



A Plain Language Guide For Content Writers

How to use this guide

Use the framework and tips in this guide when you are planning, writing and editing your content.

Why plain language helps writers

Writing in plain language makes your content clear to your readers. This is because it:

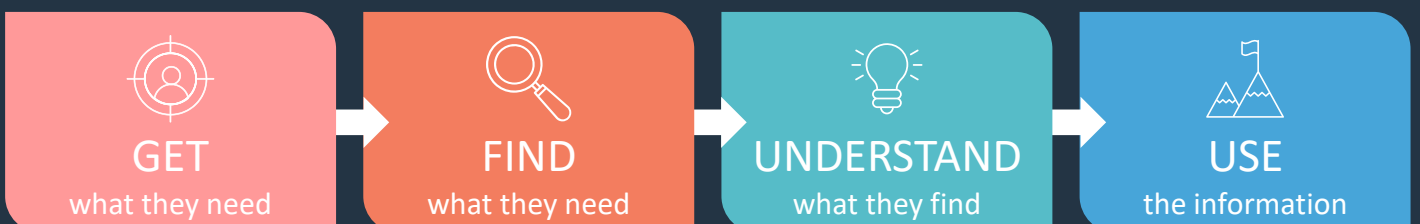
- ▶ Uses words and phrases that readers understand easily, and
- ▶ Is laid out in a way that matches how readers actually read.

A plain language framework to follow

Using the framework below will help. It was developed by the International Standard for Plain Language.

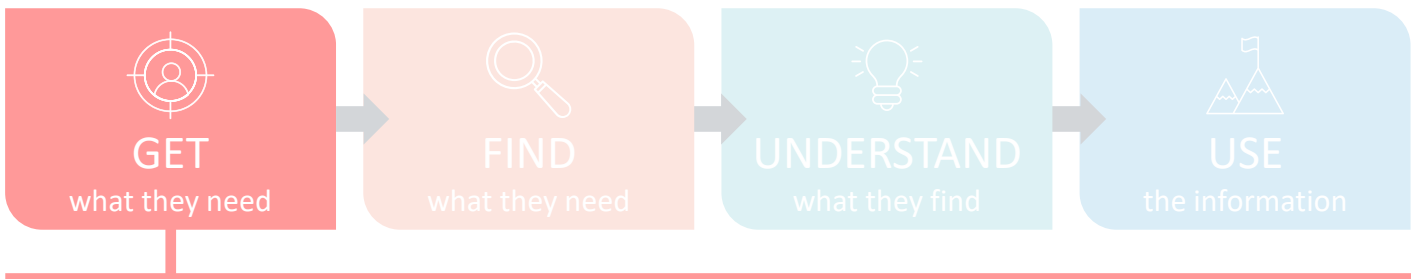
If you follow the framework, you will:

- 1 Give your readers the information they need when they need it,
- 2 Design your content so that readers can find the information they need easily,
- 3 Use words and phrases that readers understand the first time they read them, and
- 4 Help your readers use what they have understood.





How to apply this framework to your writing

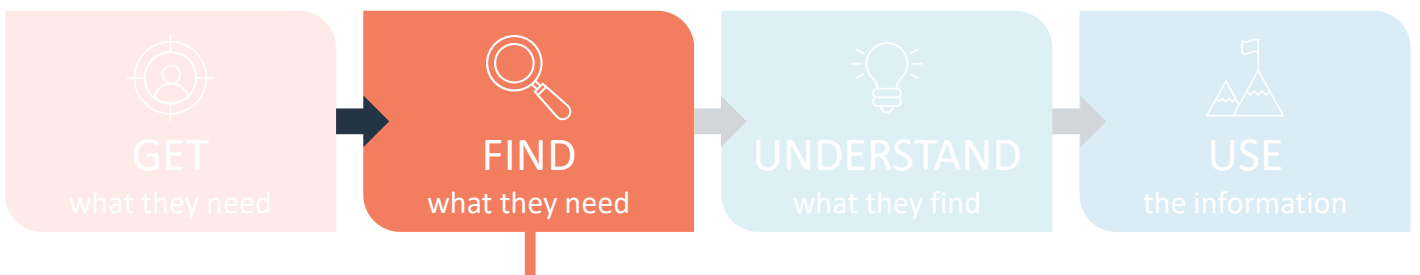


Give The Reader The Information They Need

- ✓ Only give readers the information they need and no more.
- ✓ If you want them to act on your content, give them this information at the beginning.

TIP:

Get to the point. Do not waffle, especially about yourself. Background information should be in the background, not at the beginning.



Help Your Reader Find The Information They Need

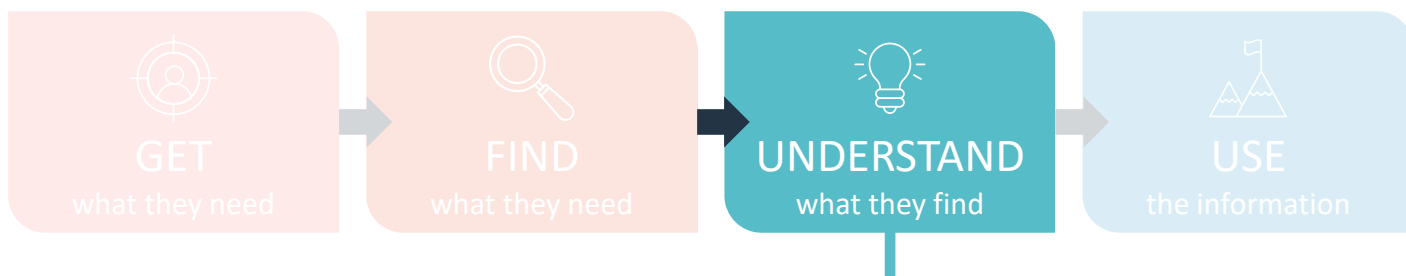
- ✓ Identify the critical information your readers will need if you want them to act on your content.
- ✓ Make sure you don't bury it in a long paragraph.
- ✓ To help them see it:
 - ▶ Use short headings and short bulleted lists.
 - ▶ Use short paragraphs surrounded by white space.
 - ▶ Place information that the reader needs where they would expect to find it.

TIP:

Do not assume that readers will read all your words. They won't. They will skim over and skip and may not read to the end.



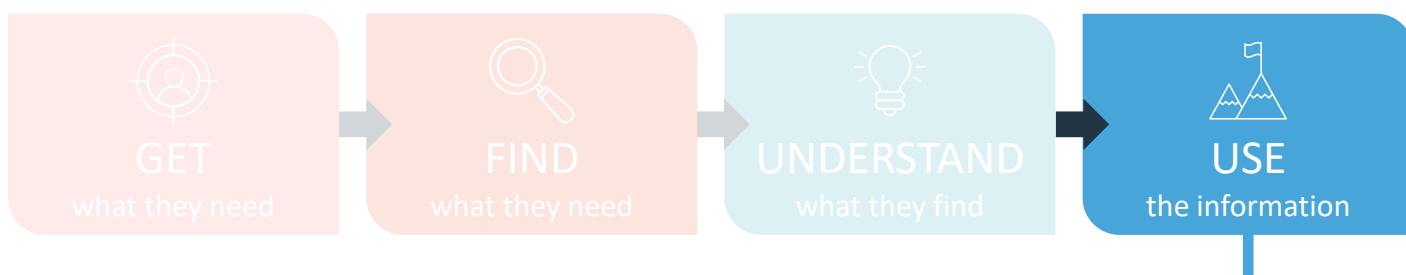
How to apply this framework to your writing



Help Your Reader Understand

- ✓ To start, think about who your typical reader is and why they want to read your content.
- ✓ Use words that will be familiar to them.
- ✓ Use short sentences (about 20 words).
- ✓ Use active sentences ('I wrote this') not passive ('This was written by me.') because active sentences are easier to understand.

TIP: Avoid technical or corporate jargon. If you have to use a specific technical legal term, define it.



Help Your Reader Use Your Information

It is your job as the writer to help your readers find and understand what they need to know or do.

- ✓ To do this, take note of problems you have had with previous content. Review whether plain language principles would have prevented these problems.
- ✓ Read your work out loud to yourself. This is a great way to see whether your sentences are difficult to read or are too long.
- ✓ Test your work with other people to make sure they can use the information. This helps identify jargon and also helps to identify what readers regard as important information.

Here's to writing clearly!

Sue



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Remember

Readers rarely read everything on the page. Instead, they

- ▶ Choose what to read and what to skip,
- ▶ Choose where to start reading, and
- ▶ Choose where to stop.

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