Communication: It’s a two way street!

Moira Dunphy  
Workshop A11  
Thursday June 8, 9:00 – 11:30 am

You have the power to inform or exclude people by the way you communicate.
Communication: It’s a two way street!

Overview

1. What is plain language?
2. Plain language techniques and practice
3. Discussion: co-ops using plain language
4. Helping our members communicate

What is Plain Language?
Communication: It’s a two way street!

Well, it’s not -

I learned a way to be condescending to people!

What’s that?

It’s when you talk down to someone.

I know what condescending means, you-

And it’s not -

Dick and Jane
Go, Go, Go
Or -

Plain language:

Communication that your audience or readers can understand the **first time** they hear or read it.
“One should aim not at being possible to understand, but at being impossible to misunderstand.”

Quintillian b. 35 AD

“Communication equals remembering what it’s like not to know.”

- Richard Saul Wurman
What it’s like not to know:

- I’m new here
- I have a vision problem
- I have a disability that you can’t see
- I don’t like reading
- My life is chaotic
Why plain language?

Literacy
42% of Canadians aged 16 to 65 have low literacy skills. *2003 StatsCan*

Efficiency
- Alberta Agriculture experiment using plain language for their government forms
- That one change saved the province $3.5 million. A YEAR.

Why plain language?

More...
- Canadian government changed one form. It doubled the rate of compliance in a year.
- A US state changed form letters in one division. They received 18,000 fewer calls in the 1st year.
- Businesses w 100 employees lose 17 hrs/wk ($500 K/yr) on emails clarifying previous emails.
Plain language in eight easy steps

1. Who is your reader?
2. What is the purpose?
3. Organize your ideas
4. Use appropriate words
5. Write clear & effective sentences
6. Write clear and effective paragraphs
7. Present your message effectively
8. Test it for usability and readability

Plain language in 8 steps

1. Who’s your reader?
2. What’s it for?
3. Organize your ideas
4. Use plain words
5. Write clear sentences
6. Write clear paragraphs
7. Use clear design
8. Test it
Plain language in 5 steps

1. Audience
2. Format
3. Design
4. Expression
5. Evaluation
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Let’s apply the 5 steps:
1. Audience
2. Format
3. Design
4. Expression
5. Evaluation
Communication: It’s a two way street!

1. Audience
2. Format
3. Design
4. Expression
5. Evaluation
Plain language in your co-op

1. Audience
2. Format
3. Design
4. Expression
5. Evaluation
Plain language in your co-op

1. Audience

- Members, Board, Committee, general public
- What do you want them to do?
  - Know something
  - Take action
  - Reply
  - Change how they do something

Plain language in your co-op

2. Format

What’s the best format for your message?

- Memo
- Notice
- Poster
- Letter
- How-to manual
Plain language in your co-op

3. Design

• White space
• Font & font size
• Margins & spacing
• Columns
• Bullet points
• Text boxes
• Images

Plain language in your co-op

3. Design Don’ts

• UPPERCASE
• Justification margins
• Lots of different FONTS
• Loads of ❤ ∞ ↔ symbols, 🌞 images and photos that may or may not have anything to do with the text.
Plain language in your co-op

4. Expression

Write as if you’re talking to your reader:

- Personal pronouns: ‘we’ ‘you’ (avoid 3rd person)
  Make it better: The Board invites members to attend...

- Active voice: better than passive
  Make it better: The BBQ was attended by most members.

Inclusive language
Positive language
Common everyday words
Lists

Plain language in your co-op
Plain language in your co-op

4.2 Expression

Contractions: “it’s” “we’ll”
Make it better: We will let you know when it is confirmed.

Simple sentences: replace “and” with a period
Make it better: The BBQ is on Sunday and we need volunteers.

Plain language in your co-op

4.3 Expression

Inclusive language: exclude words that exclude!
Make it better: OK gentlemen, let’s get started.

Positive language: just a spoonful of sugar...
Make it better: Don’t come late to the meeting, it’s rude to the guest presenter.
Plain language in your co-op

4.4 Expression

Common everyday words: bigger isn’t better
Make it better: Inducements for recycling abound!

Lists, tables: just the facts...
Make it better: We need a lot of things like seeds, gardening gloves, stakes, volunteers and garbage bags.

Use everyday words

Make it better:
• anticipate
• attempt
• commence
• demonstrate
• implement
• in the event that
• submit
• terminate
Plain language in your co-op

5. Evaluation

• Read it out loud
• Test it on someone
• Then make adjustments

Plain language exercise
ATTENTION COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN
Since you have been appointed/elected/named Chairman of a Committee of the Perfectly Lovely Housing Co-operative Inc., the Perfectly Lovely Housing Co-operative Board of Directors would like you to know that the Board of Directors passed a policy in regards to Committee Chairmen for the co-op’s committees. Perfectly Lovely expects Committee Chairmen to uphold certain standards, so that the co-op is not seen to be in contravention of any of the by-laws or government laws.

1/3

When chairing a committee, do not start late just because some other people haven’t arrived yet. Don’t ignore some people’s ideas or comments or questions in favour of somebody else. Make sure you don’t allow the loudest person to do all the talking and control the meeting. DO NOT TRY TO DO ALL THE WORK YOURSELF. IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE ON THE COMMITTEE AND THINK IT’S EASIER TO JUST DO IT YOURSELF, YOU’RE WRONG. Let the office know if there are big problems. Don’t have meetings that go forever because some people may not tell you but they won’t like it and they’ll just stop coming to the meetings and you’ll get frustrated.

2/3
Communication: It’s a two way street!

Don’t complain about the co-op or other members. Do not allow members to insult each other. Don’t take a negative tone to everything because any action will seem pointless, then members don’t want to be on that committee any more. Don’t leave the Common Room a mess. If you use the kitchen don’t expect somebody else to do dishes for you. Don’t forget to turn the lights off in the handicap bathroom, lock the Common Room doors and return the keys to the office.

Signed                Perfectly    Lovely    Board    of    Directors

Discussion: How can your co-op use plain language?
Verbal Communication
Exercises

Discussion:
Helping members speak up
Resources on the new website!

www.chfcanada.coop

Resources at chfcanada.coop

- Member satisfaction survey
- Excellent meetings for everyone: 20 tips
- Speaking up at members meetings
- Plain language and design
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Member feedback suggestions

• Create your own online survey (free):
  – surveymonkey.com
  – surveyplanet.com

• Ask at a meeting:
  – What did you like?
  – What could be better?

• Any other suggestions?

Getting workshop materials

CHF Canada Website
www.chfcanada.coop/workshopmaterials

AGM Conference App
https://eventmobi.com/2017agm
Time for Evaluation
Evaluations on Conference App
https://eventmobi.com/2017agm/

Paper copies also available in the workshop room!

Use the smallest word that does the job.

*E.B. White*

Thanks, and don’t forget to fill out your survey!

Instructor: Moira Dunphy
Workshop: A11 Communication is a 2-way street!
Five steps of plain language

1. Audience

Who’s your audience?
What do you want them to do?
- Know something
- Take action
- Reply
- Change how they do something

2. Format

What’s the best format for your message?
- Memo
- Notice
- Poster
- Letter
- How-to manual

Can you make a summary of key info?
Can you replace sentences with bullet points?

3. Design

What design elements will lessen the visual clutter?
- White space
- Font & font size
- Margins & spacing
- Columns
- Text boxes
- Images
4. Expression

What would change if you write like you’re speaking?
- Personal pronouns
- Active voice
- Inclusive language
- Contractions
- Positive language
- Simple sentences
- Common everyday words

5. Evaluation

Does this do what I want it to do?
- Review it
- Test it on someone
- Then make adjustments

Design tips

Font & font size
- Find the fonts that work for your different formats. Some look better in headings; some work better when you have a small space for a lot of text, etc.
- 10, 11, 12 are ideal fonts sizes for readability
- **Serif fonts** have swoops or marks that helps the eye connect the letters
- Older readers trained in cursive prefer it: makes it look more like writing
  - Times New Roman
  - Century Schoolbook
  - Garamond
- **Sans serif fonts** are plainer, without the connectors
- Younger readers trained on digital are more familiar with sans serif fonts
  - Arial
  - Verdana
  - Gill sans

Margins & spacing
- The eye needs white space.
- Try to work with 1” margins where possible.
- Play with spacing (font > advanced) to correct an area that looks too tight or too spread out

Text boxes
- Separate key info to highlight it
  - Summary
  - Quote
  - List
  - Reminder
Making better word choices

From the 2015 Twitter feed of Kate Whiteside, a Canadian specialist in the field of plain or clear language. She also posted this list in her blog at [www.keyadvice.net](http://www.keyadvice.net).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t use</th>
<th>Choose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anticipate</td>
<td>expect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt</td>
<td>try</td>
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<tr>
<td>as a consequence of</td>
<td>because</td>
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<tr>
<td>accordingly</td>
<td>so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commence</td>
<td>start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consequently</td>
<td>so</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>show</td>
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<tr>
<td>determine</td>
<td>decide</td>
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<tr>
<td>expedite</td>
<td>speed up</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the event of</td>
<td>if</td>
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<tr>
<td>facilitate</td>
<td>help</td>
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<tr>
<td>however</td>
<td>but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in accordance with</td>
<td>with</td>
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<tr>
<td>in relation to</td>
<td>due to</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the amount of</td>
<td>for</td>
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<tr>
<td>it is requested</td>
<td>please</td>
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<td>at this point in time</td>
<td>now</td>
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<tr>
<td>modify</td>
<td>change</td>
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<td>numerous</td>
<td>many</td>
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<td>operate</td>
<td>use</td>
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<tr>
<td>prioritize</td>
<td>order</td>
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<td>for the purpose of</td>
<td>for</td>
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<td>prior to</td>
<td>before</td>
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<tr>
<td>regarding</td>
<td>about</td>
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<tr>
<td>represents</td>
<td>is</td>
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<tr>
<td>subsequently</td>
<td>after or then</td>
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<tr>
<td>therefore</td>
<td>so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transmit</td>
<td>send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with reference to</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our office</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plain language workshop exercise

Task: Create a notice that can be given to members or placed on bulletin boards.

In your group, discuss:
1. **Audience**: Who’s the reader? What do you want them to do?
2. **Format**: Decide what’s important to include
3. **Design**: see design tips handout
4. **Expression**: common words, lists, personal pronouns
5. **Evaluation**: review it, have someone look at it

At a co-op meeting, you volunteer to create a notice for an event. It’s important to have as many members attend the event as possible. These are the notes passed to you.

Thur May 19 6pm pasta dinner and meeting or come just for meeting 7:15
Social fund has $ for dinner. Joan will do shop. Need to know #s when? – Sat before MON
Call office or email or during office hrs
Need volunteers to cook (pasta, garlic bread, salad) Joan says no more than 4 in kit. or chaos. Also volun. for table setup, chairs, and end of night put away. Doug out of town.
Also kit. cleanup. Serve at pass-through.
Already have coffe tea juice cookies. Plates & napkins good; need more forks, NOT knives, cups. Or ask for people to bring own mugs? Sandra & Naheed babysit during mtng not dinner, parents shld be w kids for dinner not like last time

Meeting: look at final sample choices for kit reno. Talk mmbrs through timeline for reno. Need mmbrs onboard, don’t want complains after that they hate new kitchens, disruption etc. they don’t come they outta luck. Flooring, counter, cupbrd doors, sink & faucet LAST CHANCE to have a say
!!!

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*CHF Canada workshop*
Plain Language Resources

Resources
www.chfcanada.coop

- Plain language and clear design: a co-op writer’s guide, 2001, CHF Canada.
  - Written for CHF Canada by the Co-op Housing Federation of Toronto. It’s an excellent guide written specifically for housing co-ops. I highly recommend it.

- Remember:
  - Resources available free to CHF Canada member co-ops
  - Plain language used in resources – some provide plain language tips
  - Find a resource that you feel could be clearer – send me an email, I’d like to know!

Website

Canadian government
Canadian Literacy and Learning Network
Editors Association of Canada (EAC)
Iva Cheung
Mar 2014 blog post Plain language: Clear and simple
Karen Payton
blog has many posts about Plain Language
Cheryl Stephens
Plain Language pioneer from BC
American Copy Editors Society (ACES)
US government

Moira Dunphy
Iva Cheung
Cheryl Stephens

Kate Harrison
Roy Peter Clark
Centre 4 Plain Language

Plain Language.gov
In Plain Language
Plain Language Day

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