

## Plain Language in Government Fact Sheet

*“Good writing consists of trying to use ordinary words to achieve extraordinary results.”*

— James Michener, novelist

In an effort to make government more accountable, accessible, and responsive, the Clinton Administration mandated that by October 1998, all government employees should use plain language when explaining how to get benefits, how to access government services, and what a person needs to know to comply with government requirements.

### **Who’s your audience?**

In your work, your audience may be a select segment of the population. For the government, it’s everyone.

- Every U.S. resident needs to access and understand public information.
- About half of all adults cannot read or understand information they need to know to live healthy and productive lives.

The work is challenging, but here are a few guidelines government writers follow when striving to make information accessible to all. Try using them in your writing.

- ☑ Use common words and avoid jargon when possible.
- ☑ Write short sentences.
- ☑ Break up dense information into short paragraphs.
- ☑ Say it straight by using the active voice.
- ☑ Organize content in a logical manner with the most important first.
- ☑ Keep formatting to a minimum (use bold, caps, italics, and multiple fonts with caution).

Ignore claims that plain language dumbs content down. In truth, it is an art that transforms the complicated into the concise.

Learn more about government plain language at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>.

© 2007 EasyRead Copywriting, LLC



Kristina Anderson

Writer, Editor, Consultant

PO Box 6146 • Albuquerque, NM 87197 • 505 345-3258

[www.easyreadcopywriting.com](http://www.easyreadcopywriting.com) • [kristina@easyreadcopywriting.com](mailto:kristina@easyreadcopywriting.com)