



## **EAC Conference 2016 Vancouver – Correction Connection Plain Language Process Panel**

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### **The Art of Succeeding with a Plain Language Project**

#### **1. Vision**

Make sure your project is a shared vision: not double vision. Invest the time before you even pick up your pen, or open a new file, to find out exactly what your client and what your audience wants. Remember: the audience is number one in plain language projects.

#### **2. Gather Resources**

Each project—no matter how big or small, whether within your organization or virtual, full on or just a quick sketch—requires resources.

#### **3. Make a Plan**

Start with a bare plain language canvas. Then, bring your talents, team expertise and tools together to create a masterful work of art. Yes, the final version will be the 'show and tell'. But, ask any artists: the real results come from the pain staking planning upfront.

#### **4. Tools and Supplies**

Plain language uses many tools. But the important ones are unmasking your audience's personal needs and your information's true depth.

**Readability tests**—the early backbone of plain language—can only supply broad strokes to the canvas: you need to go deeper. Don't forget to blend in user testing at each stage: it can add real visual power to your next version.

#### **5. Begin**

You are starting with a blank canvas for each project. Always keep the doors to communication open. Start with gusto, but work with your client along the way. Go step-by-step: resist the temptation to throw all your creative and concept skills at the canvas in one go. Be prepared for tantrums—yours and theirs.

## **6. Build a Foundation**

Whether the project is one document, or a whole group of documents, or a mix of media, create a style guide. Consistency is a huge part of plain language: *using first person instead of third; upper and lower case titles instead of screaming bold caps; not underlining copy (readers think it's a hyperlink)*. Do it for your sanity and to create your signature.

## **7. Dip In Paint**

So, you've done your preparation, planning, and the canvas is ready. Go wild—'dip it in paint'. Go for the test, the rewrite, and the edit. Create! Paint a clear picture of the top changes and share. Training staff has always been a key part of my projects: it can make plain language the universal language of the organization.

## **8. Professional Secrets**

Each and every one of you has unique skills, talents, knowledge and experience that will be transferable to any plain language project. The key is the audience. Use all the plain language tools to get, use and measure the impact of the audience's needs, interests, and expectations. It will make the final project so much more stunning.

## **9. Glue It Down**

Put on the final touches—proofread, check against style guide and checklists, review audience feedback. Get someone else to take a close-up look. Give it to the users for final review. Finish it. Stand back and admire. Then, on with the show.

## **10. Unveil Your Work of Art**

Make a big deal of the final project unveiling. Encourage your team to celebrate. This is a big accomplishment and deserves a 'gallery opening' style event.

Ask for samples. Some huge successes can be made, and you'll want a limited edition version for yourself. Gather them for your next gallery showing!

Where an artist works primarily alone, plain language is all about collaboration. This may feel awkward at first – but it is the best way to get the 'oohs' and 'ahs' when the unveiling happens. Plain language is hard work and you must be proud of your creations.

Best of luck with your next work of art!

**Kate**