Plain Language Checklist

Audience Checklist

1. Who are my readers? What do they know about this subject?
2. Why will they read this document? What do my readers need to know about this subject?

Organization Checklist

1. Have I presented information logically and in a way that makes sense to my readers?
2. Can my readers put my document into context? Do they understand what they are about to read, how the document is organized and what its purpose is?
3. Have I put the most important information first?
4. Can my readers quickly and easily find what they are looking for? Have I guided them through the text?
5. Have I used headings and subheadings that are:
   o descriptive of the text that follows,
   o consistent in style and design, and
   o logical and explicit?

Words Checklist

1. Have I written directly to my readers?
2. What words would my readers use when talking about this subject?
3. What terms are familiar to me but likely to be unfamiliar to my readers?
4. Have I explained unfamiliar terms and acronyms?
5. Have I used:
   o verbs to describe action
   o words that my readers know in ways that are familiar to them,
   o words with clear meanings
   o appropriate examples, and
   o language that is free of bias?
6. Have I avoided using jargon and words from foreign languages?
7. Have I used the words "may," "can" and "shall" correctly?

Sentence Checklist

1. Have I written sentences with:
   o an average length of 15 to 25 words, and
   o only one idea?
2. Have I used active voice rather than passive voice?
3. Have I written clearly and concisely, without surplus words?
4. Have I kept the core of my sentences together?
5. Have I avoided using:
   o unnecessary preambles, and
   o double negatives, and
   o prepositional phrases?
6. Have I used point form and tabulation lists that:
   o help to explain complex material or describe a sequence of steps to follow, and
   o are consistent in form and style?

**Paragraph Checklist**

1. Have I used paragraphs with:
   o only one topic
   o sentences that relate logically to the subject
   o familiar material introducing new information, and
   o appropriate transitions?

**Design Checklist**

1. Have I used:
   o a serif typeface
   o a type size of 10 or 12 points
2. Do my headings and subheadings stand out?
3. In my Headings and subheadings, have I used:
4. Have I used:
   1. plenty of space between lines of type,
   2. a justified left margin,
   3. a ragged or unjustified right margin, and
   4. plenty of white space on the page?
   5. Have I used visual images appropriately?

http://www.nald.ca/library/research/plc/index.htm