# Plain Language Checklist

❑ Write for the average reader (7th grade level).

❑ Organize the information to serve the reader's needs.

❑ Use headings and sub-headings to organize information.

❑ Use "you" to speak to the reader.

❑ Use active voice.

❑ Use short sections and sentences.

❑ Stick to one topic in a paragraph.

❑ Use the simplest tense possible—present is best.

❑ Use base verbs, not hidden verbs.

❑ Omit excessive words.

❑ Use concrete, familiar words.

  ❑ Avoid jargon.

  ❑ Avoid legalese.

  ❑ Avoid bureaucrat-ese.

❑ Use "must" to express requirements and avoids the ambiguous word "shall."

❑ Place words carefully.

  ❑ Avoid large gaps between the subject, the verb, and the object.

  ❑ Place exceptions last.

  ❑ Place modifiers correctly.

❑ Use bulleted or numbered lists and tables to simplify complex material.

**See "Writing for the Web" on the reverse side.**

**VERMONT**
**DEPARTMENT OF TAXES**

# Plain Language Writing for the Web

- ❑ Less is more! Be concise.

- ❑ Break documents into separate topics.

- ❑ Use even shorter paragraphs than on paper.

- ❑ Use short lists and bullets to organize information.

- ❑ Use even more lists than on paper.

- ❑ Use even more headings with less under each heading.

- ❑ Questions often make great headings.

- ❑ Present each topic or point separately, and use descriptive section headings.

- ❑ Keep the information on each page to no more than two levels.

- ❑ Make liberal use of white space so pages are easy to scan.

- ❑ Write (especially page titles) using the same words your readers would use when doing a web search for the info.

- ❑ Don't assume your readers have knowledge of the subject or have read related pages on your site. Clearly explain things so each page can stand on its own.

- ❑ Never use "click here" as a link — link language should describe what your reader will get if they click the link.

- ❑ Eliminate words that are not needed.

**See the "Plain Language Checklist" on the reverse side.**

Source: www.plainlanguage.gov