

A Clear Language Checklist

Use this checklist as you review your draft document.

Audience

- Do you have a clear idea of who is going to read your material?
- Do you know what the readers want and need to know?

Organization

- Is the most important information first?
- Is the information presented logically?
- Can the readers find what they need to know quickly and easily?
- Do you guide the readers through the document using headings?
- Do you use point form, lists, and question-and-answer formats when possible?

Words

- Do you use common everyday words?
- Do you use active verbs?
- Do you explain unfamiliar words?
- Do you avoid jargon and idioms?
- Do you spell out acronyms and abbreviations the first time you use them?

Sentences

- Do you use simple sentences?
- Are your sentences short, with an average length of 10 to 15 words?
- Do your sentences follow the usual English word order—subject, verb, object?

Tone

- Do you use a relaxed, conversational tone?
- Do you use “you” and “we” to speak directly to your readers?
- Does your writing sound friendly and helpful?

Testing and revision

- Did you test your draft with people who represent your audience?
- Did you make revisions based on feedback from readers?
- Did you shorten any complex sentences?
- Did you correct all typos?

✓ The best check is to test your document with some of your intended readers.

A Clear Design Checklist

Use this checklist as you review your draft document.

White space

- Did you provide lots of white space on every page?
- Did you leave white space around graphics?
- Did you leave extra space between bulleted or number lists?

Font

- Did you choose a serif font for running text and a sans serif font for headings?
- Did you avoid hard-to-read decorative fonts?
- Did you choose a comfortable type size, with nothing smaller than 12 pt.?
- Did you use upper and lower case letters, and avoid using all CAPS?

Graphics

- Did you include illustrations, photos, or other graphics to break up text?
- Are the graphics clear and simple?
- Are the graphics placed near the text they illustrate?

Justification

- Is your text justified (even) on the left and unjustified (uneven) on the right, with no hyphenation?

Line length

- Did you avoid long lines of text, with nothing longer than about 7 to 10 words per line?
- Did you avoid using very short (3 or 4 words) lines of text?

Highlighting

- Did you use a bold font to highlight headings?
- Did you avoid underlining to highlight words and phrases?

Colour

- Does all the coloured text show up well when printed?
- Are words set on a coloured background easy to read?
- Have you tested your colour draft by printing it on a black and white printer or photocopying it?

✓ The best check is to test your document with some of your intended readers.