Clear Writing and Literacy
revised second edition

How to recognize clear writing.

How to use it.

How to convince others to use it.

New resources and practical examples.

**prepared for Ontario Literacy Coalition
by Ruth Baldwin**

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About the author

Ruth Baldwin has been working in literacy since 1979. She was a founding member of AlSO (one of the first community-based literacy programs), the Ottawa-Carleton Coalition for Literacy and the Ontario Literacy Coalition. In 1983, she developed an outreach program to help community groups in the Ottawa area understand the link between clear writing and literacy. Since 1986, she has given training workshops in Plain Writing for workers in social services, health care, unions, community organizations, and government departments. She is the owner of Plain Writing Services, a literacy consulting firm.

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About this booklet. . .

This booklet is about writing to be understood. It will give you some ideas about what makes material difficult to read, and some tips on how to communicate better.

The ideas you will find in this booklet can be applied to any kind of writing. However, they are most important if you are writing for adults who are not comfortable getting information from print, either because they don't read well, or because English is not their first language. We're still learning what is most effective for adults who are developing their literacy skills, so, please remember, these are suggestions not rules.

The booklet has been organized in six sections, but it can be read in any order.

Section One defines clear writing and talks about why it is an important issue for literacy workers and students.

Section Two shows you what makes material hard to read. It includes information about standardized readability tests and how to use them.

Section Three gives practical suggestions for changing your writing style in order to communicate with a wider audience.

Section Four shows you some examples of clear writing. You may be able to adapt some of these for use in your community.

Section Five focuses on how to convince others in your community to begin using clear writing.

Section Six provides references to help you expand your knowledge of clear writing and design. It includes a variety of books, articles and helpful websites.

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Appendix One

Section One

What do we mean by clear writing?

Clear writing is a way of presenting information so that it is easy for everyone to read and understand. Sometimes it is referred to as readability, plain English, plain writing or clear language and design. Generally these terms all refer to the same idea. As you will see from this booklet, clear writing is not some mysterious process, but it may challenge some of the ideas you have learned, or come to accept, about writing.

Clear writing includes more than just the words that are used and how they are put together. It considers how the material looks, as well as what it says. It cqnsiders what the reader needs to know, as well as what the writer wants to say. Most important, it is writing that can be read and understood by as many people as possible.

The Ontario Literacy Coalition believes that no one should be at a disadvantage because they don't read well. If material is written clearly, it will be easier for people who don't read well to get the information they need.

How can you recognize clear writing and design?

Materials that use clear writing and design follow some general principles:

- They focus on the information that readers want or need to know.

- They respect the reader's background and intelligence.

- They use familiar language and a straightforward writing style.

- They choose an attractive design that helps the reader follow the information.

- They include photos, drawings or other graphics to illustrate the information.

- They avoid small type, dense text and other layout errors that can intimidate the reader.

- They make it easy for the reader to find out what's important and what must be done.

Every writer has a responsibility to present information in a way that is easy for the reader to understand. The reader should not have to struggle to figure out what the writer is trying to say.

On the other hand, no one should feel restricted to childish or boring writing in order to get a message across. Material that is written to be understood should provide essential information without making anyone feel uncomfortable with the writing style.

Clear Writing and Literacy

Why is clear writing important?

Millions of people in Canada can't read, or don't read well. This has been the message of the literacy movement in Canada for almost twenty years. The Southam News National Literacy Survey (1987) was the first study that proved we were right. In 1990, Statistics Canada took a more detailed look at how well Canadians can read. This study showed that 38% of Canadians between 16 and 69 years had difficulty with written materials.

In 1995, Canada was one of seven countries that participated in the International Adult literacy Survey (IAlB). More than 5,000 Canadians between 16 and 69 were surveyed to assess their ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community. Overall, this survey showed that almost 48% of Canadian adults have some degree of difficulty with everyday reading tasks.

- About 22% of Canada's adults have serious difficulty dealing with printed materials, and identify themselves as having difficulties reading.
- Another 24-26% of the adult population can read but not well. They can deal only with material that is simple and clearly laid out. They do not have the skills to cope with unfamiliar or complex reading material. Most of these people said they avoid situations that require reading.
  (**Reading the Future: A Portrait of literacy in Canada**, 1997)

The survey results show that material that is clear and easy to read can be used by a wider audience. Changing the way we write can make it easier for up to 26% more people to begin to get information from print. If we want to reach the people who say they avoid reading, or include people whose first language is not English, we must keep them in mind as we write. Our print material must invite readers to begin reading, and our writing must make it easy for them to get our message.

Public education materials that are written clearly benefit the whole community.

- Public education materials that are written clearly benefit the whole community. Literacy programs have a better choice of relevant, topical teaching material.
- Community programs have a better chance of reaching the people they were designed for.
- People who don't read well have a better chance of finding out important information that affects their lives.
- The whole community can benefit from greater participation by all its citizens.

Why not use clear writing?... Some common reactions...

1. **We don't have time.**
   It does take a little longer to write using clear language, but the more you use it, the easier it gets. The time will be well spent if your materials are more effective.

2. **It will insult people who read well.**
   Materials written for adults should not be childish or insulting to anyone. If they are clear and easy to read, they will have the greatest benefit for people who don't read well. But people who do read well can find out what they want to know more quickly from material that is clear, focused on the main ideas, and well designed. Nobody will complain about that.

3. **It costs too much.**
   Studies in the U.S. and Britain have shown that clear writing saves money. The text is often shorter because it sticks to the point. Forms and form letters can often be eliminated, and staff spend less time answering questions and dealing with complaints.

4. **Our boss will never go for it.**
   Sometimes people feel that complex writing demonstrates how educated or important they are. Or they may believe that what they have to say just can't be put simply. Some technical information may be difficult to revise, and will take a little more work. Some good "before and after" samples may convince a reluctant boss that a clear and direct style works.

5. **I'm paid to write - my writing is just fine.**
   Chances are this person is right, but the material she or he produces may not be useful for a wide audience. You can apply the techniques of clear language and design in all forms of writing, but they are most useful when you want to expand your audience to include as many people as possible.

6. **Literacy isn't a problem for our audience.**
   This may be true, but it has become clearer that literacy is a problem for more people than we had realized. Any material that is written for the general public should be clear and easy to read, since as many as 48% of Canadian adults have difficulty using print to get information.

7. **It won't be legal.**
   Even lawyers are beginning to recognize that legal jargon doesn't make a document more legally binding. It's important for people to understand what their legal obligations are, and what they must do. Readers are more likely to understand their legal obligations if the document is written in everyday language. Again, some good "before and after" examples may be needed to demonstrate how effective clear language can be. Please see Section Four for examples.

8. **What we have to say can't be written simply — we have to use technical language.**
   Some material is written for a special audience that has the background to understand technical language or specific terms. But when material is written for the public, the writer must explain those terms so that more people can understand. If it's important for the audience to know the terms, then define them and use them

consistently. That way the audience will have a better chance of understanding. If the words or terms are not essential, then choose a more common word that will get the idea across, even if it's not quite as precise.

Section Two

What makes material hard to read and understand?

There are five areas to consider when analysing the readability of any material:
1. overall appearance - layout and design
2. organization of material
3. language
4. sentence length and structure
5. tone — how you speak to the reader

Although we will look at each of these areas separately, it's important to remember that they all work together to make material easy, or hard, to read. Try not to isolate any one element, but think about the total message the reader gets.

Any changes that you make to the text, even if it's only substituting "easy" words for "hard" ones, will be a step in the right direction. But try to extend your analysis of the problems, and the ways to solve them.

1. Appearance - Layout and Design

The overall appearance of your material is important. You have to catch your readers' attention, invite them to begin reading, and make it easy for them to continue.

Watch out for:	**Why?**
too much information on a page	Dense text can discourage readers before they begin.
heavy blocks of type	It gives two messages: • this is going to be hard! • this is going to be borin
not enough white space	White space — around the text and between paragraphs — provides contrast and makes the text less dense.
small type	Type must be large enough to read easily.
italics or difficult type styles	The type style should be clear and simple.
block capital letters	Block capitals take away the characteristic shape of letters which help many people read. They also make the text look dense.
no pictures, illustrations or other graphics	Graphics should provide relief from dense text. Charts or diagrams can be used to reinforce or replace written information.

☞	graphics that are poorly chosen or presented	Graphics should be easy to read and should not interrupt normal reading patterns.
☞	coloured paper or ink	Choose colours carefully to provide good contrast
☞	light letters on a dark background	The most readable choice is always black type on white or light coloured paper. Watch out for highlighting techniques that reduce contrast (e.g. screens).
☞	no clear focus to the design	Sometimes a pamphlet tries to do too much.
☞	too many competing elements	The design elements may not work together. Or they may not give the reader a clear focus.
☞	small columns with short lines	Short lines and small columns make the eye shift too quickly and can confuse the reader into reading across columns instead of down.
☞	very long lines	Long lines can also be hard to follow and may create a dense block of type.
☞	type that is even on both sides (justified)	Type that is justified on both sides often makes big spaces between words or between letters within a word. These spaces disrupt the reader's eye movement and can be confusing.
☞	hyphenated words	Words that are hyphenated over two lines force the reader to remember part of the word at the same time as she may be trying to sound it out
☞	type that is centred or ragged on both sides	Type that is centred or ragged on both sides does not show the reader where sentences begin and end. It looks like each line is a sentence by itself.
☞	graphics that are poorly chosen or presented	Graphics should be easy to read and should not interrupt normal reading patterns.

The layout that is easiest to read is type that is justified (even) on the left and unjustified (ragged) on the right.

☞	forms that don't give enough space to write	Seniors, adult learners, and people with motor disabilities may find it difficult to fill in forms that require small writing, or writing letters in individual boxes.
☞	forms that use complicated layout	
☞	forms that use more than one language	New readers may find it difficult to distinguish between English and French, especially if they are used on alternate lines.

2. Organization of information

Good organization makes it easy for the reader to find out what's important, and what he or she must do. The focus should be on what the reader needs to know. The main ideas should come near the beginning so they catch the reader's attention and are easy to remember.

Watch out for:
- nothing to show what's important
- titles don't give enough information
- directions buried in the text
- poor organization of material
- too much information
- irrelevant information
- material continued on another page

Why?
Most readers look at graphics and headlines — the things that catch their eye first. They may not read anything else. If they are not comfortable with reading, they are not likely to struggle through a whole page to find out what y think is important. They are also not likely to read from page to page, unless there is a good reason.

3. Language

Choice of language is the area that usually needs the most improvement. Many people believe that difficult language gives the writing more importance, or makes it better. Unfortunately, it only makes it harder to read. Sometimes using difficult language helps to maintain an unequal relationship between the writer and the reader — for example, between a doctor and patient, or a social worker and "client".

Watch out for:
- complex language, unfamiliar words
- impersonal terms, like client or consumer
- nouns made from verbs — for example, anything that ends in "ization"
- technical language
- jargon
- legal language
- acronyms (e.g. OLC)
- English idioms
- language that shows class, cultural or gender bias
- use of more than one language

Why?
Technical language, legal language and jargon all exclude readers who are not familiar with the terms. You can usually replace them with common language. If technical terms and legal language must be used, define them in the text or in a glossary.

Acronyms are a special form of jargon — they assume everyone knows the organization that the letters refer to. The first time an acronym is used it should appear with the words it stands for. If it is used frequently, or is commonly known, it can be used alone in the rest of the text.

English idioms and biased language also excludes people — women, poor people, people from other cultures. This language gives the message that these groups are not important enough to pay attention to. It suggests that the material is not for them. English idioms can be particularly confusing. Although they use common words and phrases, idioms always have a more complex meaning, for example — give someone a hand, shake a leg.

More than one language in the text can be confusing because a new reader may not distinguish between the languages, but try to read the whole text.

Section Four gives some simple alternatives for commonly-used complex language.

4. Sentence length and structure

Your readers should be able to make sense of what you're saying on the first reading. They should not be forced to remember a lot of information, or struggle with complex sentence structure, in order to understand. If you have to read it twice (or more) to be sure you have the information right, then the sentence should be changed.

Watch out for:
- long sentences (over 30 words)
- sentences with several clauses
- several ideas in one sentence
- passive construction

Why?
Long sentences are usually also complex sentences. If there is more than one idea, the reader must remember them all in order to understand the sentence. A number of long sentences together form a dense visual block on the page, and may be intimidating for the reader.

Passive construction (for example, It has been decided, We have been advised) makes writing impersonal and formal. It is difficult because the reader must read and remember the whole sentence before it makes sense.

5. Tone — how we speak to the reader

How we give our message is just as important as what we say. The words we choose usually demonstrate what we know about the readers, and how we feel about them. The tone can show authority or friendliness. It can demonstrate a negative or positive attitude towards the readers. Be aware of how you sound in your written material — be sure you aren't giving a message you don't intend to give.

Watch out for:

- negative tone
  - bossy, hostile
  - legalistic, very formal
  - paternalistic, patronizing

- assumptions about who the reader is or what the reader knows

not knowing the readers' context

Why?
A negative tone can make the reader feel intimidated and uncomfortable. It does not encourage anyone to read on.

If you make assumptions about what the reader knows, you may miss explaining something that is important for the reader to understand. If you make assumptions about who the reader is, then your material may show class, gender or cultural bias.

It's important to know the readers' context for the material. Are they familiar with the information or is it totally new? Some information (like health information) may come to the reader at a time when she is feeling worried, or distracted. The context may make it hard to understand the message clearly the first time.

What makes material hard to read and understand — who decides?

It's important for you to develop your ability to analyse material, and to encourage people in community programs and agencies to do so as well. However, the best people to tell you what's hard to read will always be the people who are developing their reading skills. Whenever possible, involve the learners in your programs in assessing materials. Why?

It will boost their confidence and help to break down any negative feelings about print.

It can help learners get over the feeling that print isn't really meant for them, or that because something is written, it must be right.

It tells them that you value their opinion and see them as colleagues in the literacy movement.

It's a good way to introduce information about the community into your program. It provides opportunities for questions and discussion about programs and services.

It helps to put literacy in a wider social context. By helping to create information that makes programs in the community more accessible to people who don't read well, the learners can participate in changing their community.

It makes the final product better, because , the authors, have never experienced problems with reading and writing.

Section Five talks more about how to involve learners and how to use clear language in your programs.

Using readability tests to analyse material

It is possible to use one of several standardized readability tests to estimate how difficult material will be. However, readability tests have many weaknesses. Testing material on the readability scale should be only part of your analysis. <u>And</u>, the results should be taken as only a rough estimate of how difficult the material is. It is much better to be able to look at material from the reader's point of view and identify its strengths and weaknesses.

The following pages describe tools to help you assess your writing:
(a) the Fry readability graph, (b) computer readability programs and (c) the Gobbledegook Detector.

a) The Fry readability graph

The Fry readability graph is one of the easiest standardized tests to use. You can apply it to a text that has as little as 100 words. It can be applied to longer texts by taking three or more samples and averaging the results.

The graph will give you an estimate of the level of education needed to read the text with ease. This readability score can often be useful in persuading a person or organization that their material probably isn't reaching their target audience. However, the graph (like all standardized tests) has limitations. Use it, but know what it can, and cannot, do.

The Fry readability graph cannot tell you any of the following information:

- how the material is written

- how complex the ideas are

- whether or not the content is in a logical order

- whether or not the material makes sense

- whether the vocabulary is appropriate for the audience whether the vocabulary is appropriate for the audience

- whether the grammar is correct

- whether there is gender, class or cultural bias

- whether the design is attractive and helps or hinders the reader

- whether the material appears in a form and type style that is easy or hard to read

How to use the readability graph

1. Start at the beginning of a sentence and count out 100 words. A word is any group of symbols with a space on either side. The following would all be counted as words — Joe, UIC, 1945, &, etc.

2. Count the number of sentences in the 100 word passage. If the passage ends in the middle of a sentence, estimate the length of the last sentence to the nearest tenth (e.g. 2.3, 4.5)

3. Count the number of syllables in the 100 word passage. The number of syllables corresponds to the number of beats you hear when you say the word aloud. Generally there are as many syllables as there are vowel sounds. For numbers and short forms, count one syllable for each symbol (e.g. 1945 = four syllables, & = one)

4. On the graph, find the number of sentences (side) and the number of syllables (top). Mark the spot where the two lines intersect. This is the approximate grade level of the passage.

5. Repeat for two (or more) samples in a long document. Take the average of at least three assessments as the average reading level required for the document.

6. If the lines meet in the grey area, the measurement is not accurate. Try again with another passage.
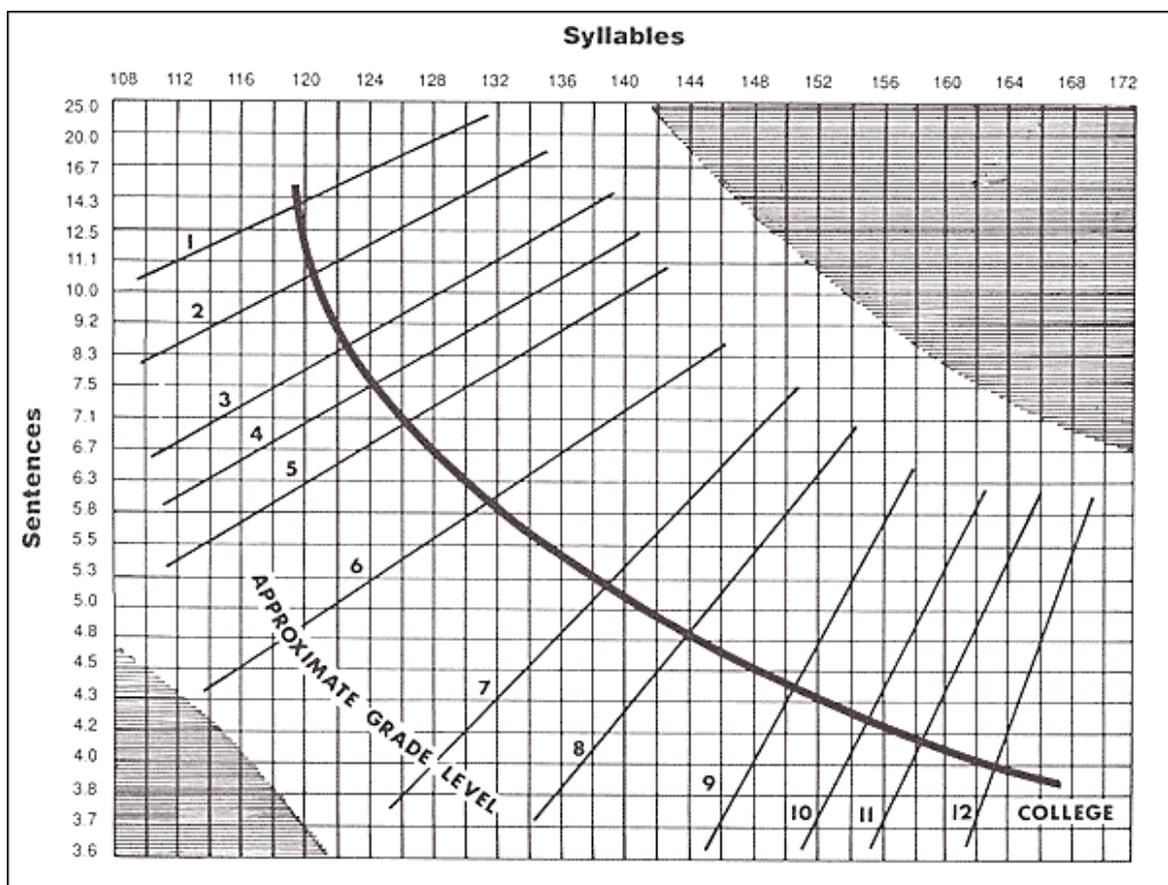
(b) Computer readability programs/grammar checkers

Word processing programs such as Word and WordPerfect now allow you to check grammar and style as well as spelling. Grammar and style checkers use several standardized tests to assess the reading level of a text. They will also identify grammatical errors, complex sentences and passive construction. Some also give suggestions to improve your writing, although they have been known to make grammatical errors.

Learn how to use your grammar and style checker effectively. It can help you identify patterns in your writing that you may not be aware of (for example, long sentences, frequent use of jargon). Most programs can be adjusted to suit your target audience and the writing style you prefer. Using this tool periodically will help you gauge your progress in applying plain writing techniques.

Remember that these programs are only a tool—you must still be a critical editor of your own writing.

(C) The Gobbledegook Detector

For a quick check on the number of complex words, and the average number of words per sentence, you can use the Gobbledegook Detector. It won't give you a graded assessment, and therefore may not be useful to convince anyone to revise their material. But some people find it helpful as a guide for their own writing. The Gobbledegook Detector was developed by Cy Whitely when he worked for the Law Reform Commission of Canada.

How to use the Gobbledegook Detector

1. Count every word and write the number in the square box.

2. Count the sentences and write the number on the line below "Sentence". If there is more than one paragraph, put the number on the line below "Para".

3. Divide the number of words by the number of sentences and write the average number of words per sentence in the space at the left. Aim for an average of 15—20. Avoid sentences over 30 words in length.

4. Analyse the number of syllables in the words that you use. Count "ed" endings even if they are not sounded. Enter the number of words in the proper circle under "Syllables per word".

5. The more words that have three or more syllables, the more difficult the writing will be.

(Adapted from **Broken Words — Why five million Canadians are illiterate.** Southam Newspaper Group, 1987.)

What is a "good" reading level?

The appropriate reading level depends on the audience you are writing for. A technical article written for people with specialized training could be written at a higher level than an information pamphlet for the general public. Know your audience!

Some general guidelines	Fry levels
Specialized information for informed audience	9 — college
Material written for the general public	6 — 8
Material written for general public including people whose first language is not English	5—6

Most newspapers are written in the grade 6 — 8 range, but include articles that are more difficult.

In a pamphlet or booklet, try to write at a consistent level. If some information is more important, make it stand out by using highlighting or a different layout.

In a newsletter or newspaper, try to include at least one article per page that is easier to read. It will encourage your readers to keep reading through the whole paper.

What makes material hard to read and understand? — some examples of things to avoid

Example 1

environmental issues and dedicated to the eradica-tion of poverty. The future depends on the col-lective strength of the union movement to achieve these goals. It is a vi-sion which says that build-ing and improving our abil-ity to care for each other doesn't mean giving up prosperity. It simply means that prosperity shouldn't belong to a gree-dy few. We could have – and must strive to achieve – a nation where equality and justice mean more than the bottom line of a ledger

- justified type creates holes in the text
- hyphenated words are hard to follow

Example 2

WILL THE AMENDED ACT RESTRICT VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION TO ONLY THOSE WORKERS WHO ARE RECEIVING TEMPORARY BENEFITS AT THE TIME OF THEIR APPLICATION?

No. Any worker who is receiv-ing or has received temporary benefits following an injury is eligible for the vocational rehabilitation provisions of the Bill.

- using all capitals creates a dense block of text

Example 3

No one unclean in person or dress being offensive to others shall be allowed to remain in the building. Bare feet and bare torsos are prohibited.

- tone
- language

Example 4

Total income of the family is the gross sum of that reported by both parents for income tax purposes during the previous calendar year, together with any income reported for income tax purposes as having been received by the child.

- length of sentence
- complex structure

Example 5

A spouse is either of a man or a woman who, at the time of death of the one who was the worker, was married to or were cohabitating.

- confusing structure
- language

Example 5 Idioms

come to a head	half-baked
back on the rails	blind-sided
lip service	give a hand
down time	man-made

- The meaning of idioms is different and more complex than the simple words they use.

Example 7

> **Nouns made from verbs**
> - reduction
> - demolition
> - disinfestation
> - deinstitutionalization

✏ Nouns made from verbs are difficult because they are both complex and abstract. Readers must break the word down to its root in order to discover the meaning. That can be hard work for new readers.

Example 8

> **Word strings**
> - events project management
> - assault injury rates
> - lowest denominator benchmarks
> - four season non-extractive tourist industry

✏ Word strings are another kind of puzzle for the reader. You have to reorganize (and usually add) words before the phrase makes sense (e.g. the rate of injury from assaults).

Dear Sir/Madam:

In regard to the allowance you are receiving under the *Family Benefits Act*, we require a report every year to verify your circumstances.

This has traditionally been done by a visit from a field worker. We are now asking that you complete the attached form and return it immediately in the envelope enclosed.

Please read the instructions on the reverse side of this letter before completing the form. It is meant to assist you in answering the questions. Should you have any questions regarding this form, you may call our local office.

A reminder, that it is your responsibility to report any changes to ensure you are receiving your correct entitlement. Should any change in your circumstances occur following the mailing date of this report, you must advise your field worker.

Please retain this instruction sheet for future reference.

Thank you,

Example 9

Difficulties

- very small type
- this is a very important letter but it doesn't say so
- must read instructions on the back first — buried in the middle of the letter
- nothing tells the reader to turn the page
- first instruction on back does not correspond to the first question on the form

Section 1: Marital Status

Please check the appropriate box. If you answer 'yes' to this question, please give the full name and date of birth of your spouse.

Section 2: Assets

Include all bank accounts, credit union accounts, vehicles, etc. If you have bonds or stocks, note the type and their current value.

Section 3: Income

You must list all income received by you, including income from roomers and boarders.

Section 4: Hospitalization

Please indicate if you(or your spouse if applicable) have been hospitalized for more than 30 continuous days since the last report.

Section 5: Absence from Ontario

Report any absence in excess of 30 continuous days.

Section 6: If your doctor has prescribed a special diet, we may in some cases provide additional funds to assist you. We require the name and address of your doctor which will allow us to assess the diet costs.

Section 7 Living Arrangements

Fill in either A or B or C. If you complete Section B, please send us a rent receipt.
**Note: If you pay your own heating costs, please send us a fuel statement or fuel receipts for the past 12 months.
Any other person sharing your home must be listed.

Boxes E and F refer to additional Real Estate you may own. If you answer 'yes' provide description and market value in Section B and whether you intend to sell this property.

If you have sold, purchased or transferred any property not previously reported, please provide details in Section B.

Section 8: Comments

You may use this section to provide additional information or to bring to our attention any questions or concerns.

Section 9: Declarations

Before completing this section, please review the entire report. Ensure that all sections are completed and that the information is accurate. When you have done this, please sign the form. If you are married and living with your spouse, he/she must also sign this form. List your telephone number, date you completed the form. Attach any receipts and return the information to us in the enclosed envelope.

If you are a Trustee, thank you for completing this form for our client.

Please sign your name where indicated.

Example 9
(back)

Effects of Chronic Exposure

This subsection indicates the effects of repeated overexposure to the material over a long period of time. These effects may be felt months or years afterwards. (Exposure here may be at or above the allowable limits.)

E.g.
Chronic exposure to n-hexane may produce numbness, tingling in the hands and feet and weakness in the arms and thighs.
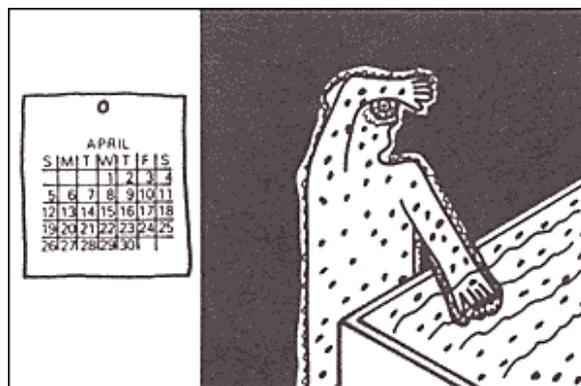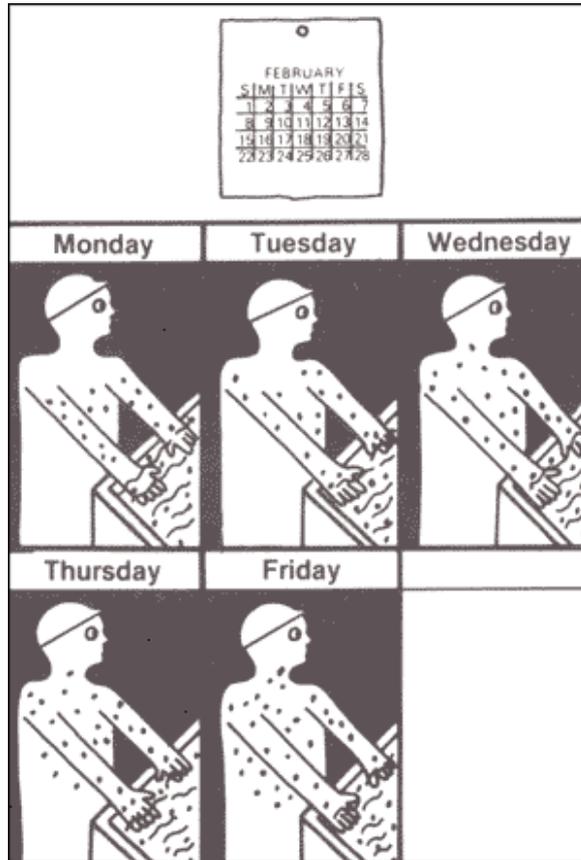
Example 10

Difficulties

- graphic
- hard to understand
- not attractive
- gives misleading information
- does not illustrate the example given

Example 11

Difficulties

- important message in small type, block caps — does not stand out
- small type for whole form
- not enough space to write

Worker's Report of Injury or Disease form — Workers' Compensation Board, Commission des accidents du travail, 2 Bloor Street East, Toronto, Ontario M4W 3C3.

Section Three

Tips to improve your writing

Step One — Plan

1. Decide the purpose of the information you are going to give.

- Who needs to know it? Why?
- When will they need to know it?
- What do you hope they will do?

2. Identify your audience — find out as much about them as possible.

- If you can, work with a group of typical readers to find out what they want to know about the subject. This is where literacy groups can play an important role.

- If it's not possible to work with a group from the beginning, make arrangements to have some new readers review the material while it's still in the draft stages. Don't wait until it's ready for print to ask for comments.

3. Decide what is the essential information and stick to it.

- It is easier to understand and remember short pieces of information. But, make sure that all the necessary details are included.

4. Organize the information clearly in a logical order.

- Think about the questions that someone new to the subject would likely have, and the steps they would go through to understand.

5. Think carefully about how to present the information.

- Consider using questions and answers, checklists or charts.

- Consider what illustrations could be used to explain the text.

- Consider whether more than one language is needed. How can they be presented so they won't confuse the reader.

6. Be prepared to go through several drafts.

- Sometimes it helps to get your ideas down first in the language and style you are comfortable with. You can change the language and writing style in later drafts.

Step Two — Write

1. It's important to get the beginning right.

- The title or heading must interest the readers and give them a context for the information.

- Imagine that the reader may read only the title and sub-titles. Try to highlight the main points in a complete idea.

- Don't be surprised if you have to write the titles last. Sometimes you have to see the finished piece before you know what the best title will be.

- The main idea should be near the beginning. If you want your readers to do something, they should know it immediately. Consider highlighting this information with bold type, a different set-up or a box.

2. Try to write as if you are explaining your points to a group of typical readers.

- Imagine your readers know almost nothing about your subject. Proceed in the order that will be logical for them.

- Use a friendly, conversational tone. Use I, we and you whenever possible.

3. Choose familiar words and phrases.

- Write in the way your audience might speak. It's fine to use contractions (don't instead of do not), or a preposition at the end of a sentence.

- Avoid jargon and technical language. If some technical terms are necessary, define them in the text or in a glossary.

- Always use the complete version of an acronym or short form the first time it appears. The acronym can follow in brackets if it's important for the reader to know it.

- Repeat key words in the same form to help the reader become familiar with them.

- Avoid nouns made from verbs (called nominalizations — for example — protection, isolation, immunization). It's better to revise the sentence so that you use the verb to emphasize the action.

- Avoid abstract language, idioms or images that depend on readers having a common background.

- Watch for language that demonstrates gender, class or cultural bias.

- Avoid long strings of words and other forms of padding. You'll find some examples, with their simple alternatives, in Section Four.

4. Vary the length of sentences but avoid sentences that are too long (over 30 words).

- Twenty words is a good average. Don't leave out important words like "a, the, or that" just to make the sentence shorter.

- Use questions, lists or point form to highlight important information and vary the look of the text.

5. Construct sentences simply with one or two clauses to a sentence.

- Introduce only one new piece of information per sentence.

- Try to put the subject and verb close to the beginning of the sentence. That helps to complete the idea sooner and makes it easier for the reader to remember.

- Try to follow the usual English word order of — Subject, Verb, Object — but don't make every sentence the same. Some variety will make the text more interesting.

- Use the active form of a verb instead of the passive — "I have decided" instead of "It has been decided".

6. Help your reader follow your writing.

- Use sub-titles and short paragraphs. Use numbered points to organize information.

- Use examples to illustrate your points.

- Use words like — "so, that means, on the other hand" — to help your reader follow the information.

- Use parallel construction for comparable ideas. For example — begin all items in a list with the verb (as we have done in this list).

7. Use basic punctuation like commas and periods.

- A sentence that needs several commas or a semi-colon usually includes more than one idea. Breaking it up into two (or more) sentences will make it easier.

- Brackets can be used for explanation or examples. Dashes can be used for emphasis. Avoid using brackets or dashes to introduce a new idea into the middle of a sentence.

- If a point form list includes single ideas, there is no need for punctuation after each point. While it is grammatically correct to use semi-colons, they are confusing to new readers.

- Avoid using a hyphen to break up a word at the end of a line. Instead, use a ragged right hand margin for the text.

Step Three — Revise

1. Read the text aloud or have someone else read it.

Does it make sense? Does it sound friendly? Is it written in the way your readers might speak?

2. Watch for:

Complex sentences:
- a lot of words before the subject
- a lot of words between the subject and verb
- 'there is' or 'there are' at the beginning
- passive structure

Difficult language:
- jargon or technical language
- language that shows gender or cultural bias

Material that could be left out or presented graphically (e.g. point form, charts).

3. Test the material with a group of typical readers, if possible. Be sure to allow yourself enough time to incorporate their comments.

Step Four — Plan the layout and design

1. Consider how the material will be used before you decide on a format and design.

Consider using a booklet format or a heavier weight paper for material you hope your reader will keep.

Design pamphlets so they can be displayed in a rack.

If more than one language is required, consider separate pamphlets, or a design that clearly distinguishes between the languages.

2. Choose a design that complements the organization of information and helps the reader find his or her way through the text.

If possible, use a single panel of a pamphlet, or a whole page in a booklet, for one kind of information. Don't start something new at the bottom of a page.

Make important information stand out by using highlighting such as bold type or a different layout.

- Be sure that information that appears in a box makes sense all by itself. The reader may choose to only read this information.

- In a newsletter or newspaper, try to include at least one item per page that is easier to read. This helps to keep the reader going from page to page through the whole publication.

3. Choose type that is clear and easy to read.

- A serif typeface used here (with 'hooks' on each letter) makes text more readable because it leads your eye from letter to letter. A sans serif typeface (see the main titles) is good for titles since it leads your eye down into the body of the text. Don't use more than two or three different typefaces in one document, and use the styles consistently. (for example, one for titles and sub-titles, one for text).

- Choose a type size that is large enough for easy reading. Choose 12 — 13 point type for single columns, 10 — 12 point type for two or three columns. Titles and sub-titles can be larger, but use a consistent size for the same type of information.

- Use upper and lower case instead of all capitals. Avoid using capitals for each word in a title.

- Avoid typestyles that are condensed, expanded or difficult to read (e.g. italics).

- Bold type is good for highlighting important information in the text.

4. Make sure that illustrations or graphics are placed with the text and help to explain it.

- Graphics should not be used only for decoration. They should help the reader understand the text. They should also make sense all by themselves.

- Make sure that drawings and photographs are clear and that captions can be read easily.

- Make sure that illustrations do not interrupt normal reading patterns. For example, don't place the text so that the reader has to "jump over" a photograph.

5. Consider the length of the lines, the style of margins, and the spacing of the text.

- Lines that are too short — less than 50 characters, and lines that are too long — more than 70 characters, can be confusing for the reader.

- Type that is justified on both sides (giving a straight right hand margin) often makes big spaces between words or letters. Many words will be hyphenated to make the lines even.

⌦ Type that is centred (ragged on both sides) doesn't show the reader where sentences begin and end. It looks like each line is a sentence by itself.

⌦ The layout that is easiest to read is type that has a straight left margin and a ragged (or unjustified) right margin.

⌦ Long lines and bold type need more space between lines.

Appendix One — Six Graphics Guidelines — gives more detailed information about layout and design for clear writing.

Section Four

Some Good Examples

Example One is from **Taking Care**, by Mary J. Breen. It uses question and answer format, and clear everyday language. The numbered list and bold type highlight the four ways that AIDS can be spread.

Example Two is from the Canadian Legal Information Council. It is an excellent example of a legally binding contract written in straightforward language. It could be used as is or adapted for your own situation.

Example Three was produced by the Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington Health Unit. The titles and sub-titles are clear and highlight important information. Every community has a letter like this that is sent home from the school. Perhaps your local health unit would like to adapt this text for their own use.

Example Four is from **Is Work Making You Sick?** published by the Labour Occupational Health Program, University of California at Berkeley, 1989. It shows how to produce material effectively in two languages. Each page is complete, and the photos provide the cue to tell a new reader that the information is being repeated.

Example Five shows you how to set up a glossary if you must use technical terms in the text. It is taken from **What you need to know about Unemployment Insurance**, Employment and Immigration Canada, 1988.

Example Six shows you the original and two revised versions of an important letter. Note the following changes:
⌦ the legal language has been removed
⌦ the information has been reorganized
⌦ the most important information has been placed at the beginning so the reader knows what he or she must do.
Example Six - Typset Version shows how a change in typestyle and professional layout improves the letter further.

Example 1

AIDS.

"What is AIDS?"
AIDS is a disease caused by a virus. This virus attacks your body's immune system. Your immune system is very important because it fights diseases. A person with AIDS has a hard time fighting off diseases. They become sick very easily. They often get pneumonia or cancer, and usually they die of one of these diseases.

AIDS is very dangerous. There is no cure for AIDS, and at present, there is no vaccine to protect you from getting it. Most people who get AIDS die from it.

"How do I get AIDS?"
When a person is infected with AIDS, the AIDS virus is in their blood and in their semen. it is also found in smaller amounts in their vaginal fluid, tears, saliva and breast milk.

AIDS is spread when the virus from an infected
person gets into another person's blood. This usually happens in one of these ways:

1. Unsafe Sex. AIDS is usually spread by having unsafe sex with an infected person. This is the most common way that AIDS is spread.
2. Drug Needles. AIDS is also spread by sharing drug needles and syringes with infected people. Injecting drugs into the veins is often called "shooting up".
3. Pregnancy. AIDS can be spread from an infected pregnant mother to her baby.
4. Blood Transfusions. AIDS can be spread by infected blood during a blood transfusion. However, all blood in Canada is now tested for AIDS. Therefore, now there is very little danger of getting AIDS in a transfusion.

AIDS cannot be caught in everyday situations. It is not spread through air, water, food, or ordinary body contact. You cannot get AIDS by holding hands or hugging. You can't get AIDS by taking care of an infected person. You can't get AIDS from toilet' seats or swimming pools. You can't get AIDS while giving blood.

Example 2

Cityhome Tenancy Agreement
Market Value

This is a lease between you, the tenant(s)

_____

_____

**and Cityhome (City of Toronto Non-Profit Housing Corporation).
If there is more than one tenant 'you' means all tenants.**

We are renting you the premises at

_____ Suite Number _____

and parking space at

_____ Space Number_____

The lease begins on _____	The rent for the premises is _____
The lease ends on _____	The rent for the parking space is _____
	Your total rent is _____ ◀
	Payable to Cityhome in advance on the first of every month.

▶ Cityhome will provide the appliances ticked below:
  ☐ refrigerator   ☐ cooking stove

▶ Cityhome will provide and pay for the services ticked below:
  ☐ electricity   ☐ hot water
  ☐ heat   ☐ cable TV

▶ If the premises are not ready by the agreed date, you have two options:
You can cancel this lease and Cityhome will repay the one month's rent you have deposited,

OR

You can sign a new lease when the premises are ready. The new lease will end on the same date as this one.

▶ If there is more than one tenant you have joint and several responsibility. This means that each of you is fully responsible for complying with the terms of the lease. For example, if one of you does not pay his or her share of the rent, the other(s) must make up the difference.

▶ You do not have the right to assign (transfer) this lease or sublet the premises or any part of the premises.

▶ You may use the premises only as a residence, not for business purposes.

▶ If there is nothing in the premises on the day the rent is due we will assume you have moved and will rent to a new tenant.

▶ If you are going to leave at the end of the lease you must give us 60 days notice in writing.

▶ You agree to abide by all the terms of the lease.

City of Toronto Non-Profit Housing Corporation ▷ _____
                                                    Property Manager

Tenant _____   Witness _____

Tenant _____   Witness _____

I have received a signed copy of this lease. _____ Date _____
(Tenant)

Example 3

Head Lice: What Everyone Needs to Know

Anyone can get head lice.
Head lice are tiny insects that live on the human head. They lay small eggs called flits. The flits are firmly attached to the hair, and are found close to the scalp. Any person can get head lice. Long hair, cleanliness and living conditions do not cause head lice.

Lice spread quickly.
Most often head lice spread to other people by crawling from one head to another. We see lice more often in children because they are usually in direct contact with each other while playing or in school. Lice do not jump or fly. They can also be spread by sharing such things as hats, scarves or combs. Often, the first sign of lice is itching and scratching. Lice multiply quickly and spread easily. Early treatment is important

Check your children weekly.
All parents must check their children's hair weekly.
Look close to the scalp
    — behind the ears
    — the back of the neck
    — top of the head.

Illustration is included.

What to look for.
• One of the first signs is itching and scratching the head.
• Adult lice are hard to see (1/8" long).
• The flits (eggs) are easier to see.
• Nits are firmly attached to the hair close to the scalp.
• Nits are greyish-white in colour and oval in shape.

How to check.
• Spend at least five (5) minutes weekly checking each child.
• Good lighting is important.
• Look for nits by parting hair in small sections going from one side of the head to the other. Check carefully   close to the scalp.
• Nits may look like dandruff but cannot be flicked off.

Example 3 continued

How to Get Rid of Head lice

Check all family members before treatment.
Do not treat anyone with a head lice product unless you find lice or flits in their hair. All family members (adults and children) must be checked if one member has head lice.

Treat only family members who have head lice.

1. Get a treatment for head lice. A prescription is not needed. Many doctors recommend NIX, a creme rinse. NIX or other newer products are more effective than older ones.
2. Head lice products should not be used by pregnant women, children under two, or people with irritated skin, unless advised by a doctor.
3. Follow the directions on the product. Do not leave the product in the hair longer than directed. Rinse the hair well after the treatment.
4. Remove flits from the hair after treatment either with tweezers or between the thumb and finger nail. Put the nits in a bag, tie it up and throw it out.
5. If live lice or new nits are found at least seven (7) days after the first treatment, a second treatment may be given.

Finish the treatment with this checklist.

- Collect all clothes, towels and bed linens used in the last two days by the person with head lice. Wash them in very hot water.

- Clothes which cannot be washed may be dry cleaned or put in the hot cycle of a clothes dryer for at least 20 minutes. Non-washable items should be put in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks.

- Combs and brushes should be cleaned by soaking them in the head lice product or in lysol. Never share combs, brushes or hats.

- Vacuum carpets and furniture thoroughly.

- Check all family members daily over the next two weeks.

Example 4

What Can I Do About It?

Listen to your body. Dangerous chemicals may cause headaches, upset stomach or dizziness, You need to act *right* away.

• Open a window or go where there is fresh air.

• Ask for safety equipment like gloves or a respirator from your boss. Learn how to use the equipment.

• Locate emergency showers and eye washes.

¿Qué Puedo Hacer Acerca De Esto?

Escuche lo que le dice su cuerpo. Los productos químicos peligrosos pueden causar dolores de cabeza, dolor de estómago o mureos, Usted necesita actuar *enseguida*.

• Abra las ventanas o diríjase hacia donde haya aire fresco.

• Pídale a su patrón equipo protector como lo son los guantes o respirador. Aprenda a usar el equipo.

• Localice regaderas de emergencia y fuentes para el enjuague de los ojos.

Example 5

Unemployment insurance terms: what do they really mean?

It's a specialist's language, like the language of the law. It has exact meanings. At first, it's confusing. To understand what UI terms are all about, here's a handy glossary.

Administrative penalty — This is a money penalty of three times your weekly benefit rate. It may be imposed by an insurance agent when a false or misleading statement has knowingly been made in a claim for benefit.
If the false or misleading statement resulted in an overpayment it must be repaid in full. And the penalty must be paid too. If false or misleading statements are made more than once, on claimants' reports, for example, then there could be more than one penalty.

Agent — An agent is an insurance officer who makes decisions about the payment or non-payment of benefits.

Appeal — You have the right to challenge any decision made by a UI agent about your claim. The appeal process to the Board of Referees and the Umpire is free.

Average weekly insurable earnings — Your agent, using your Record(s) of Employment, will take the average of your insurable earnings in the *last 20 weeks you worked* in your qualifying period (or all weeks of insurable employment, if less than 20).
You'll get 60 per cent of this as your *weekly benefit rate*. Income tax is deducted from this amount.

Benefit period — A benefit period is 52 weeks. But everyone has a two-week waiting period. So the longest anyone can collect UI is 50 weeks. The number of weeks you can collect depends on how long you worked before you lost your job and the rate of unemployment in the area where you ordinarily live.

Benefit rate — You'll get 60 per cent of your average weekly insurable earnings. It's a taxable income.

Benefits — That's what we call the money you get from UI.

Board of Referees — This is a three-person group, independent from UI, made up of a chairperson and members representing employees and employers. It reviews agents' decisions when you appeal. It can change an agent's decision.

Claimant - This means you as soon as you apply for UI.

Investigation Control Officers — These are trained investigators. They verify the facts on a claim for benefits and statements made by claimants. They cannot make decisions on claims. They present all the facts to UI agents who decide on cases.

Claimant's report — This is a computer form which you fill out and send to UI — usually every two weeks. It's a key document in making sure you get your money on time.

Disentitlement — This means you can't get UI benefits because you do not meet one or more conditions of eligibility. For example, if you're not available for work or don't actively

look for work, you could be disentitled — for a day, a week or indefinitely — as long as the condition exists.

Disqualification — This means UI benefits are withheld for up to six weeks. A disqualification can be imposed if you lose your job for misconduct or you voluntarily leave your job.
It could be imposed if you turn down a suitable job when it's offered, if you refuse to apply for suitable work, or if you don't attend a training course arranged by our employment services. For reasons like these, a UI agent can prevent benefits being paid for up to six weeks.

Example 6
Original Version

NOTICE TO WITNESS

You have been served with a Summons to Witness to compel your attendance at a hearing before the Workers' Compensation Board (the "Board") at the location, date, and time indicated on the summons to give evidence.

Pursuant to section 81(a) of the Workers' Compensation Act (the "Act") the Board has the power to summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses and to compel them to give oral or written evidence under oath in the same manner as a court of record in civil cases.

If you fail to attend without lawful excuse you may have contempt proceedings commenced against you in the Supreme Court of Ontario.

The attendance money that has been served with the summons is to facilitate your attendance at the hearing. If as a result of your attending the hearing you incur a loss of wages or salary, you may be entitled to an additional payment subject to the limits and guidelines in effect from time to time.

If you have any questions regarding the summons or your attendance before the Board, please contact:

Supervisor, Administrative Services
Review Services
2 Bloor Street East
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 2V1

Tel: 416-927-4150
Toll Free: 1-800-387-0050
Fax: 416-927-4146

Example 6
Revised Version

<u>IMPORTANT</u>

You must appear as a witness at a hearing of the
Workers' Compensation Board.

The attached summons tells you where and when.

Please read these two pages carefully right away.

Information for witnesses

1. The law says all witnesses must attend.

   Under the Workers' Compensation Act (section 61a), the
   Workers' Compensation Board has the same powers as a court.
   It investigates accidents that happen on the job. If you are
   summoned as a witness, you must attend the hearing and give
   your evidence under oath.

   It is against the law to miss this hearing without a lawful
   reason. You can be charged with contempt of court. If you
   have a lawful reason why you can't attend, you must advise the
   Board as soon as possible.

2. You may have to miss work.

   You must appear at the time and place listed on the attached
   summons and stay as long as you are needed.

3. Your expenses will be paid.

   The money attached to the summons is to cover your expenses to
   attend the hearing. If you lose any pay for the time you are
   a witness, the Board may also pay part or all of your wages or
   salary up to a maximum set by the Board.

4. If you have questions

   Please contact:

   Supervisor, Administrative Services
   Review Services
   2 Bloor Street East
   Toronto, Ontario
   M4W 3C3

   Tel:416-927-4150
   Toll Free:1-800-387-0050
   Fax:416-927-4146

   Plain Writing Services
   Dec. 89   613-726-0553

Example 6
Typeset Version

Important

You must appear as a witness at a hearing
of the Worker's Compensation Board.
The attached summons tells you where and when.
Please read these two pages carefully right away.

Information for witnesses

1. The law says all witnesses must attend.
Under the Workers' Compensation Act (Section 81a), the Workers' Compensation Board has the same powers as a court. It investigates accidents that happen on the job. If you are summoned as a witness, you must attend the hearing and give your evidence under oath.

It is against the law to miss this hearing without a lawful reason. You can be charged with contempt of court. If you have a lawful reason why you can't attend, you must advise the Board as soon as possible.

2. You may have to miss work.
You must appear at the time and place listed on the attached summons and stay as long as you are needed.

3. Your expenses will be paid.
The money attached to the summons is to cover your expenses to attend the hearing. If you lose any pay for the time you are a witness, the Board may also pay part or all of your wages or salary.

4. If you have questions
Please Contact: Supervisor, Administrative Services
Review Services
Workers' Compensation Board
2 Bloor Street East
Toronto, Ontario M5W 2V1
Telephone: 416-927-4150 (Toronto calls)
Toll Free: 1-800-387-0050 (Long distance calls)
Fax: 416-927-4146

Choose your words carefully!

Words that are familiar to your readers are easier to read and to remember. Whenever possible, use simple, familiar words instead of formal or difficult language. Avoid stock phrases and padded expressions. The list below gives some examples of how you can simplify your writing, but remember that these words aren't the only ones to avoid. Add your own "pet peeves"!

Avoid	Use
accompany	go with
accomplish	do
advise	tell
adequate number	enough
afford an opportunity	let, allow
anticipate	expect
approximately	about
assist	help
attached herewith is	here is
at the present time	now
commence	start
components	parts
conclude	end, finish
concur	agree
consequently	as a result, so
co-operate	help
critically evaluated	evaluated
demonstrate	show
endeavour	try
exhibit	show
facilitate	help
failed to	didn't
forward	send
has the capability	can, is able
identical	same
implement	begin, start
indicate	show
initial	first
institute	start, begin
interface	talk, discuss
in the absence of	without
in the event that	if
locate	find
maintain	keep
modify	change
notify	tell
on the basis of	by, from
participate	take part
permit	let

Avoid	Use
practitioner	worker
prior to	before
provided that	if
purchase	buy
relating to	about
request	ask
retain	keep
state	tell
subsequent	later, next
sufficient	enough
terminate	end
the manner in which	how
transpire	happen
until such time	until
utilize	use
with a view to	to
with reference to	about, concerning
with respect to	on, about
witnessed	saw

Section Five

Clear Writing and Advocacy

Public information should be clear and easy to read

Advocates of clear writing are most concerned about public information — information that everybody needs and has a right to know. That includes information about health, safety, the law, public services, individual rights, workplace rules or community programs. It includes information about groups and organizations that have an important role in the community — consumer organizations, lobby groups, political parties, even literacy programs.

Public information that is hard to read and understand reinforces the isolation of people who have reading problems.

- It assumes that everyone will be able to use the information as it is presented. It ignores more than six million people, and denies their right to be as informed as the rest of the population.

- It prevents people from getting information that may be essential for their health, safety, or legal rights.

- It excludes people from participating in community programs and services by not informing them in an appropriate way that the programs are available and open to them. By excluding more than 30% of the population, it also undercuts the effectiveness of community programs.

Complex writing can be used to obscure or confuse ideas. Clear writing can help clarify policies, and may raise important questions about the effects of these policies for people who don't read well.

When public information is written clearly and presented in a way that is attractive and easy to read, it reduces one barrier that prevents people from taking part in their community When everyone can find out what they have to do, and learn about things they might like to do, there is a greater chance they will take part.

By producing public information that is clear and easy to understand, we acknowledge that many people do not read easily. We recognize that they are a part of our society, and that they have an equal right to be informed.

Clear writing promotes public awareness about literacy

Material that is easy to read complements the efforts of community literacy programs to help people develop their reading and writing skills. First, it provides relevant and topical information that can be used as teaching material in our literacy programs. Second, it's a very practical way for people in the community to "do something" about literacy within their own offices and organizations.

Clear writing is a good starting place for literacy organizations to begin talking to other groups in the community about literacy. Many groups have never considered that they may be excluding people from their activities because of the way they present themselves in print. Their pamphlets, newsletters and other printed material may only be useful for an exclusive, well-educated audience, even though they hope to reach the general public.

When an organization accepts clear writing as a principle, and begins to use it, they have taken an important step. They have recognized that they have the power to inform or exclude people by the way they write. The decision to use clear writing and good design is a decision to try and reach as many people as possible. The reasons for doing this may vary — but the effect is the same. People who don't read well have a better chance of finding out what they need or want to know.

What is the role of literacy organizations?

1. Advocacy

Because literacy organizations are directly involved with adult learners, they can be the best advocates for clear writing. Literacy organizations can:

- Make links between learners and community organizations to help those organizations find out what learners want or need to know.

- Develop community awareness that clear writing benefits every person who doesn't read well, not only those who take part in literacy programs.

- Help community organizations learn how to write material that is clear and easy to read, by acting as consultants or referring them to others who do training workshops.

- Encourage community organizations to look at all the places they expect people to use reading to get information, including the forms and signs they use.

- Get learners involved in assessing materials from community groups for clear writing.

- Get learners involved in developing easy to read materials.

- Work with community organizations to find funding to produce easy to read materials.

- Publicize good examples of clear writing through your own newsletter or the OLC newsletter so that other literacy groups can benefit.

- Help to establish a clear writing interest group within your community.

- Be advocates for clear writing in all public education material.

- Be advocates for clear writing within your own program.

2. Changing theory into practice

If literacy organizations are going to be credible as advocates for clear writing, they have a special responsibility to communicate clearly in their own programs. Publicity materials, learning materials, forms, signs, even by-laws and Board minutes, should all be clearly written. This will encourage students to become informed about the organization and its activities, and allow them to participate in a more equal way. They will not be restricted to activities that require little reading and writing, but can be encouraged to take part in all parts of the program.

What is OLC's role?

Besides publishing this booklet, OLC can provide:

- names of consultants who do clear writing training

- information on strategies for funding clear writing

- information on how to find materials listed in the bibliography, and materials that are easy-to-read

- publicity for the materials you create.

The most important role for OLC, however, is as your provincial advocacy organization. OLC is lobbying the provincial government for:

- public information and education materials that are clear and easy to read

- consultation with literacy students and workers on content, style and design of public education materials

- a clear writing policy for all ministries

- training on clear writing and design for all government staff

- funding for community groups to produce materials that are written clearly.

Section 6

For more information

General Information on Literacy in Canada

- **Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada**,
  Statistics Canada, 1997.
  Website: www.statcan.ca

- Calami, Peter, **Broken Words — Why five million Canadians are illiterate**, Southam Newspaper Group, Toronto, 1987.

- Des Laurier, Bob, "Functional Illiteracy in Canadian Business", in **Canadian Business Review**, Winter, 1989.

General Information on Clear Writing

- **Plain Language Clear and Simple**, Canada Communication Group Inc., Ottawa ON.
  $6.95 + GST and shipping
  Tel: 819-956-4800   Toll free: 1-800-635-7943
  Fax: 819-994-1498   E-mail: publications@pwgcs.gc.ca

- **Écrire simplement**, Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en francais (FCAF), Ottawa, ON.
  $15 + taxes and shipping
  Tel: 613-749-5333   E-mail: alpha@fcaf.franco.ca
  Fax: 613-749-2252

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Appendix 1

NOTE: This Appendix was not reproduced to scale.

Simply Stated

Six Graphics Guidelines

In this article, we present six graphics guidelines that the Document Design Center has developed to help writers and graphic artists produce documents that are both visually appealing and easy to read. Good graphics can help readers to overcome resistance to a text or even help them to understand the material more easily.

1. Use highlighting techniques, but don't overuse them.

Highlighting techniques are a way of emphasizing important aspects of your document by calling attention to them visually. Some highlighting techniques are: *boldface, italics, and white space.* The six guidelines are printed in boldface. The list of highlighting techniques in this paragraph is printed in italics. We have used all of those techniques in Simply Stated.

In addition to emphasizing a part of your document, highlighting techniques generally contribute to the attractiveness of your document by providing visual relief in what might otherwise be a uniform page of text.

You can use highlighting techniques to emphasize important points, set off examples from the rest of the text, or set off sections of text by calling attention to headings.

Be careful, however, not to overuse any highlighting technique. If too much of your text is highlighted, the purpose of highlighting will be defeated. For example, if a whole section is in italics, it will not stand out; in fact, it will be more difficult to read than text set in regular type. If too much is in boldface, your text will also become more difficult to read, because the page will look too black and heavy. Also be careful not to use too many different highlighting techniques in one document. This can make your text look cluttered and can lead to confusion. Finally, make sure you are consistent in the way you use a particular technique. For example, if you are going to use boldface for a certain level of heading, be sure always to use it for that level.

2. Use 8 to 10 point type for text.

For most documents, 8 to 10 point type is the most readable size. If your type is too small, your document can look crowded and uninviting. Your readers may skip over text, or they may get eyestrain.

If your type is too large, your text will use more space than it needs too. If you have constraints on space, you may have to cut down on important information. If you choose to add pages to accommodate the large type, it can get expensive. Inappropriately large type can even make a text more difficult to read.

In addition to considering point size (see "Measuring Type."), you must consider the look of the type you choose. Some typefaces look larger than others of the same type size. For example:

This is an example of 10 point Souvenir type.

This is an example of 10 point Avant Garde type.

Simply Stated is set in 10 point Century Schoolbook. See how much more difficult it would be to read if it were set in 6 point type of the same style.

Simply Stated is set in 10 point Century Schoolbook. See how much more difficult it would be to read if it were set in 6 point type of the same style.

3. Avoid making your lines of type too long or too short.

The best line length for most text is 50-70 characters. Experience has shown that this length is less tiring to the eye than either short lines, which make the eye jump back and forth, or long lines, which strain the eye as it tries to stay on course. With either extreme, the eye is likely to jump to another line.

The lines in Simply Stated average about 48 characters. If we were to keep the same type size but lay out Simply Stated in four columns, the line length would be too short. The short lines would make awkward breaks in the text and cause the eye to jerk back and forth. The change would make for uncomfortable reading.

If we were to keep the same type size and lay out Simply Stated all the way across the page, with no column breaks, the long lines would be difficult to follow, and the text would look too densely packed to make pleasant reading. It would even appear to have less leading between the lines. (See "Leading.")

4. Use white space in margins and between sections.

If you use white space well, you can make your document look better and easier to read. The term "white space" refers to any of the blank space on a document, such as the margins and the space between sections, or the space that sets off an example. A text with too little white space can look cramped.

Use white space as an integral element in designing your document, and use it functionally. For example, the white space between sections helps the reader to see how the document is organized. The white space surrounding a title or an example isolates it and emphasizes its importance.

In Simply Stated we use white space to isolate the masthead and the titles of the articles. We leave adequate margins and separate each paragraph from the next with white space. If the margins were narrower and there was no space between paragraphs, the text would look cramped and less inviting.

5. Use ragged right margins.

When all the lines of text begin at a left margin but end at different points on the right, the right margin is "ragged." Simply Stated is set with a ragged right margin.

When the lines all end in the same place, the right margin is even. The text is "justified." This paragraph is justified, or set "flush left" and "flush right." To get the lines to come out even on the right, the typesetter had to put extra spaces between words and letters all along the line.

Many document designers today prefer ragged right margins, because they are less formal than justified text and create a more relaxed, contemporary look that many readers find inviting. Tastes do change, however, and ragged right margins may go out of fashion.

There are practical advantages to ragged right margins, however. Some printers have found that they reduce production costs, because it is easier to make corrections on unjustified type. It is not necessary to change every line in a paragraph in order to add or take out a word in one line. Some readers find that ragged right margins make a text easier to read. When lines end at different places, it is easier for readers to keep their place in the text. They are less likely to go back and reread the same line twice, because the right profile distinguishes one line from another. Also, the eye does not have to adjust to different spacing between letters, as it does with justified type.

6. Avoid using all capital letters.

Some documents use ALL CAPS, or upper-case letters, for emphasis. But ALL CAPS interferes with the legibility of text. We recommend other highlighting techniques instead, such as boldface, italics, or color.

All caps make text harder to read because the shapes of the letters do not vary very much. One of the ways that readers differentiate among letters is by their shape. Lower-case letters have more distinctive shapes than upper-case. Compare the shape of these two sets of words:

FLASHLIGHT | BATTERY

Flashlight battery

When a whole block of text is printed in ALL CAPS, it takes up more space and takes longer to read. Also, the highlighting effect of the upper-case letters is lost because it is overused. See how this paragraph would look in ALL CAPS.

WHEN A WHOLE BLOCK OF TEXT IS PRINTED IN ALL CAPS, IT TAKES UP MORE SPACE AND TAKES LONGER TO READ. ALSO, THE HIGHLIGHTING EFFECT OF THE UPPER-CASE LETTERS IS LOST BECAUSE IT IS OVERUSED. SEE HOW THIS PARAGRAPH WOULD LOOK IN ALL CAPS.

A Typography Primer

In this article, we describe the basic features used in typesetting.

Serif and Sans Serif Type

Type comes in many styles, but there are two basic ones: serif and sans serif. Serif type has short, horizontal strokes that project from the tops and bottoms of the letters. **Simply Stated** is printed in a serif typeface. Serifs enhance the horizontal flow of a line of type, making it easier to read across a line. Serifs also make the individual letters easier to distinguish. Ancient Roman stone cutters used serifs to make their hand cut lettering look more even and horizontal. Serif typefaces are generally considered to be formal and traditional.

Sans serif type is type without serifs. It has a clean, contemporary look, and is generally considered to give an informal feeling. The clean design of sans serif type makes it easy to read, but because it does not have serifs to enhance the horizontal flow, a sans serif typeface requires more space between lines of type than a serif typeface of the same size.

serif   Typography

sans serif   Typography

Families of Type

Most styles of type are available in six different versions. The *style* is the same, but the letters vary in thickness, width, or slant. For example, here are six versions of Helios, a sans serif typeface.

Light	typography
Regular	typography
Bold	**typography**
Condensed	typography
Extended	typography
Italic	*typography*

These six versions form a "family" of type. If you want to emphasize individual words or short passages, you can use bold or italic type of the same family as the rest of your text. Titles can be in a larger size of the same face. (See "Measuring Type.") You can mix light, regular, bold, and italic type, as long as they are in the same family. But do not mix condensed or extended type with regular type; the shapes of the letters differ too much to look good together. In addition, condensed and extended faces have their own families of light, bold, and italic.

Measuring Type

Graphic artists work with two basic measurements: *picas* and *points*. They use picas to measure the length of a line or the width of a column. There are six picas to an inch, twelve points to a pica, and 72 points to an inch.

Inch   0   1
Points | | | | | |
Picas 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Points are used to measure the size of the type itself—the individual letters. Typefaces are identified by *point size* and *style;* for example, Simply Stated is printed in 10 point Century Schoolbook. The point size measures the whole letter, including *ascenders* (the tops of the "T" and the "h") and *descenders* (the tails of the "y" and the "p.")

Point Size | Typography | X-Height

Graphic artists also speak of the "x-height" of a letter. This is the height of the body of the letter *without* ascenders or descenders, or the

height of a small letter like an "x." When you are choosing a type size, it is important to consider the "x" height of your typeface. Although two different styles of type may both be 9 point, one may have a smaller "x-height" than the other. If you choose that face, you might need to go up to a 10 point size to get as readable a text as you would with a 9 point size and a larger "x-height." "X-height" will also influence how much space or "leading" you need between lines of type. (See "Leading.")

Leading

The space between lines of type is called *leading*. This term derives from the practice of setting hot metal type. When the type is set, strips of lead are laid between the lines of type. Although phototypesetting is more common than hot metal today, graphic artists still use the term "leading" to describe the spacing between lines. The leading, like the type itself, is measured in points. A text set in 10 point type with 11 point leading is said to be set "10 on 11," or "10/11." Simply Stated is set 10/11.

The amount of leading you use can affect the legibility of your text. If your text is *set solid*,

with no extra space between lines, it will look heavy and difficult to read. If you put in too much leading, your lines of type will appear to drift apart, making it difficult for the reader to follow the text.

Features of the type will affect your leading. Very small type and bold type require extra leading to relieve the density of the text. Sans serif type requires more leading than serif type of the same size, because it does not have serifs to carry the horizontal flow of the line and establish a clean break between lines. Long lines require more leading than short lines in the same typesize; the extra leading helps the reader to follow across the long lines.

Look how much easier it is to read this passage in 7 point type when it is set with 8 point leading, as opposed to 7 (set solid). But see how it floats apart when it is set 7/11. (This is set 7/8)

Look how much easier it is to read this passage in 7 point type when it is set with 8 point leading, as opposed to 7 (set solid). But see how it floats apart when it is set 7/11 (This is set solid)

Look how much easier it is to read this passage in 7 point type when it is set with 8 point leading, as opposed to 7 (set solid). But see how it floats apart when it is set 7/11. (This is set 7/11)