



Plain Language Checklist



THIS CHECKLIST WILL HELP YOU MAKE SURE YOUR CONTENT FOLLOWS BASIC PLAIN LANGUAGE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES.



OVERVIEW

- Audience is clearly defined and the content is written with the target audience in mind
- Purpose of the material is clearly defined and all key ideas are included
- Medium is clearly defined and material is developed and formatted for the specific medium and size (e.g. print or digital)



LANGUAGE

- Content is written in a friendly, first-person tone
- Uses an active, not passive voice
- Uses common vocabulary that the audience will understand
- Includes clear definitions of any technical language or jargon
- Spells out acronyms or abbreviations the first time they are mentioned
- Sentences are less than 20 words and focus on one idea
- Paragraphs are concise (3-4 sentences) and focus on one main idea
- Readability level is appropriate for the intended audience (no higher than 8th grade)



ORGANIZATION

- The purpose is clearly stated at the beginning of the content
- Messaging is divided into appropriate sections with clear headers
- Headings, subheadings, and body paragraphs are used consistently
- Most important information is presented first or near the top of the document
- Nonessential information is removed or placed near the end of the document
- Information is organized logically (i.e., chronologically, step-by-step, or most to least important)
- Heading and subheadings are a different font style and size than main body text
- Bulleted lists are used in place of large boxes of text when appropriate
- ALL CAPS and italics are removed



DESIGN

- Font size is at least 12 point (except in tables or graphs)
- No more than three different fonts are used
- There is ample white space and crowded text is eliminated
- Left margin is justified
- Graphics are included when possible to assist the audience in visual understanding
- Captions/descriptions are included underneath or beside graphics and/or photos
- Graphics and photos are reflective of the content and add value to the document
- Document uses a white or light background with black or dark text