

Tips for Identifying Clients with Limited Literacy

David Godfrey

1: Don't assume or stereotype

2: Persons with LL frequently:

- a) have difficulty giving you common personal information
- b) miss deadlines or appointments
- c) have failed to respond to notices
- d) say they have lost or never received paperwork
- e) only partially complete the forms and know the answers when asked.
- f) forgot their reading glasses
- g) have difficulty giving or receiving directions
- h) won't make notes or write down directions
- i) have another person with them
- j) have difficulty budgeting, paying bills and avoiding financial problems
- k) can't tell you what it is that they signed
- l) are repeated victims of scams and frauds
- m) make bad buying decisions
- n) have difficulty at work, fail to be promoted
- o) can understand short simple paragraphs but have difficulty with long or complex materials
- p) can read you something, but can't explain what it means

3: On a house call, look around the living room for reading materials. In the office what do they do to pass the time in the waiting room?

4: Always ask if the client has received anything that might help you understand the problem. Ask if anything was left on their door, handed to them, or received in the mail. If they don't understand the document they may not think that it is important or may be embarrassed to show it to you.

Statistics on Limited Literacy in the United States
David Godfrey

- 1) 25% of adults have are unable to properly address an envelope
- 2) 25% of adults are unable to comprehend long or complex texts
- 3) The average adult reads at an 8th grade level
- 4) Adults with very low literacy work on average of 19 weeks per year (compared to 44 weeks per year for persons with the highest level of literacy.)
- 5) Adults read one to two grade levels below their highest level of education
- 6) 62% of persons with very low literacy did not complete high school
- 7) 38% of persons with very low literacy finished high school
- 8) The median income of persons in the lowest measured literacy level is \$240 a week
- 9) 44% of persons in the lowest level of literacy live at or below the federal poverty level
- 10) Persons with limited literacy are 22% less likely to vote than someone with high literacy
- 11) Nearly half of adults are unable to write a letter about a billing error or calculate the time needed to travel from a printed schedule
- 12) Business loose \$25-\$30 billion dollars every year due to low literacy

Drafting documents for clients with limited literacy

Keith L. Morris

Organizing the document to make it more readable

- a. Structuring your document to make it easier to understand
- b. The importance of aesthetics: font size, white space, etc.
- c. Using different formats to convey the information
 - i. FAQs
 - ii. Letters
 - iii. Brochures
 - iv. Titled Sections
- d. Deciding what level of detail is appropriate
 - II. Avoid sounding like a lawyer
 - a. Building trust through clear communication
 - b. Be careful about using legal terms of art
 - c. Try to avoid non-restrictive phrases that make the subject and verb hard to find