Tailoring Messages 201
The “How-To” of Message Development

PART 1 – Before Message Writing Begins

Consider a Message Writing Approach for Each Section of Your Program
Approach 1 – Write a Counseling Session
- Write messages for one particular person, like you are counseling
- Go back and fill in tailoring for everyone else

Approach 2 – Address the Topic
- List all variations of the central tailoring theme/topic
- Go back and begin to fill in messages
- Build in other appropriate tailoring characteristics as appropriate

Approach 1
As a counselor, you might ask the following question of someone who quit smoking but was struggling to stay quit—"to help them find reasons to continue to motivate them. Write how you might imagine someone responding or use real world responses if you have them. Then add logic to fit the response.

Why did you decide to quit?

Well, I had a couple of good reasons for quitting. First, we needed to save money to put towards a car that would actually work. Second, my husband wanted me to. Third, I didn't like leaving the fun when I'd have to step outside to smoke at places that didn’t allow smoking inside. It made me feel like an outcast. Plus, it wasn’t really fair to the kids for me to tell them not to smoke while I did. “Do as I say, not as I do” isn’t such a great example to set.
Writing good tailored messages demands more than creativity; it requires effectively translating background research, appropriate theories, and message descriptions into meaningful action steps in helping the recipient enact desired changes.

1. What Are You Writing About?
   - The main purpose should be easy to identify.
   - Provide specific action steps when needed.
   - Be explicit in describing action steps.
   - Use the active voice.

2. Who Are You Writing To?
   - Directly address the individual reader (use “you”).
   - Adjust/Avoid technical or scientific jargon depending on audience.
   - Assure reading level is appropriate for audience.

3 Questions to Keep You Focused

1. What are you writing about?
2. Who are you writing to?
3. Is your information presented clearly?
3. Is Your Information Presented Clearly?

- Each component should have a clear organizational structure.
- Express ideas concisely.
- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations.
- Use descriptive adjectives.
- Use action-oriented verbs.
- Use clear examples to illustrate or reinforce important points.
- Messages should not exaggerate health benefits, or in any way mislead readers.

Track References/Resources

Track References and Resources used for messages and survey questions:

- Statistics
- Quotes
- Studies
- Scales

A client, team member, an Institutional Review Board, or a participant WILL ask – so be prepared.

What Can Stop You in Your Tracks

- Survey Changes
- Program Outline Changes
- Lack of Audience Buy-In

PART 3 – Getting Technical

If...Then...

If...Then...Else If...Then...

Example: Consider the decision about what to wear to work.

1. IF it will be cold outside today and it will be cold at my office, THEN I need to wear something warm and bring a coat.
2. ELSE IF it will be cold outside today and it will be warm at my office, THEN I need to wear something light and bring a coat.
3. ELSE IF it will be warm outside today and cold at my office, THEN I need to wear something light and bring a jacket or sweater.
4. ELSE IF it will be warm outside today and warm at my office, THEN I need to wear something light.
5. IF none of these choices can be met, then you have to go with a default or back-up plan (e.g., most of my clothes are dirty so I will have to wear whatever is clean).
You want to tailor on X

Answers to A, B, C, and D are all relevant to X and you want to tailor based on them.

Create a matrix to reveal the number of messages needed to cover all responses.
### Algorithm of Survey Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOGIC</th>
<th>MESSAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QuitReasonGoodExample&gt;=5</td>
<td>You feel it's important to quit because you want to set a good example for others by quitting. You are sending them a powerful message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuitReasonProudOthers&gt;=5</td>
<td>You feel it's important to quit because you know others will be proud of you. It can be quite uplifting to please others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuitReasonOthersUpset&gt;=5</td>
<td>You feel it's important to quit because you know others will be upset with you if you continue to smoke. Turn this thought around and think of how happy they will be when you quit for good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QuitReasonNoLetDown&gt;=5</td>
<td>You feel it's important to quit because you don’t want to let others down. Turn this thought around and think of how happy they will be when you quit for good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A Word About Default Messages

When writing default messages for a tailored health communication program there are 3 basic strategies:

1. **Posing Questions Default Message**
   - Poses the same kind of questions that were asked in the survey but that were left unanswered by the participant.
   - Raising the questions again focuses the individual on the topic, and may get individual to self-assess while reading/watching/listening.

2. **Presenting "If - Then" Contingencies**
   - Allows individual to self-select.
   - "If A was a problem for you, you might try this; if B was a problem for you, try that;"

3. **Covering All Possible Bases**
   - Includes concepts from each of the tailored messages in the topic set.
   - Generic, but provides all potential important points relating to that message.

### The Need for Review

Continued Testing
- Logic/Message Match Checks (i.e.: high stress logic paired with high stress message)

Editorial Review
- Copy
- Medical
- Behavioral
- Also consider “tone” review if multiple writers

### Questions?