

## Plain language in 2012: what's new?

What you'll find in this document:

- Some context before you look at the handout
- Handout distributed to participants in the June 3 sessions, with a few details added

### Some context before you look at the handout...

In June 2012, I gave two one-hour sessions at the Editors' Association of Canada annual conference, one in English, one in French. The topic: the latest developments in the world of “plain language” or clear communications.

I shared the latest, up-to-date news I had learned at the Clarity International conference just 10 days before. It was very fresh news, right off the press!

As you'll see in the handout, we discussed 9 main topics. You may notice some common trends emerging here and there. Here are a few:

- Looking at the definition, the IC Clear diploma and Karen Schriver's summary of research: It's a **multidisciplinary** field, focused not only on writing, but also on visual design and how people read and use texts.
- Looking at the IC Clear diploma and the European Commission: It's a **multilingual** and **multicultural** field, with initiatives in a variety of countries and languages. (Note: The international associations, Clarity and PLAIN, tend to operate in English. But they have members all around the world, who work in their respective languages.)
- Looking at Karen Schriver's project and Joe Kimble's book: Our field is **grounded in research**, both about what impacts reading and comprehension (which is very helpful to us as writers, editors, trainers, etc.), and about the benefits of producing better documents.

It may not be obvious from the handout, but we also talked about some Canadian projects, as well as “plain language” in French.

The participants were a wonderful public, bright, curious, involved, knowledgeable and passionate about language and writing. Many thanks to them all!

I'll conclude this introduction with a tweet from the English session (from Adrienne Montgomerie). It's a great take-away from our discussion:

Plain language is geared toward "intended reader",  
not just most simple reader possible or lack of jargon.

# **Plain language in 2012: what's new?**

EAC Conference, Ottawa 2012

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Note: To see Web resources about the topics below, go to [www.delicious.com/djclear](http://www.delicious.com/djclear), and use the tag **EAC.conf.2012**

## **1. Context: professionalizing plain language**

- International Plain Language Working Group
- Definition of plain language, training and certification for professionals, research, standards, etc.
- See: the working group's first recommendations, published in the Clarity journal

## **2. A new, wider definition of plain language**

"A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find, understand and use what they need."

- Created by the International Plain Language Working Group
- First published in 2011, revised in May 2012
- Some key elements : focused on readers, focused on outcomes , combines many aspects of the text (not only words and sentences, but also structure and visual elements)

## **3. IC Clear : Diploma in Clear Communications**

- One-year diploma, multidisciplinary: clear writing, visual design and testing
- For people who already have a bachelor's or master's degree
- Main partners: European universities... and Simon Fraser Univ., in Vancouver!
- Currently in development, pilot project in 2013, launch in 2014
- See: [www.icclear.net](http://www.icclear.net)

## **4. Summary of existing research (Karen Schriver)**

- Looking at 500+ research papers, from many disciplines (education, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, etc.)
- About how people read, and how writing, design and technology impact readers
- See (not right now but later): a book

## 5. Legislation

- Plain Writing Act (U.S. Federal government)
- See: [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov), for info about implementing the Act, plain language manual, videos, etc. (My favorite video: passive voice!)
- Project from Clarity: listing all laws drafted in plain language or requiring plain language

## 6. European Commission

- *Clear writing* campaign (formerly *Fight the fog*)
- New pilot project to add a quality-control step (editing)
- See: *Clear Writing* booklet (in 20+ languages), *Writing for translation*, and a song!

## 7. Book *Writing for dollars, writing to please*

- New edition of Joe Kimble's book
- Case studies showing the benefits of plain language
- See: the previous edition is free online. You can order the new edition online and preview the table of contents and introduction.

## 8. Want to find out more?

- Join the LinkedIn group Plain language advocates, led by Cheryl Stephens
- Check out the three major plain language associations:
  - Plain Language Association International: has a discussion forum, tends to be for practitioners
  - Clarity: focused on plain legal language; publishes a journal twice a year; see previous issues free online
  - The Centre for Plain Language: news, blog, ClearMarks Awards (great examples!)
- Explore my favorite links on Delicious ([www.delicious.com/djclear](http://www.delicious.com/djclear) )

## 9. Upcoming events

- Fall 2012: October 13 is International Plain Language Day
  - Consider organizing a local event
- Fall 2013 (to be confirmed): PLAIN conference (possibly in Canada?)
- Fall 2014 (to be confirmed): Clarity conference in Belgium, combined with the launch of the IC Clear program