



## Plain Language

### What is plain language?

Plain language is communication that is clear, concise, well organized and understood by the intended audience.

### Why worry about plain language?

Have you ever felt like an outsider at a meeting because you didn't understand the jargon or weren't familiar with the acronyms? Have you ever tried to figure out what a developer or City planner was trying to tell you? If you have, then you already have some awareness of what plain language offers.

### What is the benefit of plain language to outreach participants?

Plain language gives us a chance to communicate better with one another and with participants in outreach. It means making information more easily understood. We can do this by avoiding the use of jargon. We can stop communicating in acronyms that only technical staff understand. We can write in shorter sentences, use a friendlier tone and break up long documents by using sub-headings. All of these techniques are part of plain language practice.

## Tips to consider when drafting content

- 1. Review for windy, outdated or repetitive language:**
  - See appendix: Windy or outdated phrases
- 2. Use contractions:**
  - Use to the degree that it is appropriate to the audience and circumstance.
  - Use "we're" ... rather than "we are," "we'll" ... rather than "we shall" or "we will", "that's" ... rather than "that is."
- 3. Use informal language:**
  - Use to the degree that it is appropriate to the audience and circumstance.
  - Words such as "of the" often can be replaced by a more informal simple plural, or an apostrophe followed by an "s" to indicate ownership.
  - "The road's surface" ... rather than "surface of the road," "community leaders ..." rather than "leaders of the community."
- 4. Avoid using City or Planning acronyms:**
  - Few Calgarians know City-generated acronyms or technical planning acronyms.
  - If you can't avoid using one, spell the term out in full on the first use followed by the acronym in parentheses — the proposal aligns with the policies in the Municipal Development Plan (MDP)
- 5. Write as if speaking:**
  - Use techniques perfected by professional writers to keep your audience with you and help them easily follow your thinking.
- 6. Write as if speaking directly to one person only:**



- One person logged onto the website, one pair of eyes reading that newspaper or watching that television message
- 7. Use connective and linking words and phrases:**
  - Occasionally start a sentence with "So," or "That's why," or "And."
  - Using a one- or two-word sentence is an effective way to emphasize a point, however, use it sparingly.
- 8. Use active words:**
  - Everywhere, especially in headlines.
  - Look for every opportunity to use inclusive expressions ("we'll all" or "every one of us").
  - Use imperative verbs that direct the reader/viewer/listener ("get it," "see it" or "try it").
- 9. Avoid over-used or cliché expressions:**
  - "We are committed to..." or "We are dedicated to..." or "Our dedicated team of skilled professionals..."
- 10. Use concrete imagery:**
  - To communicate tangible messages, each of which should have some benefit to — or be of interest to —the reader/viewer.
- 11. As far as possible, use print-style copy treatment:**
  - Short one- or two-sentence paragraphs.
  - Screens, subheads, highlight boxes, or call-outs to break up large amounts of copy.

## Appendix: Words windy, unneeded, over-used or outdated?

### *Words to omit...*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a total of</li> <li>• absolutely</li> <li>• abundantly</li> <li>• actually</li> <li>• all things being equal</li> <li>• as a matter of fact</li> <li>• as far as I am concerned</li> <li>• at the end of the day</li> <li>• at this moment in time</li> <li>• basically</li> <li>• current</li> <li>• currently</li> <li>• during the period from</li> <li>• each and every one</li> <li>• existing</li> <li>• extremely</li> <li>• I am of the opinion that</li> <li>• I would like to say</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would like to take this opportunity to</li> <li>• in due course</li> <li>• in the end</li> <li>• in the final analysis</li> <li>• in this connection</li> <li>• in total</li> <li>• in view of the fact that</li> <li>• it should be understood</li> <li>• last but not least</li> <li>• obviously</li> <li>• other things being equal</li> <li>• quite</li> <li>• really</li> <li>• really quite</li> <li>• regarding the (noun), it was</li> <li>• the fact of the matter is</li> <li>• the month(s) of</li> </ul> |
|---|---|



# Community Outreach on Planning & Development Plain Language Tips

- to all intents and purposes
- to one's own mind
- very

## **Words to substitute...**

### **Instead of... Use...**

4 a.m. this morning...4 a.m.  
 a great deal of...much  
 a large number of...more  
 a little less than...almost  
 a majority of...most  
 a number of...several, many, some  
 a period of several weeks...several weeks  
 a sufficient number...enough  
 absolutely conclusive...conclusively  
 absolutely necessary...necessarily  
 accomplish...do  
 accorded...given  
 according to the law...legally, legal  
 accordingly...so  
 acquaint...tell  
 activate...start, begin  
 actual experience...experience  
 add an additional...add  
 additional...added  
 adequate enough...adequately  
 adequate number of...enough  
 administer...manage, give  
 admit of...allow, enable  
 advance planning...planning

### **Instead of... Use...**

advise...write, tell  
 affirmative...yes  
 afford an opportunity...allow, permit  
 afforded...given  
 aggregate...total  
 agricultural crops...crops  
 all of a sudden...suddenly  
 all of the...all the  
 allocate...give, divide  
 allow...enable  
 almost never...rarely  
 along the line of...like  
 alternatives...choices  
 ameliorate...improve  
 anticipate...expect  
 apparent...clear  
 appear...seem  
 apprise...inform, tell  
 approximately...about  
 are able to...can  
 arrive at the conclusion...conclude  
 as a general rule...generally  
 as a matter of fact...in fact [or omit]  
 as a means of...to



## Community Outreach on Planning & Development Plain Language Tips

|   |   |
|---|---|
| as of now...now                                     | businessman...business person,<br>professional        |
| as to whether...about, whether                      |   |
| as to...about                                       | by means of...by                                      |
| ascertain...find out                                | by reason of ...because of                            |
| ask the question...ask                              | by the time that...when                               |
| assist, assistance...help                           | by the use of...by                                    |
| at a later date...later                             | by virtue of...by, under                              |
| at all times...always                               | by way of illustration...for example                  |
| at an early date...soon                             | calculate...compute                                   |
| at hand...here                                      | came to a conclusion...concluded                      |
| at present...now                                    | came to a stop...stopped                              |
| at regular intervals...regularly                    | cancelled out...cancelled                             |
| at that/this point in time...now                    | carbon copy...copy                                    |
| at the present time...now                           | category...kind, class, group                         |
| at which time...then                                | cause it to be done...have it done                    |
| attached hereto...attached                          | cease and desist...stop                               |
| attains the age of...becomes                        | cease...stop  |
| attempt (verb)...try                                | chairman...chair, chairperson                         |
| audio speaker...speaker                             | check into...check                                    |
| awkward dilemma...dilemma                           | City Council...Council                                |
| based on the fact that...due to, because            | close proximity...nearby                              |
| basic fundamentals...fundamentals                   | cognizance...knowledge                                |
| be in receipt of...received                         | combined together...combined                          |
| beyond a shadow of a doubt...no doubt,<br>doubtless | come to an end...end                                  |
| bottom line...result                                | commence...begin, start                               |
| brand new...new                                     | commit...promise                                      |
| bring to a conclusion...conclude                    | commitment...promise                                  |
| brought to a sudden halt...halted,<br>stopped       | communicate...write, tell, talk,<br>telephone, e-mail |
|   | compensate...pay                                      |



|  |  |
|--|--|
| compensation...pay   | determine...decide                                       |
| complete (verb)...finish, fill out                         | dialogue...discussion, conversation                      |
| complete unanimity...unanimously                           | did not have...lacked                                    |
| completely full...fully                                    | did not succeed...failed                                 |
| comply with...follow                                       | different varieties...various                            |
| conceal...hide   | disclose...show, reveal                                  |
| concerning the matter of...about,<br>concerning, regarding | discontinue...stop                                       |
| conduct an investigation...investigate                     | disseminate...send, distribute                           |
| consensus of opinion...agreed                              | does not operate to...does not                           |
| consequence...result, outcome                              | donate...give  |
| consequently...so  | draw to a close...end                                    |
| constitute...make up                                       | due to the fact that...because, although,<br>even though |
| construct...build  | during such time as...during, while                      |
| consummate...complete, bring about                         | during the course of...during, while                     |
| contiguous to...next to                                    | during the period from...from                            |
| contingent upon...if                                       | during the time that...during, while                     |
| continue...keep up   | during which time...while                                |
| contribute...give  | edifice...building                                       |
| cost the sum of...cost                                     | effect...make, start                                     |
| current status...status                                    | effectuate...bring about, carry out                      |
| current trend...trend                                      | elect...choose, pick                                     |
| customary practice...practice                              | eliminate...remove, strike out                           |
| daily basis...daily  | elucidate...explain                                      |
| deem...consider, think                                     | employment...work  |
| demonstrate...show   | encounter...meet   |
| desire...want  | encourage...urge, promote                                |
| despite the fact that...although, even<br>though           | endeavour (verb)...try                                   |
| detailed information...details                             | ensuing...following                                      |



## Community Outreach on Planning & Development Plain Language Tips

|  |  |
|--|--|
| ensure...help to                           | first began...began  |
| enter (on a form)...write, fill in         | first ever...first   |
| enter into a contract with...contract with | for a period of...during, for                              |
| equivalent...equal                         | for the duration of...while, during                        |
| established conclusively...established     | for the purpose of...for, to                               |
| evidence of...proof                        | for the purpose of...to                                    |
| evince...show                              | for the reason that...since, because                       |
| exact same...same                          | foreman...supervisor, lead                                 |
| excessive number of...too many             | formulate...work out, form, devise                         |
| execute...sign                             | forthwith...immediately                                    |
| exhibit a tendency to...tend to            | forward...send   |
| expedite...hasten, hurry, speed up         | free gift...gift   |
| expend...spend                             | free pass...pass   |
| expiration...end                           | from the point of view of...for                            |
| explicit...plain, clear                    | from time to time...occasionally                           |
| expressed opposition...opposed             | future plan...plan   |
| extended an invitation...invited           | gathered together...gathered                               |
| facilitate...help, make easy               | gave an explanation...explained                            |
| facility...building                        | gave authorization...authorized                            |
| failed to...did not                        | general public...public                                    |
| fair and equitable...fair                  | give authorization...authorize                             |
| feasible...possible                        | Government of Canada...Canada,<br>Canadian                 |
| feedback...ideas, comments                 | had a suspicion...suspected                                |
| few in number...few                        | handyman...caretaker, maintenance<br>worker, repair worker |
| fewer in number...fewer                    | held a meeting...met                                       |
| final completion...completion              | hence...so   |
| final outcome...result                     | hereafter...after this takes effect                        |
| finalize...end, finish                     | herein...here  |
| fireman...fire fighter                     |  |



|   |  |
|---|--|
| hereinafter...following, future                         | in excess of...more than                       |
| heretofore...until now, before this takes effect        | in favour of...for                             |
| HIV virus...HIV   | in lieu of...instead of, in place of           |
| honest truth...truth                                    | in light of the fact that...because            |
| hopefully...I hope                                      | in many cases...often                          |
| hostess...host  | in most cases...usually                        |
| housewife...homemaker                                   | in order to...to                               |
| I would appreciate it if you would...please             | in other words...or, that is                   |
| if at all possible...if possible                        | in possession of...have                        |
| if that were the case...if so                           | in reference to...about, concerning, regarding |
| impact...affect   | in regard to...about, concerning, regarding    |
| implement...carry out                                   | in relation to...about, concerning, regarding  |
| in a position to...can                                  | in respect to...about, concerning, regarding   |
| in a satisfactory manner...satisfactorily               | in short supply...scarce                       |
| in a timely manner...timely                             | in spite of the fact that...despite            |
| in accordance with...by, under                          | in such a manner as to...to                    |
| in addition to...also, besides                          | in terms of...in, of                           |
| in an effort to...to                                    | in the absence of...without                    |
| in as much as...since, because                          | in the amount of...of, for                     |
| in back of...behind                                     | in the case of...regarding, about              |
| in case...if  | in the course of...during, while               |
| in close proximity...near, close                        | in the event that...if                         |
| in compliance with your request...as requested          | in the event that...if, when, should           |
| in conjunction with...with                              | in the first place...first                     |
| in connection with...about, concerning, regarding, with | in the instance of...for                       |
| in consideration of the fact that...because             | in the interest of...for                       |



in the majority of instances...usually,  
generally

in the matter of...about, concerning  
regarding

in the near future...soon

in the near future...soon

in the neighbourhood of...about, near

in the possession of...has, have

in the proximity of...nearly

in the vicinity of...near, close to, around

in this case...here

in view of the fact...because

inasmuch as...because

indicate...show

indicate...show, tell, say

inform...tell

initial...first

initiate...begin

initiate...start, begin

input...opinion, comments

inquire...ask

inside of...inside

institute...start, begin

insufficient...not enough, inadequate

in the nature of...like

interface with...meet

interrogate...question, ask

is able to ...can

is authorized to...may

is binding upon...binds

is defined as...is

is empowered to...may

is entitled...is called

is unable to...cannot, can't

is well aware of ...knows

issue...give

it is apparent that...apparently

it is clear that...clearly

it is directly...will

it is evident that...evidently

it is my intention to...I will

it is obvious that...obviously

it is often the case that...often

it is probably that...probably

it is requested...[omit]

it is the duty...will

it shall be lawful...may

it will be necessary...will need to

it would appear that...apparently

keep an eye on...watch

last of all...last

law passed...law enacted

limited number...few

loan (verb)...lend

locality...place

locate (verb) ...find

location...place

look into...check

made a change...changed





|  |  |
|--|--|
| made a choice...chose  | modify...change  |
| made a particular point of...pointed out                     | month of July...July                                     |
| made a reduction...reduced                                   | moreover...how, next                                     |
| made a suggestion...suggested                                | necessitate....need, require                             |
| made an acquisition...acquired                               | negative...no  |
| made an implication...implied                                | negotiate...make   |
| made up his mind...decided                                   | nevertheless...but, however                              |
| mailman...letter carrier                                     | new construction...new                                   |
| maintenance...upkeep   | newsman...reporter, journalist                           |
| major portion of...most                                      | no later than June 30...before July 1                    |
| majority...most  | not later than...by                                      |
| make application to...apply                                  | notwithstanding the fact that...although,<br>even though |
| make contact with...see, meet                                | notwithstanding the fact that...because                  |
| make the acquaintance of...meet                              | objective...goal, aim                                    |
| man (verb)...staff, operate                                  | obligate...bind  |
| man/men (noun)...people, individuals,<br>humans              | obligation...debt  |
| man-days/hours...worker-days/hours                           | obtain...get   |
| mankind...people, humankind, humans                          | occasion (verb)...cause                                  |
| man-made...manufactured, hand-made,<br>artificial, synthetic | of a technical nature...technical                        |
| manner...way   | of no mean ability...capable                             |
| manpower...workforce, staff, employees,<br>workers           | of the opinion...think, believe                          |
| materialize...appear   | old adage...adage  |
| maximum...most, largest, longest,<br>greatest                | on a daily basis...daily, every day                      |
| middleman...intermediary, facilitator, go-<br>between        | on a few occasions...occasionally                        |
| minimum...least, smallest                                    | on a weekly basis...weekly, every week                   |
| modification...change  | on account of...because                                  |
|  | on an ongoing basis...continually                        |
|  | on and after July 1...after June 30                      |



## Community Outreach on Planning & Development Plain Language Tips

|  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| on behalf of...for   | peruse...read                        |
| on his/her own application...at his/her request                  | police man...police officer          |
| on or before June 30...before July 1                             | policeman...police officer           |
| on the basis of...by, from, because of                           | portion...part                       |
| on the grounds that...because                                    | possess...have                       |
| on the grounds that...because                                    | post man...mail carrier              |
| on the part of...by  | prepared to offer...offer, can offer |
| once in a while...occasionally                                   | presently...soon                     |
| ongoing...continuing   | preserve...keep                      |
| optimum...best, greatest, most                                   | previous experience...experience     |
| or, in the alternative...or                                      | prior to...before                    |
| other alternative...alternative                                  | prior...earlier                      |
| outcome...results  | prioritize...rank                    |
| outdoor picnic...picnic  | proceed...go ahead, start, go        |
| output...product   | procure...buy, get, obtain           |
| over again...again   | prohibited from...may not            |
| owing to the fact that...because                                 | promulgate...make, issue             |
| parameter...boundary, limit                                      | prosecute its business...do business |
| participate...take part  | proved to be of benefit...beneficial |
| past achievements...achievements                                 | provide...give                       |
| patently obvious...obviously                                     | provided that...if                   |
| pending...until  | provision of law...law               |
| per annum, per day, per for...a year/yearly, a day/daily, a foot | purchase (verb)...buy                |
| per centum...percent   | pursuant to...under                  |
| period of time...[omit]  | put in an appearance...appeared      |
| period of time...period, time                                    | range all the way from...range from  |
| personnel...people, employees, staff                             | reached a conclusion...concluded     |
| pertaining to...of, about, regarding                             | reached a decision...decided         |
|  | reason is because...because          |



## Community Outreach on Planning & Development Plain Language Tips

|   |   |
|---|---|
| receipt of...receive  | since the time that...since                         |
| refer back...refer  | single most...single                                |
| regarding...about   | solely...only                                       |
| regular basis...regularly                                       | specified...named                                   |
| reimburse...repay   | spokesman...spokesperson                            |
| relative to...about   | started off with...started with                     |
| remainder...rest  | stewardess, steward...flight attendant              |
| remunerate...pay  | strategize...plan                                   |
| remuneration...salary, wages, pay                               | submit...give, send                                 |
| render...make, give   | submitted his resignation...resigned                |
| repairman...repairer, technician                                | subsequent to...after, later                        |
| reported to the effect that...reported                          | subsequent...next                                   |
| represents...is   | subsequently...later                                |
| require...need  | substantial...big, large, significant               |
| reside...live   | sufficient number of...enough                       |
| residence...home  | sufficient...enough                                 |
| respecting...about  | summon...call, send for                             |
| retain...keep   | sustain...keep going, maintain, suffer              |
| reverted back...reverted  | take under advisement...consider                    |
| revise downward...lower, decrease                               | terminate...end, stop                               |
| rise up...rise  | that is to say...that is                            |
| rules and regulations...rules                                   | The City of Calgary...The City, City                |
| said, same, such...the, this, that                              | the fact that...(omit)                              |
| salesgirl, saleslady...sales clerk / person<br>/ representative | the foregoing...the, this, that                     |
| sections 20 to 94 inclusive...sections 20<br>to 94              | the fullest possible extent...mostly,<br>completely |
| seldom if ever...rarely   | the manner in which...how                           |
| shall...will  | the only difference being that...except<br>that     |
| shows a preference for...prefers                                | the present time...now                              |



the province of Alberta...Alberta

the question as to whether...whether,  
the question

there is no doubt but that...doubtless, no  
doubt

this is a person who....this person

this is a subject that...this subject

this is a topic that...this topic

this is an (instance, case, situation)  
which...this (omit)

through the use of...by

thus...so, that way

time schedule...schedule

to be sure...of course, surely

to the extent that...if, when

tradesman...trades person

transmit...send

transpire...happen

ultimate outcome...outcome, result

under circumstances in  
which...although, even though

under the provisions of...under

unexpected surprise...surprise

until such time as...until

usage...use

utilization...use

utilize, employ...use

verbose...wordy

viable...possible

visualize...imagine

voluminous...bulky

waitress...server, waiter

watchman...security guard

weatherman...weather forecaster,  
meteorologist

whether or not...whether

will have to...must

will have to...must

with a view to...to

with reference to...for, about, concerning

with regard to...for, about, concerning

with respect to...for, regarding, on, about

with the exception of...except, other than

with the object of...to  
with the result  
that...so that

workman...worker

would be able to...will



## Community Outreach on Planning & Development Resource: Plain Language Tips