

Plain-Language Rewrite Sheet

A five-step routine for turning a hard-to-read paragraph into a clear one. Works for emails, assignment briefs, policies and letters home.

- 1 Find the point.** Write, in one sentence, what the reader must know or do. Put that sentence first.
- 2 Split long sentences.** One idea per sentence. Look hard at any sentence over about 25 words.
- 3 Make it active.** Name who does what: “Your tutor will email you,” not “You will be emailed.”
- 4 Swap the hard words.** Use the table below. Explain any term you can’t avoid, or add it to a glossary.
- 5 Shape it.** Turn steps into a numbered list, add a heading, and leave white space. Then read it aloud.

BEFORE
It should be noted that, prior to the commencement of the examination period, students are required to ensure that all outstanding library materials have been returned, failing which their results may not be released.

AFTER
Return your library books before exams start. If you don’t, we can’t release your results.

Try it: rewrite your own paragraph

Everyday word swaps

Instead of	Try
utilize	use
commence	start
terminate	end
prior to	before
subsequent to	after
in order to	to
approximately	about
sufficient	enough
facilitate	help
in the event that	if
with regard to	about
is required to	must
endeavor	try
at this point in time	now
a number of	some / many
in addition	also
demonstrate	show
obtain	get
purchase	buy
submit	send / hand in

Check before you send

- ☐ Main point in the first sentence
- ☐ No sentence over about 25 words without a reason
- ☐ Paragraphs under about 50 words
- ☐ Someone outside your team could follow it

Reviewed against sources on October 6, 2026. Steps draw on Digital.gov’s plain language guides (put the most important information first; one idea per sentence; active voice) and the W3C’s Making Content Usable for People with Cognitive and Learning Disabilities (2021; use clear words, a simple tense and voice, short paragraphs). The 25-word mark is a rule of thumb, not a standard. Word swaps are common plain-language substitutions; always check the meaning still fits.