

A Quick Guide to Plain Language

What Is Plain Language?

Plain language is simple and clear language. It is defined in the Plain Writing Act of 2010 as “writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.”

Writing in plain language helps your users:

- Find what they need
- Understand what they find, and
- Use that information to do what they need to do.

Plain language is:

- Clear
- Direct
- Organized
- Focused on what the reader needs to know

Plain language does not:

- “Dumb things down”
- Sound unprofessional
- Leave out important information

Complex information doesn't require complicated language.

Who Benefits from Plain Language?

Plain language can help everyone.

It can be especially helpful for:

- People with disabilities that affect reading, memory, attention, or understanding
- People who are still learning English
- People who are unfamiliar with the topic
- People who are reading quickly or under stress

Organizations benefit too. Plain language can help more people understand and use the information you provide.



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Is Plain Language Required?

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires federal agencies to use clear communication that the public can understand and use.

Other laws may require information to be accessible to people with disabilities in certain situations. Plain language can help make information more accessible, particularly for people with disabilities that affect reading or understanding.

How Do I Get Started with Plain Language?

Think about ways you can make information you provide easier to find, understand, and use.

Ask yourself: Can the reader quickly answer these questions?

- What is this about?
- What is most important?
- What do I need to do?
- When do I need to do it?
- Who can help me?

Review your content and look for ways to make it clearer.

5 quick ways to make your writing clearer:

1. Use common, everyday words.
2. Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
3. Put the most important information first.
4. Use headings and lists to organize information.
5. Tell readers clearly what they need to do.



Instead of: “Prior to submitting the application...”

Try: “Before you submit the application...”

Instead of: “Individuals who are eligible...”

Try: “People who are eligible...”

Instead of: “In the event that you need assistance...”

Try: “If you need help...”



Quick Take

- Plain language is simple and clear language
- It helps people find what they need and understand it easily.
- Plain language helps everyone but is very helpful for people who have difficulty reading or understanding information.
- The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires federal agencies to use clear language that people can understand.
- Easy Read is not the same as plain language.
- Some tips for using plain language:
 1. Use common words.
 2. Keep sentences short.
 3. Put important information first.
 4. Use headings and lists.
 5. Tell people clearly what to do next.

Resources

There are lots of resources for learning how to write in plain language. This [plain language guide from plainlanguage.gov](#) will get you started. Then check out the additional resources below.

- [Center on Disability: Plain Language and Easy Read](#)
- [Center for Plain Language](#)
- [plainlanguage.gov](#)
- [Plain Language Association International](#)
- [ASAN: One Idea Per Line: A Guide to Making Easy Read Resources](#)

Tools for Assessing Plain Language

- [Hemingway Editor](#)
- [MS Word: Readability Stats Tool](#)



This handout is available in an accessible format at:

exploreaccess.org/plain-language/

To request other formats, contact us, partners@uark.edu.

U of A Partners is administratively located in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas. Partners is the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service.

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