

Clear Writing Checklist

Language and Tone

- use short, familiar words (1-2 syllables if you can)
- use 1st and 2nd person voice when possible – avoided 3rd person if possible
- use a positive tone
- use the active voice – the subject does the action
- explain difficult words (maybe using more words/sentences if needed)
- avoid using jargon and acronyms (spell out acronyms once per page)
- used verbs instead of changing them into nouns (avoid “tion” words)

Organization

- get to the point – start with your main point, then explain the details
- write sentences that are short and simple (15 words max)
- write sentences only when it makes sense (maybe key info can be pulled out)
- use lists for important points – list them in the same grammatical form (all verbs or all nouns) – use an intro line for a bullet list
- use headings that summarize the text
- write instructions in the order they need to be done
- use short paragraphs (one topic per paragraph)

Layout and Design

- use **bold** to highlight important information (no italics, underline or BLOCK CAPS)
- use a font that is clear and easy to read
- use at least 12-point font for all body text (even headers/footers) – subheadings should be larger (14+), presentations should be 24+
- be consistent and use no more than 2 different fonts (all the same or one for body, one for headings)
- use a 1” margin
- use 1.5 line spacing or close to it if possible – even 1.2 is better than single-spacing - double spacing isn't recommended
- use white space throughout your document (between paragraphs, after headings, when creating forms, etc.)
- use 2 spaces after periods
- left justify the body of the document
- use centre justification sparingly (don't use for headings that are more than one line – in this case, indent to make it appear centred)
- use graphics appropriately – relate the graphic to the text, put it close to the text but not behind it, be inclusive with picture selection, test-print
- use black text on white background/paper – this creates the best contrast
- avoid dark text on a dark background
- bold white font if using it on with a colour background
- if printing, use matte or low-gloss paper (high gloss can be difficult to read because it creates a glare)