



Creating Effective Brochures: A Guide for Content and Presentation

How-to Guides



Introduction

Your brochure may be the first thing a potential member or donor sees about your organization. An effective brochure is informative, attractive, and easy to read. Whether you plan to print thousands of glossy pamphlets designed by a professional or a black and white brochure produced at home, a few basic steps will help make your brochure successful.

This Guide addresses five basic steps to creating an effective brochure:

- Identify Your Audience
- Consider Your Audience's Reading Level
- Write the Text
- Design the Brochure
- Print the Brochure



Step 1: Identify Your Audience

First, identify the audience for your brochure. Do you want to reach the public, healthcare professionals, potential funders, or others? Be sure that your messages reflect the age, literacy skills, and the social and cultural diversity of your intended audience.

Tip:

- Remember, many healthcare professionals know as little as about specific genetic disease as the lay public.





Step 2: Consider Your Audience's Reading Level

Many popular publications are written at an eighth-grade reading level. Use the following guidelines to lower the reading level of your brochure if needed:

- Organize the information so the most important points come first.
- Keep sentences and words short.
- Use simple language and avoid jargon. If you must use technical terms, define them the first time they are used.
- Use graphics or visuals to illustrate difficult concepts.
- Use the active voice (“We found that...”) rather than the passive voice (“It was found that...”).
- Use headings and bullets to break up the text.

Testing the reading level is an easy way to make sure your information is available to everyone. Most word processing programs (such as Microsoft Word) can help you test the grade level, or “readability,” of your material, similar to the way you check spelling and grammar. This can be set up using your Tools or Preferences menu.

After you test the grade level you may have to change some of your text. Using words that have fewer than four syllables will lower the grade level. Using short sentences and paragraphs will also help.

Tips:

- Keep it simple! Your information will be more accessible to the reader and less overwhelming.
- Make your materials more reader-friendly by applying the Usability Scale, part of the *Trust It or Trash It?* tool. See the Resources section for more information on this tool.



Step 3: Write the Text

Begin by listing the key points covered in your brochure. Tailor the brochure's content to your audience. Potential donors might respond differently to information than newly diagnosed patients or healthcare providers. Depending on the audience, you may want to include information on some of the following topics:

- Description of the disease (including physical appearance, cause, and age at onset.)
- Description of who is affected, e.g., specific ethnic groups, males only, etc.
- Number of people who have the disease
- Genetic tests available
- Treatment options
- Lifestyle issues
- Family issues



- Financial issues and assistance available for services
- Support groups and other support systems
- What to expect over time
- Where to look for more information

The Content Scale, another component of the *Trust It or Trash It?* tool, includes additional topics that families, providers, and other experts felt were important to include in educational materials about genetic conditions.

Write your first draft and share it with as many people as possible to make sure that the material is easy to understand. If you have a scientific advisory board, ask the members to check the material for accuracy. Remember to include the publication date on the brochure so readers can tell whether the information is up-to-date.

Tips:

- Just because you understand it does not mean others will! Ask people from your intended audience to read the brochure to make sure it is clear.
- You do not need to include information on every topic. Too much text will clutter the brochure and may overwhelm your reader.
- The Quality Scale from the *Trust It or Trash It?* tool can be used to make certain that you include important information (such as the date of publication and your sources) that will allow your audience to have appropriate confidence in what they read.



Step 4: Design the Brochure

You have three choices when it comes to designing your brochure: hire a designer to design the entire brochure, hire a designer to create a template that you can use for multiple brochures, or design the brochure yourself.

Hire a designer to design the brochure

Although designers can be expensive, they provide a valuable service if you have the funding to hire one. A good designer will ensure that the look and feel of the brochure are consistent with your other print pieces and website.

If you decide to hire a designer, consider writing a request for proposals (RFP) and sending it to several designers in your area. The RFP provides all of the brochure specifications and will help you save money by selecting the designer with the best price. A good RFP includes:

- Your organization's mission statement
- Purpose and audience for the brochure
- Size of the brochure (for example, three panels)
- Black and white or color
- Whether or not you want the designer to manage the printing process
- Number of images or photos the brochure will include and whether the designer will find them for you
- Deadline for final product
- Name and contact information of the contact person in your organization



Ask each designer to provide recommendations, a cost proposal, and some samples of previous work. Choose the designer who provides the most attractive work for the least amount of money.

Hire a designer to create a template

A less expensive option is to hire a designer to create a template that you can use for your brochure and other print pieces. The template typically includes the organizational logo and colors and will give your publications a professional appearance. You will be able to use the template for publications such as annual reports and fact sheets.

Design the brochure on your own

If hiring a designer is not an option, you can design the brochure on your own computer. Your design choices may be more limited, but your brochure can still be effective and attractive. There are computer programs that can help with design. Some of these are inexpensive and easy to use.

Here are suggestions for designing your brochure:

- Leave lots of white space in the margins and between paragraphs.
- Use visuals that help illustrate your message.
- Use at least a 12-point font.
- Use headings and bullets to break up the text.

Tip:

- The Usability Scale, part of the *Trust It or Trash It?* tool, provides other points to consider when creating an effective, eye-catching brochure.



Step 5: Print the Brochure

Some organizations have their brochures professionally printed, while others prefer to print them in-house.

Hire a printer

If you plan to hire a printer, contact several in your area and ask for an estimate. Again, consider writing a RFP to get the best possible price. The printer will need to know:

- Number of copies you need
- Size of the brochure
- Weight and finish of the paper (glossy or matte)
- Number of colors (cost generally increases with the number of colors)
- How the brochure will be folded
- Your deadline

Request a written estimate from the printer to avoid surprises about final costs. Ask to review the final page proofs of the brochure. Review all proofs carefully! This is your last chance to catch any mistakes or to change your mind about color or paper quality. If you do not like the proofs, you will not like the final product. Do not be afraid to speak up!



Tips:

- Consider printing at least 1,000 copies of your brochure. As the print count goes up, the cost per copy goes down, and you will have extras to distribute should the need arise.
- Proofread the content very carefully before you send it to the printer. You likely will have to pay for changes in the page proofs that are not the result of the printer's errors.

Desktop publishing

Another option is to print the brochures directly from your desktop computer. Office supply stores carry paper with different finishes (such as glossy or matte) and designs. Decide how you want the brochure folded; trifold is the most common method. Desktop publishing also allows you to print only what you need while still being cost effective. Alternatively, you can ask a commercial photocopy company such as Kinko's to print and fold your brochure.

Tip:

- Before you print, be sure to proofread carefully. Ask more than one person to proofread the brochure. Mistakes can be costly!





Resources

Here are some additional resources to assist in the development of your brochure:

www.trustortrash.org/developer

Developed as part of the Access to Credible Genetics Resource Network, the *Trust It or Trash It?* tool provides essential questions to consider when developing materials. It includes a Content Scale, Quality Scale, and Usability Scale.

www.bluecentauri.com/tools/writer/sample.php

This site tests literacy level in the same way as Word. It is for people who cannot access Word on their computers.

www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/SMOG.html

This site uses the SMOG (Simplified Measure Of Gobbledygook) to test for literacy.

chcs.org

This site contains health literacy fact sheets. Search “health literacy” to find them.

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/etr.html

This site gives tips for writing health materials that are easy to read.

www.health.gov/communication/literacy/quickguide/Quickguide.pdf

This is a quick guide to health literacy with fact sheets, strategies, and resources.

