

ECDD TRAINING ACADEMY

“PLAIN TALK”
FOR
BUSINESS SERVICES

SEPTEMBER, 2011

EMPLOYMENT & CAREER DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
EMPLOYMENT SECURITY DEPARTMENT



Plain Talk

What qualifies as 'plain talk'?

Plain talk is more than a writing style; it is a customer-focused, collaborative process for developing documents that are clear and concise. According to the [Governor's Executive Order](#), documents written in plain talk must include:

- Clear language that is commonly used by the intended audience.
- Only the information needed by the recipient, presented in a logical sequence.
- Short sentences.
- Active sentences that make it clear who is responsible for what.
- Layout and design that help the reader understand the meaning on the first try (e.g., white space, bulleted lists, helpful headings, etc.).

How does this apply to job listings and other business communications?

In the case of job orders, the 'logical sequence' and 'layout and design' have already been largely established for you, in the form of the **Format Template** presented in Appendix B of the WorkSource Service Delivery System Policy #1006, **Job Order Policy**. By incorporating the vocabulary and grammatical suggestions following, you can ensure that your completed job orders meet the guidelines of Plain Talk.

In other written communications with your business customers – correspondence, e-mails, service proposals, etc. – follow the same guidelines regarding general language. Also, be especially careful to use acronyms specific to this Department or other governmental agencies *very sparingly*. They should never be used without spelling out the full expression on first occurrence, followed by the acronym in parentheses (and a clear definition of the term, if not readily apparent).

Use words people know and understand

Instead of ...	Use ...
adversely/negatively impact	damage, harm, hurt, destroy, injure
amend	fix, correct
assessed	charged
assistance	help
assistive	helpful
balance owing of \$XX	you owe \$XX
cease	stop
commence	start, begin
continuing claim	weekly claim
delinquent	late
encounter (as a verb)	have
erroneous	incorrect, wrong, mistaken
facilitate	assist, aid, coordinate, lead
file an initial claim	apply for unemployment
finalize	complete, finish
impact (as a verb)	affect, change, alter,
infrastructure	roads/highways, utilities, plumbing, wiring, cables, pipes (pick the right combination for what you're talking about)
input	comments, involvement, ideas, expertise, opinions, review, participation, help, time, involvement
inquire	ask
inquiries	questions
knowingly withholding information	lie, do not tell the truth
misrepresent	lie, do not tell the truth

Instead of ...	Use ...
non-monetary determinations	eligibility decisions, decisions about your claim
notify	tell
obtain	get
provision	law, rule
pursuant to	the law says
in receipt of	have received
remit	send
remittance	payment
remuneration	pay, payment
require	need
required to	must
retain	keep
socialize	spread across (e.g., spread unemployment-insurance costs across all employers)
stakeholder	interested parties/groups, people with an interest in this issue, partners
statute	law
subsequent	next, future
subsequent to	before
terminate	end, stop
transmit	send
usage	use
utilize, utilization, utilizing	use, using

Simplify

Instead of...	Use...
during the course of an audit	during an audit
you should contact	contact
for a period of 10 days	for 10 days
up to a maximum of 14 days	up to 14 days
during such time that	while
in the amount of	for
until such time that	until
it should be mentioned that your claim	your claim
be in a position to	can
in spite of the fact that	despite
please do not hesitate to call	please call
this letter is to inform you that you are eligible	you are eligible
we acknowledge receipt of	we received
was in attendance	attended
in view of the fact that	because
were an indication of	indicated
assemble together	assemble
are taken as a deduction	are deducted

Instead of...	Use...
assisted in rescuing	helped rescue
began to have conversations	started talking
there are still a large number of claimants having difficulty accessing the workforce	many claimants still have trouble getting jobs
had a positive employment outcome	got a job
It is designed to help focus tracking efforts on supporting customers seeking work	It tracks efforts to help job seekers
became employed	was hired, got a job

Avoid passive voice; use active voice:

Passive	Active
Your prompt attention to this matter is appreciated.	I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.
By submitting the wage information as soon as possible, potential delays for former employees who may file for benefits can be avoided.	Submit your wage information as soon as possible to avoid delays in benefit payments to your former employees.
Your online application has been received.	I received your online application.
Findings will be presented by Mary at the conference.	Mary will present findings at the conference.
A decision has been made to reject your application for unemployment benefits.	You are not eligible for unemployment benefits.
Failure to complete your job search requirements could result in a loss of benefits.	You must look for work while you collect benefits.
The intake form must be completed by all job seekers.	You must complete the intake form.
Action on the bill is being considered by the committee.	The committee is considering action on the bill.
Mistakes were made.	I made a mistake.
A resolution to the situation is being sought.	I am trying to resolve the situation.
The findings will be published next month.	We will publish the findings next month.
The survey was taken by about half of all employees.	About half of all employees took the survey.

Passive	Active
announced the immediate closure of	announced that it was immediately closing
Counted among those workers were	The workers included
the falsification of	falsifying
the construction of	constructing
the prevention of	preventing
the generation of	"Generation" is a noun. "Generate" or "generated" are the verbs. Rewrite appropriately.
the development of	developing
The implementation of	Implementing
the negligent release of	negligently releasing
Activation of the system	Activating the system
Would be harmful to	Would harm
The management of	Managing
The adoption of	Adopting
The cleanup of	Cleaning up
...is the owner and operator of	Owns and operates
After completion of	After completing
The amendment of	Amending
Under the leadership/direction of	Led/Directed by

Know the difference between. . .

Anxious (filled with anxiety)	Eager (looking forward to)
Become effective (successful, useful)	Take effect
Insure (protect)	Ensure (assure, guarantee)
Sanction (explicit or official approval, permission, or ratification)	Sanction (penalty, enforcing the law)
Underway (adj.) (an underway train)	Under way (adv.) (the train is under way)
Which (Use only with nonessential clauses – information that <i>can</i> be eliminated without altering the basic meaning of the sentence. Nonessential clauses must always be set off by commas)	That (Use with essential clauses - information that <i>cannot</i> be eliminated without altering the basic meaning of the sentence. Essential clauses must not be set off from the sentence by commas)
Youth (one young person; the time of life when one is young)	Youths (more than one youth)

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Plain Talk

Governor Gregoire's "Plain Talk" **Executive Order 05-03** requires all state agencies to use simple and clear language when communicating with citizens and businesses.

Why Plain Talk?

"Translating" long, difficult messages takes everyone a lot of time. It also can lead to errors, misunderstandings and frustration. Plain language documents can be read and understood quickly. That means your customers will comply faster and more accurately with regulations.

What is Plain Talk?

Plain Talk messages are clear, concise and visually easy to read. They contain common words, rather than jargon, acronyms or unnecessary legal language.

Check out the [Plain Talk Guidelines](#) and [learn](#) more about Plain Talk.

2009 Meeting Schedule | Tips

- Oct 15th: Full Committee Meeting
- For more 2009 meeting dates, click [here](#).

All meetings take place at the [Department of Labor and Industries, Tumwater](#)