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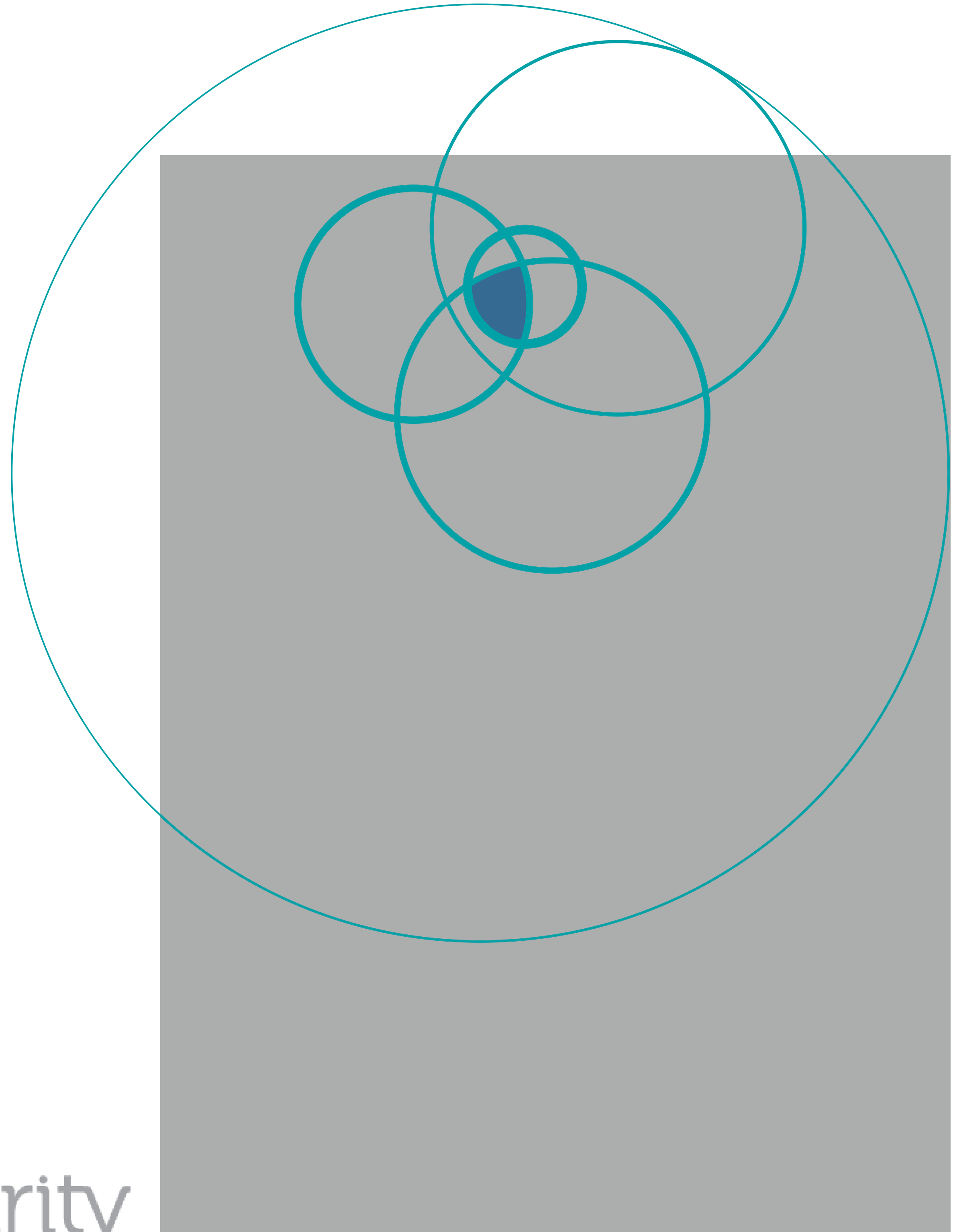

clarity

From the President

In the last journal I spoke about the joint ICClear and Clarity Conference to be held in Belgium. In November almost 200 delegates met initially in Antwerp and then in Brussels to share their experiences and hear about the challenges and successes of integrating plain language in the European Union.

The quality of the program was exceptional, with keynote speakers including the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly and Stephen Pinker, who has recently launched a new book on writing. Both papers promoted discussion at the time and I am sure, like me, many hours of considered contemplation since. The quality of the program was due to the hard work of the team at ICClear who were led by Karine Nicolay and Ingrid Adriaensen. Thank you on behalf of Clarity for the many hours (and I am sure days and weeks) of work that you did to make the conference such a success.

We have started planning for our 2016 conference, and I hope to be able to make an announcement on the location and timing shortly. In the meantime, I hope to see many of you at our sister organisation PLAIN's next conference to be held in Dublin, Ireland, from 17 to 20 September 2015. The conference, held in partnership with the National Adult Literacy Association, will once again challenge us to reflect on how we can all work better as plain-language practitioners.

You can't have helped but have noticed a few changes in this issue of *Clarity*. The redesign that I mentioned in the last issue is here thanks to the hard work of Josiah Fisk and Cori Stevens from More Carrot who generously donated their time to the project. The design respects the traditions of *Clarity* but brings a more modern touch to our organisation. We hope you like it.

Finally, thanks to our dedicated editor-in-chief, Julie Clement. Like everyone on the Clarity committee, Julie volunteers her time to produce the journal to ensure that Clarity members have access to the best plain-language research and reflection. Julie's dedication is one of the pillars of the Clarity organisation. At my organisation we think that the journal and the work of Julie (and past editors) has created the most important source of plain language information available, and we want to make it more available. As a result, this year we are working on a project to include all the journal articles on our Better Information plain language searchable database. Many articles have already been added, and we hope to have all articles listed by the end of the year. Visit our website and look under our Better Information section to check it out.

Once again don't hesitate to contact me if you have any suggestions or would like to discuss any suggestions you might have for our organisation. Happy New Year and best wishes for 2015.

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Guest editor's note

When Julie Clement asked if I would guest edit an issue of Clarity, I jumped at the chance. She asked that the issue consist of articles from presentations given at the October, 2013 PLAIN conference in Vancouver, CA. This is that issue.

The conference provided me with a wealth of possible articles, and selecting ones for this issue was difficult. How to choose from the multitude of presentations? So I asked PLAIN members to recommend presentations, and here are the results.

One of the most interesting results of reading these articles was finding a common theme among them all: Plain language itself often is not enough to create understanding and usability. We all know that the words "plain language" privilege words, but we also know that the limitations of the words alone remind us of the multitude of other elements that create an easy-to-read document. Each of these articles presents us with a much wider context in which to think about "plain language."

Decision-Making: Mark Hochhauser provides us with the psychology of decision-making. Readers choose what to read, how to read, and when to read. As he states, "Plain language alone may not be the one-size-fits-all solution to communication problems." His article focuses on the influence of thinking strategies, information overload, intuition vs rationality, and framing. Understanding the psychology of readers will help us attend better to their reading needs.

Convergence: Neil James's article comes from his keynote address in which he explains not only why plain language is not enough but advocates that we learn the research in other fields that impact our own. He includes a history of our field and others that converge with us and lays out a direction for the future of plain language.

Credibility: Martin Cutts, in his humorous and engaging acceptance speech for the Christine Mowatt Award, sets up the theme of this issue by reminding us that plain language as a field has built into its principles the concept of transparency and credibility for the public good.

Disabilities: Cathy Basterfield and Mark Starford show us that we must consider audiences comprised of people with disabilities and how such consideration affects how we create information. Citing The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), they show us that knowing how to identify access to understandable information is paramount to providing people with freedom, opportunity, and full participation.

Design: Robert Linsky, an information designer, reminds us that color, image, fonts, placement, and visual appeal have a significant impact on understanding. Using LUNA, his methodology, we learn the importance of integrating the visual and the verbal.

Collaboration: Mats Hydbom, with the Digital Project in Sweden, provides us with a case study on teaching legal experts at the Swedish National Tax Agency how to write tax law information that will be published on the web. He shows us not only the value to the Agency to hire plain language experts to be integral to this project, but that understanding and respecting attorneys' requirements that plain language still be "legal" helps us be less "evangelical" and more collaborative.

I hope you find these articles as relevant and informative as I did.

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In this issue

How Do Our Readers Really Think, Understand, and Decide — Despite What They Know?

Mark Hochhauser, Ph.D., is a readability consultant in Golden Valley, MN. He has given 120 conference presentations, published 200 articles, and testified as an expert witness on the readability, legibility, and comprehension of consumer agreements.

By Mark Hochhauser, PhD

Summary

My readability and plain language consulting includes clinical trial consent forms, health information, privacy notices, consumer contracts, government communications, etc. Following Karen Schriver's insights in her 1997 book *Dynamics in Document Design*, I rely not only on standard readability formulas, but also statewide educational attainment data, adult literacy data and document legibility. Plain language is important to me because US federal regulations and ethical guidelines require that patients and prospective human subjects understand health information before making medical decisions. In addition, plain language is essential for consumers to understand and act on their State's regulations and appeal processes.

Introduction

This article recognizes that everyone's cognitive abilities (writing, reading, remembering, thinking, and deciding) are brain-based activities. Your brain controls what you write, but you cannot control how people read, understand, remember, think, judge or decide. However, a deeper understanding of the psychology of readers may help you become a more realistic writer if you understand that plain language alone may not be the one-size-fits-all solution to communication problems.

Words matter

Plain language benefits some readers, but not all. Reading researchers have found that

- "Word knowledge is critical for good comprehension. Vocabulary is the single best predictor of comprehension ability" according to Nicole Landi, in her 2010 article "An examination of the relationship between reading comprehension, higher-level and lower-level reading sub-skills in adults." Word choice matters.
- According to Perfetti and Adlop's 2012 chapter in "Measuring Up: Advances in How We Assess Reading Ability, "A reader needs to know the meanings of 90 percent of the individual words contained within a text in order to comprehend it." This makes legalese hard for any reader to understand.
- Schmitt, et al. in their 2011 article "The Percentage of Words Known in a Text and Reading Comprehension," and Nation's 2006 article "How large a vocabulary is needed for reading and listening" concluded that "readers should understand about 98% of the words in a text for adequate comprehension."

But vocabulary size alone does not guarantee that low literacy adults will understand your materials In their 2010 article "A path analysis of reading comprehension for adults with low literacy," Mellard and Woods found that low literacy readers have not shifted from word recognition to language comprehension. Pronouncing individual words is not the same as reading a sentence.

All readers are not the same

Reading, comprehension and thinking abilities aren't based only on plain language, but on

- brain factors such as the aging brain, learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, etc.
- how researchers define and measure reading comprehension, and on whom, as summarized in Fletcher's 2006 article "Measuring reading comprehension." Much reading comprehension research has been done on convenience samples of healthy college students reading short text passages.
- health problems such as the following as found by Hochhauser in his 2012 article "Can sick patients understand informed consent" and Weber et al. in their 2012 article "Reconciling subjective memory complaints with objective memory performance in the menopausal transition can affect learning, memory, and decision making:
    - adult coronary syndrome
    - medical inpatient experience
    - chemotherapy/chemobrain
    - metabolic syndrome
    - common medical conditions
    - type 2 diabetes
    - drug addiction
    - traumatic brain injury
    - menopausal transition
    - vascular risk factors

Because readers bring these conditions with them, accept that you cannot overcome reader literacy problems by plain language alone.

How readers decide

In his 2011 book "Thinking, fast and slow," Psychologist Dan Kahneman's "Law of Least Effort" shows that readers take the least demanding strategy to reach a conclusion. Below are five strategies that people use for decision-making that affect how they read and process information:

1. Thinking strategies. According to Dan Kahneman in his 2003 article "A perspective on judgment and choice: Mapping bounded rationality," and Paul Slovic, et al's 2003 conference paper "Risk as analysis and risk as feelings: Some thoughts about affect, reason, risk and rationality, people use two distinct thinking systems, slower logical and analytical thinking vs faster emotional and intuitive thinking.

Logical/Analytic (Good "mind")	Emotional/Intuition (Bad "body")
Slow Decisions	Fast decisions
Controlled thinking	Automatic reactions
Much mental effort	No mental effort
Requires complex analytic rule	Based on habits
Sensible and logical	Emotional memories; feelings
Leads to delayed decisions	Leads to immediate decisions

Conventional wisdom is that people are (or should be) logical instead of emotional because emotions interfere with logical analyses. But brain researchers know that people often feel their emotional decisions first, and then justify that feeling with logical analyses. Thus, Slovic et al. (above) describe "risk as feelings" and not just "risk as analysis." We would, therefore, do well to focus on the emotional responses people have to reading and understanding information not just on the logical presentation of information. Some forms of information (like paying taxes) present readers with a highly emotional and generally negative reading situation.

2. Information Overload Our brains can't process all the information we receive in a day. At best, we can store a few pieces of information in our working memory. While early research found a working memory capacity of about 5 to 9 pieces of information, current research suggests a smaller working memory of 4 to 7 items—depending on our brain's age. According to Klingberg's 2009 book "The Overflowing Brain," our short-term memory capacity peaks at age 25 – 35 and begins to decline after that. Long sentences will tax readers' working memory; they may forget the beginning of the sentence by the time they get to the end. Information overload means that readers must rely on other decision-making strategies.

3. Intuition Intuition is the "direct perception of truth or fact independent of any reasoning process" via a very selective (unconscious) focus. In his 2002 book "Intuition: Its Powers and Perils, "Psychologist David Myers describes "knowing without awareness"—people can know things automatically (unconsciously) or cognitively (consciously). In his 2002 book "The Tipping Point," Malcolm Gladwell suggested (p. 23) that intuitive decisions were based on "thin slicing"—"the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behavior based on narrow slices of experience." Some decisions just "feel right" or "feel wrong."

4. Heuristic strategies Heuristics simplify complex choices by finding adequate answers to difficult questions. For example, here are three heuristics I used when choosing my Medicare supplemental health plan:

- Logically and analytically, I researched and analyzed online and printed information to make health plan comparisons—a complicated and time-consuming task.
- The affect heuristic described by Slovic et al. in their 2002 chapter in "Heuristics and Biases" helped me simplify my choices by immediately eliminating plan "M" because of a bad patient experience with that plan. That experience created unpleasant emotions (my affect) and memories. Eliminating plan M was an emotional decision that felt right.
- The effort heuristic described by Krugera et al. in their 2004 article "The Effort Heuristic" lets people make decisions based on other people's effort. My family and friends knew that I thoroughly researched the Medicare supplemental health plans, so they decided not to do their own research. They asked me which plan I picked, and they picked the same plan because they valued the time and analysis that I put into my research. While I took hours to make my decision, they made their decision in less than a minute. ("What plan did you pick, Mark?")

5. Psychological framing and decisions As Kahneman noted in his 2011 book "Thinking, fast and slow," framing presents the same information in different ways. A classic example from Levin and Gaeth's 1998 article "How consumers are affected by the framing of attribute information before and after consuming the product" is when consumers gave higher ratings to 75% lean beef (a healthy "frame") than to 25% fat beef (an unhealthy "frame"). These two percentage descriptions mean the same (beef is 75% lean and 25% fat), but the "frame" creates different interpretations. Or consider the framing difference between a "9% unemployment rate" vs a "91% employment" rate.

Conclusions

Plain language may make information more comprehensible for some readers but not all. You cannot magically change readers' literacy skills or illnesses that affect their comprehension without understanding the decision-making processes that accompany reading and understanding. In addition, you have no control over how much information an aging reader's brain can remember and process, or over which strategies they use to arrive at a decision. Therefore, we would all be wise to consider the use of plain language as a treatment—not a cure.

What's in a name?

The future for plain language in a converging communication profession.

By Dr Neil James

Dr Neil James, is Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation in Australia, which combines plain English training, editing and auditing with a public campaign for more ethical language practice. He has published three books and over 75 articles and essays on language and literature. His book *Writing at Work*, (Allen and Unwin, 2007) has become a standard reference on workplace rhetoric and plain English, while Modern Manglish (Scribe, 2011) looks at the lighter side of Gobbledygook. He is currently Vice President of PLAIN and chair of the International Plain Language Working Group.

Have you ever been to a school reunion? If you have, there's a chance you experienced that classic icebreaker question: 'So what do you do now?' For many school alumni, this question will elicit an equally simple reply. I am a builder. Or a teacher. Perhaps an accountant or a nurse.

But if you are a communication practitioner, the conversation is a tad more complicated. In my case, it went something like this:

'So what do you do now?'

'I'm a plain language consultant.'

'Oh ...' [obviously not knowing what that is]

'Have you ever read a document from a bank or an insurance company that was hard to follow?'

'Ah ... I guess.' [but not really]

'We're the people trying to fix that.'

'Right… [time to change subject] So how was your trip?'

When I found myself having this conversation a couple of times at my reunion, I decided to vary the job title, but with much the same result. It didn't much matter whether I called myself an editor or a technical writer or an information designer. My old schoolmates found it hard to get their head around what I do.

The experience suggested that a number of communication fields share this particular problem, among them:

- plain language
- editing
- technical writing
- information design
- usability
- corporate communications

People understand that when you have a health problem, you go to a doctor. When it's tax time, you go to an accountant. Leaking pipes? Call a plumber. But unlike these occupations, there isn't a single, well-understood communication profession that people will think of if their problem happens to be a document.

On the long drive home from the reunion, I decided to look into why communication is not well understood and why it seems so fragmented.

1. A fragmented profession

Let's start by reviewing how communication practitioners came to use such different names to describe what they do. After all, even the wide variety of engineers in that profession still see themselves as engineers and use that word in their title. Why can't communication professionals settle on an equivalent?

If you look at our history, there are five trends that seem to have fragmented communication as a profession:

1. Historical contexts
2. Mixed theoretical base
3. Rapidly changing practice
4. Commercial pressures
5. Divided institutional base

The first one is the most obvious. Our fields emerged in specific contexts, often without much overlap:

Field	Most common context
Plain language	• Government and legal documents
Editing	• Books, newspapers, and magazines
Technical writing	• Engineering and technical documents
Information design	• Graphic and product design
Usability	• human factors engineering
Corporate communication	• Public relations and marketing

Given this diversity, it is perhaps no surprise that when J A Anderson surveyed seven major communications texts, he identified no less than 249 distinct 'theories' of communication. Nearly 80 per cent (195) of these appeared in only one book. Amazingly, only seven per cent (18) were found in more than three of the seven titles.[1]

Far from being a coherent profession with a common intellectual base, communication tends to be a series of isolated fields that work in parallel.

Part of the explanation for this is that each field has evolved rapidly in response to its own context. Consider some key developments in just two of these fields:

Period	Key developments in technical writing[2]
Pre - 1900	• Morrill Acts 1862 lifted education of engineers • Colleges faced literacy gaps in engineering students
Early 20th century	• Chandler Earle's 1911 definition of 'writing abilities' • 1920s Sada Harbager English for Engineers
1940s - 1960s	• World War II boosted demand for technological skills, along with post-war economic boom • First technical writing societies and textbooks
1970s - 1980s	• First major technical writing journals
1990s - 2000s	• Growth in academic programs, distant from industry • Impact of personal computer, desktop publishing, word processing, usability and content management

Period	Key developments in plain language
1940s - 1960s	• Ernest Gowers *Plain Words* (UK) and Rudolph Flesch *The Art of Readable Writing* (USA) raise awareness of plain English • Focus largely on expression rather than structure or design • Application initially in government (UK) and media (USA)
1970s - 1980s	• Rise of consumer movement (USA) and launch of Plain English Campaign (UK) • Publication of Martin Cutts *Pocket Guide to Plain English* • Expanded focus on structure and document design • Establishment of Clarity and growing influence in law, finance and insurance sectors
1990s - present	• Growing use of testing and inclusion of document design • Increasing influence in government and corporate contexts • Establishment of PLAIN (Canada), Center for Plain Language (USA) and International Plain Language Working Group • Passing of legislation such as South African consumer credit laws and USA Plain Writing Act

I do not pretend that these tables are anything like a comprehensive account of each field. But they are sufficient to show just how recently communication disciplines have emerged and how quickly they have evolved. With so much changing so rapidly, it is no wonder that practitioners did not prioritise how they fit into a broader communication profession.

What concerns me more is that, to the extent that communication practitioners do notice each other, it is often to criticise each other's work as part of a marketing strategy. Here's a typical example from a Canadian company promoting its work at the expense of 'plain language':

> **Is plain language enough?**
>
> Many organizations are realizing that in fact more is needed. To achieve the goals of plain language – clarity and good comprehension – documents must go beyond the use of simplified vocabulary and sentence structure. ...
>
> Good content design enables readers to quickly and easily find and digest the information they need. This expanded definition is often referred to as clear and effective communications.

The suggestion here is that unlike 'content design', plain language is not concerned with structure, organisation and design. This is a classic straw person fallacy, which sets up a rival communication practice in simplistic terms so you can position your own communication product as the more effective. Whether this is ethical commercial marketing is one thing, but it hardly promotes a unified profession.

We have also institutionalised many of these differences by setting up organisational silos in each field. Just think for a moment about the range and number of communication-related peak bodies:

- Plain Language Association InterNational and Clarity
- Society for Technical Communication, tekom and Professional Communication Society
- International Institute for Information Design and Information Design Association
- Societ(ies) of editors
- International Association of Business Communicators and Public Relations institutes/ societies
- Usability Professionals Association

When we map when these bodies emerged, we can clearly see a parallel evolution concentrated from the late 1940s to the 1990s:

	Early 20th Century	1940s	1950s and 1960s
Editing	• Growth in dedicated in-house editors in publishing	• **1946 Editors Guild in UK**	• Golden age of the literary book editor
Public relations	• Publicity Bureau in Boston • Editorial Services in UK	• First university courses • **1947 Public Relations Society of America** • **1948 (Chartered) Institute of Public Relations (UK)**	• First media tours • Trade magazines like *PR Week* and *PR News* • *Public Relations Review* • **1956 Institute of Public Relations**
Technical writing	• Rise of technically based documentation.	• Wartime expansion of technical documentation.	• 1951 First published job ad for a 'technical writer' • **1953 to 1957 First associations merge as Society for Technical Communication** • **1957 Professional Communication Society of IEEE**
Plain language	• Basic English • Early readability studies	• George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language' • Winston Churchill's memo • Ernest Gowers *Plain Words*	• Flesch, *Art of Readable Writing* • O'Hayre, *Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go*
Information design			
Usability		• Human factors engineering and methods in US military during WWII	

2. Uniting communication

Even this cursory glance at our histories is sufficient to explain the fragmented state we are in. But the more we look at the evolving practice of each field, the more we find similarities rather than differences. Fundamental similarities.

Ginny Redish captured this elegantly in a 2005 interview:

"My definition of usability is identical to my definition of Plain Language, my definition of reader-focused writing, my definition of document design . . . We're here to make the product work for people."[3]

If we are all here to make the product work for people, it is worth asking whether we might do so in a more cooperative way. Four factors suggest we have this potential:

1. A common heritage
2. Overlapping definitions
3. Differences of degree
4. The push to professionalise

We should start by acknowledging the intellectual base of our communication fields. Robert Craig identified what he calls seven major communication 'traditions' and traced the overlaps and tensions between them:

Rhetorical — communication as practical discourse.

Semiotic — communication as intersubjective mediation by signs.

1970s	1980s	1990s and 2000s
• Editors societies in Australia and Canada	• Decline of copy desk with rise of computer typesetting	• Professional certification in Canada and Australia
• **1970 International Association of Business Communicators**	• *Journal of Public Relations Research*	• Influence of technology and social media • The Cluetrain Manifesto • Seth Godin and *Permission Marketing*
• MLA panel on technical writing • **1978 tekom**	• HTML • Desktop publishing	• XML
• Plain English Campaign • USA consumer laws	• **1983 Clarity** • Martin Cutts *Oxford Guide*	• **1993 PLAIN** • Kimble's 'Elements' • President Clinton's memo • PLAIN.gov and SEC Handbook • Plain language laws • **2009 International Plain Language Working Group**
• Graphic design movement • 1979 - Information Design Journal	• Information design conferences • Edward Tufte	• **1986 International Institute for Information Design** • **1991 Information Design Association** • STC SIG
	• Conference on Human Factors in Computer Systems • First books on HCI	• Usability engineering • 1991 Usability Professionals Association • STC SIG • Texts by Dumas and Redish, Nielson, and Rubin

Phenomenological — communication as the experience of otherness.

Cybernetic — communication as information processing.

Sociopsychological — communication as expression, interaction and influence.

Sociocultural — communication as the (re)production of social order.

Critical — communication as discursive reflection.[4]

This framework helps to identify the connections between plain language, technical communication, information design, corporate communication and usability in particular. We all share common ground as part of the rhetorical tradition.

The rhetorical tradition is a practical one. It has always offered audience-focused methods for delivering public discourse to achieve practical outcomes. Rhetoric emerged prominently in the early days of democracy in Greece, when the first teachers of oratory became quite the fashion in the 5th century BC. Then Aristotle developed the 'techne' or craft of rhetoric as a systematic method of communication (from which, by the way, the word 'technical' is derived).

By the time of the Roman Republic, the rhetorician and lawyer Cicero had divided the discipline into five 'canons': invention, arrangement, style, delivery and memory. Although these have developed over time, we can still see the five canons operating in our communication practice today.

Traditional canon	Traditional application	Contemporary equivalent
Inventio	'Discovery' of arguments	Content: accuracy, completeness and logic.
Dispositio	Arrangement of a speech	Structure: effective sequencing of a document for its purpose
Elocutio	Setting the style to a level appropriate to audience	Expression: elements such as word choice, syntax, sentence length, efficiency and tone.
Pronuntiatio	Delivery of a speech	Document design: typography, layout and other visual elements.
Memoria	Memorising techniques for long spoken text	Databases, manuals, help files and content management systems.

Invention relates to our work with content, arrangement to structure, and style to expression. While delivery in classical times meant vocal delivery of a speech, for the modern document it now involves the design. Similarly, while rhetoric originally offered techniques for memorising a long speech, today we are more likely to use databases and content management systems to achieve the same ends for information retrieval.

The focus has evolved, but the underlying elements remain the same. Taking these together, there is a clear intellectual tradition that has the potential to unite us.

Just how much we share these common roots becomes particularly clear when you look at the official definitions of each field.

Let's start with the current draft definition of plain language developed by the International Plain Language Working Group:

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.[5]

How very different is this from the following definitions of information design and usability published by their respective organisations:

Information design is the defining, planning, and shaping of the contents of a message and the environments in which it is presented, with the intention to satisfy the information needs of the intended recipients.[6]

[Usability refers to] the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use.[7]

"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."[5]

Equivalent definitions of technical writing and editing tend to be more detailed but have the same base.[8] By contrast, definitions for public relations and corporate communication tend to be pitched at a more general level, but have a similar ring:

Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.[9]

Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent.[10]

So what exactly are the differences in our work? Is it in the subject matter? The writing process? The use of technology? The people we date?

Of course, there are some genuine differences, but I would argue that they are differences of degree relating to the:

1. contexts we operate in
2. texts we work with
3. extent of our intervention
4. focus of our work
5. methods we apply.

The first difference remains from our historical contexts. Editors still work on books for the public while plain language practitioners tend to focus more on workplace communication. Some editors work substantively and some specialise in copy editing or proofreading. Technical writers still wrestle with making technical content clear. Information designers may focus more on visual elements but they also improve expression. Usability professionals may use testing as a fundamental part of their work, but they do not do so exclusively.

The more we examine what communication practitioners actually do, the more it looks like we fall on a spectrum, much in the way that we have different types of engineers, or the way that doctors have different specialisations. Despite the different emphases in tools or contexts or genres, we are all wrestling with content, structure, design and words to help an intended audience achieve specific things in a particular context. We make a communication product work for people.

The final element that might help unite us is a problem we all share: the push to professionalise.

The plain language world has been wrestling with how it might increasingly professionalise through an International Plain Language Working Group that is assessing developments such as:

1. A common definition
2. International standards
3. Training
4. Research
5. Advocacy
6. Certification
7. A governing body [11]

Other organisations have already come to grips with these elements. After decades of debate, the Society for Technical Communication introduced certification but more recently suspended it.[12] Editors' societies in Canada and Australia have accreditation systems in place.[13] The Usability Professionals Association doesn't have certification but does have a Code of Conduct.[14] Some fields work with formal standards and some do not. [15]

Are any of these fields on their own sufficiently developed to be considered a profession? There's a lot of contention about the requirements that an occupation must meet to become a profession. The entire concept is still a relatively new one, but it has a status that naturally makes any new occupation aspire to.

So since I'm arguing in favour of a unified communication profession, let me sketch out what I mean by that term. There seem to be around a dozen major factors:[16]

1. Full time occupation
2. Work based on extensive theoretical framework
3. Presence in universities
4. Extensive specific education
5. Professional association or institute
6. Testing and certification of competence
7. Code of ethics or conduct
8. Fee paid work for individual clients
9. Mobility and autonomy of practitioner
10. Institutional experience and ongoing learning and recognition
11. Recognition of social benefit of occupation
12. Regulation and authorisation through statute

While our fields each have some degree of professionalism, I don't think any of us can yet claim full professional status, as the following table suggests:

Criteria	Editing	Tech. comms	Plain lang.	Info. design	Usability
Full time occupation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Theoretical framework	Part	Part	Part	Part	Part
University presence	Yes	Yes	Part	Part	Part
Extensive specific education	Part	Part	Part	Part	Part
Fee-paid work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobility and autonomy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exp. and ongoing learning	Part	Part	Part	Part	Part
Professional association	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Testing and certification	Yes	Part	No	No	No
Code of ethics	Part	Part	No	No	Part
Regulation through statute	No	No	Yes	Part	No
State recognition of benefit	No	No	Yes	Part	No

Yes **Part** **No**

You may disagree with some of these classifications and I am the first to admit that this a work in progress. What is clear is that we are all still becoming a profession and none of us yet meet all of these criteria.

3. The pressure to converge

While it is one thing to accept the potential to unify these fragmented fields, it is another to assert that they will actually do so. Certainly, there is plenty in our histories that might keep each field operating within its own sphere.

But I would argue there are emerging pressures that will steer us in a more cooperative direction, toward what I call communication convergence.

‘Convergence’ is a concept with complementary meanings in a range of contexts:

Area	Example
Technological convergence	The tendency for different technologies to evolve toward performing similar tasks.
Digital convergence	The merging of IT, telecommunications, electronics and entertainment industries.
Accounting convergence	The development of single accounting standards internationally
Logic	The tendency for different transformations of the same state to end up at the same end state.

This is a useful concept to consider when looking at the various fields of communication. To me, ‘communication convergence’ refers to a tendency for different communication fields over time to apply a common range of methods.

Even in the last decade, the work that technical writers, information designers, editors and plain language practitioners do is becoming increasingly similar in context, scope and method. There will come a point where the similarities will outweigh the differences and make it harder to sustain our fragmented fields.

There are four pressures that I believe will drive convergence:

1. Technology
2. Information age
3. State sanction
4. Self-interest

The main driver is technology. Initially, our fields were kept apart by inherent specialisation in the tools we used.

Few plain language practitioners had the technical competence to write in HTML, for example, or the desktop publishing expertise to achieve great document design.[17] And their early work certainly did focus on elements of expression such as word and sentence length or the passive voice.

In contrast, many technical communicators or information designers were not always the strongest writers. The International Institute for Information Design still acknowledges that it pays ‘special attention to the potential of graphic information design’. Technical writers were at times engineers or computer technicians who had more aptitude for writing than their peers. And some usability professionals are not writers at all, but come to that field from disciplines such as human factors engineering.

Increasingly, however, many of these barriers are dissolving. Developments in computer software and hardware mean it is possible for a single practitioner to write or edit a text, develop its document design, prepare it for delivery on multiple platforms and test it with its intended audience.

The technological barriers are simply no longer as high as they were even 10 years ago. I no longer need to become proficient with complex desktop publishing software to design documents. Nor do I need to master programming language to publish and edit my website. I can readily master a wider range of communications tasks that were once the province of separate fields.

If this seems unlikely to you, think back over the impact that technology has had over the last 50 years and consider what a similar rate of change would mean in 50 years time. Technical writing and plain language barely existed 50 years ago, and information design and usability did not really exist at all. Technology brought us into being and technology is already driving us together.

Notes

1 J A Anderson, Communication Theory: Epistemological Foundations, Guilford Press, New York, 1996.

2 Information drawn in part from Earl E McDowell ‘Tracing the History of Technical Communication from 1850-2000: Plus a series of Survey Studies’, 2003. Educational Resources Information Centre.

3 Clifford Anderson, ‘Thumbnail: Ginny Redish’, UPA Voice, June 2005.

4 Robert Craig, ‘Communication Theory as a Field’ in Communication Theory, Nine: Two, May 1999, pp 119-161. See also Neil James, ‘Defining the profession: placing plain language in the field of communication’, Clarity, Number 61, May 2009, pp 33-37.

5 Aristotle, The Art of Rhetoric, trans. H C Lawson Tancred, Penguin Books, London, 1991. See also James A Herrick, The History and Theory of Rhetoric, 3rd edition, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 2005.

6 www.iiid.net/Information.aspx

7 www.usabilityprofessionals.org/usability_resources/about_usability/definitions_of_usability.html.

8 See for example www.stc.org/about-stc/the-profession-all-about-technical-communication; http://www.editors.ca/hire/definitions.html; and http://www.sfep.org.uk/pub/faqs/fedit.asp.

Notes continued

9 http://www.prsa.org/aboutprsa/publicrelationsdefined/#.VClX0MYwLfM.

10 http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/39352_978_0_85702_243_1.pdf.ta/39352_978_0_85702_243_1.pdf.

11 Neil James (ed) 'Strengthening plain language: public benefit and professional practice. Options paper published by the International Plain Language Working group. Clarity, Number 64, November 2010.

12 http://www.stc.org/education/certification/certification-main.

13 http://iped-editors.org/Accreditation.aspx; http://www.editors.ca/certification/index.html.

14 https://uxpa.org/resources/about-ux.

15 http://www.usabilitynet.org/tools/r_international.htm; http://iped-editors.org/About_editing/Editing_standards.aspx.

Then there is the rapid expansion of the information age. Technology has brought with it greater transmission of information than ever before. Here are some sobering numbers on the recent growth of the world's information transmission capacity, measured in optimally compressed bytes:[18]

Year	1-way broadcast capacity	2-way broadcast capacity
1986	432 exabytes	281 petabytes
1993	715 exabytes	471 petabytes
2000	1.2 zettabytes	2.2 exabytes
2007	1.9 zettabytes	65 exabytes

For those who can't readily distinguish their exabytes from their zettabytes, here is a more concrete translation. By 2007, the world was transmitting the equivalent of 174 newspapers per person per day, and 2-way transmissions the equivalent of 6 newspapers per person per day. It's little wonder that Michael Kapor quipped 'Getting information off the Internet is like taking a drink from a fire hydrant'.

In this explosion of information, the world will increasingly see value in a comprehensive communication profession that can help us shape that information so we can find what we need and understand what we find to achieve our goals. A communication profession that combines the strengths of plain language, information design, technical writing and usability into one.

Already, governments are starting to recognise the social value of communication. The International Institute for Information Design was recognised by UNESCO in 1995 as a partner organisation. Plain language has been enshrined in laws in countries as diverse as Sweden, South Africa and the United States. In the United States, the Plain Writing Act provides a clear endorsement in stating its purpose to:

improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.[19]

Plain language practitioners might see this as the opportunity to move ahead of other fields and become the endorsed profession. The reality is that we are the least developed at an institutional level. If anything, state recognition gives us a seat at the table as several communication fields converge. And if communication fields do not start those discussions, there may come a point when governments may start them for us.

Far better that we drive the process ourselves and recognise the convergence that is already underway. This will bring us greater resources and recognition. If you want to consider pure self-interest, it will likely also improve our incomes and our professional standing. More importantly, it will strengthen our methods and the impact we will have in the real world.

4. Implications and next steps

Of course, most of us will continue in our day-to-day work completing the next text and meeting the next deadline. But each year has and will bring changes in the way that we work, so it is worth thinking about the implications of our future occupation.

My conclusions are that communication fields and practices will be highly fluid, and practitioners will need to adapt to changing technologies and markets. The good news is that there will continue to be a demand for communication practitioners. To take advantage of that demand, we will need to adapt to new skills and a wider range of methods and embrace opportunities that emerge across previously separate fields. As we do so, we will find more and more reasons to embrace convergence.

How can we make this happen in the most constructive way? I suggest a five-step process:

Step 1: Start some dialogue
Step 2: Do some research
Step 3: Put the pieces together
Step 4: Engage with stakeholders
Step 5: Pick a name

Let's start by having some conversations between and within each field, perhaps with an informal cross-field working group. Some informal conversations have begun, and in Vancouver in 2014 a conference explored communication convergence as part of Plain Language Day involving the Society for Technical Communication, the Editors' Association and others.[20]

Initial discussions should quickly settle on a practical focus. I suggest that should be research. Let's get some hard facts together about what each field does, where we work, the texts we work with, the skills we have, what we earn and how we describe ourselves.

Then we can start to put the pieces together with a stronger information base. Dialogue might become more formal between our organisations, including discussions of federations or mergers. Cautious and careful discussions.

While that is happening, we also need to engage with outside institutions. If we are to unify, we need a home within the academy to promote research and to refine our theoretical framework. We need to work with industry in researching job requirements and promoting the relevance of our evolving roles. And we need to inform and seek the support of governments.

Finally, we need to pick a name. Instead of plain language or technical writing or information design or usability, my crystal ball suggests that something like 'clear communication' could cover the spectrum of what we do. Our specialisations (and our names for them) won't disappear, just as they don't in accounting or law or engineering or medicine. But a single name we can all identify with is essential.

How exactly we might organise ourselves under that name could evolve in any number of ways. But only together can we develop the strongest and most effective communication profession. And perhaps, when we attend future school reunions, we may not have to explain what we do in quite as much detail.

Notes continued

16 The origins of classifying the requirements for a profession are Abraham Flexner. 'Is Social Work a Profession?' presentation at 42nd National Conference of Charities and Correction, Baltimore, May 1915, published at http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/programs/is-social-work-a-profession-1915/. I also drew from a more recent summary by Alex S Brown, 'Nine elements of a Profession' http://www.alexsbrown.com, viewed in October 2010.

17 http://www.iiid.net/About.aspx.

18 Martin Hilbert and Priscila Lopez, The World's Technological Capacity to Store, Communicate and Compute Information', Science, April 2011, Vol 332, No 6025, pp. 60-65, available at http://www.sciencemag.org/content/332/6025/60.

19 http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr946enr/pdf/BILLS-111hr946enr.pdf.

20 https://www.facebook.com/events/664997733614419/; http://plainlanguagewizardry.blogspot.ca/2014/09/communication-convergence-vancouver.html; http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Why-converge-other-communicators-158634%2ES%2E5913745634321510402?trk=groups_items_see_more-0-b-ttl.

Acceptance Speech for the Christine Mowat Award

Martin Cutts, Plain Language Commission, www.clearest.co.uk

By Martin Cutts

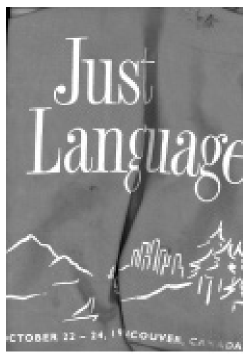
If ever I had any doubts about the wisdom, intelligence, and judgment of the PLAIN Board, this award has utterly dispelled them. But seriously, thank you for this special prize. It is indeed an honour, especially as it comes from people I respect and esteem.

I see that this response of mine is to be the warm-up act for Katherine Barber, Canada's Word Lady. Already my mind is racing forwards to a new career in which she and I join forces as Barber & Kutz. We will hack, scissor and shear our way through the jungle of overgrown and overblown language that strangles so many government and commercial documents.

Now I'll try not to go on for too long. As I was leaving home for the conference, my wife said, 'Martin—don't expatiate; don't expatiate; you know those PLAIN folks don't like expatiation.' I think she put those semicolons in, too. So I'll be brief.

Working in this field has enabled me to meet and form friendships with many remarkable people, and I want to mention a few of those who, for whatever reason, aren't here tonight. They've all made big contributions to what we do.

They include John Walton, the founder of Clarity; Mark Adler, who edited the Clarity journal for so many years; Chris Balmforth, Judith Bennett and Robert Eagleson, giants on the Australian scene; Phil Knight, who did such remarkable work on the South Africa constitution; David Elliott, a wise legal counsel in Canada; Bryan Garner, whose legal dictionaries are pre-eminent; Sandra Fisher-Martins, who has lit the fire in Portugal; David Mellinkoff, whose 1963 book 'The Language of the Law' was way ahead of its time; Mr Desikan from the Federation of Consumer Organizations of Tamilnadu, whose campaign for clarity in India has been part of his lifelong work for consumer rights; Janet Pringle, who's done great work on Easy Read in Canada; and Jyoti Sanyal, the formidable Indian journalist whom we lost soon after the Amsterdam conference where he spoke so eloquently.



All people from whom I've learnt a lot and to whom I'm in considerable debt. I mean, I don't owe them loads of money—it's not as if I've left a trail of unpaid bar bills behind me at every conference—but the metaphorical debt one can never repay.

I'm a veteran of the 1992 Vancouver conference, and I can prove I was there because this is the conference bag. Perhaps it's the only one left in existence. No? Christine says she has one too. Well, the words on the bag summarize the theme of that pre-PLAIN event, and it's still the theme of so much of what we do today: Just Language.

Our desire for clear language is part of our desire for just language. I think it's unjust, not to say duplicitous, that these little cans of drink, which boast 16% lemon or orange juice on the front in large letters, contain about 33 grams of sugar, that's 1.3 ounces, which you find out if you read the blurred small print on the back.

We have in the UK a national obesity epidemic and most physicians agree excessive sugar consumption is a major cause. So there's a battle to fight for clear and honest labelling. Just as the rate of interest on a credit agreement must be shown in large lettering, I'd like to see the sugar content shown big and prominent on Coke and all the other drinks, then people can choose, whether with their heart or their head.

As with my campaign against unclear parking signs, which you may have read about in Plain Language Commission's Pikestaff newsletter, we need to look at the malevolent purpose that often lies—in both senses of that word—behind bad communications. And the Watergate mantra 'follow the money' is often the clue to what's going on.

I've learned so much at PLAIN conferences over the years. In Toronto I visited a local hat shop. A female was trying on two hats. One was of plain and simple style and cost 250 dollars. The other was made to the same pattern but with the addition of bows and flowers. This cost only 200 dollars. The customer asked why she should pay so much more for the unadorned hat. To which the rather grand shop assistant replied, 'Madam is paying for the restraint.' In our field, we often have to persuade our customers to pay for the restraint of short sentences and easy words.

I also found an excellent parallel with what we do when visiting the Blue Mountains after the Sydney conference. There I learned that, in her pouch, the female wallaby has not, as you might expect, two nipples, but four. This is not an evolutionary tactic to catch the attention of a passing Hugh Hefner. No, it's a classic example of a doctrine we know well, namely different strokes for different folks, because the female wallaby often has more than two infants on the go at any one time, and at very different stage of development. The newest baby joey needs to suck on what we might call Nipple Starbucks, which produces the richest stream of nutrients, whereas the oldest joey attaches itself to the teat that delivers milk for a more sophisticated palate, say Nipple McDonalds. Just as there isn't only one sort of wallaby milk, there isn't only one kind of plain language that suits all situations and readerships.

Thanks again, Christine, for creating this award and thanks to the conference organizers Cheryl Stephens and Kate Harrison Whiteside and their team, for their superhuman efforts on our behalf this week.

Plain Language for Accessibility, Democracy, and Citizenship

Cathy Basterfield, a Speech Pathologist with 26 years experience working with people with Complex Communication Needs. Cathy runs Access Easy English, a specialist business writing documents for people with non-functional literacy. In 2011 Cathy was awarded a Victorian government study scholarship to investigate accreditation and universal standards internationally, for people with limited literacy. Cathy is an acknowledged expert in the area of developing documents for people with limited literacy, the language, the techniques, the images and format to use. Her business provides training, consultancy and translation services to Easy English. Cathy has previously been involved in establishing Australian quality benchmarks, resource development and the development and adherence to in-house standards for Easy English.

By Cathy Basterfield and Mark Starford

Summary

There is a growing international commitment to deliver information in more accessible ways for individuals with low literacy and comprehension. This article highlights the rights and challenges and features two case stories of how having access to Easy English (Read) increases community inclusion and self-determination.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) sets forth the economic, social and cultural rights to which all human beings are entitled. These fundamental rights of self-determination are essential to eliminating social and political exclusion. Particularly, groups are disadvantaged and marginalized due to ethnicity, caste, economic circumstance, sex, disability, or limited literacy. Human rights principles have been reaffirmed and refined in other international legislation over time. They all reiterate that the ideal of men and women enjoying freedom from fear and what can be achieved if conditions are created when everyone enjoys economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights.

The United Nations enacted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) with specific Articles that identify access to understandable information as paramount to freedom, opportunity and full participation. However, in practical terms, what does this mean?

For many communities there have been few changes in how they access and use information that is essential to decision making, health and wellbeing. Governments, human services and social practices can and do marginalise. This happens when governments, human services and social practices continue to neglect the needs of a large but voiceless group that cannot access traditional communication and information systems. Research shows there is a high correlation between lower literacy skills, inferior health outcomes, and reduced functional knowledge of financial obligations. In addition, lower income levels, underemployment, involvement with the justice system and social isolation are also highly correlated. For many, even in developed countries, fluency with and access to communication technology is limited. The reasons are twofold: both literacy and financial means are required to access the technology.

Who is marginalised?

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), 2013 was completed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The research identified significant percentages of all populations have non-functional literacy. Across the world, 49% of adults have non-functional literacy. In Australia 44% in the adult population; in the U.S.A. 53%. See Figure 1. These numbers do not include people who are incarcerated, are remote populations, or are people living in group or institutional settings. Nor does it include Aboriginal populations. Often these populations are some of the most marginalised in our society. Because the OECD released its most recent data during the week of the 2013 PLAIN conference, only 2006 data for other countries to US and Australia were discussed, at that time. Included here is the 2013 updated data for other countries. See Figure 2.

According to the PIAAC, 2013 research, the following defines someone with non-functional literacy:

- Requires a person to make matches between the text, either digital or printed, and information, and may require paraphrasing or low-level inferences.

  OR at a lesser skill level

- Requires a person to read brief texts on familiar topics and locate a single piece of specific information. There is seldom any competing information in the text. Only basic vocabulary knowledge is required, and the reader is not required to understand the structure of sentences or paragraphs or make use of other text features.

  OR at a lesser skill level

- Requires a person to read relatively short digital or print texts to locate a single piece of information that is identical to or synonymous with the information provided in the question or directive. Knowledge and skill in recognizing basic vocabulary, determining the meaning of sentences, and reading paragraphs of text is expected.

It is obvious that each level requires significant skill achievement. What does this mean for the members of our communities who do not reach any of these levels of achievement? How do these people find, access and use information important to their lives? Even information written in what many label as "Plain or Clear Language" can be too complex. Increased research and development of written and communication design formats must be undertaken. In Australia, one effort is called "Easy English." In the U. S., it is called "Easy Read."

Who has non-functional literacy?

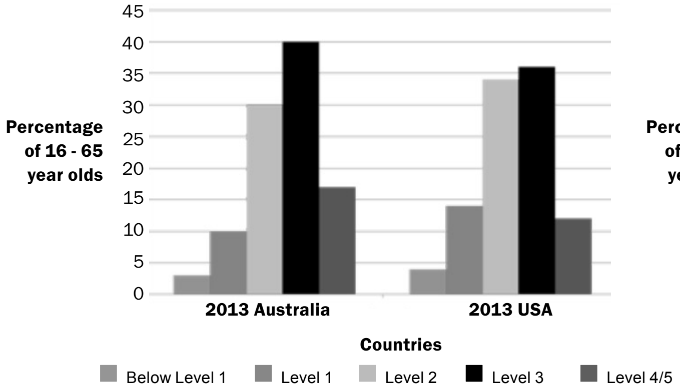
There are useful video clips from both Australia and the U.S. that begin to identify those who have non-functional literacy.

- Australia, Channel 7, Melbourne.
  http://au.news.yahoo.com/today-tonight/latest/article/-/17489370/adult-illiteracy/
- USA. American Illiteracy
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdQzCyp4i60

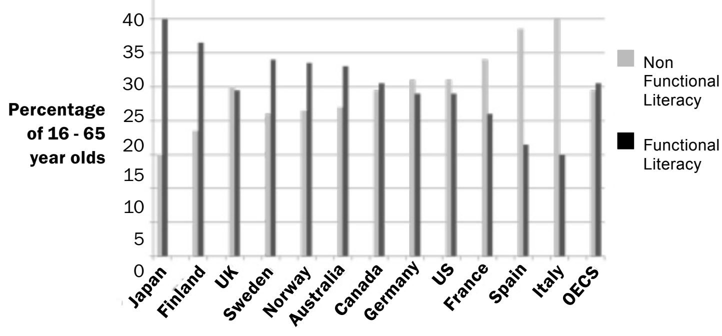
Mark Starford, is founder and executive director of the Board Resource Center (BRC), established in 1994. BRC provides leadership development and management facilitation for government agencies, non-profit organizations and community groups. BRC advocates for people from underserved communities for greater civic engagement and access to public policy making. With engagement from end-users and partners, BRC develops easy access training and tools that support people with limited literacy to increase self-determination and social inclusion. Active in training and advocacy for 30 years, Starford has designed community specific training curricula with supporting materials in a range of accessible formats used across the U.S. Mark holds a teaching credential and M.Ed. BRC offers a library of accessible training tools and media that make complex ideas easier to understand and apply.

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), OECD, 2013

2013 Literacy data for Australia and USA
Figure 1



2013 Literacy data from many countries in the PIAAC research
Figure 2



Who are the people that need Easy English or Easy Read?

Typically, we think of people with a developmental or acquired disability. However, it does also include “the man in the street.” That is, the person who has had poor educational outcomes, or the elderly person with age related cognitive limitations, or diagnosed limitations such as dementia and Alzheimer’s. Consider also the person with recurring illnesses, or the person with mental health disorders. Additionally, there are other times when functional literacy is reduced; during a serious illness or times of great stress or when confronted with new and unfamiliar information. Additional populations may be impacted as well, including those from diverse cultural and language backgrounds including the Deaf community, first, second and even third generation immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Below are just 2 examples of the positive impact for individuals when information is written in a way in which they can read and understand. It also highlights their needs with regard to future development of Easy English (Australia) and Easy Read (US).

Scenario 1

David’s story (US):

Background: David is a 32-year-old man with mild developmental disability. He lives in a large urban city with his family and is not employed. David is bilingual (English and Spanish) with very low literacy skills in both languages. He completed high school with a certificate of completion instead of a diploma.

Situation: David is an activist advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. David receives in-home support services from a large case management agency contracted with the state. The agency’s annual budget is more than $150 million (US). David was nominated to be a member of their Board of Directors with a three—year term. He was approved. He is a peer representative for over ten thousand fellow self-advocates who receive services from the agency. David never received governance or leadership training but instead was provided with a two hundred page board member manual. He must come to each monthly meeting having reviewed a packet of information and prepared with questions and ready to vote on action items. David is lost and does not know what to do. He is unable to read the information and also does not understand the meeting protocol. He is ready to resign after the first meeting.

Response: David realized he had to advocate for himself and not quit. He called the Board Chair and explained the problem. The Chair was unaware and realized the agency needed to provide supports and board training if they want to maintain a diverse membership.

The Board’s actions included:

1. Reorganize the Board meeting structure to ensure David and other community members are comfortable and can participate. Provide facilitation support for David. Support included one-to-one coaching (before, during, after the meeting) to review the packet, organize questions, and adapt hard to understand language into Easy Read.
2. Create a summary board member manual, insert information graphics and only emphasize the key points.
3. Members receive training on the value of plain language and begin using post meeting evaluations.
4. The Board Development Committee conducts ongoing orientation and governance training for current and potential members.

References

Boards for All: Plain Language Boardsmanship Training (ClearMark Award of Distinction 2012)
Published by: BRC, State Council of California, East Los Angeles Regional Center.
http://www.brcenter.org/BRC_Board_Training/index.shtml

Facilitation Manual and Worksheet
Published by: BRC and State Council of California
http://www.brcenter.org/BRC_Board_Training/PDF/Facilitation.pdf

Outcome: David is now in his third year as a full board member. With the adaptations and facilitation support he is now an active participant during meetings and comes to each meeting prepared to contribute to agenda items. Most important to David is that he went from feeling inferior and ready to quit to now not just being a contributing board member but encouraging other people with a disability that they have the right and responsibility to speak up when they need information in Easy English or graphics. Note: The agency has now added another person with a disability and provides support, and David is a peer mentor as well.

Scenario 2

Background: Jenny is a 45-year-old woman, married with no children. Jenny works 5 days a week, traveling there and back by train. Jenny does not drive nor use the computers or emails at work. Jenny is expected to participate in all meetings, planning, goal setting and staff training at work. Jenny uses a passbook at the bank, rather than a debit or credit card. She understands how to use her cash for basic purchases. Jenny has a mild intellectual disability. Jenny describes herself as a non-reader.

Situation: As a self described non-reader, Jenny does not engage in reading or incidental reading (signage, wall notices) throughout her day. However, Jenny can read many everyday words, when they are written in short sentences and with a clear context. She will use images to aid her understanding of the written word. It takes her some time to read anything, and it is a tiring task for her. Jenny is highly motivated to read more things about her world and the options she has.

Response: Jenny has begun to support the development of a variety of Easy English documents. In 1:1 supported reading of Easy English documents, Jenny can read, understand and interpret meaning for herself and her family. As a consequence of this, she has developed improved confidence in her reading and understanding of the written language, and her self-esteem and confidence has expanded.

Outcome: Jenny has said she would prefer to see more information developed into Easy English about things of importance to her. This includes letters and forms from government departments; information on health issues that relate to herself and her husband; choices for weekly activities and holidays; information about her banking, bills and money; and also better information on bus and train timetables. Jenny wants to be able to use the email at work, rather than relying on her manager to get information all the time. Jenny needs to be able to access the information in staff training days, meetings and meeting agendas. Jenny says not having access to these things is frustrating.

Summary

Providing information in a way the person understands best, that is, Easy Read (US) and Easy English (Australia) is a basic human right. Doing so increases participation in civic affairs and provides greater social inclusion. Large percentages of the population are all significantly marginalised. This population of readers demands our attention to ensure dignity, a higher quality of life with greater self-esteem increased independence, and the ability to contribute more meaningfully in health services, financial management, legal issues, employment and other community activities.

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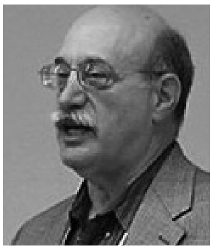
Developed by Access Easy English and Women with Disabilities Victoria

Country Fire Authority, Victoria. How to be safe from bushfire in Victoria
Due for release August 2014
Developed by Access Easy English and Country Fire Authority, Victoria

A Methodology for Clear Communication



Robert Linsky Information Design Doc, is the Director of Information Design at NEPS, LLC, a leading customer communications management consulting firm. Robert Linsky has been practicing information design for almost 25 years. Robert developed LUNA™ (Locate/UNderstand/Act), a methodology for designing information to ensure clear communications.

Robert is a board member of PLAIN and a member of the International Institute for Information Design (IIID), a board member of the Information Design Association (IDA), a Life Fellow of the Communications Research Institute and a member of the editorial board of the Information Design Journal (IDJ). He has spoken at many venues, most recently at PLAIN 2013 in Vancouver.

By Robert Linsky

What is Clear Communications?

No matter the delivery channel—print, email, web, smart phone, tablet, etc.—clear communications that connects the user with the thought is the ultimate goal. All communications, whether written, oral or electronic must consider some or all of the following disciplines: plain language, graphic design, psychology, usability and, definitely, understanding of all stakeholders. The purpose of information design is to make that communication clear.

Companies often overlook how information is presented, and this can lead to higher costs, additional customer service calls and, yes, lost customers too. Today, there is a lot of talk about customer experience.

A survey done by a Washington, DC research group found that when people stopped filling out a form because they had trouble with the form, 58% stopped using the products and services of the company that generated the form. Companies do not realize that they are creating a poor customer experience and losing business due to poor customer communications!

LUNA, Locate/UNderstand/Act™ is the design of information for clear communications.

Using the LUNA process, clear communications will be achieved and many mistakes including industry jargon, organization and the Patchwork Approach™ will be avoided. Utilizing best practices in clear communications avoids visual confusion and redundancy, and makes content easy to understand. When this happens, effective communications are created.

For any communications to be successful, all of these three things must fall into place. No matter what the communications, no matter who the users are, the success of the communication is because anyone looking for any information can find the correct information easily and quickly. Secondly, that the recipients of the communication can easily comprehend what they have found, and lastly, they are able to do something with the information they have found and comprehended – LUNA.

LOCATE

Purpose

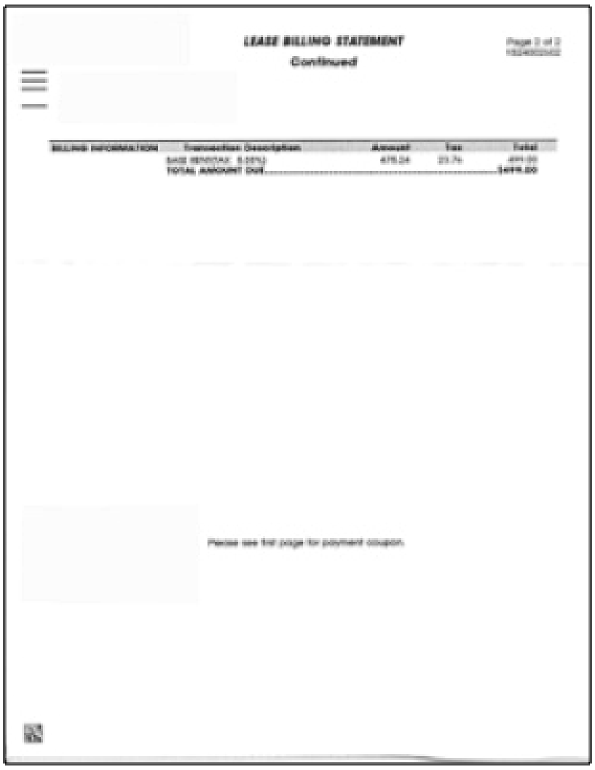
There are many different types of communications and each has a purpose. All types, whether they are letters, statements, bills, regulatory, forms, websites, smart phones, etc., fit into the broad category of communications. The difference is the purpose, whether it is imparting information (a letter or website), requesting information (a form) or personal, variable data information (a statement or bill).

To be effective a document must have only one main purpose. Too often organizations try to “stuff” too much into a document, and then the document’s purpose becomes unclear. Is it a bill? Is it a marketing piece? What do they want me to do? A lot of bills look like marketing brochures and some get thrown away inadvertently!

Take, for instance, a hypothetical auto lease bill (based upon real examples, of course, see below). It has two sheets of paper, printed just on one side. 90% of page two is blank. The only data on page two is the detail of the payment which consists of principle + interest = monthly loan amount. The reason this is on page two is because there is seven (7) messages on page one that takes up about 2/3 of the page. All are under the heading of “Important Messages.” (More about messages later.) Generally speaking, only one message (sometimes two) is truly “important,” and more than that will dilute the value of ALL of the messages. In this case the messages are all valuable, but none are critical or fall under the heading of “important.” They are: view statements online, how to make automatic payments, pay by phone, accident information, mailing payment information and contacting the company. All valuable, but not worth the extra costs involved: paper, printing, and postage. In addition, studies have shown that most people do not go beyond page one in a statement.


LEASE BILLING STATEMENT

Billing Summary


LEASE BILLING STATEMENT

Continued

Messages

Messaging is very important and can be a useful tool in marketing and maintaining customer loyalty, but it must be done appropriately. There is a fine line between success and failure in messaging. If customers receive monthly statements and the same message is repeated two or three times in a row, not only will the message stop being read, but future messages will be passed over too. In the example above, the appropriate decision would have been to spread all of these messages over multiple months. This would achieve four things—one, there would be a fresh message every time. Two—each would stand out by itself, and thus become more important. The third thing that would have happened—cost savings—fewer sheets of paper, and let us not forget perhaps the most important, a better customer experience.

Best practices in Information Design

A large body of theory and research informs good information design. Information design focuses on many things including clear, easy-to-understand language, well-organized content, grouping of like information, use of font weights and sizes to create a hierarchy of information, graphically pleasing layout, psychology and usability. Best practices in Information Design ensure that the result is clear communications, which allows all stakeholders touching a communication to easily find information, understand what they have found and be able to act on it.

Stakeholders - Psychology

In order for any communications to be successful, understanding all users is critical so that the best practices in information design can be applied appropriately and be directed to those stakeholders involved. Most people view the stakeholder as “the customer” or “end user” but in reality, most communications affect more than one stakeholder. There are internal as well as external users and all of their needs must be considered to create communications that work effectively.

Consider, for example, a bill (utility, telecom, etc.). Before the bill is sent out, it must be inspected to make sure the “system” is working properly. For data—intensive transactional documents, testing the system means ensuring that the data and the calculations are correct.

Then, of course, there is the recipient of the bill, who needs to know the amount due, the transactions or reasons for the amount due, when payment is due, about late payment penalties, etc. Customer service representatives may need to answer questions from the customer concerning information on the bill, and lastly, the accounts receivable staff that receives and processes the payment and payment coupon relies on information in the bill to apply payment. Each stakeholder is looking for different information in order to act in an appropriate manner.

On the other hand, consider a hospital pharmacy medication label whose small size creates a challenge to the information designer. Here we have many people all looking for different information: the lab technician—making sure the information he inputted is correct; the pharmacist compounding the medication; the assistant adhering the labels to the medication; the person delivering the medication to the floor and, don’t forget, the nurse administering the medication.

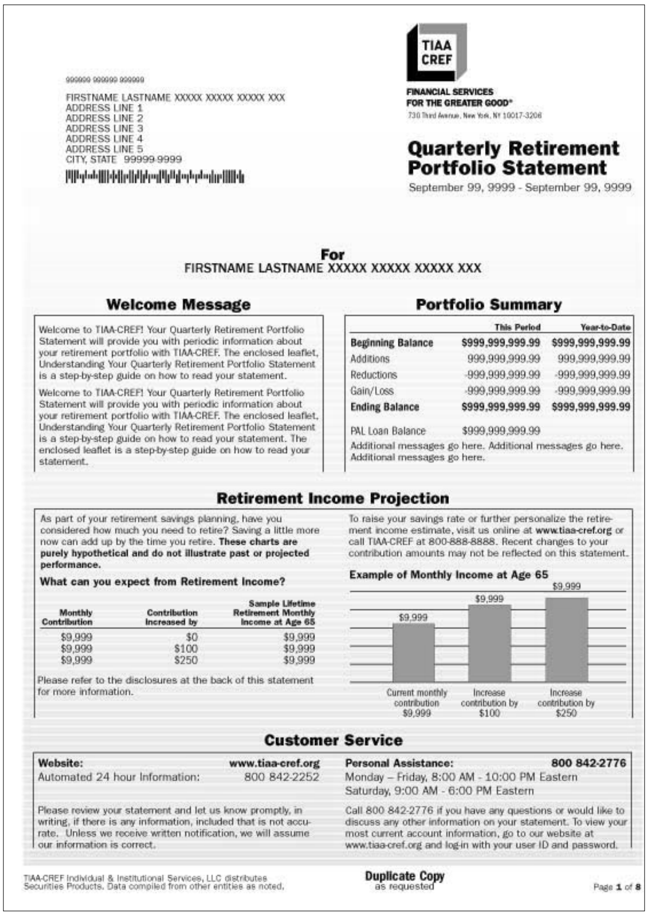
The organization of content, putting like information together, as well as clearly defining sections saves time and increases the customer experience. Each communication needs to help many people find different information easily and quickly, therefore, all stakeholders must be considered.

UNDERSTAND

Plain Language

We can all agree that plain language is not dumbing down, but is proving clear, easy to understand terminology by and for all stakeholders.

For example, the retirement statement below uses terms like "additions" reductions" and section headers like "customer service" "portfolio summary" "retirement income projection" and "message board" rather than industry terminology, allowing all users to easily understand and find information. Clear definitions were created to explain industry terminology that was regulated to appear on the statement.



999999 999999 999999

FIRSTNAME LASTNAME XXXXX XXXXX XXXXX XXX
ADDRESS LINE 1
ADDRESS LINE 2
ADDRESS LINE 3
ADDRESS LINE 4
ADDRESS LINE 5
CITY, STATE 99999-9999

TIAA CREF

FINANCIAL SERVICES
FOR THE GREATER GOOD®
730 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017-3206

Quarterly Retirement Portfolio Statement

September 99, 9999 - September 99, 9999

For
FIRSTNAME LASTNAME XXXXX XXXXX XXXXX XXX

Welcome Message

Welcome to TIAA-CREF! Your Quarterly Retirement Portfolio Statement will provide you with periodic information about your retirement portfolio with TIAA-CREF. The enclosed leaflet, Understanding Your Quarterly Retirement Portfolio Statement is a step-by-step guide on how to read your statement.

Welcome to TIAA-CREF! Your Quarterly Retirement Portfolio Statement will provide you with periodic information about your retirement portfolio with TIAA-CREF. The enclosed leaflet, Understanding Your Quarterly Retirement Portfolio Statement is a step-by-step guide on how to read your statement. The enclosed leaflet is a step-by-step guide on how to read your statement.

Portfolio Summary

	This Period	Year-to-Date
Beginning Balance	**$999,999,999.99**	**$999,999,999.99**
Additions	999,999,999.99	999,999,999.99
Reductions	-999,999,999.99	-999,999,999.99
Gain/Loss	-999,999,999.99	-999,999,999.99
Ending Balance	**$999,999,999.99**	**$999,999,999.99**
PAL Loan Balance	$999,999,999.99	

Additional messages go here. Additional messages go here. Additional messages go here.

Retirement Income Projection

As part of your retirement savings planning, have you considered how much you need to retire? Saving a little more now can add up by the time you retire. **These charts are purely hypothetical and do not illustrate past or projected performance.**

What can you expect from Retirement Income?

Monthly Contribution	Contribution Increased by	Sample Lifetime Retirement Monthly Income at Age 65
$9,999	$0	$9,999
$9,999	$100	$9,999
$9,999	$250	$9,999

Please refer to the disclosures at the back of this statement for more information.

To raise your savings rate or further personalize the retirement income estimate, visit us online at **www.tiaa-cref.org** or call TIAA-CREF at 800-888-8888. Recent changes to your contribution amounts may not be reflected on this statement.

Example of Monthly Income at Age 65

$9,999
$9,999
$9,999
Current monthly contribution $9,999
Increase contribution by $100
Increase contribution by $250

Customer Service

Website: **www.tiaa-cref.org**
Automated 24 hour Information: 800 842-2252

Please review your statement and let us know promptly, in writing, if there is any information, included that is not accurate. Unless we receive written notification, we will assume our information is correct.

Personal Assistance: **800 842-2776**
Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM - 10:00 PM Eastern
Saturday, 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM Eastern

Call 800 842-2776 if you have any questions or would like to discuss any other information on your statement. To view your most current account information, go to our website at www.tiaa-cref.org and log-in with your user ID and password.

TIAA-CREF Individual & Institutional Services, LLC distributes Securities Products. Data compiled from other entities as noted.

Duplicate Copy as requested

Page **1** of **8**

Because of this simplification, there was an increase in customer satisfaction. And, it was rated one of the top ten statements in retirement by Dalbar and awarded the Dalbar communications seal for excellence. Dalbar is a nationally known financial services market research firm that performs a variety of ratings and evaluations of practices and communications to raise the standards of excellence in the financial services and healthcare industries.

But clear, plain language does not mean clear communications. There are other considerations too. Take, for instance the following sign; sure the language is clear, but the hierarchy of information and emphasis in terms of font size and weight doesn't make for clear communications.

Document Design

Most people are familiar with pure graphic design—making the document or marketing communications look good. But many of these "pretty" documents fail because they don't communicate or, in the case of the electronic document, can't be produced. How often has a company "designed" a form, bill or statement, etc. only to find out that the development tools or the printers can't produce it because it doesn't fit within the parameters of the equipment? Yes, but don't worry, it looks good!

Document design incorporates Information design, plain language, psychology and usability testing in addition to pure graphic design, and—especially for transaction documents—includes understanding the environment in which the document lives. Too often, organizations look at documents as nothing more than a cost of doing business either because they are regulatory or they fill a need like a bill, which helps to fund the organization. Although this is true, good document design, using the best practices of information design, goes beyond look & feel, to functionality, cost reduction and increased customer loyalty. Therefore, involving information designers at the start of any customer-facing document project is essential. Relegating information design until the end of the design project, with the only intent to make the document pretty, is useless.

Usability Testing

There are many types of usability testing: attitude surveys, preference tests, focus groups, expert opinion and diagnostic testing to name a few (some of these have other names). Focus groups are the most popular, but for information design, diagnostic testing has been proven to be most successful. For financial and other personal communications specifically, diagnostic testing using one-on-one protocols are recommended. This method is used because the results are more indicative of how individuals view them. In this type of testing, a moderator is employed to interview a participant with questions and scenarios. In this way, testing will reveal how well the participant can find information, understand information and navigate through a multipage document. This testing is done with these three questions in mind:

- How accurately does the document communicate information?
- How well does it guide the users?
- How well does it help people in using the document to solve a problem or answer a question?

If the budget allows, testing should be done with current state samples as well as the proposed design. This is to make sure all issues and problems are identified before any redesign is started. A second testing is done after the redesign. This is to verify that all user requirements have been captured and all user problems and pain points have been identified. A document must reflect how people think about a task, how they find information and what they do with that information. Therefore, testing should be done with actual users, both internal and external.

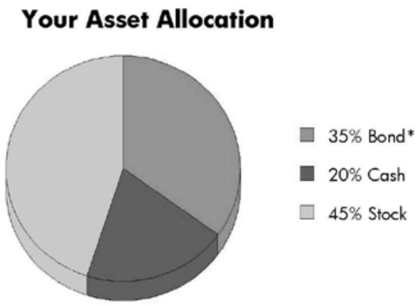
Testing will determine how accurately the document communicates information, how well it guides the user, how users actually use the document to verify information or answer a question, and what final improvements are needed. The document is successful if it naturally fits into work routines like any well-designed tool.

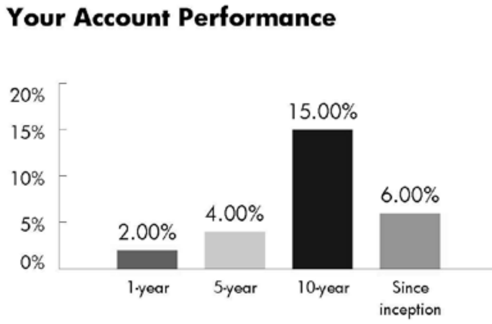
Color

Color grabs your attention and quickly conveys important information; imagine traffic lights without red, green and yellow! Judicious use of color can be used to emphasize important information. But overuse will defeat that purpose.

Color is very important and needs to be used carefully not only to make an attractive document, but also to serve a higher purpose: clarifying information. When using color, thought must be given to being consistent so that similar information is emphasized throughout the communications. Take the example of the traffic light. Everyone knows that the red is on top and green on the bottom, but think what would happen if occasionally, they were reversed. That would make for a lot of confusion, traffic jams and potentially accidents. The same is true of any communications. If a bar chart, showing one type of information, has three different colors and then a pie chart uses the same colors but shows a different type of information, then the stakeholder will be confused thinking that there is a connection between the two visuals. (See example below)

Proper use of color can emphasize important information, increase reader's attention, leave a lasting impression and increase comprehension.





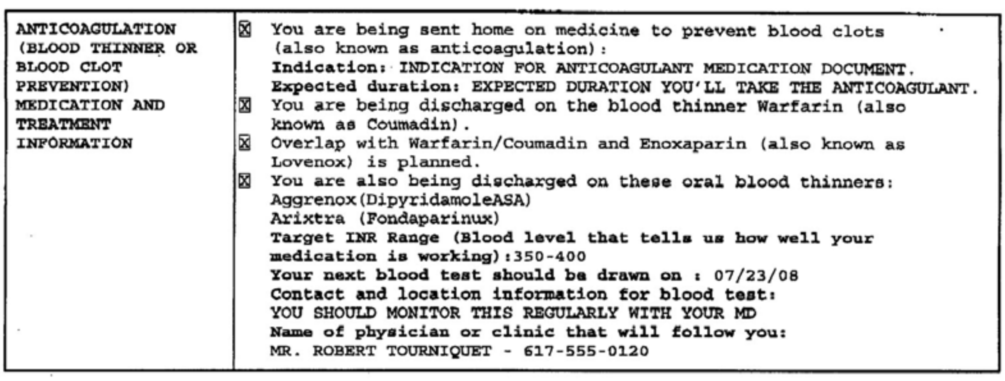
Fonts

Fonts play a large role in any communication. It is important to choose a font that is readable in different sizes as well as having a variety of weights (bold, italic, condensed, etc.) since many types of communications are data intense and font weights are used to create hierarchy and visual separation for readability.

Readability is improved significantly when the number of different font families used is limited to a maximum of two. Except in rare cases avoid using type smaller than 9 point. Most content should be in the 10-to-12 point range. This will depend on the communications and the type of content. For instance, in a financial statement with many sections and numerous columns within a section, 9 point might be the largest that will fit. With sections that contain a lot of numerical information, a sans serif font is most readable. By using different weights and different point sizes for different types of information, a clear hierarchy will be created. But consistency across the document is important, just as it is when using color. For fonts, using the same weight and size for similar information is very important.

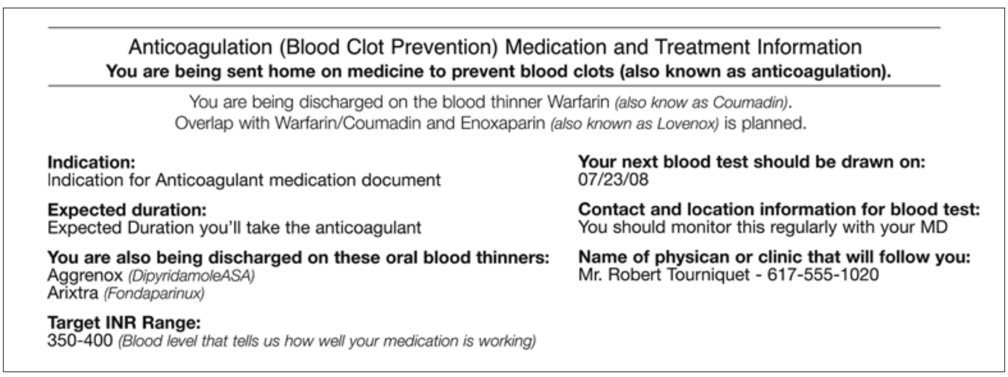
The before and after example below clearly shows the value of using different font sizes and weights to visually separate information. The before example uses one font weight and one size (8 point) while the after (taking up less space) uses bold that emphasizes different information from the regular weight and various point sizes (larger – 10 and 12 point).

Original



ANTICOAGULATION (BLOOD THINNER OR BLOOD CLOT PREVENTION) MEDICATION AND TREATMENT INFORMATION	☒ You are being sent home on medicine to prevent blood clots (also known as anticoagulation): Indication: INDICATION FOR ANTICOAGULANT MEDICATION DOCUMENT. Expected duration: EXPECTED DURATION YOU'LL TAKE THE ANTICOAGULANT. ☒ You are being discharged on the blood thinner Warfarin (also known as Coumadin). ☒ Overlap with Warfarin/Coumadin and Enoxaparin (also known as Lovenox) is planned. ☒ You are also being discharged on these oral blood thinners: Aggrenox(DipyridamoleASA) Arixtra (Fondaparinux) Target INR Range (Blood level that tells us how well your medication is working):350-400 Your next blood test should be drawn on : 07/23/08 Contact and location information for blood test: YOU SHOULD MONITOR THIS REGULARLY WITH YOUR MD Name of physician or clinic that will follow you: MR. ROBERT TOURNIQUET - 617-555-0120

Revised



Anticoagulation (Blood Clot Prevention) Medication and Treatment Information

You are being sent home on medicine to prevent blood clots (also known as anticoagulation).

You are being discharged on the blood thinner Warfarin *(also know as Coumadin)*.
Overlap with Warfarin/Coumadin and Enoxaparin *(also known as Lovenox)* is planned.

Indication:
Indication for Anticoagulant medication document

Expected duration:
Expected Duration you'll take the anticoagulant

You are also being discharged on these oral blood thinners:
Aggrenox *(DipyridamoleASA)*
Arixtra *(Fondaparinux)*

Target INR Range:
350-400 *(Blood level that tells us how well your medication is working)*

Your next blood test should be drawn on:
07/23/08

Contact and location information for blood test:
You should monitor this regularly with your MD

Name of physican or clinic that will follow you:
Mr. Robert Tourniquet - 617-555-1020

White space and white space management

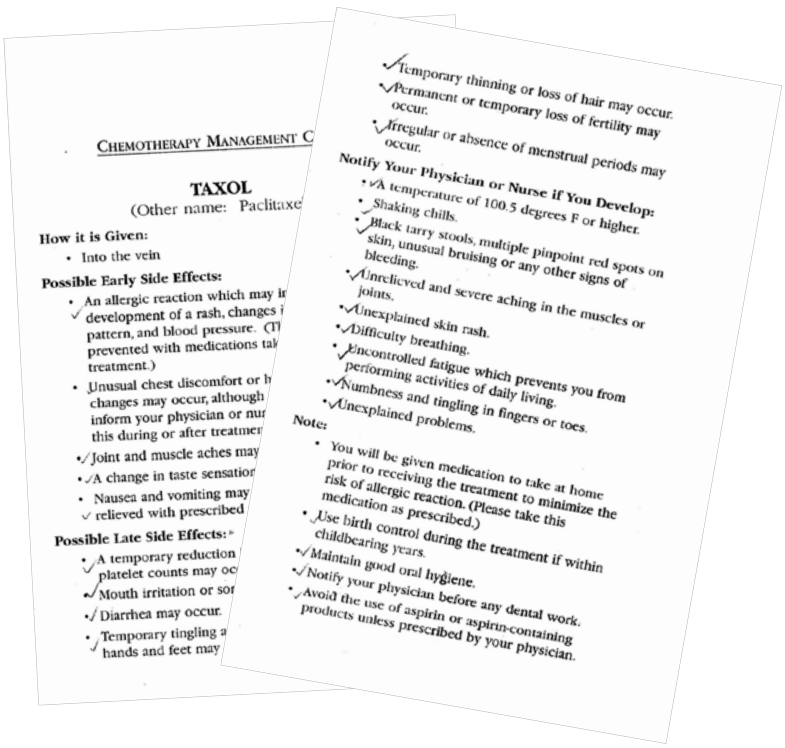
Probably the most important concept to understand and the least understood, is white space and white space management. White space is the areas in a document without text or images, just the background. Organizations tend to want to “fill up” the page, thinking that, if there is room, why not add more text. In reality white space allows the eye to travel from section to section, from concept/idea to concept/idea easily and quickly, thus making the communication easier to understand and easier to find information. Look at the example above. Notice that the before example is almost completely filled up, but in the after example, the white space visually separates different pieces of content, making it easier for the eye to follow.

ACT

Acting on information can take many forms. It could be as simple as paying a bill. Companies send out bills as part of doing business. They are looking for quick turnaround as every day that money does not come in is lost revenue to the company. So information that is easy to locate, is easy to understand and is clear about when, where and how to pay, will benefit the company because it will be acted upon in a timely fashion.

Other “acts” are not so straightforward or as simple. Take for instance the following two-sided management chemotherapy card. Many people found it confusing and poorly organized.

Original



Chemotherapy Management C

TAXOL

(Other name: Paclitaxe

How it is Given:

- Into the vein

Possible Early Side Effects:

- An allergic reaction which may i development of a rash, changes i pattern, and blood pressure. (T prevented with medications tal treatment.)
- Unusual chest discomfort or h changes may occur, although inform your physician or nur this during or after treatmen
- Joint and muscle aches may
- A change in taste sensation
- Nausea and vomiting may relieved with prescribed

Possible Late Side Effects:

- A temporary reduction platelet counts may oc
- Mouth irritation or sor
- Diarrhea may occur.
- Temporary tingling a hands and feet may

Temporary thinning or loss of hair may occur.

Permanent or temporary loss of fertility may occur.

Irregular or absence of menstrual periods may occur.

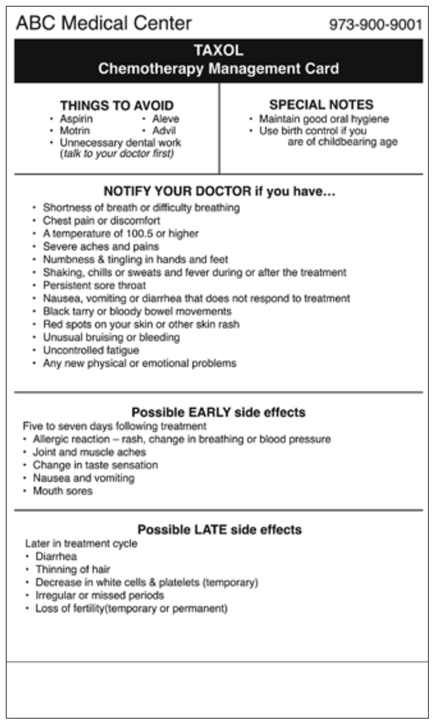
Notify Your Physician or Nurse if You Develop:

- A temperature of 100.5 degrees F or higher.
- Shaking chills.
- Black tarry stools, multiple pinpoint red spots on skin, unusual bruising or any other signs of bleeding.
- Unrelieved and severe aching in the muscles or joints.
- Unexplained skin rash.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Uncontrolled fatigue which prevents you from performing activities of daily living.
- Numbness and tingling in fingers or toes.
- Unexplained problems.

Note:

- You will be given medication to take at home prior to receiving the treatment to minimize the risk of allergic reaction. (Please take this medication as prescribed.)
- Use birth control during the treatment if within childbearing years.
- Maintain good oral hygiene.
- Notify your physician before any dental work.
- Avoid the use of aspirin or aspirin-containing products unless prescribed by your physician.

Revised



ABC Medical Center 973-900-9001

TAXOL
Chemotherapy Management Card

THINGS TO AVOID

- Aspirin
- Aleve
- Motrin
- Advil
- Unnecessary dental work (*talk to your doctor first*)

SPECIAL NOTES

- Maintain good oral hygiene
- Use birth control if you are of childbearing age

NOTIFY YOUR DOCTOR if you have…

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chest pain or discomfort
- A temperature of 100.5 or higher
- Severe aches and pains
- Numbness & tingling in hands and feet
- Shaking, chills or sweats and fever during or after the treatment
- Persistent sore throat
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea that does not respond to treatment
- Black tarry or bloody bowel movements
- Red spots on your skin or other skin rash
- Unusual bruising or bleeding
- Uncontrolled fatigue
- Any new physical or emotional problems

Possible EARLY side effects

Five to seven days following treatment

- Allergic reaction – rash, change in breathing or blood pressure
- Joint and muscle aches
- Change in taste sensation
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mouth sores

Possible LATE side effects

Later in treatment cycle

- Diarrhea
- Thinning of hair
- Decrease in white cells & platelets (temporary)
- Irregular or missed periods
- Loss of fertility(temporary or permanent)

On side one of the original, the possible side effect are shown, both early and late, in addition to how the drug is administered. On the reverse side, however, are key issues that may require contacting a physician or nurse. Also are special notes, like, notify your doctor if you are going to have dental work or avoid aspirin or using birth control. All things people thought were more important than potential side effects. That plus a two-side card made for a very poor communication tool.

The redesigned card is on the right. Using good information design, the revised version is a card that people can act on and fulfills all of LUNA's requirements to make information into clear communications. The two most important sections,"things to avoid" and "special notes," are now prominently displayed at the top.

The name of the organization and a contact number that didn't appear in the original version now appears. Using plain language and eliminating redundant content also allows for creating a one-side card.

Patchwork Approach

One of the biggest problems we've identified is what we call "The Patchwork Approach."

The Patchwork Approach is when content is added or additional documents created to try to explain an already confusing document. The most egregious of the Patchwork Approach is the EOB and the words: "this is not a bill." It is obvious that many people who receive EOBs think they are bills. The reason for this is that culturally documents with numbers tend to look like bills. But, instead of redesigning them, the solution seems to be to add the words "this is not a bill" across the top of the first page.

Once, in speaking to the insurance commissioner of a large state, I learned that they had a similar problem. They sent out an automobile notice with personal information about the owner's vehicle, rates, etc. This was a paper that the owner was to keep with other insurance documents. Many people were sending in money because they thought it was a bill. So instead of redesign, the solution was to add the words "this is not a bill" at the top. The result was that when people realized they were not bills, they inadvertently threw them out.

Many companies send out 3rd, 4th and even 5th overdue notices. Often times the solution is to correct the original bill and that alone will avoid many of these additional notices.

There are many aspects to clear communications. Not all are needed in every type or instance of a communications, but all need to be considered. Plain language, graphic design, usability and psychology all pay a part in creating clear communications.

The conclusion is clear: good information design utilizing LUNA, Locate/UNderstand/Act, will create clear communications that will result in creating a good customer experience and ensure the successful outcome of any communications project.

Coaching legal experts in plain language for the web

Mats Hydbom, one of the consultants in the Digit Project, is a Plain Language Consultant at Språkkon-sulterna, Sweden's largest language consultant agency. Previously, he has worked as a copywriter, as a plain language specialist and communication strategist at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and as a host in nationwide Swedish broad-casting.

By Mats Hydbom

With 10,000 book pages to be rewritten by hundreds of legal experts for the web in plain language, how do you develop a process to accommodate so much material? The Swedish National Tax Agency started a nationwide web project and hired six plain language consultants to make it happen.

The Swedish National Tax Agency publishes a great deal of legal information on how Swedish taxation law should be interpreted and applied. The texts are written by legal experts at the Tax Agency and mainly used by other employees in the organization and, to some extent, by external taxation consultants and experts. Traditionally this vast information has been published as a series of printed books.

A few years ago the Swedish government decided that this rather specialized and detailed tax law information should be published on the Tax Agency's web page and made available to all.

New requirements and new possibilities Rather than just publishing the book pages on the web, the Swedish Tax Agency decided that the texts had to be adapted to the special requirements of the web regarding information selection, text structure, and searchability. The web offers new possibilities to "package" and present information in a user-friendly way, and the Swedish Tax Agency was determined to make the most of this opportunity.

The texts also had to be rewritten in plain language. Since 2009, Sweden has had a law stipulating that the language used in all governmental and municipal agencies should be clear and plain. Also, the Tax Agency understood that there was a lot to gain by using plain language.

The Digit Project is born Some 10,000 book pages were to be rewritten in plain language and adapted to the web. To accomplish this, the Digit Project was born. The legal experts in the organization needed to be trained in the use of plain language and, not least important, be made to accept the very concept of plain language. To make the project truly successful, they would also have to appreciate the limits as well as the possibilities of the web as an information channel.

Plain language consultants coaching the legal experts Since the Swedish National Tax Agency is a very large organization with over 11,000 employees working all over Sweden, and hundreds of these employees are legal experts who write the tax law information that was now to be published on the web, the Digit Project over time became a large-scale one. When it was time to start the content and publishing phase of the project, the Tax Agency hired six full time plain language consultants from Språkkonsulterna (I was one of them). Our assignment: to coach the legal experts in plain language writing for the web.

Crash courses for a flying start We immediately arranged a number of crash courses to get the legal experts started. On the agenda was a new way of thinking about the tax information and its users—to change focus from who is writing the information to who is going to read and, more importantly, use it. Therefore, a key message was how critical it is for the legal experts to always have the reader in clear focus when selecting information and writing the text. And, furthermore, to try to predict what the reader wants to know; what questions the reader is likely to have. (The principle being "one purpose = one webpage".) Another important message was the concept of presenting information in one place only on the web site, and instead make use of linked pages.

Plain language as a tool for effective communication One of the main goals of the Digit Project was to promote the use of plain language in the organization. We were given a unique opportunity to communicate the many advantages of using plain language—language without complicated syntax, unnecessary jargon or complex technical terms. One challenge was to convince the legal experts that plain language does not make texts simple or lacking in precision. On the contrary, we argued, plain language can help to clarify complex legal issues in a pedagogical way, hence making it possible for the reader to use the tax information in the right way, which benefits all. This we had to work on persistently over a long period of time.

The "persona" Roger One method we used in educating the legal experts in plain language writing for the web was the use of Roger. He is a fictitious person created especially for this project and this purpose. Roger was presented in some detail—with photo, family members, personal history and what not. He was described as a workmate at the Tax Agency, an accountant with extensive education in tax law and economics, but without any deeper knowledge in the many special fields of tax law expertise. "You are writing for Roger", we said to the legal experts. "You can assume that he has some previous knowledge of your particular topic, but no more than that. Choose wisely what you want to say in every page, and say it plainly!"

Continued coaching After the crash courses a more long term coaching began. This was carried out through personal meetings, email, telephone and video conferences. The most important tool was a digital project room created especially for the Digit Project to enable the close cooperation between the language consultants and the legal experts. Here texts could be scrutinized, discussed and worked on. Syntax could be questioned, choice of words challenged, and new and plainer sentences could be created and agreed upon.

During the whole period of the project an extensive style guide was developed. It addresses different aspects of plain language as well as information selection, text structure and the linking of pages.

Two important lessons from the project so far The most important lesson from the Digit Project is perhaps that coaching legal experts in plain writing for the web is a worthwhile task. The legal experts at the Swedish Tax Agency accepted the idea of plain language willingly. It is true that some skepticism was expressed at first, but legal experts will listen to reason, and providing that the arguments for plain language are sound and well substantiated, the legal experts will accept them and act accordingly.

Another lesson, however, is that it is very important for plain language consultants to respect legal experts' fears that their language will be oversimplified or diluted in some way. Language consultants are wise to tread gently at every stage of the writing process, to be patient and, not least, to give the legal experts ample time to get used to the idea of plain language and to really try it for themselves. Language consultants have their area of expertise, legal experts have theirs. To make collaboration possible and successful, it is crucial that we respect each other. When texts written in plain language turns out to be satisfactory also in a legal perspective, the legal experts will embrace plain language as a new and useful tool.

Has anything gone less well so far? To be quite truthful, Roger was "taken hostage" both by the language consultants and the legal experts! We, the language consultants, often used him in an attempt to make the legal experts write more plainly by saying: "Are you really sure that Roger will understand this?" The legal experts, on the other hand, used him in their defense: "Oh, you think this sentence is too complicated? Well, I'm quite sure that Roger will understand."

Since the rewriting of the tax law information is far from finished, the coaching of the legal experts at the Swedish National Tax Agency still continues, and the methods and tools for doing so efficiently are constantly being developed within the project. Up till now some two hundred legal experts have been coached, they have embraced the very idea and the advantages of plain writing, and as a result Swedish tax law information has taken a big step towards clarity.

The aim of Clarity — *the organization — is "the use of good, clear language by the legal profession." With that in mind, what path would you like to see the journal take? Do you have an article you would like published? Can you recommend authors or potential guest editors? No organization or publication can survive for long if its members (or readers) are not gaining something of value. How can Clarity help you? Please contact editor-in-chief Julie Clement at* clementj@cooley.edu *with your suggestions and other comments.*

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Lesotho LSL100
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Philippines PHP1500
Portugal EUR35
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Julie Clement

PLAIN Conference –

Clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness

17-20 September, Dublin 2015

PLAIN's 2015 conference is coming up - and we are planning a very interesting programme for delegates.

PLAIN's conference is a great opportunity to meet plain language experts and experts in similar areas of expertise such as information design, technical writing, usability, user experience and so on. One element of the conference focuses on plain legal language. The conference also gives you the opportunity to share your knowledge and generate new ideas and initiatives.

Confirmed speakers so far include:

Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman

Deborah S Bosley, President of PLAIN
Owner, The Plain Language Group

Dr Neil James, Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation in Australia

Dr Richard K Murray, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Merck & Co, Inc

Robert Linsky, Director of Information Design, NEPS, LLC and creator of the LUNA methodology

PLAIN has a special early registration rate for Clarity members.

Registration is now open.

Please visit PLAIN 2015 website for more information: www.plain2015.ie

PLAIN and NALA look forward to welcoming you!

A Note of Thanks

Clarity wishes to express its deep appreciation to Josiah Fisk and his team at More Carrot for its generous, multi-year donation of writing and design services:

- Refined and updated logo
- New website
- New structure and design for Clarity Journal

Taken together, this work represents a significant improvement in the appearance and professionalism of our communications.

We also congratulate Bernard Lambeau of More Carrot's EU office for being named the Clarity member for Luxembourg.

Clarity Journal is published twice a year in the spring and fall.

Submissions We encourage you to submit articles to be considered for publication in Clarity. Send submissions directly to editor in chief Julie Clement. Please limit submissions to approximately 1,500 or 3,000 words.