



**National Association
for Court Management**

Strengthening Court Professionals



Plain Language Guide

*How to Incorporate Plain Language into
Court Forms, Websites, and Other Materials*

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Cover: *Sumi-e* is an ancient Japanese art form of communicating with clarity and simplicity using only black ink, brush, and paper. The goal is to not just depict the appearance of a subject but to convey its essence and spirit.

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How to Incorporate Plain Language into Court Forms, Websites, and Other Materials

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1 Introduction

History of Plain Language

It used to be the case that when we did not understand the meaning of a word, we referred to a dictionary for its definition. Today, we “Google” it.

*Plain, clear to the mind; evident, manifest, or obvious;
to make one’s meaning plain.*

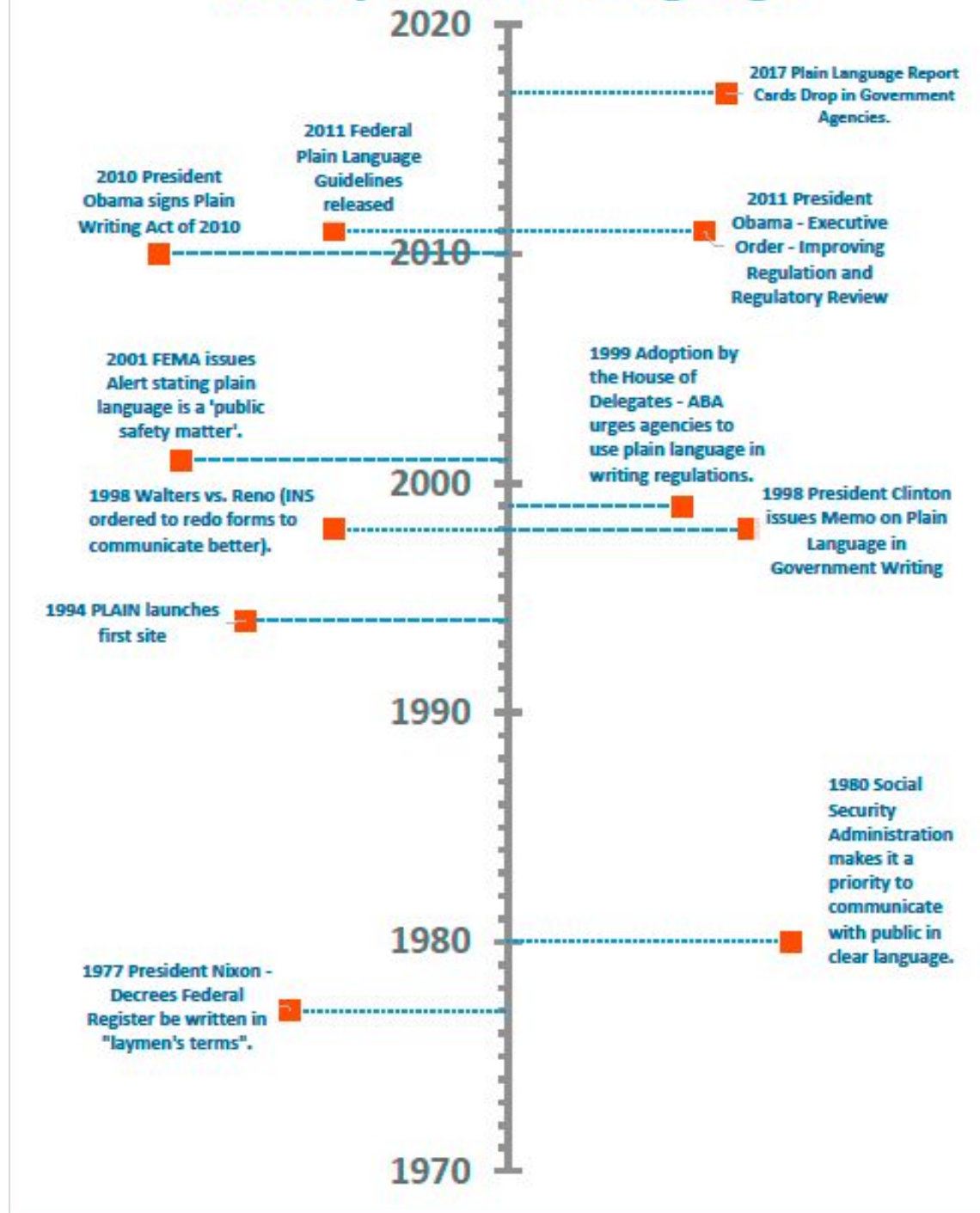
In this Guide, the word retains that meaning and extends it to include “*plain language*”, communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. The concept is so prevalent there is a namesake acronym referring to the **Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN)**¹ which is a community of federal employees dedicated to the idea that citizens deserve clear communications from the government.

The timeline below demonstrates how this style and concept of writing was directed and has evolved in our country. In this Guide, NACM offers guidelines, resources, and examples for our courts, following the requirements of the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) action so your court users can:

- Find what they need;
- Understand what they find; and
- Use what they find to meet their needs.

¹ Federal Plain Language Guidelines, March 2011, Revision 1, May 2011.
<https://plainlanguage.gov/media/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf>, accessed May 8, 2018.

History of Plain Language



2 Why Use Plain Language

We see examples of plain language used in government communication all the time, but perhaps we do not recognize them as such. Take, for example, the evolution of the “Don’t Walk” sign for crossing the street. We used to see this to let us know it is not safe to cross the street as a pedestrian:



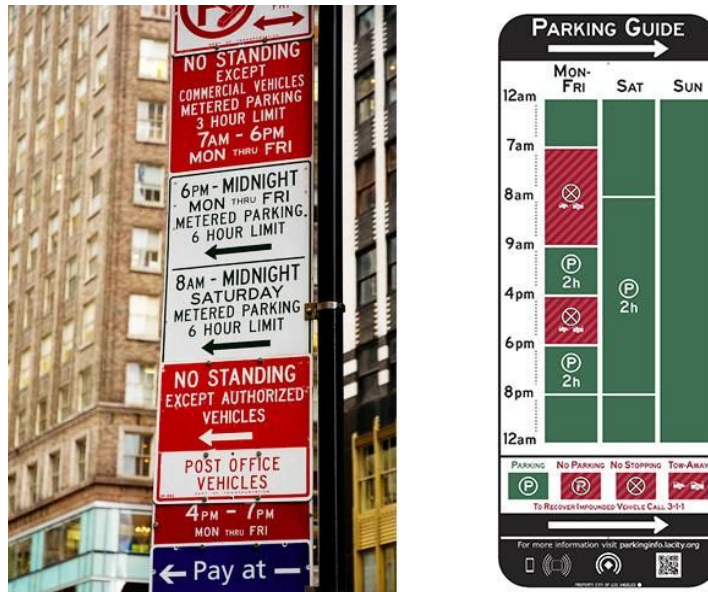
Have you noticed the evolution from the sign with words, to the sign with a picture or symbol? Now we more commonly see this:



The message has not changed - it is still unsafe to cross the street - but the comprehension opportunity has increased. Instantaneously, and without reading, albeit only two words, the user of this signs knows not to cross the street just yet. In

addition to improving comprehension time, the use of this symbol is also meaningful to non-English speakers or those with reading deficits.

Another traffic example, and definitely a more extreme one, is depicted in this side-by-side comparison:



Using a simple grid and symbols with a key or legend, a plain language version summarizing the numerous signs on the left is created eliminating some confusion over when and for how long one is permitted to park in this area.

Much like the goal of the Parking Guide above, our goal as court professionals is to provide users with the tools and understanding they need to effectively navigate the rules and laws governing their legal matters. We do not want to confuse users resulting in mistakes but rather empower users to make their own decisions regarding how to manage legal issues in their lives.

Whether in law, government, medicine, or other fields, the consensus around plain language is clear. Studies ranging from patients' adherence to their prescription drug regimens to voters at the ballot box all emphasize that plain and direct language increases understanding and application of information.² Federal guidelines promote

² D. James Greiner, Dalié Jiménez, and Lois Lupica, *Self-Help, Reimagined*, 92 IND. L. J. 1119,1172 (2017), available at <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol92/iss3/6/>.

plain language so that users can “find what they need, understand what they find, and use what they find to meet their needs.”³

This is all the more important in explaining court processes. Studies of stress and psychological barriers to understanding highlight that even for those with high literacy and familiarity with a topic, stress can limit a person’s ability to digest and process information. People often come to court as a last resort or after a crisis in their family, home, or workplace requires legal action. Plain and direct language can be crafted to overcome these barriers to ensure understanding and accurate completion of procedural requirements.

Improving one’s ability to navigate the court has obvious benefits for the court user in that the user will avoid additional stress resulting from lack of comprehension, the user will feel empowered to follow through with clearly defined tasks, and the user will feel a greater sense of ability to at least work toward success, if not achieve it. But, there are also benefits to court operations when users have increased and improved ability to navigate process and procedure. For example:

1. There may be a reduced need for human interaction with patrons, thus freeing up staff to help those who really have complex issues to navigate and to complete other business of the courts, such as special project work, day-to-day operational tasks, statistical analysis, etc.; and
2. Judges and staff may notice less protracted litigation from self-represented litigants, who will now have a better ability to understand their legal options and remedies and, when coupled with meaningful referrals to community-based resources, may also have a better understanding of non-legal options for resolution of their issue.


All of this culminates in reduced stress on patrons, reduced stress on Judges and court staff, and reduced stress on the building and physical spaces within the courthouse.

When we improve the public’s ability to understand the work of the courts and their legal options available to remedy legal problems, we increase the likelihood that users will select the right path to resolution of their issue, which may include non-legal remedies altogether. The use of plain language is a cornerstone of

³ Federal Plain Language Guidelines (rev.) 94 (2011), available at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf>.

transparent government. Allowing the public to have a clear understanding of the work of the courts is important to improving the public trust and confidence in the third branch. Access to justice exists when the public can understand, use, and afford information and services to prevent and resolve their legal disputes and to achieve just outcomes without delay.⁴

The remainder of this Guide endeavors to allow readers to understand where, when, and how to incorporate plain language into their forms, instructions, signage, and other materials intended for public use. Readers will find tools and resources to help in this journey, as well as supplemental reading and research. As you read through the Guide, please put yourself into the shoes of the court users and ask yourself, If we choose to disregard these guidelines, will we be providing adequate access to justice?



⁴ Karen Cohl, “Access to Justice Themes—‘Quotable Quotes’: Background Paper for The Law Society of Ontario’s Access to Justice Symposium Creating a Climate for Change, October 29, 2013” (Toronto: Law Society of Upper Canada, 2013), 5. Available at Quotable Quotes.

3 Plain-Language Principles

Information from courts should be understandable. While the goal of providing clear and understandable information may be self-evident, applying plain-language principles can be a challenge. Fortunately, court staff do not have to reinvent the wheel: communication experts in government, health, and adult education have tested strategies for conveying information that people without expertise can understand and act on. All we have to do is apply those strategies in the courts. This section demonstrates some of the best practices in plain language writing and visual formatting that have proven effective in other fields.

3.1 What Does Plain Language Look Like?

Shorter sentences

Most sentences are too long. The first step in reducing unnecessary complexity or ambiguity is to remove unnecessary words. As Professors Greiner, Jiménez, and Lupica describe in their article, *Self-Help, Reimagined*,

“The education literature recommends the use of short sentences. Very short. Perhaps so short that they lack subjects and verbs. Some that are not grammatically correct. Write the way the intended user speaks and thinks. Write as though you are competing for the time and attention of busy and stressed individuals. Because you are.”⁵

The level of formality may depend on the type of material, but all court information would benefit from shorter sentences.

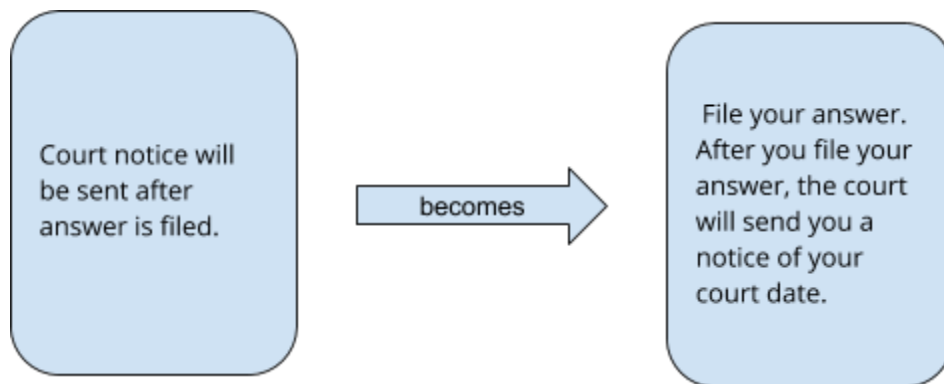
Change passive voice to active voice

The second step to improving clarity is through the use of active voice. Official court language frequently uses passive voice. Passive voice means that there is an object *being acted on* rather than a subject *taking action*, as in: “your motion was denied” rather than “the judge denied your motion.” In communicating with court users,

⁵ Greiner et al., *supra* n. 2, at 1135.

passive voice runs the risk of taking concrete action steps and transforming them into confusing abstractions. When you change a sentence from passive to active voice, you will find you have to be more precise and specific: rather than taking the easy way out and say that a task will be done, active voice requires some thought about who is responsible for the task, and what the task requires.

For example:



Address the reader directly

As you can see from the example above, court materials also tend to use the third person ("the parties shall," "it is the plaintiff's responsibility," etc.) instead of addressing the reader directly. Addressing the court user directly makes it clear that indeed the court user is to be the actor. Including the word "you" can make instructions shorter and clearer.

Take this example from the executive branch:⁶

<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
"When the process of freeing a vehicle that has been stuck results in ruts or holes, the operator will fill the rut or hole created by such activity before removing the vehicle from the immediate area."	"If you make a hole while freeing a stuck vehicle, you must fill the hole before you drive away."

⁶ Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) before-and-after examples, available at http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/before_after/wordiness.cfm.

Reduce the reading level

Over 40% of Americans read at a “basic” or “below basic” proficiency level.⁷ In addition to baseline literacy, stress can reduce a person’s ability to understand, process, and act on written information.⁸ Direct, precise language can reduce cognitive load and reach a broader audience.

While not clear proof of direct and precise language, automated reading-level tools provide a quick readability assessment. While there is no single industry standard, the authors recommend a benchmark of 6th grade reading level.

Most word-processing applications also have readability features. However, these features are often optional, so you must activate them. Online tools have more features. Free websites exist that rate text for readability, including reading level, sentence complexity, word use, and passive voice. In [section 4.3](#), we outline some of the tools you can use to measure the reading level of web content.

More than words: formatting and visual design

In addition to the words themselves, the format of words on a page or a website have a significant impact on a person’s ability to digest and act upon the information presented.

Capitalization

The clearest lesson from the literature is to avoid ALL CAPS at all costs.⁹ COURT NOTICES TOO OFTEN INCLUDE THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION IN ALL CAPS.

⁷ Mark Kutner, Elizabeth Greenberg, and Justin Baer, National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL): A First Look at the Literacy of America’s Adults in the 21st Century, Washington, D.C., National Center for Education Statistics (2005), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/pdf/2006470.pdf>.

⁸ J. KIMBLE, WRITING FOR DOLLARS, WRITING TO PLEASE: THE CASE FOR PLAIN LANGUAGE IN BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT, AND LAW (Carolina Academic Press 2012).

⁹ Ruth Anne Robbins, *Painting with Print: Incorporating Concepts of Typographic Layout and Design into the Text of Legal Writing Documents*, 2 J. ASS’N. LEGAL WRITING DIRECTORS 108, 115 (2004).

Readers tend to skip words and sentences where all letters are capitalized, meaning that the most important information is the least likely to be read.

White space and headings

Overall, the less text and more white space on a page, the easier it is to digest and understand. The goal of reducing the number of pages often comes at the expense of white space, but effective forms and self-help materials can balance these two needs. Plain-language consultants at [Transcend Translations](https://transcend.net/library/legalCourts/PL_ProPerLitigants.pdf) also recommend numbering sections and adding clear descriptive subheadings on the page to help the reader understand each section in context.¹⁰

Typeface

Typeface is the word that describes the way the text looks: whether the letters have little flourishes or “feet” on them, like Times New Roman (serif) or are without those flourishes, like Arial or Helvetica (sans serif). Experimental findings suggest that the typeface (serif or sans serif) does not affect comprehension.¹¹ That said, there are practical considerations when choosing a typeface. Court staff often resort to photocopying rather than printing new forms directly, resulting in fuzzy or blurry text. With that in mind, sans serif¹² (rather than serif) fonts are a better choice, as they result in cleaner photocopies. That said, typeface is a matter of organizational preference.¹³ Two additional recommendations to consider: (1) select different typeface for your headings to create contrast between heading and text; and (2) once you’ve made a decision, be consistent throughout your materials.

Font size also plays a role in making text accessible and understandable. The CDC recommends 12-size font in health communication materials.¹⁴

¹⁰ Maria Mindlind, Transcend Translations (2012), available at https://transcend.net/library/legalCourts/PL_ProPerLitigants.pdf.

¹¹ Maria Lonsdale, Mary C. Dyson & Linda Reynolds, *Reading in Examination-type Situations: The Effects of Text Layout on Performance*, 29 J. RES. READING 433-453 (2006).

¹² Examples of sans serif fonts include Helvetica, Avant Garde, Arial, and Geneva.

¹³ Indeed, this Guide itself has followed its authors’ preference for serif font in the body of the text and sans serif headings.

¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective, <https://www.cdc.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/ToolkitPart05.html>.

Visuals

Illustrations that relate to the text increase the likelihood that someone will follow the instructions.¹⁵ Effective visuals can sometimes replace lengthy text instructions.

For example, the instruction,

“Once you have received the complaint, mail copies of your Answer to both the Plaintiff and the Court. Retain a copy for your own records,”

can be visually depicted.¹⁶



In addition to cartoons, other visual representations of information include roadmaps and flow charts. The key is to provide a visual that clearly conveys information in a way that the reader can understand.

¹⁵ Peter S. Houts et al., *The Role of Pictures in Improving Health Communication: A Review of Research on Attention, Comprehension, Recall, and Adherence*, 61 *PATIENT EDUC. COUNSELING* 174, 175 (2006); W. Howard Levie & Richard Lentz, *Effects of Text Illustrations: A Review of Research*, 30 *EDUC. COMM. & TECH.* 195, 206 (1982) (analyzing 155 studies on the effect of illustrations on reading comprehension); J.M.H. Moll, *Doctor-Patient Communication in Rheumatology: Studies of Visual and Verbal Perception Using Educational Booklets and Other Graphic Material*, 45 *ANNALS RHEUMATIC DISEASES* 198, 202 (1986).

¹⁶ D. James Greiner & Andrea Matthews, *The Problem of Default, Part I* (2015), available at <http://a2jlab.org/current-projects/signature-studies/default/>. Thanks to Hallie Jay Pope from the Graphic Advocacy Project for the cartoon.

Before:

An appeal from an administrative agency decision, also referred to as a “30A appeal,” or a request for “judicial review of an administrative agency decision,” is what you file in the Superior Court when you want a judge to review a final decision made by a state agency. You have 30 days from the date of the decision to file a 30A appeal.

The moving party files the complaint, civil action cover sheet, and filing fee with the Clerk’s Office, and receives a summons to serve along with the complaint on the opposing party/ies within 90 days of filing. The opposing party has 90 days to respond.

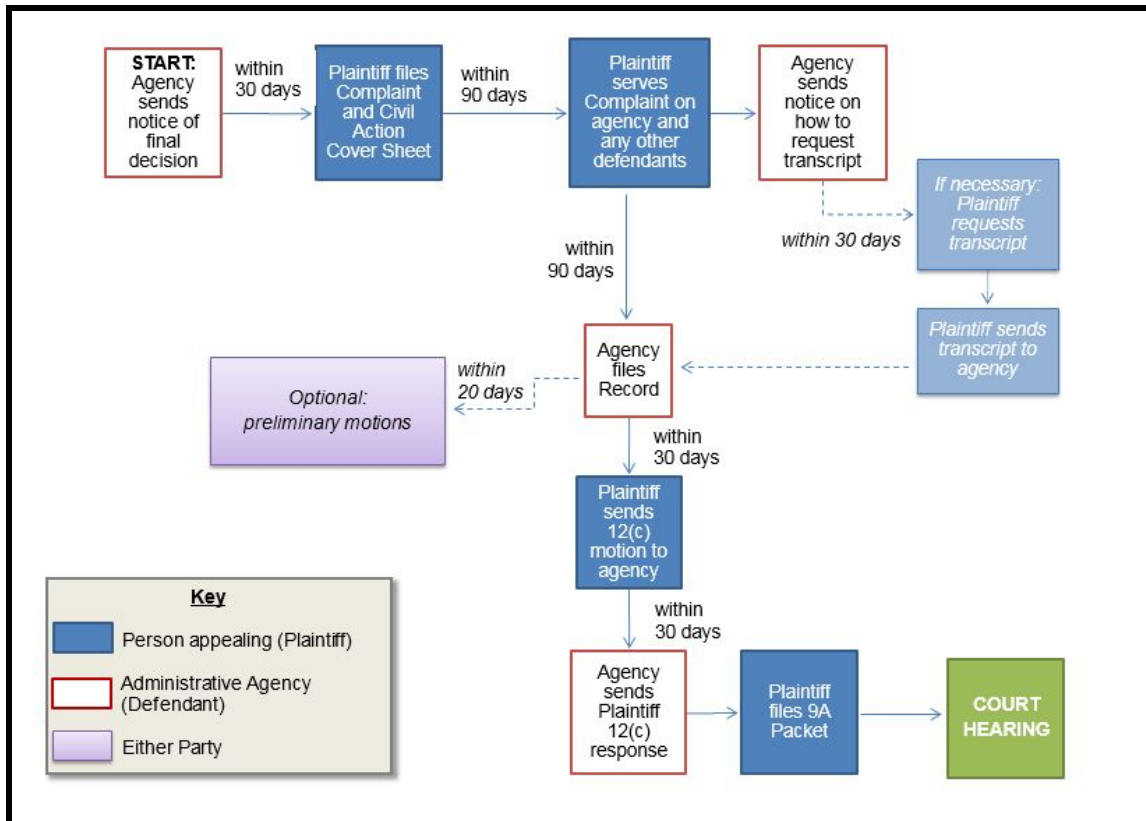
The opposing parties serve the moving party with the answer and administrative record and any transcript requested. Within 30 days of receipt, the moving party serves copies of the motion, memorandum, and all supporting papers on all other parties, without filing with the Court. The opposing parties serve the original opposing memorandum and papers (to be filed by the moving party with the Court), and serve copies of all opposing memoranda and papers on all parties, including the moving party. Oppositions to motions are served 30 days after

service of a motion (except a summary judgment motion, which must be served within 20 days of filing of the administrative record and must adhere to the provisions of Rule 9A).

After time for a response has passed, the moving party assembles a “Rule 9A package” for filing with the Superior Court, which includes its motion and supporting papers and timely opposition memoranda and supporting papers. “A separate document accompanying the filing shall list the title of each document in the Rule 9A package”. If the moving party doesn’t receive an opposition in the time permitted, it files its motion and supporting papers along with an affidavit “reciting compliance with this rule and receipt of no opposition in timely fashion, unless the moving party has notified all parties that the motion has been withdrawn.”

Upon filing the Rule 9A package, the moving party gives “prompt notice of the filing of the Rule 9A package to all other parties by serving... a copy of a certificate of notice of filing on a separate document.” (See Rule 9A(b) (2), Rule 9A(b) (3) and Rule 9A(b) (4) for exceptions to this procedure.)

After:



3.2 A Deeper Look: Making Content Usable and Useful

Emphasize Procedural Knowledge Over Conceptual Understanding

The first step to develop and test court forms and informational material is to identify the legal problem or court process then break that process down into all of its parts. For example, when an individual comes to the courthouse or court website looking for information on how to defend a small claims court debt collection case, what are the steps that a person has to take to defend that case? Explaining these steps does not require legal advice or even legal information. Most of these steps are logistical, administrative “legal mundanity.” Such as the following:

- How many copies should the person make of their court papers?
- Where do they go when they first come to the courthouse?
- Do they need to check in with anyone?
- Where do they sit while they are waiting?

- How long should they be prepared to be at the courthouse?
- Will they need to go through security and, if so, what should they expect?
- Do they need to bring copies of any documents with them such as pay stubs or identification, etc.?

Most court notices and instructions overlook some of these steps as they have little to do with formal law. But from the perspective of the court user, they are both critical to the process and completely unknown without court guidance.

Affirmation and Motivation

“Modern self-help materials fail to address many psychological and cognitive barriers that prevent the individuals who use them from successfully deploying their contents.”¹⁷

Breaking a court process down into its constituent parts for the court user might include:

- Overcoming the fear or intimidation about the court itself
- Making a plan to come to court
- Gathering and understanding information about what will happen at court
- Preparing for what will happen
- Following through

In addition to the concrete procedural and logistical steps, in order for information to be effectively deployed, the reader must feel like it is achievable. Studies show that increasing feelings of self-efficacy increase the likelihood that a person will take a recommended course of action.¹⁸ Research further suggests that providing instructions on what specific actions to take in order to deal with a stressful situation can be effective, for example by providing a specific action plan for getting flu shots.¹⁹ Specific, proximate goals or action steps can increase a patient’s success in managing

¹⁷ Greiner et al., *supra* n. 2, at 1119.

¹⁸ James E. Maddux & Ronald W. Rogers, *Protection Motivation and Self-efficacy: A Revised Theory of Fear Appeals and Attitude Change*, 19 J. EXPERIMENTAL SOC. PSYCHOL. 469 (1983).

¹⁹ Kevin D. McCaul & Rebecca J. Johnson, *The Effects of Framing and Action Instructions on Whether Older Adults Obtain Flu Shots*, 21 HEALTH PSYCHOL. 624, 627 (2002).

a medical condition.²⁰ They may also increase a court user’s success in navigating complex court procedures.

Is this outside the scope of a court’s obligations? Not at all! In fact, a notice of trial or other notice to appear is specifically intended for the recipient to read and to follow the course of action – to come to court. If a party does not come to court, the adversarial process grinds to a halt, and in many jurisdictions, time and money is spent on alternative ways to force the party to attend (e.g., civil arrest warrant).

Modify Court Process

Forms and court notices are reflective of process. Sometimes all the plain language description in the world can’t save a process from being unnecessarily complex. Using the form or notice itself as a starting point, court administrators can look at the processes themselves from the perspective of the court user and simplify the process to the extent possible.

Process improvement starts with identifying all the steps in the current process. It can be a painstaking endeavor but it can also serve to illustrate barriers that we were overlooking as well as duplications of effort that can be consolidated. So, if we start with the notice itself, track every single place that notice goes until the matter is resolved. Who hands this paper to whom? Which inbox does this paper go into next. What does that person then do with it? And so on and so forth. Most redundancies, unnecessary, or arduous steps will rise to the surface on their own. After those are identified, read critically through the steps that remain asking yourself “What value does this step add to the process? Is it necessary?”

3.3 You’ve Drafted Something. Now What?

Test to See What Works

User testing is useful when developing a new written tool. Consider conducting interviews, focus groups, or surveys of people who use the information. User testing at its best is an iterative or repetitive process and an inclusive one. Users can include litigants, lawyers, interpreters, and clerical staff. Iterative feedback from court users can improve the end result and highlight underlying court processes that can be simplified.

²⁰ P.G. Gibson & H. Powell, *Written Action Plans for Asthma: An Evidence-Based Review of the Key Components*, 59 *THORAX* 94, 94-95 (2004).

After initial user testing, it is important to build rigorous evaluation into the rollout of any new intervention, including new court forms. The most scientifically rigorous evaluation technique is randomized study. This means rolling out a new intervention in a randomized fashion, with a control group (status quo) and a treatment group (the group that receives the new form).

Below is a useful checklist for testing design and content developed by the [Center for Plain Language](https://centerforplainlanguage.org/learning-training/five-steps-plain-language/):²¹

Test the design at multiple points

- Were audience needs, such as top tasks, prioritized based on user research?
- Did you test navigation labels and information organization for predictability?
- Did you test the content for readability and understandability?
- Did you test the final product?

Use evidence-based testing strategies

- Were the participants representative of the target groups?
- Did you test your design and content with enough people?
- How was understanding and ability to act measured?
- Was there a before-and-after comparison to demonstrate improvement?

Check that the final product is useful and usable

- Ask readers to describe who and what the document or site is intended for
- Have them show you how they would find the information they want or need
- Ask them to describe key concepts or processes in their own words
- Observe whether target users can finish key tasks easily and confidently
- Note where they stumble or misunderstand and rethink those parts of the site or document

²¹ <https://centerforplainlanguage.org/learning-training/five-steps-plain-language/>, accessed August 7, 2018.

4 When and Where to Use Plain Language

4.1 Court Forms

In this era that emphasizes customer service, courts around the country are trying to meet the challenges posed by a relatively new customer—the self-represented litigant. The difficulty is that court systems are not designed to serve these customers. As a result, individuals seeking “service” from the court system and those involved in providing service are frustrated. Confusing language, rules, and procedures frustrate litigants. Unprepared self-represented litigants frustrate attorneys by delaying proceedings, which may increase expenses. Judges must remain neutral.

Challenges begin when self-represented litigants make their first contact with the court system. The self-represented litigant is seeking some form of assistance from the court clerk about how to start the proceeding. The court clerk must balance the training they have received on providing customer service, workload demands, and legal and ethical constraints concerning the unauthorized practice of law. As a result, the court clerk is faced with a customer that may require an explanation of a number of items, but the clerk is not sure what information is appropriate to provide. The uncertainty of this situation likely results in limited information being provided to self-represented litigants.

This is where the plain-language legal court form can bridge the gap in services that the court clerk can provide. Researchers have examined the user experience in the court system and found that the public's trust in the justice system is driven far more by whether their interaction with the courts was positive or negative, i.e., whether they were treated with respect and felt heard, rather than whether they win or lose.²²

To fully serve the self-represented litigant, a plain-language legal court form should be written with clarity (more fully explained below), and the court form should include instructions explaining the procedural process and any other form that the litigant might need to complete the process (for example, an order, notice of court, or summons).

²² Tom Tyler, *Procedural Justice and the Courts*, 44 CT. REV. 26 (2007-2008) <http://amjudges.org/publications/courtrv/cr44-1/CR44-1-2Tyler.pdf>.

Plain-language court forms are effective because they:

- Educate litigants about the law and help them better present their cases;
- Better inform other parties of claims and issues;
- Give the court relevant information on which to make decisions; and
- Allow decisions and orders to be more specific, thus easier to comply with and to enforce.

Plain-language court forms have the following impact on **users**:

- Users may have an easier time starting their case;
- Users may understand upfront if the circumstances in their case qualify them for the relief they are seeking;
- Users may be more confident and less pressured in the courtroom because they feel that the forms present the key information;
- Users may be better notified of the likely positions of the opposing side, leading to better preparation and fewer surprises; and
- Users may make fewer errors and be less confused.

Plain-language court forms have the following impact on **judges** and **court staff**:

- There may be less wasted time answering questions, reviewing forms, rescheduling hearings, etc.;
- There may be fewer errors by litigants;
- Ability to improve access to justice; and
- They create a more transparent court system.

Drafting Court Forms

Do not assume your readers have knowledge of the subject or have read any related information. Clearly ask or explain in a way that your reader understands and knows what to do with the information. Eliminate unnecessary words. Be concise. Define and use terms consistently. Use the same words your reader would use.

Before:

PETITION FOR CHANGE OF NAME (single / plural)		3253 (Rev. 12/08)
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;">IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;">FOR CHANGE OF NAME</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">DATE OF BIRTH</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;">CASE NUMBER</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">PETITION FOR CHANGE OF NAME (single / plural)</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">File Stamp Here</div>
<p>TO THE HONORABLE JUDGE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT</p> <p>Your petitioner(s) respectfully show as a resident(s) of the State of Illinois and have resided in said State for six (6) months prior to the filing of this petition; having been a resident of the State of Illinois since _____. Your petitioner(s) who were born in _____ state / county desire to change name(s) according to the provisions of 735 ILCS 5/21 in such case made and provided, and now, in that behalf, respectfully show and now bears the name of :</p> <p>_____</p> <p>and are known and called by this name; and desire to assume the name of:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>by which may afterward be known and called. That given notice of this intended application by publication for three (3) successive weeks in _____ a newspaper of general circulation, published in DuPage County, a copy of said published notice, with the certificate of the publisher thereon is hereto annexed and made part of this petition.</p> <p>WHEREFORE, your petitioner(s) pray(s), the premises being considered and name(s) be changed from it's present form to:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>as provided by statute, and that such other or future relief in the premises as this Honorable Court shall deem met, according to law.</p> <p>Name: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> PRO SE</p> <p>Attorney Number: _____</p> <p>Attorney for: _____ Date _____ Date _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>City/State/Zip: _____</p> <p>Telephone Number: _____ Petitioner _____ Petitioner _____</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">AFFIDAVIT</p> <p>_____ being duly sworn on oath deposes and says that they are acquainted with the petitioner(s) in this cause, who have signed this petition; and that have hereby read this petition, and knows the contents thereof, and that the same, and the matters and things herein stated are true.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Signed and sworn to before me</p> <p>_____ Date _____ Circuit Clerk or Notary Public _____ Affiant _____</p>		

After:

This form is approved by the Illinois Supreme Court and is required to be accepted in all Illinois courts.

STATE OF ILLINOIS, CIRCUIT COURT _____ COUNTY		REQUEST FOR NAME CHANGE (ADULT)	<i>For Court Use Only</i>
Instructions ▼ Directly above, enter the county name where you will file this case. Enter your current name. DO NOT enter a Case Number, the Circuit Clerk will add it.	Request of: Your current name (First, middle, last name) _____		Case Number _____

In 1, enter your complete current name. In 2, enter the new full name you would like. In 3, enter your complete current address. In 4, enter the date you started living in Illinois. In 5, enter your date of birth. In 6, enter the city, county, state, and country where you were born. In 7-9, check the boxes that apply to your criminal history. In 10, 11, and 12 check whether you have or have not been convicted or put on probation for the crime listed. If you checked "have" in 10 or 11 and have not been pardoned, <u>the court cannot give you a name change.</u> If you checked "have" in 12 and have not been pardoned or have not completed your probation or sentence over 10 years ago, the court may not give you a name change.	<p>I ask the court to enter an order to change my name, and I state:</p> <p>1. My current name is:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>First Middle Last</p> <p>2. I wish my name to be changed to:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>First Middle Last</p> <p>3. My address is:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Street City State ZIP</p> <p>4. I have lived continuously in Illinois for at least 6 months beginning:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>5. My birth date is:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>6. My place of birth is:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>City County State/Province Country</p> <p>7. I <input type="checkbox"/> have <input type="checkbox"/> have not been adjudicated or convicted of a felony or misdemeanor in Illinois or any other state for which a pardon has not been granted.</p> <p>8. I <input type="checkbox"/> do <input type="checkbox"/> do not have an arrest for which charges have not been filed.</p> <p>9. I <input type="checkbox"/> do <input type="checkbox"/> do not have a pending felony or misdemeanor charge.</p> <p>10. I <input type="checkbox"/> have <input type="checkbox"/> have not been convicted of or placed on probation for a crime which requires me to register as a sex offender in Illinois or any other state.</p> <p>11. I <input type="checkbox"/> have <input type="checkbox"/> have not been convicted of or placed on probation for identity theft or aggravated identity theft in Illinois or any other state.</p> <p>12. I <input type="checkbox"/> have <input type="checkbox"/> have not been convicted of or placed on probation for a felony in Illinois or any other state.</p>
--	---

Enter the Case Number given by the Circuit Clerk: _____

In 13, describe what you were convicted of or placed on probation for, if you checked "have" in 10, 11, or 12.

If you run out of space, use a separate piece of paper.

13. If you checked "have" in 10, 11, or 12 complete the following:

Description of Felony or Misdemeanor	Date of Conviction or Probation	Sentence Received (include parole and supervised release)	Date Sentence Completed	Pardoned? (Yes or No)

Under the Code of Civil Procedure, [735 ILCS 5/1-109](#), making a statement on this form that you know to be false is perjury, a Class 3 Felony.

If you are completing this form on a computer, sign your name by typing it. If you are completing it by hand, sign and print your name.

I certify that everything above is true and correct. I understand that making a false statement on this form is perjury and has penalties provided by law under [735 ILCS 5/1-109](#).

/s/ _____
Your Signature

Print Your Name

Street Address

City, State, ZIP

Telephone

GETTING COURT DOCUMENTS BY EMAIL: If you agree to receive court documents by email, check the box below and enter your email address. You should use an email account that you do not share with anyone else and that you check every day. If you do not check your email every day, you may miss important information or notice of court dates. Other parties may still send you court documents by mail.

☐ I agree to receive court documents at this email address during my entire case.

 Email

NOTE

This section should be filled out by someone else, not the person asking for a name change.

Witness: Enter your full name.

Under the Code of Civil Procedure, [735 ILCS 5/1-109](#), making a statement on this form that you know to be false is perjury, a Class 3 Felony.

VERIFICATION BY WITNESS

I, _____

First Middle Last

certify that what is stated above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Witness Signature

Witness Name

Write in Short Sentences/Questions

It is difficult to determine the intended meaning of a complex sentence. Readable sentences are simple, active, affirmative, and declarative. The more a sentence deviates from this structure, the harder the sentence is to understand.

Follow these guides for writing sentences:

- State one thing and only one thing in each sentence.
- Divide long sentences into two or three short sentences.

- Remove all unnecessary words. Strive for a simple sentence with an implied subject and implied verb. Eliminate unnecessary modifiers.

Before:

TO THE HONORABLE JUDGE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

Your petitioner(s) respectfully show as a resident(s) of the State of Illinois and have resided in said State for six (6) months prior to the filing of this petition; having been a resident of the State of Illinois since _____. Your petitioner(s) who were born in _____ state / country desire to change name(s) according to the provisions of 735 ILCS 5/21 in such case made and provided, and now, in that behalf, respectfully show and now bears the name of:

and are known and called by this name; and desire to assume the name of:

by which may afterward be known and called.

WHEREFORE, your petitioner(s) pray(s), the premises being considered and name(s) be changed from it's present form to:

as provided by statute, and that such other or future relief in the premises as this Honorable Court shall deem met, according to law.

After:

I ask the court to enter an order to change my name, and I state:

1. My current name is:

First Middle Last

2. I wish my name to be changed to:

First Middle Last

3. My address is:

Street City State ZIP

4. I have lived continuously in Illinois for at least 6 months beginning:

Date

5. My birth date is: _____

Date

6. My place of birth is: _____

City County State/Province Country

Use Understandable Expressions

When choosing a word, balance the following:

- Use the most basic word.
- If the most basic word has many definitions and if those definitions can cause confusion, use a more precise word.
- Use industry-standard words.

- When a law is referenced, use the core words of the law. Do not use the legalese, if possible.

Before:

AFFIDAVIT		
<p>_____ being <u>duly sworn on oath</u> deposes and says that they are acquainted with the petitioner(s) in this cause, who have signed this petition; and that have hereby read this petition, and knows the contents thereof, and that the same, and the <u>matters and things herein stated are true.</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Signed and sworn to before me</p>		
_____ Date	_____ Circuit Clerk or Notary Public	_____ Affiant

After:

VERIFICATION BY WITNESS		
<p>I, _____ <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; font-size: small;"> First Middle Last </div> </p> <p>certify that what is stated above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.</p>		
<p>_____ Witness Signature</p>		
<p>_____ Witness Name</p>		

Put the instructions on how to complete the form right on the form

STATE OF ILLINOIS, CIRCUIT COURT		REQUEST FOR NAME CHANGE (ADULT)	For Court Use Only
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> Instruction: ▼ </div> <div style="font-size: x-small;"> <p>Directly above, enter the county name where you will file this case.</p> <p>Enter your current name.</p> <p>DO NOT enter a Case Number, the Circuit Clerk will add it.</p> </div> </div>	<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> Request of: </div> </div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> Your current name (First, middle, last name) </div> </div>	<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 40px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> Case Number </div> </div>	

Use Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks can be used throughout the form to connect the reader to specific references.

A hyperlink is appropriate when it is necessary for providing more information for the reader, such as definitions, instructions, or step-by-step guides, or citing an online source within the text, such as statutes or other court forms.

<p>Under the Code of Civil Procedure, 735 ILCS 5/1-109, making a statement on this form that you know to be false is perjury, a Class 3 Felony.</p> <p>If you are completing this form on a computer, sign your name by typing it. If you are completing it by hand, sign and print your name.</p>	<p>I certify that everything above is true and correct. I understand that making a false statement on this form is perjury and has penalties provided by law under 735 ILCS 5/1-109.</p>	
	<p>/s/</p> <p>_____ Your Signature</p>	<p>_____ Street Address</p>
	<p>_____ Print Your Name</p>	<p>_____ City, State, ZIP</p>
		<p>_____ Telephone</p>

It's More than Well-Drafted Forms

Very little frustrates a self-represented litigant more or slows down the administration of justice than having a court hearing when a necessary step in the process was not completed, or even worse, when the litigant is disqualified from the type of relief they are seeking. It is essential that the materials that accompany forms include any necessary notices and orders. Further, the instructions must:

- (1) prompt the user to ask “do the specific circumstances allow me to seek this relief”; and
- (2) explain the process from filing to court hearing.

Explaining the Process

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR NAME (for an Adult)	
Who can ask the court for a name change? To change your name, you MUST : <ul style="list-style-type: none">Be at least 18 years old; ANDHave lived in Illinois for at least 6 months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If there is no newspaper in your county, contact a convenient newspaper published in Illinois.
You CAN NOT change your name if you have been convicted of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A felony and have not been pardoned or you finished your sentence less than 10 years ago; ORIdentity theft or aggravated identity theft and have not been pardoned; ORFelony or misdemeanor: criminal sexual abuse when the victim at the time is under 18 years of age, sexual exploitation of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, or indecent solicitation of an adult, or any other offense that requires you to register as a sex offender, and have not been pardoned.	<p>Who can ask the court for a name change? To change your name, you MUST:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Be at least 18 years old; ANDHave lived in Illinois for at least 6 months. <p>You CAN NOT change your name if you have been convicted of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A felony and have not been pardoned or you finished your sentence less than 10 years ago; ORIdentity theft or aggravated identity theft and have not been pardoned; ORFelony or misdemeanor: criminal sexual abuse when the victim at the time is under 18 years of age, sexual exploitation of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, or indecent solicitation of an adult, or any other offense that requires you to register as a sex offender, and have not been pardoned.
What forms do I need to fill out? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Request for Name Change: provides the information needed to decide if you can change your name. A person who knows you must sign the form.	<p>Step 3: Get a Certificate of Publication from the newspaper and file it with the court.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">After the notice appears in a newspaper for 3 weeks, get a Certificate of Publication from the newspaper.Ask the newspaper how you will get the Certificate of Publication. The newspaper will either:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Send the Certificate directly to the Circuit Clerk;Mail the Certificate to you; ORTell you to pick up the Certificate in person.Take the Certificate of Publication to the courthouse and file it with the Circuit Clerk before your court date.If the newspaper sends the Certificate directly to the Circuit Clerk, make sure it arrives before your court date and ask the newspaper to send you a copy.

Asking qualifying questions

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR NAME (for an Adult)	
Who can ask the court for a name change? To change your name, you MUST : <ul style="list-style-type: none">Be at least 18 years old; ANDHave lived in Illinois for at least 6 months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If there is no newspaper in your county, contact a convenient newspaper published in Illinois.
You CAN NOT change your name if you have been convicted of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A felony and have not been pardoned or you finished your sentence less than 10 years ago; ORIdentity theft or aggravated identity theft and have not been pardoned; ORFelony or misdemeanor: criminal sexual abuse when the victim at the time is under 18 years of age, sexual exploitation of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, or indecent solicitation of an adult, or any other offense that requires you to register as a sex offender, and have not been pardoned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Give a copy of the <i>Publication Notice of Court Date for Request for Name Change</i> to a newspaper.The notice must appear in a newspaper for the first time at least 6 weeks before your hearing date.Newspapers may charge you a publication fee.
What forms do I need to fill out? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Request for Name Change: provides the information needed to decide if you can change your name. A person who knows you must sign the form.Publication Notice of Court Date for Request for Name Change: tells the public that you are asking the court to change your name. It must appear in a newspaper for 3 weeks.Order for Name Change: is the court's decision on your Request for Name Change.	<p>Step 3: Get a Certificate of Publication from the newspaper and file it with the court.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">After the notice appears in a newspaper for 3 weeks, get a Certificate of Publication from the newspaper.Ask the newspaper how you will get the Certificate of Publication. The newspaper will either:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Send the Certificate directly to the Circuit Clerk;Mail the Certificate to you; ORTell you to pick up the Certificate in person.Take the Certificate of Publication to the courthouse and file it with the Circuit Clerk before your court date.If the newspaper sends the Certificate directly to the Circuit Clerk, make sure it arrives before your court date and ask the newspaper to send you a copy.
What costs will I need to pay? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Filing Fee: to file your form.Publication Fee: to put your name change notice in a newspaper.Certified Copy Fee: if you need certified copies of your court documents.	<p>Step 3: Get a Certificate of Publication from the newspaper and file it with the court.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">After the notice appears in a newspaper for 3 weeks, get a Certificate of Publication from the newspaper.Ask the newspaper how you will get the Certificate of Publication. The newspaper will either:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Send the Certificate directly to the Circuit Clerk;Mail the Certificate to you; ORTell you to pick up the Certificate in person.Take the Certificate of Publication to the courthouse and file it with the Circuit Clerk before your court date.If the newspaper sends the Certificate directly to the Circuit Clerk, make sure it arrives before your court date and ask the newspaper to send you a copy.

Other Forms

Often in the course of filing a new case or responding to an existing case, there is the petition or answer, but then there are other procedural forms needed, like a summons or a notice. It is necessary to provide litigants with all possible forms they may need, including a well-drafted order that the judge can fill out at the conclusion of the legal matter.

Notice

This form is approved by the Illinois Supreme Court and is required to be accepted in all Illinois courts.

<p>STATE OF ILLINOIS, CIRCUIT COURT</p> <p> COUNTY</p>	<p>PUBLICATION NOTICE OF COURT DATE FOR REQUEST FOR NAME CHANGE (ADULT)</p>	<p><i>For Court Use Only</i></p>
<p>Instructions ▼</p> <p>Directly above, enter the name of the county where the case was filed.</p> <p>Enter your current name.</p> <p>Enter the case number given to you by the Circuit Clerk.</p>	<p>Request of:</p> <p></p> <p>Your current name (First, middle, last name)</p>	<p></p> <p>Case Number</p>

There will be a court date on my *Request* to change my name from:

Enter your current full name.

First

Middle

Last

to the new name of:

Enter the new full name you would like.

First

Middle

Last

Get the court date and time from the Circuit Clerk when you file the *Request for Name Change*. Make sure the date is at least 8 weeks after the date you file this form with the Circuit Clerk.

The court date will be held:

on at ☐ a.m. ☐ p.m.,

Date Time

at

Street Address City County

in Courtroom #

Room Number

If you are completing this form on a computer, sign your name by typing it. If you are completing it by hand, sign and print your name.

For information on how to publish this Notice, see *How to Change your Name (for an Adult)*.

Your Signature

Your Current Name

Order

This form is approved by the Illinois Supreme Court and is required to be accepted in all Illinois courts.

STATE OF ILLINOIS, CIRCUIT COURT COUNTY		ORDER FOR NAME CHANGE (ADULT)	For Court Use Only
Instructions ▼ Directly above, enter the county name where the case was filed. Enter your current name. Enter the case number given to you by the Circuit Clerk.	Request of: Your current name (First, middle, last name)		Case Number

The Court reviewed your *Request for Name Change* and finds:

DO NOT check any boxes on this form. The judge will check the correct boxes at the hearing.

☐ The Court has jurisdiction.
☐ Correct notice was done by newspaper publication.
 In this Newspaper: _____
 On these Dates: _____
☐ The statements made in the *Request for Name Change* meet the statutory requirements.
☐ The statements made in the *Request for Name Change* do not meet the statutory requirements.

IT IS ORDERED:

Enter your current full name.

Enter the new full name you would like.

☐ The *Request for Name Change* is GRANTED.
 The name of:
 First Middle Last
 is changed to:
 First Middle Last
☐ The *Request for Name Change* is DENIED.
 The *Request* is denied for the following reason(s): _____

ENTERED:

DO NOT enter the Judge and Date. The judge will sign here.

Judge _____ Date _____

Provide Forms in Multiple Formats

Once you have a plain-language court form and instructions explaining the process, it is time to increase usability of the suite by making them ADA compliant, providing

access to them in multiple formats, creating a guided interview, and translating them into non-English languages.

Print and PDF

Forms should be available at courthouses, public libraries, and other relevant community spaces in print version for users that do not have the ability to use a computer. The form should also be publicly available in a fillable PDF format. When posting a fillable PDF on the web, Courts should always ensure that the PDF complies with the [Americans with Disabilities Act Section 508](#). Under 508, disabled members of the public must have comparable access to information that is available to those without disabilities.

According to Transcend the features of an accessible PDF include²³:

- Alternate text for important images that convey information;
- Active links;
- Logically organized page structure with headers, subheads, paragraphs, etc., so that the text can be read in the proper order; and
- Properties that specify the document's source language

Guided Interviews

The Access to Justice: Meeting the Needs of Self-represented Litigants Project studied how self-represented litigants navigated the court system and identified the process of selecting and completing court forms as a major hurdle for self-represented litigants to overcome.²⁴ Guided interviews can help self-represented litigants choose the correct forms, guide them in answering the questions, provide additional helpful information through the process, and return the completed documents to them ready to file.²⁵

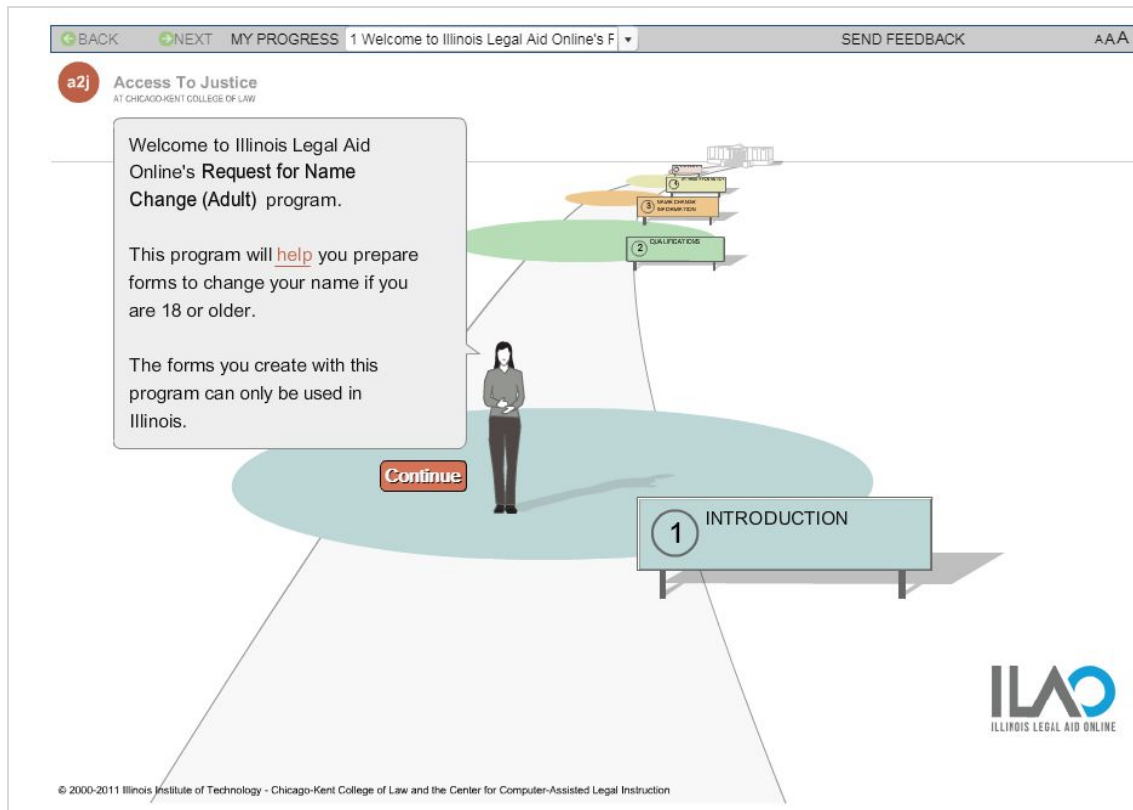
²³ Transcend, Accessible PDFs, available at <https://transcend.net/services/webAccessibility.html#features>.

²⁴ JULIE MACFARLANE, THE NATIONAL SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS PROJECT: IDENTIFYING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS FINAL REPORT <http://www.representingyourselfcanada.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/reportm15-2.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/PTH6-YAMZ>].)

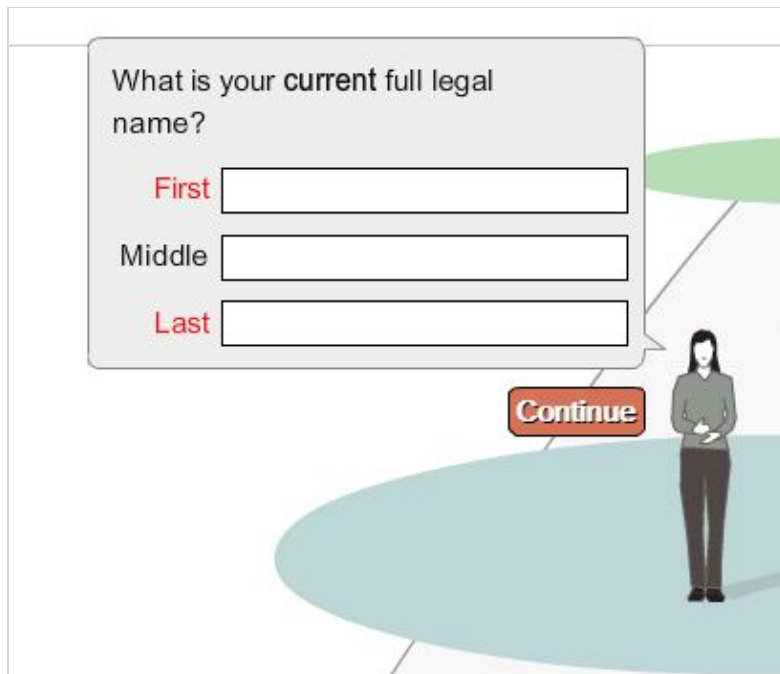
²⁵ Example of guided interview was created by Illinois Legal Aid Online using A2J Author software and is hosted by Law Help Interactive. A link to the full interview can be found here: <https://lawhelpinteractive.org/Interview/GenerateInterview/6195/engine>

Advantages of guided interviews include:

- The interface is less intimidating than a court form.



- Qualifying questions are asked up front.
- Questions are asked one at a time and on one topic.



What is your **current** full legal name?

First

Middle

Last

Continue

The screenshot shows a digital form for entering a full legal name. It has three input fields labeled 'First', 'Middle', and 'Last'. A red 'Continue' button is positioned below the fields. To the right of the form is a stylized illustration of a person standing on a path.

- Self-represented litigants are given additional information as needed.



You must publish notice of your name change in a newspaper in the county where you live. You should contact a newspaper in your county and set up publication of the notice.

If there is no newspaper in your county, contact a convenient newspaper published in Illinois.

If you live in Cook County, you may wish to publish notice in the [Chicago Daily Law Bulletin](#).

Close

3 NAME CHANGE INFORMATION

This block contains a large informational box with text about publishing a name change notice. It includes a 'Close' button. Below the box is a sign that reads '3 NAME CHANGE INFORMATION'. A person is illustrated on the left side of the box.

Translate into Non-English Languages

The 2011 American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, tells us that over 60 million people (21 percent of the 291.5 million surveyed) speak a language other than English at home, and over 25 million speak English less than “very well.”²⁶ Translating forms and other self-help content into the most common languages spoken in your part of the country is a vital way to improve access to the civil justice system.

CÓMO CAMBIAR SU NOMBRE (para un adulto)

¿Quién puede pedirle un cambio de nombre a la corte?

Para cambiar su nombre, **TIENE QUE:**

- Tener por lo menos 18 años de edad; Y
- Haber vivido en Illinois por lo menos durante 6 meses.

NO PUEDE cambiar su nombre si fue condenado por:

- Un delito grave y no fue perdonado, o cumplió con su sentencia hace menos de 10 años; O
- Robo de identidad, o robo de identidad agravado, y no ha sido perdonado; O
- Delito grave o delito menor: abuso sexual penal cuando la víctima tenía menos de 18 años de edad, explotación sexual de un menor; solicitud sexual indecente a un menor de edad o un adulto; o cualquier otra infracción que requiera su inscripción como infractor sexual, y no ha sido perdonado.

¿Qué formularios tengo que llenar para cambiar mi nombre?

- **Solicitud de cambio de nombre (Request for Name Change):** le proporciona a la corte la información que necesita para poder aprobar su cambio de nombre. El formulario tiene que ser firmado también por una persona que lo conozca.
- **Aviso de presentación de una solicitud de cambio de nombre (Notice of Filing a Request for Name Change):** le informa al público que está solicitando a la corte que cambie su nombre; tiene que ser publicado en un periódico durante 3 semanas.
- **Orden de cambio de nombre (Order for Name Change):** este formulario es utilizado por el juez para otorgar o denegar su *Solicitud de cambio de nombre*.

¿Cuánto tendré que pagar para cambiar mi nombre?

- **Cuota de presentación:** para presentar sus formularios ante el secretario de la corte de circuito.
- **Cuota de publicación:** para colocar su aviso en el periódico.
- **Cuota de copia certificada:** si le otorgan el cambio de nombre y necesita copias certificadas de la orden de la corte.

Si no puede pagar estas cuotas, puede pedirle a la corte que le otorgue una exención de cuotas.

¿Qué hago después de llenar mis formularios?

Paso 1 – Presente sus formularios ante el secretario de la corte de circuito del condado donde se inició el caso.

- Haga copias de sus formularios para usted y para cada parte del caso.
- Llame al secretario de la corte de circuito y pregúntele cuánto costará presentar sus formularios y cómo puede pagar (efectivo, cheque, crédito, en línea).
- Si no puede pagar la cuota de presentación, llene y presente una *Solicitud de exención de cuotas de la corte (Application for Waiver of Court Fees)*, que podrá encontrar en: <http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/Forms/approved/>. Si ya le otorgaron una exención de cuotas para este caso de la corte, no hace falta que tome este paso.
- Presente sus formularios ante el secretario de la corte de circuito en persona, por correo o en línea, si es permitido.
- Cómo presentar en persona
 - Vaya a la corte del condado donde se inició su caso.
 - Déle al secretario de la corte de circuito sus formularios originales y las copias para que las selle.
 - El secretario de la corte de circuito se quedará con sus formularios originales y le devolverá las copias selladas.
 - Pague la cuota de presentación o presente su *Solicitud de exención de cuotas de la corte*.
- Cómo presentar por correo
 - Envíe sus formularios originales y una copia al secretario de la corte de circuito.
 - Incluya la *Carta al secretario de la corte de circuito (Letter to the Circuit Clerk)*, que puede encontrar en: <http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/Forms/approved/>.
 - Incluya un sobre con porte pagado y su dirección para que el secretario de la corte de distrito le pueda enviar a vuelta de correo su copia presentada-sellada.
 - Incluya el pago de la cuota de presentación o su *Solicitud de exención de cuotas de la corte*.
- Cómo presentar en línea

²⁶Camille Ryan, Language Use in the United States: 2011, American Community Survey Reports, issued August 2013, available at <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-22.pdf>.

Este formulario ha sido aprobado por la Corte Suprema de Illinois y todas las cortes de circuito de Illinois están obligadas a aceptarlo.

ESTADO DE ILLINOIS CORTE DE CIRCUITO CONDADO DE _____	SOLICITUD DE CAMBIO DE NOMBRE (ADULTO)	<i>Solo para uso de la corte</i> Solo para información No entregue a la corte
Instrucciones ▼ Escriba más arriba el nombre del condado donde va a presentar el caso. Escriba su nombre actual. NO escriba un número de caso; el secretario lo agregará.	Solicitud de: Solo para información. Su nombre actual (<i>Nombre de pila, segundo nombre, apellido</i>) _____	Número de caso _____

Le pido a la corte que publique una orden para cambiar mi nombre, y declaro:

En 1, escriba su nombre actual completo.	1. Mi nombre actual es: Solo para información. <i>Nombre de pila Segundo nombre Apellido</i>
En 2, escriba el nuevo nombre completo que desea tener.	2. Quiero que mi nombre se cambie a: <i>Nombre de pila Segundo nombre Apellido</i>
En 3, escriba su dirección actual completa.	3. Mi dirección es: _____ <i>Calle Ciudad Estado Código postal</i>
En 4, escriba la fecha en que comenzó a vivir en Illinois.	4. He vivido continuamente en Illinois por lo menos durante 6 meses, comenzando el: _____ <i>Fecha</i>
En 5, escriba el año en que nació. NO ponga su fecha de nacimiento completa.	5. Mi año de nacimiento es: _____ <i>Año</i>
En 6, ponga la ciudad, condado, estado y país donde nació.	6. Mi lugar de nacimiento es: _____ <i>Ciudad Condado Estado/Provincia País</i>
En 7, 8 y 9 indique si ha sido condenado o ha recibido una condena condicional por el delito indicado.	7. Yo <input type="checkbox"/> he <input type="checkbox"/> no he sido condenado o recibí una condena condicional por un delito que requiere que me registre como infractor sexual en Illinois o cualquier otro estado.
Si marcó "he" en 7 u 8 y no ha sido perdonado, la corte no puede aprobar su cambio de nombre.	8. Yo <input type="checkbox"/> he <input type="checkbox"/> no he sido condenado o recibí una condena condicional por robo de identidad o robo de identidad agravado en Illinois o cualquier otro estado.
	9. Yo <input type="checkbox"/> he <input type="checkbox"/> no he sido condenado o recibí una condena condicional por un delito grave en Illinois o en cualquier otro estado.

Interested in Drafting Your Own Plain-Language Court Forms?

Limit drafting to proceedings where self-representation is high (family law, small claims, landlord/tenant, guardianship, name change, etc.). Include areas with a known history of avoidable litigant confusion. Identify proceedings where developing forms is not a priority (for example, cases where appointed counsel is available, cases that involve money and there are resources to hire counsel, and cases that are too complex).

4.2 Correspondence from the Court

Correspondence from the Court

- Identify your audience (besides the person you are writing to, consider any additional readers)
- Organize letters to meet your users' needs
- Start with the main message
- After the main message, use an overview sentence about the content
- Use headings to organize the content
- Limit each paragraph to one topic
- Use bulleted lists
- Use a professional, compassionate tone
- Focus on the reader by using “you” and the active voice
- Use a sympathetic opening when appropriate
- Apologize, if appropriate
- Use terms such as “we regret” or “unfortunately” when delivering bad news
- Express requirements and requests clearly

Content – Writing with Clarity

Don't assume your readers have knowledge of the subject or have read any related information.

- Clearly ask or explain in a way that your reader understands and knows what to do with the information.
- Eliminate unnecessary words. Be concise.
- Define and use terms consistently.
- Use the same words your reader would use.

Use the Present Tense

Write so the subject speaks as of the time it is applied, not as of the time it is drafted.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
It was decided by the court to grant the request.	The court granted your request.

Use Active Voice

Use the active voice in correspondence to communicate effectively. Active voice clearly identifies the action and who is performing that action. Unfortunately, much of legal and government writing is in the passive voice, giving documents a wordy, bureaucratic tone.

Active voice makes documents stronger by showing responsibility or giving credit for an action. When we don't identify the doer of the action, the sentence can sound vague. An active voice sentence generally uses fewer words to communicate the same information, and more closely resembles spoken language.

Active Voice

- A sentence's voice indicates whether its subject acts or is acted upon. When the subject does something or acts, the verb is in the active voice.
- Active voice makes it clear who has acted and who is responsible for what action.
- Active voice is important so that readers can easily tell who did what action.
- Active voice follows natural sentence structure: doer-verb-receiver of action, i.e., "The attorney (doer) wrote (verb) the correspondence (receiver)".
- Passive voice reverses natural sentence structure. When the subject receives the action or is acted upon, the verb is in the passive voice.
- The correspondence (receiver) was written (verb) by the coordinator (doer).
- With passive voice, sentences are usually longer and responsibility is not as clear. Sentences written in the passive voice are obscure and often raise more questions than provide answers.

Passive:	The rule was adopted by the supreme court.
Active:	The supreme court adopted the rule.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
If it is found that the applicant is qualified, a license will be issued.	The department will issue a license if it finds that the applicant is qualified.
The social worker performs an assessment of the child's injuries.	The social worker assesses the child's injuries.

Tone

Tone in a document is the impression we leave about our professionalism, our attitudes toward the subject, and even our attitudes toward the reader. The choice of personal pronouns is an important factor in giving your document a friendly, personal, human tone.

Address the reader by name or as “you”

Use “you” or “your” often to express a conversational tone. This will make your documents sound more natural, open, and much less bureaucratic.

Refer to yourself as “I” instead of “we”

Using “I” instead of “we” when the document is clear that only one person carried out the action makes you seem more real to your reader. Refer to yourself or the person signing the letter as “I” instead of “we.” You will communicate accountability, a professional friendliness, and a personal interest in the document you are signing. Use “we” when you are referring to actions you and at least one other person carried out and “I” when referring to yourself as the subject of the action.

Avoid jargon

Avoid unfamiliar, jargon. Use specific, concrete words to ensure the writing is as direct and clear as possible. For example, instead of writing “We need to move forward, seizing low-hanging fruit,” write “We need to move forward with an achievable goal.”

Avoid Repetitive and Redundant Words

Redundant expressions needlessly repeat ideas and add no value to your documents. For example, in the expression “final outcome,” the word final is redundant because outcome implies finality.

Delete repetitious words. Ex. Each and every student voted to strike in protest.
Correction: Each student voted to strike.

Redundant Words

Do not use the same word or words that have the same meaning within a sentence.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
The Child Support Department and the Child Welfare Department worked together on a joint project.	The Child Support and Welfare Departments worked on a project.

Avoid Redundancies

Do not use word pairs if the words have the same effect or where the meaning of one includes the other.

Examples:

- any and all
- full and complete
- authorize and direct
- order and direct
- cease and desist
- each and every

Avoid Indefinite Words and References

Examples:

- Frequently
- Untimely

- Unseasonable
- Temporarily
- Promptly
- Reasonably

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
Total disclosure of all facts is very important to make sure we draw up a total and completely accurate picture of your financial position.	Disclosing all facts is important to create an accurate picture of your financial position.

Superfluous and Verbose Expressions

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
The attorney general is empowered to appoint such personnel as may reasonably be required to carry out the functions prescribed for his office.	The attorney general may appoint personnel to carry out the office's functions.
Absolutely null and void and of no effect	Void
Adequate number of	Enough
At the same time	When
At the place	Where
For the purpose of In order to	To
During such time as	While
By virtue of By means of	By, under

Give consideration to	Consider
Have knowledge of	Know
Is authorized and directed to Is directed to Is required to It is the duty	Shall
Is authorized to Is empowered to It shall be lawful	May
In case In the event that However or provided	If
Is able to	Can

Write Positively

Express negative ideas in positive form.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
A decision will not be made unless all information has been received.	A decision will be made when all information is received.
The request cannot be approved without payment.	The request will be approved when payment is received.

Use Action Verbs

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
is applicable to	applies to
is concerned with	concerns
make payment	pay
denial	deny
Make application to	apply
give recognition to	recognize

Hidden Verbs

Hidden verbs found in endings such as -ment, -tion, -sion, and -ance or link with verbs such as achieve, effect, give, have, make, reach, and take. Often, you will find a hidden verb between the words “the” and “of.”

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
If you cannot make the payment of the \$100 fee, you must make an application in writing before you file your form.	If you cannot pay the \$100 fee, you must apply for a fee waiver in writing before you file your form.

Use Singular Nouns Rather Than the Plural Nouns

Using singular nouns instead of plural nouns avoids confusion of whether the noun applies separately or jointly.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
The applicant shall submit the required fee or fees.	The applicant shall submit the required fees.
The guard will issue a security badge to each employee who works in Building D and each employee who works in Building E.	The guard will issue security badges to the employees who work in Buildings D and E.

***Exception: Use plural nouns for headings and titles.*

Use Elliptical Clauses

An elliptical clause is a clause in which some words have been left out.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
For excusable delays that are not caused by weather, the Department pays your added costs.	For excusable delays not caused by weather, the Department pays your added costs.
If the Court determines that a claim is without merit, you may...	If the Court determines a claim is without merit, you may...

Use Parallel Phrases

Parallel phrases balance a sentence when a series of words, thoughts, or ideas appear in one sentence.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
A copy may be obtained by mail or if a person appears personally.	You may obtain a copy by mail or in person.

Avoid Prepositions

Avoid prepositions but do not eliminate them if non-parallel phrases are created as a result.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
authority of the Judge	Judge's authority
order for the court	Court order

Avoid Split Infinitives

An infinitive consists of the word to and the base form of a verb. A split infinitive occurs when another word is placed between to and the verb.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
Be sure to promptly reply to the invitation.	Be sure to reply promptly to the invitation. <i>or</i> Be sure to reply to the invitation promptly.

Avoid Adjectives

Adjectives composed of two or more words are usually hyphenated when they precede a noun, even though the phrase would not be hyphenated if standing alone, such as "low income," "one year," "full time," and "part time." This is necessary to avoid ambiguity.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
A patron may purchase two dollar tickets.	A patron may purchase two-dollar tickets.
Low income persons may serve three year terms.	Low-income persons may serve three-year terms.

Do not hyphenate between an adverb ending in "ly" and the adjective it modifies. For example, "substantially new construction" does not need a hyphen.

Using the Words *Shall, Will, Must, Should, and May*

shall	imposes an obligation to act, but may be confused with prediction of future action
will	predicts future action
must	imposes obligation, indicates a necessity to act
should	infers obligation, but not absolute necessity
may	indicates discretion to act
may not	indicates a prohibition

To determine whether the use of "shall" or "may" is correct, a helpful test is to mentally substitute for the word "may" the words "has the authority to" and substitute for the word "shall" the words "has the duty to." This reading will make it readily apparent whether the usage is correct.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
The Governor shall approve it.	The Governor must approve it. [obligation] The Governor will approve it. [future action]
The department should ...	The department shall
The department should not ...	The department may not ...

Avoid Unnecessary Qualifiers

Qualifiers do not add meaning to a sentence and will cause misinterpretations.

Examples:

- actual
- all (only use to differentiate between partial and whole quantities)
- any (only use to specify a choice)
- completely
- existing (with remove, reconstruct, salvage, abandon, or obliterate)
- Do not use respective and respectively.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
All forms are listed under the names of their respective sections.	Forms are listed under the names of their corresponding sections.

Avoid Use of Exceptions

State a rule or category directly. Do not describe the rule or category by stating its exceptions.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
All persons except those 18 years or older...	Each person under 18 years of age...

Use an exception only to avoid long and cumbersome lists or elaborate descriptions. State the rule or category first then state its exception.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
Alabama, Alaska,... (listing 47 states) and Wyoming must ration...	Each state except Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona must ration... (In this case the category "each State" is established first and then the exceptions are stated.)

Do not use general phrases such as "except as otherwise specified" or "except as otherwise shown." Be specific and state the particular items to which the specification does not apply. Use "Specify:."

Write Short Sentences/Questions

It is difficult to determine the intended meaning of a complex sentence. Readable sentences are simple, active, affirmative, and declarative. The more a sentence deviates from this structure, the harder the sentence is to understand. Follow these guides for writing sentences:

1. State one thing and only one thing in each sentence.
2. Divide long sentences into two or three short sentences.
3. Remove all unnecessary words. Strive for a simple sentence with an implied subject and implied verb. Eliminate unnecessary modifiers.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
When the device is not in use for less than one work shift, turn off the device.	When the device is not in use during a work shift, turn it off.
In the event that the director objects to the filing of the complaint, the director, in his discretion, may file a responsive pleading subsequent to the filing.	If the director objects to the complaint, the director may file a responsive pleading.

Be Consistent

Use simple specific words. Do not use abstract, vague, or different words to say the same thing.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
Each motor vehicle owner must register their car with the Department of Motor Vehicles.	Each automobile owner must register their automobile with the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Use Parallel Structure

Arrange sentences so that parallel ideas look parallel. When using lists, the lead-in sentence along with each item in the list should read as though it is a stand-alone sentence.

Use lists and numbered steps when presenting information that has several parts or is chronological. Even if the information isn't too complicated, a list adds white space and helps with understanding.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
The duties of the Executive Secretary of the Administrative Committee are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To take minutes of all the meetings• The Executive Secretary answers all the correspondence• Writing of monthly reports	The duties of the Executive Secretary of the Administrative Committee are to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take minutes of all meetings• Answer all correspondence• Write monthly reports

Use Preferred Expressions

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
in accordance with conformance with as determined by	according to
subsequent to	after
permit permitted	allow allowed
at no cost to the Petitioner	at the Agency's expense
for the reason that due to the fact that	because

prior to	before
commence initiate	begin
alter modification revision	change
adequate number of sufficient number of	enough
excluding	except
in the interest of with reference to	for
when subject to in case in the event that provided that	if (except use when in reference to time and where in reference to location)
in lieu of	instead of
deems	is
retain	keep

When choosing a word, balance the following:

- Use the most basic word.
- If the most basic word has many definitions and if those definitions can cause confusion, use a more precise word.
- Use industry-standard words.
- When a law is referenced, use the core words of the law. Do not use the legalese, if possible.

Omit Needless Words

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
with regard to	about
located at at the following location	at
because of the fact that	because
by means of	by
at no time	do not
during the course of during the duration of	during
for the period of	for
in a manner that in a manner which	how
in the event of should it appear that	if
including, but not limited to	including
at a later date	later
on a monthly basis	monthly
close proximity	near
there will be no	no
related to	of
pertaining to	of, about
such that	that

so as to in order to	to
as a means of for the purpose of	to, for
until such time	until

Use Simple Language

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
Accorded, afforded	given
cease	stop
ascertain	determine
cognizant of	aware of
deem	consider
effectuate	carry out
execute	sign
indicate	show
institute	begin, start
interrogate	question
of each year	annually
opt for	choose
optimum	best
preserve	keep

pursuant to	under
subsequent	later
summons	send for, call, request

For more plain language alternatives, see section [5.1 Plain Language Alternatives to Commonly Used Terms](#).

Ranges of Numbers, Days, Dates, and Ages

To specify ranges of numbers, ages, and dates: to, through, between, and from.

<i>Do not say:</i>	<i>Say:</i>
From July 1, 2002, to. . .	After June 30, 2002, and before. . .
Between July 1, 2002, and. . .	After June 30, 2002, and before. . .
Before July 1, 2002. . .	To (or until or by) June 30, 2002. . .
between the ages of 17 and 45	17 years old or older and under 46
who has passed his 17th birthday [or who is 17 years old or older] unless you mean who is 18 years old or older	who is more than 17 years old
over 17 members	at least 18 members not fewer than 18 members

Statutory language

What to do when you can't change the legal language? Avoid citing statutory language. If you have to keep it, keep it small. Provide a hyperlink to direct the user to a specific section. <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/prefaces/toc>

Legalese:

- Remove legalese language (therefore; whereas; hereafter; wherein; etc.).
- Rewrite in a way that the reader will understand.
- When a law is referenced, use the core words of the law.

Definitions:

- It is important not to define a word in a sense significantly different from the way it is normally understood by the persons to whom it is primarily addressed.
- Rewrite to try to eliminate the need for most definitions.
- Define the word where you use it in your form.
- If you must have a definition section, place it at the beginning or the end of your form and direct word definitions within the form with hyperlinks.

Acronyms

Define initialisms and acronyms when first introduced. For example, “American Bar Association (ABA).” Thereafter, refer to the entity defined only by the initials or acronym. If the entity is mentioned only once in a writing, do not use the initials or acronym but rather the full name.

Bulleted Lists

Use bulleted lists to clarify text. These lists make text simple and emphasize important points.

Colloquialisms

Avoid using colloquial phrases in correspondence as they will confuse the reader. Colloquial language includes slang, but also informal words, phrases known only to native speakers of the language, and regional/local phraseology.

4.3 Websites

Web Accessibility

What is web accessibility? In simple terms, it is ensuring that every visitor to a website is able to access, navigate and understand all of the content displayed.

Web accessibility is for everyone, irrespective of the method of access. Website users can be broadly categorized into three groups:

1. Users who are not visually impaired and use a mouse to navigate and access content on a website. These ‘sighted’ users can easily look through the content without assistance. These users also benefit from web accessibility features such as “alt” text for images wherein they can just hover over the image and see information about it rather than having to click on the image.
2. Visually impaired users or those that use a keyboard to navigate a website. These users require web accessibility features enabled so as to provide them with the same access to content as ‘sighted’ users. For example, having “link outline” enabled helps keyboard users find their way on the webpage by highlighting the link that their ‘cursor’ is on. Without an outline it is nearly impossible to find your place on a website. See example below.
3. Users with assistive devices such as screen readers gain the maximum benefit from web accessibility. Screen readers read aloud the content on the webpage including images, navigation, hyperlinks etc. Without web accessibility features, these users face an uphill task to access and navigate a webpage. For example, a simple “alt” text for an image helps these users as the assistive device would read aloud the “alt” text to help the user understand that this is an image with a title. Without web accessibility, imagine trying to access, understand and navigate a webpage with the monitor off. It is impossible to know your place on the page much less navigate it.

Keeping all these users in mind, it is every web developer’s responsibility to ensure that their sites, forms, documents and other media are accessible to users by implementing web accessibility guidelines to the fullest extent possible.

There are several resources available to help implement web accessibility. Here are some guidelines:

- Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI):
<https://www.w3.org/standards/webdesign/accessibility>
- Web Accessibility in mind (WebAIM) : <https://webaim.org/>
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG):
<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

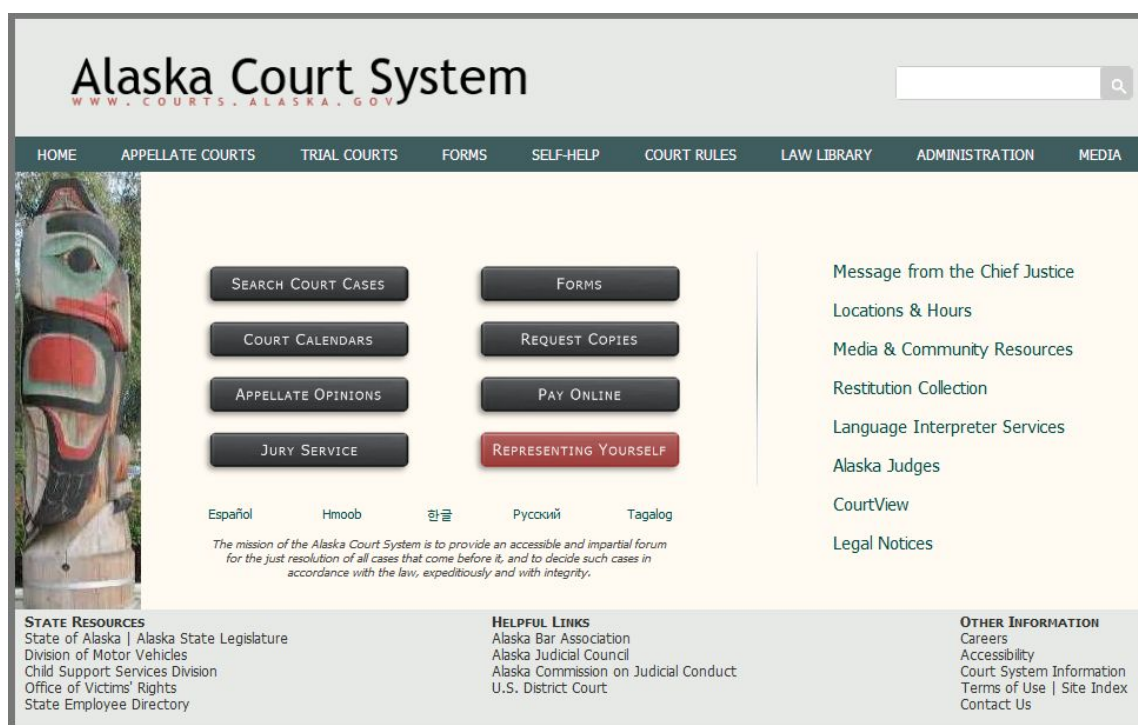
- U.S. Government-wide IT Accessibility Program – Section 508:
<https://www.section508.gov/>

Tools to check for web accessibility:

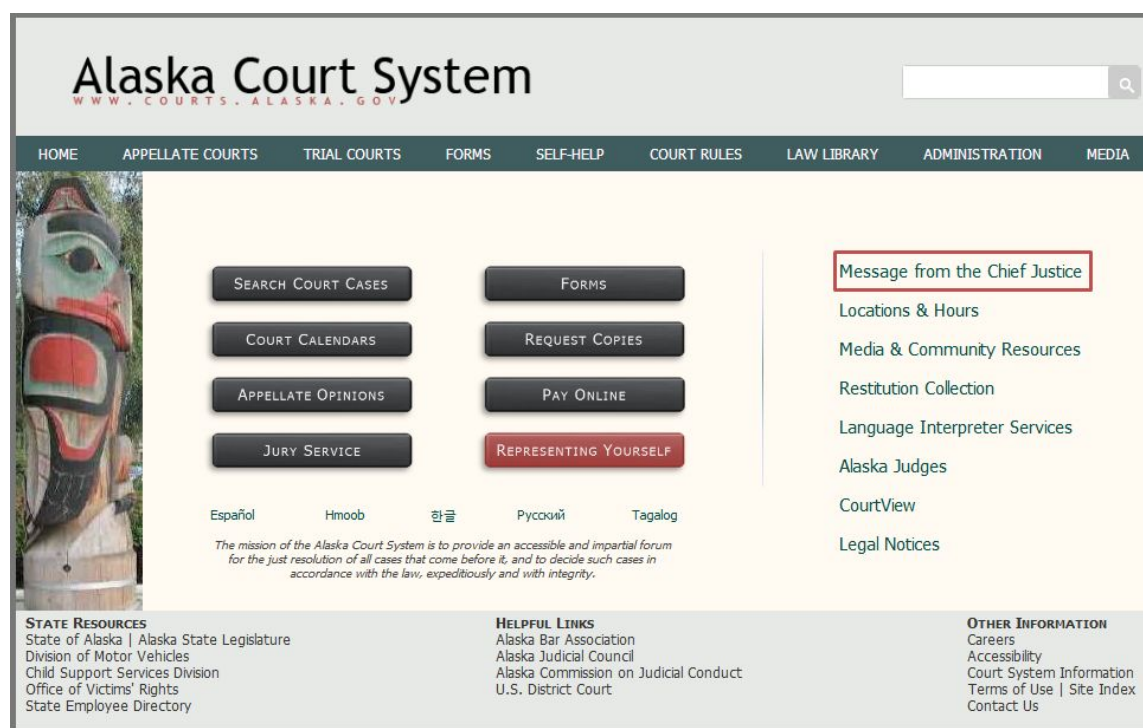
- Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools List - <https://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools/>

Example of a webpage without outlines for links

Do you know where you are?



(Hint: The link that is in focus/tabbed over is “Message from the Chief Justice”, the first link in the right hand side menu bar.)



The same web page with an outline for a link that is in focus or tabbed on, which gives the keyboard user a visual cue as to the location of the cursor. Options for styling of the outline range from a simple dotted border to solid lines of color as shown below. No matter the style, it should still meet accessibility guidelines.

Tools

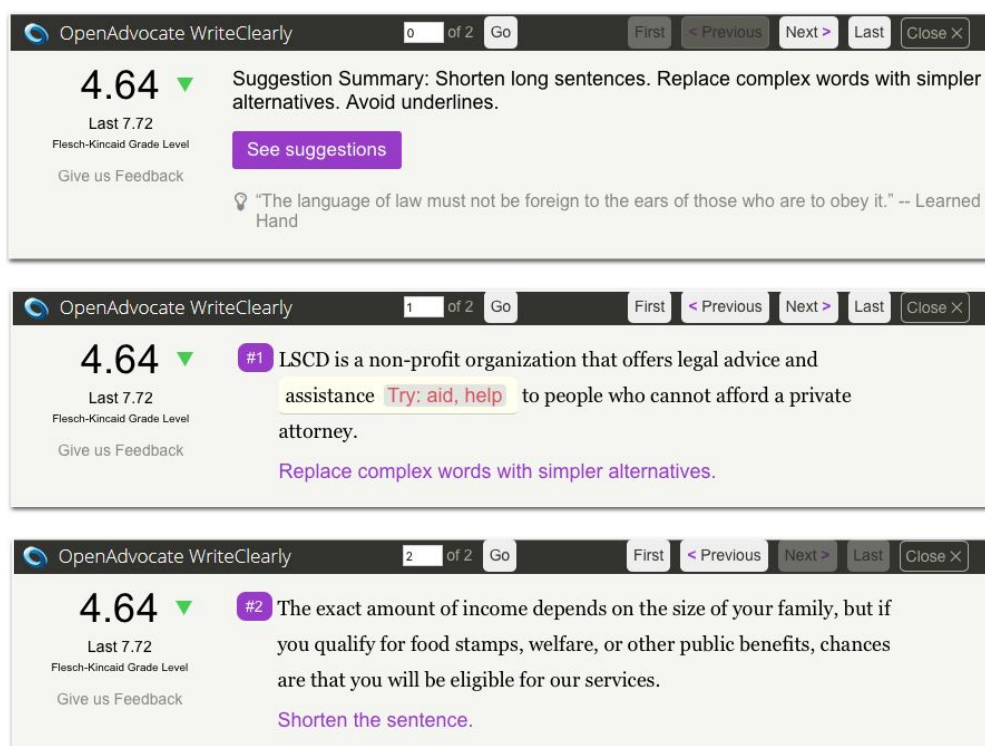
WriteClearly

Web experts recommend that web content should be at 8th grade reading level ²⁷ or lower in order to reach a broad audience. Writeclearly is a free web tool that is designed for helping authors write more readable web content. WriteClearly analyzes the reading grade level of a web page and offers suggestions for improving readability. WriteClearly is a web browser “bookmarklet” which a snippet of code that can be easily saved as a web browser bookmark. You do not need to install any software.

Get WriteClearly at <http://openadvocate.org/writeclearly>

Once you have WriteClearly installed as a bookmarklet in your web browser’s bookmarks toolbar, visit a web page you want to analyze and then click/select the bookmarklet. WriteClearly will analyze the web page and display a panel with the results. (To inspect only part of the text on a web page, select the text and then click on the WriteClearly bookmark.)

²⁷ Jakob Nielsen, *Lower-Literacy Users: Writing for a Broad Consumer Audience*, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/writing-for-lower-literacy-users/> March 14, 2005 (accessed Nov 9, 2018)



WriteClearly will display Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level²⁸ of the web page along with a summary of the suggestions. By clicking on the “See suggestions” you can review all the suggestions. (The suggestion number is added to corresponding section in the web page as a purple marker.)

1. WriteClearly identifies complex words and suggests simpler synonyms.
2. Short paragraphs are easier to read and understand. WriteClearly identifies long paragraphs and suggests breaking them into several shorter paragraphs.
3. Shorter sentences are better for conveying complex information. WriteClearly identifies long sentences and suggest breaking up into smaller sentences.
4. On the Internet, text in ALL CAPS is associated with “yelling.” Excessive use of ALL CAPS makes text harder to read. WriteClearly identifies excessive use of ALL CAPS and suggests avoiding the practice to improve readability.

²⁸ Wikipedia, Flesch–Kincaid Readability Tests
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flesch%E2%80%93Kincaid_readability_tests (accessed Nov 9, 2018)

5. Large passages of underlined text look ugly and are hard to read. On the web, underlined text can also be mistaken for a link. WriteClearly catches instances of underlined text and suggests avoiding it to improve readability.
6. Multiple exclamation points should be avoided in professional writing. WriteClearly identifies instances of multiple exclamation points and suggests toning it down.
7. Bold and italics should be used sparingly as they reduce readability of text. WriteClearly identifies excessive use of bold and italics.
8. Don't use "Click Here" for links as it degrades web accessibility of the web page. WriteClearly catches instances of "click here" and suggests avoiding the practice.
9. Images on web pages should have alternative text to make the content understandable in screen readers. WriteClearly displays an alert when a page has images without alternative text.

The development of WriteClearly was funded by a Technology Initiative Grant ("TIG")²⁹ from the Legal Services Corporation ("LSC").³⁰

ReadClearly

Legal web content presents unique challenges for the web author due to complexity of legal information. While rewriting legal content to use plain language is helpful, it is not always possible to eliminate legal terms completely. ReadClearly is a free tool that enables website visitors to look up explanations for complex legal terms on your website. ReadClearly's pre-built glossaries are designed to assist with improving the readability of legal services websites.

It's easy to add ReadClearly to a website. Just add a Javascript code snippet to your website and ReadClearly does the rest. To install ReadClearly please see <https://github.com/openadvocate/readclearly/blob/master/HOWTO.md>.

²⁹ Learn more about TIG <https://www.lsc.gov/grants-grantee-resources/our-grant-programs/tig>.

³⁰ Abhijeet Chavan, Improve Readability of Web Content With WriteClearly, Innovations in Legal Aid, Jan 22, 2018, <https://medium.com/innovations-in-legal-aid/improve-readability-of-web-content-with-writeclearly-3-0-2a2d2f64a74a> (accessed Aug 29, 2018).

Once installed, ReadClearly highlights words that are in its glossary of complex legal terms. The web page visitor can then click on the word to see a plain language explanation.

juvenile court that handled the delinquency or child in need of services case.

When deciding whether to grant the petition, the juvenile court may review:

- The best interests of the child.
- The age of the person during the person's contact with the juvenile court or law enforcement agency.
- The nature of any allegations.
- Whether there was an informal adjustment or an adjudication.
- The disposition of the case.
- The manner in which the person participated in a case or action.
- The time during which the person has been with the juvenile court or with any law enforcement agency.
- Whether the person acquired a criminal record.
- The person's current status.

If expungement is granted, the records may be destroyed or given to the person who requested expungement.

The judge's decision in a case or action.

Was this hint helpful?

Yes No

i

✓

ReadClearly offers a choice of four pre-built glossaries:

1. *Basic English Legal Glossary with Spanish Explanations* (349 terms) For English-language websites. The 100 most commonly used English terms have Spanish explanations to assist bilingual readers.
2. *Common Usage Spanish Legal Glossary* (100 terms) For Spanish-language websites.
3. *Expanded Plain Language English Legal Glossary* (1763 terms) Plain language explanations to assist readers understand advanced-level legal content.
4. *Basic English Legal Glossary* (349 terms).

In addition to the pre-built glossaries offered by ReadClearly, you have the option to use glossaries contributed by other users, or contribute your own. Contributed glossaries can be found in our GitHub repository <https://github.com/openadvocate/readclearly>.

The development of ReadClearly was funded by a TIG from the LSC.³¹

4.4 Building Signage

How can we deliver the message of “welcome, we respect you, whatever situation brings you to our house?”

Building signage should be considered the first step to minimizing an otherwise confusing, frightening experience for first time court users. When people understand a process, they are more accepting to decisions, even if the decision is unfavorable. In the justice system, minor adjustments such as helping court users navigate a courthouse may translate into increased compliance with court orders and enhanced perceptions of legitimacy.³² Ultimately, improving procedural justice through improved signage creates a welcoming atmosphere, helps court users navigate the building more easily, and communicates rules and procedures clearly and respectfully.

Implementing or improving building signage may follow a Why? Where? How? process.

Why should we care or invest in building signage? The referenced study, “Improving Courthouse Signage”, identified the initiative as two primary elements of procedural justice:

- Treating people respectfully; and
- Helping them understand key procedures.

³¹ Abhijeet Chavan, Add Legal Glossaries To Websites with ReadClearly, Innovations in Legal Aid, Jan 22, 2018, <https://medium.com/innovations-in-legal-aid/add-legal-glossaries-to-websites-with-readclearly-3-0-57d62a3baf31> (accessed Aug 29, 2018)

³² RALPH POPE-SUSSMAN, IMPROVING COURTHOUSE SIGNAGE: PROCEDURAL JUSTICE THROUGH DESIGN (Center for Court Innovation 2015).

If a court is using this plain language guide to improve understanding by the court user of court procedures, forms and communication; it is imperative that this goal be extended to the arrival and departure of the court user.

In its publication, “What do Defendants Really Think?”,³³ The Center for Court Innovation found that people are more likely to perceive the justice system as fair when they feel they are treated with respect, understand the process, have opportunities to be heard, and that decision-makers are unbiased.

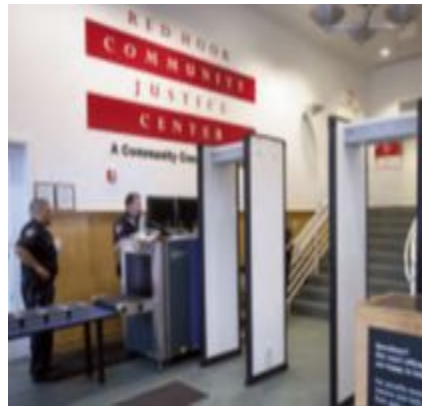
What can we do to achieve this improved understanding?

- Create a welcoming atmosphere through logos and welcoming signage, including the court’s mission in a visible, prominent location;
- Enable court visitors to navigate the courthouse more easily with building directories by the elevator on every floor and clearly identified courtrooms; and,
- Communicate court rules and procedures clearly and respectfully, such as cell phone, dress attire, and recording device policies.

Before:



After:



Where should this improved signage be located? Eye-level, visible signage with well-known terminology will lessen the “fear of the unknown” in the court user.

³³ RACHEL SWANER ET AL., WHAT DO DEFENDANTS REALLY THINK?(Center for Court Innovation 2018), available at <https://www.courtinnovation.org/publications/what-do-defendants-really-think>, accessed November 13, 2018.

Performing a walk-thru of your courthouse with a friend who has never been there will help you see what a new court user sees. Where would they look for directions? In the elevator? Upon exiting the elevator? As you walk down a corridor? At a turning point in the corridor? Don't expect the court user to remember where the arrow was pointing when they exited the elevator. Constantly encourage them that they are going in the right direction with repeated signs with simple labels and legible lettering.

Investing in professional, commercial signs versus typed paper signs tells the court user that he/she is worth the time, effort and investment.

Before:



After:



How can we deliver the message of “welcome, we respect you, whatever situation brings you to our house?”

Be cognizant of court users with limited abilities, whether it is language needs or physical needs. Place signage at a level that someone with a physical disability can easily read. Include signage in languages most commonly used in your area. On the topic of language access, The National Center for State Courts refers to ‘Wayfinding’ in their report and recommendation to California courts.³⁴

³⁴ National Center for State Courts, Wayfinding and Signage Strategies for Language Access in the California Courts: Report and Recommendations, Judicial Council of California (February 2017), available at www.courts.ca.gov/languageaccess.htm, accessed October 19, 2018.

- Include signage that directs court users with impaired hearing on where to go for assistance;
- Assure that signs at elevators and corridors and courtroom entrances have raised and Braille characters;
- Identify those areas limited to court staff in clear language;
- We've discussed using symbols and icons versus wordy documents and forms in earlier sections. Building signage lends itself to these types of signs. Not only do recognized symbols accomplish delivery of the message at first sight, the cost of signage is reduced;



- Rethink language that is common to court staff but confusing to the court user, such as “community supervision.” Replace this term with “probation.”
- Avoid signage that may be confusing. For example, replace “payments” with “court costs and fine payments”; and
- Revise or fine tune signage along the way if you see it is ineffective or misleading.

The Tennessee Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission during its 2012 Clerks' Conference listed easy steps to assisting the self-represented litigant navigate an unknown territory full of uncommon phrases and words.

- Keep sentences to fifteen words or less;
- Never use ALL CAPS or *italics*. This formatting makes words harder to read.
- Use common terms as much as possible. Use 'lawyer' instead of 'attorney'; and,
- Use contractions. Use 'can't' instead of 'cannot.'

Remember that eliminating or minimizing fear of the unknown for the court user allows them to develop trust and confidence in the justice system, even at a time when the outcome is uncertain.

4.5 Training Court Professionals

Within federal agencies, complying with the Plain Language Writing Act of 2010 is measured by Report Cards.³⁵ The Report Card grades federal departments within each agency and advises them how to improve.

The two main criteria are:

1. **Compliance** - Does the agency content submitted fulfill the requirements of the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#)?
2. **Writing and Information Design** - Do the samples consistently make documents and web pages easier to read, understand and use?

Since this concept of using plain language in our courts is not mandated, there are no Report Cards. However, NACM encourages court managers to review current court processes, forms, building signage, websites, and other materials and implement the use of plain language to ensure all communications are easily understood by court customers. Using the Report Card as a guide, courts can make their best effort to comply with the Act even if not mandatory.

³⁵ Center for Plain Language/Reports,
<https://centerforplainlanguage.org/reports/federal-report-card/>

Establish a Plain Language Committee

Creating a governance structure around a large and iterative process is integral to success. When establishing your Plain Language Committee, identify and assign a key member from each department to review the current court processes; forms; and other materials for their respective areas. For example, judicial officers, forms attorneys, clerks of court, and division supervisors (criminal, civil, probate, etc.). This committee would then:

1. Develop a plain language drafting process,
2. Educate respective staff on style and formatting guidelines,
3. Designate persons to oversee ongoing compliance³⁶ with established guidelines,
4. Develop training modules on the usage of plain language,
5. Test new forms and customer service scripts, and
6. Prioritize the forms drafted in plain language.

Communicating the benefits of using plain language in court materials early on in the process will go a long way to change the court culture so that use of plain language becomes systemic in your court.

Design a Checklist for Implementing Plain Language


Design a Checklist for Implementing Plain Language in Court Processes and Forms

Example Checklist

✓ / X	AREA:	ACTION:
	Mission Statement	
	Court Customers	
	Instructions on Courtroom Decorum	
	Public Signage in Courtrooms	

³⁶ Administrative Conference of the United States, Plain Language in Regulatory Drafting, December 2017, <https://www.acus.gov/recommendation/plain-language-regulatory-drafting>, accessed May 9, 2018.

	Juror Education – What to Expect if Summoned?	
	Instructions for Self-represented Litigants	
	Kiosks and Electronic Court Dockets	
	Process for Communicating with a Judge	
	Forms:	
	Court Notices	
	Generic Court Orders	
	Self-Help Documents	
	Attorney Appointment/Reimbursement Forms	
	Juror Instructions	
	Grand Juror and Petit Juror Oaths	
	Personnel:	
	Orientation Materials	
	Staff Training Manuals	
	Job Descriptions (Roles & Responsibilities)	
	Strategic Plan	
	Addressing the Media	
	Public Speaking	
	Telephone Etiquette	
	Social Media Etiquette	
	Coordinator’s Oath and Understanding the Canons	
	Filing a Grievance	
	Example:	
√	Court Notices	<p>Can the notice be easily understood after the first reading?</p> <p>Does the notice tell the person receiving it what he or she must</p>

		<p>do, if anything?</p> <p>Could images be used in the notice to help further communicate the message? For example:</p> <p>Affix postage </p> <p>See other examples in the Court Forms section 4.1.</p>
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Test New Forms and Customer Service Scripts

Employing the methods for testing discussed in Chapter 3, test your court forms and customer service scripts (verbal communication) to ensure that others easily understand the information being communicated.



5 Tools and Resources

1. [Center for Plain Language](#): They offer resources to help government agencies and businesses write so clearly that their intended audience understands what they are saying the first time they read or hear it.
2. [FDA: Plain Writing: It's the Law!](#) Explains [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#), and explains how to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal Agencies to the public by promoting clear communication that the public can use and understand.
3. [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#): The Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) is a community of federal employees dedicated to the idea that citizens deserve clear communications from government.
4. [How Users Read on the Web](#), by NN/G Nielsen Norman Group, *Evidence-Based User Experience Research, Training, and Consulting*: Research shows that 79 percent of the test users scanned a web page, and 16 percent read word-by-word. This article explains how to write scannable text for web content.
5. [Illinois Courts Access to Justice Standardized State Forms](#): Illinois standardized state forms examples.
6. [Legal Writing in Plain English](#), by Bryan Garner: This book takes a practical approach to legal writing. The author has three decades of experience working with law students, lawyers and judges. Practical exercises accompany each section of the book.
7. [Plain English and the Law](#): The legal consequences of clear and unclear communication. This booklet highlights the importance and benefits of clear communication from a legal perspective. Explains how plain English can save time and money by avoiding unnecessary legal costs.

8. [Plain Language Disaster Sheets to help people affected by natural disasters:](#) Sample print flyers.
9. [Plain Language Examples](#), *British Columbia Web Content and Development*: The British Columbia government lists plain language examples, word lists, and usage.
10. [ReadClearly](#): ReadClearly identifies complex legal terms on your website and displays a plain language explanation.
11. [SRLN Brief: Plain Language Resources for 100% Access](#): As described by the federal government on plainlanguage.gov, plain language is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it.
12. [The Office of the Federal Register \(OFR\) Plain Language Tools: Writing Resources](#): The Office of the Federal Register (OFR) offers resources to help writers comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and Presidential Memorandum of June 1, 1998 – Plain Language in Government Writing.
13. [Transcend–Plain Language Tips for Courts & Law](#): Transcend, a translation agency, offers plain language tips.
14. [Transcend–Plain Language Works for Pro Per Litigants](#), by Maria Mindlin and Katherine McCormick: An article about plain language and how it works.
15. [Usability.gov: Improving the User Experience: Writing for the Web](#): People read differently online than they do when they read print materials – web users typically scan for information. This article helps explain how to write specifically for web pages.
16. [Webinar: How to Incorporate Plain Language into Court Forms, Websites, and Other Materials](#): The National Association for Court Management, in partnership with the Self-represented Litigation Network (SRLN) provides this webinar.
17. [WriteClearly](#): Use WriteClearly to test the reading grade level of a web page.

18. [Writing For Self Represented Litigants. A guide for Maryland's courts and civil legal services providers](#): Addresses writing for the needs of self-represented litigants in order for them to better understand what they are reading.
19. [Behavioral Insights Communications Checklist from the Department of Labor](#): Quick tool to make sure you are communicating effectively.
20. *Article*: [Plain Language in Government Suffers in 2017](#): Highlights the importance of usable FAQ pages and infographics on websites. Provides insight into what the Center for Plain Language looks for when assessing government web pages and resources for usability. Includes seven criteria upon which the Center assesses resources.
21. *Webinar*: [Infographics: Plain Language Considerations](#): Discussion about effective plain language infographics. Discusses considerations and questions as you plan creation of an infographic. Moves to understanding effective use of data in infographics. Ends with a discussion of effective communication with target audience through infographics.
22. [Writing for Self-Represented Litigants](#): A guide produced by the Maryland Access to Justice Commission.
23. *Article*: [Self-Help, Reimagined](#): Discusses the social science behind the use of plain-language and graphics in instructional materials in the law.



5.1 Plain Language Alternatives to Commonly Used Terms

A

(an) absence of	no, none
abundance	enough, plenty, a lot (or say how many)
accelerate	speed up
accentuate	stress
accommodation	where you live, home
accompanying	with
according to our records	our records show
acquire	buy, get
accordingly	so
accrue	add, gain
accurate	correct, exact, right
achieve	do, make
additional	added, more, other
address	discuss
adjacent to	next to
adjustment	change, alteration
admissible	allowed, acceptable
admit	agree
adopt	approve
advantageous	useful, helpful
advise	recommend, tell
advise	tell, say (unless you are giving advice)
affix	add, write, fasten, stick on, fix to
aforesaid	this, earlier in this document
aggregate	total
alter	change
alleviate	ease, reduce
allocate	divide, share, give
alternative	(a) choice, (the) other
amendment	change
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear, plain, obvious
appear	seem
applicant (the)	you
apprise	inform, tell
appropriate	proper, right, suitable
approximately	about, roughly
as a consequence of	because
ascertain	find out, learn
as of the date of	from
assist, assistance	aid, help
attain	reach, get, win
attempt	try
attorney	lawyer

B

benefit
 by means of
 belated
 beneficial
 bestow
 breach
 by means of

help
 by, with
 late
 helpful, useful
 give, award
 break
 by

C

calculate
 capias
 capability
 caveat
 cease
 circumvent
 clarification
 commence
 communicate
 competent
 compile
 complete
 completion
 comply
 components
 comprises
 (it is) compulsory
 conceal
 concept
 concerning
 conclude
 concur
 condition
 consequently
 considerable
 constitutes
 consult
 contains
 contemplate
 contrary to
 correspond
 counter
 courteous
 cumulative

work out, decide
 warrant
 ability
 warning
 finish, stop, end
 get round, avoid, skirt, circle
 explanation, help
 start, begin
 talk, write, telephone (be specific)
 able, can
 make, collect
 fill in, finish
 end
 do, follow
 parts
 is made up of, includes
 (you) must
 hide
 Idea, plan
 about, on
 end, finish
 agree
 rule
 so
 great, important
 is, forms, makes up
 talk to, see, meet
 has
 think about
 against, despite
 write
 against
 polite
 added up, added together

D

decree
 deduct

order
 take off, take away

deem
defer
demonstrate
depart
directive
designate
desire
determine
detrimental
develop
disburse
discharge
disclose
discontinue
discuss
disseminate
dissolution
documentation
domiciled in
duration
during which time
dwelling

E

effect modifications
elapse
elect
eligible
eliminate
emphasize
employ
empower
encounter
endeavor
enumerate
enquire
ensure
enter
equitable
equivalent
erroneous
establish
evaluate
evident
examine
exceedingly
excessive
exclude

believe, consider, think
put off, delay
prove, show
leave
order
appoint, choose, name
want, wish
decide, figure, find
harmful, damaging
grow, make
pay, pay out
carry out
show
drop, stop
talk about
give, issue, pass, send
divorce
papers, documents
living in
time, life
while
home

make changes
pass, go by
choose, pick
allowed, qualified
cut, drop, end
stress
use
allow, let
meet
try
count
ask
make sure
approve, order, sign
fair
equal
wrong
set up, prove, show
test, check
clear
check, look at
highly
too many, too much
leave out, do not include

excluding
exclusively
exempt from
exhibit
expedite
expeditious
expend
expertise
expiration
expire
extended

F

fabricate
facilitate
factor
failed to
favorable
feasible
final
finalize
forfeit
formulate
forthwith
forward
frequently
function
fundamental
furnish
furthermore

G

generate
grant

H

has the capacity
henceforth
hereby
herein
heretofore
herewith
however

I

identical
identify
imply

apart from, except
only
free from
show
hurry, speed up
fast, quick
pay, spend
ability
end
run out
long

make, make up
ease, help
reason
didn't
good
can be done, workable
last
complete, finish
give up, lose
plan, devise
now, at once
send
often
act, role, work
basic
give, send
then, also, and

produce, give, make
give

can, is able
from now on
now, by this (or edit out)
here
until now
below, here
but

same
find, name, show
suggest, hint at

immediately
impacted
Impairment
implement
in accordance with
in advance
in addition
inasmuch as
inappropriate
in case of
in conjunction with
in consequence
in excess of
inform
in lieu of
in order that
in order to
initial
initiate
in receipt of
in regard to
in relation to
in respect of
in the absence of
in the course of
in the amount of
in the event of
in the near future
in the neighborhood of
issue
is applicable to
is authorized to
is of the opinion
it appears
it is known that
it is requested

J
justify

L
liaison
(a) large number of
legislation
locality
locate

at once
affected, changed
problem
carry out, start
by, following, per, under
before
also, besides, too
since
wrong, unsuitable
if
and, with
because, as a result
more than
tell
instead
for, so
to
first
start
get, have, receive
about, concerning, on
about, with, to
about, for
without
while, during
for
if
shortly, soon
about, around
give, send
applies to
may
thinks
seems
I/we know that
please, we request, I request

prove

discussion
many, most (or say how many)
law
place, area
find, put

M

magnitude	size
maintain	keep, support
majority	most
manufacture	make
marginal	small, slight
material	relevant
materialize	happen, occur
maximum	greatest, largest, most
minimum	least, smallest
modify	change
monitor	check, watch
moreover	and, also, as well
motion	request

N

narrate	tell
necessitate	cause, need
negligible	very small
nevertheless	but, however, even so
notify	let know, tell
notwithstanding	in spite of, still
numerous	many

O

objective	aim, goal
obligate	bind, compel
observe	see
obtain	get, receive
occupation	job, work, business
occur	happen
operational	working
on behalf of	for
on numerous occasions	often
optimum	best, ideal
option	choice
originate	start, came from
otherwise	or
outcome	result
outstanding	unpaid

P

parameters	limits
participate	join in, take part
perform	do
permissible	allowed
per annum	every year

permit
pertaining to
peruse
portion
position
possess
possessions
possibility
practically
precede
presently
preclude
predominant
prescribe
preserve
previous
principal
prior to
probability
procedures
proceed
procure
proficiency
programmed
prohibit
projected
promptly
promulgate
provide
provisions
purchase
pursuant to

R

recapitulate
reconsider
reduce
reflect
regarding
relocation
regulation
reimburse
reiterate
relocate
render
remain
remuneration
render

let
about, of, on
read, read carefully, look at
part
place
have, own
belongings
chance
almost, nearly
go before, come before
now, soon
prevent
main
set, fix
keep, protect
earlier, past
main
before
chance
Rules, way
go ahead
get, obtain, arrange
skill
planned
ban, stop
estimated
quickly, at once
issue, publish
give, offer, say
rules, terms
buy
by, following, per, under

sum up
think again about, look again at
cut
say, show
about, of, on
move
rule
repay, pay back
repeat, restate
move
make, give, send
stay
pay, payment
give, make

represents
request
require
requirement
reside
retain
review
revised
revocation

S

selection
shall
significance
similar
simultaneously
solely
solicit
specified
state
statutory
subject
submit
subsequently
substantial
sufficient
supplement
supplementary
supply
surrender
surmise
susceptible

T

terminate
thereafter
thereby by that,
therefore
therein
thereof
thereto
the undersigned
thus
timely
transfer
transmit
transpire

shows, stands for, is
ask
must
need
live
keep
look at (again)
new, changed
cancel, withdraw

choice
must
meaning, point
like
at the same time
only
ask for
given, written, set
say, tell us, write down
legal, by law
the, this, you
send, give
after, later, then
large, much
enough
go with, add to
extra, more
give, sell, deliver
turn in
guess
open to

end, stop
then, afterwards
because of that
so
there
its, their, of that
to that
I
so, therefore
prompt
change, move
send
happen, occur

U

ultimately
unavailability
undersigned
undertake
unilateral
unoccupied
utilize

in the end, finally
lack of
I, we
agree, promise, do
one-sided, one-way
empty
use

V

validate
verbatim
viable
variation
vice
virtually
visualize

confirm
exact
practical, workable
change
instead of, versus
almost (or edit out)
see, predict

W

warrant
whatsoever
whereas
with reference to
with the exception of
witnessed
whether or not
with reference to
with regard to

call for, permit
whatever, what, any
because, since, but
about
except for
saw
whether
about
about, for

—

About the Authors

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Aurora Zamora is employed with the Texas Office of Court Administration as a Court Services Consultant. In this role Aurora trains court personnel and court clerks and provides technical assistance to any of the courts in Texas in the area of case management and court processes. Aurora has been a member of the National Association for Court Management since 2003.



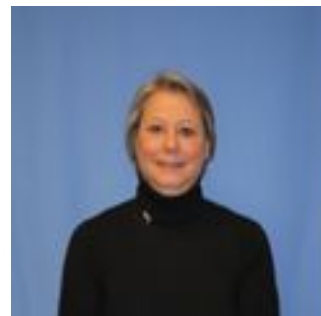
Alyce Roberts, Co-Chair

Alyce Roberts works in the Administrative Office of the Alaska Court System where she serves as the special projects coordinator. In this capacity, she is the Administrative Office's primary liaison with clerks of court and is responsible for the management of statewide projects. Ms. Roberts has been a member of the National Association for Court Management since 2009, is currently serving on the NACM Board, and is the Communications Committee Chair. She is a Fellow of the Institute for Court Management (2010).



Terri Borrud

Terri first began working with forms and Form Management Programs over 38 years ago while employed with a large insurance company in Madison, Wisconsin. She set up their first "forms management program" for their home office and 7 branch offices. She has worked in various capacities of forms management over the years as an analyst, designer, sales representative and manager. She joined the Wisconsin Supreme Court, Director of State Courts office in the Court



Operations Department in 2005 where she manages nearly 1,000 court forms. She also staffs the Wisconsin Records Management Forms Committee which consists of judges, court commissioner, clerks of court, juvenile court clerk, register in probate, district court administrator, a member from the state bar and district attorney's office. This committee creates and maintains all the circuit court forms through an extensive review and approval process.

Abhijeet Chavan

Abhijeet Chavan has over 20 years of technology consulting experience with public sector, higher education, and non-profit clients. He is a consulting manager with *Tyler Technologies, Inc.* Abhijeet was named to the *Fastcase 50* list of global legal innovators in 2017. He regularly presents at conferences on access to justice and artificial intelligence. Abhijeet sits on committees of the *State Bar of California*, *American Bar Association*, and *National Association for Court Management*. Previously, Abhijeet served as chief technology officer of a consulting firm; created legal tools *WriteClearly*, *ReadClearly*, and *DLAW*; co-founded a media business; and managed geographic data projects. Abhijeet has graduate degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Renee L. Danser, Esq.

Drawing on her knowledge of justice system operations and the pressures on the justice system, Ms. Danser joined the *Access to Justice Lab* at *Harvard Law School* to incorporate rigorous research into improving access to justice. Ms. Danser believes that for our research to be impactful, we must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the communities reviewing and incorporating it. Using her court management and non-profit leadership experience, Ms. Danser encourages courts and the justice community to think about their needs and the needs of their



users and how to successfully balance those interests. Reach Ms. Danser at rdanser@law.harvard.edu.

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Colleen Horvath is a Technical Writer and Analyst for the *Maryland Judiciary* in Annapolis, Maryland. Previously, she was a documentation specialist working for large private law firms in Information Systems and Training.



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