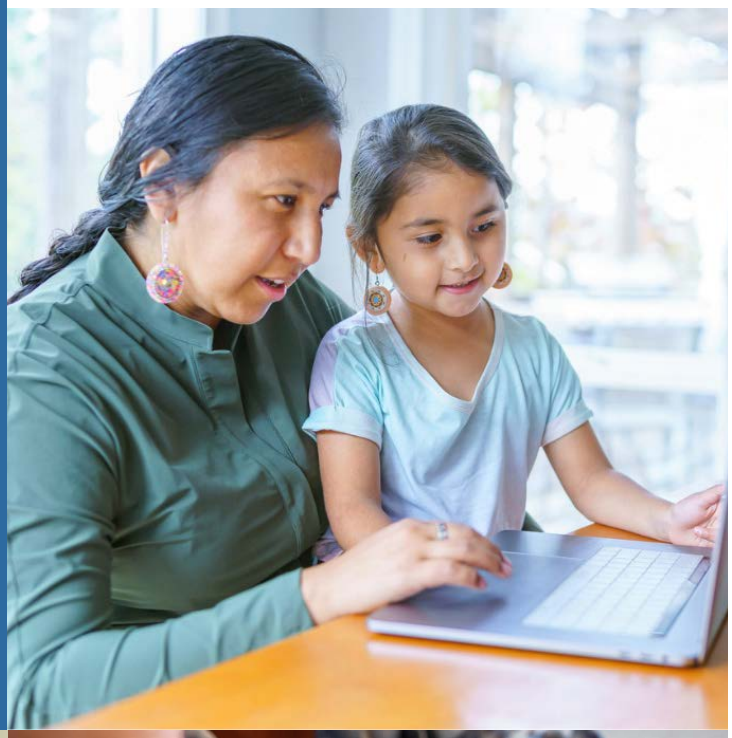
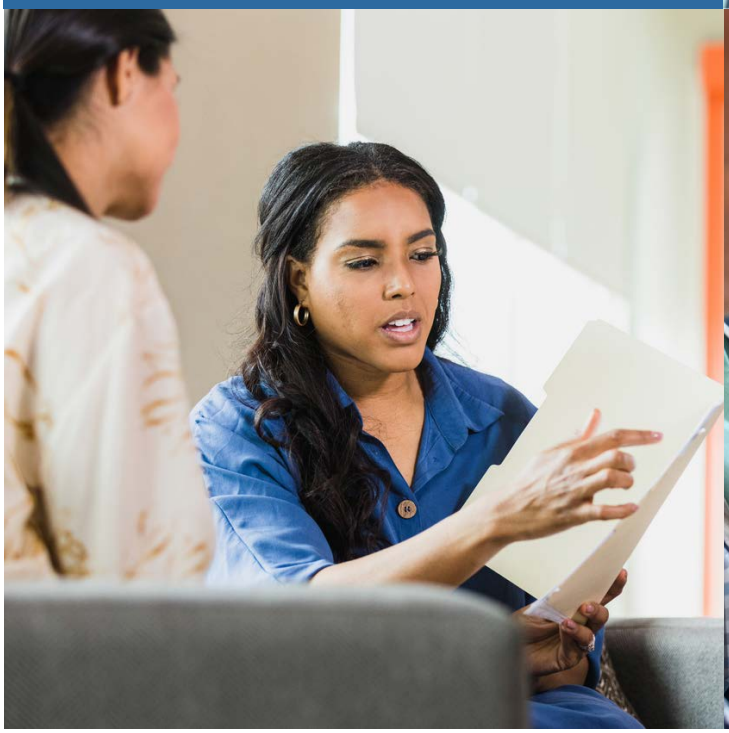
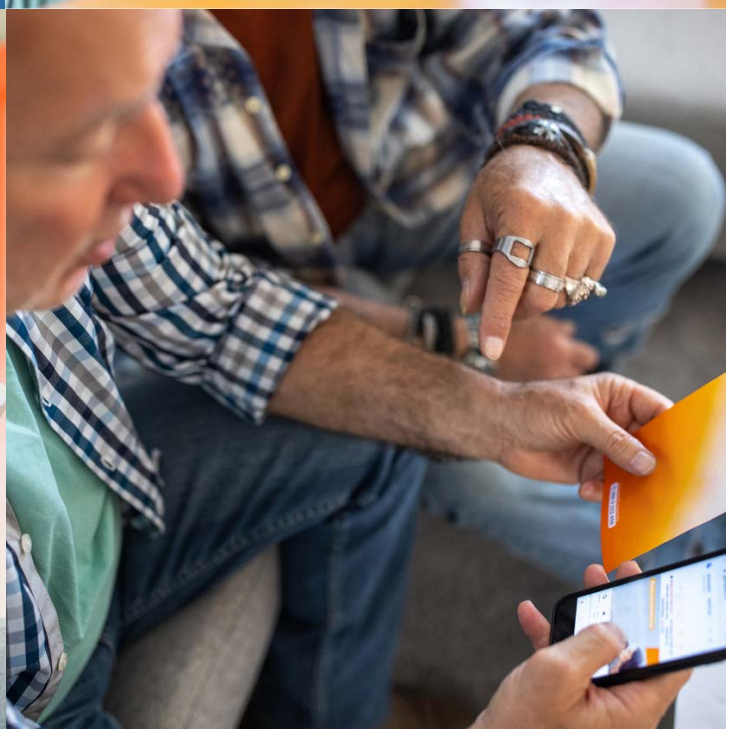
Opening Doors

A Literacy Audit Tool Kit







Community Learning Network

Literacy Alberta

Opening Doors: A Literacy Audit Tool Kit

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Opening Doors: A Literacy Audit Tool Kit for Customer Service Excellence

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Introduction

"How can people help? By recognizing that not everybody in the world reads, that not everybody in the world has that capability and yet they are intelligent, well-adjusted people. I have been helped most by people being open, honest and treating me like they would anybody else"
- Kate

Did you know...?

Not everyone has the skills to access the services they need

How much does your service depend on clients reading text? What unintended barriers might make it difficult for someone to access your services?

Not everyone can follow and easily understand verbal communication

Is your messaging clear in your interactions with clients? Do you use open-ended questions, and provide time for clients to answer questions?

Not everyone has the skills to read and easily understand print or digital materials

How easy is it to read your printed materials or digital text?

Not everyone can access your advertising

How easy is it to find your office or find your information on your promotional material?

It's important that staff receive ongoing training to improve the accessibility of services

What training opportunities do you provide for staff?

The Opening Doors: A Literacy Audit Tool Kit will…

- reaffirm the practices you already do well as an organization
- give suggestions for ways to improve service to the general public
- help you understand Canadian adults' struggles with literacy in their daily lives
- help you write and speak in plain or clear language with clients

What is literacy?

We often think that literacy means reading and writing, and while that is true, it's more complex than that. UNESCO defines literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning, enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society."

This definition includes *how* we use literacy in our life and the outcomes or *benefits* of literacy for an individual.

We use our literacy skills in all aspects of our lives. Literacy helps us to respond, engage and take action in the world around us. Literacy can empower us to make informed choices in our life.

Think of the clients who use your organization's services. What literacy tasks are they expected to perform? How can you help them feel more comfortable accessing your services? *Opening Doors* can give you practical suggestions for improving your service delivery.

What is a literacy audit?

A literacy audit supports you to…

- reaffirm the practices you already do well as an organization
- systematically identify possible barriers in the delivery of your services to the general public
- give you effective suggestions to continuously improve service
- improve practices to engage and retain clients
- understand Canadian adults' literacy needs
- help you communicate in plain or clear language with clients

Who is the literacy audit for?

Anyone who works with the public, such as…

- Community organizations
- Social service agencies
- Businesses
- Government departments
- Those who work with the general public

Why do a literacy audit?

Nearly half of Canadians may have trouble accessing the services you provide because of low literacy skills. They will have difficulty with the kinds of daily literacy activities many take for granted:

- Reading posters, pamphlets, bills, or business letters
- Filling out forms
- Understanding written instructions
- Using maps to find directions
- Navigating websites and interpreting online communications

If you work with the general public, chances are that the literacy demands of your organization raise barriers for some clients.

Opening Doors will give you effective methods to continuously improve your service by increasing **equity** and **accessibility** for all of your clients.

"The biggest problem is when you don't even know where to start looking. Like if you're facing a whole row of brochures, where's the section that you're looking for? Where's the information that you want? If you cannot understand what you are reading, you cannot figure out which brochure to pick up."

- Kate

How to use Opening Doors a Literacy Audit Toolkit

The *Opening Doors a Literacy Audit Tool Kit* has a number of sections to help you complete an audit in your organization.

Literacy Audit Tool

There are five audit checklists with reflective statements for you to assess your organization's practices in the following areas:

- **Service Delivery**
- **Clear Verbal Communication**
- **Clear Print or Digital Materials**
- **Advertising**
- **Staff and Volunteer Training**

Action Planning

This section will help you begin planning for positive change and includes:

- **Tips on setting goals**
- **Action Planning templates**, which can be used or adapted to suit the facilitator's needs
- **Sample action plans**

Facilitating the Audit

This section will guide you on how to conduct an audit for your organization and how to support organizations and businesses in your community in understanding literacy and completing their own audit.

Literacy Awareness

There are facts and stories you can use in this section to increase your own understanding of literacy and to share with organizations and businesses in your community.

Plain Language Guidelines

This is an additional section to help you use plain language in all your writing. This section includes:

- Samples of plain language writing
- Guidelines on plain language design and layout

General Steps for Conducting an Audit

In general, you can use these steps for conducting an audit. For more guidance on conducting an audit see **Facilitating an Audit**.

Bring your staff together and decide which audit checklist to work through. You can do all of the audit checklists or only those which directly relate to your current concerns. If you only have time to do one audit checklist, it would be most effective to begin with **Service Delivery**. Here is the process to use:

1. Review the questions at the beginning of the audit checklist and then work through each of the statements to rate your organization's current practices. You can work in groups or individually.
2. Use the **Gaining Consensus template** to discuss the ratings as a group.
3. Discuss what changes you could make within your organization to make your services more **accessible** and **equitable** for clients.
4. Create an action plan, using a template in the **Action Planning** section. Consider **short term and long-term goals** and the resources required to complete your actions.
5. Review your actions regularly to complete the changes you desire.

"When we first saw the literacy audit, we were really excited that there was a tool that an organization could use to assess its products and services. Overall, the success of our organization in general speaks to the fact that we have incorporated literacy strategies within our programming."

- Momentum: A Community Economic Development Organization

Literacy Audit Tool

"I couldn't fill the form out because I couldn't read it. And then I was too scared and too afraid to go up there and ask them for help. I just grabbed the form and I either took it home or left it, I never passed it in. I'd take it home and get my sister to fill it out for me."

- Lil

The Literacy Audit Tool will help you assess your organization's service practices. Focusing on your organization's literacy practices can improve your connection, engagement and retention of clients.

The Literacy Audit Tool consists of five different checklists:

- **Service Delivery**
- **Clear Verbal Communication**
- **Clear Print or Digital Materials**
- **Advertising**
- **Staff and Volunteer Training**

Tip:

If you only have time to do one area of the literacy audit, it would be most effective to begin with Service Delivery.

To provide a more literacy-friendly service, you can decide to do all five checklists of the literacy audit tool or only those checklists which directly relate to your current concerns.

The **Facilitating the Audit** section will walk you through the process on how to conduct an audit. The **Action Planning** Templates will help you begin planning for positive change. The **Plain Language Guidelines** section will help make your communications easier for your clients to understand the first time they read them.

Remember to involve all levels of staff and board in your review of your organization's practices.

Tip:
Print Me

Service Delivery

Did you know that not everyone has the skills to access the services they need?

Take a moment to think about your organization's practices:

- How welcoming is your space for everyone?
- What unintended barriers might make it difficult for someone to access your services?
- In what ways have you addressed barriers to accessing your services?

Using the following rating scale, please check the ONE response that most accurately describes your organization today:

A We are doing this consistently.
B We are doing this, but we could make some improvements.
C We are not doing this, but we should be.
N/A Not applicable.

Service Delivery	A	B	C	N/A
Office environment				
1. Our reception area is clearly marked.	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. The atmosphere in our reception area is friendly. People feel they can ask for help without embarrassment.	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. We provide a quiet, private space for clients to fill out forms or participate in interviews.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Application procedures				
4. We offer all clients the same help and choices.	◯	◯	◯	◯
5. We have simplified our application or admission procedures, so we get the essential information at the first meeting and the details at subsequent meetings.	◯	◯	◯	◯
6. We ask all clients if they need access to a translator/ interpreter in order to use our services, or if they have a preferred **translator/interpreter** whom they like to use.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Service Delivery	A	B	C	N/A
7. We accommodate clients who may want or need to bring friends, family, Elders, or spokespersons to their meetings with our staff.	◯	◯	◯	◯
8. We ask all clients how they would like to receive information from us (e.g., through a verbal conversation, written materials, emails, video or audio clips, texts, websites, or via a specific app such as Facebook,).	◯	◯	◯	◯
9. When appropriate for our clients' needs, we have the same information available in visual, written, and auditory forms (e.g., video or audio clips, posters, pamphlets, touchscreen technology, or online interactive formats).	◯	◯	◯	◯
10. We offer clients various ways to fill in a form or access our services (e.g., in person, by personal interview, phone interview, an online form from our website, or by an email attachment).	◯	◯	◯	◯
11. Our website has clear, easy-to-follow instructions on how to fill out, print, and send forms to us.	◯	◯	◯	◯
12. We explain, in **plain language**, each point in our consent forms to ensure informed consent.	◯	◯	◯	◯
13. We use various methods to orient clients to our services (e.g., videos, learning circles, small group orientations, or one-on-one orientations).	◯	◯	◯	◯
14. We regularly ask our clients for feedback about the quality and effectiveness of our services and application processes.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communicating with Clients				
15. We use a welcoming, respectful tone when speaking with all of our clients.	◯	◯	◯	◯
16. With each initial client interaction, we provide a brief overview of our services, giving only the essential information.	◯	◯	◯	◯
17. At subsequent appointments, we review with clients the information gathered at the previous appointment(s) to check our mutual understanding.	◯	◯	◯	◯
18. We use gestures, body language, drawings, models, and demonstrations to enhance our communication with clients.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Service Delivery	A	B	C	N/A
19. When appropriate, we learn second language equivalents for some of the English key words which describe our services (e.g., if there are many speakers from the Philippines in your community you could ask a translator/interpreter, or bilingually fluent co-worker or client to help you translate the key words into Tagalog or other regional Filipino dialects).	◯	◯	◯	◯
20. When using an interpreter, we are careful to focus on the client as we interact, not the interpreter.	◯	◯	◯	◯
21. When using an interpreter, we leave additional time for the client to ask questions or ask to have information repeated.	◯	◯	◯	◯
22. We offer the interpreter breaks during appointments to ensure the optimum level of language translation.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Tip:
Print Me

Clear Verbal Communication

Did you that know not everyone can follow and easily understand verbal communication?

Take a moment to think about your organization's practices:

- In what ways are you intentional about providing clear messaging in your interactions with clients?
- In what ways do you allow time for clients to process information and ask questions?

Using the following rating scale, please check the ONE response that most accurately describes your organization today:

A We are doing this consistently.
B We are doing this, but we could make some improvements.
C We are not doing this, but we should be.
N/A Not applicable.

Clear Verbal Communication	A	B	C	N/A
Facilitating Understanding				
1. We use **plain language** and the same key words when describing our services whether in speaking with clients, in our written materials, on our social media platforms or on our website.	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. We have identified the **jargon** and technical vocabulary terms that are important for clients to know and have developed an easy way to explain these words.	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. We keep instructions brief and deliver them in step-by-step sequence.	◯	◯	◯	◯
4. We are careful not to speak more loudly when it appears that a client does not understand what we have said.	◯	◯	◯	◯
5. We are prepared to repeat information if it appears that a client does not understand what we have said.	◯	◯	◯	◯
6. We are prepared to use alternate vocabulary if it appears that a client does not understand what we have said.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Clear Verbal Communication	A	B	C	N/A
7. We speak at a normal, unhurried rate and clearly enunciate the words we use when we work with clients for whom English is an additional language.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Voicemail				
8. Our voicemail or messaging system has a prompt to reach a "real" person in the first menu.	◯	◯	◯	◯
9. We follow plain language guidelines when creating the messages for our voicemail system or leaving messages with clients.	◯	◯	◯	◯
10. Our voicemail or messaging system is spoken at a normal, unhurried rate given that some clients may speak English as an additional language.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Conversations				
11. We pause after each key point in a conversation to allow our clients time to process the information and form questions.	◯	◯	◯	◯
12. We allow clients plenty of time to answer questions. We accept silence and do not interrupt the client's thought processes to ask for a response immediately after a question is asked.	◯	◯	◯	◯
13. Our conversations include open-ended questions, which allow clients time to better express their needs (e.g., "What brings you here today?" or "What else can you tell me about that?")	◯	◯	◯	◯
14. We regularly pause to check for mutual understanding between our clients and ourselves (e.g., through paraphrasing, restating, or asking questions.)	◯	◯	◯	◯
15. We briefly review all of the information we have given clients at the end of each conversation, paying particular attention to repeating key words and phrases.	◯	◯	◯	◯
16. We give clients plain language handouts which duplicate the most important verbal information we have discussed.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Tip:
Print Me

Clear Print or Digital Materials

Did you know not everyone has the literacy skills to read and easily understand print or digital materials?

Take a moment to think about your organization's practices:

- How much printed materials or digital text do you use with clients?
- How easy is it to read your printed materials or digital text?
- What is your organization doing to make it easier for everyone to read your print or digital materials?

Using the following rating scale, please check the ONE response that most accurately describes your organization today:

A We are doing this consistently.
B We are doing this, but we could make some improvements.
C We are not doing this, but we should be.
N/A Not applicable.

Clear Print or Digital Materials	A	B	C	N/A
Plain Language				
1. Our print or digital materials use a personal tone (e.g., I, you, or we) to engage the reader.	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. When possible, we avoid the use of **acronyms** and abbreviations in our texts. If they are used, they are spelled out in full every few pages.	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. Where appropriate, our texts use a simple question and answer format to convey information.	◯	◯	◯	◯
4. We keep paragraphs short (one idea per paragraph) and few in number.	◯	◯	◯	◯
5. We attach **plain language** summaries to information and forms which contain mandated legal and technical language.	◯	◯	◯	◯
6. We regularly ask our clients for feedback on the **readability** of our print materials and digital text.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Clear Print or Digital Materials	A	B	C	N/A
7. We regularly consult with people outside our office for feedback on the print or digital materials we prepare for the general public.	◯	◯	◯	◯
8. When we have print materials translated, we ask a fluently bilingual client, staff, or community member to review it for accuracy to the original text and appropriate tone for the audience.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Formatting and design				
9. We use bulleted lists, where appropriate, instead of long paragraphs in our print or digital materials.	◯	◯	◯	◯
10. We avoid the use of ALL CAPS or italicized print.	◯	◯	◯	◯
11. We use 12 point or larger fonts for our text.	◯	◯	◯	◯
12. The formatting of our text is limited to two standard font styles and sizes (e.g., Calibri, Cambria or Arial 12-point font).	◯	◯	◯	◯
13. Our print or digital materials are designed with lots of white space to provide relief from print (e.g., wider margins, space between sections of text, or 1.5 line spacing).	◯	◯	◯	◯
14. Our print or digital materials use simple, realistic line drawings to illustrate key points only.	◯	◯	◯	◯
15. We put brief plain language captions beside or underneath drawings to reinforce the message.	◯	◯	◯	◯
16. To aid in readability, we do not crowd our print or digital materials with drawings or words.	◯	◯	◯	◯
17. We provide options for accessing our information in print or online (e.g., video, audio, large print, or other languages, as appropriate).	◯	◯	◯	◯
18. We use **assistive technology tools** such as a screen reader, or closed captioning to make the text accessible for people with various reading abilities and disabilities.	◯	◯	◯	◯
19. We use the **Accessibility Checker** for Microsoft Office content to ensure we have made it easy for people with disabilities to read.	◯	◯	◯	◯
20. We do not use glossy paper for any of our print materials since glossy paper creates a glare which is hard to read for those with reading difficulties or low vision.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Clear Print or Digital Materials	A	B	C	N/A
Forms				
21. Our forms are organized in a logical way with one idea per question.	◯	◯	◯	◯
22. Our forms require only brief words, phrases, or check boxes to complete each question.	◯	◯	◯	◯
23. The questions on our forms do not contain **jargon** or **technical language** which could be confusing to our clients.	◯	◯	◯	◯
24. As often as possible, our forms are no longer than two pages per form.	◯	◯	◯	◯
25. Instructions on our forms are placed immediately before the question to which they relate.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Tip:
Print Me

Advertising

Did you know that not everyone can access your advertising?

Take a moment to think about your organization's practices:

- How do you advertise your services?
- What unintended barriers might make it difficult for someone to access your advertising?
- How can you make your advertising accessible to everyone?

Using the following rating scale, please check the ONE response that most accurately describes your organization today:

A We are doing this consistently.
B We are doing this, but we could make some improvements.
C We are not doing this, but we should be.
N/A Not applicable.

Advertising	A	B	C	N/A
1. We use various ways to advertise our services (e.g., radio, word of mouth, television, video, websites, social media, or printed materials).	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. We attend community meetings, job fairs, and other events to promote our services to clients who may not initially feel comfortable coming to our office.	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. Our name and logo are clearly displayed on our building.	◯	◯	◯	◯
4. Clear signs and symbols direct people from the front door of the building to our office.	◯	◯	◯	◯
5. Our phone number, email, and web address are easy for anyone to find on all of our promotional materials.	◯	◯	◯	◯
6. When we give directions to our office, we refer to familiar landmarks or transit stops.	◯	◯	◯	◯
7. The content of our website matches the information given to clients who come to our office in person.	◯	◯	◯	◯
8. Where possible, our website is linked to various translations of our materials.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Advertising	A	B	C	N/A
9. The walls, bulletin boards, and pamphlet racks in our reception area and interview spaces are organized and uncluttered. It is easy for anyone to find the information they want or need.	◯	◯	◯	◯
10. We build relationships with other businesses and community groups to explore new ways of advertising our services to low literacy and English language clients.	◯	◯	◯	◯
11. We use **plain language** and **accessibility** guidelines in the design of all of our advertising.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Tip:
Print Me

Staff and Volunteer Training

Did you know it's important that staff receives ongoing training to improve the accessibility of services?

Take a moment to think about your organization's practices:

- What training have staff received?
- What training do you need to improve your services?
- How will you ensure that the appropriate training is consistently offered to your staff?

Using the following rating scale, please check the ONE response that most accurately describes your organization today:

A We are doing this consistently.
B We are doing this, but we could make some improvements.
C We are not doing this, but we should be.
N/A Not applicable.

Staff and Volunteer Training	A	B	C	N/A
1. We regularly receive awareness and sensitivity training about literacy issues.	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. We regularly receive diversity and equity training.	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. We regularly receive training about colonization and reconciliation.	◯	◯	◯	◯
4. We regularly receive training on communicating effectively with diverse clients.	◯	◯	◯	◯
5. We build relationships with cultural organizations to increase our cultural responsiveness and sensitivity.	◯	◯	◯	◯
6. We regularly receive training on how and when to use translators/interpreters.	◯	◯	◯	◯
7. We regularly receive training on preparing materials in plain language.	◯	◯	◯	◯
8. We are aware that certain behaviours may indicate that a client could have literacy barriers (e.g., some adults may resist filling in forms themselves, or they may pretend they left their glasses at home and so they can't read the form).	◯	◯	◯	◯

Staff and Volunteer Training	A	B	C	N/A
9. We have been trained to recognize non-verbal cues that may indicate a person is not understanding what is being said (e.g., a puzzled expression, excessive nodding of the head, or smiling without asking any questions.)	◯	◯	◯	◯
10. We are aware of the other service providers in our community, including literacy and English language learning programs.	◯	◯	◯	◯
11. We refer our clients to other service providers, including literacy and English language learning programs.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Client Feedback

Clients themselves are one of the best sources of feedback about your organization's customer service skills. Their input is invaluable when conducting an audit.

Gathering feedback orally is a literacy-friendly approach. Asking clients a few brief questions at the end of a conversation can give you some quick ideas about changes that need to be made. Be open about how the feedback is being recorded and read what has been written down back to the client to ensure accuracy.

Below are some sample questions you can ask in your feedback conversation. Feel free to rearrange the order of the questions, add new questions, or reduce the number of questions to suit your needs.

On the following page you will find a rating scale you can give to clients. Feel free to customize the questions to suit your needs.

A quick inventory of client satisfaction

Would you mind answering a few questions for me? It will help me understand how well we are meeting your needs.

- What do you like about our organization?
- How do you feel when you are here?
- What would you tell your friends or family about us?
- How could we make you feel more comfortable here?

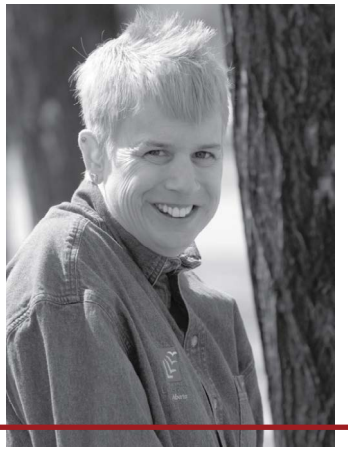
Tip:
Print Me

A rating scale of client satisfaction

	True	Could be better	Not True
1. I felt your office was easy to find.	◯	◯	◯
2. It feels friendly here.	◯	◯	◯
3. I felt that my privacy was respected here.	◯	◯	◯
4. It's easy to read the posters and signs here.	◯	◯	◯
5. I understood your forms.	◯	◯	◯
6. Someone offered to help me fill out forms.	◯	◯	◯
7. I understood most of what you told me about your services.	◯	◯	◯
8. I felt comfortable asking questions.	◯	◯	◯
9. I liked the videos and audio clips which describe your services.	◯	◯	◯
10. I think you treat everyone with respect.	◯	◯	◯

Comments and suggestions:

Action Planning



"I started life as a very sick baby and it impaired my ability to speak, read, and write. I attended a special school where I was taught the basics of reading and writing. After school, I wanted to do more with my life than sit around – so I took courses in childcare and was able to get a job in a daycare."
- Alison

An Action Plan is a map to guide your organization to:

- make changes
- remove literacy related barriers
- better serve your clients

An Action Plan includes goals and strategies to meet your identified goals. Here are some resources to help guide the process of setting goals, as well as templates and examples of goal setting action plans:

Opening Doors - a template to note where your organization would like to improve and what policies or practices you will change to make your organization accessible

Tips for Setting Goals - a list of examples of best practices in setting goals

Sample Goal Setting Plan - an example of how goals can build on each other for future success

Action Plan - a template you can fill in with your organization's goals to help create your action plan

Sample Action Plan - a sample of what an action plan could look like

Identifying External Resources - a template to help guide the process of identifying external resources needed to move your action plan forward

Feel free to adapt any of these templates to suit your needs.

Tip:
Print Me

Opening Doors

Where we will improve access:	Practices or policies we will change:
Advertising	
Service Delivery	
Clear verbal communication	
Clear print materials	
Staff and volunteer training	
Other strengths	

Tips for Setting Goals

- Make your goals **SMART**

  Specific – Is the goal specific enough to be able to describe it easily to someone else?

  Measurable – How will we know that the goal has been achieved?

  Action-oriented – How does this goal show that we are moving forward?

  Realistic – Do we have the people and resources to work towards this goal?

  Timely – Can we realistically accomplish this goal in the time we have set out?

- Prioritize – choose two or three goals you want to work on right away
- Break goals into smaller pieces. Answer the questions:
  - What will be our end result?
  - What do we need to do as an organization?
  - What materials or resources will we need?
  - Which internal staff can help us reach this goal?
  - Which external resources do we need?
- Identify goals for the next three months, six months, and year (or beyond, if necessary)
- Include clients and/or board members in the goal setting process as appropriate
- Write the goals into an action plan template
- Describe the concrete end result of reaching each goal
- Review your action plan regularly to reflect on past actions and make changes if needed
- Make a plan to celebrate when you've reached your goals!

Sample Goal Setting Plan

Goals for the next three months (choose two or three goals that represent things your organization is currently doing, but wants to improve)	Example: 1. Take out the jargon and technical language in our forms and replace with plain language where appropriate. 2. Place the instructions on our forms immediately before the question to which they relate. 3. Redesign our print materials with lots of white space to provide relief from print.
Goals for the next six months (should build on the previous goals)	Example: 1. Identify the jargon and technical vocabulary which is important for our clients to know and develop an easy way to explain these words. 2. Shorten all of our forms to no longer than two pages each.
Goals for the next year (could be a few new goals which your organization is not currently doing)	Example: 1. Organize training in how to prepare materials in plain language. 2. Consult our clients for feedback on the readability of the written materials we prepare.

Action Plan

3 to 6 month goals	Internal staff who need to be involved in effecting this change	External resources needed (funds, individuals, organizations, contractors, etc.)

6-12 month goals	Internal staff who need to be involved in effecting this change	External resources needed (funds, individuals, organizations, contractors, etc.)

Sample Action Plan

3 to 6 month goals	Internal staff who need to be involved in effecting this change	External resources needed (funds, individuals, organizations, contractors, etc.)
Service Delivery 8. Ask all clients how they would like to receive information from us.	• Frontline staff • Anyone who speaks directly with clients • Staff who check the general business email	Videographer if making a video
Service Delivery 12. Explain each point in our consent forms in plain language in order to ensure informed consent.	• Frontline staff • Program managers • Supervisors	

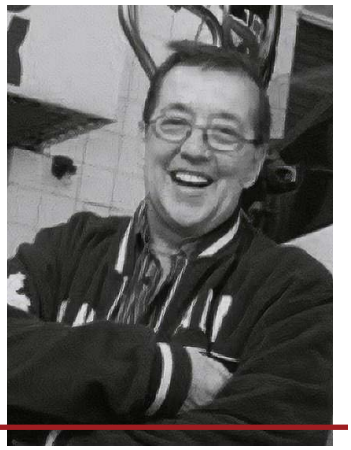
6-12 month goals	Internal staff who need to be involved in effecting this change	External resources needed (funds, individuals, organizations, contractors, etc.)
Service Delivery 5. Simplify our application or admission procedures so we get the essential information at the first meeting, and the details at subsequent meetings.	• Frontline staff • Supervisors • Project managers • Executive director if policy needs to change	Printer - may need to revise and reprint some forms
Service Delivery 6. Ask all clients if they need access to a translator/ interpreter in order to use our services, or if they have a preferred translator/ interpreter whom they like to use.	• Frontline staff • Program managers • Anyone who speaks directly with clients	Local immigrant service agencies Cultural groups

Identifying External Resources

Resource people we have personal contact with	Other resource people we have heard of	Outside agencies or organizations	Government departments	Alternative funding sources

Facilitating the Audit

"I couldn't write a cheque. I couldn't read bank statements. As a president of sports leagues, I always had secretaries do my paperwork. Now I can do this stuff on my own. I don't have to ask anybody. It makes me strong."
- Danny



This section includes a facilitated process for you as a CALP to use within your organization, or with organizations and services in your community. There are suggestions for you to promote literacy awareness or the Literacy Audit Tool to organizations and services in your community. You can adapt the facilitation to suit your facilitation style and needs of the organization.

How long will the literacy audit take?

- It will take 2.5 hours if you follow the facilitation guide below. You may decide to do the Literacy Awareness Walkabout at a different time before doing the actual audit.
- You will want to plan for follow-up meetings to check on the progress of your action plan

What tools are included to help with facilitation?

- Literacy Awareness Walkabout worksheet
- Literacy Awareness
- Gaining Consensus template
- Action planning templates
- Plain language guidelines

Who should participate?

- Identify and invite people from all levels of the organization to participate in the audit. This could include:
    - Clients
    - Front line staff
    - Administrators
    - Managers
    - Board members
- Include key decision makers in the audit; this will be crucial for creating positive change
- Be aware that managers will need to approve any action plans for ongoing work

Materials Needed

- Flipchart paper
- Markers and pens for each person in the group
- Large post-it notes
- Enough copies of the literacy awareness walkabout handout in **Appendix A** for each member of the group
- Enough copies of the literacy audit checklist you chose and your chosen action templates for each member of the group

Literacy Audit Process

Total Time: 2.5 hours

Literacy Awareness

Time: 30 minutes

1. Ask participants to read over the Literacy Awareness section. (15 minutes)
2. Ask participants to share something that stood out for them from the information and stories. What was interesting or surprising about what they read? What did they learn? How has it increased their literacy awareness? How will they use what they have learned in their work? (15 minutes)

Literacy Awareness Walkabout

Time: 30 minutes

1. Use the Literacy Awareness Walkabout worksheet to look at aspects of your organization through the eyes of someone coming in for the first time. (20 minutes)
2. After the walkabout, describe the positive things the group noticed in your organization and briefly list on flip chart paper those things which you might want to change. (5minutes)
3. Look over the list and decide which audit checklist you will start with to support your organization in what you want to change. You may choose to complete all of the audit checklists. (5 minutes)

"Probably the most significant impact was in how we trained our staff. The offer of handing a piece of paper to a client always comes with the offer of "Can I help you with that form?" or "Can I explain that form?" in a way that wouldn't single them out from anybody else coming in. It's just become a standard procedure for how we treat any visitor coming in the door."

- Gabriela, Momentum: A Community Economic Development Organization

Conduct the Literacy Audit

Time: 1 hour

1. Have group members fill out the literacy audit checklist individually or in groups. (20 minutes)
2. After everyone has completed the audit, assign each person a different statement or two (depending on the size of the group), from the literacy audit checklist and have them write the statement down on a post-it note. (5 minutes)
3. Compare the results of the literacy audit responses by creating a grid on flipchart paper like the Gaining Consensus template in **Appendix B**. Each person will bring their post-it note to the flipchart and, as a group, decide which quadrant it fits. Each person can share why they rated that statement the way they did. Use the completed audit checklists to guide the discussion. The idea is for everyone to come to a consensus of which quadrant to place each statement. (20 minutes)
4. Look at the results from column A and describe how your organization does well in these areas. This will identify your strengths in providing literacy-friendly customer service. (5 minutes)
5. Look at the statements in quadrant B & C and decide which statements you would like to take action on. (10 minutes)

Create an Action Plan

Time: 30 minutes

1. Look at the statements you decided to work on and choose two you feel you can accomplish in the next three to six months. Determine some strategies you can use to implement change. Identify which internal or external resources may be needed to effect this change. Will you need any training to support the change? Use the templates in the **Action Planning** section to record your plans. (15 minutes)
2. Look back at the statements you decided to work on and choose two you feel you can accomplish in the next six to twelve months. (10 minutes)
3. As a group, identify key decision makers in your organization who will need to approve the action plans for future work, including the formation of any sub-committees. Set a date to follow up on your action plan. (5 minutes)

"We are committed to continually improving our service. The literacy audit has really opened our eyes to areas that we can improve right now as well as areas that we are doing well in. The workshop facilitator encouraged us to celebrate our strengths while further developing our service delivery methods."

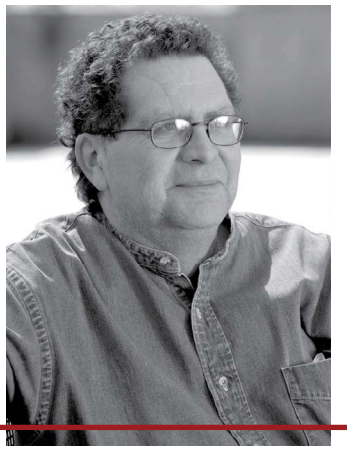
- McMan Youth, Family and Community Services

Sharing the literacy audit with your community

Below are a number of activities that you can follow to share information about literacy and the literacy audit with your community. Choose the activities that fit best for you and your community.

- Make copies of the first page at the beginning of the Introduction section and share it at Interagency meetings or with other organizations and community members. Ask them the 'did you know' questions and talk about how doing a Literacy Audit can help them better serve their clients.
- Share stories from the Literacy Awareness section that relate to the work of the community organization you are talking to. Include the information connected with the stories and talk about literacy needs in your community.
- Share the list of examples of daily literacy activities located at the end of the Literacy Awareness section. Ask if they are surprised by any of the daily tasks we use to get things done. Have they met anyone who finds these tasks challenging? Ask them if they could refer the person to your CALP.
- Ask staff from an organization if they have programs that rely on printed information. Share information from the "Did you know" questions in the Introduction or share a few statements from the Clear Print or Digital Material checklist to raise awareness of how making small changes can increase access to their services.
- Share a statement or two from one of the literacy audit checklists at an Interagency meeting or when talking with another organization and ask what it means to them. Is this something they have thought about? Share a story from the Literacy Awareness section to highlight why they may want to think about changes in their organization.
- Ask someone from an organization if they ever thought about the literacy skills someone would need to access their services. Share information about Plain Language and how using the guidelines can increase access to their services for everyone. Offer to do a plain language workshop with their staff or share one of the websites where they can learn more about Plain Language guidelines
- Invite them to have further talks with you after your initial discussion.
- Invite them to do a literacy audit with their staff. You can follow the Literacy Audit Process as outlined.

Literacy Awareness



"I was born with a brain tumor and I didn't really start to learn until my late thirties. Nowadays you have to learn to read and write to survive."
- Phil

What is Literacy?

Take a moment and think what literacy means to you. In what ways do literacy skills enable you to:

- make informed decisions…about your health, finances, employment, family, and basic needs?
- navigate the world around you…follow workplace procedures, make online purchases, connect with friends and colleagues through social media, email, text?
- advocate for rights for yourself, your children, and your community?
- learn new things in response to challenges or opportunities in your life…fix a broken tap, plan a trip, learn about residential schools in Canada, workplace training?

See **What are examples of daily literacy activities?** at the end of the Literacy Awareness section for a more comprehensive list of how we use literacy in our daily life.

Literacy is the ability to understand and interpret what we read and write that allows us to achieve our goals and participate in our community and society. When we read and write in our everyday life, literacy skills are a mighty force. LeeAnne Ireland of Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth explains that:

> *"While reading and writing provide the necessary foundation for learning, literacy is fundamentally about an individual's capacity to put their skills and knowledge to work in shaping the course of their own life." (Indigenous Literacy Assessment p. 5)*

Why Literacy Matters

Not everyone who reaches adulthood has the literacy skills necessary to achieve their goals and meet the demands of their daily life. Some of the reasons for this could include:

- Interrupted or incomplete education such as leaving school at a young age to provide income for the family or care for a sick family member
- Unsupported or undiagnosed learning disabilities, neurodiversity, developmental, cognitive disabilities
- School-based trauma or intergenerational trauma due to residential schools
- Poverty, systemic oppression, violence or a focus on survival needs rather than education
- Health concerns such as hearing or vision loss, mental health, or chronic illness
- Other situations

Have you ever heard the phrase, "use it or lose it?" Literacy skills needed to complete High School are not needed in many jobs or life circumstances. Without opportunities to use higher level skills, they slowly erode over time.

We are often unaware of losing our skills until something in our world changes. For example, we may have the skills we need for our job and work environment, but our environment can change with the introduction of new technology, reporting requirements, communication or assessments in the workplace. We may have emerging health concerns that require us to improve our literacy skills, or we may have lost the person who always helped us with our literacy skills or tasks that needed to be done. Or perhaps we have reached the point where we are tired of relying on others for help.

Our literacy skills not only impact how we manage our daily life, but also our life outcomes. The Government of Alberta explains:

> *Literacy …"[has] a significant influence on life outcomes – the ability to learn, health status, civic participation and social engagement, economic performance, and involvement with the justice system. "*
> *- Community Adult Learning Program Guidelines (2020), p. 4*

Literacy Matters to Daniel

Daniel struggled for years with an addiction problem. When he hit a very low point in his life, he decided to get help. While in the detox centre, the counsellor noticed he wasn't taking part in the workshops. When asked about it, Daniel admitted he struggled with both the readings and the writing involved. It was then that he sought out a literacy program. Daniel credits the literacy programs he attended as the means for helping him in his recovery program. "They literally saved my life. With the support of my family, and with the encouragement of the people I have met in the literacy community, I have accomplished more than I ever dreamed was possible." (Ten years of Students Sharing Stories 2010-2019. PALS)

Studies show there is direct link between our literacy skills and our health. Higher literacy levels correlate to greater health outcomes. Accessing health messaging, interacting with health professionals, and making informed choices that influence our well-being requires us to read, understand and interpret information. With stronger literacy skills we can find, understand and use health information, thereby increasing our health outcomes.

There is a direct connection between our mental health and strong literacy skills. Strong literacy skills help us improve and maintain our mental health and good mental health supports our literacy skill development. (Literacy and Mental Health Discussion Paper 2022. Frontier College)

A community mental health nurse mentioned she has seen the direct correlation between mental health and literacy skills. She noted that the more severe an illness, the more an individual's literacy and cognitive skills are impacted. Often, part of recovering from an illness requires attending courses and reading through health-related materials at home. When you have strong literacy skills, you are better able to access the information needed for recovery.

Literacy Matters to Zahara, Allison, & Kate

Zahara attended a literacy program to develop her reading skills and to help her with everyday life skills. As her literacy skills improved, she felt more confident and learned what to do in different situations. Zahara is now more outspoken and feels able to help others, including helping her children with their schoolwork.

As Allison increased her literacy skills, she volunteered to help children do crafts in bible study and then made a big step by joining the church choir.

Kate, after she strengthened her own reading skills, found herself reading to strangers who also had reading challenges. She never thought she would ever read out loud and was surprised she felt confident enough to read to strangers.

Literacy creates engaged citizens. When we have strong literacy skills, we are more likely to volunteer and be more engaged in our community. As our literacy skills increase, we are more likely to feel in control of our lives and use our critical thinking skills to make decisions. Literacy matters in understanding our rights and responsibilities, such as, when we are more aware of the political environment, we are more likely to vote.

When adults improve their literacy skills, they may find themselves doing things they never expected they would do.

Literacy Matters to Ron

Ron worked at a fast-food restaurant and decided to change his career. He noticed the community lacked reliable access to garbage disposal services and decided to launch his own business. He claimed he wasn't a 'good student' and didn't do well in school. He had difficulty comprehending what he read from just the words alone. But he did understand how things worked and what he needed to do to reach his goal.

One thing he needed was his Class 3 driver's license. Although he studied the workbook twice, he failed the test both times. He had a tutor from a literacy organization work with him, carefully going over each question at a pace that matched his learning needs. He took the test several times over of a period of 18 months before he finally passed. As a learner driver he registered for lessons, and when he felt ready, he took the test and failed. Despite having to drive 400+km to retake the test multiple times, he persevered and finally got his license.

Now, his business is thriving. He provides a reliable, punctual service and during COVID-19 his clientele doubled. He is now buying his third truck. (The Displaced Workers Project: Case Studies. Decoda Literacy Solutions. 2021)

Literacy matters when it comes to our economic opportunities. According to the 2019 national research report 'Literacy and Essential Skills as a Poverty Reductions Strategy', there is a clear relationship between literacy skills and the experience of poverty. The report further states that improving our literacy skills can increase our job performance, employment opportunities, and subsequently result in higher earnings and longer-term employment.

Numerous entry level jobs in a variety of fields require a 'basic education', but they also require increased foundational skills in critical thinking, adaptability to changes on the job and problem-solving skills. Ongoing changes in the work environment will continue to demand higher levels of literacy skills. Gaining these skills can result in changes for adults and open the way for them to take control of the direction of their life.

Literacy Matters to Mark

In early 2000, Mark left his rural Alberta hometown to go and work. Fort McMurray was experiencing a major boom and Mark, like many of his peers, left school early to work in the oil patch. The job paid well and did not require high school completion. Mark's literacy skills were sufficient for the demands of his job then, but now the same positions require a knowledge of how to use digital devices, as well as technical reading, interpretation and critical thinking skills. Our work, home, community and around the world has shifted to an 'information-intense economy.' (Ontario Literacy Coalition, *Menial is Menial No More*)

According to Ontario Literacy Coalition's 2011 discussion paper *Menial is Menial No More*, "Jobs perceived as low-skilled are undergoing massive changes driven by emerging technology, the pressures of productivity, and legislative changes to health and safety standards". Routine tasks now require 'expert thinking and complex communication'. The literacy skills that were once sufficient no longer meet the demands of the job. Stronger literacy skills are essential in our changing work environment.

Literacy Matters to Everyone

Having the literacy skills to shape the course of our lives is within reach for all adults in Alberta. Non-formal learning opportunities to build foundational skills are available through Community Adult Learning Programs in communities across the province.

Improving the literacy skills of adults not only results in greater economic growth for Alberta but can improve the quality of life for each person in our communities.

'Involving the whole of community in supporting Albertans with low literacy is essential to advancing the development and skills of these individuals. Literacy develops through everyday contexts; a supportive network and effective community engagement is called upon.'

Lunch & Learn Summary: Breaking the Stigma for Albertans with Low Literacy

Want to know more?

CBC Cost of Living: Nearly half of adult Canadians struggle with literacy. 2021

https://www.cbc.ca/radio/costofliving/let-s-get-digital-from-bitcoin-to-stocktok-plus-what-low-literacy-means-for-canada-s-economy-1.5873703/nearly-half-of-adult-canadians-struggle-with-literacy-and-that-s-bad-for-the-economy-1.5873757

Indigenous Literacy Assessment. USAY

https://usay.ca/Download/Indigenous-literacy-assessment-2022.pdf

Literacy and Health. United for Literacy formerly known as Frontier College

https://www.unitedforliteracy.ca/getmedia/4c35c83e-7242-47bc-9bc4-0794c1eae70f/2018-Frontier-College-Discussion-Paper-on-Literacy-and-Health.pdf

Literacy and Mental Health. United for Literacy formerly known as Frontier College

https://www.unitedforliteracy.ca/getmedia/cf4bd45d-73f8-4c1e-b683-8ca8232e0f2a/2022-Literacy-and-Mental-Health-Discussion-Paper.pdf

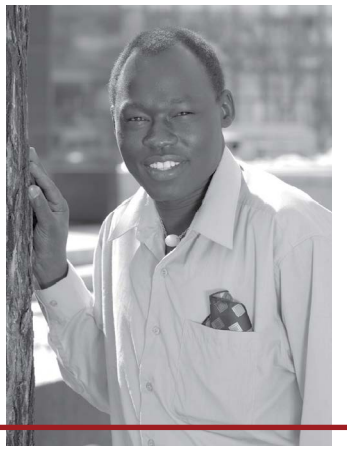
Literacy Pittsburgh: Challenges of Low Literacy

https://www.literacypittsburgh.org/the-challenge/

What are examples of daily literacy activities?

- Understanding the information in print materials you encounter such as the newspaper, reports,
- job ads, brochures, labels on foods or medicine containers, training manuals, or street signs
- Skimming and scanning print materials for specific information, such as when a bus leaves or
- proportions for diluting baby formula
- Organizing information in logical sequence when you are making a report or presentation
- Reading and interpreting charts, graphs, maps, schedules, or other numerical information
- Summarizing information from anything you read, such as how to take care of a particular health problem or what safety procedures to follow when on the worksite
- Paraphrasing what someone has said to show you understand or to tell someone else what has been said
- Comparing information from different sources to decide what product to buy or how to prepare
- certain foods
- Being able to follow oral instructions such as how to find a particular office in an organization, how to take your medication, or how to change the setting on a piece of equipment
- Decoding letters and letter combinations in unfamiliar words, such as scientific or technical words
- Listening to the radio, television, or a podcast to get news about community events
- Using math to complete an order form for a product, double the ingredients in a recipe, or balance a budget
- Using digital devices to send an email, look up information online, or use automated checkouts
- Attending a class in parenting, life skills, cultural sensitivity, or workplace training in person or online
- Writing reports, creative writing, or journal writing

Plain Language Guidelines



"Banking is like a different language.

So, when I go to the bank they just assume that everybody knows banking language and I didn't know. I didn't know anything about credit issues and things like that."
- Paul

What is plain language?

Plain or clear language is a way of communicating with people so that your message is easy to understand the first time. Plain language speaks directly to the reader or listener; the audience or clients are the focus, not your organization. Plain language imagines how the audience understands the message and focuses communication from that point of view.

"I'm becoming aware now of how much I've taken for granted being literate. I'm meeting new Canadians who are at a loss about how to navigate through our system. There's a mini success story each time they get a little bit of help to read a few signs, decipher a few flyers, get a few good deals, or feel comfortable in the dentist's office."

- Marilyn, Literacy Coordinator

Plain language uses:	Plain language does not use:
shorter sentences common vocabulary short paragraphs one idea per paragraph bulleted lists lots of white space on the page use of the first or second person (I, you, or we) more often to engage the reader or listener visual organizers such as charts or pictures to illustrate main ideas a positive, friendly tone polite phrases to engage the reader or listener	long sentences with phrases and clauses strung together by commas jargon, technical language, acronyms, abbreviations, or Roman numerals long complicated paragraphs several ideas in one paragraph long lists in sentences separated by commas crowded words, diagrams, or paragraphs on the page use of the third person (one, they, or them) since it distances the reader or listener complicated graphs or diagrams to illustrate every point negative sentence constructions the shortest way of saying something if it means being blunt or accidentally rude

"The literacy audit was a very positive experience. Our clients are happy to see changes that make our agency more literacy friendly.

- On Site Placement Services Association

What does clear writing look like?

Original version:

Unnecessary interruptions to classroom activities

It has come to our attention that many children are not always clear about how they will be getting home at the end of each day. We would therefore be grateful if you would please ensure that in the mornings before your child leaves for school they know what their plans are for the end of the day. This includes: are they traveling on the bus, are they being picked up, and if so who is picking them up, or are they perhaps walking home?

Although it is recognized in the school office that there may be emergencies which arise from time to time requiring changes to normal itineraries, if children know their plans in advance then interruptions are not required to be made to regular classroom instruction time in order to pass on messages. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Original version readability statistics:

Words:
148

Words per sentence:
28.6

Passive sentences:
20%

Flesch readability:
61.8

Flesch-Kincaid grade level: **11.7**

Readability statistics

Average words per sentence – this should be below 20

Passive sentences – this should be close to 0%

Flesch readability – this should be as high as possible 65 – 75%

Flesch-Kincaid grade level – this should be below 7 for average readers, between 4 and 6 for less able readers

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Plain language version:

Do your children know how they will get home after school?

Before your children leave for school each morning, please make sure they know how they will get home. Ask them these questions:

- Do you know how you will get home today?
- Will you travel by bus?
- Will you be picked up?
- Who will pick you up?
- Will you walk home today?

If children know their plans in advance, then we do not need to interrupt classroom activities to pass on last minute messages. If there is a change of plans due to an emergency, please contact the office and we will pass on the message to your child. Thank you for your help with this.

Plain language version readability statistics:

Words:
116

Words per sentence:
11.1

Passive sentences:
0%

Flesch readability:
91.9

Flesch-Kincaid grade level: **3.1**

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What changed?

Plain language changes made:

- Tone changed to a positive call to action
- Main idea highlighted at the beginning
- Questions formatted as bullet points
- Unnecessary phrases and excess words deleted:

  "It has come to our attention"

  "We would therefore be grateful if you would please ensure"

- Consistent and common vocabulary used – dropped "itinerary"
- Sentences shortened and simple sentence structure used where possible
- Passive sentences changed to active

Passive to active voice

- "how they will be getting home" changed to, "they know how they will get home"
- "it is recognized in the school office that there may be emergencies" changed to, "If there is a change of plans due to an emergency…we will pass on"
- "interruptions are not required to be made" changed to, "we do not need to interrupt"

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How can I write a document in plain language?

Vocabulary

- Think of your audience when you choose vocabulary.
- Generally, **jargon, technical language, acronyms**, and abbreviations are used when someone is part of a group – be it at work or in the community. If the terms are used, be sure to include a definition for those who may not be familiar with the meaning.
- If your audience is the general public, then find more common vocabulary to replace the jargon and technical language you generally use. Use the same vocabulary consistently throughout the document.
- If your audience must learn the technical language (for example, some medical terms), then teach it using common vocabulary and check for understanding after teaching.
- If your audience will be professionals in your field, then it will be appropriate to include in the document more of the acronyms, abbreviations, technical language, and jargon you use.
- Minimize the number of acronyms or abbreviations you use and always clearly spell out the acronyms and abbreviations the first time you use them (such as "When giving cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)…").

Tone

- Think of your audience when you choose the tone of your writing.
- All audiences appreciate the first or second person (I, you, or we) in text because the reader feels directly connected to what you are writing about.
- Pretend that you are speaking to the audience directly and write using that vocabulary and tone; this will engage your audience and keep your writing friendly and positive in tone.
- Using a question and answer format for the body of your text will engage the reader more than long sections with paragraphs (for example, this section is written in question/answer format).

"Plain language is information that is easy to read. There's a wide range of people so not everybody's going to have the same literacy skills. Having plain language documents is going to help everybody to access services."

- The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute

Sentence length and structure

- Use shorter sentences more often.
- Keep the subject and verb close to one another in the sentence.

Examples:

Complex sentence length and structure:

> It is to be announced on consecutive months which agencies will be receiving the grant monies via the provincial government body.

Easier sentence length and structure:

> We will notify you every two months if your agency will be receiving grant money.

Headings

- Use descriptive headings to indicate the main ideas.
- Use brief headings with plain language.
- Use a question and answer format with questions as headings. This will encourage people to read to find the answers.
- Set off the headings with bold or a different font style from the rest of the document.
- Italics are difficult to read and are therefore not often used when writing in plain language.

Test your materials

- Use your audience to test the advertising or print or digital materials you produce.
- The people who receive your information will give you the best feedback about the effectiveness of your materials.
- There are various ways to test your materials such as focus groups, one-on-one interviews, study circles, etc.

How can I make my documents more readable?

Microsoft Word has a tool to show you the **readability** statistics for your document. Type 'readability' in the Help menu for directions on how to find and use the readability statistics. It will check for word count, sentences per paragraph and words per sentence as well as the reading ease percentage, grade level and percentage of passive sentences.

Some versions of Word will allow you to check how assessable your document is based on best practices. The **Accessibility Checker** will give you tips and recommendations on how to make your document more accessible for others.

Google Docs no longer has a readability tool as a standard function. Instead, you will need to use a third-party app.

Remember you want to look for these readability statistics:

Average words per sentence – this should be below 20

Passive sentences – this should be close to 0%

Flesch readability – this should be as high as possible 65 – 75%

Flesch-Kincaid grade level – this should be below 7 for average readers, between 4 and 6 for less able readers

"The literacy audit made us really aware that everything you're putting out from a postcard, to a form, to the materials that you're using to present in class, everything needs to be carefully considered. I think that was a big eye opener for our staff."

- Gabriela, Momentum: A Community Economic Development Organization

Choose an appropriate reading level for your document

Beginning

> I do not drive to work. I take the bus. I save money this way. I do not have to pay for gas. I do not have to pay for parking. I save money on gas. I save money on parking.

Intermediate

> I don't drive my car to work. I take the bus instead. This saves me money because I don't pay for gas or parking. Parking is very high – five dollars a day. That would be twenty-five dollars a week!

More advanced

> I could drive to work, but I decided to take the bus in order to save money. When I include the costs of parking, gas, and maintenance, I figure I must be saving around a thousand dollars a year.

Beginning

Short simple words mainly of one syllable. Short simple, repetitive sentences of 4 – 8 words. (Flesch-Kincaid grade levels range 0 – 2)

Intermediate

Short, simple words mainly of one or two syllables. Short but more fluid sentences of 6 – 12 words. (Flesch-Kincaid grade levels range 2 – 5)

More advanced

Conversational, but not sophisticated, words of one to three syllables. Conversational sentences of 10 – 20 words. (Flesch-Kincaid grade levels range 5 – 9)

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How can I design a document that looks clear on the page?

Justification

Keep all lines aligned on the left and ragged on the right. This is how most materials are printed so readers are used to this style.

Full justification, so that both ends of text are in line at the left and right margins, stretches spaces between words unnaturally. This can be very hard to read. The following body of text is fully justified. There are large spaces between the words. Can you see the stretching?

> The literacy audit made us really aware that everything you're putting out from a postcard, to a form, to the materials that you're using to present in class, everything needs to be carefully considered. I think that was a big eye opener for our staff.

Hyphenation

- Avoid splitting a word over two lines. Example: hyphe-
  nation

Fonts

- Use common font styles and sizes
- For example, Calibri, Cambria and Arial are popular font styles. Use other fonts that look similar in appearance to these.
- THE USE OF ALL CAPITALS IN YOUR DOCUMENT gives the impression of shouting, and sets a negative tone. It is difficult to read because all of the letters are blocked and look the same. Capital letters are best used for titles and headings.
- *Italics* are considered difficult to read and should be used sparingly

Graphics

- Use common, simple diagrams and line drawings to illustrate your main ideas
- Keep any graphics close to the main ideas they describe
- Keep graphics to one side, above, or below the ideas they represent
- Keep graphics to a minimum so they do not clutter the page

White space

- Create white space to encourage readers to read
- Create visual contrast between the letters on the page and the background, for reading ease and photocopying
- Use off-white paper that is not glossy, with darker print
- Keep extra text in the margins to a minimum (e.g., definitions, quotations, footnotes, or graphics)
- Use 1.5 line spacing between the lines in paragraphs and 2.0 line spacing between paragraphs
- Put spaces above and below bulleted lists to separate them from the main text
- Keep no more than two thirds white space on a page

"One of the things that is most important is creating partnerships with the clients and getting them involved in creating documents. They know what they can understand. They know what they can read."

- Stacey, The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute

How can I speak clearly?

Clear verbal communication means using the same key words and messages in all of your print materials, on the voicemail messages for your organization, and in what is said during conversations with clients.

Clear verbal communication uses:

- Key words from written materials
- Gestures to illustrate main ideas
- Three to five main ideas in a message
- Delivery of instructions in time-order sequence
- Pauses between pieces of information to allow listeners time to form questions or process the information
- Repetition of the most important pieces of information at the beginning and end of each conversation

Tips for clear verbal communication:

- Turn off your phone's ringer and close your door if in an office
- Use a friendly tone of voice at all times
- Face the listener to support those who are hard of hearing or if culturally appropriate
- Project an unhurried image; let the listener know that you have time to listen and help
- Verbally go over any brochures with clients and use a highlighter to underline the most important points
- Be prepared to repeat what you say using different vocabulary
- Use respectful lead-ins to offer assistance with various reading and writing tasks:

  "I'm not sure if I remembered to tell you about…"

  "Just remind me what I've already said about… so I'm sure I haven't forgotten to tell you everything you need to know."

  "I'm not sure the questions on this form are very clear to get the information we need. Let's go over them together."

  "I find that the print on this form is a little hard to read… can I help you with it?"

Where can I get more help with plain language?

The following is a list of established websites that will provide detailed descriptions of plain language guiding principles and practical instruction for plain or clear language.

Plain Language Reference websites

Plain Language (NWT): provides Plain Language principles and links to resources such as the Write for your Reader: Plain Language Handbook

https://www.nwtliteracy.ca/resources/plain-language

Writing Resources (Canada): Government of Canada website with links to other resources on plain language writing

https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/ressources-resources/ressources-resources/langue-claire-plain-language-eng

Plain Language Checklist (BC): Checklist with links to more information on using plain language

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/service-experience-digital-delivery/web-content-development-guides/web-style-guide/writing-guide/plain-language

Plain English Campaign (United Kingdom): Scroll down to Plain English Tools to access the free guides for pdf documents and free software downloads.

http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/

Plain Language (United States): Federal plain language guidelines. The guide includes examples and strategies for writing in plain language. Look for the guide on the left side of the page under the words 'In this Section'.

https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/

Plain language online training courses

The Plain Train (Canada)

http://www.lisibilite.net/PlainTrain/

NIH Plain Language Training (United States): Produced by the National Institutes of Health in the United States. An interactive course on using plain language.

https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/plain-language/plain-language-getting-started-or-brushing

Because websites can change drastically over time, or become extinct, try using the terms "plain language" or "clear language" when searching online for current information on these topics. The two terms are interchangeable. You can find a number of videos on plain language when searching Google for plain language resources.

"Just being able to participate in everyday life and not being isolated is a challenge without English. To get meaningful employment, you need English. To fill out any application form, to get a library card, to get a subsidy for childcare, you need English."

- Tamara, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Tip:
Print Me

Appendix A:
Literacy Awareness Walkabout Worksheet

Walk around the front space of your organization and look at everything you can see on the walls, objects in the space and any print material. Look for examples of how the organization both supports and hinders a literacy-friendly environment.

Consider the following points and take notes as you walk about:

- How do people find what they are looking for? Is there someone to help them? What processes are in place for when new people walk in the door?

- Is it obvious who is the front-line person? Are there barriers (desk, counter, glass partition) between the front-line person and clients?

- How clear are the signs, symbols, and displays that explain the organization's services and that direct you around the environment?

    - Can you see what supports the organization provides when you walk in?

    - How easy is it to see who/what/when/how/where the organization serves?

- What organizational **jargon** could be a barrier to understanding the services provided?

- Do you need to fill out a form to use this organization's services? How easy is the form to read/complete? Is friendly, helpful, confidential assistance readily available?

- Do you need to access information online? How easy is it to find the information online? Is the site easy to navigate?

- How easy is it to read the print-based materials that describe:
    - The organization's services?
    - Other related services that have brochures/posters at this organization?
- Does the organization display awareness of literacy issues?
    - Literacy posters/flyers from local literacy classes
    - Signs or notices offering help with forms

After the walkabout, discuss as staff specific instances where your organization is doing well, and where it could make changes to reduce barriers and create a more literacy-friendly environment. Identify some strategies for change.

Based on the Widening Access for Adult Literacies project of The Learning Centre Literacy Association and The Candora Society of Edmonton 2008.

Appendix B:
Gaining Consensus Template

A. We are doing this consistently	B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
C. We are not doing this, but we should be	D. Not applicable

(Adapted from Connecting Literacy to Community)

Glossary

Accessibility - the design of products, devices, services or environments for people who experience disabilities

Accessibility Checker - verifies your document or website against a set of rules that identify possible issues for people who have disabilities. Depending on how severe the issue is, the Accessibility Checker classifies each issue as an error, warning, or tip. Microsoft 365 includes an Accessibility Checker.

Accessibility Guidelines – guidelines that outline how to make your document accessible for everyone

Acronyms – a series of letters taken from a term or name which is used in place of the term or name. For instance, CPR is the acronym for the term cardiopulmonary resuscitation and for the name Canadian Pacific Railway.

Assistive technology - used to describe products or systems that support and assist individuals with disabilities, restricted mobility or other impairments to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible

Equity - the situation in which everyone is treated fairly according to their needs and no group of people is given special treatment

Digital - websites, online documents, online forms, social media posts, video

Interpreter – provides oral translation of speech into a second language, or translation of speech into sign language.

Jargon – terminology or phrases which are usually understood and used within a specific context. For example, "non-attending physician" is jargon in the medical field for a doctor who helps you, but who is not your regular doctor.

Plain language or clear language – a way of writing or speaking which uses common vocabulary so that your message is easy to understand the first time. Refer to Plain Language Guidelines for more information. Plain language and clear language are interchangeable terms. Use either term when you research this concept.

Readability – a measure of how easy or difficult a piece of text is to read. Readability is usually expressed as a grade level or rating scale as in, "This text has a readability of Grade 6.3 on the Flesch-Kincaid scale."

Technical language - written or oral communication that has specialized content. The product specification for a new microprocessor, a financial presentation by a senior executive and a design meeting for a new medical device are all examples of technical communication.

Translator – provides written translation of text from one language to another.

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