

Tina Miller's PLAIN LANGUAGE WRITING

PLANNING WORKSHEET

The following questions and tasks are designed to help you be clear and understandable when writing

PURPOSE & ORGANIZATION

Why are you writing this message or website text? What are you trying to teach the reader or get them to do?

Is the purpose/action stated in the subject line/title/first paragraph?

Yes

No

Is the most important information near the top?

Yes

No

Are you using active voice where possible?

Yes

No

Do you highlight anything the reader needs to do, and by when?

Yes

No

Are you using headers or bullet points to help organize the information?

Yes

No

TONE

Have you personalized the message where possible (such as using their pronouns and preferred name, if available to you)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is your tone welcoming and friendly?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did you affirm that readers may have questions about what you are saying, and that it is ok to contact us and ask?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

READABILITY & LANGUAGE

Check readability by using the Flesch-Kincaid readability tool built into Microsoft Word. The lower the grade level score is, the easier it will be for more students to understand.	Readability Score: _____	
Did you look for higher ed jargon (words that someone new to higher ed may not know), and either translate it into plain language, or define it the first time you use it? (Use the jargon translator below to help.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did you look for other complicated words that could be replaced by “plain language?” See the “everyday words” table at the end of this worksheet for examples.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did you have someone who is like your readers review what you wrote and see if they understand it?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

JARGON TRANSLATOR

Examples of higher ed jargon are: matriculate/matriculated, prerequisite/corequisite, scholarship, probation, standing, eligibility, enroll/enrollment, Bursar, MWF/TR, etc.

Jargon	Translation

EVERYDAY WORDS TO CONSIDER*

Instead of	Consider
accompany	go with
accomplish	carry out, do
accordingly	so
additional	more, other
advantageous	helpful
advise	recommend, tell
alternatively	or
anticipated	expected
appropriate	(omit), proper, right
approximately	about
ascertain	find out
assist, assistance	aid, help
at the present time	at present, now
attempt	try
by means of	by, with
calculate	work out
commence	begin, start
comply with	follow
concerning	about, on
contains	has
currently	now
demonstrate	show
determine	decide, figure, find
discontinue	stop
due to the fact that	due to, since
ensure	make sure
establish	set up, prove, show
expedite	hasten, speed up
facilitate	make easier, help, enable
finalize	complete, finish
for a period of	for
forfeit	give up, lose
forward	send
frequently	often
fundamental	basic
however	but
impacted	affected, changed
implement	carry out, start
In accordance with	By, per, under
in addition	also, besides, too

Instead of	Consider
in an effort to	to
in order that	for, so
in order to	to
in regard to	about, concerning, on
in the event of	if
indicate	show, write down
initial	first
initiate	start
is authorized to	may
maintain	keep, support
maximum	greatest, largest, most
minimum	least, smallest
Modification, modify	change
monitor	check, watch
necessitate	cause, need
notify	let know, tell
objective	aim, goal
option	choice, way
participate	take part
permit	let
pertaining to	about, of, on
preclude	prevent
Previous, previously	Earlier, before
proficiency	skill
request	ask
required to	must, need to, should
requirement	need
retain	keep
selection	choice
submit	give, send
substantial	large, much
successfully complete	complete, pass
sufficient	enough
terminate	end, stop
therefore	so
timely	prompt
transmit	send
utilize, utilization	use
validate	confirm
with the exception of	except for

*created from <https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/words/use-simple-words-phrases/> and <http://www.simplyput.ie/everyday-words>