

Guideline 1: Understand your customers' needs

Find out who will be reading your material, what information they are looking for, and what the circumstances are.

How do I do this?

- **Interview staff members.** Ask employees who work directly with your customers. They know what questions people ask and the problems they encounter.
- **Ask your customers.** Survey your customers or their associations. Try questionnaires or short interviews.
- **Do a usability test.** Test your revised document or web pages with four to six typical customers to see if they can “use” it. [Learn about usability testing.](#)
- **Do informal try-outs.** Try your document out with a group of people who know nothing about the subject. They may be friends, family, or work colleagues.

Why do this?

- Your writing will be more effective and direct when you understand who you are trying to reach.
- When you listen to people read what you've written, it helps you understand what is confusing and which words don't work.

Do	Don't
<p>Can DCS garnish my public assistance money?</p> <p>No. DCS cannot take public assistance money.</p>	<p>Can DCS collect child support from me while I'm on public assistance?</p> <p>If you owe child support, DCS will continue to try to collect from you even when you receive public assistance, such as a TANF or a General Assistance – Unemployment (GA-U) Grant. DCS cannot take and keep your public assistance money, but we can keep your wages, earnings or assets.</p>
<p>We received your public records request and are now searching for the materials. We will respond within 30 days to let you know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the records are available.• If any of the records will be withheld for legal reasons.	<p>Thank you for your public records request. Pursuant to RCW 42.1.320, we are informing you it has been received and we estimate a further response to you by mail within 30 days. Although we hope to complete your request as soon as possible, we are making allowances for such variables as file availability, increased request demands, computer system downtime and</p>

- **If we must charge you for copying.** unforeseen staff changes.