

## Plain Language - Readability Checklist

Always keep your audience in mind. Sometimes it is difficult to write in plain language because it sounds “choppy”. This is especially true for people with legal training. But if your writing is not plain, then low literacy people cannot read or understand what you are saying to them. The information you give to potential clients is of the utmost importance! Don’t make it inaccessible to them. It may also be wasting precious time for someone to wait to contact your organization because they did not understand what services you provide.

### Over-all:

- Be concise as possible. Give only needed information. Too much information is difficult to track.
- A few short sentences is better than one long one.
- Use “we” rather than full organization names or acronyms
- Use bold, italics, and underlining for important info, but too much of it can be visually hard.
- Don’t go font crazy!! Don’t use all caps.
- Use a minimum of 12 point font size, 14 for headings.
- Read it out loud as if you are talking to someone. See how it sounds.
- Bullet points ok if listing more than 3 items... For example:

### Paragraphs and Sentences:

- Make descriptions short. Large chunks of text scare readers off and they may skip important information.
- Break sentences down to be short and informative. Try for only one idea per sentence.
- Do not use too much punctuation. Lists (bulleted or numbered) are better than long sentences with commas or semicolons.

**Words:**

- Use “you” vs. “one” or “people”
- Use 1 and 2 syllable words as much as possible.
- Use easy words. Do not use extra words.
- Avoid contractions unless VERY common like don’t or can’t. But contractions like “you’ve”, should be written as “you have”.
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms – unless VERY commonly known.
- Forget the rules you learned about writing numbers!! Use actual numbers – 2 not two.

**Words to remove:**

“please” (~~please~~ *contact us for help*)

“will” (*you ~~will~~ get a letter from the court*)

“extended representation” (meaningless to non-legal people)

**Word replacements:**

attorney → lawyer

will not → won’t

individual → person

employment → job

whether → if

complete (the form) → fill out

regarding → about

modify → change

at the present time → now

for the purpose of → to

prior to → before

for the reason that → because

assist/assistance → help

employment → job or work

persons → people

however → but

receive → get

difficult → hard

lawful → legal

accord → agree

request → ask for

in favor of → for

in relation to → about

in the event that → if