Tips On Presenting Facts and Figures

Purpose	This tool provides guidelines and tips on presenting facts and figures to professional audiences.
Format	The tips are presented in a concise bulleted format for easy use. The list also contains additional resources for presenting data creatively.
Audience	This tool is designed primarily for researchers from the Model Systems that are funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The tool can be adapted by other NIDRR-funded grantees and the general public.

Audience

- Know your audience. Who is requesting facts and figures? Who is using the information and how? What is the format they prefer? Are they looking to scoop up a paragraph about trends? Do they want to reproduce a graph or table for a report? Target your facts and figures sheets toward audience needs.

- Professional audiences skim and scan. Focus your writing and displays to help readers quickly grab and grasp the information that is relevant to their needs.

- Professional audiences often want more technical detail than other audiences. Address these needs by creating a brief fact sheet that layers information from general to specific and provides links to resources for those who want a deeper dive.

- Busy professionals need plain language too. Technical language can be misinterpreted by even the most sophisticated reader, so use it sparingly and purposefully.

Purpose

- Begin with a couple of sentences about the purpose of the fact sheet. Focus on what you want the readers to know, do, and feel**.** What contextual information do readers need to know? What can they do with the information? How is this information different from/the same as previous "facts and figures"? What do you want them to feel? For example, you may wish them to have an emotional connection to the people who experience spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, or burn injury.

- Convey a welcoming tone through casual, conversational language to invite the reader to learn about the data. Help the reader use the information by giving some examples.

- Provide the "bottom line" summary in the first paragraph so readers can easily determine whether the fact sheet is relevant to their needs.

Tell a story

- Organize data around a theme, such as how rehabilitation for spinal cord injury has shifted to outpatient facilities or that the types of burn injuries are changing over time.

- Use topic sentences to quickly convey the main idea. Then follow with descriptive detail.

- Use a combination of words and graphics to tell the story. Be sure to provide context for the graphs, such as a sentence or two explaining the relevance of the data, or link the data to an important question.

Group data into manageable chunks

- Break the information into manageable chunks, such as short paragraphs that focus on a single idea.

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MSKTC
SCI · TBI · BURN

Model Systems
Knowledge Translation
Center

- Put the most important information first.

- Use consistent formatting such as bold print, consistent section names, headings, and bullets to provide visual cues about the organization of the material. These signposts help make the material easy to scan, so readers can find what they need quickly and find it again if they need to without rereading everything.

- KISS—Keep it Short and Simple. Hit the highlights and provide references for those who want to dig deeper.

- Use descriptive headings such as "The most common cause of burn injury is fire/flame." Descriptive headings help readers interpret data and target the information most relevant to them.

Make data meaningful

- Charts and tables can quickly convey data patterns to add meaning to numbers. Be sure to introduce charts and tables with a sentence or two about their purpose and what they show.

- Make visual displays clean and uncluttered. Limit the information to one page and focus on the data most relevant to the point you are making. That is, illustrate the data the reader "needs to know" and eliminate the "nice to know."

- Order the data in charts and tables to illustrate the key finding. For example, sort the data by most common cause of burn injury to least common cause of burn injury.

- Be sure to explain the measures, not just define them. For example, explain what is meant by quality-of-life measures and why it is important to consider them. When defining measures, be sure to describe how a measure is scored. For example: The SF12 physical health score measures x. Scores range from a low of x to a high of z.

- Use data labels that give cues to the meaning of the data, such as whether a high number/score is good or bad.

- Add contextual information to data such as explanatory information, narratives, and real-life examples to help readers understand why the information is important and how it is relevant to their personal situation.

Resources for presenting data

- Get inspired by these creative presentations—Infographics
http://sixrevisions.com/graphics-design/40-useful-and-creative-infographics/
- Dig deeper into making data meaningful by reading Making Data Meaningful by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/writing/MDM_Part2_English.pdf

Plain Language

- Use plain language to make information more accessible. Plain language is not "dumbing down" and it is not just about reading level. Instead, plain language uses clear, direct speech and writing that does not include jargon.

- Plain language is more than words. It focuses on helping readers quickly and easily
    - Find what they need;
    - Understand what they find; and
    - Act appropriately on that understanding.

Plain Language Resources

- "Plain Language Action & Information Network," includes "Writing User-Friendly Documents," http://www.plainlanguage.gov

- "CDC's Plain Language Thesaurus for Health Communications," http://www.plainlanguage.gov/populartopics/health_literacy/index.cfm (fifth item under "Federal Agency Links about Health Literacy")

- "Research-Based Web Design & Usability Guidelines," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, http://www.usability.gov/guidelines/guidelines_book.pdf

- "Simply Put," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply_Put.pdf