

Plain Language – Checklist

1. Principles:

- Explain purpose and limit content.
- Involve the reader.
- Make it easy to read.
- Make it **look** easy to read.
- Select visuals that clarify and motivate.
- Keep it short
- Emphasize the positive
- Write in active voice
- Use personal pronouns
- Keep it simple
- Make it easy to scan

2. Techniques:

- Emphasize the desired behavior rather than the medical facts. Education is more important than information.
- Have just one or two educational objectives – what the reader needs to learn and do.
- Use clear headings, bullets instead of paragraphs, and ample white space (a Q&A format works especially well).
- Use short sentences and conversational language.
- Use pictures and examples to illustrate important points.

3. Content – The Basics

- Be prepared to edit and revise
- Use simple, everyday words
- Cut out unnecessary words
- Avoid or explain technical words

4. Content – The Next Level

- Don't change verbs into nouns
- Avoid double negatives
- Avoid unnecessary preambles
- Avoid unnecessary qualifiers or redundancies
- Be careful with modifiers
- Be aware of commonly misused word pairs
- Use parallel construction
- Use point form and lists appropriately

5. Design

- Font: Use serif font for text, sans serif font for titles. Size- 12-14 pt, 10 pt. minimum for text
- Justify the left margin only
- Leave white space
- Use graphics/illustrations when appropriate

6. **Testing** – Consider testing. Only your readers can tell you if your writing is useful, relevant and readable. The CRC can help.