

Plain Language for Arts Organizations

A Guide from Creatives Rebuild New York

By Reid Caplan, Kevin Gotkin, and Isaiah Madison

CREATIVES REBUILD NEW YORK

Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) was a three-year, \$125 million investment in the financial stability of New York State artists and the organizations that employ them. CRNY's funding was anchored by \$115 million from the Mellon Foundation, with \$5 million each from the Ford Foundation and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

CreativesRebuildNY.org


December 2024

Design by Kevin Gotkin



CONTENTS

PART 1: INTRODUCTION	1
PART 2: HOW TO WRITE IN PLAIN LANGUAGE	8
PART 3: HOW TO ORGANIZE A FOCUS GROUP	18
PART 4: WHAT WE LEARNED	22
TO LEARN MORE	23
GLOSSARY	23



PART 1: INTRODUCTION

What is this guide about?

This guide will teach you how to write in Plain Language. Plain language is a way to make writing easier to understand. This guide is for people who work at arts organizations. You might be:

- Someone who runs an organization that shows works of art
- A volunteer at a place for artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- The person who updates the website or social media accounts of an arts organization
- An art teacher

Many other people might find this guide helpful too. For example, disabled artists might learn something from this guide. They can help others make their art more accessible.

There are many ways to write in Plain Language. This guide will not give you one “right” way. The goal is to help you get started. You will find ways to make your work better once you start using Plain Language.

How we write in Plain Language will change over time. This guide was made in 2024. There may be new ideas about writing Plain Language by the time you read this. You should search for recent Plain Language writing from disabled self-advocates. And you should talk to self-advocates about your work.

This guide is written in Plain Language.

Who wrote this guide?

This guide was made by a team of 3 people. Their names are Kevin Gotkin, Isaiah Madison, and Reid Caplan.

Kevin and Isaiah worked together at an organization called Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY). CRNY gave out money and jobs to artists in New York State. This organization closed at the end of 2024 after it gave out all the money it had.

Kevin and Isaiah wanted to learn how to write in Plain Language. They read other guides and learned some new skills. Then, they started working with an expert named Reid Caplan. Reid helped make some of the rules that other people follow to write in Plain Language. They worked on Plain Language at the Autistic Self Advocacy Network starting in 2016. Then they created their own organization called Accessible Academia. Reid helped teach Kevin and Isaiah how to make their Plain Language writing better. Together, they created this guide for other arts organizations.

Reid, Kevin, and Isaiah used documents by disability self-advocacy organizations to make this guide. Some of these organizations are:

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)
- [Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [Self Advocates Becoming Empowered](#)
- [Green Mountain Self Advocates](#)

If you use this guide to create your own Plain Language writing, please tell people how to find the guide. You can call it “Plain Language for Arts Organizations” by Reid Caplan, Kevin Gotkin, and Isaiah Madison.

What is Plain Language?

Plain Language is a style of writing that uses shorter words and sentences. This helps people understand the main ideas more clearly. Plain Language gets written between a 6th and 8th grade reading. Plain Language can help people who have trouble reading.

Plain Language makes writing more accessible. **Accessible** means that something works well for people with disabilities. Accessible writing is writing that disabled people can easily read and understand.

Some good times to use Plain Language are when you need to:

- Send a message to a lot of people you don't know.
- Give information to people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.
- Talk to people who are learning English.
- Make reading easier for people who have trouble concentrating.

There are a lot of other people who will use Plain Language too. Plain language helps everyone learn more about what is important to them.

Imagine you're making a website. You want this website to be easy to use for as many people as possible. That's why the website should be written in Plain Language. You should write in Plain Language anytime you want to talk to a big group of people. Plain Language helps make sure that people actually understand what you write.

It's important to know that Plain Language is a skill. You have to learn how to do it. This means you have to:

- Practice writing in Plain Language
- Get feedback on your work
- Use that feedback to make changes to your writing

The more you write in Plain Language the better you will get at it.

- A big part of Plain Language is choosing which words to use. But it's also about how words look. Plain Language documents should have:
 - A clear structure for which ideas go where.
 - Fonts that are easy to read.
 - Enough spacing between each line.
 - Other ways to make them accessible. For example, Blind people should be able to read your document with a screen-reader.

We will talk more about formatting for Plain Language later in this guide.

Plain Language only uses words. But there is another way of writing that also uses pictures. This way of writing is called Easy Read. Easy Read uses picture icons next to each sentence. This helps people who learn better by looking at pictures. Adding pictures can help make your writing even more accessible.

Plain Language has been around for a long time. Many different countries write in Plain Language. Plain Language started in the 1960s in Sweden. In Sweden, Plain Language is called lättläst. Disability groups in Sweden asked the government to use lättläst. This helped more Swedish people understand things the government wrote.

Then, Plain Language started spreading around the world. In the U.S., Plain Language was first used by People First self-advocacy chapters. In the last 10 years, Plain Language has gotten more popular. Now, a lot more people have heard about and use Plain Language.

“Plain Language” can mean different things based on where you are and who you’re talking to. Different places may have different rules they use to write. But people who need Plain Language to understand things should always help make the rules.

In the U.S., there is a law called the Plain Writing Act of 2010. This law says the government has to write in Plain Language. This can help more people can understand what the government does.

But the government’s Plain Language uses rules the government wrote. They did not talk to people who need Plain Language. So the Plain Language the government writes does not always work well.

The best way to make sure Plain Language is useful for the people you want to reach is by asking those people directly. That means people with disabilities should always be a part of Plain Language writing. We talked to people with disabilities to help make this guide.

There are 7.4 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the U.S. Many people with IDD need Plain Language to understand the information that affects their lives. People with IDD can be experts about Plain Language. Everyone

should look for ways to support with people with IDD.

Why is Plain Language important?

Access is a civil right. Everyone deserves access to information. But many people don't have access to the information they need. For example, 3 out of 10 adults in the U.S. have trouble reading a newspaper.

A lot of people have a bad experience reading documents that are not accessible. When we talk about if writing is accessible, we talk a lot about reading levels. A **reading level** is a score for how well someone reads. Reading levels get scored based on grades in school.

For example, Ben is an adult. But Ben can only read books that say they are written for 8th graders. So Ben gets told he has an 8th grade reading level.

More than half of U.S. adults read at an 8th grade reading level or below. In New York, 3 out of 4 people who get government help read at an 8th grade reading level or below. 3 out of 4 of people in prisons have very low reading levels. This means that confusing writing is even harder for a lot of people who need help.

Plain Language can help you run an organization. For example, Minha is the leader of an organization. She wants to begin a new project at her organization. She asks her team to use Plain Language to talk about the new project.

It takes some time for everyone to agree on the best words to use. But then, Minha and her team all understand what is going on. They can talk and write clearly about their new project. They have text to use on their website and social media. These words helps ASL interpreters prepare for the event where Minha starts the project. And because the project is more accessible, more people get to take part.

These are some ways that writing in Plain Language helps organizations:

- Everyone takes time to agree about what words to use. This helps groups work

better together.

- Writers can use the same words in different documents. This makes things easier to write.
- Staff don't have to feel bad if they don't understand something. They can say something if certain words are confusing.
- Staff will get better at writing as they learn Plain Language.
- Staff may be able to help other organizations start to use Plain Language.
- The organization can talk to people who got left out before. Plain Language can help those people understand what the organization does.
- The organization gets to know the people who use their Plain Language documents.
- People with intellectual and developmental disabilities can lead and make decisions.
- Plain Language fits in with other kinds of accessibility at an organization.
- Plain Language makes it easier to translate writing into other languages.
- Staff get job skills they can take with them when they go to a new job.
- People can understand more about the organization, and what it cares about.
- More people can learn about the organization who didn't know about it before.
- The organization could do bigger and more important things.

Very few arts organizations use Plain Language. You could be an important part of a new movement in the arts!

Artists shouldn't have to read well to be artists. But lots of information about art gets written in complicated ways. This means if someone can't read well, it gets harder for them to be an artist. It gets harder for them to get the money or other resources they need to do art.

For example, **grants** are money that artists can apply for. Artists can use grant money to pay for their art projects. But grant programs make artists fill out an application. The applications are written in ways that are hard to understand. And grant programs expect artists to write about their art using complicated words. That makes it harder for some artists to get grants. Then, those artists have a harder time making money from their

art.

A lot of artists are interested in Plain Language. We had events about accessibility at Creatives Rebuild New York in 2023. One of the events focused on Plain Language. This event had the most people sign up out of any of the events.

You help artists when you use Plain Language. Some people become artists because they find it hard to read. They like painting or photography more because it doesn't use words. But artists get forced to write in confusing ways to get money for their art.

Arts organizations are important in communities. Arts organizations should show their communities that they care about accessibility. That's why arts organizations should use Plain Language.

Some arts organizations help artists find jobs or get money to make their art. These organizations have their own grants, and they look for specific things from artists. But they don't always say clearly what they are looking for. They may only use complicated language to say what they want. Some people might not understand what these organizations want when applying for a grant. This can affect who gets job and money. Plain Language helps people who make grants find more artists and learn what artists need.

Arts organizations sometimes ignore artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). But there are some organizations that focus just on artists with IDD. These organizations can help disabled artists to become self-advocates and earn money. More artists with IDD could get resources if more arts organizations used Plain Language.

Many artists with disabilities get left out of arts organizations. Then, people assume that artists with disabilities do not exist, or don't do good art. This gets used as an excuse to not try to make things more accessible. Then, disabled people keep getting left out.

Arts organizations can have trouble finding enough money to stay open. Sometimes the people who focus on accessibility in an organization leave for another job. This can make it hard to keep accessibility going. Plain Language can help all artists fight for

accessibility. Artists can help make art more accessible even when arts organizations can't.

PART 2: HOW TO WRITE IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

Reid Caplan created a video about how to start writing in Plain Language. It has captioning and audio description. You can find it [here](#). You can use this video if you don't want to keep reading.

Here are some things to remember when you start writing in Plain Language:

- Plain Language can be done! You might think it's too much work or too difficult to try writing in Plain Language. It will get easier once you start. You are doing something really important every time you try. You won't learn how to do it overnight. But you will learn a lot as you get used to it.
- There is no one "right" way. It's more important to try writing in Plain Language than to get it perfect. The steps we list for writing in Plain Language are only suggestions. You could try them the first time you write something in Plain Language. Then, think about what could work better for you and for the people you want to talk to. Soon you will know how to make changes to find your own best work.
- Some people write in Plain Language as their first try writing something. Other times, people "translate" a document that isn't in Plain Language into Plain Language. For example, someone might rewrite a research paper so it is in Plain Language. Here are some tips for translating something into Plain Language:
 - The Plain language version must have all the same information as the non-Plain Language version. If you take out information, you are not helping people learn what they need to know. It is not fair to the people who need Plain Language.
 - You might need to add more information your readers need to know. But you should never skip information because you decide it's too confusing. When you translate a document, you need to translate everything.

- You may need to change the original order. Your readers may need some background information at the beginning. Or, you might need to move more difficult ideas to a later part of the document.
- Define the words that readers need to know. Don't replace a word just because it is a difficult word. For example, if you are talking about kinds of art, you should define each kind. That's because disabled artists need to know the words for different kinds of art. You should not cut out words like "Impressionism" just because they complicated words.
- Replace difficult words that readers don't need to know. It is up to you to decide which words are important. For example, in a paper about art, people might not need to know the word "segregated". You can change that word to say "kept separate" or "left out" instead.
- Sentences in Plain Language need to be short. But you can use as many sentences as you need. Your paper will probably end up being longer in Plain Language than it was before.
- Sometimes people do not have the time or resources to translate a whole paper into Plain Language. When this happens, people might write a Plain Language summary of the paper instead. A summary is a 1-2 page document that says the main ideas of the paper.
- Plain Language summaries are better than nothing at all. But making a summary in Plain Language is not the same as making a full Plain Language paper. Your goal should always be to write a whole Plain Language paper. Making a summary should be a last resort.

More people are starting to use Artificial Intelligence to write in Plain Language.

Artificial intelligence is when a computer does a job that humans normally have to do. Artificial intelligence gets called "AI" for short.

AI is not good at writing in Plain Language. People writing in Plain Language are much better than AI. People know a lot about how to make Plain Language work for everyone. AI does not understand what makes Plain Language different from other ways of writing.

You should try not to use AI when you write in Plain Language. If you have to use AI, think of it as a starting point. AI is not a shortcut. To write good Plain Language, you should use all the steps below.

Step 1: Make an outline

Plain Language starts by making an outline. You can make a document outline by asking yourself these questions:

- What is the main idea?
- By the time they finish reading, what questions do you want your reader to know the answer to?
- Who is your audience? What background information is important?
- How will you split up your ideas?
- What words need to be defined?

It is important to think about your reader's point of view. For each part of the outline, ask:

- Why?
- So what?
- How does this affect me?

Make sure your ideas are laid out in a clear way. For example, you can use headings, sections, and subsections. Figure out which information is more or less important. Put the most important information first.

If you need to make a list, use bullet points. Sometimes people have a hard time keeping track of numbers in a list. If the order of a list is important, you can use numbers.

You may need to “move backwards” to give background information. For example:

Ed wants to write about how AI has been getting more popular these days. But first he has to explain what AI is. He should also talk about how AI has been used in the past.

Here is an example of an outline:

Heading/Topic: Helping people get affordable housing

Section: What is affordable housing?

Sub-sections:

- What does “affordable” mean?
- Who makes affordable housing?
- Who can get affordable housing?

Step 2: Write

Now, turn your outline into sentences and paragraphs. Here are some rules for you to follow:

- Use shorter sentences and paragraphs.
 - Try not to take up more than 1 - 1.5 lines in a Word document in most 12-point font.
 - Split long sentences into 2 smaller ones.
- Use words you see in everyday life. Avoid long, difficult words.
 - Look at this list of the 1000 most-used words. Then, you can use This text editor can check your writing. It tells you how many words you used that are in the top 1000.
 - Use the Simple English Wikipedia to see how others write.

- Write like you are talking to someone.
- Use clear and direct words. Don't use sarcasm or metaphors.
 - There are a lot of sayings that don't make sense to everyone. Leave these sayings out. If there's a good reason to use a saying, explain what it means.
- Write definitions for important words.
 - Sometimes, you will have to use complicated words in your writing. You might need these words so people can understand your main idea. When this happens, write a definition for the word. Giving your readers a simple definition will help you explain the confusing parts.
 - The list of definitions might be called the "Glossary" or "Words to Know". You can put your glossary at the beginning or end of a document.
- Use examples to help readers understand your ideas.
- Explain how an idea affects someone specific. It can be helpful to make an imaginary person to go through an example situation. This helps people understand how something happens in real life.
 - Here is an example of how to make something into an example:

Before: To get a COVID vaccination, you could call your local pharmacy, but they may not have appointments available same-day.

After: John needs a COVID vaccine. He calls the pharmacy near him to make an appointment. But the pharmacy did not have any appointments left that day.
- Don't put in information you don't need.
 - A lot of other things could be related to your main idea. But you should only write about what your readers need to know. Otherwise you could distract your reader from your main points.
 - For example: Lisa is writing a paper about taking care of cats. She could write

about all the different kinds of cats, like tigers and panthers. But people don't need to know about that to take care of their cats. So Lisa should not write about different kinds of cats.

- Don't use the passive voice.
 - Passive voice leaves out information about who or what is doing something. You should use active voice instead. Here is an example of passive vs active voice:
 - Passive voice: When writing, passive voice should not be used.
 - Active voice: You should not use passive voice in your writing.
- It's okay to repeat important information. Saying things more than once helps readers remember things.

Then, look at your writing from the point of view of your reader. Ask the same questions from when you made your outline:

- Why?
- So what?
- How does this affect me?

Step 3: Check the reading level

Once you've written something, you should check the reading level. Sometimes reading level is also called "readability."

You can use a website to check the reading level. But before you do, read through your paper. Then, change any of the harder words that you defined into easier words. For example, you can change the word "Impressionism" to "apple".

You should do this so the words you defined won't affect your reading level score. Since you defined these words, readers will understand them even if they are difficult. So it is

okay to leave these words out of the reading level checker.

If your document is short, you can copy and paste the whole thing. If it's long, you can go by section or paragraph. Try not to put more than 3 pages into the reading level checker at a time. You could even put in every sentence of your paper separately if you want!

Here are some free websites that will check the reading level of your writing:

- <https://hemingwayapp.com/>
- <https://readabilityformulas.com/readability-scoring-system.php>
- <https://readable.com/>
- <https://originality.ai/readability-checker>
- You can also use Microsoft Word. In new versions of Word, go to “Tools” > then click on “Spelling and Grammar”. Then click on “Editor” > then click on “Document Stats” under “Insights.”

There are many different ways to calculate a reading level. You might find more than one score. You can average out the scores to figure out the overall reading level.

For example: Parvati checks the reading level of her paper. She goes through 3 reading level checkers. One of the reading level checkers says her document is a 6th grade level. The other 2 checkers say Parvati's paper is a 9th grade reading level. Overall, Parvati's paper is around an 8th grade reading level.

Most reading level checkers will give you some number scores. These numbers are based on grades in school. For example, Luis put his paper into a reading level checker. The checker says his paper scores a 6.4. That means his paper is a little over a 6th grade reading level. You can round the score up or down to make things easier.

Not all the reading level checkers use the same kind of numbers. You can search for the name of a checker to learn more about how it works.

Try to get your reading level as low as you can. You will need to check again after you

make changes. If you get the reading level to 8th grade or below, congratulations! You just wrote in plain language.

Example: Creatives Rebuild New York

We looked at the reading level of our own organization, Creatives Rebuild New York. We learned the language about our organization was hard to read.

This was the language we checked:

“CRNY is a three-year, \$125 million investment in the financial stability of New York State artists and the organizations that employ them. CRNY provides guaranteed income and employment opportunities for 2,700 artists whose primary residence is in New York State. These two programs work to alleviate unemployment of artists, continue the creative work of artists in partnership with organizations and their communities, and enable artists to continue working and living in New York State under less financial strain.”

The reading level checkers told us you have to be a college graduate to understand those sentences. That’s why we wanted to write this guide.

We also looked at the websites of some of the biggest art organizations in New York State. Plain language gets written at a middle school reading level (6th - 8th grade). But the front pages of their websites were also at a college reading level. Lots of people would have trouble understanding these websites.

If you work at an art organization, check the reading level of your website or other documents. What did you learn?

Step 4: Format your document

Plain Language is not just about the words you use. It’s also about how easy it is to read your document. That means you need to choose designs that work for many people.

How will people read your writing? They might read with...

- A book.
- A print-out.
- A poster.
- A website.
- A document on their computer.

Then, you should format your document while thinking about accessibility. If you are designing a website, you can use help from [The A11y Project](#).

Here are some rules for your formatting:

- Use a simple font.
 - Some good fonts are Arial, Helvetica, and Times New Roman.
 - Fonts that are “sans serif” are easier to read for a lot of people.
 - Use a 14 point font size or higher.
 - Don’t mix fonts. You can choose different fonts for headings and the body of the text. But use only one font in the body. Use only one font for all of your headings.
- Use 1.5 line spacing or higher.
- Align the text to the right side (instead of center or justified).
- Use the same style of bullets in each list you make (like diamonds or arrows).
- Use the same formatting for the same things each time. For example, always **bold** words you define for the first time. Underline or highlight things that you want to stand out. Try not to use italics since they can be hard to read.
- Put a table of contents at the beginning of your paper. This can help people know where to find information in bigger documents.
- Your glossary should be on its own page. You should also put definitions in your paper. You can define a word when you use it for the first time.

- Keep whole paragraphs together. If a paragraph gets split in 2 pages, move the whole paragraph on the next page. You can add “Page Breaks” to do this. You can find this in the “Insert” tab of most word processing programs.
- Choose easy to read colors.
 - Make sure your font color is very different from the background. This is called having high contrast. High contrast is important for people with vision disabilities. You can use a [Contrast Checker](#) to make sure you have high contrast.
 - Don't only use color as the only way to show something. This helps people who have trouble with colors understand what you mean. For example: Joanne is writing a paper to correct people's wrong ideas about disability. She wants to use a red font color to show that a sentence is wrong. It is okay for her to use the red font. But she should also write out “This sentence is wrong.”
- Think about adding pictures to go along with your words. [This guide to Easy Read](#) has examples of how pictures can help.

Step 5: Ask people to read your writing

Getting feedback is an important part of writing in Plain Language. Once you've finished writing, you can ask others to read it. For example, you could ask your best friend or someone who works with you.

But you also need to make sure that people who use Plain Language can understand your document. A good way to do this is to make a focus group. A focus group is an event where people come together to give feedback about something. The next section of this guide will talk more about focus groups.

PART 3: HOW TO ORGANIZE A FOCUS GROUP

A Plain Language focus group is when Plain Language experts get together. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can be experts in Plain Language. That's because they use Plain Language. They can tell you what doesn't make sense so you can make changes. This is important information that you can't get from AI or a reading level checker.

Many people in the disability community say "Nothing about us without us". That means disabled people should get to be a part of anything that affects their lives. That means disabled people should be a part of making Plain Language.

Here is how to organize a focus group:

- Talk to an organization that works with people with IDD. Some organizations around the U.S. are:
 - [People First chapters](#)
 - [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)
 - [Protection and Advocacy agencies](#)
 - [Developmental Disabilities Councils](#)
 - [Centers for Independent Living](#)
- Your focus group should have 6 - 10 participants who read Plain Language. This size leaves enough space for everyone to give feedback.
- Schedule a time and place that is accessible for everyone.
 - You can use Zoom to make it easier for people to come.
 - Sometimes, it is better for everyone to be in the same room. You can decide which kinds of meetings work best for you and your readers.
 - Make sure everyone has what they need. For example, wheelchair users need

accessible bathrooms. Autistic people need a space to take breaks.

- Send your writing early.
 - Everyone needs to read the document before the focus group.
 - Send your writing a month before your focus group. If you can't do that, send it at least 2 weeks before the focus group.
 - Send the whole document. Your readers will need to go through every part.
 - If your document is very long, split your focus group into 2 or more parts.
 - Ask people how they would like to read.
 - Some people read on their computers or phones.
 - Some people read with family members or care workers.
 - Some people need a print-out to read.
 - Make sure you send your writing in a way that works for everyone.
- Have at least 2 leaders for the focus group.
 - Try to have a leader who knows the people in the focus group already.
 - One leader should go through the document, ask questions, and call on people.
 - Another leader should take notes on everything people say.
- Have a clear schedule for what will happen during the focus group.
- Take breaks. Set at least one break time for every hour of working.
- Pay people fairly for their work. Everyone deserves money for doing work. Being part of a focus group is hard work. That means disabled people should get paid for focus groups.
 - When thinking about how much to pay people, think about how much time they are taking for your focus group. Some things that take time are:

- Reading your document before the focus group,
 - Getting to and from wherever the focus group is (if in-person)
 - Taking part in the focus group itself
- Some people with disabilities get help from the government called benefits. People who get benefits can't earn or save too much money. That means you should think about different ways to pay people. For example, you can give people a gift card with money on it. This money won't go into their bank accounts, so it won't change their benefits.

Once you've gone through the whole document, make changes to make your writing clearer and easier to understand. Make sure you don't ignore any feedback.

Give people credit for taking part in your focus group. You should thank them somewhere in your document. Ask each person to make sure they're okay with being thanked in your document.

Once you've put out your document, you can ask readers what they thought about your writing. For example, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network asks people to take a survey after reading. This helps you understand if your Plain Language is working.

CRNY's work with Summertime Gallery

One thing CRNY did was give money to artists in New York State. Artists didn't need to do anything in return for the money. This is called Guaranteed Income (GI).

A lot of people don't know what GI is. GI is hard to explain. And sometimes people mean different things when they use the word GI. We wanted to make sure we wrote about GI in Plain Language. This helped us communicate better with the artists in our program.

We needed to organize a focus group for writing we did about GI. We worked with an art organization called Summertime Gallery. Summertime is a place where artists make and show their work. They want to make art more accessible to people who are usually

“outsiders.” Summertime is a place for artists with and without intellectual disabilities.

The leaders of Summertime invited 6 artists to our in-person focus group. We went through all our writing with the artists and answered their questions. Some artists were confused about what we wrote. With the help of the leaders at Summertime, the artists understood our writing.

We paid the artists for 4 hours of work. They got paid for 2 hours for reading the document before the focus group. They got paid 2 hours for the focus group itself.

We learned a lot from the artists. For example, we wrote that GI was “no strings attached” money. The artists didn’t understand what the saying “no strings attached” meant. So we changed the wording to get rid of the confusing part.

Thank you to the Summertime artists who were in our focus group: Lauren McArthur, Shmuel Taurog, Sophia, Dean Millien, Jimmy Tucker, Daniella Rodriguez. And thank you to Summertime Directors Anna Schechter and Sophia Cosmadopoulos for helping us put it together.

PART 4: WHAT WE LEARNED

We wrote down the things we learned as we worked on Plain Language. We wrote about things we didn't expect, even though we had a plan. Here are some of our lessons:

- Disability is an important part of writing in Plain Language. But most of the information about Plain Language was written by non-disabled people. It's important to use rules about Plain Language that disabled people wrote.
- We got better at Plain Language when we used it more. When we didn't use Plain Language for a long time, we needed time to figure it out again. This showed us that Plain Language is a skill.
- We needed more time to write than we thought. When we had more time for writing, the Plain Language was better. If we had set aside more time, we could have sent our writing to the focus group earlier. That way, they wouldn't have had to rush to read it.
- Writing in Plain Language from the start is helpful in a lot of ways. We could understand some things better ourselves when we wrote in Plain Language from the start. It also made it easier and faster to share this information with others.
- It was harder when we translated a non-Plain Language document. Most people who write complicated documents don't know about Plain Language. If you translate their documents, it's harder to check if the translation does a good job.
- We needed time and money for Plain Language. CRNY gave us the time to work on this project and the money to pay for experts like the focus group artists. Now we know how much time and money it takes to do projects like this. We hope we can get more money in the future to do Plain Language projects.

Writing in Plain Language is worth doing. We think Plain Language can help more people learn about and make art. It can help all kinds of artists have more chances to succeed. Plain Language helps us communicate about the things we care about. Plain Language can help make things more accessible for disabled people. It can help everyone be a part of what matters to them.

We believe anything can get written in Plain Language if we try hard enough. We hope this guide helps you join us.

TO LEARN MORE...

Reid's introduction to Plain Language (video): [Writing for Cognitive Accessibility](#)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network: [One Idea Per Line: A Guide to Making Easy Read Resources](#)

Self Advocacy Info: [Learn how to write using Plain Language](#)

Green Mountain Self Advocates: [Getting Your Message Across: Communicating with People with Intellectual Disabilities](#)

Teresa Moore, Nancy Ward, and Hannah Bowen with Self Advocates Becoming Empowered and the National Technical Assistance Center for Voting and Cognitive Access: [Guide for Creating Cognitively Accessible Language](#)

Example documents/projects:

[Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century](#)

[Disability & Climate Change: A Public Archive Project](#)

GLOSSARY

Accessible – When something works well for people with disabilities.

Artificial intelligence - When a computer does a job that humans normally have to do. Artificial intelligence gets called “AI” for short.

Focus group - An event where people come together to give feedback about something.

Grants - Money that artists can apply for. Artists can use grant money to pay for their art projects.

Plain Language - A style of writing that uses shorter words and sentences. This helps people understand the main ideas more clearly.

Reading level - A score for how well someone reads. Reading levels get scored based on grades in school.



CREATIVES
REBUILD
NEW YORK