

Tips for Creating Education Materials!

Technology has made new tools available to dietetics professionals for counseling and teaching patients. These tools allow us to work creatively and tailor materials to our specific needs.

When developing a patient education booklet for new ESRD clients, we received estimates from a typesetter of about \$100 per page for layout! After briefly considering this expense we changed to plan BDo it ourselves!

We found a variety of good software publishing programs that are affordable, user-friendly, and reliable. The program we selected, Microsoft® Publisher®, cost about \$100 and came with a good selection of clip art and online support. Permission from our corporate office was obtained to add this software to our dialysis center's computer, with the stipulation that the center would be responsible for any problems incurred. In no time at all, professional looking publications were coming hot and heavy "off the press", our color printer.

The tools and skills for working with this type of software are very basic and editing is the same as in any word processing program. After a brief introduction and a few "trials and errors", diet booklets, holiday recipes and instruction aids were easily produced from ideas that had been stacked in a huge pile for too long.

The software can be used to make publications from scratch or from designs already set up. Tutorial assistance and "help" options are available to get you started. Elements such as color scheme or format can be changed with a click of the mouse. As you work with the program you'll become adept at tailoring these designs to serve your needs, and the final product is an expression of your own vision and creativity!

Simplicity - Consistency - Contrast

Knowing how to apply some basic principles of design will help you produce publications with a professional look. Three key words to remember are simplicity, consistency and contrast.

Simplicity avoids a cluttered, confusing look

Limit the number of elements on each page. Hold your publication up to a mirror about five feet away. From that distance, skim the page and count the times your eye stops. If you count more than five elements, either eliminate some or group related items.

Use white space to make key information stand out. White space rests the eye and will visually sort the main details of the publication for your reader.

Align the elements in your publication. Alignment pleases the eye and simplifies reading. The programs are set up to help you achieve precise alignment.

Consistency unifies

Although consistency matters on a single-page, it is especially important in longer publications. Inconsistency will create confusion and distract readers from the intended message. To achieve consistency:

- ✓ Keep the spacing consistent throughout. Keep margin widths the same: 1/2 inch is recommended.
- ✓ Maintain the same amount of space between each heading and its body text, or between pictures and captions.
- ✓ Use fonts consistently.
- ✓ Size major headings and subheadings consistently.
- ✓ Use one alignment for a publication or set of publications. For example, if your letterhead text is left aligned, use left alignment for related publications, such as business cards.
- ✓ Use color consistently throughout a publication. Color schemes are set up ready for you to choose from if needed.
- ✓ Use the same style for decorative elements, such as borders. Decorative elements should fit and enhance the theme and not compete with your message for attention.

Contrast pulls the reader's eye to what is important

Using a background will tell the reader where to look and what to remember. Use big bold type or a large graphic to get the point across.

Fonts - Graphics - Color

Basic elements of design will dress up the publication so that it conveys your message, in your style, for the results you want. Key elements of design are:

1. Fonts

- ✓ There are thousands of fonts, also called type or typeface. They will fall into three main categories - serif, sans serif and script. Serif are small curls on a letter. Sans Serif fonts have no curls. Script fonts are designed to make letters look connected, imitating handwriting. For easy reading use sans serif for the main text. Limit the fancy fonts for a headline that can be more easily read.

- ✓ Size of font is also important. Type is usually 10-12 points. For those with failing eyesight it may be larger, 14-18 points for the basic message. Headings and titles can be 24-36 points. One inch equals 72 points. Experiment to see what works best for your publication.

2. Graphics

- ✓ The old saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words" expresses the effectiveness of illustrations to reinforce the text. Clients who have difficulty reading benefit from materials that include pictures of allowed and restricted foods. Pictures are also very useful for simplifying more complex concepts!
- ✓ The software comes with graphics on CD, which are categorized by theme. All you do is click on the clip art icon and pick the graphic you want to try. Graphics come in a variety of prices and we have since purchased a more extensive collection. The Web is also a source for graphics. If you want to use pictures from other publications, be sure to get permission from the copyright owner by writing to the author or publisher. Like printed material, electronic material is also protected by copyright. Permission must first be obtained from the owner. Some sources invite copy of their material for educational purposes.

3. Color

- ✓ Color is dramatic. Who can forget that moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy's real world becomes a colorful dream? Color will aid with attention, comprehension and retention.
- ✓ If you don't have a color printer, copy your work onto ~ disc and make color copies at a copy center. However, at a price of about \$1.00 per page, this can become expensive. If using a color printer, color cartridges are also an expense to consider. We have reserved color copies for bulletin board displays and teaching aids kept in protective covers to be used one on one. Black and white copies are given out in greater numbers.
- ✓ Another trick to make the most of color cartridges is to tint the graphics to a lighter shade. This uses less color, prevents garishly bright colors, and also enables you to print front to back without the color showing through.

Don't be afraid to try technology's new innovations. You may know someone who will let you try his or her software to make a simple handout. You may want to employ or implore your kids to assist you. Kids are really adept at this sort of thing and will learn to use a new software program in the process. The possibilities are endless, the process is a lot of fun, and the results are very useful.