Webinar Presentation:
November 10, 2015

Drop the jargon
Use plain language to connect with your audience

NACIO
National Association of County Information Officers

NACo
National Association of Counties
Webinar Presenters

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Webinar recording and evaluation survey

• This webinar is being recorded and will be made available online to view later
  • Recording will also be available at:
    • www.naco.org/webinars
    • www.nacio.org

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About NACIO

- NACo affiliate group – County Public Information Officers
  - www.nacio.org
  - www.facebook.com – search for National Association of County Information Officers
  - Twitter – nacio66
Drop the jargon
Use plain language to connect with your audience

Brian Lieb
Hennepin County
Recent U.S. history

1970 IBM memo
1979 Carter executive order
1998 Clinton memorandum
2010 Plain Writing Act

Warren Buffett approves
What is plain language?

With everything you publish, your audience should be able to:

- **Find** what they need
- **Understand** what they find
- **Use** that information to meet their needs
Does it work?

Yes. Results include:

• Increased reader satisfaction
• Increased access to services and benefits
• Increased compliance with regulations
• Decreased costs
Example – drug labels

**Drug Facts**

**Active ingredient** (in each tablet)  
Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg

**Purpose**  
Antihistamine

**Uses**  
Temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergies:  
- Sneezing  
- Runny nose  
- Itchy, watery eyes  
- Itchy throat

**Warnings**  
- Ask a doctor before use if you have  
- Glaucoma: a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis  
- Trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland

**Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives**

**When using this product**  
- Drowsiness may occur  
- Alcohol may increase drowsiness

**Avoid alcoholic drinks**

**Additional warnings**  
- Alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness

**Do not drive, operate machinery**

**Exclamation mark**

**Other Information**  
- Store at 20-25°C (68-77°F)  
- Protect from excessive moisture

**Inactive ingredients**  
D&C yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch

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**Allergy Tablets**

**INDICATIONS:** Provides effective, temporary relief of sneezing, watery and itchy eyes, and runny nose due to hay fever and other upper respiratory allergies.

**DIRECTIONS:** Adults and children 12 years and over—1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours, not to exceed 6 tablets in 24 hours or as directed by a physician. Children 6 to 11 years—one half the adult dose; break tablets in half every 4 to 6 hours, not to exceed 3 whole tablets in 24 hours. For children under 6 years, consult a physician.

**EACH TABLET CONTAINS:** Chlorpheniramine Maleate 4 mg. May also contain may differ from brands:

- D&C Yellow No. 10, Lactose, Magnesium Stearate, Microcrystalline Cellulose, Pregelatinized Starch

**WARNINGS:** May cause excitability especially in children. Do not take this product unless directed by a physician, if you have a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis, or if you have glaucoma or difficulty in urination due to enlargement of the prostate gland. May cause drowsiness; alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase the drowsiness effect. Avoid alcoholic beverages, and do not take this product if you are taking sedatives or tranquilizers without first consulting your physician. Use caution when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery. As with any drug, if you are pregnant or nursing a baby, seek the advice of a health professional before using this product. Keep this and all other products out of the reach of children. In case of accidental overdose, seek professional assistance or contact a Poison Control Center immediately.

**Store at controlled room temperature 2°-30°C (36°-86°F).** Use by expiration date printed on package. Protect from excessive moisture. For better identification keep tablets in carton until used.
Example – jury instructions

Studies show that most jurors do not fully understand instructions from judges.

- Majority thought “malice aforethought” meant a murder must be committed with a mallet

**Before:** “A preponderance of the evidence”

**After:** “More likely than not”
Example – visiting County Home School

Before (530 words with corrections jargon)

• “Custodial adults and other approved visitors …”
• “Visits shall be subject only to limitations necessary to maintain order and security …”
• “A temporary visitors badge will be displayed on each person …”
Example – visiting County Home School

After

• Concise (289 words)
• Clearer language
• Scannable

Getting there

Metro Transit bus route 804 provides access to the facility.

Who can visit?

Visits are limited to:

• Parents
• Step-parents
• Legal guardians
• Custodial adults
• Children of residents

Visiting rules

• Visitors may check in 15 minutes before the start of the visit.
• Visitors must present a valid picture identification (e.g., driver's license, state-issued ID card, passport, or a photo ID issued by social services, employer, military or school).
• All visitors must go through a screening process (metal detector and pat search) to enter the facility beyond the lobby.
• No one may wait in vehicles on County Home School property.
• Personal items such as purses, wallets, and cell phones are not permitted in visiting areas:
  • Lockers are provided for storage during visits.
  • Items brought for a resident will be searched and inventoried by correctional staff.
• Visitors are restricted to designated visiting areas.
Example – 500px photo site

Fine print includes plain language explanations

**User Conduct** (legal version is 571 words):

“Basically,
You cannot use our site to post pornographic material, harass people, send spam, negatively vote on all photos, and do other crazy stuff. Be reasonable and responsible, don't do anything stupid and you'll be fine.”
Example – revised IRS account notice

Changes to your 2004 Form 1040
Amount due: $24.60

Based on the information you provided, we changed your 2004 Form 1040 to show:
• Filing status to head of household
• Total exemption amount
As a result, you owe $24.60.

What you need to do immediately
If you agree with the changes we made:
• Pay the amount due of $24.60 by March 23, 2009, to avoid additional penalty and interest charges.

Payment
• Make your check or money order payable to the United States Treasury.
• Write Social Security number (999-99-9999), the tax year (2004), and the form number (1040) on your payment and any correspondence.

Amount due by March 23, 2009
$24.60

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
KANSAS CITY, MO 64999-0010

Contact information
If your address has changed, please call 1-800-999-9999 or visit www.irs.gov.
• Have your check on hand if you have written any correspondence. Write your Social Security number (999-99-9999), the tax year (2004), and the form number (1040) on any correspondence.

Hennepin County
Examples of non-plain language

From a letter to a body donor

Dear ____,
The receipt of your pre-death whole body donation consent form is acknowledged.
Why does plain language work?

1. Lifestyle – we are busier than ever
2. Biology – we read in patterns

It doesn’t matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letter are in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without problem.
How to apply plain language

The goal is **clear, concise and scannable**

- Include only what the audience needs
- Organize so key information is featured
- Use descriptive headings and white space
- Avoid acronyms, jargon and odd capitalization
- Use personal pronouns
Clear, concise and scannable

Texas.gov

Welcome
Welcome to the Texas Driver License Renewal and Change of Address system.

Services
- Renew your driver license and/or identification (ID) card
- Change the address on your driver license and/or ID card

What You Need
- A printer to print your temporary driver license or ID, which is valid for 45 days. If you do not have a printer, you can renew by phone: 1-800-DL-RENEW (1-888-307-3036)
- A valid credit card (Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express)
- Your current Texas driver license or ID card
- Your Social Security number

Fees
- Renewal of driver license (with or without changing address): $25
- Renewal of ID (with or without changing address): $16
- Renewal of driver license with motorcycle (with or without changing address): $33
- Change of address only for driver license or ID: $11

This online service is provided by Texas.gov, the official website of Texas. The price of this service includes funds that support the ongoing operations and enhancements of Texas.gov, which is provided by a third party in partnership with the State.
Clear, concise and scannable

Hennepin.us

Absentee voting
You can vote early by using an absentee ballot, instead of voting in person at the polling place on Election Day.

Check absentee ballot status for state or federal elections
Online absentee ballot request

Contact
hc.vote@hennepin.us
Phone: 612-348-5151
Fax: 612-348-2151
300 South 6th Street
D12 Skyway level - Government Center
Minneapolis, MN 55401
M-F: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Map
Clear, concise and scannable

Suburban Hospital
Johns Hopkins

welcome to Suburban Hospital!

You are a key part of your health care team. The more you are involved actively in your care, the better your care will be.

- Speak up if you have any questions or concerns.
- Pay attention to the care you are receiving.
- Educate yourself so you fully understand your diagnosis and treatment.
- Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.
- Know about your medicine. Medicine errors are the most common health mistakes.
- Participate in all decisions about your treatment plan.
Clear, concise and scannable

Suburban Hospital
Johns Hopkins

my health care notebook

Why?
Being an active part of your health care team helps you feel better and helps you get even better care. Starting on Day 1, you can keep track of important information and questions. My health care notebook helps you stay informed about your care and prepares you for going home.

Who?
This is your notebook, so start using it right away. If you don’t feel well, your family care partner can start using it. Ask your nurse if you need help with information you do not know.

When?
Use my health care notebook from the start to help staff get to know you and to record important information.

How?
- Fill out my health care notebook where you can.
- Talk to your health care team.
- Write down any questions you have.
- Use the back pocket of this folder for important information sheets, such as your

my medicine while i am in the hospital

When you are in the hospital
- Ask your nurse about any medicine you don’t recognize.
- If you want, your nurse can give you a list of the medicines you are taking in the hospital. The list may include medicines you will not take when you go home.

When you go home
- The medicine you take may change.
- Look at your After Visit Summary (AVS) to know what medicine you must stop and what you must take.
- Only take medicine listed on your After Visit Summary (AVS) until you talk to your primary care physician.
- Before you leave, review your medicine with your nurse and ask questions.

- My medicine questions for my nurse, physician or hospital pharmacist

What’s Inside?
My health care team

Hennepin County
If the county agency finds that an individual has received a payment to which the individual was not entitled, whether or not the payment was due to the person’s fault or misrepresentation, the individual shall be liable to repay the county the total sum of the payment to which the individual was not entitled.
If the county agency finds that it gave you money you were not meant to have, you must pay it all back.
How to develop an effective program

• **Make a commitment**
  – Official policy and dedicated staff

• **Build capacity**
  – Resources and training for front-line staff
How to develop an effective program

• Interact with your audiences
  – Promote program and encourage feedback

• Keep the ball rolling
  – Continue to engage front-line staff
  – Evaluate and improve
Plain language resources

- www.plainlanguage.gov
  Federal plain language information
- www.centerforplainlanguage.org
  National plain language organization
- www.hennepin.us/writingguide
  Hennepin County resource with writing tips and information on plain language
Questions

• You may ask a question using the questions box on the right side of the webinar window
Thank You for participating

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