



ONE GESTURE IS ENOUGH

GUIDELINE
3

GUIDELINE FOR PLAIN LANGUAGE



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Why use plain language?

Using plain language in communicating with the Deaf and HoH is essentially good accessibility practice. It will ensure that information is relayed more efficiently and actors working for accessibility projects have used open communication channels. It should be kept in mind that accessibility projects will by their very nature entail experts with different ability profiles, different educational and professional profiles.

The benefits of plain language are both tangible and intangible:

- Plain language gets your message across in the shortest time possible.
- More people are able to understand your message.
- There is less chance that your document will be misunderstood, so you spend less time explaining it to people. And if your document gives instructions, your readers are more likely to understand them and follow them correctly.
- And you will give better service to your end-users.

Plain language: The process and the principles

Process:

- 1) The team identifies the terms (machine elements for the scope of this project) to be described, to be used in the technical sign language development (TSLD) process and added to the list.
- 2) The engineers define the elements referred to in as plain a language as possible providing only information that is necessary.
- 3) The plain language (accessibility) team revises definitions and provide feedback adhering by the principles set out below.
- 4) The engineers check the version produced by the accessibility team to ensure there are no technical errors.
- 5) The process is repeated until the final version is agreed upon by the two team of experts.
- 6) The final draft is presented to the Deaf linguist who may provide revisions if necessary.
- 7) An interpreter works with the Deaf linguist and the two groups of experts to ensure the linguist fully understands the material to be presented.
- 8) Once this cycle is complete the team moves on to the TSLT development stage (see: TSLD Guideline).



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Basic Tenet: Plain language is clear, concise, organized, and appropriate for the intended audience

There can be no single definitive guideline for plain language in all languages and all contexts of plain language used. But some basic characteristics of plain language use may be used across different languages to draft the texts. Please keep in mind that the experts drafting the plain language versions need to understand the concept and the aim of plain language and adapt it to their language and the context in which the material is to be used. Some 'approaches' to drafting plain language versions (both micro and macro level approaches entailing morphological, syntactic, discursal etc. choices) are as given below.

Textual characteristics:

- Use short sentences as much as possible.
 - Shorter is always better; except when it can lead to misunderstanding.
 - Use short sentences without clauses and with single subject, verb, object
- Explain only as much as is necessary. Loading information will lead to unnecessary cognitive load.
 - Omit unneeded words.
- Proofread your work and have a colleague proof it as well.

Terms and vocabulary:

- Write for your reader, not yourself.
- When something can be expressed without terminology 'in laymen's terms' without loss of meaning and sense, opt for the laymen's version.
 - If you must use technical terms, explain them on the first reference.
- When there is a well-known synonym for a lesser-known word, always opt for the version that is more widely known.
- Do not resort to cyclical definitions. Where a part of the element described is used in the definition. (For ex: B.C means before Christ. It is the time before the birth of Jesus Christ.)
- If a term/element is used in the definition of an element, make sure that it is also defined within the TSL list.



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Grammar:

- Use pronouns when you can.
- Always try to start the sentence with the noun. Prefer to use the noun itself instead of using referring expressions.
- When there is a need to use longer sentences, separate sentence parts with clear connectors like AND, THUS etc. that are easily recognizable.
- Avoid adverbials and adjectivals; instead convert into separate sentences.
- Write in active voice. Use the passive voice only in rare cases.
- Keep the subject and verb close together.

Discourse:

- Use headings, lists, and tables to make reading easier.
- State your major point(s) first before going into details.
- Use meta terms in definitions to help the end user visualize the element being referred to (is it a machine, is it a tool, is it a machine part etc.)
- The definition should follow a certain rationale:
 - o a) what is the element being described (the meta term)
 - o b) what function does it serve
 - o c) how does it serve this function
 - o d) extra info.
- Stick to your topic.
- Limit each paragraph to one idea and keep it short.