

How much of the ISO plain language standard is about words or readability formulas?

Two measures yield similar results.

Measure 1: Word count

Focus of advice:

Principles of plain language:	784 words
Metadiscourse* about using principles:	633 words
Organizational cues for using ideas:	1080 words
Words focused on word choice:	334 words
Words focused on readability formulas:	2 words

Total number of words: 4833 words

Percentage of advice about words: 7%

Percentage of words about readability formulas: 0.04%

Evidence-based claim

The ISO Plain Language Standard has roughly 4800 words. It covers a variety of language issues—such as the content’s structure, findability, understandability, and usability—but only 7% of the guidance focuses on word choice.

In addition, readability formulas are mentioned only once. That single mention states explicitly that plain language does not focus on readability formulas to judge text quality. Rather the standard places emphasis on how successfully readers can use documents.

Measure 2: Idea count

Focus of advice:

Principles of plain language:	253 ideas
Metadiscourse* about using principles:	39 ideas
Organizational cues for using ideas:	158 ideas
Ideas about word choice:	36 ideas
Ideas about readability formulas:	1 idea

Total number of ideas: 487 ideas

Percentage of ideas about words: 7%

Percentage of ideas about readability formulas: 0.21%

Evidence-based claim

The ISO Plain Language Standard has roughly 485 ideas. These cover a variety of language issues—such as the content’s structure, findability, understandability, and usability—but only 7% focus on word choice.

In addition, readability formulas are mentioned only once. That single mention states explicitly that plain language does not focus on readability formulas to judge text quality. Rather the standard places emphasis on how successfully readers can use documents.

* Language that comments on other language, helping readers to understand the author’s purpose and point of view. For example: *“This guidance applies mainly to printed or digital information. However, creators of podcasts and videos may also find it useful.”* The word “however” functions as metadiscourse. It acts as a linguistic marker that guides the reader—in this case—to recognize that while the guidance is specific, it may be useful in a wider context.