# Plain Language Checklist

## FOCUS ON THE READER
- The title and introduction tell what the material is about, whom it is for, and how to use it.
- The tone is direct and positive, with pronouns such as “you” and “we.”
- The content only has what readers need to know and answers their questions and concerns.

## ORGANIZE THE MESSAGE
- The material begins with the most important message.
- The content is arranged in an order that makes sense to readers.
- Headings tell the reader what’s coming and make it easy to skim.

## WRITING STYLE
- The writing is mostly in active voice.
- The words are common and familiar to the intended readers.
- Acronyms, abbreviations, technical terms, and legal terms are used only if readers need to know them. If used, they are explained.
- Paragraphs have only one topic with short, simple and straightforward sentences.
- Key terms are used the same way each time. Instructions are short, step-by-step, and placed right where readers need them.
- The writing makes connections among ideas to help readers understand and absorb new information.

## CHECK THE LANGUAGE
- Identify words your readers would probably not use in their everyday speech. Replace these words with others that would be easier and more familiar.
- Read it aloud or have someone read it to you. You will hear if the tone is too formal, the wording is awkward, the sentences are too long, or the paragraphs too dense.

## DESIGN AND FORMATTING
- The material has similar style and structure throughout, with consistent use of fonts, italics, bold print, color, numbers, and bullets.
- The material looks inviting, uncluttered, and easy to read, with plenty of white space, and dark colored type on a light background.
- The fonts are easy to read, with text large enough for easy reading, and each line has about 10 to 15 words.
- Italics and bold print are not used much.
- Images are clear and uncluttered, related to the content, and culturally appropriate for the readers.
- The format is readable on both desktop and mobile devices.
- Accessibility, including color contrast, PDF formatting, alt text and image names are included in the design.

## CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS
- Who translated the material?
- What does the audience already know and need to know?
- What questions will they have?
- What outcomes do I want for my audience and for my organization?

Adapted from: Quick Checklist for Plain Language Center for Health Literacy | MAXIMUS and McGee & Evers Consulting, Inc