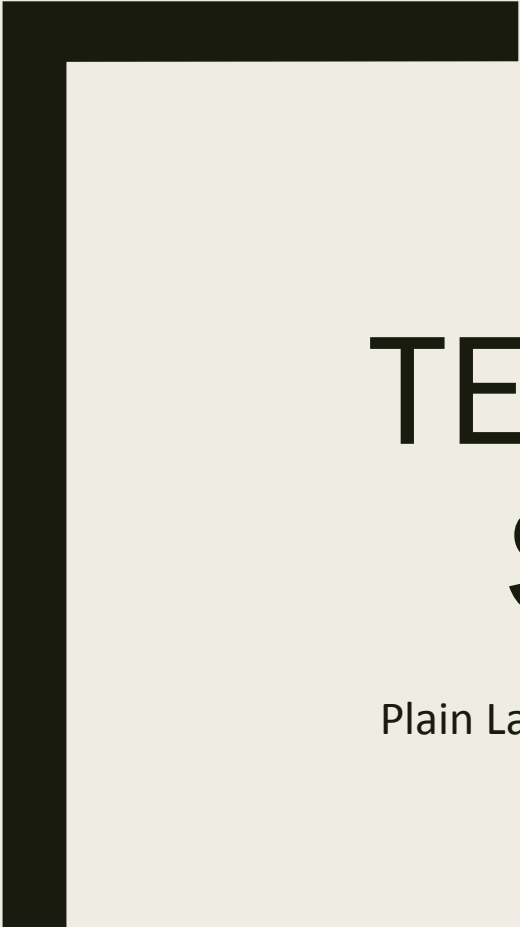
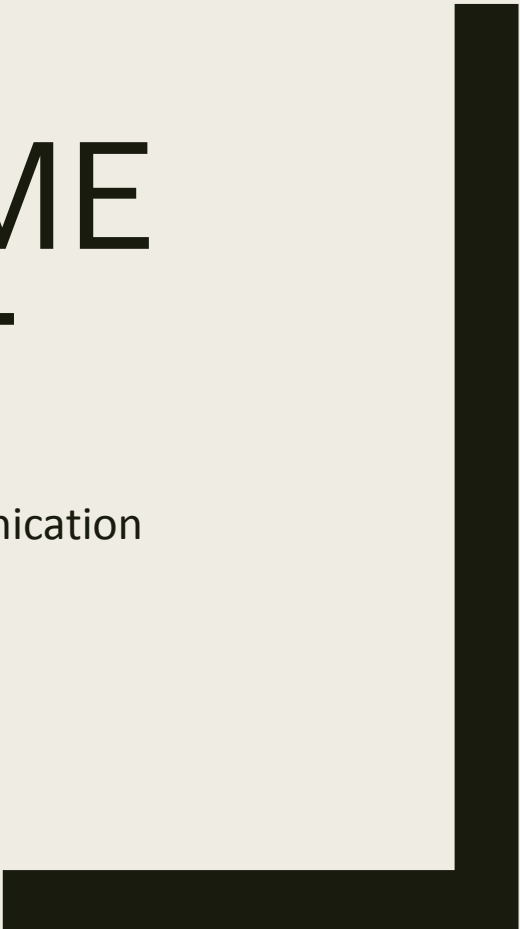




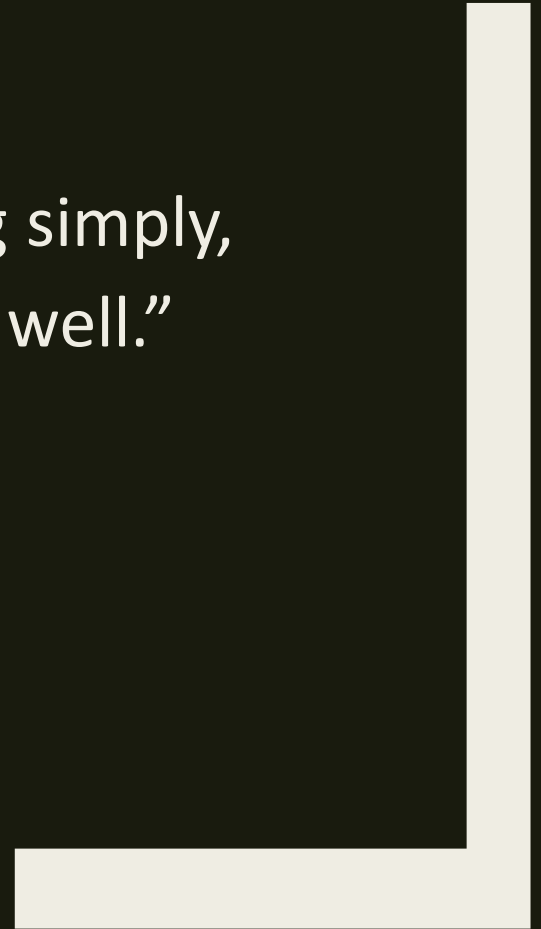
TELL IT TO ME STRAIGHT

Plain Language in Public Health Communication



“If you can’t explain something simply,
you don’t understand it very well.”

Albert Einstein



What is Plain Language?

- Communication that your audience or readers can understand the **first time** they hear or read it.
- Language that is simple, clear, direct and uses common words.

Goals of Plain Language

- Help the reader ***find*** what they need
- Help the reader ***understand*** what they find
- Help the reader ***use*** what they find to meet their needs

*If your message doesn't do all three,
it's not plain language.*

Why use Plain Language?

- We're all busy people.
- We don't want to waste time trying to translate difficult, wordy documents.
- In this age of information overload, we often want to scan, not read.
- 32 million U.S. adults can't read.

Plain Language Myths

Plain Language is NOT:

- ✓ *Imprecise*
- ✓ *An attempt to “dumb-down” information*
- ✓ *Stripping out necessary technical/legal information*
- ✓ *Just editorial “polishing” after you finish writing*
- ✓ *Something state leaders, legislators will never go for*
- ✓ *Easy*

Before and After

Before

The plan covering the patient as a dependent child of a person whose date of birth occurs earlier in the calendar year shall be primary over the plan covering the patient as a dependent of a person whose date of birth occurs later in the calendar year provided.

After

What happens if my spouse and I both have health coverage for our child?

If your child is covered under more than one insurance policy, the policy of the adult whose birthday is earlier in the year pays the claim first. For example: Your birthday is in March; your spouse's birthday is in May. March comes earlier in the year than May, so your policy will pay for your child's claim first.

Before and After

CALIFORNIA ADVANCE HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE

Explanation

You have the right to give instructions about your own health care. You also have the right to name someone else to make health care decisions for you. This form lets you do either or both of these things. It also lets you express your wishes regarding donation of organs and the designation of your primary physician. If you use this form, you may complete or modify all or any part of it. You are free to use a different form.

Part 1 of this form is a power of attorney for health care. Part 1 lets you name another individual as agent to make health care decisions for you if you become incapable of making your own decisions or if you want someone else to make those decisions for you now even though you are still capable. You may name an alternate agent to act for you if your first choice is not willing, able, or reasonably available to make decisions for you. (Your agent may not be an operator or employee of a community care facility or a residential care facility where you are receiving care, or an employee of the health care institution where you are receiving care, unless your agent is related to you, is your registered domestic partner, or is a co-worker. Your supervising health care provider can never act as your agent.)

Unless the form you sign limits the authority of your agent, your agent may make all health care decisions for you. This form has a place for you to limit the authority of your agent. You need not limit the authority of your agent if you wish to rely on your agent for all health care decisions that may have to be made. If you choose not to limit the authority of your agent, your agent will have the right to:

- (a) Consent or refuse consent to any care, treatment, service, or procedure to maintain, diagnose, or otherwise affect a physical or mental condition;
- (b) Select or discharge health care providers and institutions;
- (c) Approve or disapprove diagnostic tests, surgical procedures and programs of medication; and
- (d) Direct the provision, withholding, or withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration and all other forms of health care, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation;
- (e) Make anatomical gifts, authorize an autopsy, and direct the disposition of your remains.

Part 2 of this form lets you give specific instructions about any aspect of your health care, whether or not you appoint an agent. Choices are provided for you to express your wishes regarding the provision, withholding, or withdrawal of treatment to keep you alive, as well as the provision of pain relief. Space is provided for you to add to the choices you have made or for you to write out any additional wishes. If you are satisfied to allow your agent to determine what is best for you in making end-of-life decisions, you need not fill out part 2 of this form.

Part 3 of this form lets you express an intention to donate your bodily organs and tissues following your death.

Part 4 of this form lets you designate a physician to have primary responsibility for your health care.

After completing this form, sign and date the form at the end. The form must be signed by two qualified witnesses or acknowledged before a notary public. Give a copy of the signed and completed form to your physician, to any other health care providers you may have, to any health care institution at which you are receiving care, and to any health-care agents you have named. You should talk to the person you have named as agent to make sure that he or she understands your wishes and is willing to take the responsibility.

You have the right to revoke this advance health care directive or replace this form at any time.

California Advance Health Care Directive

This form lets you have a say about how
you want to be treated if you get very sick.



● This form has 3 parts. It lets you:

Part 1: Choose a health care agent.

A health care agent is a person
who can make medical decisions for you
if you are too sick to make them yourself.

Part 2: Make your own health care choices.

This form lets you choose the kind of health care you want.

This way, those who care for you will not have to guess
what you want if you are too sick to tell them yourself.

Part 3: Sign the form.

It must be signed before it can be used.



You can fill out Part 1, Part 2, or both.

Fill out **only** the parts you want.

Always sign the form in Part 3.

Go to the next page



1

“The key to making things understandable
is to understand what it’s like to not
understand.”

Richard Saul Wurman

Important Questions to Ask

Why does the user need to read your document?

What questions might the reader ask?

In what order will they ask the questions?

What is the most important information so the reader can find it quickly?

Make Information Easy to Find

For most materials use:

- *descriptive titles*
- *descriptive images*
- *descriptive headers that carry the message*
- *bolded headers and sub-headers*



Be Active Your Way

A Guide for Adults

Based on the 2008 *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*

Be Active, Healthy, and Happy!



Improved Readability

- Good use of white space
- Descriptive headers
- Good use of bullets
- Short paragraphs
- Clear relevant images

For best success

- Team up with a friend. It will keep you motivated and be more fun.
- Pick activities that you like to do.
- Track your time and progress. It helps you stay on course. Fill in the forms on pages 20 and 21 to help set your activity goals. Before you know it, you'll be able to do at least **2 hours and 30 minutes** of activities at a moderate level each week.
- Add in more strength-building activities over time. For example, you can do sit-ups or push-ups.



Shaping up

"My son and I play in a baseball league twice a week. On the days we play, I sleep much better at night. This makes me want to do more on other days. My son wants to lift weights together, and so we got some weights and work out in the basement."

Provide Information that Actually IS Easy to Read

- Use short, familiar words, when possible
- Use sentences that are short, but not choppy
- Aim for 20 words per sentence ***or fewer***
- Treat only one subject in each sentence
- Provide pronunciation guides, when appropriate

Did you know?

When you are **not** physically active, you are more likely to:

- Get heart disease
- Get type 2 diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high blood cholesterol
- Have a stroke



Build up over time

Start by doing what you can, and then look for ways to do more. If you have not been active for a while, start out slowly. After several weeks or months, build up your activities—do them longer and more often.

Walking is one way to add physical activity to your life. When you first start, walk 10 minutes a day on a few days during the first couple of weeks.

Add more time and days. Walk a little longer. Try 15 minutes instead of 10 minutes. Then walk on more days a week.

Pick up the pace. Once this is easy to do, try walking faster. Keep up your brisk walking for a couple of months. You might want to add biking on the weekends for variety.

Make Information Easy to Relate To

Check with intended audiences to determine if information seems to be:

- personally relevant
- acceptable and non-offensive
- believable
- persuasive, convincing
- practical and easy to respond to

Believable & Sensitive Messages

- Address real barriers
- Offer practical choices
- If using Q&A format, use “I” in the questions and “you” in the text
- Anticipate questions an informed reader is likely to ask

Part 1. Getting Started



Start slowly

"The employee wellness program at my work just started a new lunchtime walking program. Some of us walk at a good clip, while others move at a slower pace. I get to be outdoors, and I feel more alert on the days I walk."

Thinking about adding physical activity to your life, but not sure how to get started? Sometimes taking the first step is the hardest part.

If you have not been active in some time, start at a comfortable level and add a little more activity as you go along. Some people find that getting active with a friend makes it easier to get started.

Is something holding you back?

Think about reasons why you have not been physically active. Then try to come up with some ways to get past what is keeping you from getting active.

Have you said to yourself . . . ?

I haven't been active in a very long time.

Solution: Choose something you like to do. Many people find walking helps them get started. Before you know it, you will be doing more each day.

I don't have the time.

Solution: Start with 10-minute chunks of time a couple of days a week. Walk during a break. Dance in the living room to your favorite music. It all adds up.

Active vs. Passive Voice

Passive voice

The subject is no longer *active*, but is, instead, being *acted upon* by the verb.

The letter was mailed by Sandie.

The building will be leased by MDHHS.

Active Voice

The subject of the sentence performs the action expressed in the verb.

Sandie mailed the letter.

MDHHS will lease the building.

Why Avoid the Passive Voice?

Passive voice

Can disguise who does what:

The memo was written yesterday.

Is wordy:

The application must be completed by the applicant and received by the finance office at the time designated by that office.

Is awkward:

Consultation from respondents was obtained to determine the estimated burden.

Active voice

Makes it clear who does what:

The Director wrote the memo yesterday.

Is concise:

We must receive your completed application by the deadline we establish.

Is natural:

We consulted with respondents to determine the estimated burden.



"The CEO KO'd our LOI with his MOU, and the SLA was BS for managing PNL, and the FDD was DOA, and now I'm on a PIP but next week I'm on ETO so WTF."

Abbreviations and Acronyms

- Readers complain more about abbreviations and acronyms than about any other feature of bureaucratic writing.
- Using abbreviations turns your material into a research project for readers.

Use Everyday Words

additional

extra

applicant

you

complete

fill in

ensure

make sure

in the event of

if

implement

start

per

as

per annum

a year

prior to

before

regarding

about

terminate

end/cancel

Plain Language Resources

National Institutes of Health – Health Literacy Initiative

www.nih.gov/clearcommunication/plainlanguage.htm

Plainlanguage.gov

Center for Plain Language – www.centerforplainlanguage.org

CDC Clear Communication Index

<http://www.cdc.gov/ccindex/>