

## Clear Language Checklist

Developed by Michael Wallace, 2007.

Widening Access for Adult Literacies Project ([www.wideningaccessforliteracies.ca](http://www.wideningaccessforliteracies.ca))

Checklist questions	Yes	No	Needs improvement
Layout and design			
<p>Does the newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Look attractive and legible?</li> <li>○ Look interesting and relevant to the reader?</li> <li>○ Use headings, bullet points and summaries to make the main points clear?</li> <li>○ Use interesting titles or headings?</li> <li>○ Avoid having too much detail on a page?</li> <li>○ Use sub-titles and short paragraphs?</li> <li>○ Use white space in margins and between sections?</li> <li>○ Use a typeface that is easy to read?</li> <li>○ Use bold type sparingly?</li> <li>○ Use an easy-to-read font size (9 – 11 pt)</li> <li>○ Avoid using more than two or three different typefaces in one document?</li> <li>○ Use ragged right margins?</li> <li>○ Use highlighting techniques?</li> <li>○ Avoid small columns with short lines?</li> <li>○ Use images such as photos, drawings or symbols that support the text?</li> <li>○ Avoid using graphics only for decoration?</li> <li>○ Place images that help explain the text next to, not on top of, the relevant words?</li> </ul>			

Organization of material			
<p>Does the newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Aim to make the material clear at a glance, even to a non- reader?</li> <li>○ Present information in a logical sequence, one-step at a time?</li> <li>○ Show clearly what is important?</li> <li>○ Focus on what the reader needs to know?</li> <li>○ Present main ideas near the beginning to catch the reader's attention?</li> <li>○ Use a formal table of contents for long documents?</li> <li>○ Use a summary paragraph to introduce shorter documents?</li> <li>○ Keep information short and to the point?</li> <li>○ Use question and answer techniques? (anticipate the readers' questions)</li> <li>○ Present information that is accessible, well-organized and comprehensible?</li> </ul>			
Language Use			
<p>Does the newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use simple English whenever possible?</li> <li>○ Avoid jargon, unnecessary technical detail or abbreviations?</li> <li>○ Avoid the passive voice?</li> <li>○ Use common, concrete words?</li> <li>○ Include a 'dictionary' or 'list of useful words' to explain jargon or acronyms?</li> </ul>			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid unfamiliar words?</li> <li>○ Avoid English idioms and language, which show a class, cultural, or gender bias?</li> <li>○ Avoid ambiguities and complex language?</li> <li>○ Avoid nouns made from verbs? (e.g. anything ending in 'ization')</li> </ul>			
Sentence length and structure			
<p>Does the newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use sentences that make sense on first reading?</li> <li>○ Keep sentences short? (25 – 30 words)</li> <li>○ Have only one main idea per sentence?</li> <li>○ Mainly use subject-verb-object sentence structure?</li> <li>○ Use active verbs?</li> <li>○ Use simple punctuation?</li> <li>○ Avoid semicolons (;), colons (:), hyphens (-), or too many commas?</li> </ul>			
Tone			
<p>Does the newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use personal and direct language?</li> <li>○ Use personal pronouns? ('you' and 'we')?</li> <li>○ Avoid a negative tone, e.g. bossy, paternalistic, patronizing?</li> <li>○ Use a friendly, conversational tone?</li> <li>○ Address readers directly in a straightforward and up-front manner?</li> <li>○ Emphasize the positive?</li> </ul>			