**Principles of Plain Language**

**Exercises**

**(handy document checklist)**

[**www.plainlanguage.gov**](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)

**Plain Language Document Checklist**

***Is/Does your document:***

\_\_\_\_ written for the average reader

\_\_\_\_ organized to serve the reader’s needs

\_\_\_\_ use question-and-answer format

\_\_\_\_ use “you” and other pronouns

\_\_\_\_ use active voice

\_\_\_\_ use short sections and sentences

\_\_\_\_ written to one person, not a group

\_\_\_\_ use the simplest tense possible

\_\_\_\_ use “must” instead of “shall” to indicate a requirement

\_\_\_\_ place words carefully (at the very least, ensure subjects and verbs are together)

\_\_\_\_ use lists and tables

\_\_\_\_ avoid confusing words and constructions

\_\_\_\_ use no more than two or three subordinate levels

**Exercise 1**

**Organize to Serve the Reader**

*This is the table of contents from a regulation that tells you how to appeal an action taken by an agency. Put yourself in the place of an average user: Where would you go in this document to find the answer to questions about the appeal process?*

*Write down as many questions that an average person would have about the appeal process.*

**PART 2 – APPEALS FROM ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS**

Section.

2.1 Information collection.

2.2 Definitions.

2.3 Applicability

2.4 Officials who may decide appeals.

2.5 Appeal bond.

2.6 Finality of decisions.

2.7 Notice of administrative decision or action.

2.8 Appeal from inaction of an official.

2.9 Notice of an appeal.

2.10 Statement of reasons.

2.11 Answer of interested party.

2.12 Service of appeal documents.

2.13 Filing documents

2.14 Record address.

2.15 Computation of time.

2.16 Extensions of time.

2.17 Summary dismissal

2.18 Consolidation of appeals.

2.19 Action by Area Directors and Education program officials on appeal.

2.20 Action by the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs on appeal.

2.21 Scope of review.

**Exercise 2**

**Shorten Sentences**

*Divide each of the samples below into smaller sentences. Don’t rewrite them extensively – put a period where you need to and make one or two minor word changes.*

1. If you are a party to an appeal, and you want to supplement the record or any Statement of Facts and Issues at any time after the Department deems the record complete under § 4.916 through the time additional responsive pleadings are filed under § 4.940, you must file any additional material together with a written request for permission to IBLA (or an Assistant Secretary who is deciding your appeal under § 4.933) to supplement the record or any Statement of Facts and Issues.

*Note:* To help you divide sentence number 2 into two sentences, begin your first sentence with the words “You may” (or something similar) and begin your second sentence with the words “In this case,” (or something similar).

1. If you submit a bond to the Regional Director executed on a form approved under paragraph (b) of this section that you have reproduced or generated by use of a computer and that document omits terms or conditions contained in the text of the form approved by the Director, the bond you submit will be deemed to contain those terms and conditions.

**Exercise 3**

**Use “you” and “we” to engage the user and to save words**

*Rewrite the following passages to speak more directly to the reader. Replace the words that refer to the agency and the user with pronouns. Make no other changes, except those needed for grammatical correctness*

1. Copies of tax returns must be provided.
2. Loan applications will be reviewed to ensure that procedures have been followed.
3. The applicant will be the primary source of information regarding his or her circumstances for the purposes of determining eligibility and need.
4. To establish eligibility for a voucher, an applicant must show that the applicant has a low income and that the present housing of the applicant is substandard and inadequate.

**Exercise 4**

**Recognize Passive Verbs**

*Circle the passive verb in each row*.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | a | b | c | d |
| 1. | was written | will write | has written | is writing |
| 2. | shall deliver | may deliver | is delivering | is delivered |
| 3. | has sent | were sent | will send | are sending |
| 4. | should revoke | will be revoking | have revoked | to be revoked |
| 5. | were mailing | have been mailed | having mailed | will mail |
| 6. | may be requesting | are requested | have requested | will request |

**See how silly passive voice sounds?**

*You know these song titles better in active voice –*

I Was Hearing It through the Grapevine — Marvin Gaye

You Will Be Watched by Me — The Police

Rock ’n’ Roll Is Loved by Me — Joan Jett

I Was Shooting the Sheriff (But the Deputy Was Not Shot By Me) — Bob Marley

You Will Always Be Loved by Me — Whitney Houston

Only Fun Is Wanted by Girls — Cyndi Lauper

**Exercise 5**

**Avoid Confusing and Wordy Language**

*The samples in this exercise suffer from wordiness and awkward construction. See how many errors you can repair.*

1. We will promptly review your proposal and provide you with a nonbinding determination of the guidance you request.
2. If we find that the evidence you submit is convincing, we may grant a reduction in the amount of supplemental bond required.
3. We will send to the applicant copies of any comments made by State or local governments on the applicant’s request after the comment period has ended.
4. We periodically will publish a list of aggregation points and the associated market centers. We will monitor market activity and, if necessary, add to or modify the list of market centers and aggregation points and will publish such modifications.
5. A performance system will allow for the development of new and innovative training techniques and methodologies and allow companies added flexibility in tailoring their training to the specific job duties of their employees.

**Exercise 6**

**Make Lists**

*Use lists to simplify the material below. Don’t rewrite the sentences! Just put a colon where you need to, insert bullets, and make one or two minor word changes.*

1. Failure to file an answer within the 30-day period may be treated as consent to the award requested, unless the Department or other agency requests an extension of time for filing or files a statement of intent to negotiate under paragraph (b) of this section.

2. The applicant and the operator must provide a statement in the permit application as to whether it is a corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, or other business entity and the taxpayer identification numbers.

3. If you determine the value of your oil under this subpart, you must retain all data relevant to the determination of royalty value. You must be able to show how you calculated the value you reported, including all adjustments for location, quality, and transportation, and how you complied with the requirements of this subpart.

4. The Superintendent or Area Director will provide you a written notice specifying the action that we will take under this part and explaining the reason(s) for the action. The notice will be delivered to you by certified mail or in person. The notice will include your appeal rights under § 70.10.

**Exercise 7**

**Making Tables**

Make the material below into tables.

1. If the estimated value of the forest products offered does not exceed $50,000, the advertisement shall be made for not less than 15 days; if the estimated value exceeds $50,000 but not $250,000, for not less than 30 days; if the estimated value exceeds $250,000, for not less than 60 days.

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2. If an action or decision on your request was made by an Agency Superintendent, you should appeal to the Area Director. If an action or decision on your request was made by an Area Director, you should appeal to the Commissioner. If an action or decision on your request was made by the Commissioner, the action or decision or action is final and you may not appeal.

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