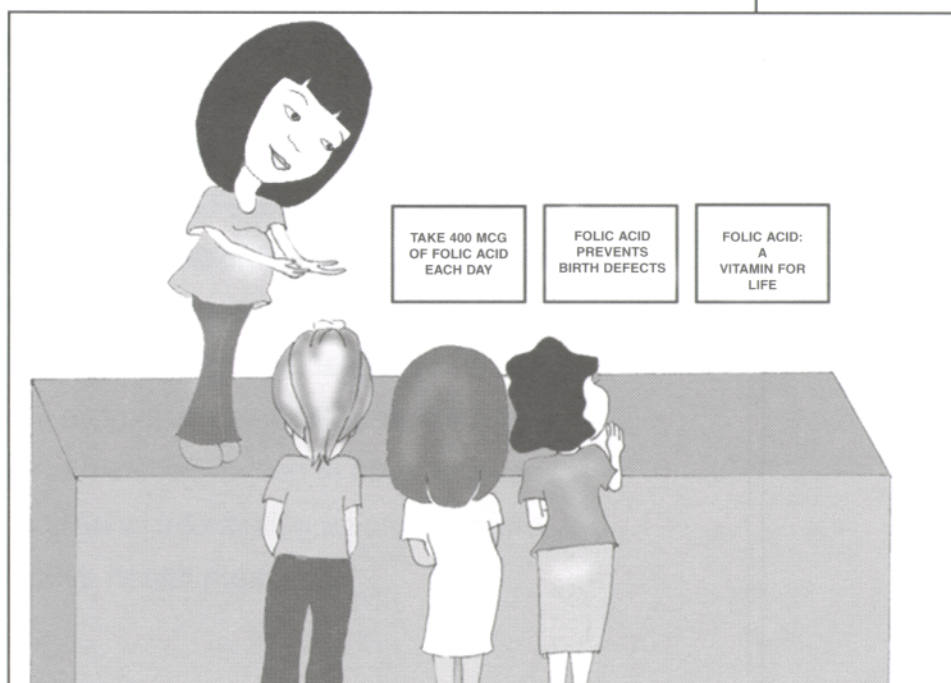


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## Step 3: Test Your Messages and Materials

### Step 3 will help you to:

- Create compelling messages and materials.
- Learn how to test messages and use the results.
- Gain support from community leaders.



### 3.1 Create Message(s) for Your Intended Audience

*Now the fun begins!* It is time to create or adapt the messages and means for reaching your audience(s). You have a lot of great information to develop some interesting, appealing, and compelling messages for each group of women you want to reach. If you are not creative by nature, then you will want to approach people in your community who are creative—art students or teachers, advertising agency personnel, marketers, and theater participants, for example. You should use the information that you have gathered to develop a message that appeals to your audience and motivates them to meet your objectives. To supplement your effort, the CDC will have tested messages and materials available by January 1999. These messages and materials will have been tested for English- and Spanish-speaking groups of women intending to get pregnant soon, and those not planning a pregnancy. You are welcome to take these messages and materials and adapt them to your organization's and target audience's needs. Call CDC's Birth Defects and Pediatric Genetics Division at (770) 488-7160 or e-mail [flo@cdc.gov](mailto:flo@cdc.gov) for more health communication information.

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## 3.2 Test Your Ideas With the Intended Audience

Create “mock-ups” or samples of your message, including the text and pictures, and show them to partners and members of your audience. Ask them to give you specific feedback on what you show them and listen to their comments. It can be hard not to be defensive about your creation, but it is important to listen and probe members of the target audience to understand which elements of your message work and which ones do not—and why. If you think you cannot do this objectively, find someone else to do it for you.

You can *pretest* your messages among members of your intended audience in a number of ways, including *self-administered questionnaires*, *in-depth interviews*, *central-location intercept interviews* (e.g., in a mall), *focus group interviews* and *theater tests*. All of these methods have the same goal: to obtain reactions to your materials. The methods differ as to where you gather this information and whether reactions are obtained from individuals or groups.

Materials in a language other than English should be tested with speakers of that language. It is important to test the message and materials for language usage and to make sure they are culturally appropriate and relevant. Be sure there are no mistakes in materials written in other languages. See Appendix B for additional information on creating and testing culturally effective health messages.

<b>MATCHING A PRETESTING METHOD TO YOUR NEEDS</b>						
	<b>Readability Tests</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Individual Interviews</b>	<b>Central Location Interviews</b>	<b>Mail Questionnaires</b>	<b>Theater Tests</b>
<b>1. Concept Development</b>		X	X	X		
<b>2. Poster</b>	X	X		X		
<b>3. Flyer</b>	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>4. Booklet</b>	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>5. Notification Letter</b>	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>6. Storyboard</b>		X		X		
<b>7. Radio PSA</b>		X		X		X
<b>8. TV PSA</b>		X		X		X
<b>9. Videotape</b>		X		X		X

The following table provides a summary and the pros & cons of each testing method:

Pretest Method	Description	Pros	Cons
<p><u>SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE</u></p> <p>Minimum of 20 respondents (100 to 200 is ideal)</p> <p><u>Resources needed</u> List of potential respondents, questionnaire, analysis expertise, postage if necessary</p>	<p>Individual audience members review draft materials and complete a questionnaire pertaining to the materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Inexpensive (does not require staff time to interact with people)</li> <li>* Anonymous</li> <li>* Accessible (can reach homebound, rural, other difficult-to-reach groups)</li> <li>* Easy and usually quick for respondents</li> <li>* Flexible (respondents can do at their own pace and at a convenient time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Response rate may be low (if mailed)</li> <li>* May require follow-up</li> <li>* May take too long to receive sufficient responses</li> <li>* Respondents choose to respond, leaving out those who do not want to take the survey room for a potential bias</li> <li>* Does not control how a respondent sees and interacts with the materials, which may lead to respondents giving answers that would be different in other viewing circumstances</li> <li>* May not be appropriate if audience has limited writing skills</li> </ul>
<p><u>IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS</u></p> <p>At least 10 respondents per group of women</p> <p><u>Resources needed</u> List of potential respondents, possibly money to pay to interviewees, trained interviewer, telephone or quiet room, tape recorder, analysis expertise</p>	<p>Individual audience members review draft materials and are asked questions about them in an in-depth, face-to-face interview.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* In-depth response may differ from first response</li> <li>* Can test sensitive or emotional materials</li> <li>* Can test longer, more complex materials</li> <li>* Can learn more about "hard to reach" audiences</li> <li>* Can be used with individuals who have limited reading and writing skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Can be time consuming to conduct and analyze</li> <li>* May yield no patterns in responses, especially if number of interviews is limited</li> <li>* Incentive gifts may be needed</li> </ul>

Pretest Method	Description	Pros	Cons
<p><u>CENTRAL-LOCATION INTERCEPT INTERVIEWS</u></p> <p>Sixty to 100 interviews per target audience</p> <p><u>Resources needed</u> Trained interviewers, questionnaire, analysis expertise, access to a central location, quiet spot for the interview</p>	<p>Individual audience members review draft materials and are asked a few questions in a brief interview in a public place (for example, malls and stores.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Can quickly conduct a large number of interviews and analyze closed-end responses</li> <li>* Can be inexpensive</li> <li>* Can test many kinds of materials</li> <li>* Can be designed to provide reliable information for decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Cannot provide in-depth answers or probe sensitive issues</li> <li>* Participants may need incentives</li> <li>* Sample is restricted to individuals at a location</li> <li>* Respondents that choose to cooperate may not be representative</li> </ul>
<p><u>FOCUS GROUPS</u></p> <p>Eight to 12 people per group, at least two groups per type of respondents</p> <p><u>Resources needed</u> Four to 6 weeks planning time, incentives for each focus group, trained moderator, discussion outline, meeting room, food, recording equipment, analysis expertise</p>	<p>A small group of audience members review draft materials and are asked a series of probing questions which the group discusses together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Can provide many in-depth opinions about one or many issues, concepts, or materials</li> <li>* Can trigger creative thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Responses may be influenced by the opinions of others in the group</li> <li>* Cannot probe sensitive or complex questions</li> <li>* Cannot provide statistical data for consensus and decision making</li> <li>* Need gift initiative</li> <li>* Should provide food (snacks and beverages)</li> </ul>

Pretest Method	Description	Pros	Cons
<p><u>THEATER TESTS</u></p> <p>Sixty to 100 respondents per target audience</p> <p><u>Resources needed</u></p> <p>Large room, incentives for participants, questionnaire, analysis expertise, list of potential respondents, possibly audio/ video equipment</p>	<p>A large group of audience members reviews draft materials, which are embedded into other materials, and are asked to respond to brief written surveys.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Can test a large group inexpensively at once and analyze the data fairly quickly</li> <li>* Can simulate natural exposure to materials and help gauge how they compete with other messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Can be time-consuming to arrange</li> <li>* Can be expensive</li> </ul>

**To get useful results from pretesting, you must plan carefully.** Ample time should be scheduled for the following:

- Contract with research firms (if necessary).
- Arrange for the required facilities (1-2 weeks).
- Develop and test the questionnaire (2-3 weeks).
- Recruit interviewers and respondents (2-4 weeks).
- Gather the data (1-2 weeks).
- Analyze the results (1 week).
- Make appropriate changes in messages or materials.
- Pretest again, if needed.

Appendix B presents several references that provide detailed instructions on the focus group process, including how much a focus group costs, how to develop a guide for focus group moderators, and how to recruit participants. Also listed are contacts in other states who have done focus group testing for their own folic acid prevention programs. In addition, Appendix B contains references that detail other types of pretesting methods and includes some easy-to-read writing tips and the SMOG readability test to use in determining the reading levels of your materials. Remember to have fun doing this—you have a great opportunity to learn from audience members about what is important to them and what may influence their behavior.



### **3.3 Use Pretesting Results to Improve Your Materials**

#### **3.3-1 Look for Recurring Themes in What People Say**

Find out what they like or do not like about the materials, what they would change, and any suggestions they offer. Do not try to quantify the results of your pretesting (for example, counting the number of people who said “I like this or that”), and do not feel you have to respond to every single comment.

#### **3.3-2 List Recurring Themes and Relate Them to the Materials**

Group responses together, and try to describe the underlying idea behind the response groups. You can even “name” the groups of responses to help you remember what that underlying idea is. For example, in one pretest of materials, many respondents said that they were confused about 400 mcg. versus 0.4 mg. versus one multivitamin pill. Researchers titled this theme “Dosage Confusion” and chose to use the least confusing term for their materials: one multivitamin pill.

### **3.3-3 Adapt Your Materials, Incorporating the Major Themes**

Pretesting with the target audience told one group that its program message was too complex and the vocabulary level too high. The group then changed its brochure to read at the sixth-grade level. You can use the SMOG readability tests provided for you in Appendix B, or other tests.



#### **Partnering Tip**

A great community resource that is often overlooked for doing audience surveys is community adult-education programs. Students in these classes can often provide helpful feedback.

### **3.3-4 Pretest Your New Drafts**

If you have time and resources, take your revised draft back to your intended audience for a second review. If you use the same group of people, they will be encouraged to see that you really listened to them. The following is an example from a WIC organization that created and tested audience-appropriate messages and materials for a folic acid promotion event.

## Real World Examples



A community WIC office wanted to run a local media campaign related to folic acid for Mother's Day. Women who use WIC's services in this community are, in general, of low income levels, between ages 19 and 29, less educated, and unlikely to know enough about nutrition and vitamin supplementation to consume the recommended levels of folic acid. The WIC staff thought that their clients were also unlikely to be interested in seeking out information about health and nutrition or to think it was very important for themselves (as opposed to being important for their children).

The staff asked a random group of clients about their radio and television viewing and newspaper reading habits. Television was overwhelmingly the primary source of information for the group. WIC staff also questioned some of the women about their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about vitamins and folic acid. Most of the women did not know about folic acid and were not interested in taking vitamins. They did not buy vitamins very often, and if they did, it was mainly for their children. They also reported believing that they did not need vitamins for themselves and that they did not like taking pills. Only 18% reported taking vitamins one or more times per week (less than the national average of 26 to 30%). They did talk about how important their children's health was to them, however.

**FREE  
MOTHER'S DAY GIFT  
HERE!!!**

As a result of this information, the WIC staff decided to pursue a Mother's Day campaign message that would emphasize the importance of a mother taking folic acid supplements for her children's sake. To cater to their client's media habits and sources of knowledge, they sent the message out through a PSA that could be aired around Mother's Day on the local television stations during the daytime soaps and talk shows.



### 3.4 Show Your Revised Message to Important Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are people who control or influence whether the intended audience ever receives your materials. They can be internal or external. Internal gatekeepers are from the agency in which you work. External gatekeepers are people from outside your agency. External gatekeepers include people who either interact directly with audience members (for example, health care providers) or directly influence what information audience members receive (for example, program managers at radio or TV stations). The following lists three important actions to take when obtaining gatekeepers' approval of your program materials.

- You should show gatekeepers your draft materials and incorporate their feedback before producing your final materials. By doing so, you are acknowledging their influence on your audience which is likely to solidify their support, and also you are alerting them about what you will be needing from them in the future.
- It is very important to show gatekeepers your audience research and pretesting results along with your messages and materials. Gatekeepers may initially not like the materials you present but may be convinced to use them if shown your audience research and pretesting results. With your audience research and pretesting results, you can explain why the messages and materials you developed are likely to be effective.
- Most agencies have a "clearance" process, whereby materials are reviewed before they are printed and distributed to the public. Some basic elements of a review process include ensuring the accuracy of information and the appeal of the layout and design. Every agency's clearance process has different standards and time requirements by which materials are reviewed. Know these rules in advance so you can plan better.