

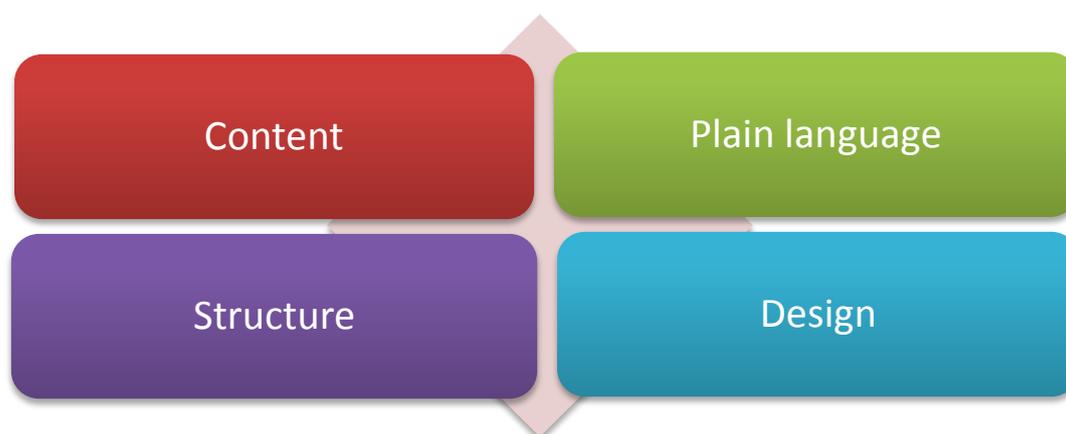
LawInfoNT: Plain language guidelines for choosing recommended resources

LawInfoNT provides simple, plain language information, resources, and referrals for Territorians, to help them uphold their legal rights and responsibilities and find help. These guidelines ensure that:

- 1) the website contains the best, most straightforward information for Northern Territorians
- 2) material produced for the NT is audience-focused and meets the legal information needs of Territorians on priority topics.

Plain language meets the audience's needs by communicating clear messages, so that people can find the information they need, understand it, and use it. All public legal information in the Northern Territory should meet plain language guidelines.

Below are plain language legal information guidelines, drawn from existing work in other jurisdictions¹ and adapted to the Territory's unique demography. We use an "elements" and "outcomes" focused approach to plain language that takes into consideration both linguistic and visual characteristics when determining how well readers are able to understand and use a document. The guidelines are divided into four sections:



Each section contains important elements for producing plain language legal information.

Good examples of plain language material in the Northern Territory include:

- 'A Shop', Discrimination Stories, produced by the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfcsew4egB4&feature=youtu.be>
- 'What's the Law', produced by NT Legal Aid Commission, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MKgKq_oWg&index=3&list=PL7ebY-LcWG4RuRHHXhLypzI5NjrQkteE

For more information, please see:

- 1) Victoria Legal Assistance Forum's "[Guidelines for Online Legal Information](#)";
- 2) Government of South Australia's "[Plain English – a good practice guide](#)";
- 3) The Aboriginal Interpreter Service, "[A guide to plain English](#)";
- 4) Cheek, A., "Defining Plain Language" in *Clarity* Vol. 64, 5-15 (2010).
- 5) Victoria Legal Assistance Forum's "[Plain Language Resources](#)".

¹ Specifically resources 1-4 above.

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Organisation: Resource name: Resource link:	
CONTENT	
	Indicates jurisdiction (NT or Cth)
	Has a clear purpose & intended audience
	Relevance to the audience is clearly identified
	Can be understood by its intended audience (and tested by users) ² (Is accurate, clear, natural)
	Is from an authoritative body or author (e.g. has expertise in relevant area) and the author/organisation is clearly identified
	Is non-partisan / non-biased
	Is legally accurate
	Is current, and the currency (ie date of production/update) is noted
	Contains links to services and indicates at what point users should seek legal advice
	Written in clear, direct way, avoiding unnecessary detail, considering information load for audience
	Information includes examples that are clearly labelled as examples
	Uses a conversational, rather than a legalistic or formal tone
PLAIN LANGUAGE	
	Where appropriate, is set out in an active voice and avoids the passive voice
	Mainly uses single clause sentences (one sentence, one idea)
	Minimises abstract nouns (replacing with verbs/adjectives where possible) or explains them
	Words and grammar are appropriate and familiar to reader, with unfamiliar and legal words defined separately from the main text (separating 'what to know' from 'what to do')
	Avoids words with multiple meanings, or words that are not used in their primary (ordinary) sense
	Avoids figurative language, unfamiliar abbreviations and acronyms
	Places cause before effect; puts ideas in logical, chronological order
STRUCTURE	
	Has a clear design
	Uses short headings to help predict what is coming up and to make the document clear
	Is ordered by: general (most important), specific, exceptions or IRAC – issue/relevance, law, application, actions
	Writing is brief, succinct: avg. sentence 10-15 words, paragraphs not more than 150 words
DESIGN	
	Font types and sizes are easy to read (Recommend 10-12 pt sans serif typeface)
	Uses 'bite, snack, meal' approach. Most important points are repeated / separated from main text
	Avoids blocks of text
	Includes relevant diagrams, tables, charts, maps, illustrations, and text boxes to explain/break up text (e.g. charge sheets, DVOs, court room layout). Captions are supplied for all graphics
	Layout is clear/inviting, drawing attention to important parts, easy to read, containing white space
	The resource is available in multiple formats e.g. html, text, pdf (WCAG-accessible)
	Is accessible via mobile
COMMENTS:	

² For a good checklist to evaluate your resource, see Step 5 at <http://centerforplainlanguage.org/5-steps-to-plain-language/>.