



Plain language checklist

by TalentLMS

Words

- **Jargon, buzzwords or vague words:** Go through your text and remove these.
- **Unnecessary words:** Read your content again. What words could you cut?
- **Long sentences:** Edit these down.
- **Multiple clauses:** Split these up into separate sentences.
- **Long words:** Use shorter alternatives.
- **Acronyms:** Remove or write them out in full (in the first instance).

Design

- **Headers:** Use different types of headers to section your content.
- **Paragraphs:** Keep these short.
- **Formatting tools:** Use lists, bullet points and graphs to make points clearer.
- **Free lines:** Use these to break up your content and create more white space.

Meaning

- **Sense:** Is your content easy to understand?
- **Clarity:** Are your points obvious?
- **Calls to action:** Do these stand out?
- **Authority:** Does it have credibility?

Audience

- **Address your learner directly:** Use the word "you" and other derivatives of "you".
 - ✓ "You can do a lot to protect yourself from a cyber attack at work." (Direct)
 - ✗ "There are a number of things that can be done to prevent the chance of cyber attacks at work." (Indirect)
- **Clarify different segments:** Talking to more than one group? State clearly which group you're addressing.
 - ✓ "This part of the policy tells you, the appraiser, how to share your review." (One group)
 - ✓ "This part of the policy tells you, the appraisee, how to draft your objectives." (Another group)

Energy

- **Active verbs:** Use these rather than passive verbs.
 - ✓ *"You must complete it."* (Active)
 - ✗ *"It must be completed."* (Passive)
- **Present simple tense:** Use this over other tenses.
 - ✓ *"Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behavior."* (Present simple)
 - ✗ *"Sexual harassment will present itself as unwanted sexual behavior."* (Future simple)
- **Hidden verbs:** Avoid these.
 - ✓ *"Please complete the assignment by next Friday."* (No hidden verb)
 - ✗ *"Please work towards completing the assignment by next Friday."* (Hidden verb)

*Tips to remember:

- **Less is more.** Be concise, but descriptive.
- **Review and edit content.** Cut out all unnecessary words.
- **Create a list of words to avoid.** Provide alternatives so you can quickly replace jargon, legalese, or buzzwords.
- **Write for your audience.** Picture your user and write as if you're talking directly to them, with the authority of someone who can help and inform.
- **Test your content.** What's clear to you may not be clear for someone else. Ask people around you if they understand. If they don't, change it.