SWOG CANCER RESEARCH NETWORK

7 Key Plain Language Best Practices

for Communicating About Clinical Trials

1 **Use simple terms.** Choose words that people (who aren't working in your field!) are likely to use or hear in everyday conversation. If you have to use a technical term because your audience needs to know it, define it with clear, simple language.

2 **Use a friendly tone.** Think of having a one-on-one conversation. (Read your content out loud to see how it sounds!) Refer to readers directly (with "you") and use contractions. Avoid directives, like "should" or "must."

3 **Focus on "need-to-know" info.** At the beginning of the material, include a clear main message (the most important thing you want people to do or know). Leave out "nice-to-know" details. But remember, you can refer people elsewhere for more information.

4 **Break up text.** Divide the material into short sections with clear headers. Visually emphasize key points, like with bolding or callout boxes. Use bullets and numbered lists.

5 **Keep content short.** Aim for no more than:

- 250 words on a page
- 3 sentences in a paragraph
- 20 words in a sentence

6 **Use active voice.** That's when the subject of the sentence is doing the action instead of receiving the action.

7 **Make numbers easy to understand.** Use whole numbers and numerals ("7," not "7.1" or "seven"), provide context and visual metaphors, and do the math for readers.

Remember the patient-friendly summary!
Keep in mind that SWOG provides plain language trial summaries you can use to help trial participants (and potential participants) understand what a trial entails. For example, you can provide a patient-friendly summary to introduce someone to a trial. Or you can use the summary as a shorter, easy-to-understand companion to the informed consent document. Find a study's patient-friendly summary at:

- **swog.org/[study number]** — for example, swog.org/S2408 (for a printable version, click the PDF icon on the right side of the page above the summary title)
- **ctsu.org** — on the protocol abstract page, click the Documents tab and then the CIRB Approved Documents tab, then search for "summary" in the Document Title filter