



Tips Towards Plain Language

What is Plain Language?

Easy – Direct – Focused – History of Plain Language – Popular Media

Plain Language (also known as Plain English) is a writing style that creates an easy to understand document. Plain Language is direct and to the point without leaving out any details. Plain Language creates an easier reading experience, making content understandable on the 1st read. Plain Language is not a new concept with a long history. The original concept of Plain Language was built around the concept that all people should understand the written word. Plain Language in the United States government began in the 1970s. In 1978, president Carter issued Executive Orders aimed at making documents easy-to-understand. The Plain Writing Act of 2010, signed into law on October 13, 2010, required that federal agencies use Plain Language in all documents. Most modern newspapers, magazines and many websites are now written using Plain Language.

What does Plain Language mean to me?

Creates – Organizes – Educates – Encourages - Understandable

If you write in Plain Language, you are creating a document that is easier to read. Your use of Plain Language will help you organize your document clearly for all readers. If you aim your writing at the reader with the least knowledge you help them understand your subject on their first reading. If you write a document in Plain Language, you are helping more people understand your important points.

How Do I Write in Plain Language?

*Active Voice – Target – Focus – Organize – Shorten – Simple – Describe —
White Space – 6th Grade Reading Level*

1. You write using the active voice with pronouns like “we” and “you”.
2. You write for the reader with the “least” knowledge about your subject. Don’t assume that your reader will understand complicated terms.
3. You get to the point. Try not to use long phrases or words. Shorten your sentences by trying to stay within 20 words a sentence.
4. You explain all terms used in the document.
5. You use simple titles and headings.
6. You start with the most important point(s) separated from the main content. Make the important parts stand alone. If your reader scans through your document, without reading every word, which parts do you want them to remember?
7. You organize your document into a simple and logical order. Lead the reader with organized steps.
8. You include lots of white space to make your document easier to read.
9. You set the reading level at the 6th grade level. You can use your grammar checker to check your document’s reading level.

Do you have some examples of Plain Language?

Yes, here are some examples:

Before: “probabilities of precipitation”

After: “chance of rain”

Before: “High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning environment.”

After: “Children need good schools to learn properly.”

Do you have any resources for Plain Language?

Yes, there are many good online resources for Plain Language, including:

- PlainLanguage.gov – The source of information on Plain Language, including examples, guidance, quick references, word suggestions, and Federal Plain Language Guidelines.
- [A Plain English Handbook](#) – Originally written for corporate investors, this handbook is a great source of information.
- [Plain Language Association International \(PLAIN\)](#) – A site for resources, samples, and specific help for writing Plain Legal Language.
- TEDx talk by Sandra Fisher-martins in Portuguese with English subtitles about Plain Language and its impact on society: “The Right to Understand” <http://www.ted.com/talks/sandra-fisher-martins-the-right-to-understand.html>
- TEDx talk by Alan Siegel: Let’s simplify legal jargon! http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/alan_siegel_let_s_simplify_legal_jargon.html
- Plain English Network - <http://www.plainenglishawards.org.nz/>
- Write Information with Clarity - <http://www.write.co.nz/>
- Youtube video showing how to use Plain Language on a government website - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtXSCwphuzg>

We want to hear from you! After reading this fact sheet please take this short survey and give us your feedback.

English version: <http://fs12.formsite.com/disabilityrightsca/form54/index.html>

Spanish version: <http://fs12.formsite.com/disabilityrightsca/form55/index.html>

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