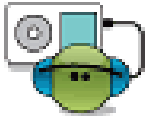


**Title****Author****Summary****Objectives****Keywords**

# 1. Plain language

## By Petri Ilmonen

### 1.1 Definition

Plain language has been adapted in its content, vocabulary and structure so that it is easier to read and understand. Its purpose is to help people that have difficulties in reading and/or understanding the common language. (The Plain-Language Centre, FAIDD, Finland)

### 1.2 Target groups for plain language

Target groups for plain language include people who for different reasons have difficulties with reading:

- foetal and childhood developmental disorders (e.g. genetic)
- illness and aging
- social environment (e.g. belonging in a linguistic minority)
- a combination of the above.

When more than one of these reasons occur at the same time, the need for plain language is even more pronounced.

**Persons who can benefit from the use of plain language, are persons**

1. with disabilities (persons with developmental disabilities, autism, aphasia, dysphasia or multiple disabilities).\*
2. with a profound difficulty in reading and/or writing (dyslexia).\*
3. who are senior citizens of the society (alzheimer, dementia and very old persons).\*

4. whose mother tongue is not the language that is widely spoken in the country they are living in (immigrants and their children, bilingual persons).\*
5. receiving rehabilitative treatment for mental problems, marginalized persons and those who are not accustomed to read\*
6. school children.

\* Typically not all, only a certain part of the group

### **Estimated size of reader groups**

The need for plain language varies in different age groups:

- children and young people 4–8 %
- people of working age 4–6 %
- people over 65 years of age 10–20 %

The target groups of plain language consist of about 4–7 % of the Finnish population. A small part of them is fully illiterate and another small part needs communication that supports and replaces speech. No extensive studies on the need of plain language have been conducted in Finland.

### **1.3 How to write in plain language?**

A summary of the principles:

#### **1. Content:**

- Consider what you are going to say and to whom
- Define the topic
- Pay careful attention to the logic of the text.

## 2. **Vocabulary:**

- Use common and well-known vocabulary
- Avoid long words (not always possible in Finnish)
- Explain difficult or abstract expressions.

## 3. **Simple structures:**

- Look closely on the grammatical cases and verb structures and replace with easier ones
- Write straight to the person by avoiding the passive voice, participles and participial phrase constructions

## 4. **Short sentences:**

- Only one important issue in one sentence
- prefer direct word order (e.g. Peter has a laptop)
- contain the most important issue in the main clause and the specifications in the subordinate clause
- Make sure that the sentences are connected logically.

## 5. **Coherency of the text:**

- Make the sentences and paragraphs consistent with each other by using different means of coherency

- See that the structure of the text is logical
- Bind the subject to time and place, be concrete, give examples.
- Avoid references to other points in the text
- Use positive language
- Use grown-up language when writing for grown-ups.

## 6. The layout makes the difference

### a. the text:

- Align the text to the left and keep rows short (max 60 marks)
- Lay only one sentence per row
- Do not hyphenate
- Do not put too much information on one page, use lot of empty space (including empty rows between the chapters)
- Do not write your text in capital letters (this is only acceptable when the person doesn't know any other text type).
- Use only bolding and underlining when highlighting the text
- Use font types that are easy to read and understand
- Do not use more than two different font types (Grotesque fonts on titles and headings (e.g. Arial, Helvetica, Gill Sans) and Romans fonts on the normal

text (e.g. Times New Roman, Goudy))

- The font size (13-16) and the line spacing (font size + 2, 3 or 4 depending the actual font size) should be big enough
- Use a structure of two columns: left column for text and the right one for pictures (or text, only when necessary)
- Limit the use of colours. Dark text on a light background is the easiest.

#### **b. The pictures**

- Use simple and clear pictures. Add a picture, when ever needed to support the understanding of the text
- Lay the pictures next to the context
- Use only pictures that do not conflict with the text and that have a good printing quality
- Avoid pictures that have been taken from a strange angle
- Crop details that are not needed or could mislead the reader
- Always check that the size of the pictures are as realist as possible (A mouse cannot be bigger than a screen) and that the pictures do not conflict with the text.
- Do not put pictures on the background (or any other elements that just have the purpose of entertaining)

The principles of plain language are suggestive by nature and they take on different emphases with different text types. It would not be meaningful to write out strict and detailed instructions that would apply to every type of text.

The principles of plain language have been studied in Finland for decades. The conception of how language can be adapted into easier form has changed in the course of years when more extensive data have been gained. International cooperation has also played a key role, and the principles of plain language in Finland have mainly been developed according to two international guidelines:

- *Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Material* by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) managed by the UN.

- *Make it easy*. Guidelines for plain language developed by the European Association of Inclusion International, which is a non-governmental organization that defends the interests and rights of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

### Self assessment tasks



**The text was written in a co-operation with the Finnish Plain Language Centre, FAIDD.**

## 2. Teaching ICT to pupils and students with learning disabilities

A summary of the principles:

Step 1: (evaluating)

To be able to teach right ICT skills (to repeat, to deepen and to learn new skills) and to motivate the learner, teachers should know the level of the learner's knowledge of ICT. This should be

done individually and carefully, to promote and to practice accessible teaching.

#### Step 2: (choosing topics)

Teachers must sort out the ICT skills that are important for the learner (personally for himself, from the curriculum point of view and/or just to support basic learning skills e.g. reading and writing). Teachers should not teach only those ICT skills that they know by themselves. Nor the skills that they hardly ever use or know by themselves – if that is the case every reasonable action or enough time should be taken to study the skills and the right terminology before teaching SEN students. This is one of the most important paradigms.

#### Step 3: (planning and implementing)

ICT skills should be divided into smaller partial skills. There should be enough time to learn a partial skill well enough, before continuing to another. This shows to the learner that there is no rush to learn nor need to go forward before the skill is really learnt - and that everybody's individual learning speed is taken under consideration.

ICT teaching should always start from something that is familiar to the learner. It is also important to take a notice of the special interests and wishes of the learner (disability, hobbies, likes and dislikes etc.). With this kind of approach, the learner will gain more motivation to learn ICT skills. It's more useful to all! Put yourself in the learner's shoes and think how motivated you would be, if you would need to make a presentation about something that you can't really stand of.

Teachers should pay attention to the terminology that they using during their teaching. The terminology should be the same all the time, not just in spoken language but also in all written materials (in study books, instruction/works sheets and exercise files, but also on the white or black boards). It would be perfect, if the used

terminology would be in plain language. If that is not possible, the used terminology should be widely well known (not found by the teacher him/herself). Unfortunately this is still a challenge for most of the teachers, even for some ICT teachers, but a very relevant and important issue to be understood and taken into consideration when teaching ICT skills to students with special needs.

ICT Lessons should always be carried out in a positive atmosphere, where errors can be made and even silly questions can be asked. Learners should also be encouraged and supported to help out their peers, since this will promote the positive output of learning ICT. Teaching should not be only about ICT skills – it should always have a theme from the curriculum or from the everyday life of the learner(s). Before teaching a new skill, teachers should explain and show to the learners, what they will learn during the lesson. The tasks and targets (What and why) should be open and explained to the learners too. This will come handy later on, when self evaluation and setting the goals by learner him/herself will take place. ICT teaching can be fun, effective and concrete (take the examples from the real world, when explaining e.g. filing the computer files).

Don't touch the mouse – do not do things for them! Just explain verbally, have supportive material available (for those who can read) and let them try out by themselves – but never leave a learner in a despair. And don't forget that the key to learn ICT-skills is simple, it's only about repeating, repeating and repeating, particularly when teaching ICT-skills to learners with special needs. But the most important part is to remember to give positive and individual feedback to all learners, even from minor things or improvement – this will raise their motivation to learn even more ICT skills.

Step 4: (evaluation)

Evaluation is a vital part of teaching and learning. Make evaluation an important part of you ICT lessons – something that happens all year round. Make it easy and simple for everyone including you – since there is hardly neither enough of time nor a point of doing proper surveys. The evaluation talks at the end of every lesson are an easy and rational way of organizing feedback. Another good way is to have short (2-3 questions) evaluation sheets with smiley faces available for collection (needs proper guidance and instruction for SEN students). A mixture of evaluation talks, evaluation sheets and short personal interviews during or after the lessons is the best way to gain quality feedback, new ideas and mostly to make the learners think, what they have learnt during the lesson (can also be asked at the opening of the next lesson).

#### Works cited

