1) Plain language is language that your audience can understand. When writing and designing a document, you need to know your audience.

2) 80% of adults read at or below the 7th grade level. Less than 15% of adults read at the 12th grade level or higher.

3) Even college graduates cannot comprehend spoken language above the 12th grade level. Something to consider when writing speeches, recorded information messages and scripts.

4) Just because you understand what you’ve written doesn’t mean anyone else will. Test documents before you release them.

5) Writing in plain language requires you to know the material better than you do now.

6) Plain language is more than simple words and short sentences. Plain language documents give you the information you need in a simple, concise fashion. Plain language documents are logically organized, nicely formatted and understandable the first time you read them.

7) Do you want your reader to know something, or do something? If you want your readers to take action, spell out the steps: “Here are three things you must do, 1…2….3.” This makes it easy for the reader to take action.

8) Plain language is not “dumbing down.” Plain language documents make the reader feel intelligent and empowered. People rarely complain that a document was too easy to read and understand.

9) Plain Language saves you money. If readers don’t understand your materials, they pick up the telephone; and fielding calls costs you money.

10) Microsoft Word will tell you the grade level and readability of your documents. Click on Tools – Options – Spelling and Grammar – Show Readability Statistics. When writing for the general public, aim for the 7th grade level with a reading ease score of 70.