



# Use “Plain Language” to improve your writing

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*When material is in plain language, the audience finds what it needs, understands what it finds, and uses what it finds to meet its needs. Some of these points are elements of the House Bill 2702 Plain Language Standard.*

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## 1 Think about your audience first.

Is it a document for the public? Does it provide technical information to a licensee? Even if it is technical, make it clear. Tell yourself: I want to write clearly and effectively to my audience.

## 2 Focus the message around facts (who, what, where, when, why, how).

Clearly state your purpose. Are you asking, telling, or acknowledging? Is there a deadline or timeframe?

## 3 Include only relevant information.

We often try to provide all the detail possible instead of just the information needed. Put the most important information at the beginning of the document, then follow up with the details later.

## 4 Fit the writing style to the message.

A policy statement (formal) is different from a thank-you letter (semi-formal), which is different from a newsletter story.

## 5 Use short, simple sentences.

Keep most sentences to one thought.

## 6 Use words your audience understands.

If you must use a technical term, define it. Use abbreviations, acronyms, and jargon sparingly, if at all. Use everyday words that have clear meanings.

Instead of ..... **Cease**, use ..... **Stop**  
**Procure** ..... **Get**  
**Terminate** ..... **End**  
**Utilize** ..... **Use**

## 7 Use present tense and active voice.

Present tense and active voice are more clear and direct. Active voice describes who does what to whom.

Example:

Do: “**All businesses must complete form B.**”

Don't: “**Form B must be completed by all businesses.**”

## 8 Let technology help you.

Microsoft Word® and other word processing programs have grammar tools that can help highlight passive voice, long sentences, and other common writing challenges. Online tools can also evaluate clarity and readability.

## 9 Design visually appealing documents.

Use an easy to read type-face (hint: many newspapers and books use Times or Arial fonts). Use a layout that spaces out paragraphs and sections of the document from each other. Bold headings or bullets can make documents more readable and highlight important points.

## 10 Test your message.

Try out your rewritten document on someone who does not know anything about the subject. Or, try reading it aloud.

Go to [plainlanguage.oregon.gov](http://plainlanguage.oregon.gov) for more resources.

**Clear • Relevant • Brief • Active**