

Plain Language Checklist

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Audience Checklist

1. Who are my readers? What do they know about this subject?
2. Why will they read this document? What do my readers need to know about this subject?

Organization Checklist

1. Have I presented information logically and in a way that makes sense to my readers?
2. Can my readers put my document into context? Do they understand what they are about to read, how the document is organized and what its purpose is?
3. Have I put the most important information first?
4. Can my readers quickly and easily find what they are looking for? Have I guided them through the text?
5. Have I used headings and subheadings that are:
 - descriptive of the text that follows,
 - consistent in style and design, and
 - logical and explicit?

Words Checklist

1. Have I written directly to my readers?
2. What words would my readers use when talking about this subject?
3. What terms are familiar to me but likely to be unfamiliar to my readers?
4. - Have I explained unfamiliar terms and acronyms?
5. Have I used:
 - verbs to describe action
 - words that my readers know in ways that are familiar to them,
 - words with clear meanings
 - appropriate examples, and
 - language that is free of bias?
6. Have I avoided using jargon and words from foreign languages?
7. Have I used the words "may," "can" and "shall" correctly?

Sentence Checklist

1. Have I written sentences with:
 - an average length of 15 to 25 words, and
 - only one idea?
2. Have I used active voice rather than passive voice?
3. Have I written clearly and concisely, without surplus words?
4. Have I kept the core of my sentences together?
5. Have I avoided using:
 - unnecessary preambles, and
 - double negatives, and
 - prepositional phrases?
6. Have I used point form and tabulation lists that:
 - help to explain complex material or describe a sequence of steps to follow, and
 - are consistent in form and style?

Paragraph Checklist

1. Have I used paragraphs with:
 - only one topic
 - sentences that relate logically to the subject
 - familiar material introducing new information, and
 - appropriate transitions?

Design Checklist

1. Have I used:
 - a serif typeface
 - a type size of 10 or 12 points
2. Do my headings and subheadings stand out?
3. In my Headings and subheadings, have I used:
4. Have I used:
 1. plenty of space between lines of type,
 2. a justified left margin,
 3. a ragged or unjustified right margin, and
 4. plenty of white space on the page?
5. Have I used visual images appropriately?

GUNNING'S FOG INDEX

To figure out the years of education needed to understand a document, Gunning's Fog Index operates like this:

Take the total number of words _____

and divide it by the total number of sentences _____

This result equals the Average number of words per sentence _____

Take the number of words of more than 3 syllables _____

and divide it by the total number of words _____

This result equals the Average syllable length of words _____

The total of these two figures is _____

Multiply this figure by 0.4 for the Fog Index $\times 0.4$

This equals the years of education required. _____

DERIVATIVE NOUNS AND VERB EQUIVALENTS

Derivative noun	Verb form
acceptance	accept
application	apply
approval	approve
assumption	assume
calculation	calculate
certification	certify
complaint	complain
conservation	conserve
consideration	consider
contribution	contribute
decision	decide
deduction	deduct
delivery	deliver
designation	designate (name, appoint)
deterioration	deteriorate
determination	determine
disclosure	disclose
discovery	discover
disposal, disposition	dispose (sell, give away)
distribution	distribute
education	educate
enforcement	enforce

examination	examine
filing	file
inclusion	include
information	inform
investigation	investigate
movement	move
objection	object
payment	pay
persistence	persist
prevention	prevent
promotion	promote
qualification	qualify
reaction	react
receipt	receive
recurrence	recur
reduction	reduce
reliance	rely
remittance	remit
residence	reside
resistance	resist
specification	specify
statement	state
submission	submit

TRANSITION WORDS

Similarity

again

also

and

as a matter of fact

as well

besides

for example

for instance

furthermore

in addition

Contrast

indeed

moreover

namely

similarly

specifically

that is

although

but

conversely

Cause

as a result

accordingly

because

consequently

for

hence

if...then

since

so

thus

in other words

in particular

Conclusion

in conclusion

in short

in summary

on the whole

to summarize

finally

first, next, last

immediately

later

despite this

however

instead

nevertheless

on the contrary

still

yet

meanwhile

next

presently

previously

since

soon

subsequently

then

while

Sequence

afterwards

at last

at length

at the same time

eventually

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES AND REPLACEMENTS

Prepositional phrases

at this (that) point in time

as a consequence of

by means of

by reason of

by virtue of

for the purpose of

for the reason that

from the point of view of

in accordance with

in addition to

in as much as

in association with

in case of

in connection with

in excess of

in favour of

in order to

in relation to

insofar as

in the absence of

in the course of

in the event of / that

Replace with

now (then)

because of

by, under

because of

by, under

to

because

from, for

by, under

besides

since

with

if

with, about, concerning

more than, over

for

to

about, concerning

since

without

during

if

in the nature of	like
in the neighborhood of	near
in the vicinity of	near
in view of	because of
on a daily basis	daily
on a regular basis	regularly
on the grounds of	because of
prior to	before
subsequent to	after
until such time as	until
with the exception of	except
with reference to	about, concerning
with regard to	about, concerning
with respect to	about, for, on

SUBSTITUTES FOR MULTI-SYLLABLE WORDS

Instead of:	Use:
accomplish	do
ascertain	find out
disseminate	send out, distribute
endeavour	try
expedite	hasten, speed up
facilitate	work out, devise, form
in lieu of	instead of
locality	place
optimum	best, greatest, most
strategy	plan
utilize	use

GUIDELINES FOR TABULATION

1. The items in the list must form a logical group. Avoid making a list of (a) bread, (b) eggs and (c) the prime minister.
2. Each item should contain only one idea.
3. All items in the list should be in the same form. Avoid beginning some items with a noun and others with a verb. Avoid varying the tenses of the verbs you use in a list.
4. Each item should work separately with the lead-in to form a complete sentence. Concluding material must fit in too, if the sentence continues after the last item on the list.
5. Put anything common to all items in the lead-in. The lead-in is the text before the bullets. The text after the bullets is the list.
6. The list should be indented to set it apart from the lead-in and any concluding material. Return to the left margin for any statement following the list.
7. Use bullets to identify each item in the list. Use numbers instead of bullets only when you are describing step-by-step procedures. Avoid using both numbers and bullets in a list.
8. If bullets are being used, all items in the list should begin with a lower case letter.
9. When items contain commas, or are lengthy, use semicolons at the end of each item; otherwise use commas or no punctuation. Put a period after the last item if it is the end of the sentence.
10. If the list consists of alternatives, put "or" after the second last item. If the list is inclusive, put "and" after the second last item.