

# Creating Easy to Read Documents

## Plain Language Guidelines for the Trucking Industry



***Our Industry. Your Council!***

**Canada**

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program.



**Canadian Trucking  
Human Resources Council**

## Acknowledgements

The Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC) wishes to express sincere appreciation for the contribution of representatives from the carriers and fleets, professional associations, labour organizations and government, independent professionals who contributed directly or indirectly to this publication. The commitment to excellence

of the many participants has made this tool possible. Special acknowledgement is extended to representatives from the following organizations:

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
- Trucking HR Sector Council Atlantic
- Siemens Transportation Group Inc.
- Sunbury Transport
- Bison Transport
- Association of Canadian Community Colleges
- Winnipeg Motor Express

The Council acknowledges the support of The Alliance of Sector Councils (TASC) and other councils that allowed their materials to be referenced or reproduced in this tool:

- Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Sector Council
- The Automotive Sector Council of Nova Scotia
- The Petroleum Human Resources Sector Council
- Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council

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### Alternative formats

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### Printed in Canada.

ISBN: 978-1-897015-45-2



This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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## Introduction

This guide is intended for anybody who is responsible for creating workplace materials used by professional drivers and other employees working and learning in the trucking industry. Using plain language techniques will help you remove the barriers and difficulties of reading and understanding workplace materials experienced by employees.

Have you ever had to read and reread instructions, applications or general information to understand what they mean? Do you put off reading or completing documents that are wordy, complex, and difficult to understand? Have you ever completed a form only to realize you entered the wrong information? We have all been there. Workplace materials not written in plain language can be hard to read and understand. Unclear language can cost time and money, cause confusion, create errors, and produce unsafe and unhealthy work environments.

Attractive and easy to use material can make the difference between material that is read and material that is ignored; a document that achieves its purpose or one that fails.

Using plain language for workplace materials in the trucking industry will have many benefits, including:

- improved operations
- increased productivity, and
- safer and healthier workplaces

## What is Plain language?

Plain language combines what you write with how you write. Plain language is the writing and design of material that successfully communicates a message to your audience. This means you put the needs and abilities of your audience first. It means a good match between the workplace material you create and your audience's ability to use and complete the material. It ensures your audience will find, understand and use your workplace material information in the shortest possible time. Plain language allows your audience to:

- find information quickly
- understand the information and grammar
- use the information correctly

## What are workplace materials?

Workplace materials refer to material that a worker uses on the job. The material can require reading text, document use, and writing text skills, separately or together.

Reading text	Document use	Writing
Refers to reading tasks that use material in the form of sentences or paragraphs. Examples: memos, procedures, regulations, manuals.	Refers to tasks that use a variety of information displays such as words, numbers and visuals (lines, colours, shapes) to determine the meaning of the information. Examples: lists, tables, labels and forms.	Refers to writing text and writing in documents, and typing on the computer. Examples: filling in forms.

## When would I use plain language?

You should use plain language with whatever material with which you are responsible. Use plain language when preparing or revising any workplace materials typically used by professional drivers, such as:

- driver's manuals
- carrier policies and procedures
- bills of lading
- equipment checklists
- driver training manuals
- industry rules and regulations
- industry newsletters

## How will this guide help me?

The intent of this guide is to present the why and how of using plain language principles and techniques with workplace materials. Use the guidelines as best practice principles, rather than a list of set rules. By using the principles and techniques you will improve your writing, make your message direct, clear, and concise, and grammatically correct.

Once you know the basic guidelines of plain language, you will continue to teach yourself how to do it until you, too, become an expert.

## 1. Identify your audience

Preparing plain language material is more than just writing — it is a project. It has a planning stage. This planning stage requires fact finding about your audience and your purpose.

Before you begin to write or revise your material you need to have a clear picture of who is your audience, what is your purpose for writing and what outcome do you want? This becomes the framework for your material. It ensures that you write from your audience's perspective and respond to their needs. By putting yourself in their shoes, you will grab and hold their attention, give them the information they want and achieve your outcome.

### Determine your audience

Writers have to understand the audience before the audience can understand the words.

In a plain language approach, you always start by identifying your audience. Sometimes you may know your audience well, other times you may need to do some research to learn more about them. Use information available from your human resources departments, trainers, supervisors and other colleagues who work with the audience or the audience themselves to gather information about their knowledge and experience with the subject matter.

For example, you want to inform your professional drivers about a change in the trip data form. You know that some of your audience has poor reading and writing abilities; many are newcomers to Canada and may be unfamiliar with the information and its importance. You would grab your audience's attention and help them understand if you use a memo structure, with:

- a bold heading sentence to explain exactly what the memo is about and who it is for
- a question and answer format that asks the questions that the drivers may have based on their knowledge
- a tone that speaks directly to them and words and terms they would understand
- an active voice that states what you want them to do and an example of how you want it done

The more you know about your audience the easier it will be to identify what essential information to include.

Use available information to answer the following questions to develop a profile of your audience.

- What are the personal characteristics of your audience — education and training background, job experience, cultural origin, gender, age, abilities and disabilities?
- How much do they know about the subject and its specialized vocabulary and terms?
- What does your audience need to know or do — do they need detailed or brief information?

- How will they read and use the information?
- How well do they read and understand English?

If you are rewriting existing material, ask:

- What are the most common complaints about the material?
- What are the most common questions about the information?
- What sections or questions are blank or completed incorrectly?

Keep these questions in mind as you write or revise in plain language.

Look at your audience's experience. Will you have new professional drivers? Will you have experts with twenty years experience? Will you have both groups side-by-side? The best rule is to visualize your least experienced user and write for that person.

### **Tell your audience whom the information is for**

Many times material has more than one audience. Your document may provide and gather information from one reader and give information to another. For example, many truck drivers use a Bill of Lading, Job Application Form or an Incident Report. Break your document into sections. At the beginning of each section, identify your intended audience. Do not make a reader go through unnecessary information.

## 2. Determine your reasons for writing

When you are writing a document, you need to know why you are writing it. Identify your purpose(s) and desired outcomes at the beginning to keep focused on the information you need to provide.

### Is your purpose to:

- *remind* employees to follow safe driving techniques
- *request* information from an employee about a driving incident
- *convince* employees to hand in a completed Bill of Lading file
- *inform* drivers about a change in a health policy
- *motivate* drivers to attend a training course
- *explain* how to complete a daily driving log or vehicle inspection form, or
- *warn* drivers of potential health hazards and teach them safer actions

If you are clear about your purpose before you start, you are able to use only the essential information that supports your purpose. This makes your presentation stronger and clearer.

### What do you want to happen?

You are writing because you want something to happen. Think about the specific action or actions you want your audience to do after reading your material.

Do you want your audience to:

- do something — load fuel following the correct procedure
- learn something — apply a new safety rule
- change habits or behaviour — change the method for completing a vehicle safety checklist
- improve performance — improve the quality and detail of written information on a incident report

Keep your purpose and outcome in mind as you plan the structure for your material.

### 3. Determine what information your audience needs

Based on your audience, purpose for writing and desired outcome ask yourself — What essential information or key points does your audience need to know and in what order do they need the information, to do what you are asking. Use this to create your outline and to divide the information among sections.

A great technique for determining what are the key points or information is to create a content map. A content map is a random record of your ideas and knowledge.

To create a content map — jot down and circle the primary purpose or key focus of the material. Draw lines from your primary purpose and write all your ideas at the end of the lines, as they occur to you. Add sub-ideas to the first ideas. After you have finished go back and number your branches or ideas to put them in the order you think works best. This becomes your material outline. See sample below.

#### Example:

Ideas for paragraph on the CTHRC:

#### *Importance of the CTHRC*

- Trucking is one of Canada's most important industries (2)
- The CTHRC is a leader in trucking human resources practices (1)

#### *Why the CTHRC exists*

- The Council was created by industry for industry (1)
- The CTHRC provides labour market and career awareness information (2)
- The CTHRC works to promote a positive image of the industry (3)

#### *Services available*

- Training programs and assessments tools are available (2)
- The Council works with industry to develop materials (1)

#### *Final edited text<sup>1</sup>*

CTHRC is the leader in human resources practices for one of Canada's most important industries, trucking!

The Council was created FOR industry BY industry to tackle the many human resource challenges you face in your company including addressing national occupational standards, providing ongoing labour market information, promoting career awareness initiatives and a positive image of trucking in general.

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of CTHRC website: [www.cthrc.com](http://www.cthrc.com); reprinted with permission.

The Council has developed training programs and assessment tools to help both you and your workers. From upgrading modules for your driver, to online courses for your dispatcher to assessing the level of essential skills of your trainer, the CTHRC has worked with industry to develop these tools to make your job easier.

## 4. Organize your information for your audience

You know your audience, purpose and desired outcome. You have identified the key information. Now think about how they will read or use your information. Then use this to determine the best structure to allow them to identify and understand the key information.

Will your audience:

- scan or locate information
- skim for overall meaning or gist of the information
- read to understand and learn
- read to follow instructions or complete forms

### Use your knowledge of your audience, purpose and desired outcome to organize your material

Knowing your audience, purpose and desired outcome and how they will use your information will help you to decide the best structure for your material.

Will you create:

- a pamphlet, flyer, letter, brochure, poster, or e-mail message
- several documents for different audiences
- several forms to enter information
- checklists to ensure information is complete
- a longer document with several divided sections

Will you use:

- sentences and paragraphs, lists, or a question and answer format
- boxes, headings, illustrations, and colour to highlight, clarify or separate your information
- tables, graphs, charts, or illustrations to show, explain, or request information
- check boxes, fill in the blank (words, sentences, or numbers), marks on a diagram, or picture drawing to collect information from your audience

Suppose you want to *motivate* drivers to attend a training workshop. You might create a short flyer highlighting the benefits to attending this workshop. Bold headings, a bulleted list, a personal and positive tone, a positive quote from a past participant and an illustration showing the learning activity might help convince drivers to come.

## Put your information in a logical order

Put important information first. Readers always look for the main message before beginning to read material.

Provide an outline for larger amounts of material or information. This can be a table of contents, or a picture or drawing. It tells your audience what to expect and where to get information.

Think about your audience to decide the most logical order for them. How will you provide the essential information in the shortest time? Some information organizes easily into alphabetical, time or order of operation. Others can be more difficult and require creativity.

- To teach your readers how to solve a mechanical problem you might first state the problem and then the cause, and then recommend what to do?
- To inform your readers about a change in employee benefits you might organize the information in order of importance to the employee — what is the change, how does it affect them and do they need to do something different
- To instruct your readers to use a certain process you might arrange the information in sections. Start with the purpose, then instructions and finally the operations, in the order they occur, e.g. a vehicle safety checklist has a definite sequence order

## 5. Use headings

Headings are great. Headings break information into small sections. Headings allow your audience to identify the key information, the levels of importance and guide the eye through the information. Use headings to label each section of a document, including the headlines, categories and sections. This makes your information easier to read and understand. Highlighting in bold face, using larger, smaller, and different typeface helps your audience to:

- scan material
- locate key information
- determine information’s level of importance

Use headings to give your audience specific information about the material. Use headings to identify the given and requested information so that your audience can understand and complete entry forms, quickly and accurately. Headings can be full sentences, descriptive phrases, words, or abbreviations.

Make headings informative. Choose the best heading for the information. Expand a single word or phrase to describe what is in the material or use a single word, phrase or sentence to describe exactly what information you want.

Before	After
<p>Provide correct forms and detail helps rating personnel correctly recreate the trip. There are six parts of the Bill of Lading that are of interest to the driver: driver and equipment identity, loading and shipping details, unloading details, signatures, trip details and explanation.</p>	<p><b>Drivers must complete six parts of a Bill of Lading</b></p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p><b>What parts must I complete on a Bill of Lading?</b></p> <p>A driver must complete six parts of a Bill of Lading before handing it in the dispatch office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ driver and equipment identity</li> <li>■ loading and shipping details</li> <li>■ unloading details</li> <li>■ signatures</li> <li>■ trip details</li> <li>■ additional explanations</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid driving over seemingly harmless objects. The small box paper bag may hide...</p>	<p><b>The dangers of driving over small objects</b></p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p><b>What is the danger of driving over small objects?</b></p> <p>Small objects may hide something dangerous. The small paper bag may seem harmless, but...</p>

## 6. Use lists

Readers love lists. And we as writers should love lists too. Use lists for material that is long, short, general, and specific. There are very few limits to lists. The purpose of the list is to shorten, clarify and organize information. You can take shortcuts using a list that you could not do if you were using a narrative format.

A list breaks up large pieces of information into small sections. It makes complex information easier to read and follow. It is a great way to organize information. Lists are a great way to:

- identify key information
- reduce the amount of text
- draw your audience’s attention to information
- clarify or add to information
- present items, procedures, and step by step instructions
- present the order in which things happen

Use bullets to draw your reader’s attention to information that may not have a particular order. Use numbering in a list to show the level of importance, or the order of operation.

You can use a simple single list of related information or use a table to show or request related information. Presenting information in table structure often works better than the narrative structure because it requires less text and immediately shows the relation between information.

Before	After																	
<p>By law all accidents are to be reported. When you report an accident you must state the location and date of the accident, weather conditions, the drivers involved and their personal information, the police officer’s name and a drawing of the accident scene.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="203 1390 799 1434"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><b>Witnesses</b></td> </tr> </table> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p>	<b>Witnesses</b>	<p><b>A driver’s accident report must include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ accident time and location</li> <li>■ weather and driving conditions</li> <li>■ name, address and license plate numbers of the other drivers involved in the accident</li> <li>■ description of property or vehicle damage</li> <li>■ name of the police officer at the scene</li> <li>■ drawing, photograph or diagram of the accident</li> <li>■ names, address and license plate number of witnesses</li> </ul> <table border="1" data-bbox="824 1675 1416 1885"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">Accident witness information</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Name</th> <th>Address</th> <th>Phone #</th> <th>License plate #</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Accident witness information				Name	Address	Phone #	License plate #								
<b>Witnesses</b>																		
Accident witness information																		
Name	Address	Phone #	License plate #															

## 7. Use question and answer

A question and answer structure (Q and A) may be either in a narrative or table format. It asks questions about information the audience needs to know and is set up as questions your audience would ask. Use your information about your audience to make your questions realistic. If you use a Q and A format for headings, use it consistently to help the information flow. A Q and A format allows your audience to quickly locate a topic and see what information it contains.

The Q and A structure works great as headings.

Before	After
<p><b>Introduction</b> (This does not tell your audience anything)</p>	<p><b>How do I avoid driving accidents?</b> (This tells your audience what the document, flyer or section is about.)</p>
<p><b>The logbook</b></p> <p>To assist in the enforcement of the number of Hours of Service regulations truck driver must maintain accurate, up to date logbooks.</p> <p>The logbook is a legal record consisting of a series of daily logs for the month. The driver records the daily number of hours worked, the vehicles driven, the commodities carried, and so on. Entries are made on a daily basis for each 24 period whether the driver is on or off duty.</p> <p>The driver is responsible for making an original and copy of the log. The original is submitted to the payroll office for each pay period and the other one is kept by the driver.</p>	<p><b>What is a driver's daily logbook?</b></p> <p>Is a legal record of your daily 24 hour driving log, whether you are on or off duty. You record:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the daily number of hours worked</li> <li>■ the vehicles driven</li> <li>■ commodities carried, etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>What do I do with completed daily logs?</b></p> <p>You must make two copies of the driver's daily log. Give the white copies (top) to the payroll office every second and fourth Friday of each month. You keep the yellow copies (bottom) for your records.</p>

## 8. Be consistent

Being consistent means using the same layout structure and grammatical format throughout your material. Be consistent in your sentences, paragraphs, lists and headings. Use the same format or numbering structure. Find the key concepts and put them in the same format (verb with verb, noun with noun). Inconsistent structure and material looks awkward because each section or sentence is using a different format. Whatever formats you use, keep it the same for the material, sections and headings. It is one of the easiest techniques for making material easy to read.

Use the same word to describe the same action. Changing your words may confuse your audience. For example, *rotate* and *turn* mean the same thing but your audience may waste time trying to figure out if there is a difference. We have been trained to be creative in our writing and vary our words but your audience will feel more comfortable with the same words — it increases reading speed and comprehension.

Choose a few good design elements, formats and wording and use them consistently.

Before	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The part is removed</li> <li>■ Repair the part</li> <li>■ The part shall be replaced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Remove the part</li> <li>■ Repair the part</li> <li>■ Replace the part</li> </ul>
Read the document, be sure to sign it, and then it must be returned to the Personnel office.	Read the document, sign it, and return it to the Personnel office.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Turn the handle to the right until it clicks</li> <li>■ Rotate back to the left</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Turn the handle to the right until it clicks</li> <li>■ Turn the handle to the left</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Completing the driver's log</i></b></p> <p>To complete the drivers' log the driver must:</p> <p>a. Enter basic information. This includes the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ name and address of carrier</li> <li>■ name of the driver</li> <li>■ driver signature</li> </ul> <p>b. Determine duty status. The driver is always one of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) off duty status</li> <li>ii) sleeper berth status</li> <li>iii) driving status</li> </ol>	<p><b><i>Completing the driver's log</i></b></p> <p>To complete the drivers' log the driver must:</p> <p>a. Enter basic information. This includes the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ carrier's name and address</li> <li>■ driver's name</li> <li>■ driver's signature</li> </ul> <p>b. Determine duty status. The driver is always one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ off duty status</li> <li>■ sleeper berth status</li> <li>■ driving status</li> </ul>

## 9. Speak directly to your audience

### Use “You” to speak to the audience

Write as though you are speaking directly to your reader. By using “you,” the reader feels that you are speaking directly to him or her. When you address different audiences in different parts of the document, define “you” in each part. For example, “How do different job applicants fill in the job application form?” You might write:

To apply for a **driving position** you must complete sections: A, B, & C.

To apply for an **office or clerical** position you must complete sections: A, B & D.

Before	After
Completed forms must be sent into the carrier’s office.	You must send your completed forms into the carrier’s office.

### Use “I” to refer to the audience in questions and answer headings

The question and answer format assumes that the reader is the person asking the questions and that you are anticipating questions they may have.

Before	After
Notifying an occupied driver.	What can I do to get a drivers attention?

### Use “We” to refer to your organization

By using “we” to respond to questions or to inform the reader, you state clearly, what your organization requires and what its responsibilities are. You also keep your voice active and use fewer words.

Before	After
To ensure that payment is correct always submit all your bills on a regular basis and attach all the documents that relate to this trip.	To ensure we pay you correctly, you must submit complete and accurate Bill of Lading packages to the dispatch office every Friday.

## 10. Choose the best words

### Use familiar words

Avoid difficult words and phrases. Use phrases and words your reader is likely to know. Use the same words you would use to talk to someone. Use technical terms and jargon in material only when it is necessary.

**Why write *immediately* or *inquire* when you could use *now* and *ask*.**

**Before:** These personnel are *required to interpret*

**After:** Office clerks *must decide*

Instead of ...	Please use ...
acquire	buy, get
additional	more, extra
allocate	divide, share
demonstrate	show, prove
following	after
remuneration	pay
immediately	at once, now
(it is) mandatory	(you) must

Pages 16 and 17 contain more complete lists of words and phrases to avoid and other words or phrases that can replace them.

- a) Let your reader determine what is familiar

By knowing your target audience you can determine if your words are familiar to them. Words that you, your colleagues and experts in the field use may be confusing or unknown to other people in your organization or field. When in doubt choose familiar and every day words to allow more readers to understand your information.

Avoid idioms. Idioms are words used by a specific culture. You would confuse a recent immigrant to Canada if you wrote *giving someone a hand* is the *modus operandi* at this place of work.

- b) When unfamiliar or technical terms are necessary

Sometimes a technical or formal word is necessary to convey a clear and concise message. Define them and include an example to clarify the word's meaning.

For example, driver related contraventions (driving violations in which a driver has been found guilty).

Only use terms such as "marginal cost pricing," "execute a document," and "reasonable grounds" if your only reader is an expert in that jargon area.

### Use only the necessary words

Users need to find information quickly. Unnecessary words waste time and take away from your message. Include only the important words in your writing. Why subject your audience to “in the event that” when the single word “if” is more concise.

Before	After
ask the question	ask
mandatory requirement	requirement or must
please do not hesitate to contact	please call
I hereby release	I release
for the purpose of	to
in the event that	if
adequate number of	enough
prior to	before
with regard to	about
In the event that you should have an accident you must ensure that you have an adequate amount of detail regarding the accident. In the event that there is an injury to another driver, you must obtain the driver’s name and license number for the purpose of contacting at a later date.	If you have an accident, you must provide enough information about the accident. If another driver is injured you must get their name and driver’s license number to contact them later.

### Use concrete, specific words and phrases

Concrete words make your writing and meaning more specific and easier for your audience to understand. In addition, you are respecting their reading habits and limited available time.

Before	After
obligation	must
authorization	may
Use the appropriate request form.	Use form 23b.
Complete an incident report form <i>if the circumstances warrant it.</i>	Complete an incident report form <i>if the following happens:</i>
<i>Strict and vigilant compliance with the aforementioned safety regulations will ensure the continued health and safety of all concerned.</i>	<i>You must follow these rules for your safety and your co-workers safety.</i>

### Choose inclusive words

The words in your document should include everyone. Use words that recognize both men and women.

Before	After
repairman or maintenance man	technician
workman	worker
foreman	supervisor
policeman	police officer

Plain language documents recognize a person's job and knowledge instead of the person's gender and cultural background.

## 11. Be active in your writing

### Use active sentences

In **active sentences**, the doer of the action is the subject in the sentence. In an active sentence, the subject is at the beginning of the sentence. The subject is the person or thing that does something. The verb shows the action. The object receives the action.

The driver <b>Subject</b>	Completed <b>Verb</b>	The driving log <b>Object</b>
------------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------------

Active sentences are easier to understand because it is easy to see who is doing what. Active writing becomes easier if you constantly ask “who does what.”

In **passive sentences**, the person or item acted upon is the subject of the sentence. Or said another way — if you can ask “by who” or “by what” after a verb, the sentence is in the passive voice. This can confuse readers and force them to guess who or what is responsible. A reader may become confused or not understand instructions, rules and procedures. This can result in mistakes.

Before — Passive sentence	After — Active sentence
The application was completed by the driver.	The driver completed the application.
All expense claims must be accompanied by receipts or vouchers.	Receipts or vouchers must accompany all expense claims.
When blank Bill of Lading forms are used by the driver, they are to contact dispatch and exchange details.	The driver must contact dispatch to exchange information to complete a Bill of Lading form.
<p><b>Procedure: When the spill data is incorrect on an incident report.</b></p> <p>If your spill data <i>are entered</i> based on initial reports that <i>are found</i> to be inaccurate later, the spill data must <i>be updated</i> in the “remarks” section.</p>	<p><b>Procedure: How a driver corrects the spill amount on an incident report.</b></p> <p>If you enter an incorrect spill amount, you must put the correct spill amount in the “remarks” section.</p>

## 12. Write with strong verbs

Strong verbs make your writing crisp, clear and powerful. Keep verbs as action words, the only words that do things. You keep verbs strong by not making them nouns. A verb made into a noun is a *nominalization*.

Before	After
efficiency	efficient
cause damage to	damage
give notice to	notify or tell
make use of	use
provide a description	describe
it is my belief	I believe

### A nominalization usually:

- ends in: tion, ion, ency, ancy, or
- may start with cause, give, make, I am, It is my

(See the list below for normalizations and alternatives).

A nominalization weakens the strength of your sentence. If you write, “give permission to,” only one word matters: “permission.” The other words are fillers. If you use the word “permit,” the sentence becomes stronger.

Nominalizations make strong sentences weak. When you change a verb into a nominalization (noun) you usually have to add a weak supporting verb for the sentence to be correct. In “make payment of” the word “make” is a weak supporting verb. The statement is stronger by only using the verb “pay”. Which phrase is stronger: “please pay me” or “please make payment to me.”

Weak verb	Weak sentence	Strong sentence	Strong verb
<i>had made</i>	Union members <i>had made</i> a decision to strike.	Union members <i>decided</i> to strike.	<i>decided</i>
<i>are</i>	The procedures <i>are</i> applicable to all drivers.	The procedures <i>apply</i> to all drivers.	<i>apply</i>
<i>have</i>	The procedures will <i>have a significant effect</i> on record keeping.	The regulation will <i>affect</i> record keeping.	<i>affect</i>
<i>have</i>	During the filling of fuel at the terminal, the truck engine should <i>be</i> turned off.	The driver must turn off the truck engine, while filling fuel at the terminal.	<i>turn off</i>

### 13. Be positive

A positive sentence tells a reader what to do, rather than what not to do. They are easier to read. Your readers are more likely to understand and follow rules and instructions that tell them what they *must* or *should* do rather than, what they *should not*.

Words like *no*, *not*, *none*, and *never* make a sentence negative, as do words like *against*, *unnecessary*, *exclude*, *impossible*, and *inefficient*.

Before	After
The truck must be <i>no</i> closer than 10 metres from another truck during fueling.	Your truck must be 10 metres, or more, from another truck during fueling.
People other than the designated dispatcher may <i>not</i> give out blank Bill of Lading forms. <i>No</i> exceptions will be made.	Only designated dispatchers can give out blank Bill of Lading forms.

Sometimes a single negative is useful. They can strengthen a workplace danger or consequences, or to make a rule or instruction stronger. However use them with caution. For example:

- Do not enter
- Do not use the north exit
- Never use another driver's number

**Never use double negatives.** Each negative makes a sentence harder to understand and adds to the error risk.

Before (double negative)	After (positive)
<i>Don't</i> hesitate to contact me if you <i>don't</i> understand this memo.	Contact me if you have any questions about the memo.
A reminder to all employees	Remember to complete your daily vehicle inspection
<i>Failure</i> to complete the daily vehicle safety inspection before leaving the yard will <i>not</i> be tolerated. We expect that you will <i>not</i> ignore this reminder.	You must always complete your daily vehicle inspection before leaving the yard.

## 14. Write short sentences

Short sentences usually contain only one or two ideas. Create a new sentence if you are using several commas and semi-colons. If you need to explain a term or make a point, use a separate sentence.

A short sentence may not be a clear sentence. You may need to use more, rather than fewer, words to get your point across. The best policy is to use only as many words as necessary. Put the subject and verb early and close together. Break up complex, multi-clause sentences into smaller pieces. This helps to keep your sentence to one or two ideas.

Use one idea per sentence or one action per step. Steps that contain more than one action confuse the user. A one step with five actions procedure is easier to read if we break it down into five steps.

Before	After
<p><b>Subject and verb separated</b></p> <p>These <i>personnel</i> without first hand knowledge are required to <i>interpret</i> what has gone on, days after it has occurred, often hundreds of kilometers away, without asking questions of the people involved.</p> <p><i>I</i> authorize you, upon submission of my application, to make such <i>investigations and inquiries</i> of my personal, employment, financial or medical history and other related matters as may be necessary in arriving at an employment decision.</p>	<p><b>Subject and verb together</b></p> <p><i>Office clerks</i> must <i>decide</i> what has happened on a trip from the information you provide.</p> <p><i>I</i> permit you to <i>review</i> my personal, employment, and medical history to make an employment decision.</p>
<p><b>Multi-clause (idea) sentence</b></p> <p>After locating parts A &amp; B, insert B into A while turning the handle to the left and tightening the screw.</p>	<p><b>Single (idea) sentence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Locate Part A</li> <li>■ Locate Part B</li> <li>■ Insert B into A</li> <li>■ Turn the handle to the left</li> <li>■ Tighten the screw</li> </ul>

## 15. Apply visual design strategies

How you present your information on the page impacts your audience's ability to read and do what you want them to do. If your workplace material is inviting with lots of headings, clearly defined sections and text that is easy to follow, your audience is more likely to read, understand, and do what you want them to do.

### Choose the best typeface and size

The **typeface** you choose affects how easy your information is to read. *Serif* typefaces are easier to read for text information.

*Serif* type has "hooks" or "feet" on the letters, like the type we are using in this text. This helps the reader's eye to move along the line of type, making the letters easier to recognize and read.

This is Times, a serif typeface. It is an easy type to read.

*Sans Serif* type has no hooks on the letters. This style draws the reader's eyes down. Sans Serif type is useful for headings, charts and tables. They provide a contrast for the serif type in the text.

This is Futura, a sans serif typeface. It is not as easy to read.

Keep the typeface simple.

The **type size** depends on your audience and how and when the document is used. As a rule, 12-point type is easy to read, but use your eye to make your final decision. Use larger fonts to attract your audience's eye.

This is 12 point.

This is 14 point.

This is 18 point.

### Emphasize important information

You can highlight important information in your document by using:

- **larger** type size for headings
- **bold**, to draw attention to headings, important information or key words
- *italics*, to emphasize a single word or phrase
- **colour**, to emphasize important information or provide a contrast
- shading and **boxes** to separate information or highlight important information.

Be consistent with whatever emphasis techniques you choose to use. Use one for titles, one for sub-titles or sections, and one for text. If you use italics to highlight words, be sure to use that technique throughout your material. Be careful not to overdo your emphasis — too much can be confusing and cause your important information to get lost.

## Avoid all capital letters

Avoid using capital letters in headings or to emphasize important information. The ALL CAPITAL TEXT BLOCK is difficult to read. Lower case letters are easier to read. Capitalize the beginning word in a heading, The First Letter of Each Key Word in the heading or proper names in the heading.

Before	After
Bill of Lading EXAM ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS BASED ON THE SAMPLE Bill of Lading	<b>Bill of Lading exam</b> Use the sample Bill of Lading to answer all questions

## Adjust your line length and margins

Short lines and narrow columns make the eyes shift too quickly or can confuse your audience into reading across columns instead of down. On the other hand, long lines can be hard to follow. Adjust your margins to allow enough information and white space to allow reading flow but also separate areas on the page.

## Use left margin justification

Text that has ragged or uneven right margins are easier to read than text that has a full margin on both the left and right side. A justified margin creates uneven spaces between words and hyphenates many words at the end of lines. Hyphenated words are hard to read.

Text that is centered or ragged on both sides does not show your audience where a sentence begins and when one ends. It looks like each line is a sentence in itself.

## Use lots of white space

There should be enough white space on each page to provide contrast, make the text less dense and easier to read. To increase your material's white space:

- increase your margins
- avoid columns
- break the text into manageable units with clear titles and headings
- shorten the length of your lines of text
- use lists
- keep paragraphs short and add an extra space between paragraphs

**Choose paper and ink colour carefully**

Choose colours that provide good contrast. Black type on light coloured paper is the easiest to read. Text on bright orange, pink and green absorb the colour making the text hard to read.

**Dark type +  
dark paper =  
difficult reading**

**Use effective graphics and illustrations**

Presenting information using graphics often works better than the information in a narrative form, such as a table versus narrative text. Graphics can compliment narrative information, such as a flow chart beside a procedure outline provides a visual of the same information.

Many members of your audience learn more effectively through graphics and illustrations. They make material more interesting, usable, and understandable and at the same time motivates your audience to pay attention. Plain language materials often benefit from graphics and illustrations, such as:

- simple charts and graphs
- tables
- illustrations and diagrams
- photographs
- flow charts

Although graphics add to your material, use them with caution. Ensure your graphics:

- mean the same to your audience as they mean to you
- reflect your audience in age, gender, and ethnic, education and work background
- do not offend anyone
- compliments the text
- do not interrupt the flow of the information

**Keep it simple**

Always remember to keep it simple. Do not include too many elements on a page. Too many elements can clutter material and make it difficult to use. Use graphics and illustrations to enhance your information. Too many design features can confuse your audience and make it difficult to focus.

Did you know the Bill of Lading requirements have changed?

- ~~~~~
- ~~~~~
- ~~~~~
- ~~~~~, and
- ~~~~~

## Conclusion

Using clear, concise language and familiar terminology will help you communicate more successfully with your colleagues and employees. If you are uncertain whether the objectives of your organization's documentation will be clearly communicated to your organization's employees, this is an area where your sector council may be able to assist you.

If you wish to have your organization's key communication pieces assessed or reviewed, or have any further questions about these guidelines, please feel free to contact us at

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## Notes