

Introduction

The Plain Language Action and Information Network is a community of interest of mainly federal employees dedicated to the idea that citizens deserve clear communications from government. We first developed this document in the mid-90s. Ten years later, we decided it was time to revise it. Based on those 10 years of experience, there were pieces of advice we no longer wanted to give, and there were others we wanted to add. We hope you find this document useful, and that it helps you improve your writing—and your agency’s writing—so your readers can:

- find what they need,
- understand what they read; and
- use it to fulfill their needs.

We’ve divided the document into four major topics, although many of the subtopics fit within more than one topic. We start with a discussion of your audience, because you should think about the audience before you start to write—in fact, before you start to plan—your document. From there we move to organization, because developing a good organization is important during your planning stage. Next, we discuss writing principles, starting at the word level and moving up through paragraphs and sections. This is the most extensive topic. We conclude with a short discussion of testing techniques.

When we first wrote this document, we were primarily interested in regulations. We’ve broadened our coverage, but the document still bears the stamp of its origin. If you have a suggestion about something we should add to address other types of writing, or have a comment on this version, email "acheek@patriot.net".