

## Guidance for U.S. government websites and social media

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# Plain Language Web Writing Tips

On the web, people are in a hurry. They skim and scan, looking for fast answers to their questions, so it's important to get to the point — quickly!

Help your readers complete their tasks with these Plain Language writing tips:

<b>Audience</b>	Write for your reader. Don't write for the experts, the lawyers, or your management, unless they are your intended audience.
<b>Length</b>	<del>Less is more!</del> <b>Be concise:</b> Eliminate ALL unnecessary words. <del>Challenge every word = do you need it?</del>
<b>Tone</b>	Use conversational pronouns (you, us, our, we). Write as if you were talking to a colleague or friend. Use contractions (we're instead of we are).
<b>Voice</b>	Use active voice with strong verbs. Say "We mailed your form on May 1" instead of "Your form was mailed by us on May 1."
<b>Word Choice</b>	Use the same words your readers use when they search for your info on the Web. Avoid acronyms and jargon.
<b>Simplify</b>	Use simple, descriptive section headings; short paragraphs; and ordinary, familiar words.
<b>Links</b>	Never use "click here" — link language should describe what your reader will get if they click that link. Include key words to help search engines.
<b>Organization</b>	Put the most important information first, followed by the details.
<b>Improve Tasks</b>	Organize content around your customers' tasks, not your organization. Highlight action items (step 1, step 2, etc.).
<b>Scannability</b>	Separate content into small chunks. Use lots of white space for easy scanning. In general, write no more than 5-7 lines per paragraph. Use lists and bullets, they are easy to scan.
<b>Separate Topics</b>	Present each topic separately. Keep the information on each page to three (or fewer) levels.
<b>Context</b>	Don't assume your readers already know the subject or have read related pages. Each page should stand on its own. Put everything in context.
<b>Test and Evaluate</b>	Test Web pages with actual customers so you can be sure real people can understand what you write.
<b>Train</b>	Encourage all your colleagues (lawyers, accountants, researchers, etc.) to use plain language — because all content is potentially Web content.

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