



Readability Checklist

July 2016

In your first draft, simply get your ideas down. Once you know what you want to say, use this checklist to edit your text so it is readable and usable.

Purpose and User

- Purpose.** Who needs to take action and what do they need to do?
- User knowledge.** What does the average user know about this topic?
- User interest.** Do users care about this topic, or do you need to motivate them?

Organization

- Purpose first.** Have you put the purpose and essential information first?
- Short paragraphs.** Have you broken up large blocks of text into shorter chunks?
- Descriptive headings.** Have you created headings that make the text easy to scan?
- Lists and tables.** Have you used lists or tables when they simplify the information? Are tables labeled clearly?

Sentences

- Subject and verb together.** Have you put your subject (doer) and verb (action) near each other in each sentence?
- Active voice.** Does your sentence say who or what does what, in that order?
- Shorter sentences.** Have you broken up long sentences? A good goal is 15 words.

Graphics

- Purpose for graphics.** Have you eliminated distracting graphics with no purpose?
- Data representation.** Are infographics, charts and graphs easy to understand? Do they represent the data accurately?
- Icons.** If you are using icons, have you made sure they clearly represent the idea to your intended audience, and that they are easy for low-literacy readers to interpret?



Words

- Personal pronouns.** Did you use pronouns like *you* and *we* so your users know you are talking to them?
- Everyday words.** Have you replaced jargon with everyday words that do the job? Have you defined **in the text** the technical terms you need to keep?
- Acronyms.** Have you kept only the acronyms that are commonly used by the public, or ones your user needs to know?
- Unnecessary words.** Have you taken out words you don't really need?
- Noun phrases.** Have you changed long noun phrases like *multi-stakeholder collaborative planning initiative* into a more digestible phrase like *collaborative planning with stakeholders*?

