

The Write Plain Language Standard

write

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The Write Plain Language Standard

To apply the Standard to any document, first:

- list your reader(s) and describe their context and questions

- write the intended or ideal outcomes for this document

Then mark 'Yes' or 'Needs work' against the 10 statements below.

'Big Picture' elements

Yes Needs
work

1. The purpose of the document is clear at the start _____
2. The content supports the purpose of the document _____
3. The structure of the document is clear and logical to the reader _____
4. The headings signal the key content _____

Language elements

5. The paragraphs are mostly short and focused on one topic _____
6. The sentences are mostly short and straightforward _____
7. The words are precise and familiar _____
8. The tone supports the purpose of the document _____

Presentation elements

9. The layout and presentation help the reader absorb the message quickly and easily _____
- 10 The document is error-free and consistent with your style guide _____

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What the Standard is

The Write Plain Language Standard is a set of 10 statements that together describe the features of a clear, reader-friendly document. If you assess a document and get 10 ticks, chances are your document will achieve your purpose and keep your reader happy. Win-win!

The Standard works alongside other best-practice approaches for achieving clear communication, including testing with real users.

How to use the Standard

- Use the Standard as a checklist to quickly assess any document
- Adapt the Standard to your own context or add hints – for example, next to ‘The sentences are short and straightforward’ you could add ‘aim for an average sentence length of 15–20 words’
- Best idea of all – adopt the Standard as company policy for all print and web documents. For a how-to primer, see *Rewrite: How to overcome daily sabotage of your brand and profit*

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How the Standard came to be

We developed the Standard over 25+ years of analysing written business communications and reviewing best practice with our international colleagues. The Write Plain Language Standard is a short version of the more in-depth WriteMark Plain English Standard that we originally developed for practitioners.

Thoughts or questions? We'd love to hear from you

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