

Plain language and accessible documents checklist

Use short sentences, everyday words, one idea per paragraph, built-in heading styles, descriptive links, useful alternative text, and accessible tables. Before release, follow the current state guidance for accessible documents and ask someone outside the team to read the document.

Why it matters

If a person cannot read or use a notice, they may not be able to understand or appeal the decision. Accessibility needs to be addressed before release.

Content

1. Structure: use real heading styles in order; one topic per heading; lists for steps; tables only for data, with header rows marked.
2. Words: everyday words; define any term you must keep; active voice; say who does what by when.
3. Sentences: aim for 15 to 20 words; one idea each; no double negatives.
4. Links: describe the destination in the link text; never 'click here'.
5. Images: describe the important meaning in alternative text. Do not place essential information only inside an image, and do not use color as the only way to communicate meaning.
6. Contrast and type: body text at least 4.5:1 contrast; avoid all-caps blocks and light gray text.
7. Forms: give every field a clear label and make sure people can complete the form with a keyboard. Error messages should explain what to fix.
8. Review: use the built-in accessibility checker, then ask someone outside the team to read the document without added explanation and describe what it means to them.

Next steps

- **Checklist for changing a form, notice, or letter** — program page </library/ja-form-notice-change>
- **Minnesota accessibility standards (external, verify)** — program page </library/ext-mn-accessibility>

Practice paths this supports

- Policy, form, or notice change
- Planning a learning or facilitation session