Quality Initiative for Commissioner's Correspondence
QUICC Tips Desk Aid

Focus on the Message

Clear
- Easy to understand
- Everyday language
- Only necessary words

Concise
- To the point
- Concentrate on the message
- Short sentences

Well-Organized
- Easy to identify important information
- Logical order
- Bullets and tables for lists

Appropriate
- Tone suits the reader
- Accurate
- Timely

Sentence Structure

Delete unnecessary words
(e.g., the fact that, obviously, of course)

Example: **Obviously, the beneficiary completed the form incorrectly.**

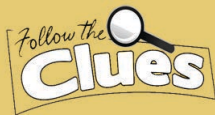**SHOULD BE:** The beneficiary completed the form incorrectly.

Focus on the verb; it should be active

Example: We will **take action to ensure implementation of** the recommendation.

SHOULD BE: We will **implement** the recommendation.

Do not use "this" without a subject.
Example: **"This letter refers to"** instead of **"This refers to"**

Follow the Clues

If you have to read it several times to understand, consider rewording.

"When in doubt, strike it out!" - Mark Twain

Remember! Clear, Concise, and Easy to Understand

Capitalization and Punctuation

Capitalization
Capitalize Proper Nouns
Congress, Federal Government, Internet, Intranet, Nation (when used as a synonym for United States)

Do Not Capitalize
federally, governmental, national, fiscal year

Punctuation
Two spaces after a sentence

Comma Usage
- In a list of three or more, use a comma after the next to last item
- After an introductory phrase to set off parenthetical phrases

Numerals and Ordinals

Spell single-digit numbers and ordinals
(e.g., one, two, or, first, second)

Use numerals to express double-digit numbers and ordinals
Example: 10, 11, or, 10th, 11th

Use numerals to express units of measure and money
Example: 3 percent; 5 years old; 75 cents; pages 2-12

Use numerals to express numbers and ordinals in a *series when two or more numbers are in a sentence and one of them is 10 or more*
Example: The student had 1 notebook, 5 pencils, and 10 erasers.

Ordinals and numbers in a sentence follow their individual rules
Example: The fourth group contained 12 items.

Active Voice

Turn Passive Voice into Active Voice

Sentences with passive voice hide the real action because they contain the "to be" verb.

Identify the <u>Actor</u> First – the Noun

Put the action at the beginning

Follow the **Clues**

Examples of the "to be" verb:
am, is, are, was, were, will be, been

Use Your Resources

SSA Plain Writing webpage —
http://mwww.ba.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/

Commissioner's QUICC Writing Center webpage — http://quicc.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov

Federal Plain Language website — http://www.plainlanguage.gov/

Office of Learning's Plain Language webpage —
http://learning.ba.ssa.gov/ol/PlainLanguage