



College of Engineering
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Lunch & Learn

Communicating Using Plain Language

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Introduce yourself to a partner

Prompt:

- Share name and department/unit
- How does miscommunication impact the work that you do?



What is plain language?

The [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) defines plain language as:

Writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.

What is plain language?

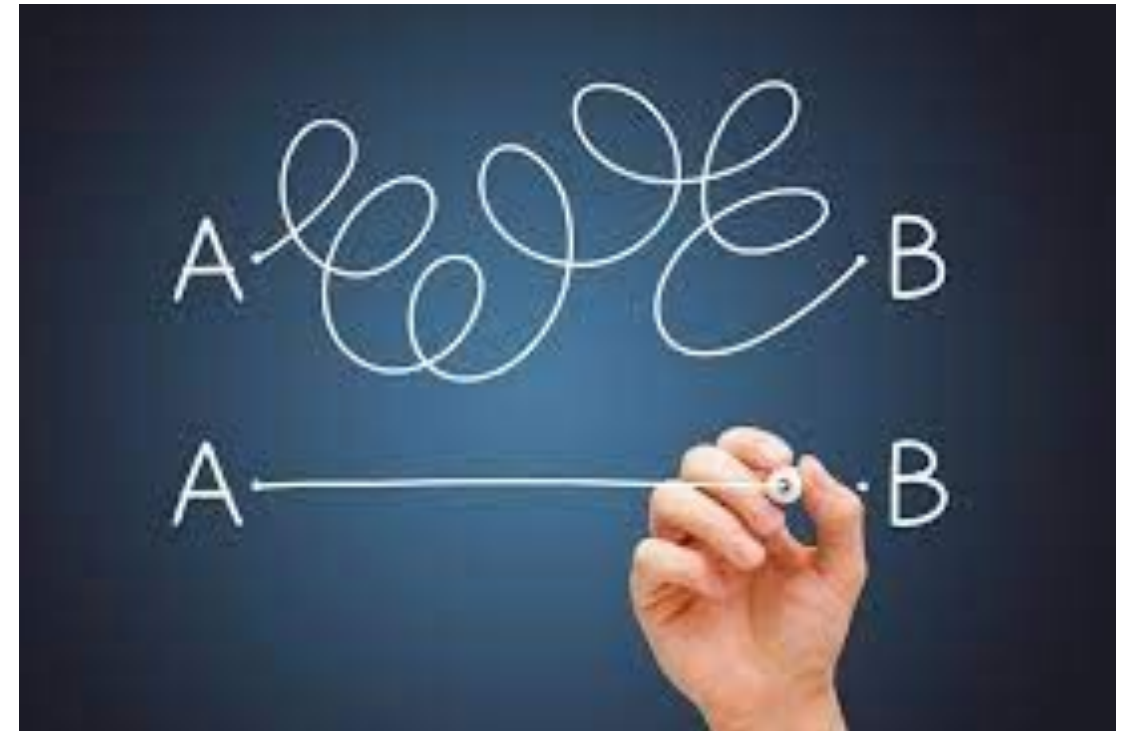
Communication your audience understands the first time

Writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.



Plain language is **not**

- Dumbing it down
- Being informal
- Writing less precisely
- Leaving out necessary technical or legal information




Benefits of plain language

- Builds trust with audience
- Promotes accessibility and equity
- Increases your reach
- Saves time and money
- Increases collaboration



Main Message First


[Short Video](#)



**What's
Your
Point?**

Put the most
important
message first

*Plain language: communication your
audience understands the first time*

 **CDC** **ATSDR** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

CC000001-0

Active Voice

[Short Video](#)

YES (active voice)	NO (passive voice)
Adopt these safety protocols to keep you and your family safe and healthy.	If these safety protocols are adopted, the public should remain safe and healthy.
Wearing a mask reduces your risk of exposure.	The risk of exposure is decreased by wearing a mask.

Pronouns

[Short Video](#)

PRONOUNS

Because they're
good for YOU!



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Readability

Before:

This is a multipurpose passenger vehicle which will handle and maneuver differently from an ordinary passenger car, in driving conditions which may occur on streets and highways and off road. As with other vehicles of this type, if you make sharp turns or abrupt maneuvers, the vehicle may roll over or may go out of control and crash. You should read driving guidelines and instructions in the Owner's Manual, and **WEAR YOUR SEAT BELTS AT ALL TIMES.**

Readability

After



Simplify

Cut It Out

Delete unnecessary words, sentences, and paragraphs

Plain language: communication your audience understands the first time



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

CS236091-11



Inclusion, Equity, and
Diversity in Engineering
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Example

✗ Before

We must receive your completed application form on or before the 15th day of the second month following the month you are reporting if you do not submit your application electronically or the 25th day of the second month following the month you are reporting if you submit your application electronically.

✓ After

**If you submit
your form:**

**We must
receive it by:**

Electronically

25th of the
second
month

Not
electronically

15th of the
second
month



Where to Use Plain Language at work?

- Staff Training
- Writing Policies
- Instructions
- Feedback
- Guidelines
- Interviews



Practice

Investigators at the contractor will review the facts in your case and decide the most appropriate course of action. The first step taken with most Medicare health care providers is to reeducate them about Medicare regulations and policies. If the practice continues, the contractor may conduct special audits of the providers medical records. Often, the contractor recovers overpayments to health care providers this way. If there is sufficient evidence to show that the provider is consistently violating Medicare policies, the contractor will document the violations and ask the Office of the Inspector General to prosecute the case. This can lead to expulsion from the Medicare program, civil monetary penalties, and imprisonment.

After

We will take two steps to look at this matter: We will find out if it was an error or fraud.

We will let you know the result.

Practice

Dear addressee,

This letter concerns your recent claim for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.

Before final action could be taken on your claim, we needed (Evidence). This evidence was requested in our letter dated (Date). Our records do not show we have received this evidence, therefore, we have disallowed your claim.

This disallowance does not mean that you cannot submit the requested evidence. You can do so at any time. However, if the evidence is not received before (Date), which is one year from the date of our first letter, benefits, if entitlement is established, cannot be paid before the date of receipt of the evidence.

If you disagree with this disallowance and believe the evidence now of record is sufficient for us to award you benefits, please refer to the enclosed VA Form 1-4107, Notice of Procedural and Appellate Rights, which explains your rights to appeal.

Sincerely yours,

Enclosure:
VAF 1-4107

After

Dear addressee:

We wrote to you on [date], for information to help us with your claim for [benefits]. We've closed your file for now because we haven't received the information.

What we needed

We asked you to send us:

A certified copy of your marriage license [example only]

A certified copy of Ronnie's birth certificate [example only]

Mary's and Ronnie's Social Security numbers [example only]

Time limit

We've closed your file for now, but you still have time to send in the information we need. We may be able to [pay benefits/raise your benefits] back to [date], if we receive this information by [date].

If you think we're wrong

If you think we shouldn't have turned down your claim, you should write and tell us. We've attached a form which explains your rights.

If you have any questions, you may call us toll-free by dialing 1-800-827-1000. Our TDD number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-829-4833. If you call, please have this letter with you.

Sincerely,

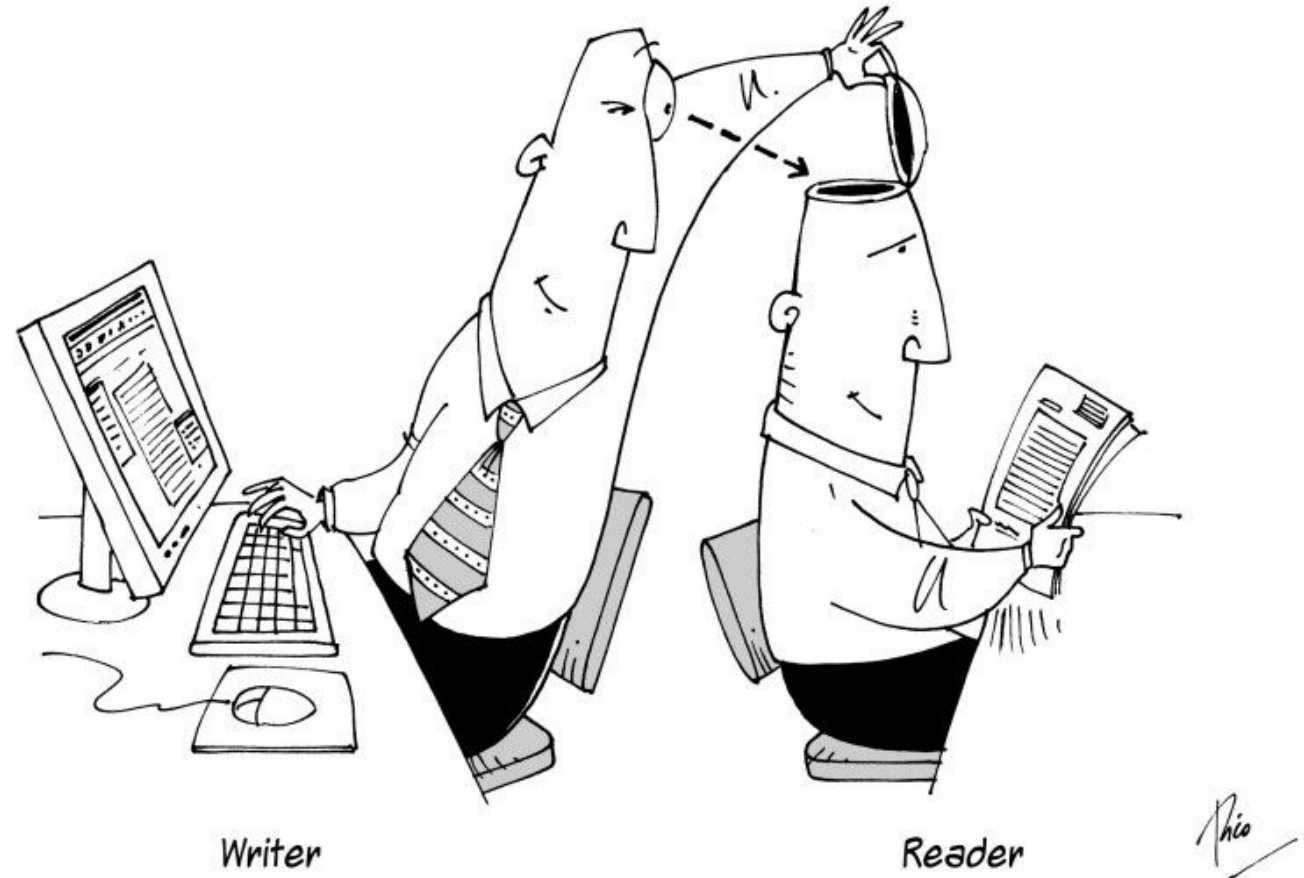
Enclosures:

VAF 1-4107

Reflection

Please see handout

When writing, try to get inside the reader's head.



Resources

- Checklist for Plain Language
 - <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/checklists/checklist/>
- Examples
 - <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/>
- Plain Language Association International
 - <https://plainlanguagenetwork.org/plain-language/what-is-plain-language/>
- Center for Plain Language
 - <https://centerforplainlanguage.org/>

Plain Language Certificate

[Cultural Linguistic Services](#) Plain Language Certificate



Volunteer Opportunity

- [Be a Tutor](#)



Thank you!

Questions?

