

# Appendix A - Language & Writing Guidelines for Policy Development and Review

the Federal Government to the Public (2011) <https://www.plainlanguage.gov>

: Improving Communication from

¾ Use “must”

- ¾ Do not use jargon or technical words unless strictly necessary.
  - x For example “involuntarily undomiciled” vs. “homeless”
- ¾ Avoid legal language.
  - x For example “thereafter,” “foregoing,” “henceforth,” “hereby,” etc.
- ¾ Use positive words instead of negatives
  - x For example “no less than” vs. “at least”
- ¾ Start your sentences with the general idea. Then, if any exceptions apply, mention them after the general rule has been stated.
  - x For example “except as described in section 11, the audit department will not begin the revision process until after a preliminary assessment is done” vs. “the audit department will begin the revision process after a preliminary assessment is done. However, see section 11 on exceptions”
- ¾ Write in the natural word order (subject, verb, and object). When you use modifiers or clauses, it is harder to understand.
- ¾ **Exceptions**
  - x Exceptions (from general rules) should be placed where it is easier for readers to understand the policy.
  - x If an exception (or condition) is just short, place it in the beginning.
    - For example “for your admission, you must submit a resume, a cover letter, a detail of your work experience, reference letters and contact information, unless you have already applied within a year” vs. “unless you have already applied within a year, you must submit (...)
  - x If an exception or condition is long (and the main clause is short) place it at the end.
    - For example “except when you submitted your application for a national bursary within a year and received a partial acceptance, we will consider your application” vs. “we will consider your application except when you submitted (...)
  - x When describing a category, avoid using exceptions
    - For example “all persons except those older than 18 years old must (...)
    - vs. “each person under 18 years old must (...)
  - x Use exceptions to avoid a long description.
    - For example “Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, Manitoba (and all provinces) must (...)
    - vs. “all provinces (instead of detailing each one) except territories must (...)
- ¾ Instead of writing all steps in a paragraph, use lists to help identify the steps in the process and in chronological order