

High-stakes, hot-button issues are *complex*.
Opinions can be *fierce*.



Clarity matters

What is clear communication?

Clear communication—also called *plain language*—is a **global movement** to write *for* readers instead of at them, over them, or in spite of them. It's a philosophy and a process. The goal is to make every message easy to read, understand, and act on.



Canadian Public Health Association – promotes clarity and offers plain language editing of health information to companies, volunteer organizations, and governments.¹

British Columbia Securities Commission – created a plain language style guide for securities regulation because “we believe securities regulation should be clear and understandable to all market participants.”²

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)– requires cell phone contracts to use plain language and clearly describe services.³

Ontario – Hamilton Police Service switched to plain language codes in 2013 to make it easier to communicate during emergencies.⁴

Sweden – for more than 40 years, the government has required that all legislation and government documents are as easy as possible to read and understand.⁵

European Commission – published a comprehensive guide on how to write clearly to enable member countries to work more effectively together, reduce unnecessary correspondence, and build goodwill.⁶

United States – the Plain Writing Act 2010 requires government agencies to write in plain language.⁷

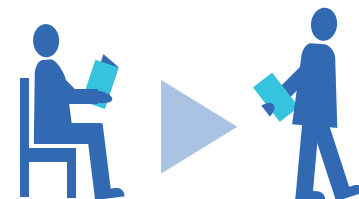
Australia - the Office of Parliamentary Counsel encourages the use of plain language in legislation and in developing and using plain language techniques.⁸

SOURCES:

- 1 Canadian Public Health Association. Plain Language Service.
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- 4 Ley, T. (2013). Hamilton Police Go 'Live' with Plain Language.
- 5 Ehrenberg-Sundin, B. (2004). Plain Language in Sweden, the Results After 30 Years. Plainlanguage.gov.
- 6 European Commission (2011). How to Write Clearly.
- 7 United States Government Publishing Office (2010). Public Law 111-274, Plain Writing Act of 2010.
- 8 Australian Government, Office of Parliamentary Counsel. Plain Language.

Written material is clear if your audience can **find** what they need, **understand** what they find, and **act** on what they understand.

Clear communication—in print and online—inspires **clear thinking** and **clear action**. It transforms your audience from **passive readers** to **active participants**.



find ► understand ► act

Who benefits?

Your audience benefits

Busy people



59% of Americans consider themselves to be “busy.”⁹ Busy readers want to get to the point.

People suffering from information overload



45% of executives and 61% of academics feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they have to deal with.¹⁰

People with low literacy skills



42% of Canadian adults between the ages of 16 and 65 do not have literacy skills required to meet the demands of today’s economy and society.¹¹

People facing the unfamiliar



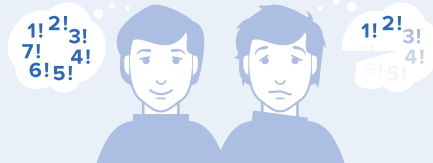
30% of Canadians can solve problems only if they involve explicitly stated goals, a small number of steps, and occur in a familiar environment.¹²

People under stress



27% of Canadian workers described their lives on most days as “quite a bit” or “extremely” stressful.¹³

Most of us can hold 4–7 pieces of information in our brains at any one time. This ability peaks between ages 25 and 35. We juggle ideas most effectively when we are healthy, well rested, and relaxed.¹⁴



SOURCES

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- 10 Hartley, M. (2011). Canadian Executives Still Struggling With Information Overload. Financial Post. FP Tech Desk.
- 11 Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (2016). Literacy Statistics.
- 12 Statistics Canada (2013) Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).
- 13 Crompton, S. (2015). What’s stressing the stressed? Main sources of stress among workers. Statistics Canada.
- 14 Klingberg, T. (2009) *The Overflowing Brain: Information Overload and the Limits of Working Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

You benefit

Clear communication saves **time and money**. When people understand what they read, they don’t have to call or write for clarification.

Clear communication saves lives. When people understand **safety** information, it’s easier for them to **comply**. They make fewer harmful –possibly fatal–mistakes.

Clear communication builds **trust**. A clear and respectful message addresses the readers’ concerns.

Clear communication fosters **cooperation**. Readers who disagree are more likely to help you find a way forward if they understand your message and feel respected.

Clear communication reaches **diverse audiences** with words, images, and media that are familiar to them.

clear language + clear design = valuable communications

Is clear language only for people with limited literacy skills?

Literacy is relative — not something people have or don't have. Our level of literacy declines when we're faced with information on an unfamiliar topic, or when we're stressed, busy, or overwhelmed. **Clear language can help everyone.**

Does clear language “dumb down” information, making it less precise?

Information too often reflects the vocabulary and background knowledge of the writers rather than their readers. **The goal of clear communication is to convey information accurately to your intended audience.**

Does design just make the text pretty?

Most of us read visual elements to help make sense of information. That is why it is important to support the text with visual elements that enable the reader to understand and use the information. **Clear design uses typography, colour, layout, and images to make the content accessible to readers.** As well, clear design is visually appealing for the purpose of drawing the reader in.

Is clear language patronizing?

Clear language starts by considering the reader and enables the reader to access the information they need. **Clear language respects readers** by not overestimating their background knowledge of a topic and never underestimating their intelligence.

BUSTED

let's be clear

We are independent clear language and design consultants.

We work with you to **clarify your goals, understand your audience,** and **emphasize your key messages.** Find out more at letsbeclear.ca.



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