

Plain Language Checklist

Focus on the Reader

- The title and introduction tell what the material is about, who it is for, and how to use it.
- The tone is direct and positive, with pronouns like “you” and “we.”
- The content only has what readers need to know and answers their questions and concerns.

Writing Style

- The writing is mostly in active voice.
- The words are common and familiar to the intended readers.
- Acronyms, abbreviations, and technical terms are used only if readers need to know them. If used, they are explained.
- Paragraphs are brief and have only one topic with short, simple sentences.
- Key terms are used the same way each time.
- Instructions are short, step-by-step, and bulleted or numbered.
- Ideas connect to help readers understand new information.

Check the Language

- Find words your readers probably do not use in their everyday speech. Replace these words with others that are more familiar.
- Read the text aloud or have someone read it to you. You will hear if the tone is too formal, the wording is awkward, or the sentences are too long.

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.

Design and Formatting

- The style and structure are similar throughout, with consistent use of fonts, italics, bold, color, numbers, and bullets.
- The material looks uncluttered, with plenty of white space.
- The fonts are easy to read (no script fonts), with large enough text, and about 10 to 15 words per line.
- Italics, all caps, and bold print are not used much.
- Images are clear, uncluttered and related to the content.
- The format is readable on both desktop and mobile devices.
- Accessibility - including color contrast, PDF formatting, alt text, and image names - is included in the design.

Cultural Responsiveness

- The material was translated and reviewed by someone familiar with the audience’s culture and language.
- The content takes into account what the readers already know and which ideas are meaningful for them.
- The design and format include symbols and images that are culturally relevant to the audience.