

## The power of plain and simple

Whenever you're explaining information—whether it's cooking instructions or cancer treatments—clarity is everything. Don't lose your audience in a labyrinth of complicated jargon and convoluted wording. Instead, your text should resemble a Saskatchewan highway: clear, straightforward and a cinch to navigate.

So how do you go about building that highway? Plain language writing boils down to three key concepts:

### **Simplify**

- *Use familiar words.* Think about how people normally talk. You don't purchase a sufficient amount of food for a weekend at the cottage. Instead, you buy enough. For a list of three-dollar words and their everyday equivalents, see page two.
- *Avoid jargon.* Unless you're speaking to specialists, keep the lingo, acronyms and industry-speak to a minimum. Sure, an audience of marine biologists will understand the term "cetaceans." For the rest of us, though, say "whales and dolphins."
- *Shorten sentences and paragraphs.* Stick to one idea per sentence. Paragraph length can vary, but break up any that stretch on too long. By inserting a hard return, you're giving your readers a little mental breathing room.
- *Clear away clutter.* Can you say the same thing in fewer words? You'll find a perfect example in the "keep it simple" sidebar on the next page.

### **Clarify**

- *Make it easy to visualize.* If you've got a complex idea to convey, use a concrete example or an analogy to help your readers wrap their heads around it.
- *Use infographics and images.* In many cases, a well-designed graphics can get your point across far more quickly and clearly than words alone.
- *Explain unusual words.* Sometimes you just can't avoid technical jargon or uncommon terms. If that's the case, promptly define them using plain language.

### **Organize**

- *Break up dense text.* Use headings, sub-headings and bulleted lists to help readers navigate your copy.
- *Make it logical.* Step back and look at your overall structure. Is it organized logically? Does it flow naturally from section to section? Make sure you haven't left out any key pieces of information or included things that aren't relevant to your readers.

*Need a little help? At Cadmium Red, we're experts in clear messaging. Contact us at [info@cadmiumred.ca](mailto:info@cadmiumred.ca).*

### Keep it simple

**Instead of...**

“For the purpose of demonstrating how to utilize Company ABC’s Bread-O-Matic, the instructions that follow will provide guidance to customers”

**Try...**

“How to use your Bread-O-Matic”

### Use familiar words

**Instead of...**

accomplish  
assist  
at a later date  
attempt  
commence  
component  
contains  
currently  
demonstrate  
ensure  
exhibit  
for the purpose of  
identify  
in addition  
in order to  
in the event of  
is responsible for  
objective  
prior to  
provide  
provided that  
purchase  
regarding  
represents  
require  
submit  
sufficient  
utilize  
with regard to

**Try...**

do  
help  
later  
try  
start  
part  
has  
now  
show  
make sure  
show  
to, for  
find  
also, too  
to  
if  
handles  
aim, goal  
before  
give  
if  
buy  
about, of  
is  
must, need  
give, send  
enough  
use  
about