

PLAIN LANGUAGE LEGAL WRITING: PART II – WRITING TO BE UNDERSTOOD

- July 07, 2014
- Cheryl M. Stephens

The actual writing phase begins when you prepare a first draft. At that point you are merely trying to record your ideas.

Always reshape your draft to match the needs and abilities of your target audience; a competent writer is one who can do this quickly and efficiently. With experience, a writer can anticipate the reader's concerns, and addresses them early in the process of composition.

The goal is to express simple ideas clearly, and complex ideas as precisely and simply as possible. Writing expert Joseph Williams describes the problem you face in trying to improve your mode of expression:

Whether we are readers or writers, teacher or editors, all of us in professional communities must understand three things about complex writing:

- it may precisely reflect complex ideas,
- it may gratuitously complicate complex ideas,
- it may gratuitously complicate simple ideas.

(Style: Toward Clarity and Grace, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)

The information that follows shows how to simplify language and expression. Many writing checklists exist that can facilitate a quick editorial review to improve the style of your first draft. The clarifying effect on your writing will be cumulative.

The rules set out here should not become clichés of style, but guidelines for improvement. The essential ingredient is thoughtful consideration of your reader.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WISELY WHICH WORDS SPEAK DIRECTLY TO YOUR READERS?

"Don't be afraid to sound like a lawyer, but try not to sound like the popular stereotype of a lawyer."
(Henry Weithofen, Legal Writing Style, West Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn. 1961)

Readers prefer familiar and concrete words. They prefer simplicity and consistency. They prefer genuineness to pretension, modern expressions to archaic words.

Style must be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do. Clearness is secured by using the words... that are current and ordinary.
(Aristotle, Rhetoric, The Words of Aristotle, W. Ross, ed. 1946)

While you struggle to clarify your meaning, keep in mind the level of simplicity and formality that is appropriate to the particular document and for the particular reader. The last refuge of a sloppy writer is the excuse, "But my clients prefer formality" by which is meant pompous, inflated language.

TRY THIS PLAIN LANGUAGE:

1. James Jones covenants
2. He is against it.

Plain Language Handbook For Legal Writers

Jianjun Gao



Plain Language Handbook For Legal Writers:

Unveiling the Power of Verbal Artistry: An Psychological Sojourn through **Plain Language Handbook For Legal Writers**

In a world inundated with monitors and the cacophony of instant connection, the profound energy and psychological resonance of verbal art often fade into obscurity, eclipsed by the constant onslaught of noise and distractions. However, nestled within the musical pages of **Plain Language Handbook For Legal Writers**, a charming function of literary brilliance that impulses with natural thoughts, lies an wonderful journey waiting to be embarked upon. Written by a virtuoso wordsmith, that exciting opus manuals visitors on a psychological odyssey, softly revealing the latent possible and profound influence stuck within the delicate internet of language. Within the heart-wrenching expanse of this evocative evaluation, we can embark upon an introspective exploration of the book is central themes, dissect their charming publishing style, and immerse ourselves in the indelible impression it leaves upon the depths of readers souls.

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