

Buried Under Words?



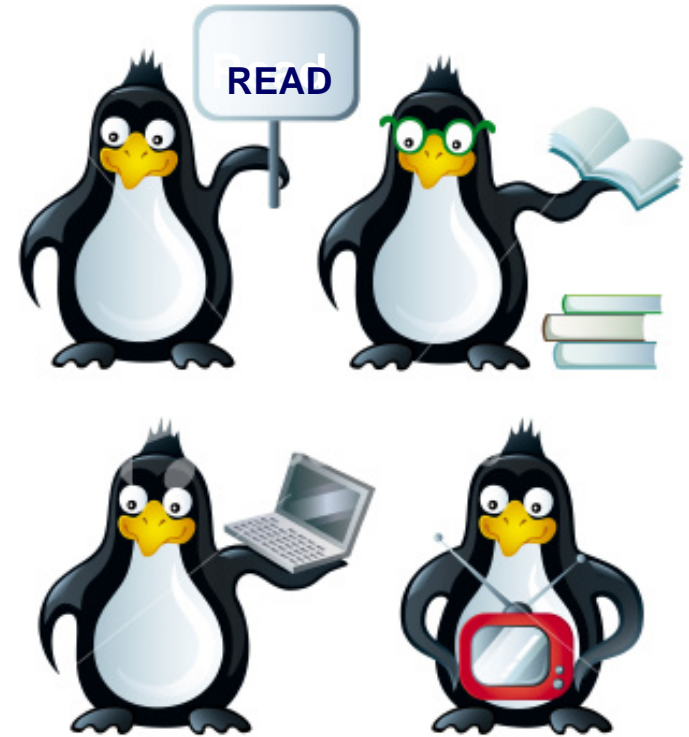
Déjà Vu All Over Again

*Revisiting Plain English with an
Emphasis on Eliminating
Wordiness and Redundancy*

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Librarians Serve Many Functions

*We're often pressed into the role of
Technical Writers with little or no training*

Plain English Redux

- ✓ *Logical Organization with the Reader in Mind*
- ✓ *Use of You and Other Pronouns*
- ✓ *Active Rather Than Passive Voice*
- ✓ *Short Sentences, Varied Sentences*
- ✓ *Common, Everyday Words*
- ✓ *Easy-to-Read Design Features*

Remember...

- ✓ *“Plain English” is written to be understood*
- ✓ *No Confusion About Meaning*
- ✓ *Simple, Direct, Clear and Concise*
- ✓ *Fancy Phrases and Purple Prose Causes Readers to Wonder What Your Real Purpose Might Be*

Identify the Reader

- ✓ *Is Writing Appropriate & Understandable for the Reader?*
- ✓ *What Do You Want the Reader to Know?*
- ✓ *Why Does the Reader Need to Read Your Document?*
- ✓ *Is It a Document for the Public?*
- ✓ *What is the Average Expertise of the Reader?*

Use of Pronouns

- ✓ *Aids Comprehension by Clarifying What Applies to Your Reader and what applies to You*
- ✓ *Allows You to “Speak” Directly to Your Reader, Creating an Appealing Tone that will Keep Readers Reading*
- ✓ *Helps You Avoid Abstractions and Use More Concrete, Everyday Language*
- ✓ *Keeps Your Sentences Short*
- ✓ *Allows You to Avoid the “he or she” Dilemma. First- and Second-person Pronouns aren’t Gender-specific*

YOU’LL BE MORE EASILY UNDERSTOOD

Use Active Rather Than Passive Verbs

Why?

- ✓ *Passive Verbs are Longwinded, Ambiguous, Impersonal and Dull.*
- ✓ *Active Verbs Make Writing Simpler, Less Formal, Clearer and More Precise.*

Verb-Tense Example

Passive

*The frog was
swallowed by Fred.*

Active

*Fred swallowed the
frog.*



Examples

Don't: *The new rules were issued by the Access Services Department on June 1.*

Do: *Access Services issued the new rules on June 1.*

Don't: *An I.D. must be presented by all students.*

Do: *All students must present I.D.*

Don't: *The report was written by Jane.*

Do: *Jane wrote the report.*

Don't: *He was thanked by the president.*

Do: *The president thanked him.*

Writing Sentences

- ✓ *Sentence Length is Crucial to Good Writing.*
- ✓ *Sentences by Good Writers Average 15 to 20 Words*
- ✓ *Keep Average Sentence Length Well Below 20 Words*
- ✓ *Vary Length and Rhythm of Sentences*
- ✓ *Try to Limit Most Sentences to One Idea*
- ✓ *Break Long Sentences With More Than One Idea Into Two or More Sentences*

Use Everyday Words with Clear Meanings

Instead of...

- ✓ *Cease, use.....Stop*
- ✓ *Procure.....Get*
- ✓ *Terminate.....End*
- ✓ *Utilize.....Use*
- ✓ *Facilitate.....Help*
- ✓ *Necessitates....Needs*
- ✓ *Parameters.....Limits*
- ✓ *Methodology....Method*
- ✓ *Promulgate.....Issue, Declare*

Avoid Jargon & Technical Terms

- ✓ *Don't Overestimate Readers' Understanding of Terms*
- ✓ *If You Must Use a Technical Term, Define it*
- ✓ *It Doesn't Insult the Intelligence of Readers to Explain Terms Clearly*
- ✓ *Use Abbreviations, Acronyms and Other Jargon Sparingly, if at All*

Easy to Read Design Features

- ✓ *Use Easy to Read Type*
- ✓ *Use a Layout that Spaces Paragraphs and Sections of the Documents From Each Other*
- ✓ *Write Short Paragraphs*
- ✓ *Charts, Graphs, Tables*
- ✓ *Bold Headings or Bullets Make Documents More Readable and Highlight Important Points*
- ✓ *Shorter Units of Text are More Manageable, Less Intimidating*
- ✓ *White Space and Headings are Clues to What's Important*

Wordiness

The habit of loading one's writing with words that don't contribute to the purpose or meaning of one's message.

Why Do Writers Resort to Wordiness?

- *Want a document to be a certain length*
- *Obscure fuzzy or underdeveloped ideas*
- *Want to sound intelligent*
- *Some writers are wordy without realizing it*

You Might Sound Smarter if...

- *You Use BIG Words*
- *You Use 25 Words When 5 Will Do*
- *Use Different Words to Say the Same Thing Twice*
- *Add Unnecessary Syllables*
- *Include meaningless adjectives*
- *Make pointless pronouncements*

Teacher-Student Dialogue

- *This is a Study of the Value of Work*
- *The problem I have addressed myself to...*
- *Study*
- *Longitudinal study*

- *Conceptual Framework*
- *The problem I have addressed myself to is the development of a conceptual framework...*
- *...Through the medium of a longitudinal study*
- *...The value of work*
- *The value of remunerative employment*
- *The magnitude of the monetary awards to be anticipated from remunerative employment*

Finished

- *This is a Study of the Value of Work*
- *The Problem I have Addressed Myself to is the Development of a Conceptual Framework Through the Medium of a Longitudinal Study of the Magnitude of Monetary Awards to be Anticipated From Remunerative Employment*



*Coruscate, Coruscate,
diminutive stellar orb;
How inexplicable to me is the
stupendous problem of your
existence!*

Self-Taught Tautology

Repetition of meaning, using different words to say the same thing twice, especially where additional words fail to provide additional clarity

Have you ever...

- *Reversed your car backwards?*
- *Given gifts to a couple of twins?*
- *Seen something that's very unique?*
- *Unloosened your laces?*
- *Seen a most puzzling mystery?*
- *Gotten an unexpected surprise?*

If you have, tautology wins!!

Tautology for Fun and Profit

- *November*
- *Yellow*
- *History*
- *Computer Science*
- *Two Kinds*
- *Surrounded*
- *Result*
- *In the Month of November*
- *Yellow in Color*
- *Past History*
- *The Field of Computer Science*
- *Two Different Kinds*
- *Surrounded on all Sides*
- *End Result*

- *He can be trusted*
- *Large*
- *Point*
- *Finished*
- *Outcome*

- *He is a person who can be trusted*
- *Large in size*
- *Point in time*
- *Completely finished*
- *Final outcome*

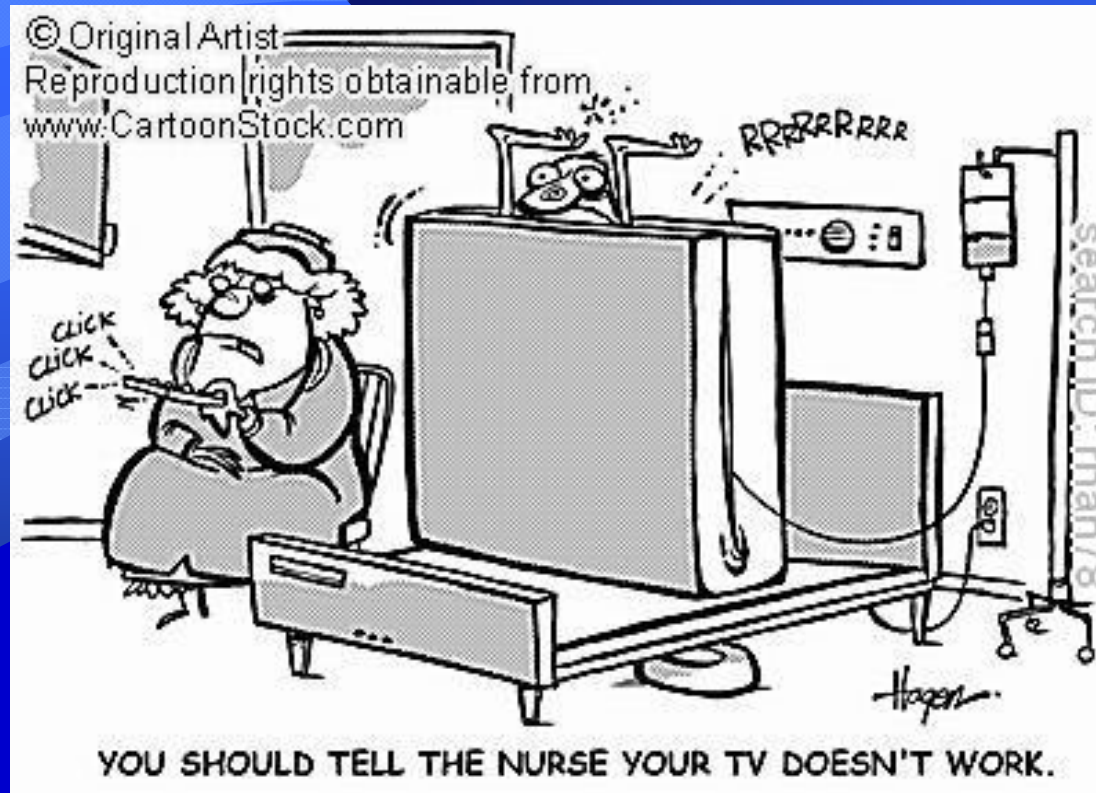
Quickly Eliminate One

- *Advance Warning*
- *Basic Fundamentals*
- *Brief in Duration*
- *Collect Together*
- *Consensus of Opinion*
- *Cooperate Together*
- *Enclosed Herein*
- *Few in Number*
- *Final Ending*
- *Important Essentials*
- *Just Exactly*
- *Merge Together*
- *Mutual Cooperation*
- *Necessary Requisite*
- *Plan in Advance*
- *Protrude Out*
- *Resume Again*
- *Round in Shape*
- *Still Continue*
- *Surrounding Circumstances*
- *True Facts*

When in Doubt Add...

Qualifiers, Intensifiers

- *Very*
- *Kind of*
- *Really*
- *Absolutely*
- *Quite*
- *Somewhat*
- *Extremely*
- *Severely*
- *Truly*



John has been ill for a long time.

*John has been **quite** ill for a **really** long time.*

A Pinch or Two of Meaningless Adjectives

- *Good*
- *Nice*
- *Bad*
- *Okay*
- *Important*
- *Significant*

Make Pointless Pronouncements

- *I will explain...*
- *This essay will show...*
- *Let me say that...*
- *It is my opinion...*
- *In my estimation...*
- *Let me make clear...*

A Few Extra Syllables Here and There

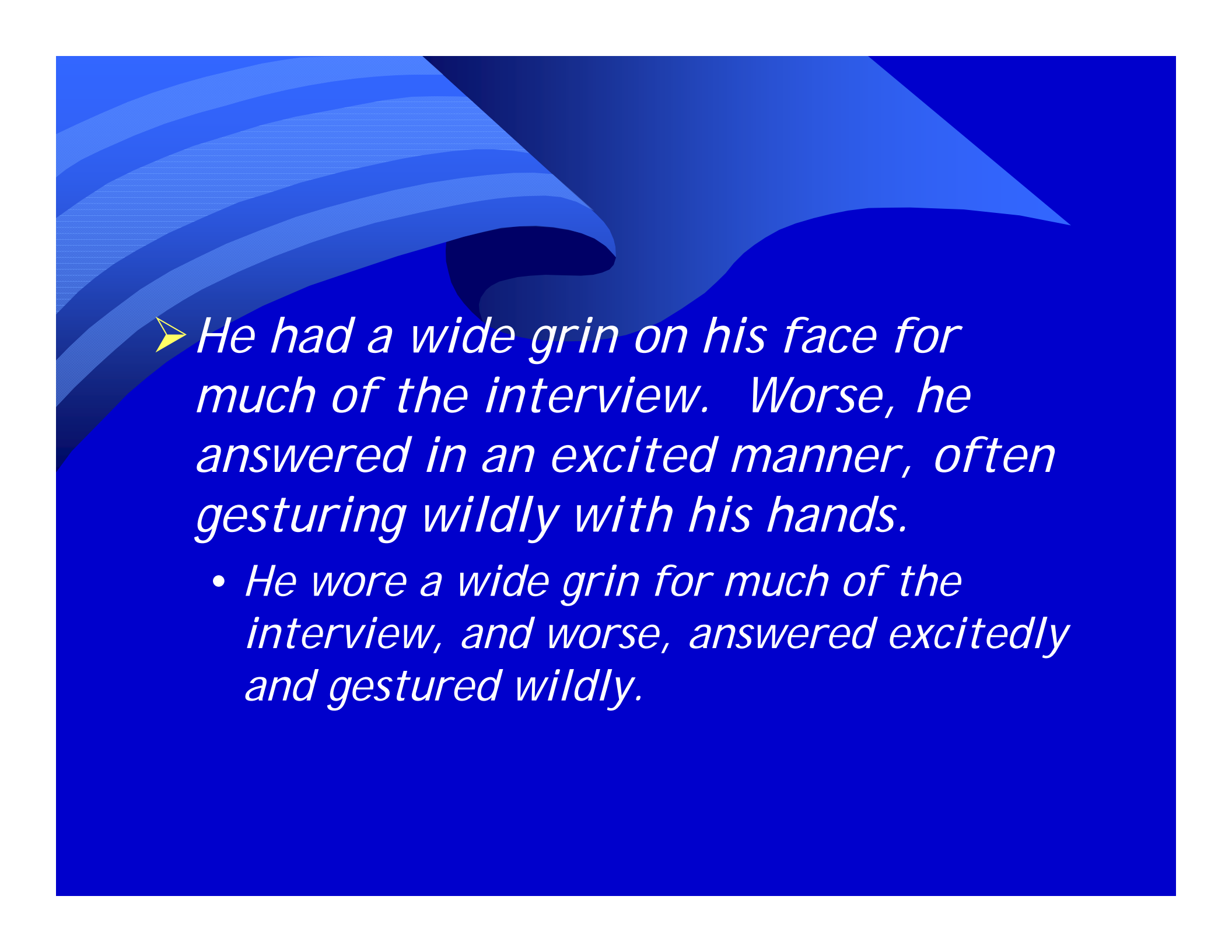
- *Public transportation **usage** is increasing because of gas prices.*
- *He's not the only one who wants tests of teacher **competency**.*
- *Forensics tested various **bodily** fluids, including saliva from his mouth.*

*Each Sentence Suffers from the
Same Flaw.*

Can you spot it?

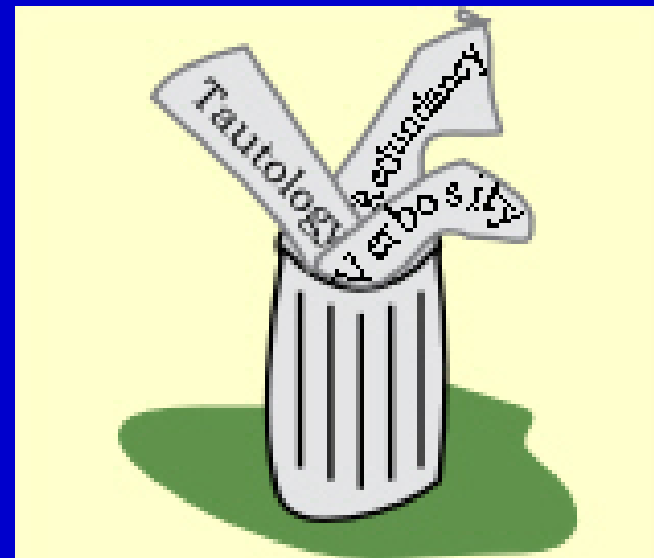
- *The path narrowed in width as it approached the bridge.*
 - The path narrowed as it approached the bridge.
- *He saluted and surreptitiously wiped the tears from his eyes.*
 - He saluted and surreptitiously wiped away tears.

- *The progress of economic development in Iraq has run into many obstacles blocking its path.*
 - Iraq's economic development has run into many obstacles.
- *She was photographed after the examination, although by then her bruises had gone from a deep purple in color to paler shades of green and yellow.*
 - She was photographed after the examination although by then her bruises were fading.
- The agency has seen a new record in the number of ethics complaints regarding free gifts.
 - The agency has seen a record number of ethics complaints regarding gifts.

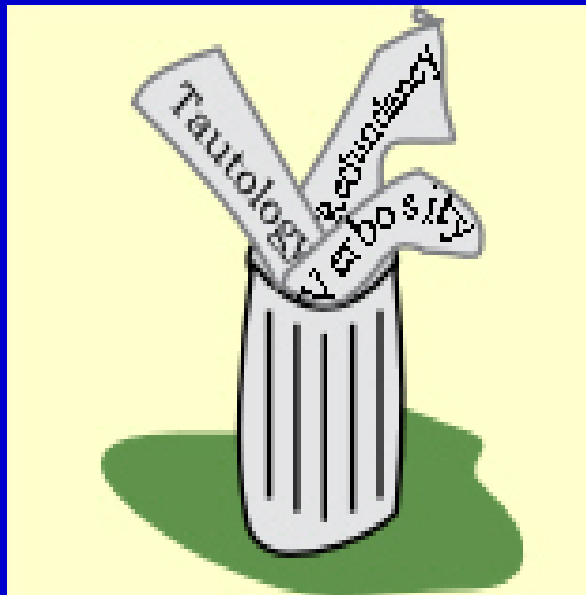
- 
- *He had a wide grin on his face for much of the interview. Worse, he answered in an excited manner, often gesturing wildly with his hands.*
 - *He wore a wide grin for much of the interview, and worse, answered excitedly and gestured wildly.*

Final Suggestion

Unless you know you write very succinctly, plan to cut your wordage by 20% in your first revision of a draft



Wordiness



Plain Language in Government Documents

- *Government Information:*
 - *Needs to be accessible to the citizens.*
 - *Needs to be written in language that can be understood by the citizens.*
 - *Should not be written in a specialized language understood only by those on the inside.*

*Government Mandates
President Clinton's Memorandum on Plain Language in
Government Writing*

- *June 1, 1998*
- *Memorandum for the Heads of
Executive Departments and Agencies*
- *Subject: Plain Language in Government
Writing*

Government Mandates President Clinton's Memorandum on Plain Language in Government Writing

- *Government communication with the public needs to be more:*
 - *Responsive*
 - *Accessible*
 - *Understandable*
- *Federal Government's writing must be in plain language, sending a clear message about:*
 - *What the government is doing*
 - *What it requires*
 - *What services it offers*

*Government Mandates
President Clinton's Memorandum on Plain Language in
Government Writing*

- *Plain language documents must have:*
 - *Logical organization*
 - *Easy-to-read design features*
 - *Common, everyday words, except for necessary technical terms*
 - *“you” and other pronouns*
 - *Active voice*
 - *Short sentences*

PlainLanguage.gov

The screenshot shows the PlainLanguage.gov website with a blue header and a white main content area. The site logo is in the top left, and a search bar is in the top right. The main content is organized into several columns and sections.

Plain Language.gov
Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public

Popular Topics:
Regulations
Health Literacy
Financial
Before-and-After

Search
Powered by Google

What is Plain Language?
History of PL Movement
Definitions of Plain Language
Government Mandates

Examples
Before-and-After Comparisons
Government Examples
Legal Examples
Award-Winners
Humorous Examples
Examples Database (beta)
What's This?

How To/Tools
Quick Reference Tips
Guidelines
Word Suggestions
Dictionaries, Thesauruses, Grammar Sites
Tips for Starting PL Programs

Why Plain Language?
Benefits
Arguments in Favor of PL
Testimonials
Usefulness in Web-Writing

Using Plain Language in...
Government
Legal Profession
Business
Sciences

Resources
Books, Articles, Journals
Take Plain-Language Training
Materials for Trainers
Quotes

Federal Plain Language Guidelines
Word version of full Guidelines
PDF version of full Guidelines

The Plain Language Community
...Within the Government
...Around the United States
...In Other Countries

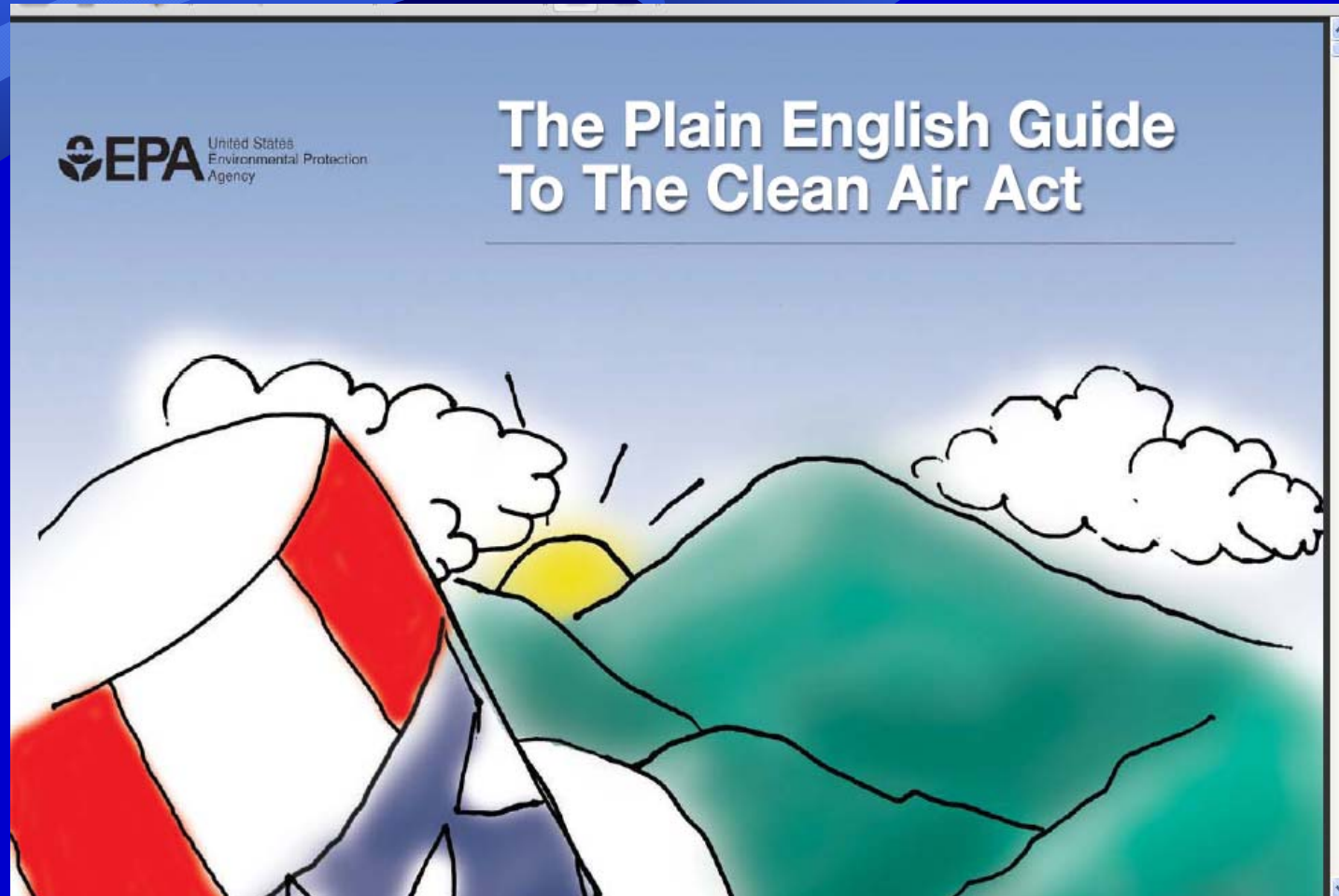
Get Info About...
Plain language analysis of federal regulations
World Usability Day 2009
Center for Plain Language Awards - nominations due 3/1/10

News
Gobbledygook's persistence
Group in Canada strives to simplify documents
Obama takes aim at credit card companies
Plain language sought in federal job ads
more...

Events
Monthly PLAIN Meeting
more...

Especially For:
Managers | Writers/Editors | Researchers | Press | World Usability Day 2009

Environmental Protection Agency



Securities and Exchange Commission

⋮ A Plain English
Handbook

⋮ *How to create clear
SEC disclosure documents*

Form Letter – Change in Enrollment Status Veterans Benefits Administration

Dear addressee:

This letter is about the change in your enrollment during the period that began on September 1, 1996. Because of this change, we may have paid you more than you were due.

What Our Records Show

You reduced your credit hours from 12 hours to 6 hours on November 5, 1996.

What We Did

We reduced your payments on December 1, 1996 to \$202.00 per month. You will receive another letter about this change. The letter will show if you have a debt.

What We Need

Please send us a statement explaining why you reduced the number of your credit hours. In most cases, we require evidence to support your statement. If you do not have supporting evidence, please tell us why. (See the enclosure Changes in Your Enrollment.)

When We Need It

Send us your statement with any supporting evidence within 30 days.

What We Will Do

If we accept your statement, we will not reduce your payments from the beginning date of the term. If a debt has already been created it must be repaid, but the debt will not be increased.

If we do not accept your statement with supporting evidence we will reduce your payments on September 1, 1996, the beginning date of the term. This will create a debt which you must repay.

If you do not respond within 30 days, we will reduce your payments on September 1, 1996, the beginning date of the term. This will create a debt which you must repay. Although we will take this action, we will consider information received from you within one year from the date of this letter. (We may extend this time limit if you show a good reason why you could not meet it.)

Your Rights

You have basic rights that are available to you before we make a final decision on your claim. (See the enclosure Basic Rights.)

Sincerely,

Enclosures:
VA Form 21-4138
Changes in Your Enrollment

Internal Revenue Service – Form CP-2000 2002

Contact:

WE ARE PROPOSING CHANGES TO YOUR 2002 TAX RETURN

We are proposing changes to your 2002 income tax return because information you reported doesn't match what was reported to us by your employers, banks, and/or other payers. Our proposed amount you owe is \$. See our proposed changes on page 2 and the detailed information beginning on page 3.

Please compare your records with the payer information that begins on page 3. To assist you in reviewing your return, the payer information may show both reported and unreported amounts. However, the proposed changes shown on page 2 are based on the unreported amounts only.

If You AGREE with our Proposed Changes:

- * Check Box A on the response page.
- * Sign and date the total agreement statement. Both spouses must sign if you filed a joint return.
- * Send us the response page in the enclosed envelope.
- * If possible, enclose your payment in full. If you can not pay the entire amount, you can request an installment agreement by completing the last page of this notice.

If You DISAGREE with our Proposed Changes:

- * Check Box B on the response page.
- * Enclose a signed statement explaining each change you disagree with and why you disagree.
- * Include any supporting documents you wish us to consider, and
- * Send us the response page with your statement and supporting documents in the enclosed envelope.

It is important that we receive your response by 11/26/2003. If we don't receive your response, we'll conclude that our proposed changes are correct. Then we'll send you a Notice of Deficiency followed by a bill for the proposed amount you owe including tax and any penalties plus additional interest.

Internal Revenue Service – Form CP-2000

2003 edition

You Must Return the Response Form by December 10, 2003

1 Why are you getting this notice?

The income, deduction and credit information (e.g., *what goes here?*) That we have on file does not match entries on your 2002 Form 1040. If this information is correct, you will owe

The proposed changes to your tax are listed below.

Summary of Proposed Changes	
2002 Tax Increase	
Penalties – if paid by December 10, 2003	
Interest – if paid by December 10, 2003	
Proposed Balance Due	

2 What steps should you take?

Following these steps can help you understand this notice.

1. Review your 2002 tax return.
2. Compare your return to the information in the *Explanation Section* — page 5.
3. Decide if the information in the *Explanation Section* is correct.
4. Check the answers to *Frequently Asked Questions* — page 2.
5. Complete and return the *Response Form* in the enclosed return envelope — page 3.
6. Complete and return the *Installment Agreement Request* (enclosed) if you need to set up a payment plan.
7. Review your rights in *The Examination Process Booklet* (enclosed).

3 What happens if you don't respond by December 10, 2003?

Department of Health and Human Services

- *Losing Weight Safely - 1996*
 - *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a half hour or more of moderate physical activity on most days, preferably every day. The activity can include brisk walking, calisthenics, home care, gardening, moderate sports exercise, and dancing.*

Department of Health and Human Services

- *Losing Weight Safely - 1998*
 - *Do at least 30 minutes of exercise, like brisk walking, most days of the week.*

Before – Medication Label Food & Drug Administration

Allergy Tablets

INDICATIONS: Provides effective, temporary relief of sneezing, watery and itchy eyes, and runny nose due to hay fever and other upper respiratory allergies.

DIRECTIONS: Adults and children 12 years and over—1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours, not to exceed 6 tablets in 24 hours or as directed by a physician. Children 6 to 11 years—one half the adult dose (break tablet in half) every 4 to 6 hours, not to exceed 3 whole tablets in 24 hours. For children under 6 years, consult a physician.

EACH TABLET CONTAINS: Chlorpheniramine Maleate 4 mg. **May also contain** (may differ from brand): D&C Yellow No. 10, Lactose, Magnesium Stearate, Microcrystalline Cellulose, Pregelatinized Starch.

WARNINGS: May cause excitability especially in children. Do not take this product unless directed by a physician, if you have a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis, or if you have glaucoma or difficulty in urination due to enlargement of the prostate gland. May cause drowsiness; alcohol, sedatives and tranquilizers may increase the drowsiness effect. Avoid alcoholic beverages, and do not take this product if you are taking sedatives or tranquilizers without first consulting your physician. Use caution when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery. As with any drug, if you are pregnant or nursing a baby, seek the advice of a health professional before using this product. Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. In case of accidental overdose, seek professional assistance or contact a Poison Control Center immediately.

Store at controlled room temperature 2°-30°C (36°-86°F).

Use by expiration date printed on package.

Protect from excessive moisture.

For better identification keep tablets in carton until used.



N
3 111111 11111 8

Made in U.S.A.

After – Medication Label Food & Drug Administration

Drug Facts

Active ingredient (in each tablet)	Purpose
Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg.....	Antihistamine

Uses temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergies: ■ sneezing ■ runny nose ■ itchy, watery eyes ■ itchy throat

Warnings

Ask a doctor before use if you have

- glaucoma ■ a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis
- trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland

Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives

When using this product

- drowsiness may occur ■ avoid alcoholic drinks
- alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness
- be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery
- excitability may occur, especially in children

If pregnant or breast-feeding, ask a health professional before use.

Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.

Directions

adults and children 12 years and over	take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 12 tablets in 24 hours
children 6 years to under 12 years	take 1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 6 tablets in 24 hours
children under 6 years	ask a doctor

Before – Car Safety Label

National Highway Traffic Safety Admin.

- This is a multipurpose passenger vehicle which will handle and maneuver differently from an ordinary passenger car, in driving conditions which may occur on streets and highways and off road. As with other vehicles of this type, if you make sharp turns or abrupt maneuvers, the vehicle may roll over or may go out of control and crash. You should read driving guidelines and instructions in the Owner's Manual, and WEAR YOUR SEAT BELTS AT ALL TIMES.*

After – Car Safety Label

National Highway Traffic Safety Admin.

After



Where to get Help!

- *Visit the website:*
 - <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>

