

Using a Plain Language Lens: Communicating Clearly With Your Participants

Here are some plain language tips to consider when creating content. Make sure what you share is clear, accessible, and effective – and avoid the curse of knowledge.



✓ Audience

- **Center your audience** – anticipate their questions and incorporate their feedback. Observe how content is used, have a focus group, or develop an advisory committee.
- **Be transparent** about what you know and don't know when information is not certain.
- **Make it relatable.** Connect content to your audience's lives. Include images, examples, and stories that relate to their experiences.
- **Consider tone** – how do you want your reader to feel about this opportunity or information? Is the tone respectful and inclusive?

✓ Organization and Cohesion

- **Make sure there is a clear main idea** that explains the purpose of the document.
- **Make sure key information is prioritized.** Don't put the most important things at the bottom or buried in text.
- **Group content** with a clear organizational pattern.
- **Be specific** about what you want people to do – and why.
- **Use bullet points to break up dense text.** Too many bullet points? Break them into smaller sections.



Words

- **Use familiar language** in general.
- If including jargon or technical terms, **use clear explanations** (repeat in varied ways, provide examples, give a definition, etc.)
- **Make clear connections** between ideas.
- **Use simpler sentence structures** in general, preferably in the active voice.
- **Use clear pronouns like "you"** when possible to clarify who should be doing what.

Clear Design

- **Use headings** to make it clear where new sections start and easier to skim
- **Divide content in clear chunks** so that people can easily find information without having to read every detail.
- **Make sure you have plenty of white space** on the page so people are not overwhelmed by the amount of content.
- **Use medium length lines of text** – too long or too short can be harder to read.
- **Choose a clear font** that's easy for people to read.
- **Use images to illustrate ideas** related to the content and that connect with the audience in a positive manner.

"A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information."

-International Plain Language Federation

Questions about plain language and clear communication?

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