

Plain Writing Checklist

Before you finish a document, ask yourself: Have you done the following?

Audience

- Identified and written for the typical reader in your intended audience?
- Developed the document around your reader's needs?

Structure

- Organized content by questions and answers when possible?
- Included meaningful headings to guide your reader?
- Used numbered lists, bullet lists, or tables to improve clarity and scannability?

Writing

- Used “you,” “we,” and other pronouns?
- Used the active voice?
- Used action verbs in the simplest tense possible?
- Written sentences of fewer than 20 words?
- Created short, concise paragraphs of fewer than 5 sentences that cover only one topic?
- Defined unusual words and acronyms?
- Used “must” instead of “shall” or “will” to indicate requirements, policy, or law?

Punctuation & Linking

- Used periods or dashes instead of semicolons?
- Linked to rather than repeated text from other resources?
- Used key words for link language instead of “click here” or “learn more”?

Reviewing

- Read the content aloud to hear whether it’s understandable?
- Tried to reduce the content by 1/3?