# Plain Language Review Worksheet

## Massachusetts state employees can use this worksheet to evaluate websites, webpages, documents, and slide decks for plain language.

**Purpose**: Use this worksheet to check if a document or website is clear and easy to use. You will focus on who it’s for, how easy it is to read, how well it's organized, and how simple the language is.

**Important**: Complete this worksheet to collect observations about your content. Use your findings to recommend improvements to the content.

## Title:

## Link to content (if any):

## 1. Define the audience

**Who is the content for?** (Be specific, e.g., "people applying for unemployment")

**Notes:**

**How much do they know about the topic? (Select one):**

☐ No experience | ☐ Some experience | ☐ Expert | ☐ Unclear

**Are there words or ideas they might not know?**

**List** any words or phrases that might need simpler explanations:

## 2. Identify the purpose

**What is the goal of this document or website?** (e.g., “to help people apply for benefits”)

**Notes:**

**Does it help the audience meet this goal without extra help?**

☐ Yes | ☐ Partly | ☐ No

**List** areas that make it harder to understand. You can start with:

* Structure (organization, headings):
* Language (difficult words, jargon):
* Design (Are buttons, links, or images clear?):

## 3. Check the readability score to identify quick wins

**Reading level:**

Use a tool like [Microsoft Word’s Editor](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2#:~:text=Open%20your%20Word%20document.%20Select%20the%20Home%20tab.,the%20statistics%20and%20reading%20level%20of%20your%20document.) or [Hemingway Editor](https://hemingwayapp.com/) to check the reading level. Aim for an 8th-grade level or lower.

*Current reading level: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

To identify opportunities to improve the readability score, you can start with these pairs of potential issues on the one hand, and potential recommendations on the other.

* If sentences are long, recommend breaking them into shorter ones.
* If there is jargon or complicated words, recommend simplifying or explaining them.
* If passive voice is interfering with understanding, recommend rewriting sentences to show who's doing the action.

## 4. Structure and clarity

### Titles and headings:

Do they have the appropriate semantic elements for screen readers (<h1>, <h2>, etc.)?

☐ Yes | ☐ No

Are the headers clear and easy to understand?  
☐ Yes | ☐ No  
  
List ways to improve them:

 Order of Information:

Does the most important information come first?

 ☐ Yes | ☐ No

**List** places where the order is confusing:

## 5. Is all the content actionable?

**Instructions or steps** (if needed):

Are they easy to follow?

 ☐ Yes | ☐ No

**List** any missing or unclear steps:

**Links**:

Does the link text clearly tell readers what they’ll find?

 ☐ Yes | ☐ No

**List** any unclear or confusing links:

Are there any sections that seem disconnected from the purpose of the content

 ☐ Yes | ☐ No

**List** any unclear or confusing sections:

## 6. Visuals and design

**Do visuals and non-text elements help explain the content?**

 ☐ Yes | ☐ No | ☐ No visuals

**Note** how visuals support or block understanding:

**Is important information also in text form?**

☐ Yes | ☐ No

**List** places where visuals or charts aren't explained:

## 7. Mobile accessibility

**Is the content easy to use on mobile devices?**

☐ Yes | ☐ No | ☐ N/A

**List** areas that don’t work well on mobile:

## 8. Final notes

**What are the strengths of this content?**

**Notes:**

**What needs improvement?**

**Notes:**

## 9. Prioritize feedback for stakeholders

**What are the top 3 to 6 patterns** that can be revised to make the document easier to find, use, and understand?