

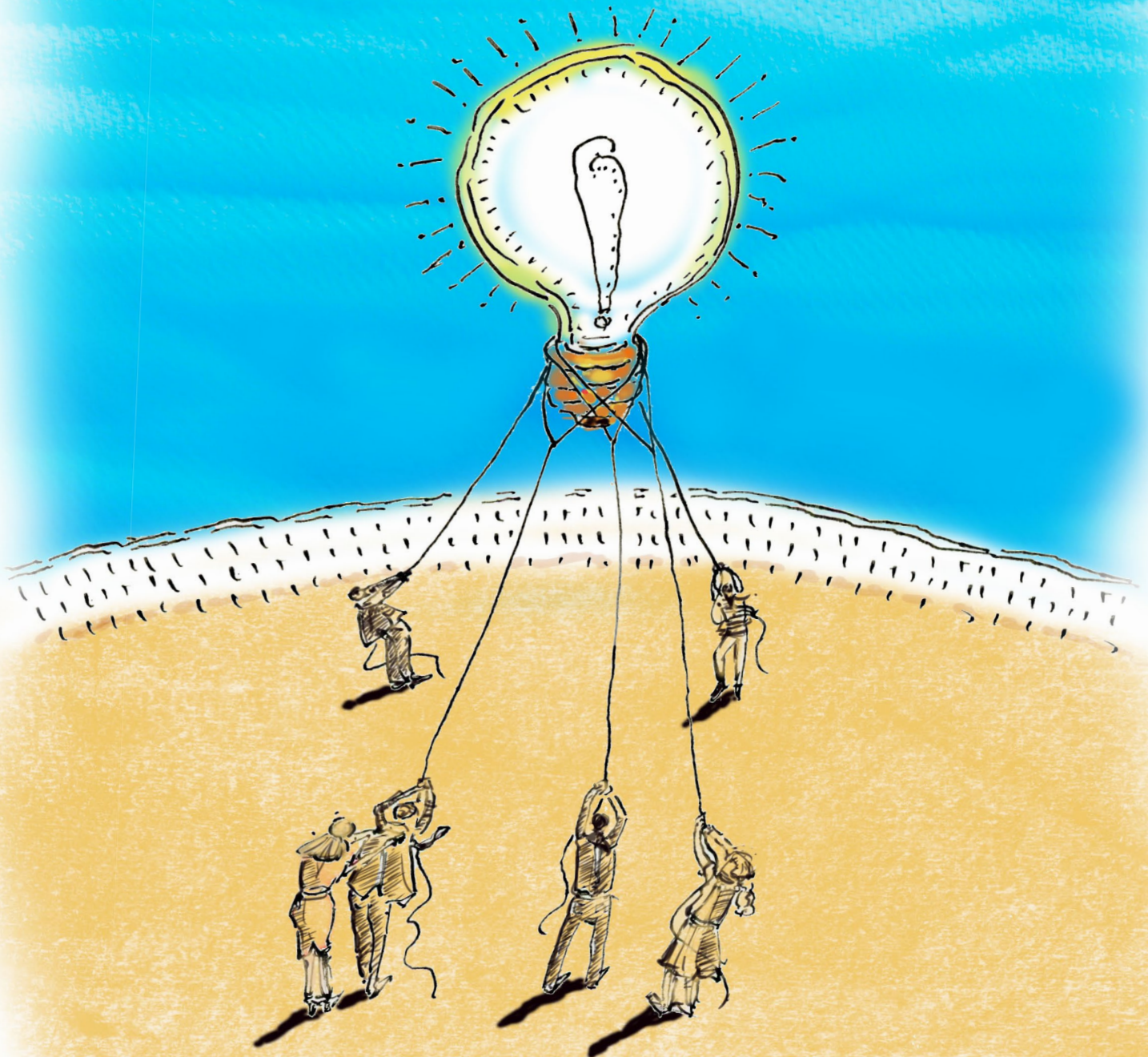
**PLAIN**

Plain Language  
Association  
International

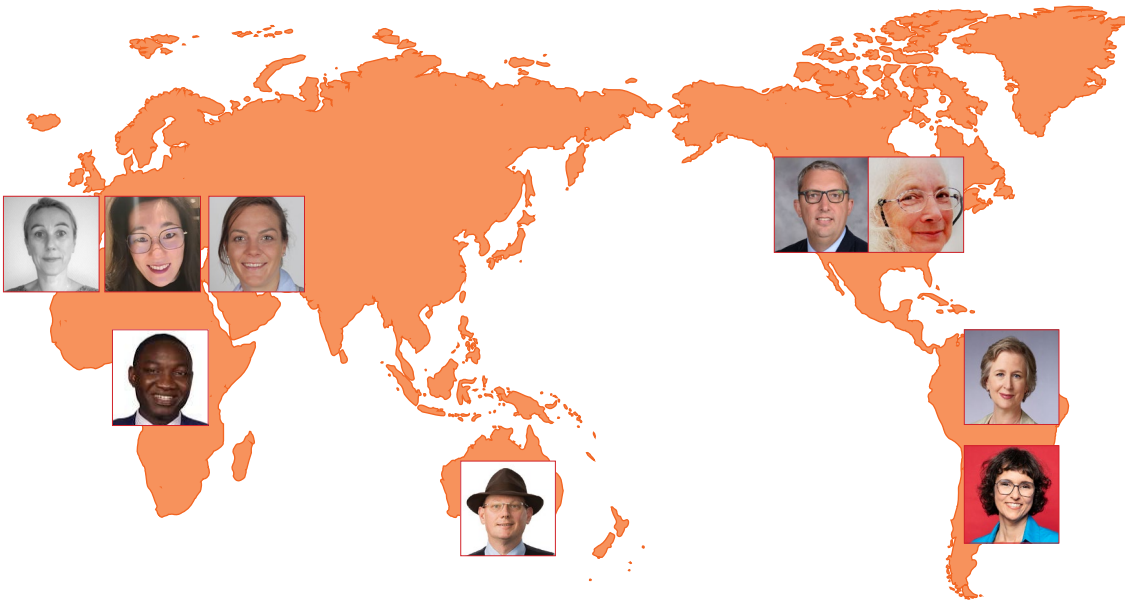
**eJOURNAL**

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# SHOWING RESULTS



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**Please do:**

- Share a link to our website where we promote the journal.
- Encourage others to join PLAIN so that they can also read the journal.
- Share a printed copy only with your colleagues who might be interested.

**Please do not:**

- Circulate digital copies.
- Post images of articles that are not written by you.

# Connecting Cultures



**Joanna Richardson**  
PLAIN President

As incoming President of PLAIN, I'd like to thank the outgoing President, Margrethe Kvarenes, for all her work

in the past 4 years leading us from strength to strength, consolidating and developing the strategic plan set out by Neil James and above all making PLAIN a more diverse and wide-reaching organization. Following in her footsteps, I aim to continue with her work and to make PLAIN an organization where many voices and languages can be heard.

This year PLAIN will be holding its first in-person conference in 4 years in Buenos Aires, and the theme is "Connecting cultures: creating bridges with clear communication." As a long-time member of PLAIN who has served on the board before, and also as a member of the host organization Observatorio de Lenguaje Claro de la Facultad de Derecho here in Buenos Aires, it will be an honor and a pleasure to welcome as many of you as possible to the conference where we will be hearing about experiences of plain language, not only in Argentina but further afield in Latin America, as well as other voices from around the world.

For the first time at a PLAIN conference the main language will be Spanish, with live interpretation into English. There will be many networking events and cultural activities to explore and enjoy such as the world famous Teatro Colón and a

tango show at the gala dinner. For those of you who'd like to extend your visit and travel around the country, Argentina is renowned for its dramatic geography with highlights such as the Iguazú Falls, Perito Moreno Glacier, and the UNESCO World Heritage Site Quebrada de Humahuaca, not to mention the vast expanses of Patagonia. The country certainly has something for everyone!

This issue of the e-journal is also connecting cultures. We offer you a broad selection of plain language work in countries as far afield as Nigeria, Brazil, Austria, France, and Belgium with translations in French, German, and Portuguese. The topics are also varied and up-to-date, covering legal literacy ecosystems, mind-mapping, and how translators are using both AI and plain language to improve their work. In our new "Ask the expert" section, there are in-depth interviews with health literacy legal expert Professor Chris Trudeau and document design wizard Ginny Redish.

As a British national who has made the city of Buenos Aires her home, I hope you enjoy this volume of our e-journal and start to plan your trip to PLAIN 2023 conference 27-29 September. I look forward to seeing you there!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanna Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

Joanna Richardson  
PLAIN President

# Introduction

**Hannah Sapunor-Davis**

Managing Editor



I speak from personal experience when I say that showing your work is a step that's easy to overlook. It might feel like boasting, or stating the obvious. Or it

might feel unimportant when we have to quickly move on to the next thing on our to-do list. But it's an important one.

It not only helps our personal growth. As a growing international network, sharing our work and our results helps everyone. We can learn from one another – what worked, what didn't, or what might be worth exploring the next time. You might be surprised to find that someone on the other side of the globe is facing a challenge that is remarkably similar to what is in front of you. And even better, they've given you a new idea for how to approach it.

Showing our work also helps build the growing body of expertise and research on plain language. So in that spirit, we invited members of our community to show their work – proudly.

We start this issue off with 2 case studies of companies with compelling results of the effect of plain language. First, **Kim Van Den Heede** details how her company uses a systematic approach to streamlining documentation, which decreased maintenance and training costs and improved customer satisfaction for clients in the pharmaceutical and mobile gaming fields.

Next, **Marie-Elise Georgelin** shares some fascinating results that prove the invaluable role of plain language in translation. As many in the PLAIN community work with more than one language, these findings are an excellent case for solidifying the relationship between translators and plain language practitioners.

Not all of us live or work in a culture where plain language is a common concept. For those of you who are working to start a plain language network or grow awareness, **Eyitayo Ogunyemi's** article outlines an approachable way that he engages with the community to show off his work in a way that both educates the public and promotes his business.

Next we have 2 exciting regional perspectives. We start with a summary of **Christina Maria Müller's** research into easy language rules in Portuguese and German. Some of you might wonder why we include easy language in this plain language journal. The audience is narrower, and the outcome can look very different from the text that most plain language practitioners create. But both camps are in fact working towards the same goal: clear communication. And in the spirit of learning from each other, I think it's important to continue to share information.

Then **Heloisa Fischer** gives us a fantastic profile on the progress of plain language in Brazil. This is an encouraging example of plain language gaining momentum and widespread buy-in.

This issue we have a new feature of the journal called "Ask the Experts." Each issue we will hear from experts about their experience working with plain language, as well as their insight on the journal's topic. Our inaugural experts this issue are **Christopher Trudeau** and **Ginny Redish**. I'm positive that you will learn something from their thoughtful reflections.

And last but not least, we get to learn the latest from the International Plain Language Federation. **Dr. Neil James**, the current chair, details the latest developments of the federation's work, as well as what we can look forward to in the near future.

We hope that you, dear reader, get inspired by this issue to share your work and your results in the PLAIN community. Whether that be in the journal, in our active LinkedIn group, or at one of our upcoming events. We invite all voices to contribute to the conversation. If you have any ideas for future topics of the journal – as well as feedback on previous issues – please send a message to [publications@plainlanguagenetwork.org](mailto:publications@plainlanguagenetwork.org).

Happy reading!

---

**Hannah Sapunor-Davis** is a freelance editor specializing in clear communication. Originally from the United States, she is currently based in Germany.

# Connecting cultures: creating bridges with clear communication

International  
Conference

27, 28 and 29 September 2023

City of Buenos Aires

Facultad de Derecho (UBA) - Av. Pres. Figueroa Alcorta 2263



Facultad de Derecho  
Universidad de Buenos Aires

## How plain language and Information Mapping were game changers in pharma and mobile gaming



### Kim Van Den Heede

Head of Professional Services at Information Mapping

Whether you're scanning clinical trial results or trying to digest a pile of policies and procedures at your new job, the simple act of reading is intimidating at times. Scientific lingo or "legalese" can confuse even the most intelligent reader, resulting in the inability to retain and act on information.

That's why we at Information Mapping® are fusing plain language with our research-based methodology to help clients in, for example pharma and mobile gaming, standardize content that's easy to read, retain, share, and update. Their efforts resulted in better employee efficiency, a higher retention rate, and more costs savings among other benefits.

### Problems from broken communication

The lack of effective documentation and plain language is a common problem, affecting every industry worldwide. According to the IDC whitepaper "It's Worse Than You Think", 75.9% of companies

experienced significant business risks and/or compliance incidents and suffered severe consequences due to broken document processes.

Take the following 2 companies as examples. One is a global pharmaceutical organization, and the other is an internationally recognized mobile gaming platform. Between clinical trials, standard operating procedures (SOPs), knowledge articles, frequently asked questions, and more, there is plenty of room for communication errors between the 2.

### Pain points

Searching for ways to make their information more accessible and increase efficiency, they approached us with the following pain points:

- They don't have a standardized way of writing in place. Different writing styles in a document or across documents can be confusing.
- The content is not adapted to the target audience profile.
- Information is difficult to find, which results in loss of time and efficiency.
- Information is confusing, which leads to incidents and more Corrective And Preventive Actions (CAPAs).
- They have more than thousands of documents in their system due to duplications, which is challenging to maintain and update.
- Support processes and content structure for customers are too weak.

### Communication issues affecting employees and consumers alike

Company employees weren't the only ones complaining about these issues. The consumer end of the relationship also experienced pain points of their

own. Such as:

- misunderstanding due to different English-language skills
- incidents due to unclear content
- frustration from gamers who don't quickly get or find a clear answer.

To address these issues, we combined our research-based methodology and software with the plain language guidelines. The solution provided a new communication strategy. Clients could now analyze, organize, and present their content in an understandable and user-focused way.

### Merging plain language and Information Mapping

According to the plain language definition, effective communication has three critical elements:

- wording
- structure
- design.

As plain language advocates, we apply this internationally adopted definition in our own internationally adopted and research-based methodology. Focusing on these 3 key elements allows readers to find, understand, and actually use the information they need quickly and easily.

### Main components of our methodology

The main components of our more than 50-year-old methodology revolve around:

- 2 modular information units, "Blocks" and "Maps," abandoning the traditional paragraph writing, which is often too dense and complicated
- 6 information types, allowing information to be clearly defined and presented in a standardized mode

- 6 research-based principles to organize information in a structured way.

For each stage of the “analyze, organize, and present” content development process, the methodology gives detailed instructions. The above components help to carry out those instructions. For example, Blocks and Maps help to organize information - akin to stacking Lego blocks of information. Identifying information types helps writers to chunk information and present it in the most efficient way.

### The benefits of improved wording, structure, and design

Combining comprehensible wording, a clear structure, and reader-focused design leads to:

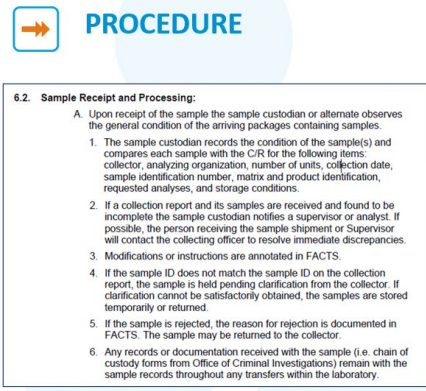
- 32% increase in retrieval accuracy
- 38% increase in usage of documents
- 83% increase in initial learning
- 90% decrease in supervisor questions.\*

Looking at the example, you can see how a procedure was transformed using improved wording, structure, and design. The combination of these 3 elements is vital. Even if the document in the “before” photo is written in language adapted to the reader, it still resembles a wall of words that isn’t inviting to read. After analyzing and organizing the information, the document transformed into a presentable format. The final product is quicker to scan, find, share, and update information than the wall of words. This saves time and money for these companies.

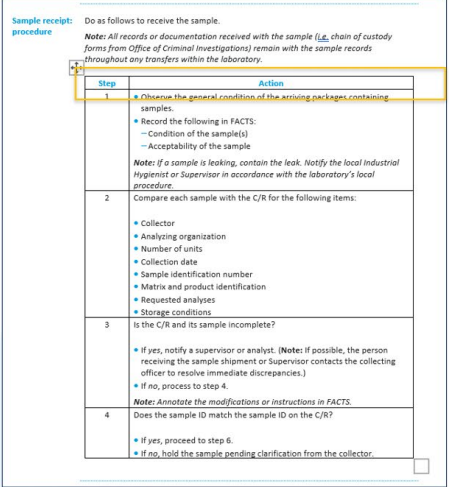
### Case studies

After implementing plain language

## Before and after: a visual glimpse at plain language results



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

and our methodology, these companies conducted case studies to see the impact of both communication strategies. The global pharma company experienced the following:

- 40% less SOPs: After analyzing their documents, they removed duplicates and merged SOPs with the same topic.
- \$2.1 million less maintenance costs: SOPs required less updates but also less time and effort to update.
- \$2.4 million less training costs: As SOPs are clear and accurate, extra training became less necessary.

Meanwhile, the international mobile gaming company reported that knowledge teams can now quickly find the information they need to help millions of support agents and gamers every day.

### Additional “fringe” benefits

Both companies also expressed that plain language and Information Mapping helped their non-native English-speaking clientele and colleagues understand the content

a lot better. For the mobile gaming company, this resulted in:

- improved customer support results
- an enhanced player experience
- increased satisfaction
- long-term engagement with the various games in the network.

### Conclusion

While the above case studies showed that the private industry obtains great value from implementing plain language, all organizations can benefit. Information Mapping® continues to fuse plain language with its methodology and a full suite of training and services to offer better-written communication for its clients. Whether it’s a non-profit organization trying to improve its reputation or the public service sector giving vital information that every citizen can understand and use. Plain language has a place in many facets of life.

*\*Statistics taken from Information Mapping® case studies*

**Kim Van Den Heede** is a Certified Consultant since January 2018. She studied Multilingual Communication at the University of Ghent. She’s always been fascinated how different cultures communicate universal messages in different ways. She sees every day how messages lose their effect because of inappropriate styles and wording, complex sentence structures, etc. It genuinely makes her happy when people say, “Plain language and Information Mapping opened my eyes.” She tries to celebrate life every day as much as possible. She likes to exercise, eat homemade spaghetti, and spend time with her husband and two dogs.

# How can professional translation be revolutionized?



## Marie-Elise Georgelin

Plain language expert and trainer,  
Labrador Language Services

You may not yet be aware of it but plain language is about to revolutionize both human and machine translation. We firmly believe this and so do our translators. But what better than a study to show this in practice?

### Complex content for non-expert readers

We translate tens of millions of words every year. Our clients entrust us with complex and regulated documentation including for example:

- annual and half-yearly financial reports
- documentation for shareholders' meetings
- codes of ethics
- sustainable development reports
- IPO prospectuses.

A [2022 Transparency study](#) shows that the average plain language score of the annual financial reports or universal registration documents (the equivalent in France of the 10-K in the US) of the 120 top-listed companies on the Paris stock exchange (the SBF 120) is 36/100. The documents are

wordy. Only 19% of the sample had an average sentence length of under 20 words.

And yet these documents are not only addressed to experts but also non-experts. Any stakeholder of a listed company may access this information. And they should be able to understand it. Most of these documents would thus benefit from plainer language.

### Failing to use plain language impacts translation quality

The translator is often one of the first people to read a text. Furthermore, they need to understand what they are reading so that it can be communicated in another language. Overly long sentences, complex structures, and jargon can result in translation errors. Plain language thus offers a solution.

The revolution in translation will come from a change in how source texts are written.

In fact, using plain language means:

- messages can sink in faster
- there are fewer misinterpretations
- translations will be quicker, more effective, and more accurate.

In short, plain language is key to improving translation quality. It just remains to be proven. At Labrador, we like to back up our words with evidence. No problem - let's do a study!

### Defining the scope and making quality objective

A plain language source text:

- will be quicker to read and easier to understand
- will be easier to translate
- will result in a plain language translation.

An increasing number of translation agencies are not only using computer-aided translation tools but also machine translation – machine learning using neural networks. The machines also clearly prefer plain language. While the human mind can intuitively deduce the meaning of a word depending on its context, the same is not really true for machines. We thus decided to assess the speed and quality of translation by a professional translator as well as using a machine translation engine.

We know that the text to be translated must be entrusted to a domain expert. This expert will work from one language into their mother tongue language. And the client or the agency will provide reference material and language resources such as glossaries, previous translations, and translation memories.

All of this is necessary but on its own not enough to guarantee a quality translation. A high-quality translation is one that faithfully communicates the information in the source text, regardless of the style.

### Methodically measuring quality...

We ran a plain language analysis on 9 documents (annual and sustainable development reports) and their French-to-English translations (UK or US). We also looked at the volume of words in the French and English versions.

The translations were done by our usual translation teams. They used the same computer-aided translation tools and went through the same quality assurance processes.

The plain language analysis was done in [Plainly](#), our online plain language solution. It uses 15 criteria to assess the readability of a text. These include:

sentence length, positive verbs, active voice, and economical use of adverbs and adjectives. Plainly scans the text and measures all these criteria before giving a plain language score out of 100.

Lastly, we compiled and analyzed the results. The “How can professional translation be revolutionized?” study was born!

**...to obtain conclusive results**

You have probably heard the saying “GIGO - Garbage In, Garbage Out.” The results of our study confirmed both this saying, and that the opposite was also true!

The results are unequivocal: an improved plain language score and fewer words. In the sample analyzed, improving the quality of the source text systematically improved the translation by the same amount.

Translation quality is thus directly linked to how plain the source text is.

**“So where does machine translation fit into all this?”**

Regardless of what progress is made in translation technology and the skill of the translator, multilingual communication will only be improved if we address the cause and not the symptoms of the problem. It is essential to work on the quality of the source material. We are convinced that a plain language edition of the source texts will ensure better translation. We’re also offering plain language training to our clients, to make sure that they write in plain language so our work of translation is facilitated.

A faster, more reliable translation that faithfully communicates the information in the source text – that is what the plain language revolution

offers. Still not convinced? We are already thinking about the next study to drive home this message.

**Marie-Elise Georgelin** is a graduate of SKEMA Business School. She has 20 years’ experience in translation and language processing. Marie-Elise ran the production department at Labrador Languages Services for six years before leading the Customer Relations team for two years. Since 2020, Marie-Elise has been responsible for rolling out plain language within Labrador with one purpose: to revolutionize client corporate communications. Labrador works with clients in Europe and the US to create corporate communications that can be trusted. Our mission: to reinvent financial, non-financial, legal, and CSR communications.

**Summary of results**

	Original texts	Texts rewritten using plain language	Benefit of plain language
Plain language score of the source version	52/100	70/100	+ 35 %
Plain language score of the target version	59.5/100	72.5/100	+ 22 %
<b>Impact on the translation</b>	<b>+ 14 %</b>	<b>+ 4 %</b>	

	Original texts	Texts rewritten using plain language	Benefit of plain language
Volume of words in the source version	83,395	75,349	- 10%
Volume of words in the target version	72,766	69,302	- 5 %
<b>Impact on the translation</b>	<b>- 13 %</b>	<b>-8 %</b>	

**Tom O’Leary** (English translator) has over 25 years’ experience in the translation and localization business. Tom has worked as a professional translator since 2002, specializing in financial reporting and investor relations. Over this time, he has built up over 17,000 hours of translation experience. Tom first started working on plain language projects in 2015 and has built up considerable expertise over the past 7 years. Tom’s mantra is “Translations investors can understand!” To find out more, please visit [website](#).



## Marie-Elise Georgelin

Experte et formatrice Language clair,  
Labrador Language Services

Vous ne le savez peut-être pas encore, mais le langage clair va révolutionner la traduction, humaine et automatique. Nous en sommes convaincus, comme nos traducteurs. Et quoi de mieux qu'une étude pour transformer cette conviction en démonstration ?

### Des contenus complexes pour des lecteurs non experts

Chaque année, nous traduisons des dizaines de millions de mots. Nos clients nous confient des documents complexes et réglementés, notamment :

- des rapports financiers annuels et semestriels ;
- des brochures de convocation aux assemblées générales ;
- des codes éthiques ;
- des rapports de développement durable ;
- des prospectus d'introduction en bourse.

Selon l'Étude Transparence 2022, la note de clarté moyenne pour les Rapports financiers annuels

# Comment révolutionner la traduction professionnelle ?

ou Documents d'enregistrement universel (l'équivalent français du 10-K américain) des 120 premières sociétés cotées à la Bourse de Paris (le SBF 120) atteint à peine 36/100. Les documents du panel sont bavards : seuls 19 % comptent en moyenne moins de 20 mots par phrase.

Or, ces documents sont destinés à des spécialistes, mais aussi à des non experts. Toutes les parties prenantes des sociétés cotées peuvent les consulter et devraient les comprendre. La majorité de ces documents gagneraient donc à être plus clairs.

### Un manque de clarté qui impacte la qualité de la traduction

Le traducteur est souvent l'un des premiers lecteurs d'un texte. Et sa mission de le retranscrire dans une autre langue l'oblige d'autant plus à le comprendre. Phrases trop longues, constructions complexes ou jargon sont autant de pièges tendus au linguiste. Le langage clair s'impose donc comme solution.

La révolution de la traduction viendra de nouvelles habitudes de rédaction des textes sources.

En effet, rédiger en langage clair permet :

- une compréhension plus rapide,
- une diminution des mauvaises interprétations,
- de garantir, par conséquent, une traduction plus rapide, plus efficace et plus fiable.

En résumé, le langage clair est indispensable pour améliorer la qualité des traductions. Mais encore faut-il le prouver. Chez Labrador,

nous aimons étayer nos propos par des preuves. Qu'à cela ne tienne, faisons une étude !

### Définir le périmètre et objectiver la qualité

Un texte source en langage clair :

- sera plus facile à lire et à comprendre,
- sera plus facile à traduire,
- produira une traduction en langage clair.

De plus en plus d'agences de traduction utilisent des outils d'aide à la traduction, mais aussi des moteurs de traduction : de l'intelligence artificielle basée sur les réseaux de neurones. En toute logique, les machines aussi aiment le langage clair. Par contre, si le cerveau humain peut déduire automatiquement le sens d'un mot selon le contexte, ce n'est pas vraiment le cas d'une machine.

Nous avons donc décidé d'évaluer la rapidité et la qualité de la traduction réalisée par un professionnel, mais aussi par un moteur de traduction.

Nous savons qu'il faut confier le texte à traduire à un traducteur professionnel, expert du domaine. Cet expert traduira bien sûr vers sa langue maternelle. Et le client ou l'agence fournira des références et des ressources linguistiques tels que des glossaires terminologiques, des documents précédemment traduits ou des mémoires de traduction.

Ces conditions sont nécessaires, mais ne suffisent pas pour obtenir une traduction de bonne qualité, à savoir une traduction qui transcrit fidèlement les informations du texte source, indépendamment du style.

## Mesurer la qualité méthodiquement...

Nous avons analysé la clarté de 9 documents (documents annuels et de développement durable) et leurs traductions du français vers l'anglais (britannique ou américain). Nous nous sommes aussi penchés sur le volume de mots des versions françaises et anglaises.

Nos équipes habituelles de traducteurs ont réalisé les traductions, assistées des mêmes outils d'aide à la traduction, avec l'application des mêmes processus qualité.

L'analyse de la clarté a été réalisée grâce à Plainly, notre solution de mesure du langage clair en ligne. Cette mesure de lisibilité d'un texte repose sur 15 critères : longueur des phrases, usage de la forme affirmative, de la voix active, utilisation mesurée des adverbes et adjectifs... Plainly scanne le texte et mesure tous ces critères pour

attribuer une note de clarté sur 100. Enfin, nous avons compilé et analysé les résultats. Ainsi a vu le jour notre étude "Comment révolutionner la traduction professionnelle ?"!

### ...pour obtenir des résultats probants

Vous connaissez sans doute l'expression GIGO - Garbage In - Garbage Out. Les résultats de notre étude ont confirmé cette expression, et que l'inverse était tout aussi vrai ! Note de clarté améliorée, volume de mots réduits : les résultats sont sans appel. Sur l'échantillon étudié, améliorer la qualité du texte source élève systématiquement et dans la même mesure la qualité de la traduction. Cette dernière est donc directement liée à la clarté du texte source !

### Et la traduction automatique, dans tout ça ?

Quels que soient les progrès des technologies de traduction et la

qualité du traducteur, la performance de la communication multilingue ne s'améliorera que si nous traitons la cause et non plus les symptômes du problème. Il faut s'attaquer à la qualité de la source.

Nous sommes convaincus que la révision en langage clair des textes sources améliorera la qualité des traductions. Nous proposons également à nos clients de les former à la rédaction claire. Ils disposeront donc eux aussi des outils pour faciliter notre travail de traduction.

Une traduction plus rapidement disponible, plus fiable, qui retranscrit fidèlement les informations du texte source, voilà la révolution du Langage clair. Pas encore convaincus ? Nous réfléchissons déjà à la prochaine étude pour enfoncer le clou !

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**Marie-Elise Georgelin** est diplômée de SKEMA Business School. Elle dispose de 20 ans d'expérience dans le monde de la traduction et du traitement du langage. Marie-Elise a dirigé le service production de Labrador Languages Services durant 6 ans, puis elle a supervisé l'équipe de Relation clients pendant 2 ans. Depuis 2020, elle pilote le déploiement du Langage clair chez Labrador et ses clients avec un objectif : révolutionner la communication d'entreprise. Labrador est L'architecte d'une information d'entreprise de confiance en France, aux États-Unis et en Europe. Notre mission : réinventer l'information financière, extra-financière, juridique et éthique des entreprises.

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Merci à **Justine Piette**, linguiste et experte langage clair, qui a relu la version française de l'article.

## Synthèse des résultats

	Textes originaux	Textes révisés en langage clair	Bénéfice du langage clair
Note de clarté de la version source	52/100	70/100	+ 35 %
Note de clarté de la version cible	59,5/100	72,5/100	+ 22 %
<b>Impact sur la traduction</b>	<b>+ 14 %</b>	<b>+ 4 %</b>	

	Textes originaux	Textes révisés en langage clair	Bénéfice du langage clair
Volume de mots de la version source	83 395	75 349	- 10%
Volume de mots de la version cible	72 766	69 302	- 5 %
<b>Impact sur la traduction</b>	<b>-13 %</b>	<b>-8 %</b>	



## Eyitayo Ogunyemi

Partner, Law Accent

How do you create a content ecosystem across multiple platforms to simplify technical details? How do you share valuable information with people using pictures, relatable images, and words? How do you host online interactive discussions to demonstrate the benefits of plain language?

We founded Law Accent in 2015 to do just that. We have an aggregate of over 10,000 members in our ecosystem and are profitably involved in the campaign for clarity of legal documents.

My goal is to show you how we created a content ecosystem which allows us to enlighten thousands of people across different platforms using different approaches with one goal – legal literacy. You can learn to start small in your quest to demonstrate the benefits of plain language and discover cost-effective ways to reach your target audience.

### **The shift from words as a tool to conceal information**

It is often said that words are the instruments of a lawyer's trade. This has been misinterpreted over the

# How to share the benefits of plain language with your audience: The Law Accent story

years to mean that legal documents must be written in a style that is convoluted. That is not minding that legal documents are made for people, and they ought to understand those documents.

When you help people understand a subject, they will return to you when they need help. For example, we once simplified the "right to fair hearing." We discussed how fining a person without first listening to the person's side of the story is a violation of the right to fair hearing.

When one of our members was illicitly fined by a government agency without being heard, he rushed to us for help. We took the matter up and the judge agreed that he deserved to be heard before being penalized.

### **Technology as a tool to build a content ecosystem for plain communication**

Technology is a useful tool to help the public to understand complex matters in a simplified manner. At Law Accent, we identify our target audience, consider their areas of interest, and then leverage our knowledge as lawyers to simplify things for them using technology tools. Below is how we have leveraged technology to create an effective ecosystem across multiple social media platforms.

### **Content ecosystem explained**

#### **Mondays**

We choose topics on Mondays. Factors that guide the choice of topic include:

- new laws and regulations
- questions shared by community members

- recent occurrences and trends, such as EndSars protest, Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, etc.
- topics related to works that our firm is currently handling. As one of our values, we believe that "You don't know it, until you write it!"

Once a topic is approved, a lead presenter is assigned to research it and create content. As part of the guidelines for content creation, we ensure that the content is simple enough and expressed in day-to-day language.

#### **Tuesdays**

On Tuesdays, we do peer review. We use Google Docs since it allows multiple people to work on the same document at a time and allows us to suggest changes instead of direct alteration of contents.

#### **Wednesdays**

On Wednesdays, the updated content is shared as a blog across our social media platforms, and snippets are extracted from the blog to create flyer. As a rule, our flyers must inspire readers to make comments, start a conversation, or ask questions.

We prioritize creating flyers that ask questions, tell a story, help our readers to question their beliefs, etc. For instance, it is a popular misconception in Nigeria that there is "court marriage," so we came up with a series to simplify the marriage laws. We ended up with a flyer which read "There is nothing called COURT MARRIAGE in Nigeria. Court only dissolves marriages!"

Flyers are usually shared on our social media pages, WhatsApp, and

Telegram communities. Community members are then encouraged to reshare the flyers to their network. This way, we have a wider reach and grow our audience. Some interesting examples of topics that we have done in the past to inspire the interest of our audience in legal literacy include:

- Did you know that using someone under the age of 18 as domestic help is an offense?
- Did you know that a pregnant woman has a right to be exempted from work 6 weeks before her estimated delivery due date?

### Thursdays

Thursdays are for presentation. A colleague presents the blog in studio, which is streamed across our social media channels. Since our online presentations happen during work hours, we ensure to save them for later viewing. As a standard, our sessions take a maximum of 30 minutes. Presenters are urged to be as brief as possible without compromising the need for clarity. When a presenter is not available to go live, we ensure we pre-record and then do a live broadcast when time is due to go live.

Friday is an off-day in our ecosystem calendar.

### Saturdays

By Saturday evenings, the blog content is shared on our WhatsApp community. The presenter merely extracts the blog and presents it as a chat. Being a “free to belong” community, we allow people from all walks of life to join. That helps us to operate a platform that encourages robust conversation across disciplines and create synergy instead of competition.

### Sundays

As a result of the oversubscription to our WhatsApp group, we opened Telegram for the overflow. Because

Telegram has a timed-message feature, presenters are encouraged to schedule their presentation to go live on Sundays.

To reduce cost of operations and burnout, we periodically recruit volunteers from the community to coordinate the groups and be the go-between for them and our firm.

### Benefits of a content ecosystem

Some additional benefits of the ecosystem are:

1. Since we launched our private studio, we have seen immense transformation in the composure and ability of our members to face the camera and teach.
2. We have access to data that can be used to study many things, including the effect of plain communication of legal documents. In line with global standards, we ensure that members give their consent to the use of their data.
3. Our community members think of us first when they have legal needs and proudly market our law firm to their networks.
4. We have a pool of content on diverse topical issues. Our commitment to simplifying legal documents to people has helped us publish books written in easy-to-read style.
5. Our lawyers have a broad knowledge, thereby improving the quality of results that we get for clients.
6. More people show interest in joining our diverse communities every day and we have a substantial following in the different regions where we have a presence.

Below is a testimonial from a legal practitioner in Nigeria who has benefited from our legal literacy ecosystem:

“I joined the Law Accent community as a professional seeking to learn more. Law Accent helped me to learn how to share legal terms in easy-to-understand words. This has helped me to improve in my interactions with clients and join the campaign to simplify law to people through my own personal community (Lawgical Arena) where I give free legal advice.” It has become our practice to have a studio in every branch office. We recently opened a branch in another part of Nigeria (Abeokuta), we have one in Kenya, and are fast expanding. With the advent of the studio, our team members now go on air every day to share legal insights with our online community. Our ultimate goal is to have an online radio station committed to legal literacy that operates around the clock. I look forward to sharing the next phase of our journey hopefully with the PLAIN membership community.

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**Eyitayo Ogunyemi** is a lawyer, author and a plain writing advocate who believes that laws are made for people and they should therefore have a basic understanding of those laws. He is the author of *Think Like a Lawyer: (For Business Owners, Executives and Leaders)*, *Structure Secrets For Startups*, and *Own It: Pep Talks On Building Your Business Through Its Intellectual Assets*. His goal is to make law more interesting to non-lawyers such that they are able to use law as a tool for personal development, business growth, and nation building.



### Christina Maria Müller

Sworn Translator & Interpreter, M.A.  
Student at University of Zurich

The number of freely available contents written in Easy Language has increased significantly in recent times. To better understand whether these contents comply with the rules defined for Easy Language texts, I carried out a research specifically for contents published in Austria and Brazil by computing the extent to which both countries employ 5 important Easy Language rules using Python.

### Easy Language in Austria and Brazil

Especially after the adoption of the Austrian Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against People with Disabilities in 2006, the Austrian public sector has been striving to provide its contents in Easy Language. However, most of the contents contain the label “Einfache Sprache” (plain language), as the rules for “Leichte Sprache” (Easy Language) may not all be followed strictly at all times. According to the German institution Netz-Barrierefrei, “Easy Language is aimed at people with learning disabilities, formerly known

# Easy Language in Austria and Brazil: Comparing (in)formal specifications and compliance with existing rules

as mental disabilities, and plain language targets people who can read but have trouble understanding more complex texts.” In Austria the classification of the different levels follows the European Reference Framework for Languages with levels A1, A2, and B1.

In Brazil, in addition to the employment of Easy Language as a means to combat social inequality, the advent of the coronavirus pandemic in 2019 gave further momentum to the topic. Public authorities became aware that immediate action was needed in order to keep also the most vulnerable portion of the population up to date regarding the pandemic. In response to that, and besides other legislation that came into force, the then councilperson of the São Paulo Municipal Chamber, David Annenberg, elaborated a bill of law as the basis for the Municipal Policy of Easy Language, which was adopted on March 6th, 2020.

### Set of rules

In Austria most texts or translations are done by the private company atempo, and more specifically, its brand Capito. The company has elaborated a 150-item criteria catalogue on Easy Language that is disclosed to franchise partners only. In Brazil, on the other hand, several guidelines exist that are elaborated by entities and initiatives in different states. However, a specific Brazilian set of rules as such does not yet exist. Due to the impossibility of obtaining the Austrian rule set and the nonexistence of a Brazilian one,

I conducted the analysis according to the specifications as set out in the German set of rules for Easy Language, published by Duden (Ratgeber Leichte Sprache, 2016). This proved to be a fair approach as the 5 Easy Language rules analyzed coincide with or at least overlap in all 3 countries (Austria, Germany, Brazil). They are the following:

- average sentence length
- separation of compounds with hyphens
- avoidance of subordinate conjunctions
- avoidance of third-person pronouns
- the use of bullet characters for clear structuring.

### The corpus

For the Austrian corpus, I collected the texts in German from freely available sources, such as the websites of the Austrian Parliament, the Austrian Press Agency, the Austrian Social Ministry, among others. All sources for Austria were translated and/or created by Capito.

Regarding the Brazilian corpus, it was more difficult to find contents written in Easy Language. In Brazil, public institutions and private companies in different states have been working on their own Easy Language projects and their rules for it. Additionally, Brazilian online Easy Language contents are not clearly identified as such. However, after contacting the Brazilian Network of Easy Language, I obtained several project manuals with links and references to websites and, thus, created the corpus with contents from the Brazilian National

Water and Sanitation Agency, Brazilian state audit courts, different public authorities, and private institutions in 3 Brazilian states: Rio de Janeiro, Ceará, and Santa Catarina. Subsequently, I analyzed the 2 corpora (Austria: 14,896 words; Brazil: 14,839 words) with a Python script (using the libraries re, spacy, and Counter) that I had written for the purpose of computing compliance with the 5 above-mentioned rules. The results were as follows:

### **Average sentence length**

The average sentence length in words proved to be quite similar in both languages: German, 5.92; Portuguese, 5.34. For Portuguese, and upon manual verification, the length of sentences presented a higher variation due to the corpus containing one highly technical text. Generally, this shows that, in both countries, the creation of short and concise sentences is considered a key rule to contribute to easy-to-read texts.

### **Separation of compounds with hyphens**

In order to get a general idea of the proportion of above-average long words, I filtered out words with more than 12 characters. The Austrian corpus had 1,108 long words and the Portuguese corpus had 423. When looking at the list of compounds obtained in German I established that, in the Austrian texts collected, the rule is only followed partly. For example, the hyphen is only used consistently between the second and a third compound. In Portuguese, compounds of 2 or more nouns are not joined as in German. Instead they are divided by the preposition “de” (similar to the English preposition “of”), which explains the fewer occurrences of long words.

### **Subordinate conjunctions**

I found 329 conjunctions in German and 259 in Portuguese. The percentage of subordinate clauses accounted for 16.57% and 15.74% in relation to all sentences, respectively. In Austria, this is solved with splitting the subordinate or the main clause, whichever comes last, into a new line to maintain good visibility and short sentences. In Brazil, this was not done. However, in Portuguese, the use of conjunctions (when not introducing a new idea to the sentence) is, in most cases, less disadvantageous, because it is possible to omit pronouns in subordinate clauses, and commas between main and subordinate clauses do not have to be applied mandatorily in as many cases in German. Thus, in Portuguese even a longer sentence does not necessarily contain the in-sentence break that a comma usually induces.

### **Third-person pronouns**

The Austrian texts showed a low usage of third-person pronouns, except for the formal third-person singular “Sie”, the indirect “Ihnen”, and for “es” being used in “there is” (“es gibt”). In the Brazilian corpus, none of the (correctly computed) pronouns stand out, which is mainly explained by the fact that pronouns can be omitted in Portuguese, including in the imperative tense.

### **Bullet characters**

The total number of bullet characters in the German corpus amounted to 227 compared to 260 in the Brazilian corpus. The numbers obtained confirm that, in both countries, bullet characters are used to structure the texts and provide a better and easy-to-understand structure.

### **Conclusions**

Although the above results speak mostly for themselves, there are 2 main conclusions I would like to draw attention to.

Firstly, it would be interesting to consider the use of the controversial interpunct (“.”, in German “Mediopunkt”) to avoid the incorrect use of the hyphen in German standard language and, thus, facilitate the consistent separation of compounds.

Lastly, the Portuguese language has quite long words, such as those with Greek or Latin origin prefixes like “heteroidentificação” (hetero-identification). This has increased specifically since the adoption of the New Orthographic Agreement for the Portuguese Speaking Countries in Brazil by December 31, 2015. In cases where the prefix ends in a vowel and the second word begins with “r” or “s”, these letters are now doubled, and the hyphen is dropped. For example, “auto-suficiência” (self-sufficiency) is now “autossuficiência”. Therefore, in order to avoid these hard-to-read words, it could be a good solution to follow the German Easy Language rule of separating compounds by a hyphen or – even better – the interpunct (e.g. auto-suficiência, anti-rábico).

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### Christina Maria Müller

Vereidigte Übersetzerin und  
Dolmetscherin, Masterstudentin  
an der Universität Zürich

Die Anzahl an frei verfügbaren und in Leichter Sprache verfassten Inhalten hat in jüngster Zeit stark zugenommen. Um besser zu verstehen, ob diese Inhalte die für die Leichte Sprache festgelegten Regeln befolgen, führte ich eine Untersuchung an Texten durch, die in Österreich und Brasilien veröffentlicht wurden und der Bevölkerung frei zur Verfügung stehen. Dabei wurde mit Python berechnet, inwieweit jedes dieser Länder fünf wichtige Leichte-Sprache-Regeln anwendet.

### Leichte Sprache in Österreich und Brasilien

Insbesondere nach der Verabschiedung des österreichischen Bundes-Behindertengleichstellungsgesetzes im Jahr 2006 wurde es ein wichtiges Anliegen des öffentlichen Sektors, Inhalte in Leichter Sprache bereitzustellen. Allerdings sind die meisten Texte als „Einfache Sprache“ gekennzeichnet, da die Regeln für „Leichte Sprache“ nicht immer strikt eingehalten werden können. Der Unterschied ist dabei laut dem deutschen Netz-Barrierefrei Folgender: „Leichte Sprache richtet sich an Menschen mit Lernbehinderung,

## Leichte Sprache in Österreich und Brasilien: (In)formale Vorgaben und Befolgung herrschender Regeln im Vergleich

früher als geistige Behinderung bezeichnet. Die einfache Sprache hat Menschen als Ziel, die zwar lesen können, aber Probleme haben, komplexere Texte zu verstehen.“ In Österreich werden die verschiedenen Verständlichkeitsstufen nach denen des Gemeinsamen europäischen Referenzrahmens (GER) für Sprachen A1, A2 und B1 klassifiziert.

In Brasilien wurde die Leichte Sprache zunächst zur allgemeinen Bekämpfung der sozialen Ungleichheit eingesetzt. Mit dem Beginn der Corona-Pandemie im Jahr 2019 gewann das Thema weiter an Fahrt. Den Behörden wurde bewusst, dass es sofortiger Maßnahmen bedarf, um auch dem vulnerabelsten Teil der Bevölkerung Informationen über die Pandemie zukommen lassen zu können. Als Reaktion darauf (und neben weiteren einschlägigen in Kraft getretenen Gesetzen) erarbeitete das damalige Stadtratsmitglied von São Paulo, David Annenberg, einen Gesetzentwurf als Grundlage für die gemeindliche Politik für Leichte Sprache, die am 06. März 2020 verabschiedet wurde.

### Regelwerke

In Österreich werden die meisten Texte oder Übersetzungen durch das Privatunternehmen atempo bzw. unter seiner Marke Capito erstellt. Das Unternehmen erarbeitete einen 150 Punkte umfassenden Kriterienkatalog zur Leichten Sprache, der nur Franchisepartnern offengelegt wird. In Brasilien hingegen existieren mehrere unverbindliche Richtlinien, die von Einrichtungen und Initiativen in verschiedenen Bundesstaaten ausgearbeitet wurden. Ein spezifisches brasilianisches Regelwerk als solches existiert jedoch noch nicht. Da es einerseits nicht möglich war, das

österreichische Regelwerk einzusehen und andererseits kein brasilianisches Regelwerk existiert, führte ich meine Untersuchung nach den Vorgaben des deutschen Regelwerks für Leichte Sprache von Duden (Ratgeber Leichte Sprache, 2016) durch. Dies erwies sich als fairer Ansatz, da die fünf untersuchten Regeln für Leichte Sprache in allen drei Ländern (Österreich, Deutschland, Brasilien) übereinstimmen oder sich zumindest weitgehend überschneiden. Dabei handelt es sich um Folgende:

- Durchschnittliche Satzlänge
- Trennung von Komposita mittels Bindestrich
- Vermeidung von hypotaktischen Konjunktionen
- Vermeidung von Pronomen der dritten Person
- Verwendung von Aufzählungszeichen für eine transparente Gliederung

### Das Korpus

Für das österreichische Korpus sammelte ich Texte in deutscher Sprache aus frei zugänglichen Quellen wie den Webseiten des österreichischen Parlaments, der Österreichischen Presseagentur, des österreichischen Sozialministeriums u.a. Alle Quellen für Österreich wurden von Capito übersetzt und/oder erstellt.

Was das brasilianische Korpus betrifft, war es wesentlich komplizierter, in Leichter Sprache verfasste Inhalte zu finden. In Brasilien existieren zahlreiche öffentliche Institutionen und private Unternehmen in verschiedenen Bundesstaaten, die an ihren eigenen Leichte-Sprache-Projekten sowie ihren jeweiligen relevanten Regeln arbeiten. Darüber hinaus sind brasilianische Online-Inhalte in Leichter Sprache nicht

eindeutig als solche gekennzeichnet. Nachdem ich jedoch mit dem Brasilianischen Netzwerk für Leichte Sprache Kontakt aufgenommen hatte, erhielt ich mehrere Projekthandbücher mit Links und Verweisen auf entsprechende Websites. Folglich enthält das brasilianische Korpus Texte der brasilianischen nationalen Wasser- und Abwasserbehörde sowie von brasilianischen staatlichen Rechnungshöfen, verschiedenen Behörden und privaten Institutionen in drei brasilianischen Bundesstaaten: Rio de Janeiro, Ceará und Santa Catarina. Anschließend analysierte ich die zwei Korpora (Österreich: 14.896 Wörter, Brasilien: 14.839 Wörter) anhand eines Python-Skripts (unter Verwendung von re, spacy und Counter), das ich geschrieben hatte, um die Einhaltung der fünf oben genannten Regeln zu berechnen. Die Ergebnisse waren wie folgt:

### **Durchschnittliche Satzlänge**

Die durchschnittliche Satzlänge in Wörtern erwies sich in beiden Sprachen als recht ähnlich: Deutsch 5,92; Portugiesisch, 5,34. Für Portugiesisch und nach manueller Überprüfung stellte ich fest, dass die Länge der Sätze stärker variierte, da das Korpus einen hochtechnischen Text enthielt. Im Durchschnitt zeigt dieses Ergebnis aber, dass die Bildung von kurzen und prägnanten Sätzen in beiden Ländern als Schlüsselregel angesehen wird, um die Texte leicht lesbar zu gestalten.

### **Trennung von Komposita mittels Bindestrich**

Um einen Überblick über den Anteil überdurchschnittlich langer Wörter zu erhalten, filterte ich Wörter mit mehr als 12 Zeichen heraus. Das österreichische Korpus verzeichnete 1.108 lange Wörter und das portugiesische Korpus 423. Beim Betrachten der Liste der für Deutsch erhaltenen Komposita stellte

ich fest, dass die Bindestrichregel in den gesammelten österreichischen Texten nur teilweise befolgt wurde. Beispielsweise wird der Bindestrich nur zwischen dem zweiten und einem dritten Substantiv durchgängig angewendet. Im Portugiesischen werden Komposita bestehend aus zwei oder mehreren Substantiva nicht wie im Deutschen aneinandergereiht. Stattdessen werden sie durch die Präposition „de“ (ähnlich der englischen Präposition „of“) getrennt, was das wesentlich geringere Vorkommen langer Wörter in dieser Sprache erklärt.

### **Subordinierende Konjunktionen**

Die Anzahl der subordinierenden Konjunktionen im Deutschen belief sich auf 329 im Gegensatz zu 259 im Portugiesischen. Der Anteil der Nebensätze betrug 16,57 % bzw. 15,74 % bezogen auf die Gesamtanzahl der Sätze. In Österreich wird die Regel, Nebensätze zu vermeiden, durchgesetzt, indem eine Hypotaxe geteilt und, je nach Satzstruktur, der Neben- oder Hauptsatz in die nächste Zeile geschrieben wird. In Brasilien wurde diese Lösung nicht angewendet. Allerdings ist die Verwendung von Konjunktionen im Portugiesischen (sofern dem Satz im Nebensatz keine neue Information hinzugefügt wird) in den meisten Fällen weniger nachteilhaft, da Pronomen in Nebensätzen ausgelassen werden können. Außerdem müssen Kommas zwischen Haupt- und Nebensätzen nicht so häufig gesetzt werden wie in der deutschen Sprache. Aus diesem Grund führen selbst längere Sätze im Portugiesischen nicht unbedingt zu der Pause, die ein Komma typischerweise mit sich bringt.

### **Pronomen der dritten Person**

Die österreichischen Texte verzeichneten eine geringe Anzahl an Pronomen der dritten Person.

Ausnahmen bildeten der Singular der Höflichkeitsform „Sie“, das dazugehörige indirekte „Ihnen“ sowie „es“, das vor allem in „es gibt“ verwendet wurde. Im brasilianischen Korpus kam keines der (korrekt berechneten) Pronomen häufig vor, was vor allem damit erklärt werden kann, dass Pronomen im Portugiesischen in vielen Fällen ausgelassen werden können.

### **Aufzählungszeichen**

Die Gesamtzahl der Aufzählungszeichen im deutschen Korpus betrug 227 gegenüber 260 im brasilianischen Korpus. Diese Ergebnisse bestätigen, dass Aufzählungszeichen in beiden Ländern dazu verwendet werden, Texte zu strukturieren und sie besser und leichter verständlich zu gliedern.

### **Schlussfolgerungen**

Obwohl die oben genannten Ergebnisse größtenteils für sich selbst sprechen, möchte ich auf zwei wichtige Schlussfolgerungen aufmerksam machen.

Interessant wäre zum einen die Verwendung des umstrittenen Mediopunkts („·“). Damit wäre es möglich, eine inkorrekte Verwendung des Bindestrichs in der deutschen Sprache zu vermeiden und die konsequente Trennung von Komposita zu erleichtern.

Zweitens existieren auch in der portugiesischen Sprache relativ lange Wörter, und zwar vor allem solche mit griechischen oder lateinischen Präfixen wie „heteroidentificação“ (Heteroidentifikation). Die Anzahl dieser Komposita ist insbesondere seit der Annahme des neuen orthographischen Abkommens für die portugiesischsprachigen Länder in Brasilien am 31. Dezember 2015 wesentlich gestiegen.

*(Fortsetzung auf Seite 21)*



## Heloisa Fischer

Founder at Comunica Simples

It is remarkable how plain language has grown in the Brazilian public sector as of 2018, especially in citizen-oriented services. This article gathers some success stories across a variety of public agencies, presenting metrics provided by each agency. It first contextualizes the rise of plain language in Brazil and then lays out the cases.

### Compulsory simplification of services boosted growth

Until 2018, plain language drew little attention in Brazil. It was on the radar of some researchers and professionals, but it was far from being a movement or driving public policies. The key role of user experience in digital public services has contributed to governments finally becoming aware of the traditionally ineffective language used when communicating with citizens.

Federal acts from the 2010s had required clear and easy-to-understand public information, but none of

# Brazilian results are just beginning to show up

the acts defined guidelines on how to write the texts. Such has been the case with the Access to Information Act (2012), the Inclusion Act (2015), and the Public Service User Defense Act (2017). The latter not only established the rights of users but also determined that every government agency should explain the services it provides in a document called “Service Charter.”

The Service Charter’s obligation as from 2018 prompted simplification efforts carried out by Public Management Innovation Labs across the country. In that same year, I released *Clarity in e-gov texts, a question of citizenship*, the first book in Portuguese to discuss the plain language movement in public communication. The book was the outcome of an academic research that began in 2016.

By 2021, “language that is clear and understandable to any citizen” became an official guideline for digital governance and public efficiency. The Brazilian Plain Language Network currently connects more than 1,500 officials throughout the country. Innovation awards granted by the São Paulo City Hall and the National Metrology Institute (Inmetro) have plain language categories.

Plain language has grown so quickly and is so widespread in the Brazilian public sector that it is getting hard to keep up with the developments.

### Five cases that confirm the power of plain language

Among various ongoing programs, we can highlight those of the Ceará State Government, the São Paulo City Hall, the National Water Agency, and several judiciary offices.

Programs have focused more on training and regulating plain language use than on compiling data about the impact of simplified documents. It has been easy to find numbers that confirm the growing interest in the topic, but it is still difficult to assess how well plain language texts perform. This article has managed to gather metrics from 5 public agencies in different fields.

### National Treasury debt collection letters

Collection letters for active debt are difficult to understand in any language. In 2022, the National Treasury set up a partnership with Ceará State Government’s Plain Language Program to simplify its letter. The new model – based on plain language and legal design – triggered a 35% increase in review requests and a 70% increase in payments without any administrative appeal. The robust data show that taxpayers better understood what to do and acted to settle their debt.

### Judicial sentences in Goiás

The “Simplify 5.0 Project” at the Goiás State Court of Justice has been transforming sentences into didactic summaries since July 2021. The project relies on plain language

and legal design techniques. After the sentence is made public in the court's system, lawyers and clients receive the summary via WhatsApp. After the Simplify Project, there was a significant drop in the rate of appealability (when one requests the judge's decision to be reviewed). From 3.1%, the rate fell to 1.7%. This means a 55% decrease in requests for sentence revision.

### **A campaign to raise awareness on sexual assault in buses in São Paulo**

The company that operates bus lines in São Paulo (SPTrans) ran a 12-month campaign to raise awareness about sexual abuse. The campaign preferred slang instead of legal jargon. For example, "rubbing against" replaced "libidinous act without consent with the intent to satisfy lust." The choice of familiar words proved to be effective. There was a 58% increase in reports of sexual assault. The campaign language was deemed appropriate by 87.9% of passengers, despite the use of expressions that might be considered vulgar.

### **Increase in user understanding and satisfaction**

Two public agencies from very different sectors have measured the benefits of plain language in user experience. Fiocruz is the main health science and technology institution in Brazil. At the peak of the pandemic, the Covid-19 section on the Fiocruz website was redesigned with plain language guidelines. Until then, the

explanation of what an IgM and/or IgG positive test means was rated as "clear" by 30.43% of users. With plain language, it jumped to 60%.

Another agency that assessed good results was the Regional Council of Engineering and Agronomy of the State of Paraná (CREA-PR), responsible for inspecting professional activities in the region. The CREA-PR held plain language workshops with its customer service team. After the training, the satisfaction index in written interactions with users increased from 70% to 90%.

### **Brazil, a ripe field waiting to be harvested**

To write this article, I contacted more than a dozen leading public agencies running plain language programs of all sizes: from massive and interdepartmental to constrained and restricted. The vast majority of agencies had not yet quantified and systematized the results they had achieved. Many showed interest in collecting the data, but needed more time. It would be convenient to conduct a more in-depth study than this one.

The vibrant Brazilian plain language scene reminds me of an image that Alphonse Chapanis, the pioneer of Ergonomics, used when he described the role of words in machine instructions: "Text is a ripe field waiting to be harvested." The plain language harvest in Brazil has what it takes to be an all-time record crop.

**Heloisa Fischer** is a Brazilian educator and journalist. She holds a Masters in Design from PUC-Rio. Author of *Clarity in e-gov texts, a question of citizenship*, the first book in Portuguese on the use of plain language in digital government. Since 2018, Heloisa has been contributing to disseminate clear communications in the public and private sectors. She is co-founder of the Brazilian Plain Language Network (Rede Linguagem Simples Brasil) and a board member of PLAIN. She developed the Comunica Simples Method to make texts easier to read and understand. Her method has trained nearly 40,000 people.



## Heloisa Fischer

### Fundadora na Comunica Simples

É notável o crescimento da Linguagem Simples no setor público brasileiro a partir de 2018, especialmente nos serviços voltados a cidadãos. Este artigo reúne histórias de sucesso em cinco órgãos públicos, com métricas fornecidas pelos próprios órgãos. O artigo abre contextualizando o crescimento da Linguagem Simples no Brasil e depois apresenta os casos.

### Obrigatoriedade de serviços simplificados alavancou o crescimento

Até 2018, a Linguagem Simples chamava pouca atenção. Estava no radar de alguns pesquisadores e profissionais brasileiros, mas nem de longe se configurava como um movimento ou norteara políticas públicas. O papel central da experiência do usuário em serviços públicos digitais contribuiu para os governos finalmente tomarem consciência da linguagem ineficaz há

# Os resultados brasileiros estão só começando

muito usada ao se comunicar com cidadãos.

Leis federais dos anos 2010 já exigiam informações públicas claras e fáceis de entender, mas nenhuma chegou a indicar diretrizes sobre como produzir os textos. Foi o caso da [Lei de Acesso à Informação](#) (2012), [Lei Brasileira de Inclusão](#) (2015) e [Lei de Defesa do Usuário do Serviço Público](#) (2017).

Esta última não só estabeleceu os direitos dos usuários como determinou que todo órgão público explicasse os serviços prestados em um documento único chamado Carta de Serviços.

A obrigatoriedade da Carta de Serviços a partir de 2018 deflagrou ações de simplificação conduzidas por Laboratórios de Inovação em Gestão Pública em todo o país. No mesmo ano, eu lancei [Clareza em textos de e-gov, uma questão de cidadania](#), o primeiro livro em português a abordar o movimento mundial Linguagem Simples aplicado à comunicação pública. O livro foi fruto de uma pesquisa acadêmica iniciada em 2016.

Em 2021, a “[linguagem clara e compreensível](#)” a qualquer cidadão tornou-se um princípio oficial de governança digital e eficiência pública. A [Rede Linguagem Simples Brasil](#) já conecta mais de 1.500 servidores em todo o país. Os prêmios de inovação da [Prefeitura de São Paulo](#) e do Instituto Nacional de Metrologia (Inmetro) têm categorias dedicadas à Linguagem Simples.

A Linguagem Simples se expandiu de forma tão rápida e está tão pulverizada pelo setor público brasileiro que começa a ser difícil acompanhar o movimento.

### Cinco casos que comprovam a força da Linguagem Simples

Entre os inúmeros programas em andamento no setor público brasileiro, destacam-se os do [Governo do Estado do Ceará](#), [Prefeitura de São Paulo](#), [Agência Nacional de Águas](#) e em vários setores do Poder Judiciário.

Os programas têm focado mais em treinar e regulamentar o uso da Linguagem Simples do que em compilar dados sobre o impacto de documentos simplificados. É fácil encontrar números que confirmem o crescente interesse pelo tema, mas ainda é difícil medir o desempenho de textos escritos com Linguagem Simples. Este artigo conseguiu reunir métricas de cinco órgãos públicos em diferentes áreas.

### Carta de cobrança da Fazenda Nacional

Cartas de cobrança de dívida ativa são documentos difíceis de entender em qualquer idioma. Em 2022, a Procuradoria Geral da Fazenda Nacional brasileira [estabeleceu uma parceria](#) com o Programa de Linguagem Simples do Governo do Estado do Ceará para simplificar a carta. O novo modelo baseado em Linguagem Simples e Design Jurídico provocou um aumento de 35% nos pedidos de revisão e aumentou

em 70% os encerramentos por cancelamento. Os dados robustos indicam que os contribuintes entenderam o que fazer e agiram para regularizar as dívidas.

### **Sentenças judiciais em Goiás**

O Projeto Simplificar 5.0, do Tribunal de Justiça do Estado de Goiás, vem transformando sentenças em resumos didáticos desde julho de 2021. O projeto usa técnicas de Linguagem Simples e Design Jurídico. Assim que a sentença é publicada no sistema do Tribunal, advogados e partes recebem o resumo por Whatsapp. Após o Projeto Simplificar, houve uma queda significativa na taxa de recorribilidade (quando se pede para rever a decisão do juiz). De 3,1%, a taxa caiu para 1,7%. Ou seja, houve uma redução de 55% nos pedidos de revisão de sentenças.

### **Campanha de conscientização sobre abuso sexual nos ônibus de São Paulo**

A empresa que gere as linhas de ônibus em São Paulo (SPTrans) veiculou uma campanha de conscientização sobre assédio sexual durante 12 meses. A campanha preferiu gírias em vez de jargão legal. Por exemplo: “encoxar” em vez de “ato libidinoso sem anuência com objetivo de satisfazer a própria lascívia”. A escolha por palavras familiares mostrou-se eficaz. Houve um aumento de 58% nos canais de denúncia de abuso sexual e 87,9% dos passageiros acharam a

linguagem da campanha adequada, mesmo com uso de expressões que poderiam ser consideradas vulgares.

### **Aumento em índices de compreensão e satisfação de usuários**

Duas organizações públicas de setores distintos aferiram o impacto positivo da Linguagem Simples na experiência de usuários. A Fiocruz é a mais importante instituição pública de ciência e tecnologia em saúde do Brasil. No pico da pandemia, a seção de dúvidas frequentes sobre a Covid no website da Fiocruz foi revisada com diretrizes de Linguagem Simples. Até então, a explicação sobre o significado de um exame positivo para IgM e/ou IgG era avaliada como “clara” por 30,43% dos usuários. Com a Linguagem Simples, saltou para 60%.

Outro órgão que aferiu bons resultados foi o Conselho Regional de Engenharia e Agronomia do Estado do Paraná (CREA-PR), responsável por fiscalizar as atividades profissionais na região. O CREA-PR fez workshops de Linguagem Simples com a sua equipe de atendimento. Após o treinamento, o índice de satisfação nas interações por escrito com usuários passou de 70% para 90%.

### **Brasil, um campo maduro à espera de ser colhido**

Para escrever este artigo, procurei mais de doze importantes órgãos públicos que conduzem programas de Linguagem Simples de variados

escopos: dos mais robustos e interdepartamentais até programas pequenos e restritos. A grande maioria não havia ainda quantificado e sistematizado os resultados que vem alcançando. Muitos ficaram interessados em coletar os dados, mas precisariam de mais tempo. Isso mostrou a pertinência de realizar um estudo mais aprofundado.

A vibrante cena brasileira da Linguagem Simples me faz lembrar da imagem que Alphonse Chapanis, o pioneiro da Ergonomia, usou para definir o papel das palavras em instruções de máquinas: “O texto é um campo maduro à espera de ser colhido”. A colheita da Linguagem Simples no Brasil tem tudo para ser uma safra recorde.

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**Heloisa Fischer** é uma educadora e jornalista brasileira. Mestre em Design pela PUC-Rio. Autora de *Clareza em textos de e-gov, uma questão de cidadania*, o primeiro livro em português sobre o uso de Linguagem Simples em governo digital. Desde 2018, Heloisa tem contribuído para disseminar a comunicação clara nos setores público e privado. Ela é co-fundadora da Rede Linguagem Simples Brasil e membro da diretoria da PLAIN. Desenvolveu o Método Comunica Simples para facilitar a leitura e a compreensão de textos. O seu método já treinou quase 40.000 pessoas.

# Ask the



## **What has been the most surprising thing you've learned about plain language in your career?**

The most surprising thing that I've learned about plain language has been that it's not all about the words. That is, the words do matter, but so do a lot of other factors like document design, numeracy principles (in some situations), and behavior theory. If you think about it, it makes sense. Even if you use words that every person can understand, if you design the document in a way that doesn't invite the reader to keep reading, then they miss the message. And if you don't take into account how the person might react to whatever message you are trying to convey, then you are missing out on an opportunity to better connect with them.

## **What has been the most convincing evidence you've encountered that proves the benefits of plain language?**

Probably the most convincing evidence of the power of plain language doesn't come from any of the studies I've done. It comes from the field of health literacy. There are hundreds of well-funded studies in that field that have shaped the boundaries of what works and what doesn't. One of the foundational pieces that can lead you into the the research is [Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion](#), which was published by the US Institute of Medicine back in 2004.

## **What do you think still needs to be researched in the field of plain language?**

In many ways, the Covid-19 pandemic has reinvigorated the importance of plain language and health literacy. Before January 2020, only a few researchers on earth had even heard of Covid-19. But now, the whole world has had to learn about, learn how to guard against it, learn how to recover from it, etc. Covid-19 didn't care about your reading level or your ability to process, understand, and use information. It came for everyone. So we had to learn how to communicate with everyone (and motivate them to care). It's that last part that is interesting to me from a research perspective. How can we use behavioral psychology in the plain language movement to nudge people in the direction toward the great good? Of course, there are also ethical issues that abound with trying to subtly encourage someone to take a certain action, but, nevertheless, it's a fascinating area to me.

## **What is your advice for someone who wants to know more about measuring the impact of plain language?**

Measuring the impact of plain language is a "sticky wicket", as they say. It really depends on the context. In the context of government-related documents, it can be measured by the number of complaints or questions about a given service or benefit. In the health world, it can be measured more easily, through hospital readmissions rates, adherence rates, etc. This is because in the health world the language in a

### **Christopher Trudeau, J.D.**

Associate Professor of Law, University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

### **How did you get started in plain language?**

I got started in plain language in law school, where I learned from Professor Joseph Kimble, one of the long-time leaders in the plain language movement. So clear legal writing was part of me from the moment I started developing my professional identity as a soon-to-be lawyer.

After a few years of practice, Professor Kimble reached out to see if I'd be interested in being a visiting professor of legal writing. I jumped at the chance and have never looked back. Through that visiting professorship, I sat through an entire term of Professor Kimble's class, quite literally learning from the master. That experience, of course, helped broaden my plain language skills, but it also helped me learn how to teach those skills to others. I've been doing that – both writing clear legal documents and teaching others how to write them – for the past 19 years!

# Experts

document usually directs someone to do (or not do) something important or else they could end up in the hospital or at least in a worse situation.

But one of my favorite ways to measure the impact of plain language is to audience-test things. We often think of doing audience testing before a document is finalized and put into use, and I'm a huge advocate for that. But I think where we often miss the mark is failing to continue to tap into that audience and get their feedback once the

document is being used. As plain language writers, we often just move on to other projects, but I like to think of document revision as iterative. We come up with something we know is better than the last version, we use it, we see how that's going, and then we improve it. Rinse and repeat until we've rooted out the vast majority of problems.

## If you could give a plain language makeover to any text in the world, what would it be?

I'm going to give a non-answer here because there isn't just one

document. If you only fixed one document, there would still be a million more than need to be fixed. So if I had to pick a type of document, I would say that 95% of every hospital form that has ever been created needs to be totally revised with plain language and health literacy principles in mind – except for the ones that I've revised, of course.

(Fortsetzung von Seite 15)

Wenn ein Präfix in einem Vokal endete und das zweite Wort mit „r“ oder „s“ begann, wurden beide Wortteile zuvor durch einen Bindestrich getrennt. Nun wurde für diesen Fall aber nicht nur der Bindestrich abgeschafft, auch die vorgenannten Anfangsbuchstaben des zweiten Wortteils müssen verdoppelt werden: Beispielsweise wurde „auto-suficiência“ (Selbstversorgung) zu „autossuficiência“. Zur Vermeidung dieser schwer lesbaren Wörter könnte es daher eine gute Lösung sein, die deutsche Leichte-Sprache-Regel zu befolgen und auch auf Portugiesisch Komposita durch einen Bindestrich, oder noch besser, den Mediopunkt zu trennen (z. B., auto-suficiência, anti-rábico).

## Christina Maria Müller

ist vereidigte Übersetzerin und Dolmetscherin für Deutsch und Portugiesisch und Masterstudentin an der Universität Zürich. Dieser Artikel basiert auf der Abschlussarbeit für das CAS-Modul „Translation Technology and Artificial Intelligence“ an der UZH (2021). Den vollständigen Bericht finden Sie auf der [UZH-Website](#).



**Clear writing for Europe 2023**

The European Commission will host the **2023 Clear Writing for Europe Conference** in Brussels and online on **23-24 May**. **Register for the conference** by 30 April!


Focusing on **Supporting European democracy and transparency through clear language**, the conference will ask:

- How does plain language act as a tool for democracy and outreach to the public?
- How can we make clear writing the default setting, and use it to reach a wider audience?
- How can plain language help us communicate on complex topics like climate change and energy?

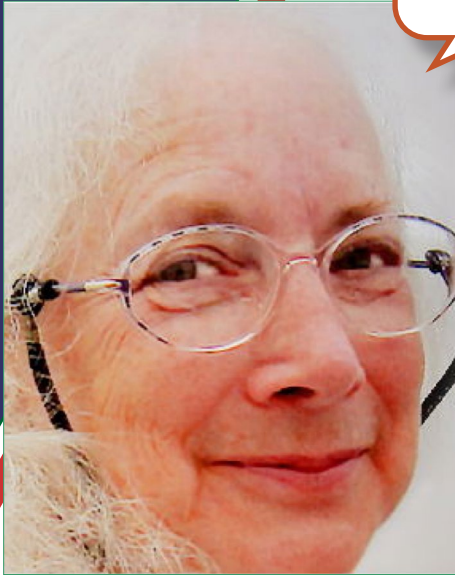
Workshops on day 2 will focus on:

- Clear language subtitling and accessibility
- Information design, and clear language for different literacy levels
- Drafting and editing tools and resources
- Clear press releases

Join plain language enthusiasts from across the EU to learn, get inspired, and build your networks! Go to [https://commission.europa.eu/events/clear-writing-europe-2023-2023-05-23\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/events/clear-writing-europe-2023-2023-05-23_en) for more details, or use **#ClearWriting**



# Ask the



UNITED STATES

## Janice (Ginny) Redish

Author and consultant in plain language, content strategy, user experience, and writing for the web

### How did you get started in plain language?

I am a linguist by training. In the late 1970s, the US government under President Jimmy Carter was concerned that too many people couldn't understand government documents. The US Department of Education funded a 3-year effort :

- understand people's problems with government documents
- collect and do research on how to make those documents better
- help government agencies improve their documents
- create new university courses to train better writers.

And they wanted a linguist to head that effort.

My colleagues and I at the American Institutes for Research (a not-for-profit research and development firm in Washington, DC) wrote the winning proposal. From the government's named Document Design Project (DDP), we created the Document Design Center (DDC) that

continued work in plain language for government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and commercial companies (IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Sony, and many others) for 2 decades. Carolyn Boccella Bagin and then Susan Kleimann succeeded me as Director of the DDC. Karen Schriver was part of the team we partnered with at Carnegie Mellon University where they expanded their part of the DDP into the Communication Design Center, which also continued to do plain language projects. One major product of the DDP was a set of research-based guidelines for plain language: [Guidelines for Document Designers](#).

### What has been the most surprising thing you've learned about plain language in your career?

I'm surprised by how difficult it is for many writers to focus on their audience, to organize logically, to write clearly. For some, writing in plain language means breaking habits (like long sentences and big words) for which they were rewarded in school. For others, it means forsaking traditional models of legal documents that were never easy to understand but that were held up as sacrosanct.

As people for whom plain language in all its aspects seems obvious and easy, we have to be sympathetic to the backgrounds of the people we meet in our training classes. We have to convince them that plain language is better. We have to help them change their attitudes about themselves and about their audiences.

### What has been the most convincing evidence you've encountered that proves the benefits of plain language?

Before we show the benefits of plain language, I think it helps to convince people about the pain of non-plain language.

Years ago, Carolyn Boccella Bagin and Andy Rose at the DDC did a project with AARP (the US organization that focuses on the needs of older adults). They asked people to send in their stories of trying to work with documents. About a third of the thousands of stories that came in were from people who gave up trying to get money or benefits to which they were actually entitled.

Painful stories like these (along with financially-relevant data on too many phone calls, too many lost sales, too many errors on forms) motivate change. In his wonderful book, *Writing for Dollars, Writing to Please*, Joe Kimble cites many examples of pain, fixes, and the evidence for the benefits of plain language.

### What do you think still needs to be researched in the field of plain language?

We need more examples with data of both the pain that non-plain language costs people and the financial benefits of plain language.

A new area of research is going to be how human information designers and writers can best use artificial intelligence (AI) products like ChatGPT. I have written extensively on why readability formulas are NOT a good tool for plain language – most recently in an [article with Caroline Jarrett](#). But new AI tools like ChatGPT may indeed be useful. I'd like to see

# Experts

plain language specialists research them and report about them to our community.

## **What is your advice for someone who wants to know more about measuring the impact of plain language?**

Read [Dana Botka's](#) article. Dana explains the power of measuring the impact of plain language and gives us 4 examples with different measures.

Realize that it does not require lots of money or time to measure impact.

First, you have to know what you are trying to achieve. What are the pain points for users and for the organization? What measures will tell you that you succeeded in easing those pain points?

Then, you must collect baseline data before you revise: errors on forms, number and length of calls or emails to customer service, response rates,

or whatever is relevant to what you are trying to achieve.

And, of course, you must then collect the same data after you have distributed the revised document(s) or launched a new website. A caution: Wait a bit before collecting the new data. The impact may not be immediate because some people who were familiar with the old document or website may struggle at first to find what they need in the new one.

Also, do iterative usability testing during the project to help achieve the greatest impact.

## **If you could give a plain language makeover to any text in the world, what would it be?**

So much still needs to be done that I can't single out just one text. However, if I had to choose a category of documents, I would say

we still need to focus on forms and their instructions.

When we started the Document Design Project, we collected examples of documents that people need over their lifetime just to get on with their lives. And we quickly realized that the absolutely necessary documents were forms (and notices people get related to the forms).

Plain language specialists have had some successes. Susan Kleimann and Barbra Kingsley revised US mortgage forms with iterative usability testing and measures of success. Joe Kimble has recently been revising legal forms. But much more needs to be done. If you choose to focus on plain language for forms, get good advice from Caroline Jarrett in her book with Gerry Gaffney, *Forms that Work*.

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## YOUR AD HERE

Do you have a service, product, event, or network that you want to share with plain language professionals around the world?

Send a message to [publications@plainlanguagenetwork.org](mailto:publications@plainlanguagenetwork.org) to ask about advertising possibilities in future issues of the PLAIN e-journal.





### Dr. Neil James

Chair, International Plain Language Federation

The International Plain Language Federation is a working group formed by 3 major international organizations for plain language:

- Plain Language Association International (PLAIN)
- Clarity
- Center for Plain Language.

We have been working to strengthen plain language as a profession and to boost the public benefits it brings. This has included a common definition, an ISO standard, and the exploration of options for certification and training.

This update outlines some of our recent achievements and what we are working on together in 2023.

#### ISO standard

A major step forward in 2022 was approval of the Draft ISO standard FDIS 24495-1 Plain language – Part 1: Governing principles and guidelines.

The draft was approved by national standards bodies in August 2022 and then went through a final round of minor comments. The ISO plain language working group (TC37

## News from the International Plain Language Federation

WG11) signed off on final changes in December 2022, and it has now entered the final ballot stage for international standards bodies to vote on.

The next step is publication, which should be mid-year 2023. The standard will provide an authoritative international reference point for plain language. It is a major step forward for our profession.

ISO 24495-1 sets out the general principles and guidelines for plain language. But it is only Part 1 of what the standard will become. Further parts can be added to specify how the standard can apply to sectors, principles, or genres. So the work will continue.

#### Localization

The Federation's Localization and Implementation Committee has 38 members around the world. It is preparing to inform the world about the forthcoming standard and to support people in as many countries as possible in adapting or endorsing it.

The ISO standard is written in English, but its general principles apply to all languages. However, we expect different countries will adopt it through their national standards bodies and localize it as needed for their one country and language.

The localization committee has also prepared communications such as a press release, fact sheets, social media posts, and profile banners to promote the standard when published, with people available to answer queries about localizing it in their own countries.

#### Bibliography

Another initiative to emerge from the standards work is the bibliography project. This will support the standard by listing key resources that:

- provide empirical evidence for the guidelines in the standard
- illustrate how authors and organizations can apply a principle or a guideline.

The bibliography will be available through the Federation website. It will be a living document, with new references added continuously.

#### Training guidelines and resources

Two training committees have also progressed their work during the last 12 months.

The Resource Bank Committee is working on building a library of plain language resources. It has prepared a technical specification and tested several platforms. It selected Slab as the most suitable platform to use, which is available free for non-profit organizations.

Once the resource bank is established, plain language practitioners will be able to contribute their own resources for the benefit of other members. These will include practical materials such as slides and handouts.

The Training Guidelines Committee has been considering guidelines for plain language training and education. It is preparing a survey and research to find out what plain language training is currently being offered, and what kind of guidelines plain language trainers might need. It will then develop recommended training objectives, content and evaluation practices, and make recommendations about training guidelines.

Keep an eye out for this survey in 2023 so you can help shape the future of plain language training.

### Certification

The Certification Committee has over 20 members, divided into 4 subcommittees, that are exploring the feasibility of plain language certification for:

- organizations
- individuals
- training
- documents.

A fifth subcommittee is looking at the systems that we would need to put into place to implement certification.

This work is in an exploration phase focusing on 3 areas:

- developing surveys to assess the demand and interest in certification
- drafting guidelines and tools that might be used as part of certification
- drafting an issues paper to identify key questions related to the focus, structure, systems, costs, and timing of certification.

The committee has just completed a survey of organizations to assess the level of interest in plain language certification.

As certification is a major step for plain language, progress will be cautious and considered. But we expect to make some key initial decisions during 2023.

### New appointments

After 2 years as the Chair of the Federation, Vera Gergely (Hungary) finished in that role at the end of 2022. We would like to thank them profusely for all their efforts in driving the Federation's agenda in a crucial

phase of our work. As the immediate past Chair, Vera will continue as an advisory member of the Board.

Dr. Neil James (Australia) has returned to the role of Chair, having been the founding chair of the (then) International Plain Language Working Group from 2008 to 2015. As a result, Neil will step down as Chair of the Certification Committee in April 2023, and Board member Sarah Slabbert (South Africa) will take over that role.

The IPLF Board itself will have 3 new members in 2023: Carlos Valdovinos (Mexico), Angelika Vaasa (Estonia), and Karel Van der Waarde (Belgium), who bring highly relevant experience in plain language, ISO, and information design.

We would like to thank retiring Board members Karen Schriver (United States), RoMa Galan (Mexico), Lynda Harris (New Zealand), and Annetta Cheek (United States) who have all contributed so much.

### Getting involved

If you would like to know more about any of the Federation's activities, please visit [www.iplfederation.org](http://www.iplfederation.org) or contact [chair@iplfederation.org](mailto:chair@iplfederation.org).

If you would like to contribute to these developments in plain language, you can get involved by joining one of the Federation's member organizations:

- PLAIN: [www.plainlanguagenetwork.org](http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org)
- Clarity: [www.clarity-international.org](http://www.clarity-international.org)
- Center for Plain Language: [www.centerforplainlanguage.org](http://www.centerforplainlanguage.org)

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**Dr. Neil James** is the Chair of the International Plain Language Federation. He was co-founder of the Plain English Foundation in Australia and worked as its Executive Director for 20 years until retiring from that position in 2022. Neil has a doctorate in English and has published more than 100 articles, essays, and reviews on language and literature.

