



Increasing Private Well Testing

A COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT FOR WATER TESTING LABORATORIES

June 2019

Increasing Private Well Testing: A Communications Toolkit for Water Testing Laboratories

Contributors

Representatives from the following agencies, associations, and businesses helped develop and review this toolkit:

- Association of Public Health Laboratories
- Minnesota Department of Health—Environmental Health Division
- Private Well Class at the University of Illinois



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Purpose

This toolkit is intended to be a resource for water testing laboratories that work with private well users. We started designing this toolkit to be specific to accredited laboratories in Minnesota, but the Private Well Class and Association of Public Health Laboratories said they were also interested in the toolkit. As such, the recommendations in this toolkit are framed so that laboratories outside of Minnesota can also use the information.

If your laboratory wants to expand communication about information private well users are looking for, this toolkit can help. Clear communications with private well users can:

- Provide private well users with the information they need to protect their health,
- Build customer trust, and
- Increase laboratory business.

Why Laboratories?

As a water testing laboratory, you are a key partner in protecting the health of over 43 million people in the United States who get their drinking water from a private well (USGS 2017). Private well owners are responsible for regularly testing their well water for contaminants that can cause short- and long-term health effects and ensuring their water is safe for everyone in their household to drink. A 2016 Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) survey of private well owners found that 43 percent of respondents look to water testing laboratories for information about how to manage their well and water quality (MDH 2016).

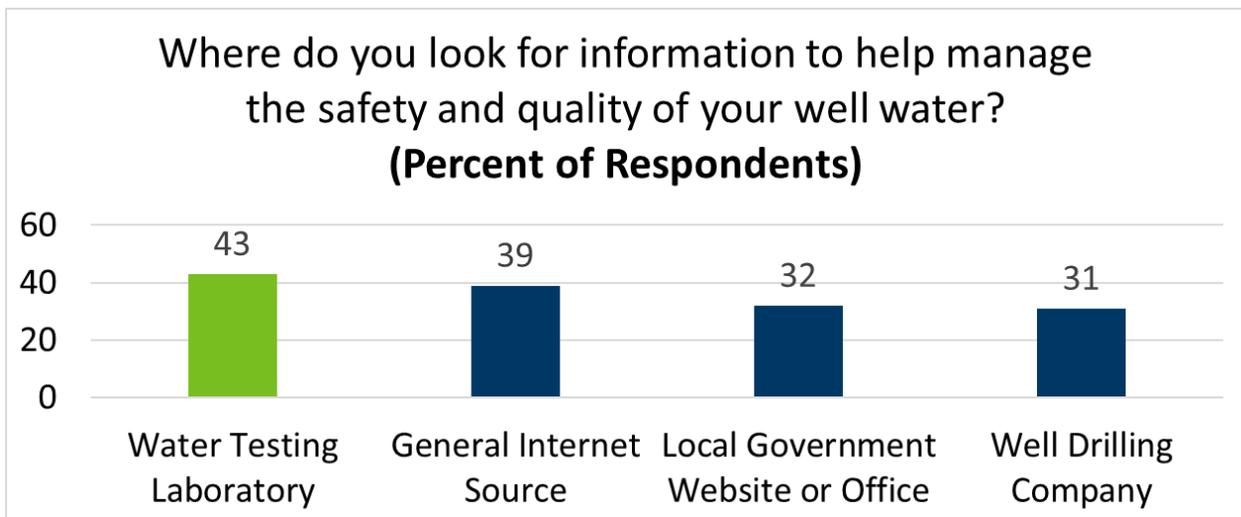


Figure 1: Survey results showing where private well owners look for information to help manage the safety and quality of their water.

What is in the Toolkit and How to Use It

This toolkit includes eleven recommendations for strengthening communications with private well owners and promoting well testing:

1. [Become an Accredited Laboratory](#), page 6
2. [Collaborate with State and Local Entities](#), page 6
3. [Make Well Testing Information Easy to Find on Your Website](#), page 7
4. [Link to Information about Contaminants](#), page 10
5. [Provide Well Testing Bundles](#), page 13
6. [Remind Well Users to Get Their Well Water Tested](#), page 16
7. [Provide Discounts or Coupons](#), page 18
8. [Provide Local Pickup and Drop-off Options](#), page 19
9. [Partner to Host Well Testing Clinics](#), page 21
10. [Make Lab Reports, Chain of Custody, and Other Documents Easier to Understand](#), page 22
11. [Promote Holistic Well Safety](#), page 26

Each recommendation includes the following sections:

- **Why?:** Why the recommendation is an important step to take.
- **Ways to Do This:** Ways you could implement this recommendation.
- **What This Could Look Like:** Example(s) of how the recommendation could look if it were implemented. The examples were inspired by things some laboratories are already doing.

Refer to the recommendations that seem most helpful for your circumstances. Not every recommendation will be appropriate for every audience or feasible for every lab.

The [Appendices](#), page 27 include the following tools and resources for implementing the recommendations:

- [Helpful Websites](#), page 27
- [Free Tools for Checking Plain Language](#), page 29
- [Free Tools for Making Laboratory Communications Easier to Read and Understand](#), page 32
- [Tips for Determining if and How to Translate Documents](#), page 32

Please Provide Feedback and Ideas for Improvement

This toolkit is a new and ongoing project. The information in the toolkit is based on surveys, environmental scans, interviews, communications science research, and plain language best practices; however, there is always room for improvement. If you have ideas about how to improve the toolkit, please contact the MDH Well Management Section at health.wells@state.mn.us or 651-201-4600 or 800-383-9808. The toolkit will evolve over time. We want to ensure this toolkit is useful for you.

Become an Accredited Laboratory

Why? Being an accredited laboratory helps assure private well users and local partners that your laboratory is accountable to national standards and is capable of producing accurate and precise test results.

To become accredited, your laboratory's quality systems, staff, facilities, equipment, test methods, records, and reports will be evaluated. Learn more at [Minnesota Department of Health Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program \(MNELAP\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/accreditation) (www.health.state.mn.us/accreditation). Laboratories outside of Minnesota can be accredited through this program as well.

Collaborate with State and Local Entities

Why? Messages are more powerful when they are consistent across multiple entities; you may be able to improve your messaging with information or ideas from partners.

Some states, counties, cities, and townships have programs that focus on private well users. They may have well testing recommendations, helpful information for private well users, or ideas for collaboration to promote private well testing. Contact programs in your area that work with private well users to see if there are ways to collaborate. Here are some types of state and local agencies and programs to contact:

- Health Departments/Services
- Environmental Departments/Services
- Health and Human Services
- Watershed Districts
- Agriculture Departments
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Department of Natural Resources
- Real Estate Companies
- City or County Drinking Water Laboratories
- Cooperative Extension
- University Extension
- Technical Assistance Providers, such as the Rural Community Assistance Partnership
- Licensed Well Contractors

This report includes several suggestions that rely heavily on collaborating with state and local partners. We use this icon to highlight where those collaborations are most important:



Make Well Testing Information Easy to Find on Your Website

Why? Easy-to-find information makes it more likely that people will select your laboratory for their well water analysis. Well users are more likely to test their well water if the process is easy.

Ways to Do This

- **Provide a tab, button, or webpage** that clearly identifies information for private well users. When it is difficult for well users to find the proper tab, it could lead them to question whether you provide water testing services.
- **Clearly outline contaminants** that well users should consider testing for and their prices. Be sure to work with your health department or other agency to determine what should be listed. You could also hyperlink to your health department's information about the health effects of contaminants and why people should test for them.



What This Could Look Like

Provide a Tab, Button, or Webpage for Private Well Information



Figure 2: Example webpage that has a tab specifically for private well owners.

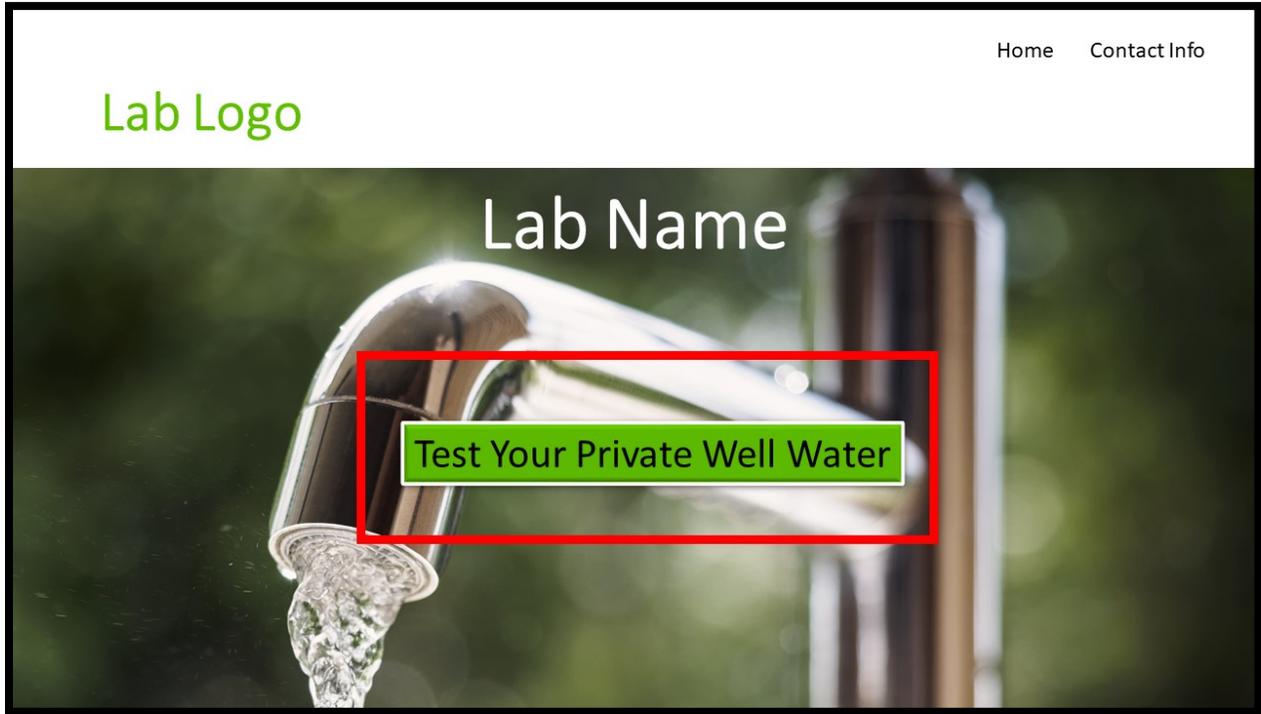


Figure 3: Example webpage that has well testing information front and center on their homepage.



Figure 4: Example webpage that includes clear buttons for well users to find the type of information they are looking for.

List Contaminants Private Well Users are Recommended to Test For



Figure 5: Example webpage where a laboratory provides a clear button for their customer to learn about MDH testing recommendations and then brings the customer to the MDH webpage. This way the laboratory does not have to worry about making sure the testing recommendations are always up to date. The customer will always see MDH’s most current recommendations.

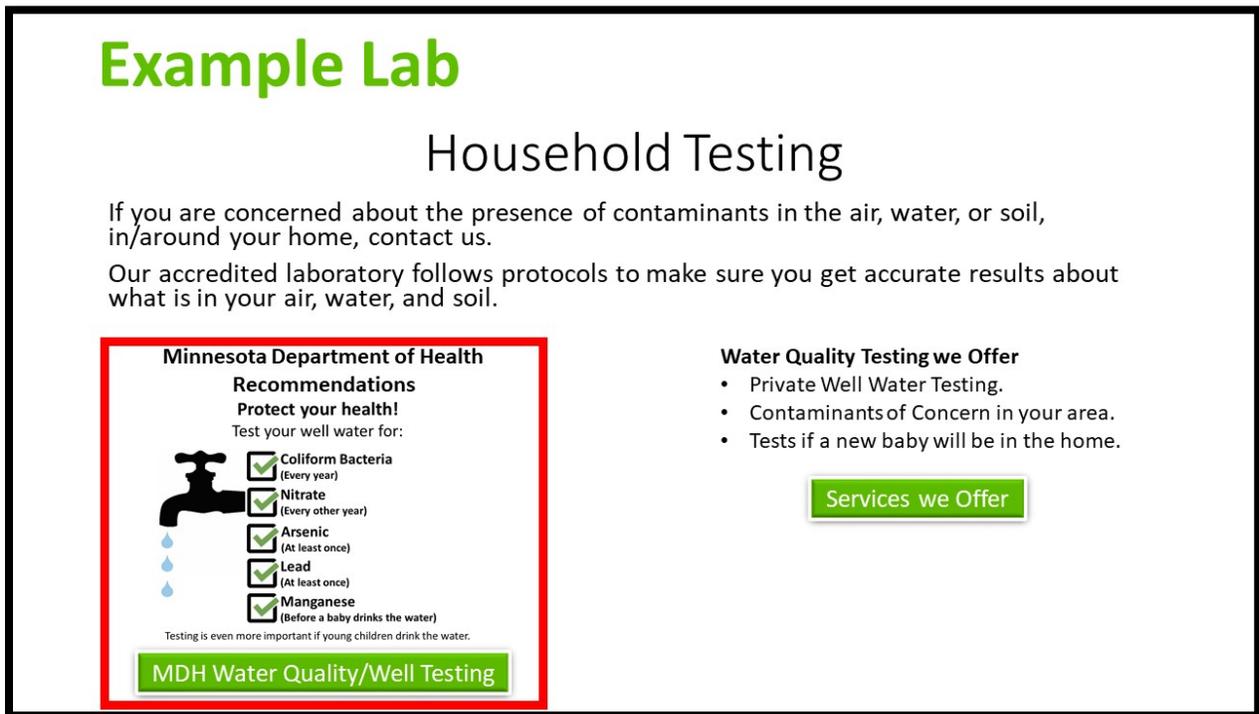


Figure 6: Example webpage that uses graphics and materials MDH created to share well testing recommendations.

Example Lab

When to Test Your Well Water

Be sure to follow testing recommendations from your health department or licensing authority (if you run a business in the home).

[MDH Water Quality/Well Testing](#)

General well testing recommendations from Minnesota Department of Health:

1. **Coliform Bacteria** (every year)
2. **Nitrate** (every other year)
3. **Arsenic** (at least once)
4. **Lead** (at least once)
5. **Manganese** (before a baby drinks the water)

Figure 7: Example webpage that lists MDH testing recommendations and also connects the customer with the MDH website. Note that this approach requires the laboratory to regularly check with MDH to make sure the recommendations are correct.

Link to Information about Contaminants

Why? Providing information about contaminants will help private well users develop an accurate sense of risk about how harmful a concentration of a contaminant may be. This accurate risk perception is more likely to lead to informed action. This practice also helps provide a well-rounded level of service and helps protect your customers' health.

***Fifty percent** of survey respondents who **did not take any action** to reduce their unsafe level of exposure to arsenic said they did not take action **because they were not concerned about the arsenic level** (MDH 2016).*

Ways to Do This

- Talk with your state or local health department to find out what resources you could link to and what messages would be best to share about contaminants and the health risks they present when in drinking water. You could include these resources and links on your website and with your laboratory reports for private well owners.



- **Link to local, state, and national websites** related to private wells and provide information about contaminants (see [Helpful Websites](#), page 27). Include these hyperlinks on your website and with your laboratory report.

What This Could Look Like

Example Lab

Drinking Water Testing

Safe drinking water is important to our health. There are several contaminants that can be in our drinking water. Testing is often the only way to know if contaminants that can cause short- or long-term health effects are in the water.

Our accredited laboratory can test for many different contaminants so you can protect your family.

Order a Test Kit



Learn More About Contaminants in Drinking Water
(Minnesota Department of Health webpages)

- [Bacteria, Viruses and Parasites in Drinking Water](#)
- [Nitrate in Drinking Water](#)
- [Arsenic in Drinking Water](#)
- [Lead in Drinking Water](#)
- [Manganese in Drinking Water](#)
- [A-Z List of Contaminants in Drinking Water](#)

Figure 8: Example webpage that links customers to established MDH webpages about contaminants in drinking water. Using this approach enables the lab to provide accurate information without having to be subject matter experts on all contaminants.

Example Lab

Private Drinking Water Testing

Contact Us

- Competitive Pricing
- Home Water Test Kits
- Sample Collection Instructions
- Chain of Custody
- How you want to receive your test kit.
- Get a third party technician to collect a water sample for home loans.



Questions about your results and what to do next?

- [Well Testing, Results, and Options \(Minnesota Department of Health\)](#)
- [Contact Minnesota Department of Health Well Management Program \(800-383-9808 or health.wells@state.mn.us\)](#)

Figure 9: Example webpage that directs questions about how to interpret results and what actions the customer should take to the MDH, where there are water quality specialists who are prepared to provide advice. If your laboratory is not prepared to answer questions about water quality, check with your local or state health department to see if they are willing to respond to questions about water quality and what people should do to protect their health.

Provide Well Testing Bundles

Why? Bundles make it easier for private well users to know what to test for.

Ways to Do This

Help reduce some of your customers' decision-making. Make it easy for them to select a bundle of tests so they are testing for the things most common in your area of the state or country. Connect with your state or local health departments to see what they recommend.



For example, MDH has the following recommendations—based on health effects and how common the contaminants are in groundwater. If your laboratory is in Minnesota, your well testing bundles could align with these general recommendations.

Protect your health!
Test your well water for:

- Coliform Bacteria**
(Every year)
- Nitrate**
(Every other year)
- Arsenic**
(At least once)
- Lead**
(At least once)
- Manganese**
(Before a baby drinks the water)

Testing is even more important if young children drink the water.

Figure 10: What MDH recommends all well users in Minnesota to test their private well water for.

When designing your bundles, think about why a person may be looking into well water testing. Consider looking into what types of private well testing are required in your area for:

- Property transfers or mortgage lenders,
- Rental properties, and
- In-home childcare services using private wells.

What This Could Look Like

Example Lab

Well Test Bundles

[Order a Bundle](#)

-  **Test every year:** Coliform Bacteria
-  **Test every other year:** Nitrate
-  **Test once:** Arsenic and Lead
-  **Test before a baby:** Coliform Bacteria, Nitrate, Arsenic, Lead, and Manganese

Figure 11: Example webpage that provides a well owner with multiple bundle options and includes graphics to help distinguish the bundles.

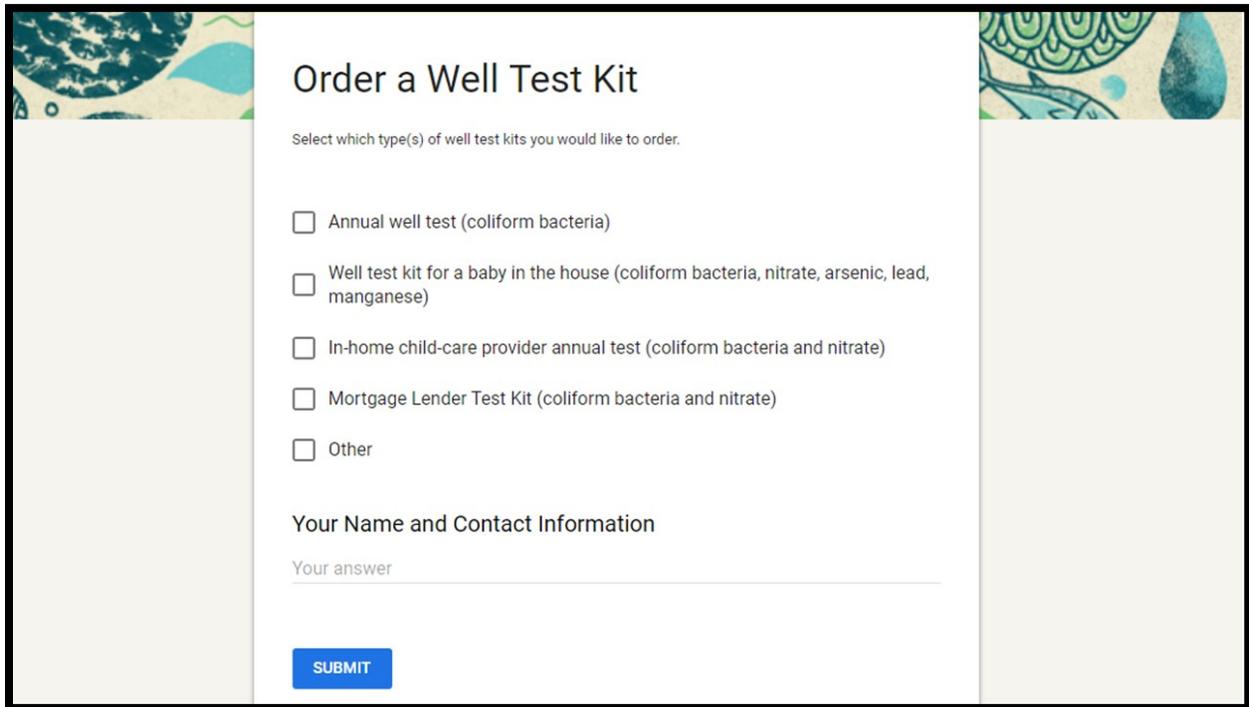
Example Lab

[About Us](#) | [Services](#) | [Private Well Info](#) | [Contact Us](#) |

Order a Well Test Kit

Basic Test (Coliform Bacteria + Nitrate)	\$XX	Add to Cart
Basic Test + Arsenic	\$XX	Add to Cart
Basic Test + Arsenic + Lead	\$XX	Add to Cart
Basic Test + Manganese	\$XX	Add to Cart

Figure 12: Example webpage that makes it easy for the customer to quickly order a well test bundle, know what they are getting in that bundle, and how much it costs.



Order a Well Test Kit

Select which type(s) of well test kits you would like to order.

- Annual well test (coliform bacteria)
- Well test kit for a baby in the house (coliform bacteria, nitrate, arsenic, lead, manganese)
- In-home child-care provider annual test (coliform bacteria and nitrate)
- Mortgage Lender Test Kit (coliform bacteria and nitrate)
- Other

Your Name and Contact Information

Your answer _____

SUBMIT

Figure 13: Example webpage using a simple Google Form as a way for private well users to order a well test bundle.

Remind Well Users to Get Their Well Water Tested

Why? Help your customers remember to get their well water tested on a regular basis.

Ways to Do This

- Send short, simple reminders the way that makes the most sense for your customers and you.
- Use vanity links/aliases/shortened URL addresses to help customers easily find your information.

Example: The MDH Water Quality/Well Testing webpage URL is <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/wells/waterquality/index.html>. Our alias for that webpage is www.health.state.mn.us/wellwater.

Both links take you to the exact same webpage.

- When applicable, remind private well users that their results are confidential. Your laboratory will not share their results with any enforcement or monitoring authorities.
- Use a variety of communication platforms.

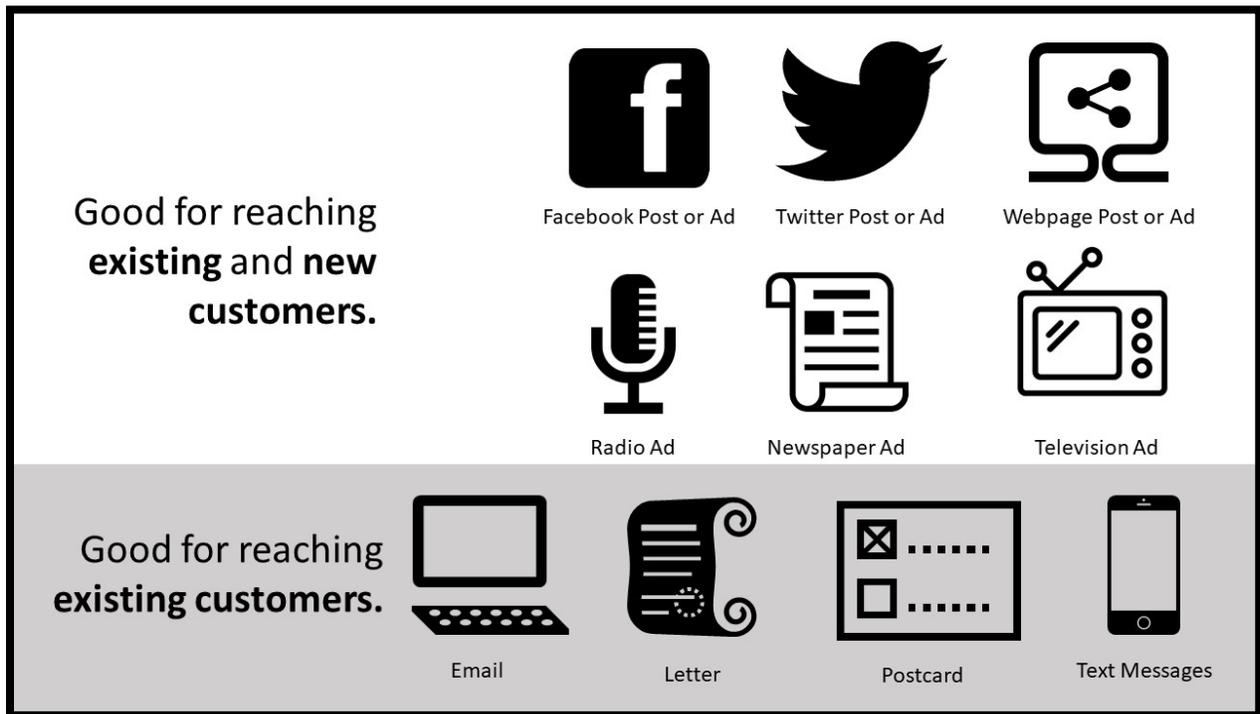


Figure 14: This graphic shows several communication platforms that different customers may use. Consider whether you are trying to reach existing or new customers. It is a good idea to use multiple communication platforms because different customers use/prefer different platforms.

What This Could Look Like

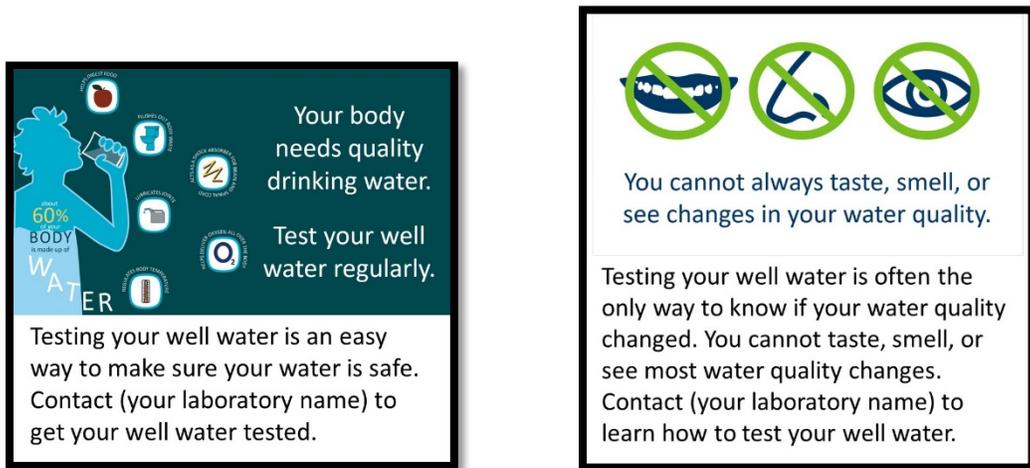
Postcards

Here is a screen shot of a template postcard. You can download the Word document template at and insert your laboratory’s information. Go to [Well Partners](http://www.health.state.mn.us/wellpartners) (www.health.state.mn.us/wellpartners) and click on “Accredited Laboratories.”



Social Media Posts

If your laboratory has social media accounts, remind your followers to get their private well water tested. Below are some screen shots of social media posts. Feel free to use template social media posts. Go to [Well Partners](http://www.health.state.mn.us/wellpartners) (www.health.state.mn.us/wellpartners) and click on “Accredited Laboratories.”



Provide Discounts or Coupons

Why? Incentivizing customers to regularly test their well water may increase your client-base.

Ways to Do This

Help promote healthy behaviors among customers by providing incentives that encourage private well users to regularly test their well water. You could offer a small discount or coupon every year that a private well user can bring in or reference when they get their water tested. You could advertise the discount through:

- Radio
- Website
- Email
- Newspaper
- Postcard/Letter
- Text Message

This not only encourages consistent behavior and reinforces the practice of testing water, but it also promotes regular business.

Forty-seven percent of survey respondents said “a discount on a well water test” would be very important in prompting them to test their well water (MDH 2016).

What This Could Look Like



Figure 15: Example of what a newspaper coupon could look like.

Provide Local Pickup and Drop-off Options

Why? Private well users want convenience. Local pickup and drop-off options make sampling much easier.

Ways to Do This

Both phone interviews with laboratories and survey responses from private well owners highlight that time and effort are primary reasons that private well users do not test their well water. Many of your customers may have to travel long distances in order to pick up and return their water samples. Here are ideas for making sample pickup and drop-off simpler:

- **Establish local pickup and drop-off sites** in collaboration with local institutions (e.g., government offices, libraries, and schools). The local institution simply needs to provide a space to store a handful of sample kits and possibly a refrigerator to hold returned samples until your laboratory picks up the sample.



Forty-three percent of respondents said they **would like to pick up a test kit at a local location** and return the sample to a local location (MDH 2016).

- **Provide prepaid postage** to return the sample by mail. The postage cost could be incorporated into the test kit price. You may be able to set it up that the price of postage is incurred only if the test kit is returned by mail.



Thirty-one percent of respondents said they would like to **order a test kit on a website** and return it by mail.



Twenty-one percent of respondents said they would like to **order a test kit over the phone** and return it by mail.

What This Could Look Like

Example Lab

About Us
Services
Private Well Info
Contact Us

🔍

Local Spots to Pick up and Drop Off a Well Test Kit

Example lab partners with municipalities, environmental agencies, and businesses to make it easier for you to pick up and drop off a well test kit. Stop by any of the locations below to pick up a well test kit. You can return your collected water sample and payment to the same place.

Where you can pick up and drop off a well test kit.	City	When the lab picks up test kits from this location.	Make sure you drop off your sample by this time.
ABC Watershed District (123 River Road)	River City	Monday-Thursday	10 a.m.
XYZ Soil and Water Conservation District (555 Pleasant Avenue)	Carroll	Wednesday	2 p.m.
Nola Health Department	Nola	Tuesday	12 noon

Figure 16: Example webpage that shows the satellite pickup and drop-off options that the laboratory provides in partnership with local institutions.

Partner to Host Well Testing Clinics

Why? Make it easier and more convenient for private well users to have their water tested, and face-to-face time gives you an opportunity to build trust.

Ways to Do This

Collaborate with local government or businesses to:

- **Hold a specific event**, where the purpose of the event is for people to learn about water quality and purchase or pick up a well test kit (well test clinic).



- **Provide well test kits at an existing event**, such as an expo, fair, or other outreach event.



- **Develop partnerships with local stakeholders to include private well training/best practices at your event**, turn it into an educational event, bringing in experts and stakeholders to educate well owners on basic well stewardship.



What This Could Look Like

In 2018, Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District, Stearns DHIA Laboratories, and MDH collaborated to provide \$10 well test kits for nitrate, coliform bacteria, and arsenic at local water test clinics and local pickup and drop-off sites. Over the course of two months, 221 households participated in the program, many of whom said they do not usually test their well water.

Make Lab Reports, Chain of Custody, and Other Documents Easier to Understand

Why? Making lab reports and other documents easy to understand will help your customer follow sampling procedures, provide you with the correct information, and know what their lab report says.

Ways to Do This

Below are recommendations for making lab reports and other documents easier for your customer to read and understand. These recommendations are based on plain language best practices (plainlanguage.gov 2019) and do not take the place of standards or requirements from the Environmental Protection Agency or other authority.

- **Use familiar terms for your audience.** Remember that most of your customers do not work in a laboratory or work with water or scientific measurements every day. How can you make sure they understand the words you use?
- **Aim for a fifth grade reading level or lower** – unless you know your audience has a more advanced water related or scientific vocabulary. Use online tools to assess your documents’ readability. (See [Free Tools for Checking Plain Language](#), page 29 and [Free Tools for Making Laboratory Communications Easier to Read and Understand](#), page 32.)
- **Put the most important information for your customer at the beginning** and information your customer may not be as interested in at the end. Keep in mind that what you find important/interesting may not be what your customer finds important or interesting.
- **Make your lab report easy to scan** so your customer is able to glance at their report and know whether there is anything they should be concerned about. Here are ideas on how to make your lab report easy to scan:
 - **Include useful headings and subheadings**, such as questions, statements, or topics.
 - Use size 12 font or larger.
 - Incorporate blank space into the document.
 - **Use visual clues** to interpret results, such as color-coding or symbols to help people quickly find the information they are looking for. The table below shows some simple and common examples:

Clue	Example Visual Clues
Icons (All the icons displayed are symbols available in Microsoft Word.)	Result above the MCL: ☒ or ☹ or 🖐 Result below the MCL: ☑ or 😊 or 👍
Color Coding	Highlight results above MCL in red. Highlight results near the MCL in yellow. Highlight results below the MCL in green.

- Use “you” and other pronouns to speak to your customer.
- Use active voice; avoid using passive voice: People have an easier time comprehending information written in active voice rather than passive voice.

Passive voice (def.): When the subject is acted on by the verb. In the examples below, the subject is in *italics* and the verb is in **bold**.

- Example 1:
 - Passive voice: “Your *water sample* was **analyzed** by ABC Laboratory.”
 - Active voice: “ABC Laboratory **analyzed** your *water sample*.”
- Example 2:
 - Passive voice: “*ABC Laboratory* may be **called** with questions.”
 - Active voice: “**Call** *ABC Laboratory* if you have questions.”
- Use short sentences. Only express one idea in each sentence.
- Determine if you should translate your lab reports. It can be difficult to determine when to translate something. (See [Tips for Determining If and How to Translate Documents](#), page 32.)

What This Could Look Like

Include a Column in Your Lab Report to Show Whether the Result Presents a Health Risk

Analyte	Result	Reporting Limit ⁶	Units	Does the level in my water present a health risk?	U.S. EPA Maximum Contaminant Level ⁷ (MCL)
Gross Alpha	X.XX ¹	3.00	pCi/L ²	Yes /No	15
Arsenic, Dissolved ³	X.XX	1.00	µg/L ⁴	Yes /No	10
Coliform, Total	XXXXXXX	1 /100	none	Yes/No	5.0% ⁸
Nitrate + Nitrite Nitrogen, Dissolved	X.XX	0.05	mg/L ⁵	Yes/No	10

Figure 17: Example from MDH letters that go to well owners for a study about radium in groundwater. MDH used Safe Drinking Water Act standards to complete this column.

Include a Guide on How to Read a Lab Report

Example Lab
How to Read Your Lab Report

Site	Test Performed	Sample Date and Time	Your Result	Units	SDWA or Health Standard	Analytical Method	Analysis Date and Time	Analyst	Code No.
Outside Tap	Arsenic	5/1/2019 10 a.m.	15	µg/L	Less than 10 µg/L	SM 3113B	5/2/2019 10:30	FV	000001

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

1. Where the sample was collected.
2. Test completed for this sample.
3. Date and time sample was collected.
4. Your result.
5. The measurement unit we use for this result.
6. The standard public water systems use for drinking water (this is to help protect human health).
7. Information the lab uses to know the method we used and when we analyzed your water.

Figure 18: Example of a simple way to explain what the different parts of the lab report mean.

Include a Guide for Interpreting What the Water Results Mean



What Your Test Results Mean and Next Steps		
The table below shows contaminants we tested your water for, the level of the contaminant that can be harmful in your drinking water, and what you can do to protect your household's health. Please contact us or Minnesota Department of Health at 800-383-9808 with questions about what your results.		
Contaminant	Drinking Water can be Harmful if:	What to do if There is an Unsafe Level of a Contaminant
Coliform Bacteria	Any coliform bacteria are detected	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get your water from a safe alternative source (like bottled water) until you address the problem. If nitrate is not detected in your water, you can also boil your water before using it for drinking or cooking. 2. Disinfect your well and water system with a chlorine solution (see <i>Well Disinfection</i> for instructions or hire a licensed well contractor). 3. Test your water again after disinfecting the well and water system. <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bacterial Safety of Well Water (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/wells/waterquality/bacteria.html). • Well Disinfection (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/wells/waterquality/disinfection.html).
Nitrate	The level is above 10 mg/L*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get your water from a safe alternative source (like bottled water) until you address the problem. Do NOT boil the water—boiling will increase the nitrate concentration. 2. Do not give the water to infants under six months old. 3. Have a licensed well contractor inspect and repair your well. 4. Remove potential sources of nitrate near your well. 5. Consider home water treatment if you have completed steps 3 and 4 and no infants drink the water. 6. Test your water again after taking action. <p>Resources:</p> <p>Nitrate in Well Water (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/wells/waterquality/nitrate.html).</p>

Figure 19: This is an example from a sheet MDH developed in collaboration with a laboratory for a water testing clinic that provided testing for coliform bacteria, nitrate, and arsenic. Note that if you want to send out an interpretation sheet like this, be sure to work with your local health department or water quality experts to make sure the information is accurate.

Promote Holistic Well Safety

Why? Many private well owners already look to laboratories for information about well safety. Helping customers easily find well safety information will help build customer satisfaction and will help ensure customers' health.

Ways to Do This

Your laboratory does not need to be an expert on how to maintain a well or address well issues. Rather, you can easily connect your customer to resources about how to maintain a well and how to address well issues. Consider the following:

- Have your website link to resources for private well users, such as the Private Well Class or state or local programs that work with private wells. See [Helpful Websites](#), page 28 for ideas.
- Work with your local or state health or environmental services to create a statement about the importance of maintaining a private well and where a well owner can find more information. Include this statement and webpage address at the bottom of laboratory reports.
- Ask your local or state health or environmental health services if they have brochures or information sheets about how private well owners can maintain their well and include those resources when you mail test results.



What This Could Look Like

Example Lab

About Us	Services	Private Well Info	Contact Us
----------	----------	-------------------	------------

Private Well Info

Protect your health. Test your well water every year.

[What should I test for?](#)

Information for Taking Care of Your Well Water

[Minnesota Department of Health: Water Quality/Well Testing](#)

[The Private Well Class](#)

Appendices

Helpful Websites

Below are lists of national, state, and local websites that may be helpful for you or your customers. The bullets below each website outline the information the website provides.

National Websites

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [Private Ground Water Wells](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells)
(www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells)
 - Basics
 - Siting and Contaminants
 - Testing
 - Treatment
 - Maintenance
 - Emergency Treatment
 - Diseases and Contaminants
- **Environmental Protection Agency:** [Private Drinking Water Wells](http://www.epa.gov/privatewells)
(www.epa.gov/privatewells)
 - Testing Your Private Water Well
 - Prevent Water Well Pollution
 - Identify Potential Contamination in Your Community
 - Emergency Preparedness and Response for Water Wells
- **Groundwater Foundation:** [The Importance of Private Well Water Testing](http://www.groundwater.org/get-informed/basics/testing.html)
(www.groundwater.org/get-informed/basics/testing.html)
 - Why should I test my well water?
 - Is my water safe to drink?
 - What tests should I have done?
 - How often should I test my well water?
 - Where can I get my well water tested?
- **National Groundwater Association:** [WellOwner.org](http://www.wellowner.org) (www.wellowner.org)
 - Water Well Basics
 - Maintenance
 - Water Quality/Quantity
 - Water Testing
 - Find a Contractor
 - Protect Your Groundwater Day
 - Hurricane Resources
- **University of Illinois:** [The Private Well Class](http://privatewellclass.org) (privatewellclass.org)
 - Groundwater and Well Contamination
 - Your Water Well System
 - Operations, Maintenance, and Best Practices
 - Getting Help and Finding Local Answers
 - Sampling and Interpreting Results
 - Water Treatment Solutions

- **Water Systems Council:** [Water Well Help for Well Owners](http://watersystemscouncil.org/water-well-help/) (watersystemscouncil.org/water-well-help/)
 - Emergency Agencies
 - Well Care Well Owners Network
 - Well Water Testing and Contractors
 - Water Well Care Info Sheets
 - Well Owner’s Manual
 - Water Well Diagram
 - Water Well Financing

State Websites that May be Helpful for a Larger Audience

- New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services: [The NHDES Be *Well* Informed Guide](http://www4.des.state.nh.us/DWITool/Welcome.aspx) (www4.des.state.nh.us/DWITool/Welcome.aspx). People can enter their test results online and **receive an evaluation of their well water quality** and, if advisable, water treatment options.
- MDH: [Water Quality/Well Testing/Well Disinfection](http://www.health.state.mn.us/wellwater) (www.health.state.mn.us/wellwater). This webpage links to resources about **contaminants in drinking water, understanding test results, and home water treatment**. While the information was gathered with Minnesota residents in mind, a lot of the information is generalizable enough to use outside of Minnesota as well.
- MDH: [Well Testing, Results, and Options](http://www.health.state.mn.us/welltesting) (www.health.state.mn.us/welltesting). This webpage walks well users what MDH recommends testing for, how to test, how to understand test results, and ways to reduce risk if there is an unsafe level of a contaminant.
- Arizona Department of Health Services: [Well Water Quality – Test Your Well](http://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/environmental-toxicology/well-water/index.php#test-your-well) (www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/environmental-toxicology/well-water/index.php#test-your-well). This webpage links to educational resources with **Spanish translations**.
- Dartmouth Toxic Metals Superfund Research Program: [Well Water Community Action Toolkit \(PDF\)](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~toxmetal/assets/pdf/wellwatertoolkit2.pdf) (www.dartmouth.edu/~toxmetal/assets/pdf/wellwatertoolkit2.pdf). The **toolkit** provides a step-by-step guide to help communities ensure the safety of private well water.

Types of State or Local Websites to Link To

Investigate what agencies and groups work with private well users or water in your area. Use the list below to help guide where to look.

- Health Departments/Services
- Environmental Departments/Services
- Health and Human Services
- Watershed Districts
- Agriculture Departments
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Department of Natural Resources
- Cooperative Extension
- University Extension

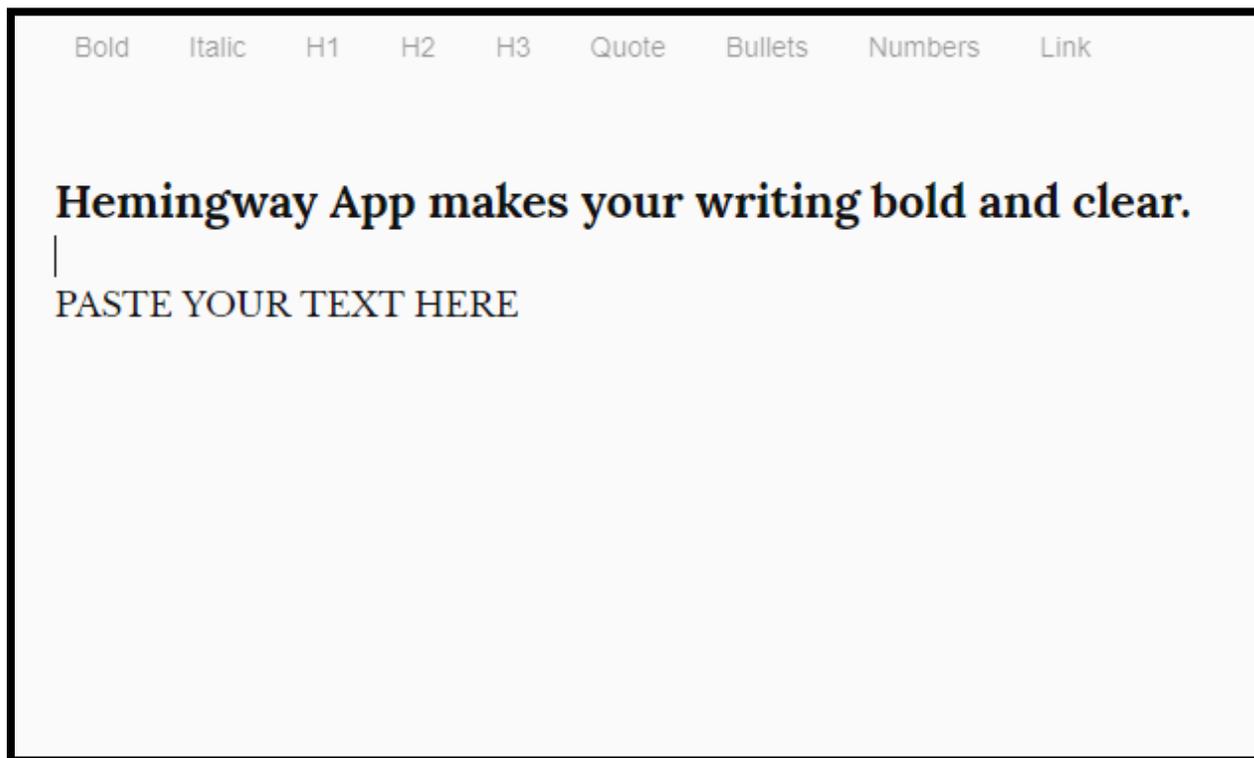
Free Tools for Checking Plain Language

Hemingway App

Available at [Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear.](http://www.hemingwayapp.com) (www.hemingwayapp.com).

How to Use It

1. Paste the text you want to test into the main screen.



2. Review the readability on the sidebar. We recommend aiming for a fifth grade reading level or lower. Ways to make your information easier to read include:
 - a. Using fewer adverbs (the app will highlight these in blue).
 - b. Use active voice (the app will highlight passive voice in green).
 - c. Use simpler phrases (the app will make suggestions for phrases in purple).
 - d. Making sentences shorter and simpler (the app will highlight hard-to-read sentences in yellow and very-hard to read sentences in red).

Example: Before

How this toolkit was developed

This toolkit was developed in response to a 2016 Minnesota Department of Health survey for private well users. The survey found that found that 43 percent of respondents look to water testing laboratories for information about how to manage their well and water quality. Laboratories are unequivocally important actors in maintain private well user's health.

The toolkit was created by the Minnesota Department of Health in collaboration with the Private Well Class and the Association of Public Health Laboratories.

Hemingway Editor

Readability
Grade 11
OK. Aim for 9.

Words: 85
Show More ▾

1 adverb, meeting the goal of 1 or fewer.

3 uses of passive voice. Cut to 1 or fewer.

0 phrases have simpler alternatives.

1 of 6 sentences is hard to read.

2 of 6 sentences are very hard to read.

Example: After

How we developed this toolkit

We created this toolkit in a response to a 2016 survey of private well owners. Four in 10 people said they look to their laboratory for water quality information. Laboratories play an important role in protecting private well users' health.

The following groups created the toolkit:

- Minnesota Department of Health
- The Private Well Class
- Association of Public Health Laboratories

Hemingway Editor

Readability
Grade 8
Good

Words: 64
Show More ▾

0 adverbs. Well done.

0 uses of passive voice. Nice work.

0 phrases have simpler alternatives.

0 of 8 sentences are hard to read.

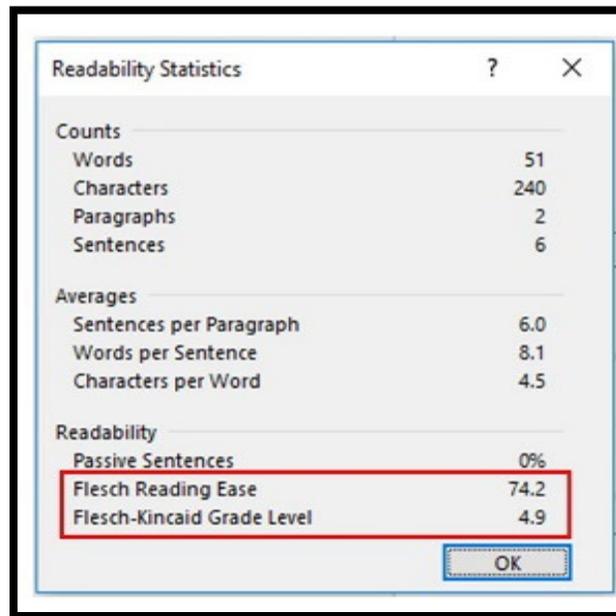
0 of 8 sentences are very hard to read.

Microsoft Word Flesch-Kincaid Score

Available in Microsoft Word or Microsoft Outlook.

How to Use It

1. Follow instructions at [Get your document's readability and level statistics](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US) (https://support.office.com/en-us/article/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US).
2. You will see a screen like the one below.
 - a. Aim for a Flesch Reading Ease score above 60.
 - b. Aim for a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test below fifth grade.



Free Tools for Making Laboratory Communications Easier to Read and Understand

- [CDC Plain Language Materials & Resources](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/developmaterials/plainlanguage.html)
(www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/developmaterials/plainlanguage.html).
- [The Plain Language Action and Information Network](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)
(www.plainlanguage.gov).
- [CDC Plain Language Communication you audience understands the first time \(PDF\)](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/checklist-H.pdf)
(www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/checklist-H.pdf).
- [National Institutes of Health Plain Language: Getting Started or Brushing Up](http://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/plain-language/plain-language-getting-started-or-brushing)
(www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/plain-language/plain-language-getting-started-or-brushing).
- [OPM Information Management](http://www.opm.gov/information-management/plain-language/#tips)
(www.opm.gov/information-management/plain-language/#tips).

Tips for Determining If and How to Translate Documents

These tips are from the MDH *Toolkit for Written Translation* (2019).

Assess Whether Translation is Appropriate

- Identify target audience.
- Be as specific as possible (age, where they live, literacy level, size of group, language).
- **Find community partners or contacts** who can provide advice on the best way to reach the community you are trying to reach.
- **Assess how critical translation is.**
 - Are there a lot of private well users who speak and read this language?
 - [Limited English Proficiency Demographic Data](http://www.lep.gov/demog_data/demog_data.html)
(www.lep.gov/demog_data/demog_data.html): federal government and nongovernmental sources of language data that can assist in assessing the limited English proficiency communities in your service area.
 - Is written translation the best way to reach your audience?
 - Could you deliver the message through just images instead?
- **Investigate if there are existing materials** that you could use to deliver your message.
 - Materials about private wells in Spanish.
 - [Clase Pozos Privados](http://clasepozosprivados.org) (clasepozosprivados.org).
 - [Well Water Quality - Test Your Well](http://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/environmental-toxicology/well-water/index.php#test-your-well) (www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/environmental-toxicology/well-water/index.php#test-your-well).
 - [NIH Health Reach](http://healthreach.nlm.nih.gov) (healthreach.nlm.nih.gov).
 - [CDC Translated Materials](http://www.cdc.gov) (look up by topic) (www.cdc.gov).
 - [Multilingual Health Exchange](http://health-exchange.net) (health-exchange.net).
 - [Medline Plus](http://medlineplus.gov/languages/languages.html) (medlineplus.gov/languages/languages.html).
- **Decide what languages** to translate materials into.

Prepare the Budget

- Decide on the type of translation services your laboratory can afford.
 - **Community partner reviews** (free).
 - **Community review (\$)**: The translation company will have an additional bilingual individual double check the translation.
 - **Back translation (\$\$)**: The translation company would have a different translator take the translated document and translate it back into English to see if the messages have remained intact. This is the highest form of quality check.
- Get a cost estimate.

Prepare Your Message and Documents

- Use plain language.
- Include images and icons.
- Leave extra space.
- Decide on the layout.

Contract with a Translator

- Decide which vendor to use.
- Give the vendor clear instructions and expectations.

Review and Share Materials

- Quality check translation.
- Have materials reviewed independently for accuracy and clarity.
- Actively share the materials.
- Work with partners.

Evaluate

- Determine the effectiveness of the material.
- Receive community's input.

How We Created This Toolkit

We created this toolkit in response to a 2016 MDH survey of private well owners. In that survey, 43 percent of respondents said they look to their laboratory for information about how to manage well safety and water quality. Initially, MDH planned to create a Minnesota-specific communications toolkit to help laboratories provide the information private well users are looking for. The Private Well Class and the Association of Public Health Laboratories were trying to do something similar, so the three groups collaborated to create this toolkit, using the following approaches to inform the recommendations:

- **Laboratory interviews:** MDH interviewed 27 private water testing laboratories in Minnesota to find out what type of information they provide for private well users, the questions they receive from private well users, and the types of resources would be helpful in their interactions with private well users.
- **Environmental scan:** MDH and the Private Well Class conducted a scan and inventory of the types of lab reports, information sheets, and websites that water testing laboratories have and use to identify some areas for improvement and examples of good communication styles.
- **Communications science:** MDH researched best practices for communications and plain language and had multiple communications experts review the recommendations.
- **Laboratory review:** Five water testing laboratories reviewed the toolkit contents to assess the feasibility of the recommendations and to provide additional examples to highlight.

References

- MDH. (2016). Data-Driven Outreach for Private Well Users: Findings from a Statewide Survey of Households on Private Wells with Elevated Levels of Arsenic (PDF) (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/docs/cwf/hhsurveyreport.pdf).
- USGS. (2017). Domestic (Private) Supply Wells (water.usgs.gov/nawqa/home_maps/private_wells.html).
- Plainlanguage.gov. Checklist for Plain Language (www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/checklists/checklist).