Plain-Language Document

I created this plain-language document in response to an assignment for ENGL 516: Topics in Print Document Production, Fall 2014. My task was to create a plain-language document for West Valley Medical Center’s Family Maternity Center to educate patients about RhoGAM and Rh-negativity.

Context in which the document was created
West Valley Medical Center’s Family Maternity Center needed a plain-language document to distribute to patients who require the injection RhoGAM. The document needed to follow a similar format to their other handouts; it needed to fit on a one-sided 8 ½ x 11 inch sheet of standard copy paper. There was no restriction on color use, but the cost of production was a concern.

The primary audience of this document included Rh-negative women who will receive the RhoGAM injection in the near future. The secondary audience included individuals such as friends or family members of an Rh-negative woman scheduled to receive an injection who may have an interest in or play an active role in the health decisions of the Rh-negative woman.

The goals of this assignment were to demonstrate an understanding of and the application of the principles of plain language documentation and information design. The successful finished plain-language document needed to meet the following conditions:

- Educate the primary and secondary audience about RhoGAM and Rh-negativity
- Be aesthetically pleasing while at the same time purposeful, informational, and clear
- Demonstrate the author’s ability to write in plain language and work with a client to produce a document that meets the client’s needs
- Demonstrate effective use of usability testing to ensure the document meets the needs of the primary and secondary audience
- Provide West Valley Medical Center with a medically accurate, easy-to-read document that meets their delivery and document standards

The assignment required communication with West Valley Medical Center to gain an understanding of their needs, production of a plain-language document, usability testing of the document, editing based on the results of the usability testing, and the delivery of the document to West Valley Medical Center.

Process and tools
It was necessary to design this document so it could be easily edited in the future. I decided to design the document in Microsoft Word. West Valley Medical Center provided me a sample document they distribute to patients on another topic to use as a format and design reference. I also conducted additional research on key components in plain-language documents and found sample format and stylistic choices of plain-language documents.
Prior to beginning, I communicated with West Valley Medical Center about their needs and expectations for this document. I also conducted research on RhoGAM and Rh-negativity. The sample document West Valley Medical Center provided me was an unformatted one-page document with dense, text-heavy paragraphs that contained no headers. In an effort to improve the readability of my document, I elected to use bold Arial headers. I chose left-alignment and printed the body text in Times New Roman. The sample document was written entirely in Times New Roman, so this decision enhanced continuity between the other documents used by West Valley Medical Center and the plain-language document.

In an effort to improve the document’s clarity, I conducted both formative and summative usability testing at various stages in the editing process. This testing was beneficial in identifying elements that required additional explanation or rephrasing.

To make the document as easy to understand as possible, I revised it until it had a 7.1 grade-level reading score. While attempting to keep terminology as medically accurate as possible while still maintaining readability, I elected to use the term “baby,” rather than “infant,” throughout the document. It has the same number of syllables, causing it to affect the grade-level reading score similarly, but “baby” is easier to understand universally and is more personal.

**Strengths of the document**
An effective plain-language document is easy to read, easy to understand, and easy to navigate. This plain-language document received positive responses during usability testing and was well received by West Valley Medical Center. It falls within the recommended grade-level reading score range and follows Gestalt theory in proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast. All textual content maintains a left-alignment, and the paragraph header and text are placed in close proximity to identify their relationship. The headers and paragraph text contrast one another by being presented in a different typeface. The format and terminology repeats consistently throughout the document.

**Areas for improvement**
This document is effective as-is for print, but the Times New Roman typeface used for the paragraph text may not transfer well to a digital version. If given the opportunity to do additional work on this plain-language document again, I would either change the Times New Roman typeface to a sans serif font to improve the digital readability, or at least create a digital version of the same document that featured a sans serif font in the paragraph text.

If time had allowed, I also would have created a graphic representation of Rh-negativity to help the audience understand the concept more easily. Plain-language documents can benefit from an effective graphic, and I think an effective graphic would be beneficial to the audience of this document by providing an additional representation of the concept.