# Beneficiary Support Toolkit for Trust Professionals


# Chapter 1 Resource

**Plain Language and Readability Resources**

Plain language is a way to write and design materials so that the people you want to reach can understand it the first time.

Providing information in plain language helps your audience find, understand, and use the information you provide. What is considered plain language depends on who your audience is. The information can be provided in many ways, such as in writing, video, graphic images, or other formats.

We provide resources below for you to better understand how to create plain language materials and test the readability of materials created.

**How to Create Plain Language Materials**

Below are some steps you can take when creating plain language materials. Please see the resources at the end of the section for more detailed checklists.

1. **Identify your target audience**

Materials should reflect the needs of the audience you want to reach. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) may prefer materials that use a simple design and clear, easy-to-understand language.

1. **Draft content as clearly as possible**

Keep your content short, to the point, and use words the reader knows. Try to use a conversational and friendly tone to the user. If content is long or takes multiple pages, consider breaking documents into shorter fact or tip sheets.

Best practice in plain language for people with IDD is to provide information in many formats for non-readers and readers at a 4th grade reading level. The average US adult reads at an 8th grade reading level. You can find readability analyzers below that can help you evaluate the reading level of your material.

Make sure content flows logically, breaks at natural points, and uses headers to guide readers through the content confidently.

1. **Make sure the material has a user-friendly design**

Use a simple design and layout with high contrast colors.

Use at least 14-point font, normal spacing, and avoid capitalizing whole words.

Start new sentences on new lines and cut sentences across lines where it is most natural.

Make sure there is a lot of white space on the page and leave space between paragraphs.

When possible, use images to illustrate text. Make sure any images used are appropriate for the audience. For example, images for documents used by adults with IDD should be appropriate for adults – not for children.

1. **Test your content with your users**

Ask users to review your material at many points – after your initial draft, after you have designed content, and before review.

This review can help you make sure users are using the content in the way you expect.

It can also help you identify ways to improve your project.

**Additional Resources**

[Plain Language Action and Information Network](https://plainlanguage.gov/)

This is a government website that provides standards for plain language, tools, checklists, and other resources to help you assess how well your audience will understand materials you create.

[Center for Plain Language – Five Steps to Plain Language](https://centerforplainlanguage.org/learning-training/five-steps-plain-language/)

The Center for Plain Language provides more detailed guidance on plain language standards, training, and education. This tip sheet gives an overview of how to create plain language materials for any audience.

[Readable.com](https://readable.com/)

This company will review a passage of text, score it on grade level, and offer suggestions on how to make written content clearer or more accessible.

**Share with Us**

Did any of these tips and resources spark a memory or story you want to share, or a resource or tool you need? [Complete this form to contact us and share your ideas](https://thearcus.surveymonkey.com/r/7F5N5DC)!

Date Revised: August 4, 2021.