Plain Language
Getting Your Message Across

Clean Water Summit

September 12, 2013
What is plain language?

With everything you publish, your audience should be able to:

• **Find** what they need
• **Understand** what they find
• **Use** that information to meet their needs
Does it work?

- Increased audience satisfaction and understanding of message
- Increased access to services and benefits
- Increased compliance with regulations
- Decreased costs – fewer phone calls and reduced printing and mailing costs
How to apply plain language

• Define your audience and goal
  – What key information does your audience need?

• Write clear, concise text
  – Avoid acronyms and jargon
  – Include only what your audience needs

• Organize to reinforce your message
  – Put key information in the most obvious location
  – Use headings to make it scannable
Example – car safety

From the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

This is a multipurpose passenger vehicle which will handle and maneuver differently from an ordinary passenger car, in driving conditions which may occur on streets and highways and off road. As with other vehicles of this type, if you make sharp turns or abrupt maneuvers, the vehicle may roll over or may go out of control and crash. You should read driving guidelines and instructions in the Owner's Manual, and WEAR YOUR SEAT BELTS AT ALL TIMES.

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**WARNING: HIGHER ROLLOVER RISK**

Avoid Abrupt Maneuvers and Excessive Speed.
Always Buckle Up.
See Owner's Manual For Further Information.
Changes to your 2004 Form 1040

Amount due: $24.60

Based on the information you provided, we changed your 2004 Form 1040 to correct your:
- Filing status to head of household
- Total exemption amount

As a result, you owe $24.60.

Billing summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount you owed</td>
<td>$1,076.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in tax</td>
<td>-$963.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in interest</td>
<td>-$89.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount due by March 23, 2009</td>
<td>$24.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What you need to do immediately

If you agree with the changes we made
- Pay the amount due of $24.60 by March 23, 2009, to avoid additional penalty and interest charges.

Payment

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
KANSAS CITY, MO 64999-0010

Amount due by March 23, 2009 $24.60
Example – revised
IRS
Account
Notice
P. 2 of 2

If you agree with the changes we made—continued
- If you can’t pay the amount due, pay as much as you can now and make payment arrangements that allow you to pay off the rest over time. Visit www.irs.gov and search for keyword “tax payment options” for more information about:
  - Instalment and payment agreements—download required forms or save time and money by applying online if you qualify
  - Automatic deductions from your bank account
  - Payroll deductions
  - Credit card payments
  Or, call us at 1-999-999-9999 to discuss your options.

If you don’t agree with the changes
- Call 1-999-999-9999 to review your account. You can also contact us by mail. Fill out the Contact information section, detach, and send it to us with any correspondence or documentation.
- If we don’t hear from you, we’ll assume you agree with the information in this notice.

If you’ve already paid your balance in full within the past 14 days or made payment arrangements, please disregard this notice.

If we don’t hear from you
If you don’t pay $24.60 by March 23, 2009, interest will increase and additional penalties may apply.

Additional information
- For tax forms, instructions, and publications, visit www.irs.gov or call 1-800-TAX-FORM (1-800-829-3676).
- Keep this notice for your records.
- If you need assistance, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Contact information

James Hinds
22 Boulder street
Harrison, CT 00000-7253

IRS
Notice CP21A
Notice date March 2, 2009
Social Security number 999-99-9999

If your address has changed, please call 1-999-999-9999 or visit www.irs.gov.
☐ Please check here if you’ve included any correspondence. Write your Social Security number (999-99-9999), the tax year (2004), and the form number (1040) on any correspondence.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
KANSAS CITY, MO 64999-0010

If applicable, please provide the following phone numbers and best times to call:

Primary phone
Best time to call
Secondary phone
Best time to call
Example – jury instructions

Studies show that most jurors do not fully understand instructions from judges.

- Majority thought “malice aforethought” meant a murder must be committed with a mallet

**Before:** “A preponderance of the evidence”
- More than 50% believed it meant “a slow and careful pondering of evidence”

**After:** “More likely than not”
Example – *500px* photo site

Fine print includes plain language explanations

**User Conduct** (legal version is 571 words):

“Basically,

You cannot use our site to post pornographic material, harass people, send spam, negatively vote on all photos, and do other crazy stuff. Be reasonable and responsible, don't do anything stupid and you'll be fine.”
Example – Pollution Control Agency

Calm to light winds will limit pollutant dispersion in Minneapolis-St. Paul, allowing particle concentrations to increase. In addition, a morning temperature inversion has reduced atmospheric mixing. ... These conditions, combined with regional pollutant carryover from previous days, will keep AQI levels Moderate.
## Forecasts

### Rochester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Today</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM2.5</td>
<td></td>
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### Twin Cities

<table>
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### Good 0-50

### Moderate 51-100

### Unhealthy for sensitive groups 101-150

### Unhealthy 151-200

What do these ratings mean?
Old Absentee Voting page

Examples

Plain language: where do we go from here

New Absentee Voting page

Hennepin County, Minnesota

Absentee Voting

If you are unable to get to your polling place location on Election Day, you may be eligible to vote by absentee.

Who can vote by absentee?
You may vote by absentee for the following reasons:

- Absent from your precinct
- Illness or disability
- Serving as an election judge in another precinct
- Religious discipline or religious holiday or observance
- Eligible emergency declared by the governor or quarantine declared by the federal or state government

How to absentee vote
- By mail, in person or by agent
- For military and overseas voters

Check the status of your absentee ballot
For a state or federal election, you can visit the Minnesota Secretary of State's absentee status website to stay up-to-date about the status of your absentee ballot.

Absentee voting FAQs
If you have any questions about absentee voting, read our frequently asked questions.
Juvenile Detention Center

The Juvenile Detention Center is an 87-bed secure detention facility for male and female offenders up to age 18 who are awaiting court disposition. In 2013, the JDC admitted more than 2,044 youths and had an average daily population of 40 residents.

In addition to a safe and secure environment, a variety of educational programs and services are provided at the facility:

- Education classes are provided daily through a partnership with the Minneapolis Public Schools.
- Chaplains provide counseling and liaison services and conduct non-denominational worship services.
- A full-time medical team provides routine and emergency medical treatment. Hospitalization services are provided by the Hennepin County Medical Center.
- A variety of leisure and group exercise activities are available to residents.
- Psychological evaluation and testing are provided.
- Interns and volunteers provide youth and their families with ongoing support in the community that is necessary to remain law-abiding.

The JDC is a division of the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation. The JDC is located at 510 Park Avenue about one block west of the Metrodome in downtown Minneapolis.

Related Links
- JDC News
- JDC Administration

Contact
Community Corrections and Rehabilitation
Juvenile Detention Center

JDC Administration
Email: 612-348-8122
Phone: 612-348-2296
Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

JDC Volunteer Coordinator Lois Mineau
Email: 612-348-3994
Phone: 612-348-2296
Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Community Corrections and Rehabilitation
Email: 612-348-6180
Phone: 612-348-6488
Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm

Location:
Juvenile Detention Center
510 Park Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55407
Map It!
Examples of non-plain language

From a letter to a body donor

Dear ____,

The receipt of your pre-death whole body donation consent form is acknowledged.
Can you improve it?

A person fueling a motor vehicle must be in close attendance to the dispenser nozzle during the fueling process.

You must remain near the pump while fueling.
Plain language resources

- www.plainlanguage.gov
  Federal plain language information
- www.centerforplainlanguage.org
  National organization dedicated to promoting plain language
- www.hennepin.us/plainlanguageguide
  Hennepin County resource with tips, examples, and a link to our writing style guide
Questions?

Brian Lieb, Hennepin County
Brian.lieb@co.hennepin.mn.us
612-543-1276

Keep it simple. 
The more you say, the less people remember.