

## Plain Language Checklist

### Focus on Your Audience

Use **you** when you can

Use **examples** or **Question and Answer format**

### Organize Your Document Logically

**Lead** your reader **through** the **document**

Use **informative headings**

Keep **sections short**

**Summarize main points** before going into details

### Use Active Voice

Have an actor!

For example:

Use: You will write new guidelines.

Not: New guidelines will be written.

### Avoid Using –tion and –ment

For example:

Use: recommend or improve

Not: make recommendations or make improvements

### Be Clear

Use common, everyday words

Use **must** – not **shall** – to convey a requirement

Define industry terms

Use acronyms sparingly, if at all

Avoid jargon and legalese

Use correct grammar

### Be Concise

Use short sentences (average 20 words)

Use short paragraphs (under 15 lines)

Drop repeats such as: **absolutely complete** or **end result**

Avoid word build-up

For example:

Use: Many employees write letters

Not: There are many employees in the agency who write letters

### Make it Visually Appealing

Include white space in design and layout

Use bullets, tables and charts