

## 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.

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Completed</b>
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	
Words	Have I used headings, subheadings, lists and charts	
	Have I written directly to my audience using 'I', 'we', and 'you'	
	Have I defined unfamiliar terms and acronyms	
Sentences	Have I avoided using jargon	
	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).