

Plain Language: Making Content Easy for Citizens to Understand



State of Hawaii

Office of Language Access



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Funny, and Not

- What I need is a list of unknown problems we are likely to encounter.
- Email is not to be used to pass on data or information, only company business.



- We know that communication is a problem, but the company is not going to discuss it with employees. **AT&T**

Sigh...

1. The medication could make you obtunded. You might become ataxic and degenerate into emesis.
2. Experiencing the loss of consciousness and the expulsion of stomach matter could be a result of taking this medication.
3. This medicine could make you pass out. You also might become dizzy and vomit.



Sigh...



Who Needs Access?



Everyone!

Agenda

1. What does Language Access Policy require?
 2. What is plain language?
 3. Why do we need plain language?
 4. What are the issues?
-
1. What are plain language strategies?



1. What the Language Access Policy Requires?

[CHAPTER 321C] OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS

"Limited English proficient person"
means a person, on account
of national origin, who
English language skills
language skills vary
as having
a limited ability to read, write, speak,
or understand the English language.



1. What the Language Access Policy Requires?

[§ 321C-3] Oral and written language services. (a) Each state agency and all covered entities shall take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to services, programs, and activities by limited English proficiency persons in the totality of circumstances:

- (1) The number of persons served or encountered;
- (2) The frequency with which persons come in contact with the services, programs, or activities;



(3) The nature and importance of the services, programs, or activities; and

(4) The resources available to the State or covered entity and the costs.

determined by a person who is a limited English proficient person; and
the needs of limited English proficient persons in the totality of circumstances;

What's Missing



HOW?

2. What is plain language?

Plain language is the use of proven writing and design strategies that make it easy for your intended audience to **find, understand,** and **use** your content.



Clear | Concise | Credible

Writer-based

Reader-based



3. Why do we need plain language?

Problems

- Average U.S. adult reads at the **8th grade level**
- **54%** of U.S. adults are below the 6th grade level
- **25%** of Hawaiians are non-English speakers at home
- **1 in 6** Hawaii residents can only read elementary texts

Solutions

- Avoids confusion, discouragement, anxiety
- Provides access to critical information
- Saves time and money
- Builds trust
- Is more efficient



4. What are the issues?

- Understand your audience
- Increase clarity
- Limit amount of information
- Eliminate jargon -- legal/bureaucratic
- Improve visual appeal



Be more
HUMAN

Oh, no



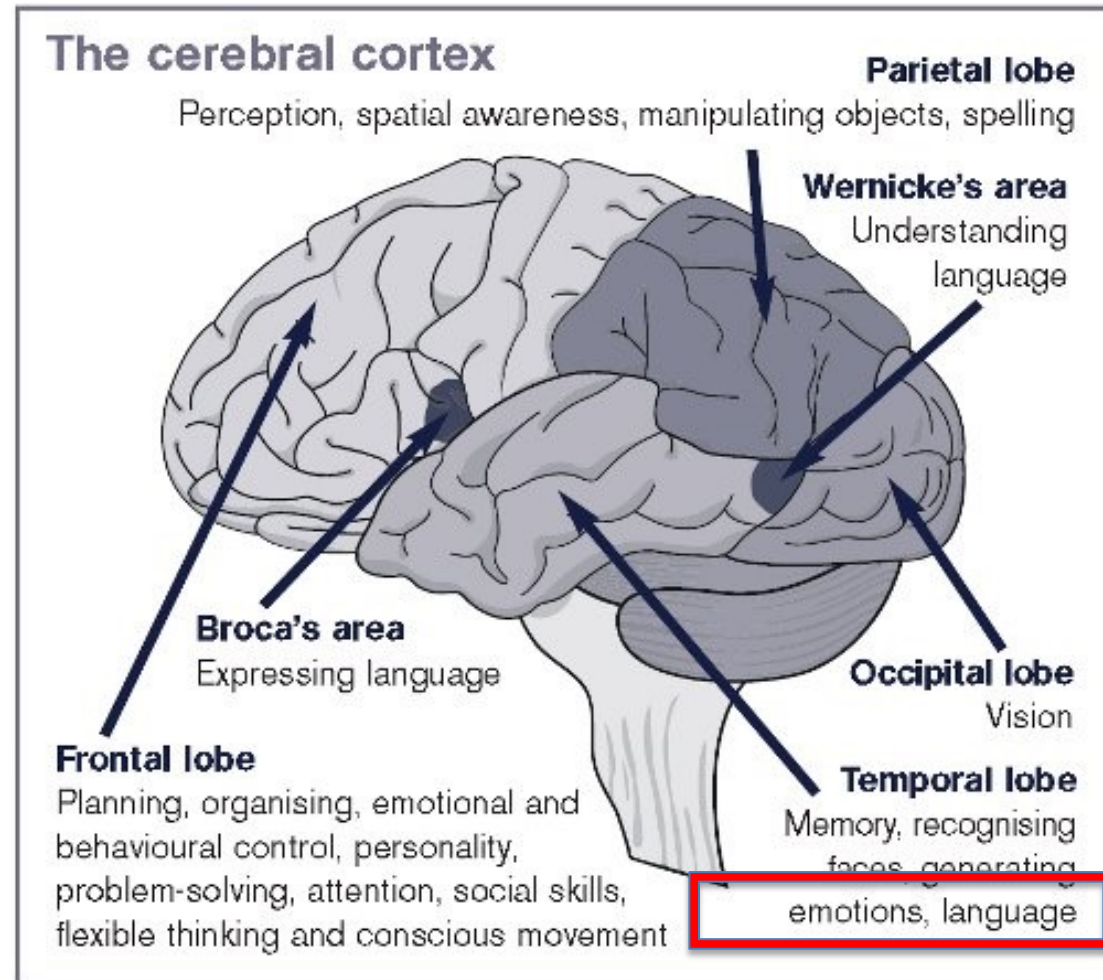
4. What are the issues? Overly complex



4. What are the issues? Emotions

“A single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress.”

– Dr. Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman
Words Can Change Your Brain



4. What are the issues? Context



5. What are plain language strategies?

1. Consider your audience
2. Understand your purpose
3. Be conversational | human
4. Use pronouns
5. Use verbs, not nouns
6. Use common words
7. Use the active voice
8. Use positive language
9. Avoid jargon | define
10. Be concise
11. Use visuals



5. What are plain language strategies?

A Few Tips to Get You Started

- Sentences: **15-20** words maximum
- Paragraphs: **3-5** sentences
- Headings: **3-5** per page (screen)
- Use columns online
- List information when possible
- Answer reader's questions
- Eliminate **30%** of your words



1. What is Unemployment Insurance (Unemployment Compensation)?

Unemployment Insurance provides temporary financial assistance to qualified workers who become unemployed through no fault of their own. Benefits are not based on need. The unemployment compensation program was established by Congress in 1935 as part of the Social Security Act. The administration of this program lies with each state. Benefit eligibility requirements such as weekly benefit amounts are determined by state law and vary from state to state.

2. Who pays for Unemployment Insurance?

Employers pay a contribution tax based on a percentage of their payroll into the Unemployment Trust Fund. Workers DO NOT pay taxes into the unemployment program and NO deductions are taken from your paycheck. If you had more than one employer, your employers will share in the costs. Employers also pay a federal tax which pays for the administrative costs of the program as well as for extension of benefits during periods of high unemployment.

3. How do I apply for unemployment insurance benefits?

When you become unemployed or have a reduction in your work schedule, you can file online or in-person at a local claims office. Be prepared to provide your social security number, all employment information such as employer's name and address, dates of employment, reason for separation for the past 18 months (including part-time work), and your bank information for direct deposit (routing and account numbers).

To apply online, go to uiclaims.hawaii.gov and click on “Claimant Services Login/Create Account”. This service is available from Monday to Friday between the hours of 6:30 am to 11:00 pm. On Weekends and Holidays, it is available from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm. All times are Hawaii Standard Time.

4. Do I qualify for Unemployment Insurance?

Your claim will be based on wages paid to you in your base period. To establish a Hawaii claim:

- 1) You must have been paid wages in at least two quarters of your base period; and
- 2) You must have been paid wages of at least 26 times your weekly benefit amount.

Your claim is good for a one year period called the benefit year. However, you can be paid only for 26 weeks of total unemployment during the one-year period that your claim is effective.

Questions/
Headings
Lists
Pronouns
Sentences

HOWEVER...

Unemployment Insurance

BEFORE

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state. Benefit eligibility requirements such as weekly benefit amounts are determined by state law and vary from state to state.

AFTER

1. What is Unemployment Insurance (Unemployment Compensation)?

Unemployment Insurance gives you temporary financial help if you are qualified and if you lost your job through no fault of your own. Each state has laws that decide what benefits you receive. These benefits are a set amount that are not based on how much money or assets you have.

Comparison

	BEFORE	AFTER
# of words	60	43
Ave. words per sentence	14	14
Grade level	12	7
Reading ease	32	50

Consider your audience

- Read **28%** slower online
- Use documents | websites to answer their questions
- Read “just in time”
- Interpret and create meaning
- Skim, scan, rarely read
- Phone if confused



Consider your purpose

- Explain the purpose(s).
- Make it clear what's included.
- Set the context.
- Give main point first.
- Focus on outcomes
- Explain action.



“Hawaii residents must post their resume online at www.hirenethawaii.com, the internet based job matching system used by the state Workforce Development Division.”



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS THE LAW

BEFORE:

It is against the law for this recipient of Federal financial [assistance](#) to discriminate on the following bases: Against any individual in the United States, on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions, sex stereotyping, transgender status, and gender identity), national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, disability, or political affiliation or belief, or, against any beneficiary of, applicant to, or participant in programs financially assisted under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, on the basis of the individual's citizenship status or participation in any WIOA [Title I- financially assisted program or activity](#).

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS THE LAW

AFTER

If you receive Federal financial help, it is illegal to discriminate against anyone in the U.S. based on

- Race
- Color
- Religion
- Age
- Disability
- National origin (including limited English proficiency)
- Political affiliation or belief
- Sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions; sex stereotyping, transgender status, and gender identity)

Under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, you also may not discriminate against anyone based on the person's citizenship status, or anyone who

- benefits, applies, or participates in programs that receive funds, or
- participates in any WIOA [Title I-financially assisted program or activity](#).

Comparison

Equal Opportunity	BEFORE	After
# of words	103	97
Average words per sentence	103	22
Grade level	50	10 th
Reading ease	-80	50

Entire Document	
# of words	576
Average words per sentence	30
Grade level	18
Reading ease	21

Notice to Individuals Filing a Complaint

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS THE LAW

BEFORE:

Right to representation. You have the right to be represented by an attorney or other individual of your choice. However, under Hawaii's Language Access Law (HRS 321C), you cannot file a lawsuit with OLA. OLA will try to resolve your complaint using [conference, conciliation, mediation, persuasion or other informal methods.]

AFTER:

Right to be represented. You have the right to have an attorney or anyone else you choose to speak for you.

However, under Hawaii's Language Access Law (HRS 321C), you cannot file a lawsuit with the Office of Language Access (OLA). Instead, we will try to resolve your complaint by [talking with you and others.]

Notice to Individuals Filing a Complaint

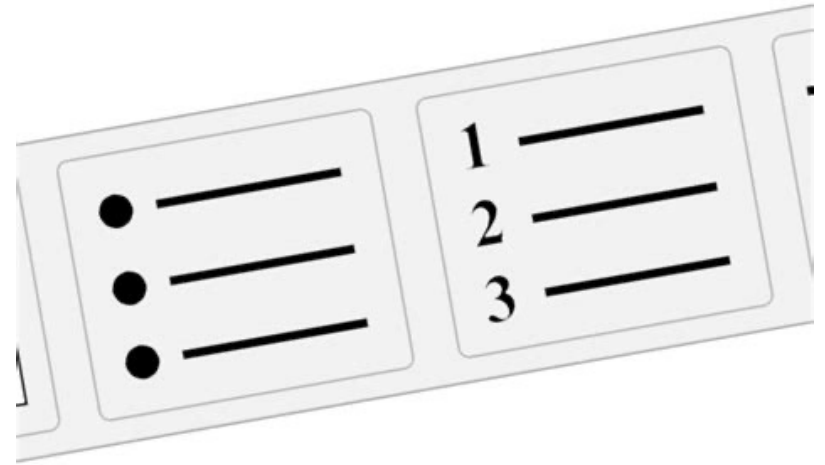
	BEFORE	After
# of words	53	52
# of sentences	3	3
Ave. words per sentence	15	14
Grade level	12	7
Reading ease	40	66

Notice to Individuals Filing a Complaint

Entire Document	
# of words	567.00
# of sentences	38.00
Ave. words per sentence	30.32
Grade level	17.89
Reading ease	20.82

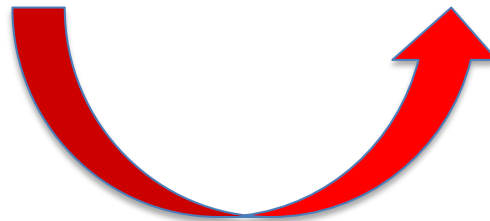
Use Lists

- **Bullets**
 - All items equal
- **Numbers**
 - Chronology
 - Steps
 - Hierarchy of importance



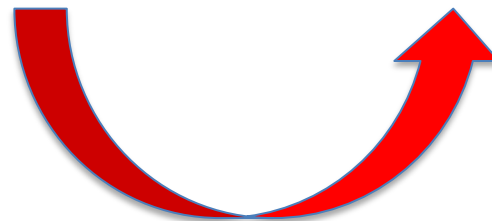
Use verbs

Nouns	Verbs
Determination	Determine
Recommendation	Recommend
Implementation	Implement (maybe “Begin”)
Evaluation	Evaluate
Communication	Communicate
Consideration	Consider
Negotiation	Negotiate



Use common words

Bureaucratic jargon	Common words
Assistance services	Help
Individuals	People
Conference, conciliation, mediation or persuasion	Meet and talk with you
Consent	Agree
Separation	Lost your job

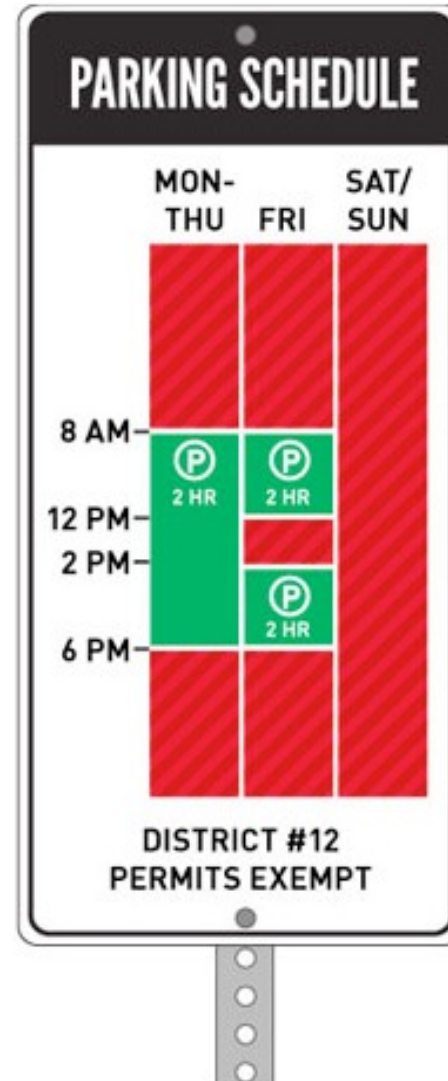


Use more visuals

- 43% more likely to be persuaded
- 25 - 40% less time
- 60,000 times faster (processing)
- 38% better retention
- Satisfies two modes of information processing



YAY!



Feel Free to Ask Me: call, email, text



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