

Ecology's Publication Expectations

Best Practices for Clear Writing

Starting October 1, 2006, all new and revised publications must receive plain talk review before they can receive a publication number.

Starting January 1, 2007, Ecology staff will review at least two new or revised publications per program, each quarter. The reviewers will evaluate the publications to see how well they meet the best practices below.

Write to your target audience.	State your purpose.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your target audience's characteristics such as age, education, culture, and language. • Use the right type of document for your audience. Different styles like brochures, letters, focus sheets, and Web pages all have a unique purpose. Make sure you pick the best one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State your purpose early in the document. • Make clear what you expect the reader to do with the information—take action or apply a principle.
Think about the words you use.	Write clear sentences and short paragraphs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use words your target audience knows. • Get rid of words you don't need. • Avoid using jargon and acronyms; define terms that hold special meaning at Ecology. • Don't use more than one word to mean the same thing – e.g. car, vehicle, and auto. Pick one and stick to it. • Use a Thesaurus or dictionary to find other words for those with more than two syllables. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write in “active voice” to tell who is doing what. • Aim for 17- 20 words or fewer in a sentence. • Include only one subject in a paragraph. • Aim for no more than 10 lines of text – three or four sentences –in a paragraph. • Avoid repeating information unless the reader might skip through the document and read things out of context.
Organize the information for your reader.	Think about the visual style of your document.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think through the questions your readers might ask and organize the information in that order. • Decide whether text should flow chronologically, general to specific, or most important to least important. • Use headings to help walk the reader through the information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break up blocks of text with tables, graphics, and white space. • Use a Serif font (with “tails” - Times) for body text and Sans Serif font (without “tails” - Arial) for headings. • Avoid using more than two fonts. • Don't overuse bold, italic, or underlined fonts.

Clear Writing Resources

- Plain Talk Teams: www.ecy.wa.gov/quality/plaintalk/teams.htm
- Plain Language.Gov: plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm
- Grammar: owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/index.html
- Clear Writing Training: www.dop.wa.gov/Employees/TrainingAndDevelopment/Written.htm