

The Write Plain Language Standard

To apply the Standard to any document, first:

- list your reader(s) and describe their context and questions

- write the intended or ideal outcomes for this document

Then mark 'Yes' or 'Needs work' against the 10 statements below.

'Big Picture' elements

- | | Yes | Needs work |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. The purpose of the document is clear at the start _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. The content supports the purpose of the document _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. The structure of the document is clear and logical to the reader _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. The headings signal the key content _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Language elements

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 5. The paragraphs are mostly short and focused on one topic _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. The sentences are mostly short and straightforward _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. The words are precise and familiar _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. The tone supports the purpose of the document _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Presentation elements

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 9. The layout and presentation help the reader absorb the message quickly and easily _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10 The document is error-free and consistent with your style guide _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Write Plain Language Standard

What the Standard is

The Write Plain Language Standard is a set of 10 statements that together describe the features of a clear, reader-friendly document. If you assess a document and get 10 ticks, chances are your document will achieve your purpose and keep your reader happy. Win-win!

The Standard works alongside other best-practice approaches for achieving clear communication, including testing with real users.

How to use the Standard

- Use the Standard as a checklist to quickly assess any document
- Adapt the Standard to your own context or add hints – for example, next to ‘The sentences are short and straightforward’ you could add ‘aim for an average sentence length of 15–20 words’
- Best idea of all – adopt the Standard as company policy for all print and web documents. For a how-to primer, see *Rewrite: How to overcome daily sabotage of your brand and profit*

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How the Standard came to be

We developed the Standard over 25+ years of analysing written business communications and reviewing best practice with our international colleagues. The Write Plain Language Standard is a short version of the more in-depth WriteMark Plain Language Standard that we originally developed for practitioners.

Thoughts or questions? We'd love to hear from you

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