

# Plain Language Overview

A comprehensive survey of literacy skills in ten of the advanced, industrialized nations found that one in every four American adults lacks “the minimum literacy skills needed for coping with everyday life and work in a complex, information-dependent society.”<sup>1</sup>

A great number of Americans are at the high and low ends of the literacy continuum, producing an average reading proficiency level of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The most literate Americans typically write for less literate citizens without first assessing the readability of their documents.

Understanding the relationship between literacy levels and access and cost has prompted many departments of the State of California to establish specific readability criteria for public documents. Recently, Governor Schwarzenegger has joined the Plain Language initiative ordering state workers to use Plain English.

As a provider of Plain Language services since 1998, Transcend is uniquely positioned to support the Governor’s order through: training, consultation, Plain language adaptations, and usability testing.

## PL Training includes:

- PL writing techniques
- Readability instruments, print & web
- PL editing and review
- PL formatting
- Field Test Instruments
- Field Test Methods
- Focus Groups & Reporting
- Glossaries and Templates

## Who’s using Plain Language?

Transcend’s PL clients include:

- Secretary of State of California
- Judicial Council of California
- Dept. of Justice of California
- Dept. of Health Services
- Dept. of Toxic Substances Control
- Dept. of Developmental Services

## Benefits of Plain Language

### Access

Using Plain Language allows more people to read and understand government materials. This understanding gives readers access to the protection, information and services that was intended.

### Savings

A collateral benefit of Plain Language is cost. A Plain Language document typically has 40% less words than the original. Not only is it easier to read and use, but there will be significant savings in printing and translation (which are on a per word basis).

### Usability

Public agencies share many communication objectives. Testing documents lets us know what types of language, formatting and text organization methods are most effective. Sharing this information allows us to benefit from our collective experiences.



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Footnote:

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy