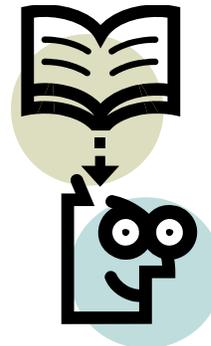


Part One
Presented by:
Miriam Vincent
Plain Language
Action & Information
Network

1

Overview

- **Definition of plain language**
- **Plain language techniques**
- **Examples**
- **Next steps**



2

What Is Plain Language?

Communication that your audience or readers can understand the first time they hear or read it.



3

What Are the Main Elements of Plain Language?

- **Logical organization**
- **The active voice**
- **Common, everyday words**
- **Short sentences**
- **“You” and other pronouns**
- **Lists and tables**
- **Easy-to-read design features**

4

Focus Outward -On the Reader

☹ NOT...	☺ BUT...
What do I want to say?	What does the audience need to know?
How can I protect my interests?	How can I serve the interests?
What can I do to impress you?	What can I clearly express to the audience?

5

Coast Guard Boating Information

- **CO Detector Update:**
- **The Coast Guard has conducted an investigation to determine what carbon monoxide (CO) detection devices are available to recreational boaters, such that, when installed and activated could reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO -THAT SILENT KILLER. A variety of technologies is available for detecting the presence of CO on boats and should be considered by recreational boaters to reduce their risk of injury or death while boating.**
- **(72 words)**

6

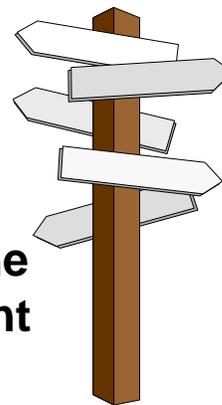
Coast Guard Boating Information

- **Carbon monoxide is a silent killer. The Coast Guard recommends that you use a carbon monoxide detection device on your boat to reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO. You may choose from a variety of devices. (39 words)**

7

Use Headings

- **Allow the reader to quickly find relevant information**
- **Break up the information**
- **Increase blank space on the page**
- **Informative headings help the reader navigate the document**



8

Keep Things Short

No one wants to read material like the next slide.

9

Executive Order 12988

With respect to the review of existing regulations and the promulgation of new regulations, section 3(a) of Executive Order 12988, "Civil Justice Reform," 61 FR 4729 (February 7, 1996), imposes on Executive agencies the general duty to adhere to the following requirements: (1) Eliminate drafting errors and ambiguity; (2) write regulations to minimize litigation; and (3) provide a clear legal standard for affected conduct rather than a general standard and promote simplification and burden reduction. With regard to the review required by section 3(a), section 3(b) of Executive Order 12988 specifically requires that Executive agencies make every reasonable effort to ensure that the regulation: (1) Clearly specifies the preemptive effect, if any; (2) clearly specifies any effect on existing Federal law or regulation; (3) provides a clear legal standard for affected conduct while promoting simplification and burden reduction; (4) specifies the retroactive effect, if any; (5) adequately defines key terms; and (6) addresses other important issues affecting clarity and general draftsmanship under any guidelines issued by the Attorney General. Section 3(c) of Executive Order 12988 requires Executive agencies to review regulations in light of applicable standards in section 3(a) and section 3(b) to determine whether they are met or it is unreasonable to meet one or more of them. DHS has completed the required review and determined that, to the extent permitted by law, this final rule meets the relevant standards of Executive Order 12988.

10

Revised Version

This rule meets the applicable standards in sections 3(a) and 3(b)(2) of Executive Order 12988.

"The most valuable of all talents is never using two words when one will do."
~Thomas Jefferson

11

Use Short Paragraphs

- **Limit a paragraph to one subject or step**
- **Smaller “bites” of info are easier to digest**
- **Aim for *no more than 7* lines**

12

Use Short Sentences

- **Treat only one subject in each sentence**
- **Avoid complexity and confusion**
- **Aim for 20 words per sentence *or fewer***



13

Eliminate

Excess words

**Some common sources of wordiness
(we'll review only some of these today)**

- **Passive voice**
- **Redundancies**
- **Prepositional phrases**
- **Hidden verbs**
- **Unnecessary modifiers**
- **Failure to use pronouns**



14

Eliminate

Excess content

Think about your purpose, your topic, and your audience. If content doesn't further your goals, don't include it!



15