Plain Language: An Introduction
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What is plain language?
Plain language helps your readers:

- Find it
- Understand it
- Use it to meet their needs
It helps you too, with:

- Customer-relations
- Compliance
- Content in other languages
What does your audience need?
Reading literacy affects all of us

50% low literacy!

We’re all:
• Rushed
• Tired
• Multi-tasking
How do you do it?

1. Reader Focus
2. Common Words
3. Pronouns (You)
4. Active and Short
5. Seemingly Easy
Not “dumbed down”!

The Right Stuff

Only What’s Needed

Limited Repetition
Example: the right stuff, only what’s needed, limited repetition

• Wordy, formal, not reader focused:
  In order to demonstrate sufficient teaching experience, classroom instructors must have at least 60 hours of classroom instructional experience.

• Improved:
  Instructors must have at least 60 hours of in-class teaching experience.
Cut extra or formal words
Use common ones

• flood event = flood
• crisis situation = crisis
• cleanup effort = cleanup
• registration process = registration/register
• make a determination = determine
• in accordance with = by, per, under, according to
• in the event of = if
• with regard to, regarding = about
Examples: pronouns AND active

**Thing focus**

- Loan applications will be reviewed to ensure that procedures have been followed.

**Reader focus**

- We will review your loan application.
Examples: passive to active

Passive
• The entire stretch of highway was paved by the crew.
• Instructions will be mailed.
• This permit shall be kept on file for six months.

Active
• The crew paved the entire stretch of highway.
• You will receive instructions in the mail.
• Keep this permit on file at your facility for six months.
Our last tip: seemingly easy

Seems Easy

Introduction content

A Heading

Add a bulleted list:
- Thing 1
- Thing 2

Headsings
Short paragraphs
White space
Bulleted lists
Example: types of headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Do I need to publish a public notice?</td>
<td>• Publish a Public Notice</td>
<td>• Public Notice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example: does it seem easy to read?

When a new sensitive feature is discovered it must be reported to TCEQ. Protection of the feature can be accomplished by removing the sediment from the area adjacent to the feature without disturbing the feature and installing a rock berm or other appropriate BMP around the feature to control and filter any potential flows into the feature. Work must be stopped after protection for the feature is installed.
Example: bullets and…

**Report** any new sensitive **feature** to TCEQ. **Protect it** with the following steps:

- Remove the sediment from the adjacent area, taking care to not disturb the **feature**.
- Install a rock berm or other appropriate structure around it, controlling and filtering any potential flows into it.
- Stop work after installing the protective structure.
Online resources

Essentials of Plain Language - GovLoop Academy
https://academy.govloop.com

Plain Language Basics: Online Workshop – Digital.gov

Plain Language Is for Everyone, Even Experts
www.nngroup.com/articles/plain-language-experts/

Tips for starting a plain language program
www.plainlanguage.gov/training/tips-for-trainers