

Plain Language Checklist and Resources

Checklist for Web Writing in Plain Language

- ☐ Is it obvious who and what the page is for? Use clear, [descriptive page titles](#). Search results usually show the page title so it must describe the page content clearly
- ☐ Is it easy to scan and pick out the main points? Use clear, [descriptive headings](#) to identify sections of your content
- ☐ [Use lists](#) instead of long sentences whenever possible
- ☐ Write short sentences. Ideally no more than 15 to 20 words
- ☐ [Keep paragraphs to one topic](#). Aim for no more than 5 sentences.
- ☐ Cut down your word count. Remove words that do not add meaning
- ☐ Use simple, **common words**. If you need to use complex terms, define them or provide examples. If you're using many complex terms, consider creating a glossary
- ☐ Use [inclusive language](#)
- ☐ [Avoid using ministry, organization or program names](#) unless required
- ☐ Define acronyms before using them
- ☐ Only include critical information. **Limit policy information** unless necessary
- ☐ Use the [active voice in the present tense](#)
- ☐ **Avoid complex terms**. If you need to use them, define them or provide examples. If you're using many complex terms, consider creating a glossary
- ☐ Use a [conversational tone](#). Use first and second person (we, us) rather than third person (he, she, it, they)
- ☐ Aim for a [Grade 8 reading level or lower](#). Test readability using the [HemingwayApp online tool](#)
- ☐ Have someone else **review your content**

Plain Language Writing Process

1. **Purpose and Audience:** Why are you writing this? Who is it for?
2. **Structure:** How will you organize? Logical flow
3. **Design:** How text looks on the page, paragraph length
4. **Expression:** Word choice, sentence length, tone, active voice
5. **Evaluation:** Checklist, readability tools, peer review

Language Simplification Examples

Instead of this:	Say this:
Accommodation	Housing
Administer	Do
Advance planning, planning for the future	Planning

After this is accomplished	Then
And also	And
Assistance, support	Help
At an early date	Soon
Communicate with staff	Let staff know
Gives you the opportunity to	Lets you
In accordance with	According to, in line with
In addition to	Plus, and
In the absence of	Without
In order to	To
In the event of	If
Individual	Person
Is able to	Can
Method	Way
Obtain	Get
Prior to	Before
Provides you with the opportunity to	Lets you
Request	Ask
Require assistance	Get help
Result in	Cause, make, lead to
Skills and abilities	Skills
The amount of time that	How long
Utilize, implement	Use
Various options	Options
Within your ability	If you can

Resources

- [Hemingway App](https://hemingwayapp.com) (hemingwayapp.com)
Calculates grade level, highlights difficult sentences, suggests word alternatives, highlights passive voice. Tip: switch to “Write” mode before cutting and pasting!
Privacy Note: Use web-based app for public information only. Contact your privacy officer if you are dealing with classified information. A desktop version is available for sensitive information.
- [Plain Language Guide](#)
Province of B.C. guidelines and tips for writing in Plain Language.
- [Plain Language Course](#)
Self-directed online course with practice exercises
- [Plainlanguage.gov](https://plainlanguage.gov)
Great checklists and additional writing tools – plus a great humour section
- **Thesaurus** (pick your favourite!)