

Handout #5: Key Elements of Plain Language Printed Materials

Structure

- List most important points first
- Focus on behaviors; supporting data are secondary
- Use short paragraphs and sections that stick to one point
- Frame messages and sequence them according to audience logic
- Deliver key messages or ask key questions in title and subtitles.

Writing Style

- Personal, conversational, friendly
- Active voice
- Little or no technical jargon
- Short words and sentences
- Unnecessary words eliminated.

Text Layout

- Uncluttered with ample margins and blank space
- Short paragraphs and sections
- Different font sizes and/or indentation to show levels of information
- Text body in upper and lowercase letters in 12–14 point serif font
- Key points emphasized with use of boxes, rule lines, bolding, color, or different typeface
- Strong print and paper contrast.

Illustrations

- Help readers understand messages
- Show the correct way to do something
- Are located close to relevant text
- Are suitable for the target audience.

Lists and Charts

- Short lists with bullets, not commas
- Simple charts—best if set up horizontally.