


PLAIN LANGUAGE

for

Postsecondary Settings

Making a document understandable is
the job of the writer—not the reader.



This handbook was created on the traditional unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation. Thank you to the Lheidli T'enneh people for graciously hosting this work.

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CNC



2022

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Introduction

If you work at a postsecondary institution, your job probably involves a lot of information. You might feel overwhelmed sometimes with all the emails and documents you have to read.

You probably also have to produce a lot of writing. Colleagues, students, and the general public should all be able to read and understand the writing you produce.

It can be frustrating trying to read a document that is not clearly written, or that uses a lot of jargon or legalese. *Have you ever found yourself rereading sentences or paragraphs, trying to understand what the writer meant?* Or maybe you have put off or just avoided reading a document because it seemed too complicated.

This handbook will show you how to make your writing easier to understand, even when you are writing about complex topics. It will give you tips on how to make your sentences clearer and show you how to organize your documents so they are more effective for the reader.

What is plain language?

01

Plain language is also called plain writing or plain English. It provides information in a way that means your audience can understand it the first time they read or hear it.

It is related to the concept of universal design, where products and systems are designed in a way that the largest number of people can use them.

Both plain language and universal design are ways to serve the largest number of people with one “product” (document, system, environment). This approach benefits people of all ages and abilities.

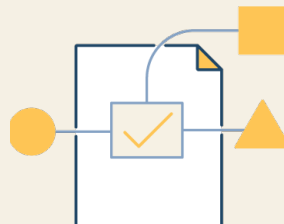
With plain language, a reader should be able to...




find the information they need, quickly and easily



understand that information the first time they read it



use that information to meet their needs



Plain language is more than just tips and tricks for presenting information more clearly. The philosophy behind plain language is that people have the right to understand information, no matter how well they read. With a plain language approach, the responsibility for clear communication is on the writer, not the reader.

Why is plain language important?

49% of Canadian adults struggle to understand complex text.¹ If we do not use plain language to write our documents, almost half of Canadian adults will not understand them. Using plain language ensures that the biggest number of people will have access to the information they need.

We cannot assume who will struggle with text based on education. Reading skills do not always correspond to education levels: 27% of Canadian adults with postsecondary education struggle to understand complex text.²

However, plain documents are better for everyone, not just people who struggle with complex text. Cognitive load is the amount of information someone can hold in their working memory at one time.³ People who have to read a lot of information for their jobs tend to have a high cognitive load, which

can lead to reading fatigue. You can help reduce your colleagues' reading fatigue by making sure your documents are written in plain, clear language.

Plain language writing also saves everyone time. If people understand your writing the first time they read it, they will not have to ask you questions to clarify what you meant, and you will not have to spend time correcting the mistakes they make because they did not understand what you wrote.

Plain documents...

- make it more likely people will follow directions correctly
- reduce reading fatigue and cognitive load
- decrease the chance of miscommunication
- save time for everyone
- provide equity and access

Plain language myths

MYTH

Plain language is just condensing the amount of text and using shorter words.

reality

Plain language is more than just making your text shorter. Among other things, it is about choosing words and arranging them so that your meaning is clear to the biggest number of people. Sometimes you will need to write more sentences and use longer words to make your meaning clear. For example, a short web page heading that says "Transfer Partnerships" is not as clear as the longer, more descriptive heading, "Postsecondary Institutions You Can Transfer To."

"Even though hamburger is a three syllable word, it is the best word for its purpose. While ilk is just one syllable, it is not plain. Aspect is short, but in many contexts it sounds bookish or too formal." (Cheryl Stephens)⁴

MYTH

Plain language documents are only for people who cannot read very well.

reality

Plain language documents help everyone read and gather information more quickly and more accurately. People with high literacy do not want to read confusing or convoluted

writing! Plain language saves busy people time, money, and annoyance.

MYTH

People will not take documents seriously if they are written in plain language.

reality

People want to understand what they are reading. Therefore, your goal in writing should be clear communication.

Studies have even shown that plain language writing can make people think you are more intelligent.⁵

“No one will ever complain because you made something too easy to understand.” (Tim Radford)⁶

MYTH

Plain language is too simplistic for use in legal documents and contracts.

reality

The point of legal writing is to be precise, clear, and unambiguous. Wordy, rambling legalese is hard to understand and creates confusion and ambiguity. Many legal firms have adopted a plain language approach because their clients and judges want to understand what they are reading.

“Plain language helps expose errors. In contrast, legalese tends to hide inconsistencies and ambiguities, because errors are harder to find.” (Peter Butt)⁷

02

Plan before you start writing

The point of plain writing is to put the reader first. That is the reason you are writing—to communicate information to someone.

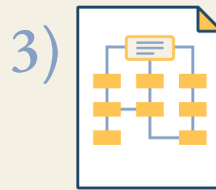
You need to figure out—



what the reader needs



what information is essential, and



how to organize it so it is most useful to the reader.

With a reader-centred approach, it is important that you think about your audience before you start writing. Planning does take time, but it will save you time later.

Questions to ask yourself before you get started

Who is my audience?

- What is their literacy level?
- Is English their first language?
- How much do they know about my topic?

Why am I writing this document?

- to instruct (for example, give step-by-step directions)
- to persuade (for example, to change current behaviour)
- to inform (for example, to tell them about a new policy, procedure, or service)

What do I need to say?

- What is essential?
- What is nice to know, but not actually necessary in this document?

How should I organize the information?

Depending on your audience's needs and your purpose...

- you can decide what is most important and put that at the beginning
- you can use chronological order (for example, step-by-step instructions)

How should I present my information?

- Does it need pictures or diagrams?
- Should it be large print?
- Does it need to be translated?
- Will it be mostly digital, or should there be a print option available?
- If there will be a print option, should it be a flat sheet, a pamphlet, or a booklet?

See Appendix A: Planning Checklist

Keys to effective writing

03

The point of plain language writing is to help your reader find, understand, and use the information they need. Here are a few ways you can do that most effectively.

Organize information in a way that makes sense to the reader

Usually, you should lead with the information that is most important *to your readers*. If you have to include other information that is not as important or applicable to your reader, it should go later in the document. Put yourself in the place of your readers: if you were in their situation, what would you want to know first?

Remember that each paragraph should be organized around one main idea (or several linked ideas). When you want to write about another idea, or when you are writing about complicated information, start a new paragraph.

Use headings and other tools to help your reader find information

Use section headings to break up text and provide a quick reference for readers to skim information for what they need. In a longer document, include a table of contents. Use bullet lists instead of long lists in a paragraph.

Use a conversational tone and address the reader directly

Usually, there is no good reason to use a formal tone with your readers. Your writing will be clearer and more understandable if your sentences sound good when they are spoken out loud. Unless you have a very good reason for writing formally, use a conversational tone when communicating to readers.

To be clear: the opposite of formal is not “chatty, full of slang and inappropriate language.” It is *informal and conversational*. One example of informal style is starting sentences with *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*. Many people were taught that this is wrong, but it is not—it is simply informal. It is fine in informal writing and can be helpful in shortening sentences.

Using a conversational tone means you should address your reader directly and use words like *you*, *your*, *we*, and *our*. If your document is intended for students, do not use the third person word *students*. Write *you*.

For example, this paragraph from a course syllabus uses the third person:

Students who require academic accommodations as a result of a disability should advise both the instructor and Accessibility Services. Students requiring support should familiarize themselves with the Accommodations for Students with Disabilities policy.

The audience for a course syllabus is primarily students. There is no need to address them in third person. A plain language approach would re-word the paragraph to address the reader:

If you need academic accommodations because of a disability, you should tell your instructor and Accessibility Services. You should also read the Accommodations for Students with Disabilities policy.

Notice that this re-worded paragraph also replaces the words *require* with *need*, *advise* with *tell*, and *familiarize* with *read*. Section 5 of this booklet discusses a plain language approach to word choice.

Even though contractions like *don't*, *won't*, *it's*, and *you're* are informal, and can create a friendly tone, they can also be difficult for readers whose first language is not English. Depending on your audience, you may want to avoid contractions.

Keep it positive

Negative wording can come across as hostile and uninviting. Whenever possible, use positive rather than negative wording. For example, instead of telling people what they *will not* be able to do if they *do not* complete a certain action, tell them what they *will* be able to do if they complete the action successfully:

NEGATIVE

If you fail to submit the documentation by April 1, you will not be considered for the program.

positive

You must submit the documentation by April 1 to be considered for the program.

It is appropriate to use negative wording sometimes: for example, to provide warnings or emphasize danger. Just use it sparingly. Make it a conscious choice with a clear rationale.

Keep it concrete, not abstract, and use examples that relate to your readers' experience

It is better to make abstract concepts as concrete as possible.

(Concrete words refer to physical things that we can perceive with our senses.) If you do have to refer to philosophical or abstract concepts in a plain language document, try to connect these ideas to something physical immediately afterwards. Examples are a good way to illustrate your point.

Choose examples that relate to your readers' experience and show how the topic could apply to them.

04

Structuring your sentences

Limit the amount of information in one sentence

If you are starting a new idea, do not just tack it on to your current sentence. Start a new sentence.

Keep most of your sentences relatively short

A good general rule is to keep sentences between 15 and 25 words long. This is not an absolute rule, though. It is good to have a variety of sentence lengths—just make sure your longer sentences are well structured, with clear word choice.

Be aware: just because you are keeping your sentences relatively short does not always mean you should have fewer of them. You

may actually need to add more information (more sentences) in order to clarify your meaning. It is better to have more sentences that are clear than one long sentence that is confusing.

Keep your sentences active

The most basic parts of a sentence in English are:

Subject—the person or thing doing the action

Verb—the action

Active sentences are easiest for a reader to understand. An active sentence puts the subject first, followed closely by the verb:

active

The committee reviews all proposals.

Who is doing the action? The committee. Therefore, *committee* is the subject. What is the action? Reviewing the proposals. Therefore, *reviews* is the verb. The word order in the sentence is *subject*, then *verb*.

If we reverse the order of the subject and verb, it makes the sentence passive:

passive

All proposals are reviewed by the committee.

In a passive sentence, the reader has to wait till the end of the sentence to find out the subject (who did the action). If there are too many words between the subject and the verb, it can be confusing for the reader.

Sometimes if the subject is not important, or you do not know the subject, it makes sense to use passive voice. If you do use the passive voice, make sure you are using it for a specific effect.

Choosing your words

05

Use ordinary, everyday words that your reader would use in conversation

Use words your readers are likely to know. Familiar words will help ensure your reader is getting the correct meaning from your document. You can still use interesting words! Just avoid using fancy ones for the sake of being impressive.

Also, remember that shorter words are not always better. The clearest word is the best word to choose, regardless of length.

See Appendix B: Choosing Everyday Words for suggestions on word replacements.

Replace wordy expressions with single words

See Appendix C: Replacing Wordy Expressions for a list of common wordy expressions and simpler alternatives.

Explain specialized and technical terms

Every sector has its own specialized language. The postsecondary setting is no different. Some examples of specialized postsecondary terms:

- admission requirements
- credential
- grade point average (or GPA, which is an initialism—see on next page)
- prerequisite
- transcript

If you need to use special terminology, make sure you provide a definition— preferably within the sentence or in the next sentence. Remember that your audience will include people who do not have all your knowledge about postsecondary systems.

Write out acronyms or initialisms the first time you use them

An acronym is a word formed from the first initial of each word in a phrase. SCUBA (self contained underwater breathing apparatus) is an example of an acronym. An initialism is similar, but each letter is pronounced separately. CPU (computer processing unit) is an example of an initialism.

Postsecondary education has a lot of acronyms and initialisms. Sometimes it is easy to forget that other people may not know what they mean. That is why it is important to spell them out fully, at least the first time we use them.

Use they/them as a gender neutral pronoun for a hypothetical person whose gender is not known

In the past, writers were encouraged to use *he* or *she*, *he/she*, or *s/he* as gender neutral pronouns in hypothetical situations. The result was policies that looked like this:

If the student has not paid the remainder of his/her tuition by the deadline, he/she may be removed from the course.

In recent years, there has been more awareness that gender is not binary and some people use *they* and *them* as their pronouns, rather than *he* or *she*. Now, we regularly use *they* and *them* as singular gender neutral pronouns, or when we do not know the person's pronouns. The most gender inclusive version of this policy would look like this:

*If the student has not paid the remainder of **their** tuition by the deadline, **they** may be removed from the course.*

Notice that the verb changes to agree with the subject *they*. (In other words, make sure you write “they are” and not “they is,” even when using “they” as a singular pronoun.)

The use of *they* as a gender neutral singular pronoun in English has a long history, dating back to the 1300s. In the 20th century, it was seen as grammatically incorrect, but with a better understanding of gender inclusivity, it is now widely accepted and used.⁸

Another gender inclusive option is to make the subject (in this case, “students”) plural:

*If **students** have not paid the remainder of **their** tuition by the deadline, **they** may be removed from the course.*

Designing your document

06

The objectives of plain design (like plain language) are:



to present information in a clear, organized way



to improve readability (how easily a document can be understood)



to increase or support the reader's understanding of the text

You are trying to create a document that is visually appealing and easy to read.

When you design your document, think about:

- how and where you will place text and images on the page
- which typefaces (fonts) you will use
- what colours you will use, and where
- what images you will use

Visual hierarchy

Visual hierarchy is the art of placing elements on the page to emphasize what is important and in what order they should be read.

DO

- Do make sure everything on the page is placed deliberately.
- Do use contrast to establish visual hierarchy: for example, different colours, sizes, weights of text.

DO NOT

- Do not place elements randomly on the page.
- Do not crowd the page with clutter (too much text or too many images).
- Do not make all text the same size, because your reader will not know where to look first.

Proximity and alignment

Proximity is the amount of distance between elements in a design. Alignment is the way that elements are lined up with each other.

DO

- Do group related items together.

- Do use bullets when listing elements.
- Do use a strong alignment, like left or right alignment.

DO NOT

- Do not put too much white space between related items.
- Do not use centre alignment unless there is a specific design reason.
- **Accessibility tip:** Do not justify your text. *When you choose to justify, each line of text is spread out evenly between your left and right margin, and each side has a clean edge. As a result, you will have large gaps between words in some lines. This makes the text more difficult for the eye to scan.*

Typography

Typography refers to how letters, text, and symbols are placed on the page. The goal of plain design is to make the text readable and the message clear. Use typography that supports this goal.

DO

- Do use a clear, legible font for body text.
- Do use contrasting colour, size, and weight to draw the reader's eye to what you want them to see first.
- Do make sure headings are sufficiently different from body text: use a different font, weight, size or colour.

DO NOT

- **Accessibility tip:** Do not use all capitals for body text—it is more difficult to read than sentence case. *Our brains read quickly by recognizing the individual shapes of letters and words. Because capitals are all the same shape (rectangles), it is harder to tell the words apart at a glance. This makes things especially difficult for people with dyslexia or other reading difficulties. It may be OK to use capitals sparingly, in headings.*

Colour

Make sure there is enough contrast between text colour and background colour. Choose colours that have appropriate connotations (this can be culturally dependent). For example, in some cultures, red is associated with danger, and in some it is associated with good luck.

Images

Images include things like photos, illustrations, graphs, and charts. *Relevant* images can—

- encourage interest and make documents more pleasant to read

- make text look less overwhelming
- reinforce a message
- provide support for readers with barriers (literacy, attention span)

Accessibility

Be aware of accessibility issues when you are designing your document. Your audience will possibly include people with colour blindness, low vision, and reading disabilities such as dyslexia. It will almost certainly include neurodiverse people. Paying careful attention to design can help make your document more accessible for everyone.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are a valuable resource for anyone working to make their web documents accessible:
<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

Summary

You do not need to be a trained graphic designer to make better documents! Just be aware of these basic principles and take time to think about why and how you are placing elements on the page.

See Appendix D: Design Checklist for more design tips.

07

Testing your document

When time and money are tight, it can be tempting to skip the step of testing your document. However, if your document does not meet your audience's needs, eventually there will be problems, and it may be difficult to find out the real reason for the problem. For example, people might stop applying for a program or they might not use a particular service at the college. Did they just decide the service did not meet their needs? Did they not understand what the service provided? Did they not understand how to access the service?

If possible, it is a good idea to test your document with people who belong to your audience demographic.

Testing readability

When you give your document to a test audience, you can use what is called a Cloze Test Procedure to check readability:

1. Replace every fifth word with a blank. (*You can use the online Cloze Test Creator on the Analyze My Writing website to do this automatically:*
<https://www.analyzemywriting.com/index.html>)
2. Find some people who fit the demographic of your intended audience. Ask them to write the word they think makes the most sense in each blank. They should take as much time as they need.
3. Check each blank and give one point per correct answer. (Even if a word is misspelled, it is still counted as correct.)
4. Divide the number of correct answers by the number of blanks to get a percent score.

The higher the percent score, the more readable the document. If your target reading audience gets an average of 60% or more correct, your document is fairly easy to read. If the score is 40% or under, your document is difficult to read.

Although it is ideal to test with real people, you can also check readability with Word's built-in editor.

To access readability scores, follow these steps:

1. Go to *File > Options*.
2. Select *Proofing*.
3. Under "*When correcting spelling and grammar in Word,*" make sure the "*Check grammar with spelling*" check box is selected.

4. Select *Show readability statistics*.

Once this feature is enabled, check the spelling on your open document by pressing F7 or going to Review > Editor. (Before you can access the readability scores, you will have to go through all the Edit feature's suggestions and either make the changes or click "ignore" on each.)

Word will tell you the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of your document. The Flesch Reading Ease score requires a conversion table for you to know the grade level.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level corresponds to the K-12 grade level in the Canadian and US education systems. For maximum readability, you will want to aim for no more than Grade 8.

(This handbook scored a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 7.8.)

Testing usability

You can also test usability with people in your target audience. Try giving the document to someone in your target audience and asking them a few questions. For example:

- What do you think is the purpose of this document?
- Was this document easy and pleasant to read?
- Was there anything that was not clear or was confusing?
- Can you recommend changes that would make this document easier to understand or more useful?

Remember to keep reviewing and testing documents frequently to make sure they continue to meet your readers' needs.

Appendix A: Planning Checklist

Questions to ask yourself before you get started

Who is my audience?

- students
- the public
- colleagues

What is their literacy level?

- low
- average
- high

How familiar are they with my topic?

- they do not know anything about it
- they have some knowledge
- they are experts

Why am I writing this document?

- to instruct (for example, give step-by-step directions)
- to persuade (for example, to change current behaviour)
- to inform (for example, to tell them about a new policy, procedure, or service)

What do I need to say?

- The essentials: _____

- Nice to know, but not necessary: _____

How will I organize the information?

- most important information first
- chronological order (for example, step-by-step instructions)
- another way: _____

How should I present my information?

- it needs pictures or diagrams
- it should be large print
- it needs to be translated
- it will be digital only
- there should be a print option available
 - flat sheet
 - rack card
 - pamphlet
 - booklet

Appendix B: Choosing Everyday Words

Instead of...	Use...	Instead of...	Use...
assist	help	regarding	about
authorize	allow	reimburse	pay back
disclose	tell	remainder	what is left
discontinue	end	request	ask for
excluding	except	require	need
failure to	if you do not	subsequently	afterwards
indicate	show	sufficient	enough
implement	carry out, do	supplementary	additional
modification	change	undertake	do
outstanding [debt]	unpaid	unilateral	one-sided
permitted	allowed	utilize	use
promptly	quickly		

Appendix C: Replacing Wordy Expressions

Wordy phrase	Simpler alternative
are advised to	should
are required to	must
are responsible to	must
assist with	help
at the present time	now
be accompanied by [documents]	include
consult with	ask
due to the fact that	because
during the period	during
in a timely manner	on time
in case of	if
in order that	so

Wordy phrase	Simpler alternative
in order to	to
in regard to	about
in relation to	about
in the event that	if
no later than	by
on behalf of	for
pertaining to	about
prior to	before
provided that	if
subsequent to	after
the means by which	the way
until such time as	until

Appendix D: Design Checklist

Alignment

- Do not crowd your design with too much clutter (typographic or images). Make sure there is a good amount of white space.
- Avoid large blocks of unbroken text.
- Use a strong alignment (left aligned or right aligned) and avoid centred alignment unless there is a good design reason for it.

Charts/graphs/images

- Make sure all charts and graphs have a legend.
- Be sure all charts, graphs, and images are relevant and improve the reader's understanding of the content.
- **Accessibility tip:** Use relevant icons and images to break up large chunks of text. This helps with accessibility for neurodiverse readers or readers with low literacy.

Colour

- Make sure colours are significantly different from each other if you are trying to use them for contrast.
- Be sure colours relate to the emotions and associations appropriate for your design. This may be culturally specific.
- **Accessibility tip:** Use colours that reduce visual glare: use a neutral background and use less intense colours but maintain good contrast. This can help dyslexic or neurodiverse readers.
- **Accessibility tip:** Avoid using red and green together, because to someone with colourblindness, they can look similar. It is better to use blue/orange, blue/red, or blue/brown.

Proximity

- Group related information together; there should not be too much white space between related items.
- Avoid “trapped white space” (blank space that is boxed in by design elements)

Typography

- Ensure headings and body text are significantly different to provide contrast: for example, different sizes and/or weights, or significantly different fonts.
- Use clear, legible fonts for body text.
- **Accessibility tip:** Consider using a dyslexic-friendly

font like Open Dyslexic or Dyslexie. These are also friendly to many neurodiverse readers.

- Establish visual hierarchy using contrast: a larger/heavier/different coloured font will draw the reader's eye first and indicate where they should start reading or indicate important information.
- **Accessibility tip:** Avoid using all capitals for body text (brief headings may be OK). It takes up more space and is harder to scan because there is less difference between the shapes of the letters.

Appendix E: Before & After Document Example

The following is an example of a document that has been revised and redesigned to meet plain language and plain design guidelines.

logo and heading are misaligned

Why is this in italics?

logo is intrusive here and needs to be moved

COTN

College of the North

Photograph Waiver / Release

misaligned, should not be centred, should have more contrast in size of heading text

The College of the North (COTN) asks for your permission to take one or more photographs of you and to use and reproduce such photographs. By signing this photograph waiver/release you are agreeing to this on the terms set out in this document.

I, _____, acknowledge and agree to permit the College of the North to take one or more photographs of me and to use and reproduce such images, whether in photographic, digital, electronic or any other form, without payment or other compensation to me, for any purposes deemed reasonable by the College of the North. Such purposes may include using my image(s) in College of the North publications, posters, website or other media, for promotional, educational, research, and archival purposes. I understand that my image(s) could possibly be seen worldwide. I AGREE NOT TO SUE THE COLLEGE OF THE NORTH OR ITS EMPLOYEES, VOLUNTEERS, OR REPRESENTATIVES, OR BRING DEMANDS OR CLAIMS OF ANY NATURE AGAINST ANY OF THESE INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS IN CONNECTION WITH ANY OF THE MATTERS REFERRED TO IN THIS WAIVER/RELEASE INCLUDING, WITHOUT LIMITATION, THE USE OR REPRODUCTION OF MY IMAGE(S).

This big block of text should be broken up.

All capitals is hard to read and hostile

Lists should be in bullet form.

Justified text has resulted in gaps between words

I also agree to the inclusion of my name in connection with any of these matters herein: Yes No

"Yes" and "No" checkboxes should not be on separate lines

Personal contact information will be treated as confidential, subject to any statutory requirements or lawful orders or directives, unless you consent in writing to a further request for its release.

lines and texts are misaligned and centred for no good reason

Participant's Name (please print)

Signature _____ Date _____

Email _____ Phone Number _____

(For College of the North Office Use Only)

Activity/Event & Location: _____

Photo Description (of person): _____

Photographer Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Photo Title or Number: _____

Location in (S:) Drive: _____

move this box so participants do not accidentally fill it in



COTN

College of the North Photograph Waiver and Release

The College of the North (COTN) is asking you for permission to

- 1) take photos of you
- 2) use these photos in any COTN publication worldwide, including
 - website
 - posters
 - social media
- 3) use these photos for a variety of purposes, including
 - promotion
 - education and research
 - archives
- 4) use the photos without limitations and without paying or compensating you.

If you sign below, it means you are agreeing to the above conditions. You are also agreeing not to sue or make claims against COTN or its employees, volunteers, representatives, or contractors for using these photos of you.

Your personal contact information will be kept confidential unless required by law or unless you provide written consent for its release.

Your name (please print):	
Signature:	Date:
Phone:	Email:
Do you agree to having your name published with these photographs? (Check one.) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

COTN Staff: Please fill out the back of this form.

For COTN Office Use Only:

Activity/Event & Location:	
Photo Description (of person):	
Photographer Name:	Phone Number:
Photo Title or Number:	Location in (S:) Drive:

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About the Author

Melinda Worfolk is an English instructor in the Academic Upgrading Program at the College of New Caledonia, on the unceded traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation.

Over the last two decades at CNC, Melinda has taught ESL, university transfer English, women's studies, and English upgrading. She has also been involved in various community literacy projects through her work as co-chair of the Prince George Literacy Advisory Committee.

She has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of British Columbia, as well as a Master of Arts in Gender Studies from the University of Northern British Columbia.

One of Melinda's goals as an educator is to improve inclusivity, transparency, and accessibility in postsecondary settings. She believes plain language initiatives are one way to do this.

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“ No one will ever complain because you made something too easy to understand.” (Tim Radford)