

Use plain language

Accessibility Basics Tutorial Series



Contents

Introduction.....	1
Be direct.....	1
Be clear.....	2
Be concise.....	3
Be literal	3
Resources.....	3

Introduction

Expressing ourselves poetically can be great, but not in contexts where we're trying to communicate specific information or teach specific skills. In those contexts, we should express ourselves plainly. This section includes some basic principles for communicating in plain language.

Be direct

Don't make people guess what you mean.

- Instead of: "That's interesting."
- Say: "That's fascinating!" or "That's questionable."

Don't disguise instructions or requirements as suggestions.

- Instead of: "It would be great if you could finish this by tomorrow."
- Say: "Finish this by tomorrow."

Don't disguise questions as statements or vice versa.

- Instead of: "I was wondering if we could meet tomorrow."
- Say: "Can we please meet tomorrow?"

Don't hide the true subject or verb of a sentence.

- Instead of: "We do youth education."
- Say: "We teach youth."

Be clear

Avoid using the same word to mean different things.

- Instead of: "That's right, turn right at the stop sign!"
- Say: "That's correct, turn right at the stop sign!"

Avoid using different words for the same thing.

- Instead of: "The state should protect our rights. The government should provide public services."

- Say: "The government should protect our rights. The government should provide public services."

Be concise

- Prefer shorter and simpler words.
- Prefer shorter and simpler sentence constructions.

Be literal

- Avoid euphemisms.
- Express ideas literally. Use figurative language in addition to the literal language, never instead. Figurative language should be a supplement, not a substitute.

Resources

- Read the [Federal plain language guidelines](#).
- Copy and paste text into [Hemingway Editor](#) to check your writing against some of these recommendations.
- Explore resources from [the Clear Language Lab](#) at LiteracyWorks, which applies a social justice lens to plain language.