

PATIENT-FRIENDLY WEB CONTENT

The Background

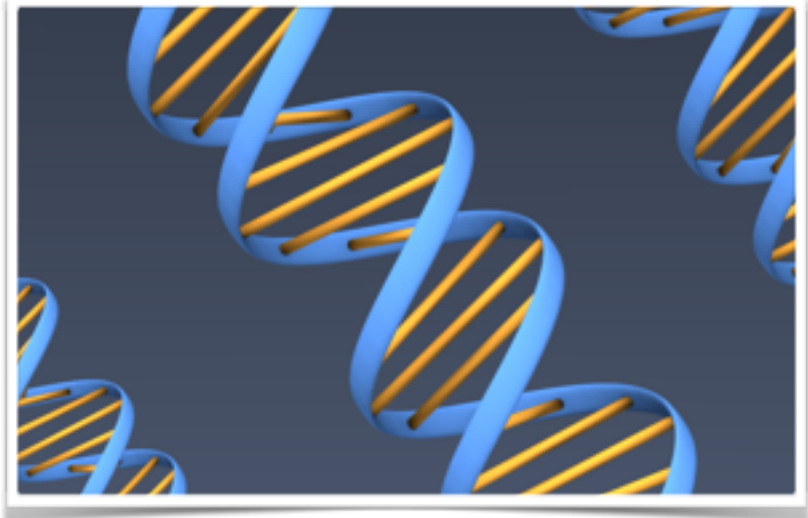
One of the largest multinational pharmaceutical and diagnostics companies needed an overhaul of their existing website to answer patients' questions about a health condition and related diagnostic testing.

The Challenge

The company was well-versed in writing for researchers or clinicians. It had significantly less experience in writing for the average consumer. This was evident in the existing text, which was dense, complex, and far beyond the recommended sixth-grade reading level for consumer-facing text.

The Request

"We want clinicians to be able to refer patients here for more information. Can you make the content accessible to a broader audience?" The basic structure of the website, divided into clinical and consumer sections, would remain the same.

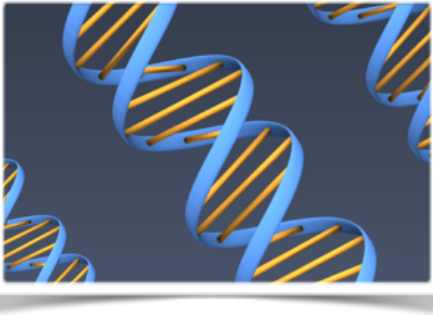


The First Step

Having worked with the company in the past, I was already familiar with the basics of the genotyping technology and its use in healthcare.

My goal was to keep the text as straightforward as possible to meet the goal of the sixth grade reading level: shorter sentences, smaller words, and more white space so patients would feel more comfortable and less overwhelmed by this complex topic.

Why a sixth grade level? Studies have shown that patients' comprehension may be compromised if the content exceeds the seventh grade level, the average reading level as identified by the US Department of Health and Human Services.* It also makes the text more accessible to patients for whom English is not their native language.



What Changed?

- The site's reading level was reduced to sixth grade or below to ensure comprehension. This benefits both native English speakers, and those for whom English is not their primary language.
- Complex terminology is defined in a glossary for easy reference.
- The full scope of the patient experience is now covered, from "Why should I be tested?" to "What do my results mean?" and "What happens next?"
- Real patient stories bring humanity to an abstract clinical process.

The Company

Revenue: \$45 billion

Employees: 88,000

Industry: Healthcare

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The Structure

I started by addressing basic questions that a patient might ask, and then moved on to advanced topics. What are we testing for, and why? What should a patient expect at the doctor's office? Does it hurt? Where can they be tested? How much does the test cost, and is it covered by insurance? Why are diagnostic tests important? How does this new approach differ from older forms of testing? What are the screening guidelines at what ages?

I closed with a follow-up section for those who had already been tested. What do the results mean? What happens if the result is positive? What are the follow-up steps?

The new site also includes a comprehensive glossary of important terms that are linked throughout the text.

We also included a section of real patient stories to put a personal face on an abstract clinical concept. These stories included everything from the importance of routine screening, to how individual patients coped with their positive diagnosis.

All content was run through an online screening tool to independently assess reading level and ensure comprehension.

The Result

The patient-facing site is now clean and easy to follow. It serves as a single resource that provides everything that a patient would need to know about this particular form of diagnostic testing.

* Walsh TM, Volsko TA. Readability assessment of internet-based consumer health information. *Respir Care*. 2008 Oct;53(10):1310-1315.