. These "road signs" make the text look less intimidating and prepare the reader's thought process to expect the announced topic.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Nearly all topics are preceded by an advance organizer (a statement that tells what is next).

☐ Adequate   About 50% of topics are preceded by advance organizers.

☐ Not Suitable   Few or no advance organizers are used.

Comment

Graphic Illustrations, Lists, Tables, Charts

Cover Graphic: People *do* judge a book by its cover. The cover image often is the deciding factor in a reader's attitude toward, and interest in, the materials.

Check One: ☐ Superior: The cover graphic:
1) Is friendly
2) Attracts attention.
3) Clearly portrays the purpose of the materials

☐ Adequate   The cover graphic has one or two of the superior criteria.

☐ Not Suitable   The cover graphic has none of the superior criteria.

Comment

Type of Illustrations: Simple line drawings can promote realism without distracting details. Visuals are accepted and remembered better when they portray what is familiar and easily recognized. Viewers may not recognize the meaning of medical drawings or abstract symbols.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Both factors:
1) Simple adult-appropriate line drawings/sketches are used.
2) Illustrations are likely to be familiar to readers

☐ Adequate   One of the superior factors is missing.

☐ Not Suitable   None of the superior factors is present.

Comment

Relevance of Illustrations: Nonessential details such as room backgrounds, elaborate borders, unneeded color can distract the viewer. The viewer's eyes may be "captured" by these details. Illustrations should tell key points visibly.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Illustrations present key messages visually so the reader can grasp the key ideas from illustrations alone. No distractions.

☐ Adequate   1) Illustrations include some distractions.
2) Insufficient use of illustrations.

☐ Not Suitable   No illustrations or an overload of illustrations.

Comment

Graphics: Lists, tables, charts, forms: Many readers do not understand the purpose of lists and charts. Explanations or directions are essential.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Provides step-by-step directions with an example that will build self-efficacy (confidence).

☐ Adequate   "How to" directions are too brief for readers to understand and use the graphic without help.

☐ Not Suitable   Graphics are presented without explanation.

Comment

Captions are used to "announce" or explain graphics: Captions can quickly tell the reader what the graphic is about and where to focus within the graphic. A graphic without a caption is usually an inferior instruction and missed learning opportunity.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Explanatory captions with all or nearly all illustrations and graphics.

☐ Adequate   Brief captions are used for some graphics.

☐ Not Suitable   Captions are not used.

Comment

Layout and Typography

Typography: Type size and fonts can make text easy or difficult for readers at all skill levels. For example, type in ALL CAPS slows everyone's reading comprehension. When too many (6+) type fonts and sizes are used on a page, the appearance becomes confusing and the focus uncertain.

Check One: ☐ Superior: At least 3 of the following 4 factors are present:
1) Text type is in uppercase and lowercase.
2) Type size is at least 12 point (This is 12 point type).
3) Typographic cues (bold type, color, size of type).
4) No ALL CAPS for long headlines and running text.

☐ Adequate   Two of the superior factors are present.

☐ Not Suitable   One or none of the superior factors are present.
Or 6 or more type styles/sizes are used on one page.

Comment

Layout: Layout has a substantial influence on the suitability of materials.

Check One: ☐ Superior: At least 5 of the following 8 factors are present:
1) Illustrations are adjacent to the related text.
2) Layout and sequence of information are consistent, making it easy to predict the flow of information.
3) Visual cueing devices (boxes, arrows, shading) are used to direct attention to key content.
4) pages do not appear cluttered.
5) Use of color supports and is not distracting to the message. Readers need not learn color codes to understand and use the message.
6) Line length is 30 to 50 characters and spaces.
7) There is high contrast between type and paper.
8) Paper has a non-gloss or low-gloss surface.

☐ Adequate   At least 3 of the superior factors are present.

☐ Not Suitable   1) Two or fewer of the superior factors are present.
2) Looks uninviting or hard to read.

Comment

Subheadings and "chunking": Few people can remember more than 7 independent items. For those with low literacy skills the limit may be 3 or 5 items. Longer lists need to be partitioned into smaller chunks.

Check One: ☐ Superior: 1) Lists are grouped under descriptive subheadings.
2) No more than 5 items are presented without a subheading.

☐ Adequate   No more than 7 items are presented without a subheading.

☐ Not Suitable   More than 7 items are presented without a subheading.

Comment

Learning Stimulation & Motivation

Interaction included in text and /or graphics: When a reader does something to reply to a question or problem, chemical changes take place in the brain that enhance retention in long-term memory. Readers should be asked to solve problems, make choices, demonstrate.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Problems or questions are presented for reader response.

☐ Adequate   Question & Answer format is used to discuss problems and solutions (passive interaction).

☐ Not Suitable   No interactive learning or stimulation is provided.

Comment

Desired behavior patterns are modeled or shown in specific terms: People often learn more readily when specific, familiar instances are used rather than abstract or general concepts.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Instruction models specific behavior and skills. Example: nutrition information emphasizes changing eating patterns, shopping, cooking.

☐ Adequate   Information is a mix of technical and common language the reader may not easily interpret in terms of daily living. Example: *High sugar, low nutrient value foods* instead of *No fuel foods*

☐ Not Suitable   Information is presented in non-specific or category items such as food groups.

Comment

Motivation: People are motivated to learn when they believe tasks and behaviors are doable.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Complex topics are subdivided so that readers may experience small successes in understanding or problem solving, leading to self-efficacy (confidence).

☐ Adequate   Some topics are subdivided to improve readers' confidence.

☐ Not Suitable   No partitioning is provided.

Comment

Cultural Appropriateness

Cultural Match — Logic, Language, Experience (LLE): A valid measure of the cultural appropriateness of material is how well its logic, language and experience (inherent in the instruction) match the LLE *of the intended audience* (not the reviewer). Example: Nutrition instruction is a poor cultural match if it tells readers to eat vegetables that are rarely eaten by people in that culture and not sold in the reader's neighborhood.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Central concepts of the material appear to be culturally similar to the LLE of the target culture.

☐ Adequate Significant match in LLE for 50% of central concepts.

☐ Not Suitable Clearly a cultural mismatch in LLE.

Comment

Cultural Image and Examples: To be accepted, an instruction must present cultural images and examples in realistic and positive ways.

Check One: ☐ Superior: Images and examples present culture in positive ways.

☐ Adequate Neutral presentation of cultural images and foods.

☐ Not Suitable Negative images such as exaggerated or caricatured cultural characteristics, actions, or examples.

Comment

Suitable for your population? Considering the socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds present in your population and your review of *the Beginnings Guides Curriculum* , would you recommend *Beginnings* for your program. Circle the number that shows the strength of your recommendation.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
NO										YES

Definitely not recommended

Recommended without reservation

Please share your results with us. Your feedback will help us continue to improve the *Guides*.

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