Plain Language Writer’s Checklist

Document Title:

Agency/Division:

Author:

Date:

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to improving our service by writing in plain language. Plain writing must be used in any new or substantially revised document that:

• Provides information about any of our services or benefits;

• Is necessary to obtain any of our benefits or services; or,

• Explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

Below is a checklist for writers to use. Before beginning to write a document the writer should use this checklist to guide the style in which they write. This checklist covers identifying the audience of the given document, formatting and organization, word choice, and sentence structure. It is best to keep all documents clear, concise, and in the active voice. As you are drafting your document make your way through the checklist and check off each item when you have considered, included, and completed it within your document.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Question | Completed |
| Audience | Who are my readers |  |
|  | What do my readers need to know |  |
| Organization | How can I present the information logically |  |
|  | Is the purpose of this document clear for the reader |  |
|  | Does the most important information come first |  |
|  | Can the reader quickly and easily find what they are looking for |  |
|  | Have I used headings, subheadings, lists and charts |  |
| Words | Have I written directly to my audience using ‘I’, ‘we’, and ‘you’ |  |
|  | Have I defined unfamiliar terms and acronyms |  |
|  | Have I avoided using jargon |  |
| Sentences | Have I written in the active NOT passive voice |  |
|  | Have I written sentences with only one idea |  |
|  | Have I avoided using double negatives |  |

For additional information and resources on the Plain Writing Act and using plain writing, you can visit [www.plainwriting.gov](http://www.plainwriting.gov) or [www.usda.gov/plain-writing](http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing).