Innovations in Election Administration 13

Simplifying Election Forms and Materials

Federal Election Commission
United States of America

Simplifying Election Forms and Materials

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Introduction by the Office of Election Administration

This report is another in the series on *Innovations in Election Administration* being published by the FEC's Office of Election Administration.

The purpose of this series is to acquaint State and local election officials with innovative election procedures and technologies that have been successfully implemented by their colleagues around the country.

Our reports on these innovations do not necessarily constitute an endorsement by the Federal Election Commission either of any specific procedures described or of any vendors or suppliers that might be listed within the report. Moreover, the views and opinions expressed in these reports are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Federal Election Commission or any division thereof.

We welcome your comments on these reports as well as any suggestions you may have for additional topics. You may mail these to us at:

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The Case for Plain Language

The Problem

Are your:

■ New registrations fewer than expected?

■ Mail-in voter applications being returned incomplete or incorrect?

■ Requests for updated voter information being ignored?

■ Registrations coming in after the deadline?

■ New registrations increasing, but not voter participation?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, there's a good chance that many of the voters in your community can't read or understand all or part of your voter materials. It could be that people who want to register are being "turned off" by your complicated-looking application. It could be that voters who have moved weren't quite sure what to do with that post card you sent them about updating their voter information. Worse yet, maybe some of the voters who need help don't understand what you mean by "voter assistance program."

There's also a good chance that many of the election materials you have out in the community are just not as reader-friendly as you think they are. Maybe there are more voters in your community than you realize who need materials that are easier to read and use.

Consider this:

The U.S. Department of Education recently conducted a study in which a random sample of adults across the U.S. were tested on their ability to read and use "typical consumer print materials." Based on this study, the Department made the startling announcement that **an estimated 90 million adult Americans would have difficulty reading, comprehending, and using "long, complex, dense print materials."**

That's bad news in general, and really bad news when you consider that many studies have shown that the readability (reading level) of most materials written and designed for use by the general public are exactly that — long, complex, and dense. They are:

■ too wordy

■ too formal

■ loaded with jargon, technospeak, bureaucratese, and legalese

■ organized and designed in an overly complicated fashion, and

■ written at a college reading level.

In other words, we know that in order to fully participate in our high-print society you have to be a highly skilled reader . Yet, at the same time, we know that:

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☐ About 50 million adults in the U.S. have not graduated from high school

☐ About half of that 50 million dropped out before the eighth grade, and

☐ About a million young adults drop out of school each year, and another million graduate with less than adequate reading skills.

Combine these citizens with the untold numbers of high school graduates from years back who are only marginally literate by today's standards, and you begin to see where the 90 million figure comes from.

The good news from the Department of Education study is its conclusion that a majority of those 90 million people who have trouble reading typical consumer print materials, are able to manage their way through **"brief and uncomplicated texts and documents."**

What this means is that millions more of our fellow citizens could participate at a higher level in our high-print society, if the materials they need to read and use were written in a brief and uncomplicated way. Alas, the problem is that most are not, and the consequences are many:

■ Agencies and organizations fail to get their messages across

■ People in general feel uninformed and alienated by the "system"

■ Confusion and complaints become self-perpetuating

■ Time gets wasted on needless inquiries

■ Millions of dollars get wasted on materials that don't get read, and

■ Able readers with hurried lives get annoyed with "so much reading for so little information," while less able readers just give up "trying to get through all those big words."

So, the research tells us that there is a major gap between the *reading abilities* of the general public and the *readability* of most consumer print materials. The general public is frustrated by the difficulty, as well as the quantity, of the materials they're being asked to read on a regular basis. And most public servants want and need to do a good, or better, job of communicating with the public. So what can you do?

The Solution

The solution is to: **Write in plain language!**

What does that mean? In a nutshell, it means to write your public information materials in a **simple, clear, organized, straightforward, and friendly way — using the language of the general public.**

To show you what it doesn't mean, take a look at these phrases from actual election materials:

■ "2-digit number"

■ "a Bona Fide resident of"

■ "before an officer authorized to administer oaths"

■ "legal disqualifications"

■ "your right to vote must be maintained"

■ "your right to vote is abridged by"

■ "your right to vote is secured by"

■ "the equivalent of an affidavit"

■ "If You Are a Member of a Language Minority Group Entitled to Printed Materials and Ballots Under the Federal Voting Rights Act Because of Your Inability to Read and Write English Indicate the Language"

This is neither the language of the general public, nor for that matter, of most high school or even college graduates. It is the legalese of lawyers and legislators, and the jargon of election personnel.

Legalese and jargon (or "electionese") are in and of themselves not a problem. The problem comes when writers, editors, and publishers pass this language on to the voter. They don't "speak" it, so you shouldn't expect them to read it!

More and more public service agencies are recognizing this problem and are working to make their print materials more **"reader-friendly"** and **"easier to read."** That's good for all readers, and especially good for the tens of millions who are only marginally literate. But plain language writing can do more than just make things better and easier for the reader. It can also help your agency. With plain language, you can:

- Reach out to, and reach, a larger audience

- Improve your public image

- Cut down on confusion, questions, and complaints

- Save staff and reader time by sending a clear message from the start

- Streamline your entire public information process

- Keep up with the growing demand for public information

- Ensure that the information you provide meets the legal requirements of "informed" consent; and, yes, even

- Avoid law suits.

You can also *learn* to write in plain language. There are no magic formulas or hard and fast rules to follow, but there are some basic principles and techniques that can guide you through the process. If you're committed to making your next voter form, flier, letter, and other materials easier to read and use, this manual will help you do that.

But All I Want to Do Is Register to Vote

Before you get into reading about what plain language is, take a look at what it *is not*. The following examples, taken from actual voter registration applications, will serve this purpose. (A reader's thought follows each example. You may find this humorous, but you should take it dead serious.)

- **Alternate Registration Form**

    "I don't understand. There's nothing here in the instructions about why this form is an alternate form. I'll just wait and fill out the other (regular) form."

- **Mail-in Registration Application**

    (If seen in any place other than an election office.) "Let's see. Do I need anything that needs to be registered? Naw. I'm in a hurry anyway."

- **(State) Voter Registration Application For Use By Authorized Registrars Only**

    "Heck. I wanted register to vote, but I'd better not use this form. I'm not an authorized registrar. I wonder where I can get a regular application?"

- **Affidavit on Application for Voter Registration**

    "I'd better fill out a regular registration form first. I'll worry about the affidavit later."

- **Mail-In Note: This form must be mailed by the applicant *at least* 30 days before the election.**

    "Does that mean I can't have my son drop this off at the post office on his way to school? And if he does, who will know?"

- **Bonafide** (sic) **residence address**

  "What's a bona fide residence? Or is it bona fide address? What does bona fide mean, anyway?"

- **Your right to vote is secured by being properly registered in the precinct where you reside.**

  "Huh?"

- *Important!* **You may *NOT* list your address as a business unless you actually reside there.**

  "What they really mean is that I may not list my business as my address unless I live there. Don't they?"

- **If you indicate a political party affiliation that is not a qualified party....**

  "Qualified to do what?"

- **Your signature may be recorded electronically....**

  "Does that take a special kind of pen?"

- **All of the contents of the completed form may be duplicated for the permanent voter registration file.**

  "But I don't want a copy for my files. Or does this mean I'm supposed to send a copy?"

- **The 2-digit number of the month, day, and year you were born.**

  "But I was born on 4/29/43. That's five digits."

- **Questions propounded to applicant.**

  "Huh?"

- **....(as submitted by you or in machine readable or other format)....**

  "I give up!"

That's what many voters would do — give up! They'd give up because the writers used words, poorly structured sentences, and out-of-place phrases that are difficult to read and understand.

However, people will not give up on your voter materials if you write them in plain language. The principles and techniques that follow explain what writing in plain language means.

Principle One: Plan Ahead

Before you begin to write, think, "What is my **purpose** for writing this material?" Ask yourself a few basic questions (**Q**), and try to come up with specific answers (**A**). For example:

Q. Why am I writing this?

A. We need to update our voter registration records.

Q. Am I writing to a particular group?

A. Yes; voters who have moved outside of my county.

Q. What is the message or information I want to get across?

A. That these voters should verify their correct address.

Q. Is there something I want voters to do? If so, how and when do I want them to do it.

A. Yes. I want them to fill out all of the information on the postage-paid card, and to return it as soon as possible.

Q. What instructions do I need to give to the voters?

A. I need to tell them how to fill out the card, the deadline for mailing it, and where to call if they have any questions.

Q. How should I organize and present the information?

A. I should tell them

- what they've received;

- why they've received it;

- what to do with it;

- how to do it;

- when (and maybe where) to send or deliver it; and

- where to call if they have any questions, in that order.

Q. What format should I use?

A. I should use the format that seems easiest to read and easiest to use. (Keeping in mind, of course, that I also have to worry about the NVRA, our State legal authority, postal regulations, printing costs, and budget restrictions, only some of which are negotiable.)

Of course, the dialogue you have with yourself (and others involved in the document design process) won't be as simple as this. But asking questions like these, and coming up with some clear answers, is where you have to start if your goal is to end up with more readable materials. .

Principle Two: Keep It Short and Simple!

It needs to be said up front that "simple" does not mean simplistic, simple-minded, dumb (as in dummied down), condescending, or any of the other terms that skeptics of plain language writing might use.

What "simple" does mean should become clearer as you read through the techniques that follow.

Choose Simpler Words

■ **Use shorter words.** This means use words with the least number of syllables, whenever you can. To marginal readers, there's a big difference between a two-syllable word and a four or five-syllable word.

Instead of:	*Use:*
assistance	help
designate/designation	choose/choice
duplicate	copy
inquiry	question
locality	place
statutory	legal

■ **Use a word (or two) instead of a phrase.** It's just easier for everyone.

Instead of:	*Use:*
with regard to	about
in the event that	if
on the part of	by
in the month of November	in November
it is necessary that you	you must
in accordance with	under

■ **Use words that most people use in their everyday lives.**

Instead of:	*Use:*
accordingly	so
forward	send
obtain	get
promptly	as soon as possible
relocate	move
request	ask
retain	keep
your place of residence	where you live

Note: More examples of "simpler words" can be found in the "Word Exchange List" in Appendix F.

Avoid Jargon

Jargon is the technical or special language used in a particular field, such as medicine, plumbing, law, electronics, and finance. In election administration, it's the language that gets passed down to you from federal legislation, state statutes, court decrees, government regulations, and other sources.

Jargon is also what makes most materials difficult to read and understand. That's why it is so important to **avoid using jargon, if you can.**

Unfortunately, there will be times when you can't, either because there is simply no substitution for the jargon, or because of some other legitimate reason. *However, there are some things you can do to help your readers "get through the jargon" when you do use it.*

■ Define the jargon, when and where you first use it, by putting it **into a context** that helps the reader know what you mean. For example:

    □ Your polling place, where you will be voting, is...."

    (You told the new voter what a polling place is.)

    □ Keep your voter record information up to date.

    (You gave an office term [voter record] a little more meaning. However, avoiding the jargon would be even better, as in "Help us keep our information up to date.")

    □ Disclosure of (giving) your Social Security Number....

    (You may have gotten around some statutory language here by using the word "giving"; unless there's a statute that says you can't put statutory language in a

context that makes it easier for the voter to understand. But that's doubtful. It's something you can chat with the lawyers about.)

    □ Application for Absentee Voter: If you want to vote in the next election, but will not be able to go to the polls, ...

    (You told the reader up front what this form is for, and you got around the words "application" and "absentee.")

■ Put the jargon in a glossary. Put the glossary at the beginning where readers will see it. Title it, "Words You Need to Know." Most words are easy to define, but if not, you can always use the words in a sentence that will help the reader at least make a good guess at what the word is. See the next page for a sample glossary in a "How To Vote" flier .

Write Simpler Sentences

Keep sentences short. As a rule of thumb:

■ Fewer than ten words is ideal.

■ Up to fifteen is often a bit more real.

■ Fifteen to twenty words is stretching it.

■ Twenty or more words is too much!

One way to do this is to cut needless words. For example, compare these sentences:

Original: Please typewrite or handprint using blue or black ink.

Rewrite: Please type or print in blue or black ink.

Sample Glossary

Words You Need to Know

Absentee Voter—A person who will not be able to go to the polls on election day, but will still be able to vote at another time, in person or by mail.

Ballot—The list of people (candidates) who are running for office. The ballot can be a card, a sheet of paper, or a list on a voting machine.

An Absentee Ballot is a ballot that is mailed or delivered to the election office by an absentee voter.

Eligible Voter—In most cases, you are an eligible voter if you have registered to vote where you now live.

General Election—A general election is an election in which candidates from different political parties are running for office.

Polling Place—A polling place is the building where you go to vote.

Primary Election—A primary election is an election where candidates from the same political party run against each other to be candidates for office in the general election.

Precinct A precinct is an area within a county, city, or town in which voting takes place. You live and vote within a certain voting precinct.

Original: Our offices will be closed in observance of Thanksgiving, but will reopen on the Friday after Thanksgiving.

Rewrite: We will be closed on Thanksgiving Day.

Original: Applicant should affix one's signature on the line below.

Rewrite: Sign on the line below (or) Sign below (or) Sign here.

Original: Contact your local election office to find your polling place and learn the date of your local election.

Rewrite: Contact your local election office about when and where to vote.

Original: This application need not be subscribed and sworn to before an officer authorized to administer oaths, if it subscribed to before two (2) witnesses who affix their respective signatures and addresses hereto.

Rewrite: Two witnesses must put their signatures and addresses below. Only one witness is needed if that person is a notary public.

or

Two witnesses must sign below and give their addresses. Or you can use a notary public instead.

Watch Those Negative Words!

Most readers get confused when two negatives **(a double negative)** are used in the same sentence. For example:

■ "Do not if you are unable to."

■ "The state will not deny benefits to"

■ "Do not fill in this box if you do not know your previous address.

■ "I do not disapprove"

Negative words include:

- Outright negative words, such as not, no, can't, shouldn't

- Words with a prefix meaning not, such as unable, unknown, untruthful, inactive, incomplete, and inability.

- Words with negative meanings, such as deny, reject, refuse, decline, disapprove

Take a look at what may go down in history as the classic example of a double negative. In fact, you are probably already familiar with it. In case you need reminding, here it is from the language required by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993.

"IF YOU DO NOT CHECK EITHER BOX, YOU WILL BE CONSIDERED TO HAVE DECIDED NOT TO REGISTER TO VOTE AT THIS TIME.

☐ YES   ☐ NO

And what is the voter to think?

- "If I check yes, that means I want to register here and now.

- If I check no, that means I don't want to register.

- But I guess I don't have to check either box.

- But if I don't check either box, that also means that I'm saying no.

- So what's the difference between checking no and not checking no?

- I don't really know, so I guess I'll play it safe and not check anything."

And so it goes between most readers and double negatives — confusion. Don't use them!

Cut Long and Needless Paragraphs

Keep paragraphs to six or fewer sentences. Better yet, avoid using formal paragraphs when you can. Instead, turn text into a list of items with bullets (•), 1-2-3, or a-b-c- order. (Roman numerals are not a good idea.)

Here are a couple of examples:

Original: If you believe that someone has interfered with your right to register or to decline to register to vote, your right to privacy in deciding whether to register or in applying to register to vote, or your right to choose your own political party or other political preference, you may file a complaint with_____.

Rewrite: If you believe that someone has interfered with:

- your right to register or to decline to register to vote,

- your right to privacy in deciding whether to register or in applying to register to vote, or

- your right to choose your own political party or other political preference,

You may file a complaint with — —.

Original: Voter Education Programs are held in the auditorium at the County Office Building every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. during September and October. These programs include a discussion of the election process, voting practice, a question and answer session, and registration for new voters.

Rewrite: Voter Education Programs

- Learn about elections and voting

- Practice voting

- Get your questions answered

- Register to vote, or update your registration

Every Wednesday —7 p.m.
September and October, 1995
County Office Building Auditorium

And Finally, Be Careful with These

■ Punctuation and other marks

Colons, semi-colons, exclamation marks, asterisk (*), dashes (—), and slashes (/) don't mean much to a lot of readers. You're better off using simple sentences with periods at the end. Avoid, for example, constructions like:

- □ change of address/name

- □ House No. / RD - Box No.

- □ Social Security Number*

■ Contractions

Poor readers often skip the second half of a contracted phrase, and therefore read a sentence to mean the opposite of what it says. To be safe, use the full phrase such as "do not" instead of "don't."

■ Abbreviations and Acronyms

Here are some rules of thumb to follow:

- □ If the abbreviation is part of everyday spoken language, such as U.S., TV, IRS, YMCA, I.D., it is generally not difficult to read.

- □ Abbreviations such as Apt., Blvd., Rd., St., Jr., and Sr., if used with an address or name, or if part of an address or name line on a form, are generally not difficult to read.

- □ Abbreviations that are commonly used as writing short-cuts, such as #, @, &, etc., e.g., w/, and misc., are unfamiliar to many readers and should not be used.

- □ Most other abbreviations, such as Tel. No., Soc. Sec. No. or S.S.N., NVRA, and FEC also are unfamiliar and should **not** be used.

Example:

Original: If you are requesting your state's special write-in ballot, indicate here the reason why you are requesting the special write-in ballot, i.e., isolated area with sporadic mail service, submarine duty, etc.

Rewrite: If you are asking your state for a special write-in ballot, say why you need this ballot. For example, "I am in an isolated area with sporadic mail service," or, "I am on submarine duty."

■ Graphics

Illustrations are good, if they are not too complicated. Tables, charts, graphs, and complex diagrams require higher level reading skills. Find another way to present the information. If you must use a table or chart, keep it as simple as possible.

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Principle Three: Keep It Straight-Forward and Friendly!

Materials that speak to readers in an active, straightforward, and personal way are more inviting, more readable, and more effective than materials that are passive, indirect, and impersonal.

So, if you want your readers to have more interest in what you write, to understand better what you are saying, and to respond more promptly and correctly to what you are requesting, here are a few things you can do.

Write in the Active Voice

If the subject of a sentence is doing the action, the sentence is in the active voice. If the subject of the sentence is acted upon, the sentence is in the passive voice.

Example:

Active: I am writing this manual.

Passive: This manual is being written by me.

Compare these sentences:

■ The application must be signed by the voter.

■ The voter must sign the application.

■ You must sign the application.

In the first sentence, the subject (the application) *does* the action of the verb signed. In the second and third sentences, the *subject* (voter) does the action. The first sentence is in the *passive* voice, the second and third are in the *active* voice.

As you can see, the second and third sentences are shorter, more straightforward, more personal, and more readable. They are also more direct, and you can "picture" what the subject is doing. This is usually the case with sentences written in the active voice, so **use the active voice whenever you can.**

To edit for passive verbs, look for any form of *to be* (is, are, was, were, am, be, being, been) that is being used with a main verb ending in -en or -ed. For example, "was rejected," "must be witnessed," "is being processed," "should be written," "must be signed," " will be notified."

Stay with the Base Form of a Verb

The *base* form of a verb is the word that comes directly from the *name* of the verb. For example: to vote - vote; to sign - sign. Don't put any endings on the verb if you can avoid it. If you do change the form, you will end up with an indirect, longer, and more complex sentence.

Compare these sentences:

■ This form can be used to register to vote, or to change your address or name if you are already registered.

■ Use this form to register to vote, or to change your address or name if you are already registered.

- This form must be <u>mailed</u> by

- <u>Mail</u> this form by

- Name <u>printed</u>.

- <u>Print</u> name.

- Original: "Applying to register or declining to register to vote will not affect the amount of assistance that you will be provided by this agency."

- Rewrite: To apply, or to decline, to register to vote will not affect the amount of assistance this agency will provide to you.

or

To register or decline to register to vote will not affect the amount of assistance this agency will provide to you.

Note: The last example is an NVRA cousin to the NVRA double-negative example noted earlier. Both cousins are a mess no matter how you look at it, and both need to be reconsidered.

Like we said, if the basic verb works, use it. And avoid putting -ion, -tion, -ment, -ance, -ancy, or -ization on the end of a verb. If you do, you turn the verb into a noun, and you have to write the sentence in the passive voice. For example:

- Base form: to submit - submit

- Polite, active base form: You may submit your form by mail or in person.

- Direct, active base form: Submit your form by mail or in person.

- Passive form: Submitting (submission of) your form may be done by mail or in person.

Don't "beat Around the bush"

If you want to say something, say it.

If someone came up to you at a voter registration booth and asked you a question, would you say to them, "It is requested that you....," or, "According to Public Law 23–89, a voter.....''? Not likely. You would probably say something like, "You should....," "You must....," "You need to...," or "We need ...."

When you write, do the same thing. Don't be afraid to use: I, you, it, we, me, us, your, and other pronouns. They're more straightforward, friendly, and "real." Speak directly to your readers instead of talking about them, because they will be "listening" to you when they read what you wrote.

Instead of this:	*Use this:*
Applicant's name.	Your name.
Voters who register...	If you register...
Does voter...	Do you...
Any voter who...	If you...
Call your election office at...	Call us at...
Applicant further states...	I further state...
Does voter require assistance...	Do you need help...
Reason for requiring assistance.	Why do you need help?

(There's a good chance that people who need help aren't going to be insulted by the word help.)

Speaking of pronouns, there's a good way to get around the *she/he, his/her dilemma.* Make the subject plural and use "their" instead. For example, instead of "The voter

should sign his/her name at the bottom of the form," try "Voters should sign their name at the bottom of the form." Better yet, use "you" or "your" instead of "voter" as the subject — "Sign your name at the bottom of the form."

Two more quick points about being friendly:

With all due respect to your eighth grade English teacher, there's nothing wrong in starting a sentence with a pronoun, preposition, or conjunction. So, use words like: and, anyone, but, each, or, nor, so, to, and yet; if they make writing easier. They're friendly words.

There's nothing wrong with, but there is something offensive about, a sentence like, "Your application has been rejected." Maybe a better tone (of voice) would be, "We are sorry that we could not accept your voter application," or "Your name could not be added to our voter list, because...." Enough said.

Principle Four: Keep It Organized!

Readers shouldn't have to search around a document to find the information they need, or to know what step to take next in filling out a form. They also shouldn't have to wonder if something was "thrown in" where it doesn't belong.

So, here are some "organizing" tips. Some of them may seem too obvious to deserve mention, but a review of election materials suggests otherwise.

■ Always title your document - at the top, in bold-face print, with a word or phrase that will catch the eye of the reader. For example, the word "voter" should be used somewhere in the heading on a voter registration application, or "Have You Moved?" in an "address verification" notice.

■ Put information where readers need it. For example, if there is a telephone number readers can call with questions or to get more information, let the reader know that in large type up front. If a form is being filled out in duplicate and you want the writer to "press down" with the pen, tell them so at the top of the form, not at the bottom.

■ When drafting material, start with the good, old who, what, where, when, why, and how. Then rearrange into the order that makes sense for your particular document.

■ Use section headings. They break up narrative text into more manageable chunks, and guide the reader through the information.

■ Avoid beginnings like, "Public Law No. 03–17–40 requires the Board of Elections to notify voters of...." The lengthy introduction isn't necessary, and it won't work to draw in the reader.

■ Present information and instructions in a step-by-step, logical order that will make sense to the reader.

■ Put need-to-know information up front and nice-to-know information last.

Need-to-know information is the information the reader needs in order to understand or be informed of something, or to do something such as fill out a form. Nice-to-know information can be anything from an agency's mission statement to a civics lesson of some sort.

For example, in a voter information piece,

Don't put this: "The right to vote is a basic right in a democracy. But you cannot exercise that right if you are not a registered voter."

Before you put this: **Who can register to vote?**

Leave the nice-to-know information until later, to be read by those who have the time, interest, and ability to read all the way through the document. Also, if you discover that you need more space for needed information, or just more white space on the paper, you'll know what can be deleted to give you the extra space.

Principle Five: Keep It Neat!

Layout

- **Avoid producing a "sea of text."** A long, uninterrupted page of text can be overwhelming for marginal readers, and tiring for all readers. If a print material looks intimidating or boring, readers may not even attempt to read it, even if the writing is simple.

- **Break up the text** with white space, headings and subheadings, space between paragraphs, different type styles and sizes, bullets, underlining, shadowing, color, etc. Add white space, even if it means cutting some of that nice-to-know, but not necessary, text.

- **Include wide margins** at each side of your text. Big margins give the eye some "breathing room."

- **Avoid straight ("justified") margins** on both sides; especially on the right side. With justified text, every line is the same length — they all look alike. And "justified right" tends to slow down even highly literate and speedy readers. "Ragged right" margins make it easier for readers to keep their place, and pace.

- **Avoid centering text.** Reading centered text is tiring on the eyes. Headlines may be centered, but only if they are no more than two lines, which is what they should be.
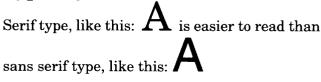
- **Design form boxes and lines that:**
  - ☐ match the instructions exactly
  - ☐ provide room for the information that has to be entered (especially the signature!)
  - ☐ fit into a typewriter, instead of "fitting" a designer's eye, and
  - ☐ clearly show which boxes are for the applicant, and which are for "official use only."

  (By the way, did you know that there are millions of people who can probably read the word "office," but not the word "official?")

Type Size

12-point type is recommended as the minimum size for marginal readers. It's also better for readers with less than perfect eyesight. With type this size, keep your lines to about 5 inches across, or less.

Type Styles

Serif type, like this: **A** is easier to read than

sans serif type, like this: **A**

You can tell serif letters by the little "feet." The "feet" give each letter a distinctive shape. This manual is set in a serif type. Our chapter headings are in a sans serif type. Sans serif

type is okay for titles and subheads, but avoid using it for long amounts of text.

Long stretches of *italic type* or of **boldface type** or of <u>underlined type</u> are also harder to read than normal type. Italics, boldface, and underlining slow the reader down. They are good treatments for words or phrases you want to emphasize, but don't use either one too often or for long amounts of text. And be careful of <u>jazzing</u> up your text with *lots* of these, and other, **special type treatments.** You may want to use a s**pecial treatment** <u>to draw attention</u> to a **certain point,** but *too much emphasis* <u>can be</u> **very distracting.**

SENTENCES THAT ARE WRITTEN ALL IN CAPITAL LETTERS ARE HARD TO READ, EVEN FOR GOOD READERS. THAT'S BECAUSE EVERY CAPITAL LETTER HAS NEARLY THE SAME HEIGHT AND SHAPE, WHILE LITTLE LETTERS HAVE DIFFERENT HEIGHTS AND SHAPES:

SHAPE   shape

THEREFORE, ONLY USE ALL-CAPITAL LETTERS FOR VERY SHORT HEADLINES.

Inks

Use dark inks. Some of your readers may have trouble reading text that is screened or in light ink.

For the same reason, make sure you have good print quality. It's hard to read a faint photocopy. For a reader who is already struggling, faded type may be the last straw.

Long lines of "reversed" type (white type on a black background) can also be hard on the eyes, and therefore difficult for persons who are not strong readers. You can use a reverse for short headings, but don't use it for large chunks of text.

Pulling It All Together

Most of you who are reading this manual are working in an election office that is probably underfunded and understaffed. You're trying to "keep up" with registrations, elections, regulations, statutory requirements, mandates, list maintenance, ballot challenges, record keeping, and reporting requirements, among other things.

And now you're being asked to take on yet another responsibility — to communicate *more effectively* with your voters. But don't despair! Writing in plain language is not all that difficult and time-consuming, and in the long run, could make "keeping up with all those other things" easier to do.

Here are some pointers for getting the process started and making it work.

Pull Together a Few "Desktop" Supplies

■ A good dictionary and thesaurus. (Even if you already have these on your computer, there's a good chance that the person who programmed the software wasn't thinking about "plain language.")

■ A thorough list of election terminology, along with definitions and synonyms; which of course you'll have to develop. (A high school student doing community service ought to be able to help you with this).

☐ One or two basic grammar books, written especially for writers.

☐ A copy of the checklist in Appendix C.

☐ This manual, and two or three other writing-improvement books (for cross-referencing purposes). See "How To Create More Readable Materials" in the bibliography in this manual.

☐ Any other reference materials listed in the bibliography that you think would be helpful.

☐ Plenty of scratch paper and sharpened pencils.

And that's about it!

Pull Together Some Resource People

No one should be expected to be both writer and editor, even if that's the way it has been done in your office in the past. (It's tough to edit out jargon, when to you, it's not jargon!) You'll need some consulting editors and readers to "test" out your materials. Here are some options.

■ The quickest and easiest, but more expensive, option is to go to the yellow pages and find a consulting editor. However, this may be a risky approach to take. Many professional editors know very little about plain

language, and as "professionals," they are not, by definition, your "average" voters.

■ Another option is to recruit a few volunteers and form an ad hoc "editorial board" to use for focus group testing. For example, you might recruit a social worker from the social services department, a staff person from a local advocacy group, a seasoned poll worker, a volunteer from the League of Women Voters, an agency service employee, and a couple of newly-registered voters. There's your focus group! As for what to do next, please see Appendix D.

■ Another option is to recruit a literacy professional from a local adult education program, adult literacy "tutoring" program, or community college developmental English department. Adult literacy programs, in particular, are often looking for ways in which to become more involved in community literacy problems and solutions.

The person you recruit should be someone who is willing and able to: provide you with information on the literacy problem in your community; participate in, or possibly even facilitate, your focus group testing; and give you access to some marginally literate readers who can participate in focus group testing of your materials.

Pull Together Your Writing Skills

Plain language writing is a *skill* that is learned and developed over time; not a formula that can be plugged in at the last moment. So, it's best to get the learning process started before election time comes around again, or before that next mandate (requiring yet another document) gets passed down to you from on high.

One step in the learning process is to take a look at all of your existing materials. Then select one that needs revision. You'd be surprised at how much you can improve it!

That's all it takes to *get started:* one document; a commitment on your part to make that document easier to read and use; and this manual. The rest is experience. Trust me.

Pull Together the Process

Plain language writing is also a *process* that is learned and developed over time:

■ It may start with one person. But it takes everyone in an agency, from the top down, to institutionalize the process.

■ It may develop and grow on its own merits. But it may need a boost from an administrative policy that commits the agency to writing and speaking in plain language.

■ It may start with voter information, but it may spread to areas such as instructions for poll workers, signs in offices and polling places, agency directories, and staff communications.

■ It may even reach beyond the agency into those "higher" places where election language gets written and mandated. But it will need to be introduced by those who see that change is necessary, and that change is possible.

On behalf of all of your voters, and especially those voters who are only marginally literate, start pulling!

Making It Work

Avoid These Pitfalls

■ **Rushing it.** As you already know, writing takes time, and as you're about to discover, writing in plain language takes even more time. You'll find that you need more time than usual to rewrite and edit your work, talk through rewrites with coworkers and others, and "test out" the final draft with willing readers.

> "If I'd had more time, I'd have written a shorter book."
>
> -Mark Twain

■ **Using hand-me-downs.** This is a tactic that may work if you're trying to save on clothing expenses, but it probably won't work as a time or energy-saver on a writing project. Besides, taking a used publication and "just cutting it down or revising it," doesn't make much sense if you're trying to develop a new and different writing style. It would be wiser to start your project from scratch.

■ **Clinging to the past.** In a plain language writing project, there's rarely an excuse for using the words "But we've always...." (used statutory language, 9 point type, red ink, upper case letters) — except as an excuse to keep things the way they were. When this happens, and it will, use the principles and techniques in this manual to come up with your own "But we can do it better by..." response.

■ **Sticking to the rules.** The principles and techniques discussed in this manual should not be treated like iron-clad rules. For example, the shorter way of saying something is not always the easiest to understand; the passive voice may work as well as the active voice; or there's just no easy substitute for a word like "purge." Creating easy-to-read and easy-to-use materials means using a lot of common sense, making many judgment calls, and settling for some trade-offs.

Get Ready for the Skeptics

Most writing projects involve a lot of people, or at least ought to — your boss, your co-workers, an editor, focus group members, the designer, the printer — and not all of those people are going to buy into a plain language effort; at least not right away. Plan ahead for how you're going to respond to the person who says:

■ "We don't want to talk down to people."

■ "That's all very nice, but we're on a tight deadline."

■ "But we've been using this form for twenty years!"

■ "It's good enough."

■ "How much more will it cost to do it your way?"

■ "Those changes will never get by the legal department."

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- "If they can't read this, they ought to go back to school."

- "If they can't read this, they shouldn't be voting."

- "Okay, but don't change that section — the boss wrote it!"

- "But those are the words in the legislation."

- "You better leave it alone. That writer has a big ego problem."

Hopefully, the information in this manual will keep you a step ahead of the Shakespeares, naysayers, legalists, traditionalists, purists, and elitists.

Build Support for Plain Language

Changing the way your organization goes about writing its forms and notices won't be an easy task. Most people know very little about the literacy problem, and even less about what "plain language" means. Add to that the usual resistance to change in a typical organization, and you've got your job cut out for you.

However, there are some things you can do to make your task easier.

- Learn more about the literacy problem in general, and educate others. (People usually don't support change unless they are convinced that change is necessary.) There are some "Background on Literacy" readings listed in Appendix G.

- Do a little fact-finding about the educational level of the population you serve, or better yet, the estimated number of adults in your area or community who are considered to have a literacy problem. You can get this information from your:

  - □ State, regional, or local literacy resource center

  - □ Public library

  - □ Local adult education program, usually located within the public school system

  - □ Local adult literacy "tutoring" programs.

Note: There's a good chance that your local white or yellow pages are not all that easy to read and use. If so, you can get the names and telephone numbers of the above places by calling the National Institute for Literacy at **1–800–228–8813.**

- After you've read this manual, evaluate your current voter materials. If there's a particular form, flier, letter, or other document that you suspect is harder to read or use than you think it needs to be, rewrite it in plain language. Use it as "your plain language model." (People don't usually support change unless they see that it is possible.)

- Get other people involved as soon as you can. Change in general, and a plain language writing initiative in particular, happens when others buy into the project. Besides, you'll need a willing and diversified team of consulting editors and readers to "test" out your writing skills: co-workers, from the boss to the janitor; friends and neighbors; reading teachers and adult literacy students; and other prospective voters, registered or not.

- Last but not least, please share this manual, or at least its message, with others: legislators, administrators, and other policy-makers; co-workers who write; volunteers who help voters register; poll workers who help them vote; and anyone else you think needs to hear the message.

Appendix A

A Voice from the Field

It's one thing to know what a specialist, such as the writer of this manual, has to say about plain language. It's quite another to hear about it from someone out in the trenches. Here are some thoughts from one plain language soldier: Thomas Wilkey, Executive Director of the New York State Board of Elections.

Q When and why did you see a need for plain language in New York election materials?

TW I first became aware of the need for plain language in voting materials when we redesigned our voter registration form and were reviewing forms from other states. The D.C. form caught my eye as being easy to read in terms of plain language and overall design. During our project, we began working with the same people who designed the D.C. form, and we continue to work with them in other areas.

Q Do you use plain language in all election materials or only for selected materials? If the latter, how do you determine which materials need to be in plain language?

TW For now, we are concentrating our plain language efforts on those forms and documents that carry the most critical messages to the largest group of voters, and that are most critical to election administration. These include voter registration forms, acknowledgment notices, confirmation notices, and mail-check cards.

Q Explain some of the particular issues that came up when you "translated" your voter registration form into a more readable and usable format.

TW I must admit, we did run into some initial resistance from segments of the legislature. Some language used in election documents is contained in the law, and this required us to seek legislative approval in changing language. The early opposition dissipated quickly and everyone was very pleased with our efforts.

Some legal obstacles will always be a problem, which is why it is essential that key legislative staff and advocacy organizations be consulted early in the process in order to overcome any obstacles.

Q What do you think the main costs and benefits are of "translating" materials into plain language — in terms of money, time, legal obstacles and other factors?

TW I believe that the costs and benefits of adopting a plain language program are very significant. The messages that we send to voters are very important and could result in someone being inadvertently placed in the wrong polling location or placed on an inactive list. Anything we can do to assure that voters can and will read this information is time well spent.

Also, production and mailing are very expensive and it's absolutely necessary that these costs not be wasted on materials that can't be read or won't be read.

Q What process do you now have in place to ensure that new materials will be made easier to read and use?

TW We routinely send drafts of all proposed forms to our local election official. This effort, while it takes additional time, can yield a wide variety of comments and suggestions. We are fortunate that our 125 election commissioners and support staff represent a cross section of our State, including large urban and small rural communities. Our first step always involves circulation of early drafts and ideas to all staff managers, regardless of their individual interest in the document. This ensures that a valued group of people will be involved in the process.

Q How do you test your materials (before publication) to confirm that they actually are more readable?

TW I think the simplest method of testing materials is to have staff members take drafts home with them to test on their family, friends, and others who are not intimately involved in the election process. This yields good results in terms of readability and usefulness of the materials.

The key questions to be answered in designing plain language materials are really quite simple. Sit back yourself, look at the document, and answer the following questions:

- Can I read and understand this document?

- Does it relay information and requirements simply?

- Is it pleasing to the eye?

- If you arrive home after a busy day and the form is in the mail, would you yourself take time to read it?

- Does it contain, in a prominent location, a phone number to call if you need help to understand or fill out the document?

Q Do you have any suggestions for how voters could or should be used to "test out" new voter materials? For example, having a voluntary voter advisory group on call to review materials.

TW I had thought about expanding our test group to include a voluntary voter group, but through the process I just mentioned, we are routinely reaching out to a diversified group. For now, this appears to be sufficient. One does have to be careful not to include "too" many people, as I believe in the old expression that "too many cooks spoil the pot."

Q Have you gotten any feedback from county election administrators, registration clerks, or others regarding your revised voter registration forms?

TW All of our feedback so far has been very positive, and this helps support my future plans of including other materials in our plain language program.

Q How do you measure the effectiveness of your plain language materials?

TW Measuring the effect of your plain language program is very simple. Has the number of incomplete forms and phone calls been reduced? This should be one of your objectives. Tracking problems that voters are having with materials is also important, as you will then be able make corrections in future form design.

Q Have you encountered any resistance to your plain language efforts? If so, from whom, for what reasons, and how did you respond?

TW There was some initial resistance from some members of the Legislature, but these concerns were addressed quickly. We are hopeful that we can convince the Legislature to allow us to completely redesign our absentee ballot application form this year. This would be a radical change from the present form, and I expect some resistance.

Involving as many people as possible in the process is helpful. Change is always difficult for some people to accept under any circumstances. Having a core group of supporters who believe in your goals is always essential.

Q Ballots are often worded in statutory language (legalese). What, if anything, can you and other election officials do to encourage the use of plain language in materials such as ballots and referendum questions?

TW We presently have a proposed bill before the Legislature to "test pilot" some new ballot designs. Our ballots are growing larger each year, and with the addition of the new parties, ballots are becoming very crowded. Selling any kind of change can only be accomplished through a test program. We hope we are successful.

Q Have you and your staff tried to influence others regarding the need for plain language? If so, how?

TW We've talked this up a great deal, and we will continue to provide training on this subject to our county commissioners. It's important that a "plain language" attitude be brought into play in every area, including routine correspondence, important

memorandum, and every piece of instructional material that is printed.

Q Do you foresee any major areas in the election process where having materials written in plain language will be of critical importance, such as in implementing the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)?

TW The use of clearer, more concise, and more readable materials was absolutely necessary in our efforts to implement NVRA. Many new changes are taking place in the election process, particularly in the areas of address changes, inactive status, and fail-safe voting procedures. It is vital that these changes be addressed in a format that is easily understood.

Q What advice do you have for other election officials, or agencies, that want to begin a plain language initiative?

TW My advice is simple. Look closely at every document and form you produce and ask yourself the key questions I mentioned before. To that I would add: don't overload materials with too much information and too much legalese; save the big words to impress someone else; and save yourself valuable time, money, and aggravation by keeping it simple!

Q Are there any other pointers you'd like to give .

TW Just this. There is always a tendency for any organization charged with the responsibility of designing forms and other materials to "fill them up" with as much information as possible. This is a natural tendency given the cost of production and mailing, but I believe that in the end, it's counterproductive. Too much information results in fewer people reading these valuable documents, and in my view, we should always reduce the information to that which is absolutely necessary.

Appendix B

A Plain Language Sample from the Field

In 1990, the District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics (with assistance from a local literacy program, Push Literacy Action Now), revised its voter registration form. The revised form not only captured the attention of the Washington Post, but also became a model for many states revising their forms.

When the new form was introduced, Emmett H. Fremaux, Jr., executive director of the Board of Elections and Ethics, noted that simplifying the form removed a significant barrier to voter participation for persons with reading difficulties, and made it easier for all residents to register to vote. He further noted that while past Board efforts had increased opportunities for citizens to register by increasing the *availability* of the voter registration form, the new easier-to-read and easier-to-use form increased *accessibility* on another level.

Board staff member, Leona Agouridis, added that the most important tools used in the revision process were common sense and a cool objectivity. She also said that the process could not have worked without the willingness of Board staff members to abandon their personal investment in the old form.

The before-and-after forms, and a guide to the changes made, are presented here as "living proof" that writing in plain language can be accomplished, and does make a big difference.

A Guide to the Changes Made

Simplifying

Vocabulary

Before	*After*
Clearly Print	Use pen-please print clearly
Residence Address	Address Where You Live
City Sec. (N.W., N.E., S.W., S.E.)	Circle One: NE NW SE SW
APT. NO.	Apartment Number
Tel. NO. Home: Office:	Daytime Telephone Number(s)
Party Affiliation	Party Registration
Registration Declaration	Voter Declaration
Signature of Registrant	Signature
District of Columbia Mail Registration Application (MRA)	Mail-In Voter Registration

Number on
Sample Forms

■ **Registration Declaration.**   (1)
Revised.

■ **Warning Statement.**   (2)
Revised.

■ **Note on Party Affiliation.**   (3)
Revised.

Cutting

Number on
Sample Forms

■ **Birth Place.**   (4)
Not legally required and
not used by the office for
any purpose.

■ **For Official Use Only.**   (5)
A change in office
procedure eliminated
the need for this section.

■ **Printed Name of Registrant.**   (6)
Not needed.

■ **Signature of Assistant.**   (7)
Not legally required and not
used by the office for any
purpose.

■ **Authorization to Cancel Voter
Registration in Former Jurisdiction.**
A change in office procedure eliminated the
need for this section. Eliminating it also cut
out an entire one-sixth of the form, allowing
for a change is form size from a cumbersome
legal size to a standard 8-1/2 x 11. (Sample
not shown here.)

Organizing

- Registration information details are clearly labeled, more direct, and friendlier on the new form.

  Note the intimidating tone, jumbled text styles, and poor layout on the old form.

- **Voter Declaration and Warning.** On the new form, the two are "united." On the old form, they are separate. (# 1 & 2)

- **Party Affiliation Note.** Has been moved from instruction section on old form to Party Affiliation check-off section of new form. (#3)

- Additional information is set off to the side and boxed-in on the new form. (#8)

Designing

A visual comparison of the old and new forms shows the effective use of layout and graphic design techniques (headings, bold typeface, bullets, highlighting, boxing, shading, ragged right text, etc.).

Other

Note the differences in language, organization, and design of the information located on the back of the old and new forms. (See last page of this appendix.)

BEFORE

MOISTEN, FOLD, SEAL, AND MAIL

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA MAIL REGISTRATION APPLICATION (MRA)

TO REGISTER TO VOTE, YOU MUST BE:

1. A citizen of the U.S. who has been a resident of the District of Columbia for at least 30 days preceding the next election and who does not claim voting residence in another state or territory.

2. At least 18 years old on or before the next Election.

3. Not incarcerated for conviction of a felony.

4. Not mentally incompetent as adjudged by a court of competent jurisdiction.

HOW TO REGISTER:

CLEARLY PRINT IN INK ALL REQUIRED INFORMATION ON THE FORM BELOW.

③ **Note On Party Affiliation:** Only a voter affiliated with a political party qualified to conduct a Primary (Democratic, Republican, or D.C. Statehood) may vote in a party Primary Election. Voters who are not affiliated with a political party (independents) and voters who are affiliated with a party not qualified to conduct a primary election may vote only in General and Special Elections, and on Initiative or Referendum Measures.

READ THE REGISTRATION DECLARATION, **SIGN YOUR NAME, AND GIVE THE DATE.** Also, PRINT your complete name on the line provided. If assistance is required to complete this application, obtain the signature of the person assisting you.

The Board will REJECT any application that does not contain a complete NAME, ADDRESS, DATE OF BIRTH, AND SIGNATURE.

FOR VOTER INFORMATION CALL: 727-2525
TDD FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED: 639-8916
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BOARD OF ELECTIONS AND ETHICS

Second Fold Here   8-1558 WdVol.3   Second Fold Here

1.	THIS IS A ☐ NEW REGISTRATION ☐ RE-REGISTRATION ☐ CHANGE OF NAME

☐ NEW REGISTRATION
☐ RE-REGISTRATION

⑤ FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY
REGISTRATION NO.

M 1050509

2.	MR. MRS. MISS.	LAST NAME (Print)	FIRST NAME (Print)	MIDDLE INITIAL—NAME	SUFFIX JR. SR. II III IV

DATE OF REGISTRATION | CLERK

3.	RESIDENT ADDRESS		CITY SEC. (N.W., N.E., S.W., S.E.)	APT. NO.	ZIP CODE

PREVIOUS REGISTRATION NO.

4.	MAILING ADDRESS (If Different from Residence)

DATE	PARTY CHANGE	CLERK

5.	DATE OF BIRTH	BIRTHPLACE, CITY, STATE AND COUNTRY **④**	TEL. NUMBER HOME: OFFICE:

6.	NAME ON LAST REGISTRATION	SOC. SEC. NO. (OPTIONAL)

7.	ADDRESS ON LAST REGISTRATION	ZIP CODE

DATE	ADDRESS CHANGE	CLERK
1		

8.	PARTY AFFILIATION (CHECK only one box) ☐ DEMOCRAT ☐ REPUBLICAN ☐ D.C. STATEHOOD ☐ NO PARTY AFFILIATION ☐ OTHER PARTY _____ (NAME OF OTHER POLITICAL PARTY)	**①** REGISTRATION DECLARATION I Hereby Swear or Affirm THAT I am a citizen of the United States and a resident of the District of Columbia THAT the residence address provided above is my fixed place of abode in the District; THAT I will be at least 18 years old on or before the day of the next election That I have never been convicted of a crime in the United States which is a felony in the District of Columbia, including those crimes designated as a felony pursuant to D.C. Code § 1 1102(7)(8), as amended (election crimes) OR IF I have been so convicted, (1) I have completed my sentence, or (2) I am on parole or probation, or (3) I have been pardoned; THAT I am not mentally incompetent as adjudged by a court of competent jurisdiction, THAT I do not now claim voting residence or right of vote in any State or Territory of the United States

2		

DATE _____
SIGNATURE OF REGISTRANT

3		

WARNING
ANY PERSON WHO IN THE COURSE OF REGISTERING OR ATTEMPTING TO REGISTER, MAKES FALSE REPRESENTATIONS AS TO HIS/HER QUALIFICATIONS FOR VOTING, SHALL UPON CONVICTION THEREOF BE SUBJECT TO A FINE OF NOT MORE THAN $10,000 OR IMPRISONMENT FOR NOT MORE THAN FIVE YEARS OR BOTH

⑥ PRINTED NAME OF REGISTRANT

4		

②
⑦ SIGNATURE OF ASSISTANT
(if required)

5		

AFTER

Mail-In Voter Registration Form

★ ★ ★ District of Columbia
Board of Elections and Ethics

You can use this form to:
- register to vote in the District of Columbia
- let us know that your name or address has changed
- register with a party or change parties

To register to vote in D.C., you must:
- be a U.S. citizen
- be a D.C. resident
- be at least 18 years old on or before the next election
- not be in jail for a felony conviction
- not have been judged "mentally incompetent" by a court of law
- not claim the right to vote anywhere outside D.C.

Questions? Call 727-2525

Hearing-impaired people with TDD, call 639-8916

Información en español: Si le interesa obtener este formulario en español, llame al 727-2525.

0-0976

(8) Important!

Keep your voter record up-to-date! If we do not have your current name or address, you might not be on the voter roll. If you are not on the voter roll, you will not be able to vote in the next election.

Use this form to send in your name or address change. If you are not sure if we have your current name or address, use this form, too. Or call 727-2525.

To vote in a primary election, you must be registered with a party that holds a primary election—either the Democratic, Republican or D.C. Statehood Party.

If you register with any other party, or with no party, you may vote only in general or special elections. Use this form if you want to register with a party or change parties (see box 8).

Use pen—please print clearly

| 1 | Check one: ☐ new registration ☐ address change ☐ party change ☐ name change | Clerk / Reg. Date | Registration No. B 0000127 |

| 2 | Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms. | Last Name | First Name | Middle Name | Suffix Jr. Sr. II III IV |

| 3 | Address Where You Live | Circle One NE NW SE SW | Apartment Number | Zip Code |

| 4 | Address Where You Get Your Mail (if different from #3) | | Zip Code |

| 5 | Date of Birth | 6 | Daytime Telephone Number(s) | 7 | Social Security Number (optional) |

8 Party Registration—check one box
- ☐ Democratic Party
- ☐ Republican Party
- ☐ D.C. Statehood Party
- ☐ No Party (independent)
- ☐ Other Party (write name below)

(3) PLEASE NOTE: To vote in a **primary** election in the District of Columbia, you must be registered with either the Democratic, Republican or D.C. Statehood Party.

10 Voter Declaration—read and sign below **(1)**
I swear or affirm that:
- I am a U.S. citizen
- I live in the District of Columbia at the address (#3) above
- I will be at least 18 years old on or before the next election
- I am not in jail on a felony conviction
- I have not been judged "mentally incompetent" in a court of law
- I do not claim the right to vote anywhere outside D.C.

9 Name and Address on Last Voter Registration

Name _____

Address _____

(If outside D.C., include county and state)

Signature **(2)** Date _____

WARNING: If you sign this statement even though you know it is untrue, you can be convicted and fined up to $10,000 and/or jailed for up to five years.

Fold on dotted lines, peel off tape, seal and mail

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BEFORE—BACK OF FORM

First Fold Here   First Fold Here

HAVE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE BEFORE?   YES ☐   NO ☐

IF THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS <u>YES</u> — YOU MUST COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM TO CANCEL YOUR FORMER VOTER REGISTRATION

AUTHORIZATION TO CANCEL VOTER REGISTRATION IN FORMER JURISDICTION
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BOARD OF ELECTIONS AND ETHICS

Date: _____

I, _____ hereby authorize cancellation
                  PRINT NAME

of my previous voter registration in:

_____	_____	_____
CITY	COUNTY	STATE

My last address there was: _____

Date of Birth: _____   _____
                                          SIGNATURE

AFTER—BACK OF FORM

Did you remember to:

    1. Write your full name, address and date of birth (in boxes 2, 3 and 5).
    2. Sign and date the form (in box 10).

Deadline:

    The voter registration deadline is 30 days before the next election. If you mail this form, it must be postmarked by that date. If you miss the deadline, you will not be registered in time to vote.

If you are qualified and the information on your form is complete, we will add your name to the District's voter roll. We will then mail you a voter card. This card will tell you where to vote.

Questions? Call 727-2525
Hearing-impaired people with TDD, call 639-8916

★★★
District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics

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Appendix C

A Checklist
for Writers

Planning

- Have you pulled together the plain language reference materials and resource people suggested in this manual?

- Have you provided enough time in your production schedule to apply the plain language principles and techniques, including ample time for review and revision of your publication?

- Have you determined your purpose for writing, who your target audience is, what your main message is going to be, and what style and format you should use?

Writing

- Are you using the spoken vocabulary of your target audience?

- If you had no choice but to use jargon or other difficult words that your readers may not know, have you defined them or used them in a way that will help readers understand what they mean?

- Are your sentences short, simple, specific, direct and in the active voice?

- Have you avoided using contractions, uncommon abbreviations, acronyms, negative words, verbs with endings, and punctuation marks (other than the basic comma, period, and question mark)?

- Are your paragraphs short? Have you listed and bulleted information where you can, instead of using formal paragraphs?

- Are you writing as if you are talking to your reader?

- Are you writing in the active voice?

- Are the concepts you present familiar to the audience or supported with examples?

- Have you avoided concepts that may be beyond the skills or outside the culture of your readers (i.e., metaphors, references or illustrations of things that they may not be familiar with)?

Organizing

- Is it clear what your message is, why it is important, and what the reader should do with it, if anything?

- Have the "who," "what," "where," "when," "why," and "how" been covered and placed in the best order?

- If you ask readers to take action, do you give concrete, clear directions on how to do so?

- Have you put the need-to-know information first, leaving the nice-to-know information for last by putting it to the side or on the back, or even deleting it?

- Do you give clear information to readers on where they can get more information if they need it?

- Are you using headings or guide questions to lead the reader along?

- Are you breaking your text into "chunks" of information that your readers can handle easily?

Designing

- Have you avoided long strings of capital letters, bold, italics, or other sorts of fancy type that are hard on the eyes?

- Do you have plenty of white space, including wide margins?

- Is the design clear and logical so that it is easy for the reader to figure out where to start reading, and where to go, or what to do, next?

- Are the type size, type styles, and selected colors easy to read?

- If you have used illustrations, are they simple and easy to follow?

Editing

- Have you included *all* of the plain language principles and techniques in your own, preliminary editing?

- Has at least one other person edited your writing, and is that person familiar with plain language principles and techniques?

- Did you get feedback on your draft publication from your target audience, either informally, or through formal focus group testing?

- If you made changes based on the feedback you received, have you asked for additional feedback on your revised version?

Appendix D
About Focus Group Testing

The best way to find out how readable your documents are is to test them out on some readers. One way to do that is through focus group testing. A few people, guided by a facilitator, are asked to read or fill out a document, answer the facilitator's questions, ask their own questions, and make suggestions for changing the document.

Focus group testing will not give you quantitative information, such as what percentage of your readers will understand your document, but it will provide valuable qualitative information.

Forming a Focus Group

The focus group should include a small number of voters. Researchers recommend anywhere from five to twelve; smaller groups are less lively, and larger groups make it harder for each individual to participate and harder for the moderator to control and collect information.

How you select the focus group members will depend on what your document's purpose is. For example, if you are testing out a new voter registration form, a focus group made up of unregistered voters would be most effective.

It is best if participants do not know each other, because people often speak more freely in front of strangers. Also, try to get participants who have not taken part in many focus groups

before so that you get fresh and candid responses. Ideally, while you should let participants know in general what kind of material they will be reviewing, they should not know the specific topic ahead of time. This will ensure more spontaneous responses.

To find focus group members with lower-level reading skills, try contacting your local literacy program, or a social services agency. (See "Literacy Programs and Related Organizations" in Appendix G.)

Focus groups can be conducted formally or informally, depending on your resources and the kind of information you need. Providing refreshments or lunch, and a stipend or gift, for participants is a good idea. If you ask an organization (such as a literacy program) to help you form and conduct a focus group, you might also think about offering some form of compensation to the organization.

Conducting the Focus Group

Basically, a focus group is conducted by a facilitator who asks open-ended questions in a non-threatening way so that participants are encouraged to express their knowledge and feelings.

After the introductions, tape record the discussion, with the recorder in full view. Explain that you want to record comments

because all points of view are important and it is impossible to write them all down.

Here are some typical questions:

- What's the purpose of this (document)?
- What is the main idea this (sentence, paragraph, entire document) is trying to get across to you?
- Are you being asked to do something (such as fill out a form)? If so:
  - ☐ What are you being asked to do?
  - ☐ Are the instructions clear?
  - ☐ Are the questions clear?
  - ☐ Is there any part of the form you didn't understand?
- Is there something you find that's confusing?
- Would you say this (word, sentence, paragraph, entire document) is easy to understand, or hard to understand?
- Were there any words that you had trouble with?
- What do you like (not like) about this document?
- In your opinion, was the message talking to you or someone like you? If not, who do you think it was talking to?
- Did you find the message: interesting, not interesting; informative, not informative?
- What do you know now that you did not know before you read this document?

Ask participants to explain how they would tell a friend the information in the message. This way you can get some clues as to how well they understood the message, and also get a sense of the kind of language they would use to convey it.

You can also ask participants to circle words or underline sentences that were hard for them to read, or that they did not know the meaning of. Ask them what words or phrases they might use instead.

Using the Information

After the session, listen to the tape several times. If you have time, make a transcript, noting hesitations, tones of voice, silences, and the like. If not, at least record participants' questions and answers, and the words and expressions they used.

After you have created a draft which takes into account your findings from the focus group, you may want to re-test the document with another group.

Individual Testing

A one-on-one dialog can provide more specific information about how well individuals read, comprehend, or use your document. These dialogs can be particularly helpful when you are at the final draft stage. You can conduct the interview much like the focus group, in terms of the questions you ask, and you can ask the individual to read the document to you to get a sense of whether there are any stumbling points.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be useful if you want to test your document with subjects from many regions, or if you need to communicate by mail. Depending on the literacy skills of your subjects, they should be able to fill out your questionnaire by themselves or do so with assistance. In any case, you will want to make the questionnaire itself easy to read and fill out. Therefore, use a check-off, such as:

How easy or hard was the booklet to read?

- ☐ Very easy
- ☐ Easy
- ☐ Just right
- ☐ A little hard
- ☐ Very hard

Appendix E

About Readability Formulas

Readability formulas are tools you can use to get a general sense of the reading ease or difficulty of a text. Readability formulas measure various parts of a text, such as the number of long words, the number of words per sentence, or the number of words that appear on a "familiar words" list. They assign a fixed numerical score that indicates a "reading level" for your text.

Readability formulas provide only a crude gauge of readability. They should be used only as a guide, not as an absolute indicator of readability. Among their drawbacks, readability formulas do not take into account:

■ context

■ the concreteness or abstractness of the language used

■ clarity of style

■ design

■ the reader's experiences and reading skills

Also, readability formulas are based on assumptions that are not always true — such as that longer words are always harder to read than shorter words, or that the shortest way of saying something is always the easiest to read.

Readability formulas don't all calculate grade level the same way, so different formulas may give you different scores for the same passage.

Another problem with readability formulas is that you have to have a fair amount of text — about 100 words or more — in order to get a score. Some texts may be too short to apply a formula.

Nonetheless, readability formulas can be useful, for example:

■ to get a general sense of how hard or easy something is to read

■ to compare two drafts of the same manuscript

■ to have "impressive" numerical data that you can use to persuade your publication's decision-makers that a manuscript needs rewriting!

You can calculate readability formulas manually or by computer. On the next page is a readability formula that can be calculated manually.

For additional information on readability formulas and software, please see Appendix G.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE FOG INDEX CREATED BY ROBERT GUNNING

1. Count off a 100-word sample.	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
2. Count the number of complete sentences in the sample.				
3. Count the total number of words in the complete sentences.				
4. Find the average sentence length (#3 ÷ #2).				
5. Count the number of words of three or more syllables in the entire 100-word passage.				
6. Add the answers to #4 (average number of words per sentence) and #5 (long words).				
7. Multiply your answer to #6 by the constant .4 (4/10) to get your approximate grade-in-school reading level.				

NOTES

■ For longer materials (more than one page), this process should be repeated every few pages to obtain an average readability across the whole text. Count numbers and symbols as words.

■ Count each part of a hyphenated word as a word (for example, "merry-go-round" is three words).

■ Count the syllables that you hear (for example, "advised" is two words and "advising" is three).

■ Count the part of a sentence after a colon (:), semicolon (;) or dash (—) as a new sentence.

Appendix F
Word Exchange List

Instead of:	Try Using:
accompany	go with
accordingly	so
accurate	correct, right
actual	real
additional	more
adjacent to	next to
advantageous	helpful
adjudged	judged, sentenced, convicted
adversely affect	hurt
affix	put, place
affiliation with	choose, register with
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear, plain
applicant/applicant's	you/your
approximately	about
ascertain	find out, learn
as prescribed by	under
assist/assistance	help, aid
at the present time	now
attached herewith is	here is
attempt	try

be in the position to	can
by authority of	by law
close proximity to	near
commence	start, begin
comply with	follow
component	part
comprises	includes, forms
concept	idea
concerning	about, on
consequently	so
consider	think about
constitutes	is, makes up
consult	ask, check with, talk to, meet
contains	has
cooperate	help
correct (address)	right
current residence	home address, address where you now live
currently	now (or leave out)
decline	choose not to
delete	cut, drop
demonstrate	show
designate	choose, name
desire	wish, want
determine	decide, find
diagram	map
digits	numbers
disclose	show, give
disclosure of	giving
discontinue	end, drop, stop

discuss	talk about
disseminate	send out, give out, pass out, hand out
domicile	home, where you live
due to the fact that	because, since, due to
duplicate	copy
during that time	while
e.g.	for example
elect	choose, pick
eligible to enroll	can register, join, sign up
eliminate	cut, stop, drop
employ	use
encourage	urge
endeavor	try
ensure	make sure
establish	set up, prove, show
evaluated	checked
evident	clear
examine	check, look at
excessive number of	too many
exhibit	show
expeditiously	quickly, fast, soon, right away
explain	show, tell
facilitate	ease, help
failed to	did not
finalize	finish, complete
forfeit	give up, lose
for administrative purposes only	for record-keeping only, for office use only
for the purpose of	for, to
for the reason that	because, since

forward	send
furnish	give, send
has the capability	can
henceforth	from now on
hereby authorize	authorize, allow, permit, approve
herein	here
however	but
identical to	same as
identify	name, find, show
identification	ID
i.e.	that is
immediately	now, right away, as soon as possible
in accordance with	by, under
in an effort to	to
inasmuch as	since
in conjunction with	with
incorporate	combine, join
incorrect	wrong, not correct
indicate	say, show, write in
initiate	start
in lieu of	instead of
in order that	so
in order to	to
inquiries	questions
in regard to	about, on
internal use	office use
in the amount of	for
in the course of	in, during
in the event that	if

in the near future	soon
in view of	since
in view of the fact	because
it is essential	must
it is requested that	please
justify	prove
legislation	law
limited number	few
limitations	limits
location	place
locality	area, place
maintain	keep up to date
majority	most, greatest
modify	change
monitor	check, watch
name of applicant	name, your name
non-voting	not voting
notify	tell, let know
numerous	many, a lot
objective	goal, aim, purpose
obligated	must
observe	see
obtain	get
on a monthly basis	monthly
on a yearly basis	yearly
on the basis of	because, since

on the part of	by
operate	run, work
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest, most
participate	take part
perform	do
permit	let
pertaining to	about, of, on
physical location	location
political parties	parties
portion	part
possess	have, own
preclude	prevent
premises	building
prepared	ready
previous	before, past
previous name	name before
previously registered	registered before
prior to	before
procedures	steps, rules, ways
proceed	move on, do, go on, try
promptly	right away, as soon as you can
propounded	asked
provide	give, say
provided that	if
qualifications	conditions (in some cases)

reason for	why
receive	get
regarding	about, of, on
registration process	registration
regulation	rule, law
relating to	about, on
relocate	move
remain	stay
remainder	rest
request/requested	ask/asked for
require	must, need
require assistance	need help
residence address	home address, address where you live
retain	keep
reverse side	other side
review	look over, go over, check over
selection	choice
similar	the same as, like
solicit	ask for
state	say
statutory	by law, legal
submit	send, give
subsequent	next
subsequent to	after
subsequently	later
substantial	large, real, strong
supplies	gives
sufficient	enough

terminate	end, stop
therefore	so
to indicate gender	for gender
transmit	send, give
transpire	happen
until such time as	until
utilize	use
validate	confirm
via	by way of, through, in, on,
warrant	call for, permit, allow
whenever	when
whereas	since
with reference to	about
with regard to	about
you are obligated to	you must
your place of residence	where you live

Add your own:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Appendix G
Bibliography

Background on Literacy

- Fox, Michael. *A Look At Illiteracy Today: The Problems, The Solutions, The Alternatives.* Washington, D.C.: PLAN, Inc., 1986.

  This paper suggests that, given the complex dimensions of illiteracy, the most effective approach for dealing with the problem is to create a wide range of literacy support services that go beyond teaching reading, including making materials more readable. Available for $6.25 from PLAN, Inc., 1528 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC, 20003. (202) 547–8903, Fax (202) 547–2529.

- Harman, David. *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma.* New York: Prentice Hall Regents, 1987.

  This analytical but very readable book looks at the facts of the illiteracy problem and outlines the sobering implications. The author makes recommendations for far-reaching solutions rather than superficial "quick fixes."

- Kirsch, Irwin, et al. *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey.* September, 1993. Available for $12 from the Government Printing Office. GPO Stock Number: 065–000–00588–3.

- Kozol, Jonathan. *Illiterate America.* New York: New American Library, 1985.

  An eloquent discussion of the "illiteracy problem" and a plan to mobilize America to work toward a solution; this is the book that got America talking about the issue.

How to Create More Readable Materials

- American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). *Be A Better Writer,* 1986.

  Part of ASTD's series of "Info-Line" guidelines, this volume presents helpful writing strategies, including a "Shorter the Better" word substitution list and a glossary of misused words. Available for $10 plus $1.50 shipping and handling from ASTD, 1640 Duke Street, P.O. Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313, (703) 683–8100.

- Bailey, Jr., Edward P. *Writing Clearly: A Contemporary Approach.* Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1984.

  This textbook includes several sections on how to write to "make it readable" and to communicate to a specific audience. Exercises are included.

■ Baker, Catherine, E. *Just Say It: How To Write For Readers Who Don't Read Well.* A hands-on training "workshop" for writers; includes plain language examples and exercises. Available for $54 from PLAN, Inc., 1528 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC, 20003. (202) 547–8903, Fax (202) 547–2529.

Please Note: Much of the material in this manual was taken from this resource; with permission.

■ Bates, Jefferson D. *Writing With Precision: How To Write So That You Cannot Possibly Be Misunderstood.* Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1988 (rev.).

Another good textbook that covers the ground rules for clear writing.

■ Bell, Jim and Anne Trussler. *Literacy Audit for Social Agencies.* Calgary, Alberta, Canada: Calgary Adult Literacy Awareness Project, 1992.

This kit helps organizations assess how user-friendly they are (considering their procedures as well as their print materials) for adults who have trouble reading and writing in English. It was produced in consultation with several Calgary social agencies. Available free from the United Way of Calgary, 120 — 13th Ave., S.E., Calgary, Alberta Canada T2G 1B3, (403) 263–0720.

■ Bhola, H.S. *Writing for New Literates: The Design, Delivery and Evaluation of a Writers' Workshop in Zambia.* German Foundation for International Development, 1984.

This 36-page paper was prepared for Workshops for Writers of Reading Materials for Adult and Continuing Education Materials, conducted in Malawi and Botswana in 1984. The author explains how workshop participants assessed need and produced materials for use by "new literates." The author documents how hard it was, even for well-intentioned people, to get into the mindset of writing clearly. Available from ERIC, Document ED 258 225.

■ Felker, Daniel, B. et al. *Guidelines for Document Designers.* Washington, D.C.: Document Design Center, 1981.

Twenty-five guidelines cover organization, clear writing, and use of graphics and typography. The 171-page manual is available for $12.95 from the Document Design Center, American Institutes for Research, 3333 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, (202) 342–5000.

■ Flesch, Rudolf. *How to Write Plain English: A Book for Lawyers and Consumers.* New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

This early classic of the "plain English" movement aims at translating legalese into understandable language for the (literate) consumer. It also explains the Flesch readability formula.

■ Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, National Literacy Secretariat. *Plain Language Clear and Simple* (also available in French as Pour un style clair et simple). Ottawa, Canada: Canada Communication Group-Publishing, 1991.

This 55-page guide (CCG-P Code 027901), published by an advisory group representing 14 Canadian federal departments, uses examples from government and other sources to show how to write to communicate simply. It is also available in audio cassette (CCG-P Code 027902) and braille (CCG-P Code 027903). Copies are available for US$8.35 plus US$3.50 shipping from the Canada Communication Group-Publishing, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0S9, (819) 997–9900.

■ Nore, Gordon. *Clear Lines: How to Compose and Design Clear Language Documents for the Workplace.* Toronto, Canada: Frontier College, 1991.

This 84-page manual focuses on readability in workplace materials. It covers the importance of clear language to Canada, principles of clear writing, and how-to-do-it information, including before-and-after samples. Available for CAN$15 plus CAN$2 postage from Learning in the Workplace, Frontier College, 35 Jackes Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4T 1E2, (416) 923–3591. A 16-minute video, called The Clear Writer's Hit Squad, is also available for CAN$125.

■ Ross-Larson, Bruce. *Edit Yourself.* New York: W. W. North and Co., 1982.

A book geared toward making bureaucratese more readable.

■ U.S. Department of the Air Force. *U.S. Air Force Effective Writing Course.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Air Force, 1980.

This 71-page manual is intended to help military personnel abandon their bureaucratese. It includes lots of examples (mostly military) and lots of opportunities to practice new skills. The aim is to produce good writing for literate readers. Available for $4.75 from the Government Printing Office, Stock Number 008–070–00444–5.

■ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Making Health Communication Programs Work: A Planner's Guide.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989.

This 131-page guide to production of health communications material covers all aspects of multimedia planning, including readability and pre-testing. Available as National Institutes of Health Publication No. 89–1493, free from the Office of Cancer Communica-

tions, National Cancer Institute, Building 31, Room 4B43, Bethesda, MD 20892, (800) 4–CANCER.

About Readability Formulas

■ Davison, Alice and Robert N. Kantor. "On the Failure of Readability Formulas to Define Readable Tests: A Case Study from Adaptations." *Reading Research Quarterly* 17 (November 1982): 187–209.

The authors report that shortening sentences and substituting vocabulary to meet the criteria of readability formulas do not necessarily increase readability; rather, the most successful adaptations are a result of conscientious, careful writing. "We urge writers to rely on their own judgments about language which is appropriate for the intended reader, and not on stereotyped notions, or readability formulas."

■ Standal, Timothy C. "Readability Formulas: What's Out, What's In?" *Reading Teachers* 31 (March 1978): 642–646.

This overview of 30 years of research in readability concludes that formulas can at best serve only as general indicators, because they cannot account for the interests and experience of readers.

■ Trapini, Fred and Sean Walmsley. "Five Readability Estimates: Differential Effects of Simplifying a Document." *Journal of Reading* 24 (February 1981): 398–403.

A Blue Cross/Blue Shield brochure was simplified in four ways: through synonym substitutions, sentence simplification, synonym and sentence modification combined, and subjective rewriting. Assessment using the Dale-Chall, Harris Jacobson, Fry, SMOG, and Flesch readability measures showed a range of scores for the five approaches. The conclusion is that writers trying to lower the readability of a

printed material should be wary of merely editing to the particular formula being applied.

Readability Software

- *Grammatic V.*

    A grammar-checking software that includes a readability calculation. Available in PC and Macintosh versions from computer software vendors or for $79.95 from Diskovery, 11703–L Fair Oaks Mall, Fairfax, VA 22033, (703) 591–3475.

- *Readability Estimator.*

    Calculates readability based on several formulas. Available in Apple II/IIGS and IBM-compatible versions (the IBM-compatible version is faster and improved) for $49.95 plus shipping (call for shipping rate) from Berta-Max, Inc., 2109 T Avenue, Unit 2, Anacortes, WA 98221, (206) 293–1978.

- *Readability Calculations.*

    This software analyzes a document's readability level and provides a score derived from nine different readability formulas. Available in an Apple II version for $44.95 and a PC version for $49.95, from Micropower and Light Co., 8814 Sanshire Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231, (214) 553–0105.

- *RightWriter.*

    This software analyzes documents for errors in grammar, style, usage, and punctuation and will highlight weak language, complex language, lengthy sentences, clichés, ambiguities, incorrect word usage, etc. A readability analysis is provided using the Flesch-Kincaid formula (based on average sentence length and average number of syllables per word). Versions for DOS, Windows, Macintosh, and Network computers are available from computer software vendors or for $95 plus $6.50 handling from Que Software, 11711 North College Avenue, Carmel, IN 46032, (800) 992–0244.

Using Focus Groups

- Debus, M. *Handbook for Excellence in Focus Group Research.* Washington D.C.: Academy for Educational Development, 1988.

    This 55-page manual provides detailed guidelines for using focus groups and individual interviews to do market research. (It does not specifically address the topic of using focus groups to determine readability.) Available for $10 from AED, 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Washington D.C. 20037, (202) 862–1900.

- Folch-Lyon, Everlyn and John F. Trost. "Conducting Focus Group Sessions." *Studies in Family Planning* 12 (December 1981): 443–449.

    This basic introduction to focus group research tells how to go about it, from prewriting to pretesting materials.

Literacy Programs and Related Organizations

- Laubach Literacy Action.

    A national literacy organization with a network of tutoring programs. Laubach Literacy Action, 1320 Jamesville Avenue, P.O. Box 131, Syracuse, NY 13210, (315) 422–9121.

- Literacy Volunteers of America.

    A national literacy organization with a network of tutoring programs. Literacy Volunteers of America, 5795 Widewaters Parkway, Syracuse, NY 13214, (315) 445–8000.

- National Institute for Literacy

    Established by the National Literacy Act, the institute is responsible for coordination on adult literacy policy among the federal agencies, research and dissemination, technical assistance, and program development.

Contact National Institute for Literacy, 800 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, DC 20202–7560, (202) 632–1500.

■ U.S. Department of Education.

For information on literacy programs and practices, contact the Office of Vocational and Adult Education's Clearinghouse on Adult Education, Mary E. Switzer Building, 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20202, (202) 205–9685. Also, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's Education Information Branch maintains statistics and research information. OERI, Washington, DC 20208–5650, (800) 424–1616 or (202) 219–1513.

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