

## Plain English Tips

To get your message across and help people remember it, follow these seven tips. You can remember them this way: CPSAVES (Clear Prose Saves).

- **Concrete** Use simple, concrete terms that readers can picture instead of difficult, abstract ones they can't.  
*report, article (NOT instrument of communication)*  
*workers, people (NOT human resources)*  
*we, researchers (NOT knowledge disseminators)*
- **Positive** Use positive wording instead of negative.  
*possible (NOT not impossible)*  
*clear (NOT unlikely to be misinterpreted)*  
*can do X if Y (NOT unable to do X unless Y)*
- **Simple** Use simple connectors instead of strings of words.  
*about (NOT with regard to)*  
*for (NOT for the purpose of)*  
*if (NOT in the event that)*
- **Active** Use active verbs instead of passive ones.  
*they found (NOT it was determined)*  
*the editors reviewed (NOT a review was done)*  
*we value your effort (NOT your effort is valued)*
- **Verbs** Use precise verbs instead of abstract nouns.  
*extract, take (NOT engage in the extraction of)*  
*impact, affect (NOT have an impact on)*  
*start, help (NOT facilitate the implementation of)*
- **Everyday** Use short, everyday words instead of long, academic ones.  
*try (NOT endeavour)*  
*use (NOT utilize)*  
*long words (NOT erudite vernacular)*
- **Short** Use short sentences. Limit most to one main idea.

# Plain English Resources

## Readings

Human Resources Development Canada, *Plain Language Clear and Simple* (PWGSC, 1996); out of print, but used copies available

Daniel M. Oppenheimer, “Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly,” *Journal of Applied Cognitive Psychology* 20:139–156 (2006), available at: <http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/psy3001/files/simple%20writing.pdf>

Translation Bureau, “Plain Language,” in *The Canadian Style*, rev. and expanded ed. (Dundurn Press, 1997), available at: <http://www.termiumplus.gc.ca/tcdnstyl-chap?lang=eng&lettr=chapsect13&info0=13#zz13>

U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, *A Plain English Handbook* (1998), available at: [www.sec.gov/pdf/handbook.pdf](http://www.sec.gov/pdf/handbook.pdf)

Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer’s Design Book*, 3rd ed. (Peachpit Press, 2008)

## Word lists

CLAD Online Thesaurus, available at: <http://www.eastendliteracy.on.ca/ClearLanguageAndDesign/thesaurus/>

“Plain Words,” *Caps and Spelling*, 20th ed. (The Canadian Press, 2012)

“Simple Words and Phrases,” PlainLanguage.gov, available at: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/wordsuggestions/simplewords.cfm>