

Plain Language Guidelines for Simplifying App Content

Important Principles

- Take care not to change meaning.
- When eliminating words, try not to leave out any entire thoughts. Eliminating actual repetition is fine, as is taking out filler words. But try to stay true to the entire original intent.
- Reading level is important, but as much as possible preserve flow and appeal. We still want to engage the audience, so it shouldn't end up bare-bones or choppy.

Example

Typical text: “When the process of freeing a vehicle that has been stuck results in ruts or holes, the operator will fill the rut or hole created by such activity before removing the vehicle from the immediate area.”

Simplified text: “If you make a hole while freeing a stuck vehicle, you must fill the hole before you drive away.”

Source: [PlainLanguage.gov: Wordiness Made Spare](#)

Suggestions

- Develop roll-out plan, possibly including:
 - page templates;
 - initial reviews to verify editors are following guidelines;
 - editors spot checking each other's work; and
 - reading-grade-level testing. (See section below “Readability Testing Tools”.)
- Use:
 - chunking / blocks of text;
 - active voice;
 - headings and subheadings (just as this document does);
 - literal text (e.g., no metaphors or jargon);
 - contextually-relevant images to help explain text content;

- repetition of new concepts;
- summarization of important points (Consider bulleted text in call-out boxes or tops of pages.); and
- culturally-appropriate content.
- Bullet sentences.
 - phrases / complete thoughts, not one-word lists; and
 - punctuation at the end of each for screen readers (just as this document does).
- Shorten sentences. (an average of 10 words or fewer per sentence.)
- Shorten paragraphs. (A single-sentence paragraph is acceptable if it forms an entire thought.)
- Replace words with simpler versions, for example:
 - look up “[individual](#)” on Thesaurus.com;
 - click tab “noun singular person, thing”; and
 - click “Length” slider one increment to the right to see simpler words.
- Use common words. (See section below “100 Most Commonly Used English Words”.)
- Eliminate filler words. (See “[30 Filler Words You Can Cut Out of Your Writing](#)”.)
- Change to present tense.
- If using Text-To-Speech (TTS) then:
 - punctuate the ends of lines of text (just as this document does);
 - check pronunciation (Listen to how the TTS pronounces words and sentences.); and
 - ensure highlighting (Watch the TTS to be sure it highlights sentences and words as they are read.)

Readability Testing Tools

- [Web Page FX](#)
- [Readability.io](#)
- [Microsoft Word](#)
- When checking reading level:

§ temporarily remove proper nouns or required words/phrases such as “assistive technology”.

§ remove all text above “Overview” and the word itself.

More Guidelines

- [Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective](#) (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services).
- [Tips for Getting Started Writing for Web Accessibility](#) (World Wide Web Consortium).
- [PlainLanguage.gov](#) (United States Federal Government).
- [Plain Language Association International](#) (Plain English Foundation).
- [Top 10 Principles for Plain Language](#) (Open Government at the United States National Archives).

100 Most Commonly Used English Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the of and a to in is you that it he was for on are as with his they I 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at be this have from or one had by word but not what all were we when your can said 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there use an each which she do how their if will up other about out many then them these so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some her would make like him into time has look two more write go see number no way could people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> my than first water been call who oil its now find long down day did get come made may part
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