



Checklist for Plain Language

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1. Plan

- Understand the client or customer's needs
- Identify the appropriate content

2. Consider audience and purpose(s)

- Make the purposes of this document immediately clear
- Understand the client's KEEEN (KNOWLEDGE, EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCE, EMOTIONS, NEEDS)
- Start with main points that are important to the client or customer

3. Draft

- Write down ideas quickly; avoid editing until after writing your first draft
- Be prepared for several revisions if others sign off on document
- Leave at least 20 minutes between drafting and revising; optimal time is 24 hours

4. Revise for content, organization, tone, style

- Start with the main ideas
- Explain the purpose
- Arrange ideas from most important to least from the reader's point of view
- Write short paragraphs – 3-5 sentences maximum
- Write short sentences – 15-18 words optimum
- Use plain language writing style
 - Use active voice (*Jim sent the report, not The report was sent by Jim.*)
 - Use verbs, not nouns (determine, not make a determination of)
 - Eliminate jargon (only people in your field understand your jargon)

5. Format for easier reading

- Use white space
- Use bulleted or numbered lists
- Use headings -- 3-5 per page
- Use sans serif typeface for headings

6. Proofread

- Check for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and typos
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