

Plain language checklist for readability and accessibility

1. Get to know your audience.

- Find out what your readers or listeners need. Ask them!
- Re-writing a document? Ask what works well and what could be improved. Ask for feedback from people who are not familiar with the subject matter. Will the text will help your audience do, learn, or access what they need? What do you want your reader to do with what they read?

2. Write as simply and directly as possible.

- Put the most important information first. Leave out information readers don't need.
- Use the active voice. ("The secretary took notes," NOT "Notes were taken.") Use a direct and conversational tone.
- Make sure your language is inclusive and free of gender and other biases. Avoid jargon and explain any acronyms or abbreviations. Use simple words, and short sentences and paragraphs.
- Check the reading level.

3. Organize your document logically. Use bulleted and numbered lists. Make sure titles and headings are useful, clear, and consistent. Use Styles in Microsoft Word to make sure these levels are coded into your document.

- Place the most important information where it's easiest to find.
- Make sure any instructions are clear and don't skip any steps.

4. Pay attention to the design and format of your document.

- Use fonts that are clear and easy to read — no more than two fonts per document!
 - Align (justify) text on the left, but not the right.
- Use bold to make text stand out, limit italics, and don't underline. Leave lots of white space and avoid walls of text. Use a simple table of contents to help people find what they need quickly.

5. Make sure your document is welcoming.

- Use images and other visuals if they help understanding.
- Print on white or light paper and use white backgrounds online. Use alternative (alt) text and written descriptions of images. If you use charts or tables, make sure they are easy to understand. Tables should only be used to display data.

6. Test your document on your intended audience before you publish it.

- Do people understand it?
- Does it do what you need it to do?
- Is it useful and available in accessible formats?