Illinois Supreme Court
Policy on Plain Language

Effective April 2018

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT POLICY ON PLAIN LANGUAGE

(a) Purpose and Scope.

The Illinois legal system is significantly text-based and utilizes unique terminology and complex procedures and rules. Often legal documents and terms are difficult for the general public to understand; and comprehension is more difficult for those with language or literacy challenges. The use of plain language increases and aids the public to understand their rights and choices so they may make informed decisions and fully participate in our legal system.

The Illinois Supreme Court, in recognition of the important role plain language plays in procedural fairness and access, has adopted this Policy on Plain Language. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to judges, court staff, circuit clerks, law librarians and other justice partners when developing written materials and when communicating to members of the public about legal information, court process, rules and forms.

(b) Definitions.

1. "Plain language" means words and statements, which when written or spoken are clear, concise, well-organized, appropriate to the subject and intended audience, and communicated at a sixth grade reading level.
2. "Legal information" means general factual information about the law and the legal process, as provided by the Illinois Supreme Court Patron Policy for Circuit Clerks, Court Staff, Law Librarians and Court-Based Volunteers.
3. "Forms" mean standardized forms and related instructions that have been approved pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 10-101; forms included in the Illinois Supreme Court Rules; and local circuit and appellate court forms adopted to facilitate compliance with local procedures.
4. "General public" means all people living in Illinois, as well as any people interested in the Illinois legal system residing outside of Illinois.
5. "Informational documents" means written communications drafted by or on behalf of the court system to the general public that provide legal information on court process, rules and forms. These include but are not limited to pamphlets, posters, signs, packets, single documents, website postings and social media communications.
6. "Informational instructions" means spoken communications made by judges, court staff, circuit clerks, law librarians and other justice partners on behalf of the court system to the general public that provide legal information on court process, rules and forms.

(c) Plain Language Policy.

All informational documents and informational instructions shall be drafted in plain language whenever practicable. There are times that legal terms may be necessary in informational documents and/or informational instructions and should continue to be used; in those cases, judges, court staff, circuit clerks, law librarians and other justice partners should provide plain language definitions of those legal terms.

(d) Plain Language Guidance.

The Court assigns the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice to develop and maintain a plain language reference guide for judges, court staff, circuit clerks, law librarians and other justice partners.

Effective April 1, 2018