# Plain Language Tips

Adults of all literacy levels prefer information communicated in plain language.

## Make it readable

Almost half of adults in the U.S. read at or below the 8th grade level. Tips for improving readability:

- ☐ **Reduce sentence length**
- ☐ **Avoid 3+ syllable words**
- ☐ **Use everyday language** and familiar words.

## Make it actionable

Tips to make it easy for the reader to do what you're asking.

- ☐ **Address the reader directly** ("You").
- ☐ **Clearly state the ask**.
- ☐ **Provide the information needed** to complete the ask:
  - – Phone number and TYY
  - – Website and email
  - – Physical address
- ☐ **Use checklists** if the reader is being asked to perform a series of tasks.
- ☐ **Offer navigation tips** to guide the reader through steps ("Pick option 1" or "Click the red button").
- ☐ **Do calculations** for the reader or provide an example.

## Make it understandable

### Organization tips

- ☐ **Put the most important point first**.
- ☐ **Organize details in a logical order**.

### Grammar tips

- ☐ **Use sentence case.** Only capitalize the first word in a sentence.
- ☐ **Use active voice**. If the sentence can end in "by zombies" and still make sense, it's passive voice.
- ☐ **Use the Oxford comma** (pigs, cats, and dogs).

### Layout/Design tips

- ☐ **Use bold headers**.
- ☐ **Use bullet points** (5 – 7 max!).
- ☐ **Left justify text.** A jagged right margin helps the reader's eye move from line to line.
- ☐ **Use 12 point font or larger**.
- ☐ **Use accessible fonts**.
  - – **For print formats**: use san serif font for headers and a serif font for body text.
  - – **For digital formats**: use san serif for all text.
  - – **Avoid**: ALL CAPS, *italics* and fancy fonts.
- ☐ **Maximize blank space**.
- ☐ **Pick universal icons or symbols**.
- ☐ **Highlight key information** in a box or sidebar.
- ☐ **Use numbers** (3 to 4), not words (three to four)
- ☐ **Use sentence case**. Only capitalize the first letter of the first word.