Focus on the Message

**Clear**
- Easy to understand
- Everyday language
- Only necessary words

**Concise**
- To the point
- Concentrate on the message
- Short sentences

**Well-Organized**
- Easy to identify important information
- Logical order
- Bullets and tables for lists

**Appropriate**
- Tone suits the reader
- Accurate
- Timely

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**Sentence Structure**

**Delete unnecessary words**
(e.g., the fact that, obviously, of course)

Example: *Obviously, the beneficiary completed the form incorrectly.*

SHOULD BE: *The beneficiary completed the form incorrectly.*

**Focus on the verb; it should be active**

Example: *We will take action to ensure implementation of the recommendation.*

SHOULD BE: *We will implement the recommendation.*

**Do not use “this” without a subject.**

Example: *“This letter refers to”* instead of *“This refers to”*

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**Capitalization and Punctuation**

**Capitalization**

- **Capitalize Proper Nouns**
  - Congress, Federal Government, Internet, Intranet, Nation (when used as a synonym for United States)

- **Do Not Capitalize**
  - federally, governmental, national, fiscal year

**Punctuation**

- **Two spaces after a sentence**

**Comma Usage**

- In a list of three or more, use a comma after the next to last item
- After an introductory phrase to set off parenthetical phrases

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*Follow the Clues*

If you have to read it several times to understand, consider rewording.

*“When in doubt, strike it out!”*- Mark Twain

*Remember! Clear, Concise, and Easy to Understand*

Numerals and Ordinals

Spell single-digit numbers and ordinals (e.g., one, two, or, first, second)

Use numerals to express double-digit numbers and ordinals
Example: 10, 11, or, 10th, 11th

Use numerals to express units of measure and money
Example: 3 percent; 5 years old; 75 cents; pages 2-12

Use numerals to express numbers and ordinals in a series when two or more numbers are in a sentence and one of them is 10 or more
Example: The student had 1 notebook, 5 pencils, and 10 erasers.

Ordinals and numbers in a sentence follow their individual rules
Example: The fourth group contained 12 items.

Active Voice

Turn Passive Voice into Active Voice

Sentences with passive voice hide the real action because they contain the “to be” verb.

Identify the **Actor** First – the Noun  
Put the action at the beginning

Examples of the “to be” verb: am, is, are, was, were, will be, been

Use Your Resources

SSA Plain Writing webpage — http://mwww.ba.ssa.gov/agency/plain-language/
Commissioner’s QUICC Writing Center webpage — http://quicc.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov
Federal Plain Language website — http://www.plainlanguage.gov/
Office of Learning’s Plain Language webpage — http://learning.ba.ssa.gov/ol/PlainLanguage