Plain Language Reviewer’s Checklist

Document Title:

Agency/Division:

Author:

Reviewer:

Date:

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to improving our service by writing in plain language. Plain writing must be used in any new or substantially revised document that:

• Provides information about any of our services or benefits;

• Is necessary to obtain any of our benefits or services; or,

• Explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

Below is a checklist for editors or reviewers of documents covered by the Plain Writing Act. This checklist will guide you through critical components of plain writing, including clear and concise language, active voice, and appropriate organization and formatting of the document.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Question | Reviewed |
| Audience | Who are the readers |  |
|  | What do the readers need to know |  |
| Organization | Is the information presented logically |  |
|  | Is the purpose of this document clear for the reader |  |
|  | Does the most important information come first |  |
|  | Can the reader quickly and easily find what they are looking for |  |
|  | Are heading, subheadings, lists and tables used |  |
| Words | Does the document use the terms ‘I’, ‘we’, and ‘you’ |  |
|  | Are any unfamiliar terms and acronyms defined |  |
|  | Does the document avoid using jargon |  |
| Sentences | Is the document written in active NOT passive voice |  |
|  | Does each sentence only have one idea |  |
|  | Does the document avoid using double negatives |  |
| Paragraphs | Do paragraphs begin and end with transitions |  |
|  | Is the overall flow of the document cohesive |  |
| Comments for the Writer | [[Please include comments to the writer if the document requires edits in order to comply with the Act.]] |  |

For additional information and resources on the Plain Writing Act and using plain writing, you can visit [www.plainwriting.gov](http://www.plainwriting.gov) or [www.usda.gov/plain-writing](http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing).