

Plain Language Essentials for WIC

WIC Statewide Meeting
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8:30 a.m. - 10 a.m.



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Goal is to understand:

- **What** plain language is
- **Why** use plain language
- **Who** plain language helps
- **How** to start writing plain

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Learning objectives

01

Recall what plain language is and why its used.

02

Identify barriers to understanding messages.

03

Apply at least one plain language skill.

4

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How would a WIC participant react to this message?

“Participants are advised that benefits may expire if redemption activities are not completed within the month.”

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Barriers to understanding

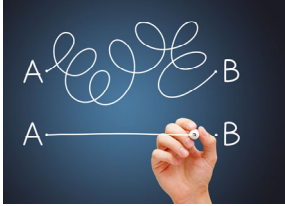
- Jumbled ideas
- Vague main point
- Formal, indirect tone
- Unfamiliar words



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Plain language removes barriers



It's writing purposefully to help people:

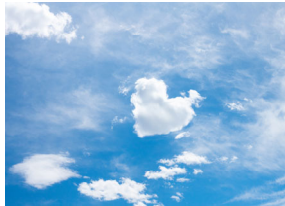
1. **Find** what they need
2. **Understand** it the first time
3. **Use** the information right away

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The elements of plain language

- Organized ideas
- Clear main point
- Direct, active voice
- Familiar words
- Information tailored to an audience



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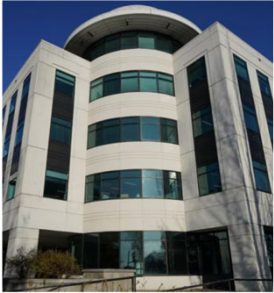
Plain language in WIC and public health

- Educational materials
- Public guidance
- Websites, social media
- Forms, applications
- Patient instructions
- Outreach



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So helpful, it's law!

Federal agencies

- Plain Writing Act of 2010

State agencies

- ORS 183.750
- ORS 411.967

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5 essential
plain language
skills

1. Write for your audience
2. Make the point clear and early
3. Organize ideas
4. Use active voice
5. Use everyday words

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Write for your audience

- Not what we think is interesting or important
- What **they** want/need to know
- What you're asking them to do
- Why it's important for them
- How to act right away



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Which one is tailored for WIC participants?

WIC helps you get healthy foods, support for feeding your baby, and answers to your nutrition questions.

1

WIC provides supplemental nutrition assistance to income-eligible women, infants, and children.

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Which one is tailored for WIC participants?

If you qualify for WIC, you can start using your nutrition benefits right away.

1

Eligible participants are encouraged to utilize the provided nutritional resources at their earliest convenience.

2

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Check: Am I writing for my audience?

Who is my audience?

What do **they** need?

Could I use “you”?

Is it obvious the message is for them?



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Make main point clear and early

- One-sentence summary of entire message
- First 1-2 sentences
- Background, disclaimers, details after

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Which has a clear and early main point for WIC staff?

Many families have been asking questions about fruit and vegetable benefits, and we know there have been recent changes to the program. With summer coming up, it's a good time to remind participants about...

1

Families will receive increased fruit and vegetable benefits next month. Here's what staff need to know to help participants prepare...

2

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Which has a clear, early point for WIC participants?

WIC offers many helpful nutrition services for families. Our staff work hard to support positive health outcomes. To plan future services, we will send a survey next week.

1

Next week, we will send you a short survey. Your answers will help us plan WIC services your family uses most.

2

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Check: Is my point clear and early?

- **Can my colleague** tell me the main point in their own words after reading my message?
- Did I answer the question “**Why should my reader care?**” in first 1-2 sentences?



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Organize ideas



- One **idea** per **sentence**
- One **topic** per **paragraph**

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Signs you can break up a sentence



- Multiple commas or connecting words
 - *that, which, though, therefore, and, but*
- More than 20 words
- Multiple ideas, subjects, or directions in one statement

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Signs you can break up a paragraph

- New step or direction given
- New topic starting
- New question being answered



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Check: Are my ideas organized?

- Does each sentence only have **one** idea or action?
- Is every sentence in the paragraph about the same **topic**?



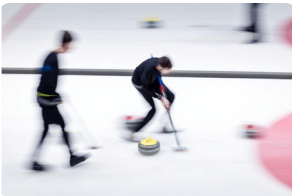
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Use active voice

Start instructions with action words

Make it clear who does what



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Passive to active instructions

The documents must be uploaded in the portal.
Upload the documents in the portal.

The card must be scanned at check out.
Scan the card at check out.

The WICShopper app can be downloaded to view benefits.
Download the WICShopper app to view your benefits.

Action

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Passive to active statements

Appointments are scheduled at the front desk.
The front desk schedules appointments.

Measurements are taken at the appointment.
Staff take measurements at the appointment.

Mistakes were made.
We made a mistake.

Who

Does

What

26

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Check: Is what I said active?

- Can I answer who does what?
 - Mistakes were made
 - We made a mistake**



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Use everyday words

What we hear and say in real life

- Familiar
- Natural
- Easy to understand



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Formal, academic, government → Everyday

Utilize	→	Use
Assistance	→	Help
Commence	→	Start
Prior to	→	Before
Terminate	→	End, Stop

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Formal, academic, government → Everyday

Obtain	→	Get
In a timely manner	→	On time, Quickly
At this time	→	Now
Due to the fact that	→	Because
In the near future	→	Soon

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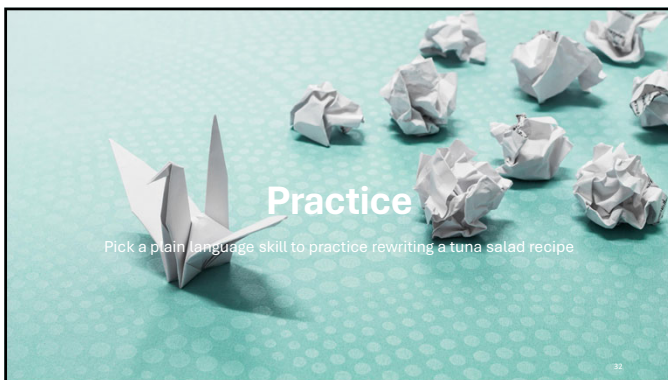
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Formal, academic, government → **Everyday**

A number of	➡	Many, A few, Some
In order to	➡	To
Provide assistance	➡	Help
Offer clarification	➡	Explain, Tell
Provide authorization	➡	Allow, Approve, Say yes to

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Practice

Pick a plain language skill to practice rewriting a tuna salad recipe

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Activity 2: Active voice examples

The tuna is drained from a 5 ounce can...	➡	Drain the tuna from the 5 ounce can.
...and placed in a bowl.	➡	Put the tuna in a bowl.
...Where two tablespoons of mayonnaise are to be added	➡	Add 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise.
If carrots and celery are available...	➡	If you have carrots or celery...

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Activity 2: Everyday word examples

Placed		Put
Approximately		About
Additional texture		More texture, Extra crunch
Not required		Optional
Depending on preference		If you want/If you like

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Activity 2: Organize ideas examples

The tuna is drained from a 5 ounce can and placed in a bowl where two tablespoons of mayonnaise are to be added along with one tablespoon of relish and a teaspoon of mustard depending on preference. And if carrots or celery are available, a small amount - approximately ¼ cup - is shredded and stirred in so that the final mixture has additional texture, though this step is not required for the recipe to be considered complete. Finally, combine all ingredients.

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Activity 2: Example of full rewrite

1. Drain the tuna from the 5 ounce can and put it in a bowl.
2. Add two tablespoons of mayonnaise, one tablespoon of relish, and one teaspoon of mustard.
3. If you have carrots or celery, shred about ¼ cup. This step is optional, but it adds extra texture.
4. Stir everything together.

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Recap

Plain language makes information easier to understand, find, and use

Confusion happens with:

- Disorganized ideas
- Unclear or hidden main points
- Information not tailored to audiences



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Clarity is kindness – for everyone!



- Experts
- Neurodivergent populations
- Stressed or tired parents
- People with limited English literacy
- Anyone new to the information

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What questions do you have?

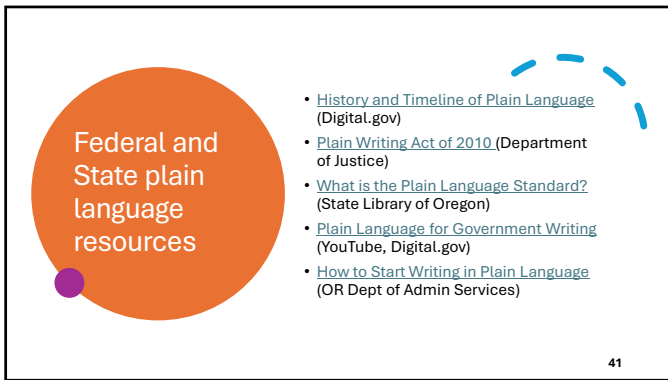


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