Plain language

DEFINITION

Written plain language is clear, concise, well-organized, and appropriate to the subject and the intended audience.

Plain language should not be confused with easy-to-read information, which is important for people with intellectual disabilities.

Your document is in plain language if your audience can:

- Find what they need.
- Understand the information the first time.
- Act on this understanding.

CHECKLIST

- Include a clear title that describes the content clearly.
- Include clear headings that describe clearly the content of each section.
    - No more than 3 levels of headings.
- Only include critical information.
- Keep paragraphs short (no more than 5 sentences) and devoted to one topic.
    - Present important information first.
- Write short sentences: ideally no more than 15 to 20 words.
- Use lists instead of long sentences whenever possible.
- Use tables to simplify complex material.
- Remove words that do not add meaning.
- Use simple, common words.
    - If you need to use complex terms, define them or provide examples.
    - If there are many complex terms, consider to add a glossary.

- Do not use words in other languages.
- Define acronyms and abbreviations before using them.
    - If there are many acronyms, consider to add a glossary.
- For numbers, use digits, not words.
- Use the active voice.
- Use the simplest tense: if possible, simple present.
- Use a conversational, rather than legal or bureaucratic tone.
    - Use first and second person (we, us) rather than third person (he, she, it, they).
- Write for the average reader:
    - Aim for a reading level of grade 8 or lower.
    - Test its readability of your content using a tool such as the Hemingway for non-sensitive information

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