

Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM)

From: Doak, C. C., Doak, L. G. & Root, J. H. (1996). Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills (2nd Ed.). Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, pages 49-59.

The first time you use SAM, follow the six steps below:

1. Read through the SAM factor list and the evaluation criteria.
2. Read the material (or view the video) you wish to evaluate and write brief statements as to its purpose(s) and key points.
3. For short instructions, evaluate the entire piece. For long instructions, select samples to evaluate.
4. Evaluate and score each of the 22 SAM factors. Calculate total suitability score.
6. Decide on the impact of deficiencies and what action to take.

Using SAM to evaluate a health care instruction

1. Read the SAM instrument and the evaluation criteria.

2. Read the material to be assessed. Read (or view) the material you plan to evaluate. It will help if you write brief statements as to its purpose(s) and its key points. Refer to these as you evaluate each SAM factor. Use a note pad to jot down comments and observations as you read the material, view the video, or listen to the audiotape.

3. The sampling process for SAM is somewhat similar to that described earlier for selecting samples to apply a readability formula. If you are applying SAM to a short material such as a single-page instruction or a typical pamphlet (twofold or threefold), assess the entire instruction. Similarly, for audio-and videotaped instructions of less than 10 minutes, evaluate the entire instruction. Select three pages that deal with topics central to the purpose of the booklet. For booklets of more than 50 pages, increase the sample size to six pages. For video-or audiotaped instructions exceeding 10 minutes, select topics in 2-minute blocks from the beginning, middle, and end sections of the video or audio presentation.

4. Evaluate material vs. criteria for each factor, decide on its rating, and record it on the score sheet. As you seek to evaluate your material against each factor, you are likely to find wide

To apply SAM to a longer text, such as a booklet, vary the sample among different parts of your material. For any one factor, some parts may rate high (superior) while other parts of the same material rate low (unsuitable). For example, some illustrations may include captions while others do not. Resolve this dilemma by giving most weight to the part of your material that includes the key points that you previously identified in step 2 above.

Materials that meet the superior criteria for a factor are scored 2 points for that factor; adequate receives 1 point; not suitable receives a zero. For factors that do not apply, write N/A. Use the SAM scoring sheet to record your score for each of the 22 factors and to guide you in calculating the overall rating in percent.

5. Calculate the total suitability score. When you have evaluated all the factors, and written a score for each one on the score sheet, add up the scores to obtain a total score. Spaces to do this are provided on the score sheet. The maximum possible total score is 44 points (100 percent)—a perfect rating, which almost never happens. A more typical example: if the total score for your material is 34, your percent score is 34/44 or 77 percent.

For some instructional materials, one or more of the 22 SAM factors may not apply. For example, for an audiotape or a videotape, the text readability level (factor 2a) does not apply. To account for SAM factors that occasionally may not apply to a particular material, subtract 2 points for each N/A from the 44 total. Let's do that using the example from the paragraph above. If you arrived at a total score of 34 as noted above, but had one N/A factor, subtract 2 points from 44 to a revised maximum score of 42. Thus, the percent rating would become 34/42, for a rating of 81 percent.

Interpretation of SAM percentage ratings:

70-100 percent superior material
40-69 percent adequate material
0-39 percent not suitable material

6. Evaluate the impact of deficiencies; decide on revisions. A deficiency, especially an "unsuitable" rating, in any of the 22 factors is significant. Many of these can be readily overcome by revising a draft material or by adding a supplemental instruction to a material already published. However, factors in two of the groups, the readability level and cultural appropriateness, must be considered as potential go-no/go signals for suitability regardless of the overall rating.

For example, except in the rare cases where an instruction contains a set of illustrations that replicate the entire message given in the text, a written instruction with a very high readability level will not be understood and is unsuitable. Similarly, a material that portrays an ethnic group in an inappropriate way is almost surely unsuitable because it is likely to be rejected by members of that ethnic group.