

Plain Language Tips

What is plain language? Why use it?

Plain language is concise and to the point. It is a style of writing that lets your ideas come across clearly so readers can find the meaning, understand the focus, and apply the messages in your article. Readers of NAEYC's publications have different levels of expertise and experience, so articles need to be clear to everyone. A first-year teacher should understand your writing as easily as an expert.

Features of plain language include:

- Reasonably short sentences
- No unnecessary words
- Active voice
- Organization that leads readers through the text
- Clear, informative headings

Use technical language and professional jargon only when absolutely necessary. When you do so, include examples that explain the meaning of the unfamiliar terms.

The best explanations do not involve complicated language. Think twice about your word choices, and when in doubt, pick the simpler word. For example, "use the active voice," rather than "utilize the active voice."

Good use of plain language:

"Within early childhood education contexts, transitions are the times in the day when children move or change from one activity to another."

From M.L. Hemmeter, M.M. Ostrosky, K.M. Artman, and K.A. Kinder, "Moving Right Along...Planning Transitions to Prevent Challenging Behavior," *Young Children* 63, no. 3 (2008): 18-25.

What is the active voice? Why use it?

Nothing engages readers more quickly than an active sentence. The active voice puts the reader in the middle of the action, and explains who did what, when, where, how, and perhaps why! Similar to using plain language, active writing benefits the reader and the writer.

Good use of active voice:

"Miriam quickly and respectfully responds to every communication from each of the four young infants in her care, actively trying to understand what the babies want or need."

From S. Petersen and D.Wittmer, "Relationship-Based Infant Care: Responsive, On Demand, and Predictable," *Young Children* 63, no. 3 (2008): 40-42.

How can I learn more?

Please visit these Web sites for more information on plain language:

www.centerforplainlanguage.org

www.plainlanguage.gov

www.plainlanguagenetwork.org

Examples of Simple Words

Instead Of	Try
Adjacent to	Next to
Afford an opportunity	Allow, let
Assist, assistance	Aid, help
Capability	Ability
Close proximity	Near
Commence	Begin, start
Comply with	Follow
Concerning	About, on
Delete	Cut, drop
Discontinue	Drop, stop
Employ	Use
Ensure	Make sure
Evident	Clear
Failed to	Didn't
In an effort to	To
Initiate	Start
Methodology	Method
Necessitate	Cause, need
Permit	Let
Possess	Have, own
Practicable	Practical
Proves guidance for	Guides
Relocate	Move
Request	Ask
Sufficient	Enough
Terminate	End, stop
Transmit	Send
Until such time as	Until
Utilize, utilization	Use
With reference to	About

For a complete list, go to <http://plainlanguage.gov/how-to/wordsuggestions/simplewords.cfm>