

Clear Language Lab Webinar Recap

Topic: Plain Language Foundations: Let's Talk Grammar ([Webinar + Slides!](#))

Date: 3/8/23

Grammar & Plain Language:

- Using plain language means centering your audience's needs and goals, and writing in a way that they can find, understand, and use the information you're sharing.
- Grammar is a set of rules about how we use words. It's a tool for communication and it changes over time.
- There are many variations of English grammar. What we consider "professional" language is rooted in racism and classism.
- Only correct someone's grammar if you have permission. Focus on how changes will help them be understood by others.

Tips for Using Simpler Grammar:

- Active voice is generally easier to understand than passive voice
- Using the 2nd person "you" can help your writing feel more conversational and personable. But be careful - it can sound patronizing or accusatory when talking about something punitive
- Aim for an average sentence length of 15-20 words, with variation. Avoid overly wordy sentences by:
 - Asking yourself "does this add new & important information?"
 - Using strong verbs
 - Avoiding repetition & complicated clauses that don't add meaning
 - Breaking up information into lists or separate sentences
- Create cohesion by:
 - Separating ideas that don't belong together
 - Using headings & subheadings that guide your reader
 - Writing about processes or steps in chronological order
 - Using transition words and phrases

Resources:

Books

- Oxford Guide to Plain English by Martin Cutts
- How English Works: A Linguistic Introduction by Anne Curzan and Michael Adams
- The Oxford English Grammar by Sidney Greenbaum

Websites

- [Plain Language – Digital.gov](#)
- [Language, Please: Style Guide & Resources for journalists and storytellers](#)
- [Bias-free language](#)
- [Conscious Style Guide](#)

Clear Language Lab is a program of [Literacy Works](#).

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