Plain Language: Frequently Asked Questions

What is plain language?

Plain language is a style of communication that prioritizes using ==easy to read, consise, and clear information.==

Why is plain language important?

Plain language makes it easier for the public to read and understand. This is helpful for people with cognitive and learning disabilities, people who don't know much about your subject matter, and many others - ==it usually helps everyone to understand you better.==
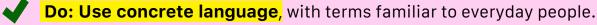
Where do you use plain language?

- Registration
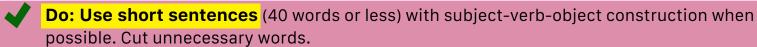- Websites
- Emails to the event participants
- Programs
- Applications
- Paper materials
- Instructions
- And more!

How do you use plain language?

✔ **Do: Use concrete language**, with terms familiar to everyday people.

✘ **Don't: Use stuffy, overcomplicated language.** Example: use "so" instead of "accordingly", and "must" instead of "is required to".

✔ **Do: Use short sentences** (40 words or less) with subject-verb-object construction when possible. Cut unnecessary words.

✘ **Don't: Use negative constructions,** such as "not fewer than". Example: use "at least" instead of "not fewer than" and "is less than $5,000" instead of "does not exceed $5,000".

✔ **Do: Use action verbs in present tense** when possible. Example: use "pay", not "make a payment".

✘ **Don't: Use negative constructions,** such as "not fewer than". Example: use "at least" instead of "not fewer than" and "is less than $5,000" instead of "does not exceed $5,000".

✔ **Do: Present ideas in a logical order**. Basic concepts first, followed by explanation + detail.

✘ **Don't: Teach two things in one sentence or paragraph.** Discuss one idea at a time.

✔ **Do: Use the same terms consistently** for a specific thought or idea.

✘ **Don't: Use jargon and legal terms** wherever possible, while preserving accuracy. When using a legal term (for example, "Substantial Gainful Activity"), inform the reader of the specific meaning(s) and application(s).

3 more tips:

Use "you": Frequently address the reader directly using the pronoun "you"

Use the active voice: This helps make clear who is responsible for what.

Provide additional resources on a topic whenever possible.

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