Message Development and Pretesting
(adapted from CDCynergy 2001)

> **Develop and pretest messages with intended audiences. Messages should be based on theory and the results of your formative research, including concept testing**. (ref: CDCynergy 2001, Step 4.3)

What To Do

Using your creative brief, results from your concept testing, and a review of relevant communication and behavioral theories, you should now refine the most promising concepts and develop messages. Begin to identify materials needed to help your communication activities convey messages. Be sure to consider revising existing materials if appropriate. Information in messages should communicate some crucial characteristics:

- Accuracy

- Completeness

- Relevancy

- Appropriateness in format, style, and readability level

How To Do It

In the previous step, you developed and tested abstract concepts. Now you will develop a message based on the concepts that show the most promise with the target audience. Your message should convey the exact statement or precise point you want to communicate.

Effective messages have the following characteristics:

- **Clarity:** Clear messages contain as few technical terms as possible and eliminate information that the audience does not need to respond to the message.

- **Consistency:** Scientific findings about health often change with new research. Messages from your program should attempt to convey consistent and accurate information.

- **Main Points:** Main points should be stressed and repeated.

- **Correct Tone and Appeal:** Messages should convey the desired tone, depending on the topic, desired impact, and the target audience. For example, the tone may be reassuring, alarming, challenging, or straightforward.

- **Truthfulness:** Messages should be honest and should be as complete as possible; that is, you should say what you mean and mean what you say.

- **Credibility:** Information should be believable and have a credible source, as determined by your audience research.

- **Audience Relevance:** Messages should be based on what the target audience perceives as most important, what the audience wants to know, and what the audience needs to know.

Pretesting messages is also considered to be a form of **prototype performance evaluation**, which is described in the next phase. Message testing is intended to provide information about some important issues:

- How appealing and attention-grabbing the audience considers the message to be

- How well the audience comprehends the message

- Which wording and colors the audience prefers

- How appropriate the selected settings, channels, and activities are

You should select a pretesting strategy based on the medium through which the message will be communicated, the target audience, and the amount of time and resources available for pretesting. For example, you may decide to test several taped radio public service announcements to simulate their sound, but to use in-house rather than professional voice talent to save money for the final production. In the case of a television spot, you may want to develop a video-animatic with voiceover before developing a more polished version of your message.

> **Pretest and select settings, the places where you hope to expose your audience to messages.** (ref: CDCynergy 2001, Step 4.4)

What To Do

Once your message has been developed, the details for conveying the message must be established. Selecting the appropriate setting is the first step toward conveying the message to your audience.

Settings are places where messages can be received or places where your audience can be reached. They are the places where you hope to expose your audience to the message and include homes, churches, businesses, airports, and automobiles (via radio and billboards). In this step, you will select the setting(s) through which your audience can receive and appropriately act on the intended message.

How To Do It

Consider some important questions as you select settings:

- Which settings attract large numbers of your target audience? Consider the following possibilities:

    o Work sites or businesses

    o Schools

    o Recreational centers/activities

    o Shopping malls

    o Grocery stores

    o Churches

    o Community gathering places

    o Community organizations

    o Homes

    o Senior centers

    o Automobiles (radio and billboards)

    o Airports

    o Clinicians' offices

- Which settings are most conducive to the communication and reception of your messages?

- Which settings seem most appropriate based on decisions you have made about concepts and messages?

- Once settings have been identified, what pretesting methods will you use to determine how your audience receives your messages within that setting?

Further, the settings you select will depend in part on the level of social structure through which you plan to convey your messages. In CDCynergy, the levels of social structure are referred to as message channels and include individual, group, organizational, community, and societal channels.

Consider the following issues when selecting your channels:

- Select channels that fit your communication objectives.

- Select channels that fit your budget and time constraints.

- Consider that mass media can be cost effective in sending information quickly to a broad audience; however, the primary purpose of mass media is to inform and create awareness. Complicated messages may not be suitable for mass media.

- Consider that interpersonal channels (e.g., physicians, friends, and family) provide a familiar and influential context for health messages.

- Community channels (e.g., schools, employers) can reinforce messages and offer instruction. Establishing communication links with community organizations can be accomplished more quickly than developing interpersonal channels.

Identify the most appropriate message channel that can convey your message within your selected setting. The following table can help match your selected setting to an identified message channel:

Levels of Social Structure (Channels)	Typical Audiences
Individual	Students, clients, patients, and other participants served on an individual level
Group	Family, coworkers, peer group, classmates, neighbors
Organizational	Multiple groups: schools, churches, neighborhood associations, businesses
Community	Multiple organizations: business community, school districts, coalitions
Societal	Public structures or public outreach: mass media, society, governmental and regulatory agencies, political parties