

Plain language checklist

Use this checklist to review your document. Does it include many of the key plain language principles listed below?

1 Planning

Have you:



- Written your objectives and key messages?
- Considered your audience and their needs?
- Organised your information in a logical flow with the most important information at the beginning? (Inverted pyramid writing style)
- Used clear headings to help readers find information quickly? (Question headings work well)

2 Writing

Have you:



- Used a friendly, conversational tone?
For example, have you:
 - referred to your reader as 'you' and your organisation as 'us' or 'we'?
 - used dashes to keep your writing short and punchy?
 - used contractions like 'it's' and 'you'll'?
- Used short, simple words and sentences?
For example, have you:
 - focused on one idea per sentence?
 - deleted unnecessary words?
 - broken long sentences into two or three shorter sentences?
- Used everyday language?
For example, have you:
 - deleted technical terms, jargon and clichés?
 - deleted internally-focused information like vision and mission statements?
 - spelt out acronyms unless they are well known?

2 Writing (cont.)

Have you:



- Used the active voice to make sentences shorter and more direct?**
For example, 'You must submit an application' **not** 'An application must be submitted'.
- Used bullet lists?**
Bullet lists:
 - help readers find information easily
 - break up text
 - add white space.
- Used examples?**
Examples help readers relate to your topic and understand key information.
- Used a consistent tense?** (preferably present tense)
- Defined technical terms?** (e.g. unfamiliar acronyms and program names)
- Listed exceptions and conditions after the main idea?**
For example, legal clauses and terms and conditions.
- Deleted repetition?**
- Used terms consistently?**
- Used minimal capitals?** (except for proper names and nouns)
- Used Australian spelling?**
- Avoided cross-referencing?**
- Finished your document with a call to action?**
For example:
 - phone number
 - postal address
 - web address
 - deadline

3 Layout and Design

Have you:



- Used a sans serif fonts (minimum of 12-point)?
- Left-aligned text?
- Broken up text into short sections and bullet lists?
- Increased white space with wide margins and line spacing?
- Used text and images that contrast with the background?
- Used clear infographics and tables to aid understanding?

4 Testing and Proofing

Have you:



- Tested the grade level of your writing using Flesch-Kincaid software?
You should aim for a score of 60-80 for early secondary school literacy levels.
- Tested the document with your target audience?
- Done a final edit, spell check and proof?

How accessible is your plain language document?

Add up the total number of check boxes ticked to determine the accessibility rating of your document.



0-8

Your document needs improvement - check the key principles and keep editing.



9-18

Your document reads well - ask your colleague for feedback and keep editing.



19-28

Your document is easy to read and understand - well done!

For more information contact Scope's Accessible information experts.

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