

Easy to read, Easy to Use

How to write about your work in words everyone will understand

Nicole Bedford & Carly Foubert



What will we talk about today?



What is plain language?



Why is plain language
important?



How do you write in plain language?



Where can you find additional resources?



What do you think about our presentation?



Is it over yet?!



PLAIN LANGUAGE ISN'T...



BORING

PATRONIZING

DUMBING DOWN

OVERSIMPLIFYING

JUST FOR ACADEMICS



BORING

PATRONIZING

DUMBBING DOWN

OVERSIMPLIFYING

JUST FOR ACADEMICS



BORING

DUMBBING DOWN

PATRONIZING

OVERSIMPLIFYING

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BORING

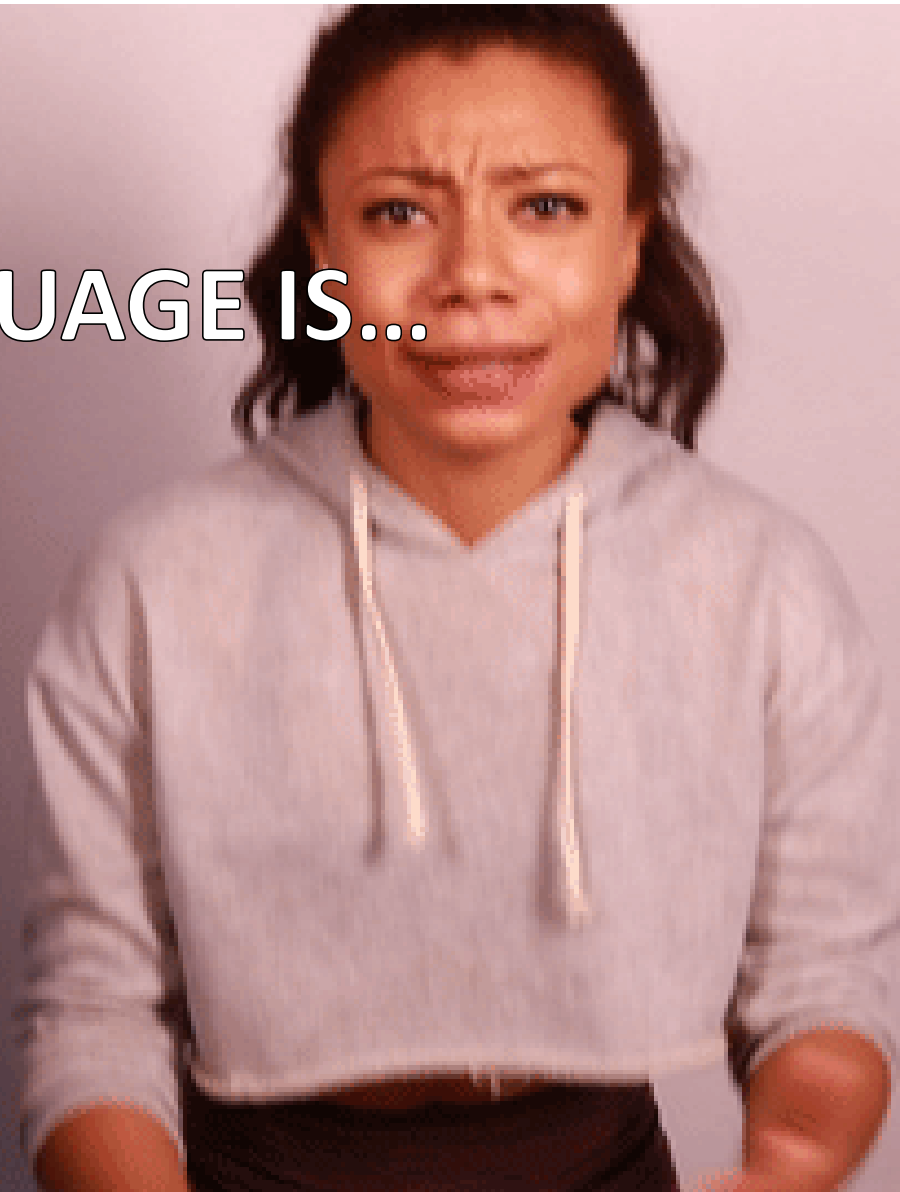
PATRONIZING

DUMBBING DOWN

OVERSIMPLIFYING

JUST FOR ACADEMICS

PLAIN LANGUAGE IS...




Plain language is communication
that is clear and easy to understand
the first time it's read.






A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The laptop screen is black and displays the text '✓ FIND WHAT THEY NEED' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with trees and a building. A solid teal vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

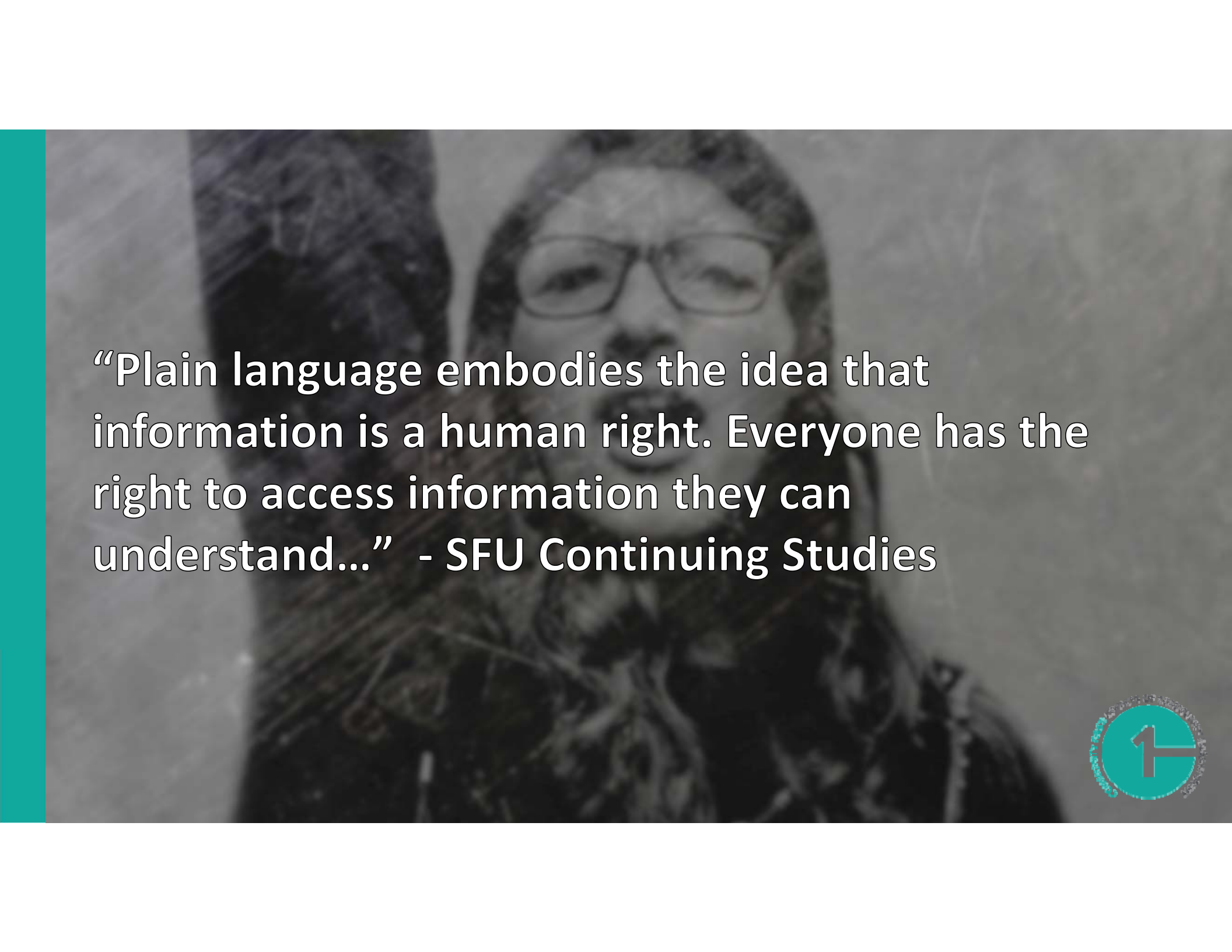
✓ FIND WHAT THEY NEED

- 
- A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The laptop screen is black and displays a white checklist with two items, each preceded by a checkmark. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with a white fence and greenery. A solid teal vertical bar is on the left side of the image.
- ✓ FIND WHAT THEY NEED
 - ✓ UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY FIND

- 
- A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The laptop screen is black and displays a white checklist with three items, each preceded by a checkmark. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with trees and a building. A solid teal vertical bar is on the left side of the image.
- ✓ FIND WHAT THEY NEED
 - ✓ UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY FIND
 - ✓ USE WHAT THEY FIND TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

Why is plain language
important?





“Plain language embodies the idea that information is a human right. Everyone has the right to access information they can understand...” - SFU Continuing Studies



- 4 in 10 adult Canadians do not have the literacy skills they need to meet the demands of modern life. (IALSS, 2003)



- 27% of adult Canadians (5.8 million) do not have the skills to cope with unfamiliar or complex reading material. (IALSS, 2003)



- 14.6% of adult Canadians (3 million) do not have the skills to deal with most writing material they encounter in everyday life. (IALSS, 2003)

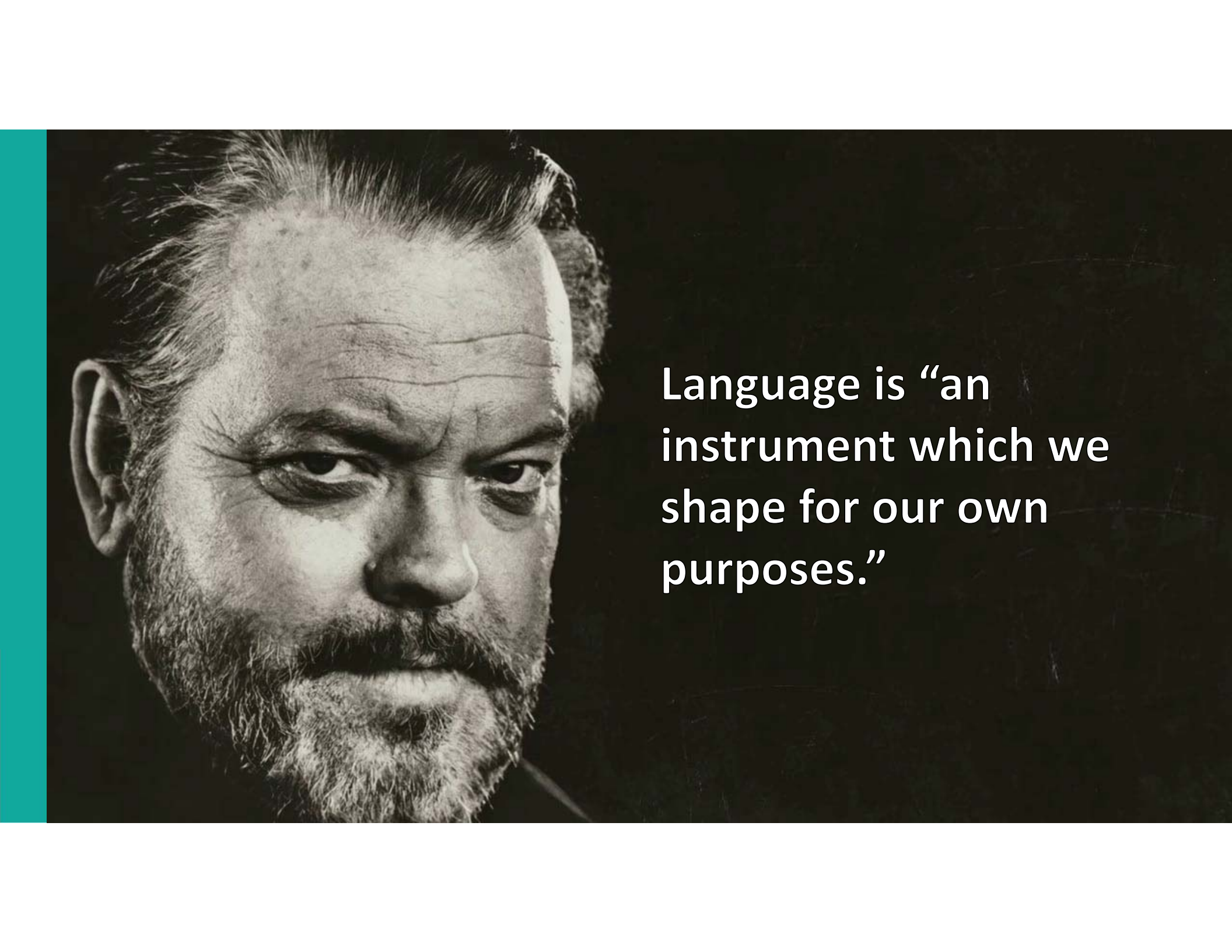


- The average American is considered to have a readability level equivalent to a 7th/8th grader (12 to 14 years old). (Center for Plain Language)



- By not addressing the readability of your content, you could also be actively discriminating against users with learning disabilities (Center for Plain Language)



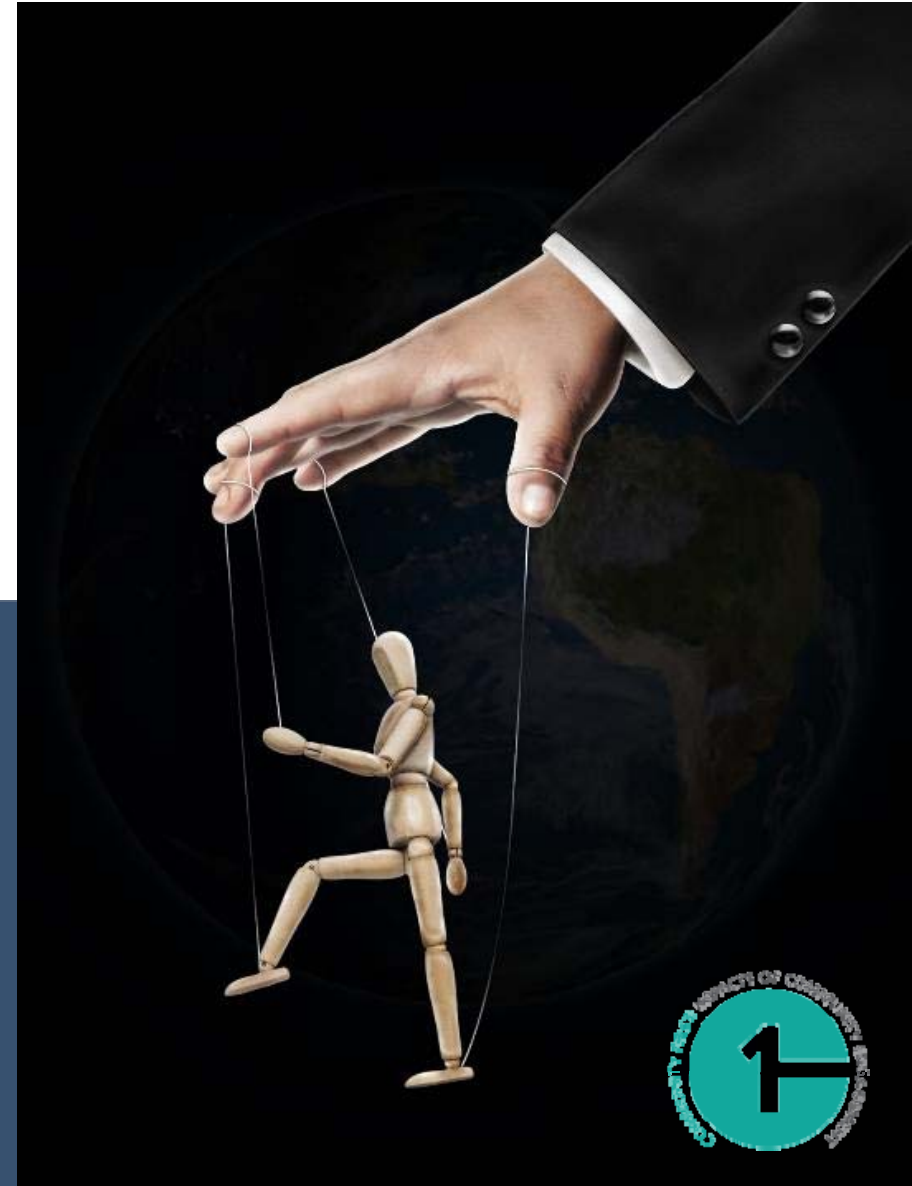
A high-contrast, black and white portrait of a man with a full, dark beard and mustache. He has a serious, intense expression, looking slightly off-camera. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows on the right side of his face and forehead. The background is dark and textured. A solid teal vertical bar is visible on the far left edge of the image.

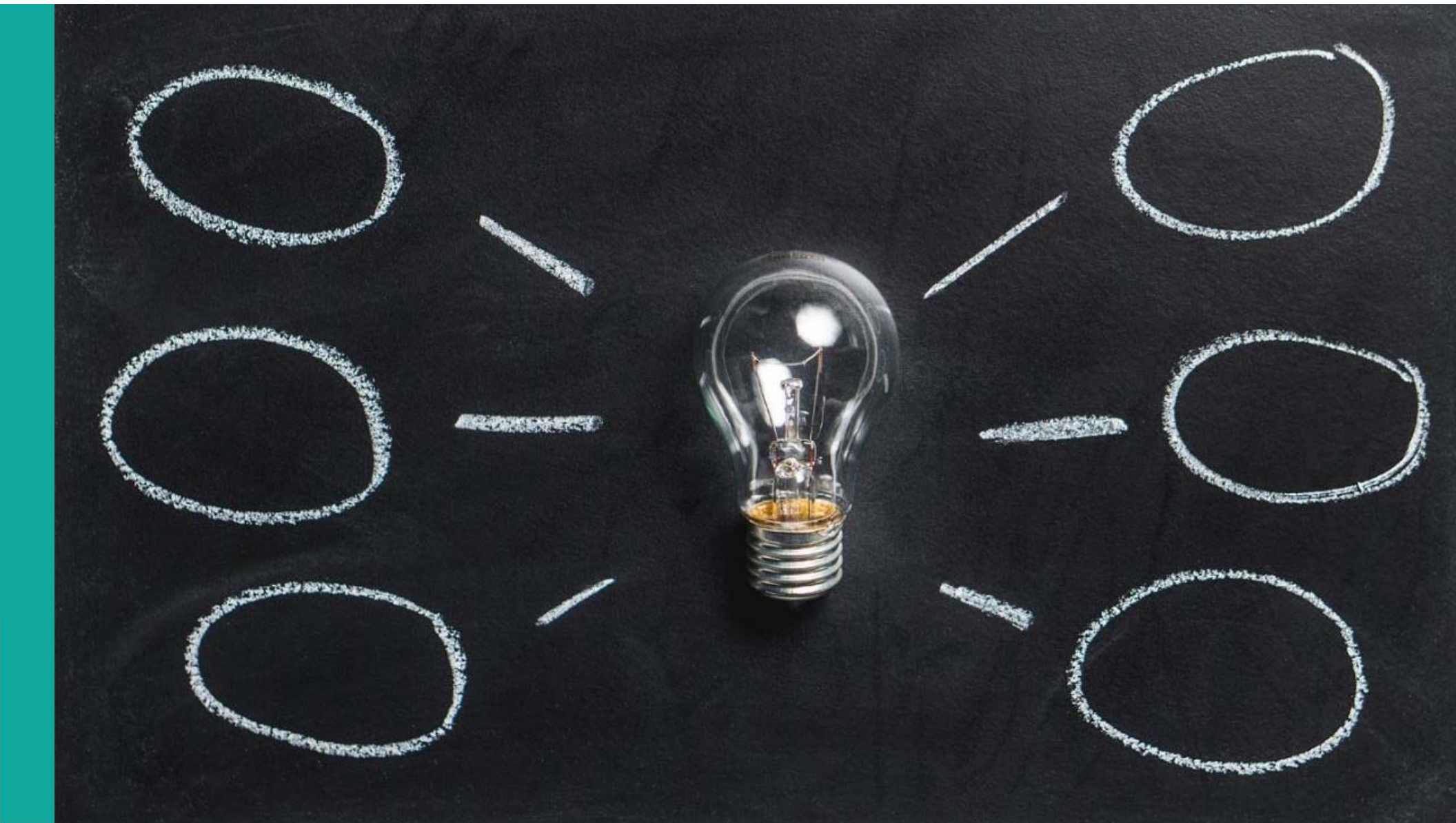
Language is “an
instrument which we
shape for our own
purposes.”





“pacifying the
enemy”





Goals



Goals



Timelines

Goals

Ideas

Timelines



Goals

Progress

Ideas

Timelines



Goals

Acronyms

Ideas



Progress

Timelines

Goals

\$\$\$\$\$

Acronyms

Progress

Ideas

Timelines



USE PLAIN LANGUAGE

Goals

\$\$\$\$\$

Acronyms

Progress

Ideas

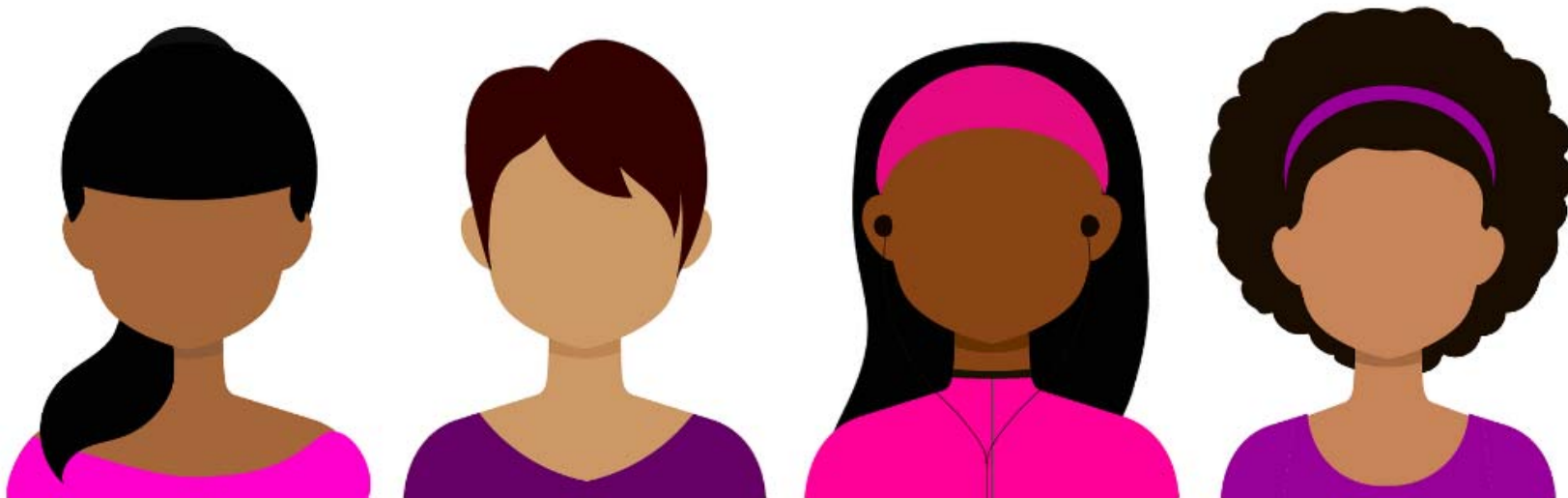
Timelines



How do you write in plain language?

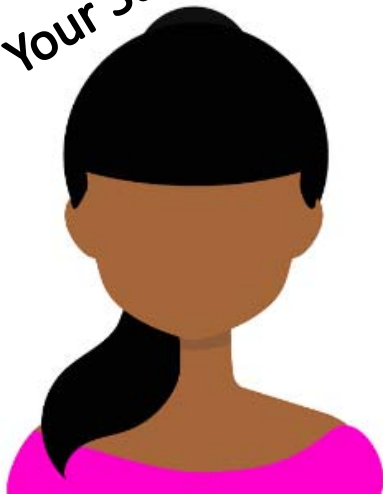


Who is your audience?



Who is your audience?

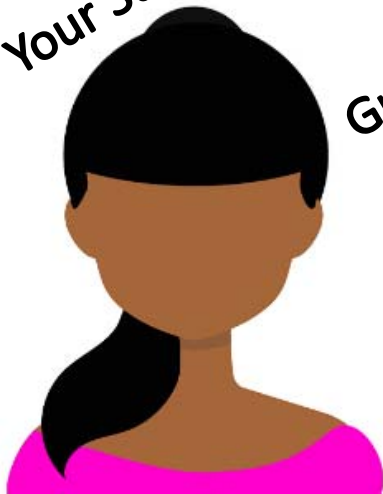
Your Supervisor



Who is your audience?

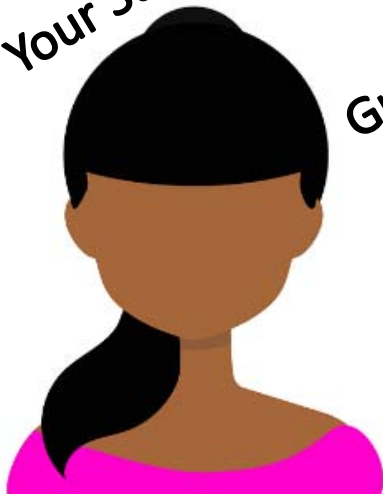
Your Supervisor

Grade 8 Reading Level

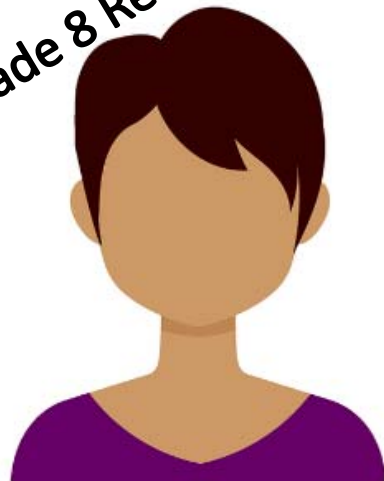


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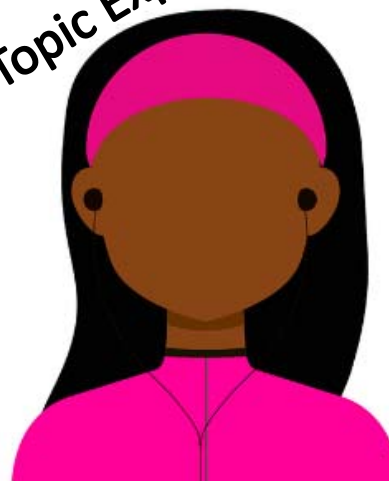
Your Supervisor



Grade 8 Reading Level

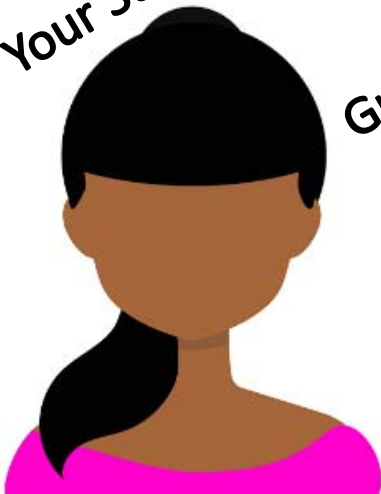


Topic Expert

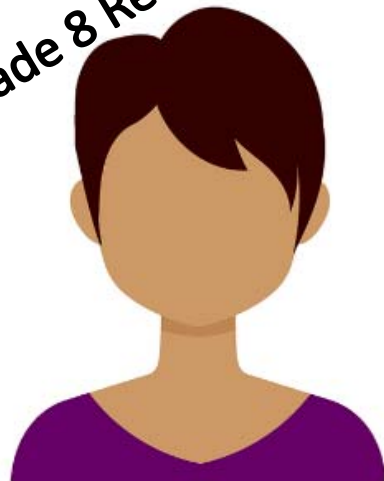


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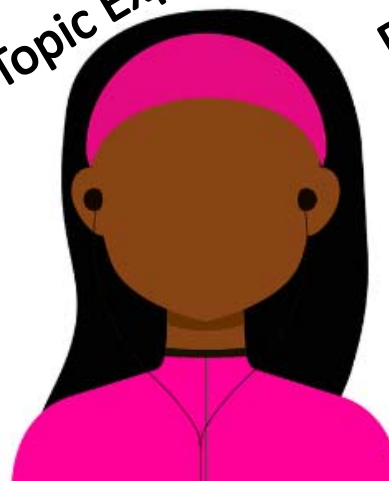
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Grade 8 Reading Level



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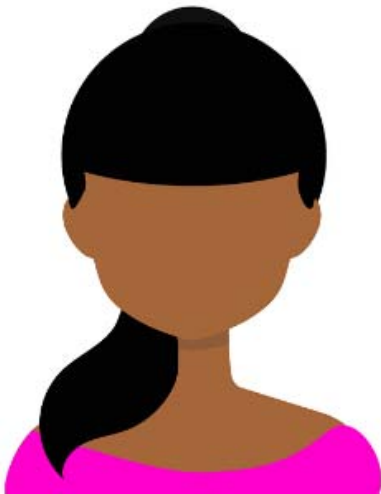


Reading at doctor's office

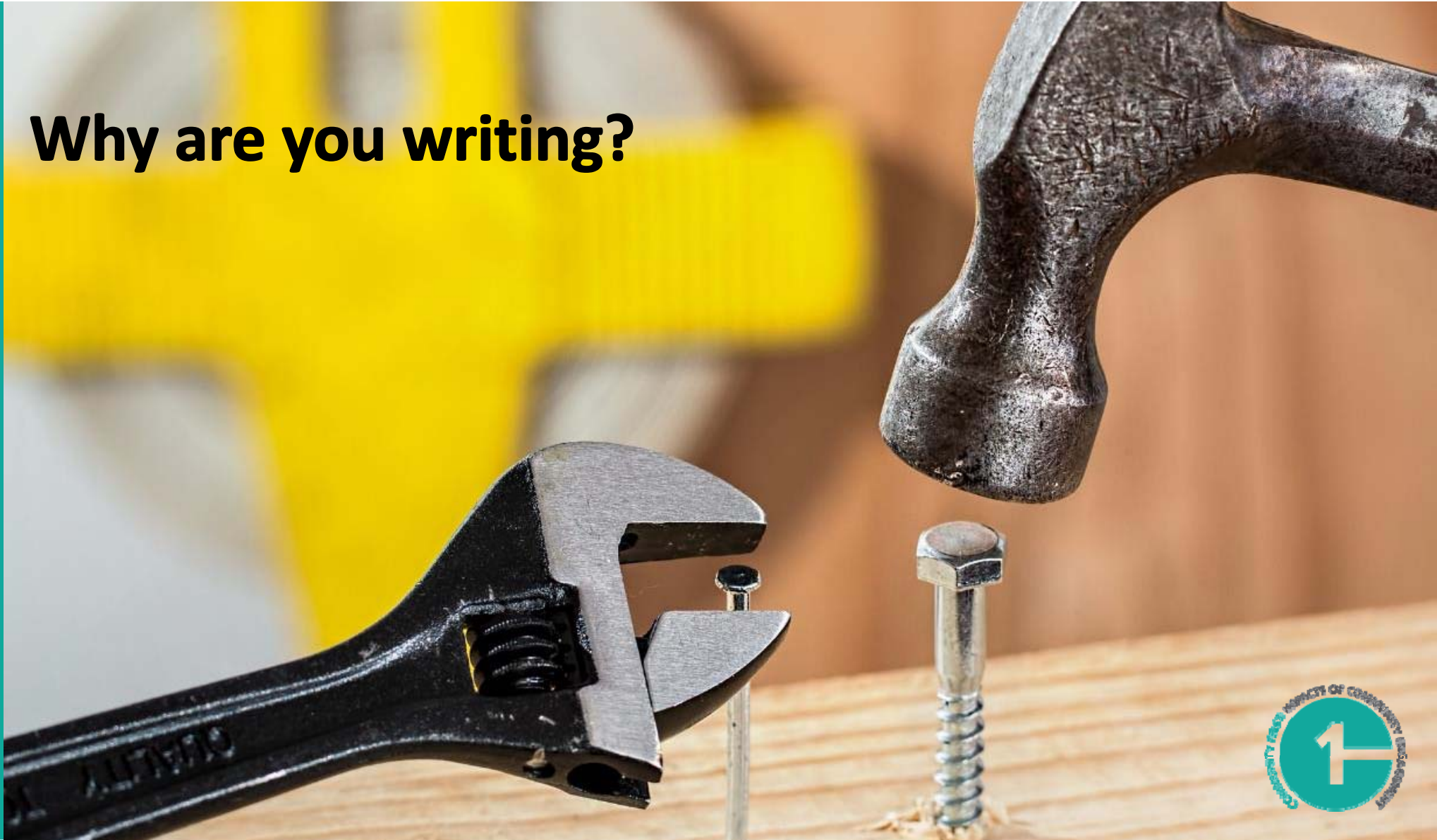


Who is your audience?

→ How to deliver message



Why are you writing?













What is your goal?



What is your goal?



What to write and how



Girls and Football SA



- Use soccer to help South African girls develop self-esteem and learn about health



Girls and Football SA



- Use soccer to help South African girls develop self-esteem and learn about health
- Need to share information to inspire donors



Girls and Football SA



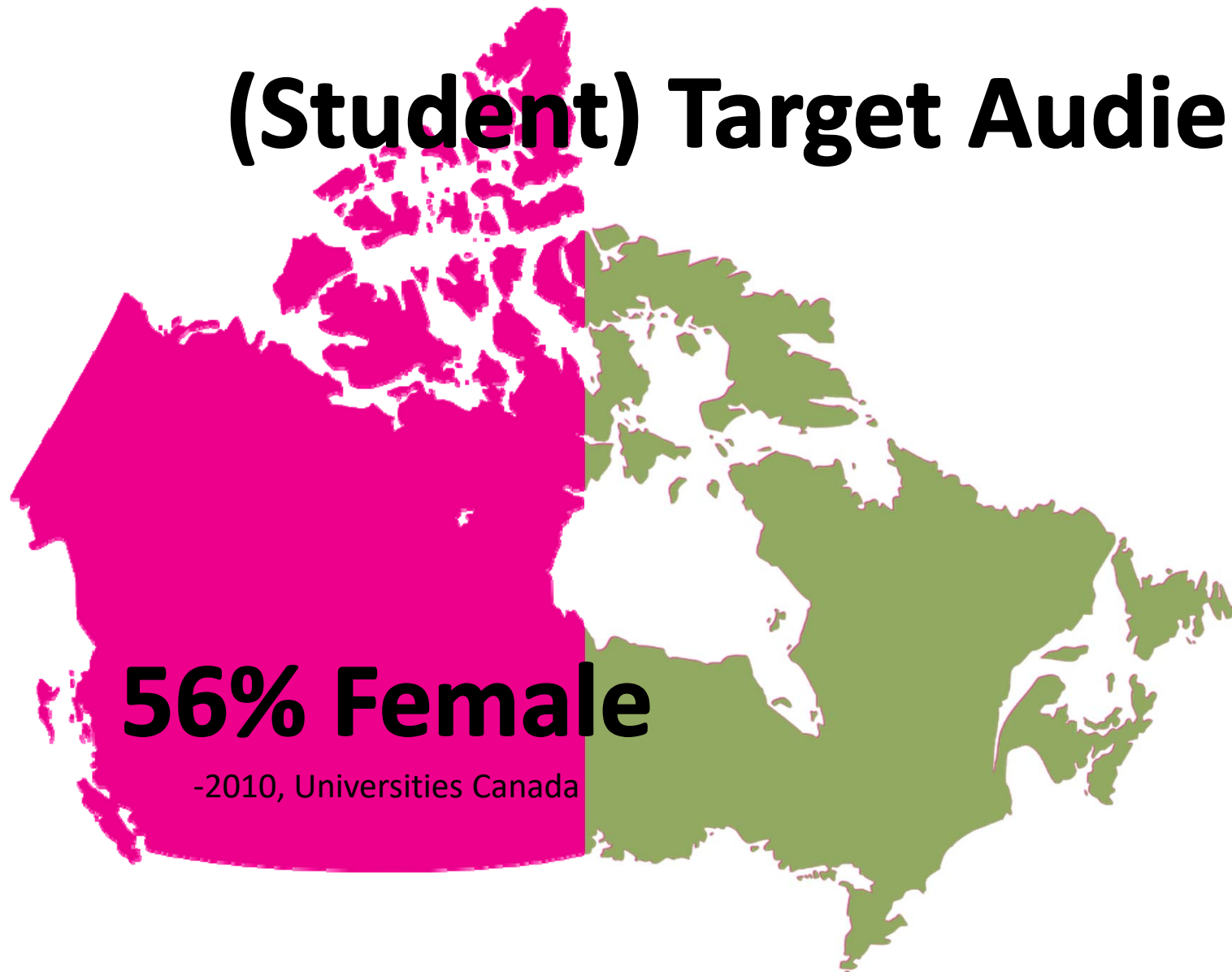
- Use soccer to help South African girls develop self-esteem and learn about health
- Need to share information to inspire donors
- Target for new donors: Western University students



(Student) Target Audience



(Student) Target Audience



“Kate” (Student) Target Audience



- Female



“Kate” (Student) Target Audience



- Female
- 22 years old



“Kate” (Student) Target Audience



- Female
- 22 years old
- 3rd year arts, grade 12 reading level



“Kate” (Student) Target Audience



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- Interested in Athletics
(Running/Swimming/Yoga)



“Kate” (Student) Target Audience



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(Running/Swimming/Yoga)
- Accesses information mostly through social media channels; in particular, loves Facebook, Instagram, and BuzzFeed



“Kate” (Student) Target Audience



- Female
- 22 years old
- 3rd year arts, grade 12 reading level
- Interested in Athletics (Running/Swimming/Yoga)
- Accesses information mostly through social media channels; in particular, loves Facebook, Instagram, and BuzzFeed
- Most pressing question: How can I make a difference in the world?



Writing Targeted to Kate

What are you doing to #ChangeTheWorld? At Girls and Football SA, we #empower young #women to become #leaders through team sports. #MakeaDifference with us!



Writing Targeted to Kate

BuzzFeed → Listicle on women and sports



Writing Targeted to Kate



Quick Quiz!



Quiz Answers

1. What is plain language writing?

2. What's the first step in plain language writing?

3. Once you know your writing goal, what do you also know?



Quiz Answers

1. What is plain language writing?

ANSWER: (a) Plain language writing is communication that is clear and easy to understand the first time it's read.

2. What's the first step in plain language writing?

3. Once you know your writing goal, what do you also know?



Quiz Answers

1. What is plain language writing?

ANSWER: (a) Plain language writing is communication that is clear and easy to understand the first time it's read.

2. What's the first step in plain language writing?

ANSWER: (c) Determine your audience

3. Once you know your writing goal, what do you also know?



Quiz Answers

1. What is plain language writing?

ANSWER: (a) Plain language writing is communication that is clear and easy to understand the first time it's read.

2. What's the first step in plain language writing?

ANSWER: (c) Determine your audience

3. Once you know your writing goal, what do you also know?

ANSWER: (b) What to write about and how



How do you write in plain language?



THINK 'BLOGGING'!





Producing Content for a Blog

- *Non-academic audience*
- *Casual tone*



Do you read a book or a newspaper the same way you would a blog or a webpage?




People scan web pages
and only read about **18%**
of what's on the page



You should reduce
content by 50%!





How and when are
people consuming the
content you are
producing?







Partners in Action: The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

Monday, June 5, 2017

The most
important
sections!

ABOUT +

SECTOR-SPECIFIC WORK +

CROSS-SECTOR WORK +

TOOLS AND RESOURCES +

NEWS AND EVENTS +

CONTACT US

by Kira Locken, CFICE Volunteer

The **Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies** (CAEFS) creates and funds projects to demonstrate and eradicate the systemic violence and inequality against women in society.

Inspired by the work of **Elizabeth Fry** and established as a non-profit organization in 1978, one of the main principles of CAEFS is to prevent the criminalization and incarceration of women. This is done through collaboration among 24

Elizabeth Fry Societies across Canada, which formed the Association in 1969, offering services and advocacy across Canada.

Services include assistance with legal matters such as applications for a pardon to parole boards as well as individual and group counseling for experiences that contribute to the criminalization of women, including domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and trauma. Elizabeth Fry Societies also offer legal support during the court process, and programs to help women reintegrate into society after



Who

What

Where

When

Why

How

by Kira Locken, CFICE Volunteer

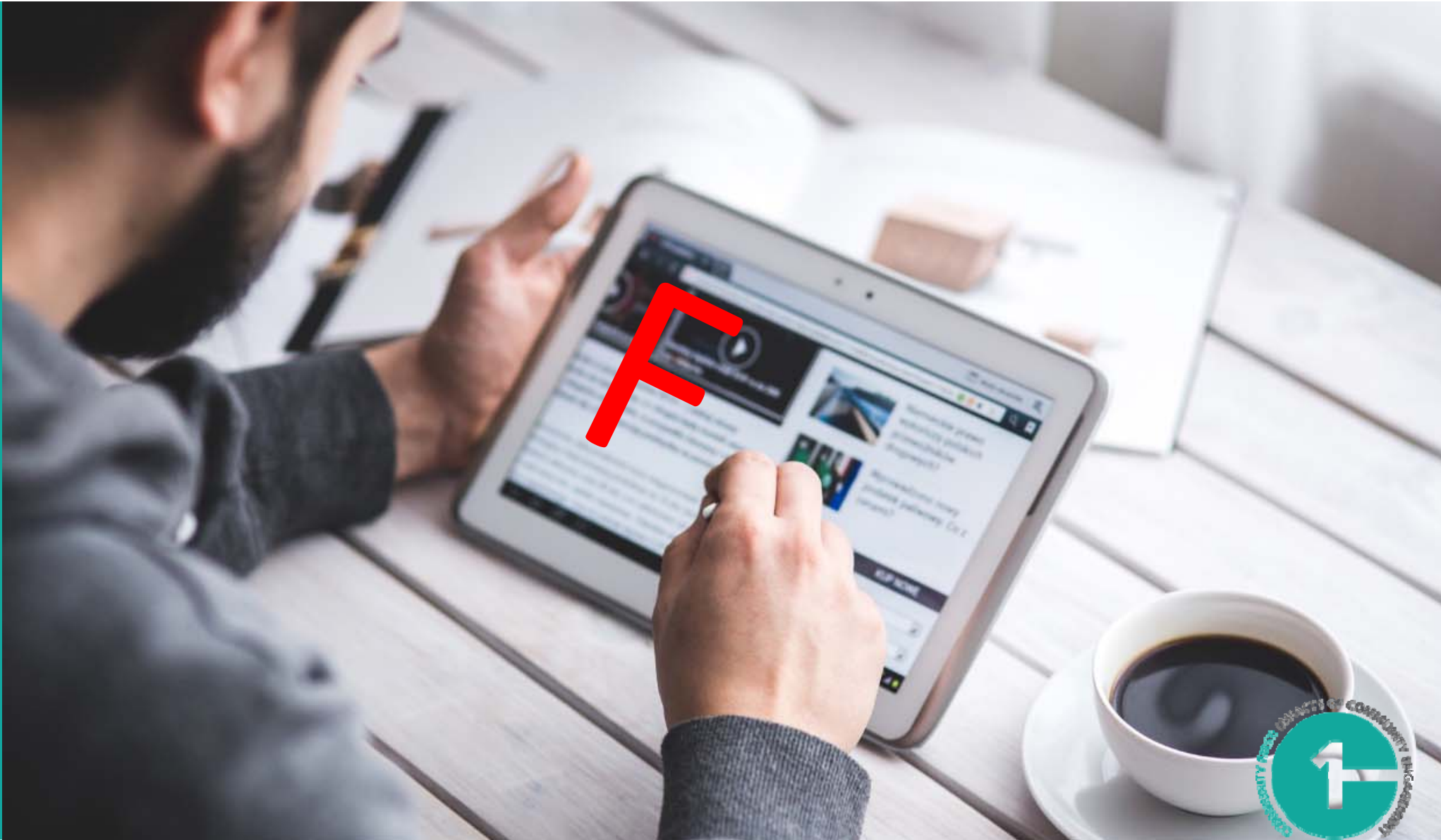
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ONE THOUGHT PER
PARAGRAPH!

- Headings
- Subheadings
- Images
- Lists

My Plan:



Sentence structure matters!



Sentence structure matters!

Complex Sentence



Tom cried because the ball hit him.

Images from: <http://www.english-grammar-revolution.com/sentence-structure.html>



Sentence structure matters!

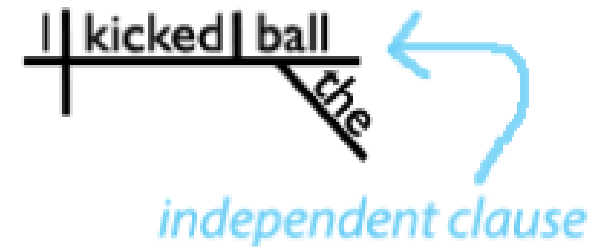
Complex Sentence



Tom cried because the ball hit him.

VS.

Simple Sentence



I kicked the ball.



INSTEAD OF

INSTEAD OF	USE
Acquire	Get

USE

Acquire

Get



A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the top left corner, there is a wooden pencil holder containing several pens and pencils. In the top right corner, there is a white mug filled with a frothy beverage. A large white sheet of paper is placed in the center of the desk, featuring a handwritten table. The table has two columns: 'INSTEAD OF' and 'USE'. Under 'INSTEAD OF' are the words 'Acquire' and 'Advance'. Under 'USE' are the words 'Get' and 'Push'. In the bottom right corner of the paper, there is a circular logo with a stylized 'G' and the text 'COMMUNITY FIRST MARKETS OF CONSUMERS EDUCATION' around it.

INSTEAD OF	USE
Acquire	Get
Advance	Push



A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the top left corner, there is a wooden pencil holder containing several colored pencils and pens. In the top right corner, there is a white mug filled with a frothy beverage. A large white sheet of paper is placed in the center of the desk, featuring a table with two columns: 'INSTEAD OF' and 'USE'.

INSTEAD OF	USE
Acquire	Get
Advance	Push
Assist	Help





Community First

@CFICECan

Communities & campuses working together for a healthy, sustainable & just society. SSHRC funded action research project co-led by Carleton University and CACSL.

📍 Canada

🌐 carleton.ca/communityfirst/

📅 Joined January 2013

📷 206 Photos and videos



C2U EXPO 2017
FOR THE COMMON GOOD

TWEETS **1,850** FOLLOWING **585** FOLLOWERS **463** LIKES **113** LISTS **5** MOMENTS **0**

Tweets Tweets & replies Media

Community First @CFICECan · now
The 140 characters that Twitter requires you to stay within forces you to be direct and concise



🔄 You Retweeted

CAEH @CAEHHomelessness · Apr 26
Canadian cities jump start efforts to end chronic homelessness in North American collaboration - mailchi.mp/caeh/m48ji9yysl #20khomes



Your Tweet activity

Your Tweets earned **1,837** over the last **week**



Apr 21

[View your top Tweets](#)

Who to follow · Refresh

WaterPolls.org

[Follow](#)

Tim Richter @tin

[Follow](#)

YWCA Toronto

[Follow](#)



Community First

@CFICECan

communities & campuses working
together for a healthy, sustainable & just
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Canada

carleton.ca/communityfirst/

joined January 2013

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TWEETS
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CAEH @CAEHHomelessness · Apr 26

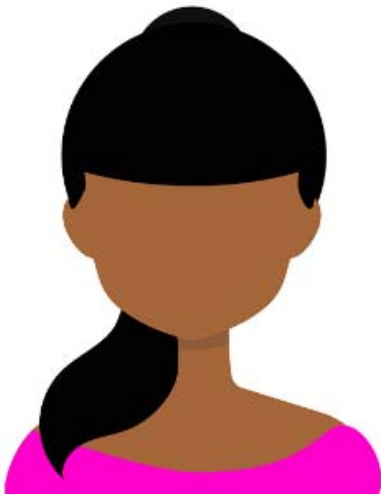
Canadian cities jump start efforts to end chronic homelessness in North American collaboration - mailchi.mp/caeh/m48ji9yvsl #20khomes



To recap...



DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE



DETERMINE YOUR WRITING GOAL



What to write and how

e.g. sports hook, grade 8 level



Writing In Plain Language for the Web

- Lead sentence: Make it interesting; 25 words max



Writing In Plain Language for the Web

- Lead sentence: Make it interesting; 25 words max
- Follow with 2-3 sentences to cover the 5 w's



Writing In Plain Language for the Web

- Lead sentence: Make it interesting; 25 words max
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- Remaining paragraphs provide more details



Writing In Plain Language for the Web

- Lead sentence: Make it interesting; 25 words max
- Follow with 2-3 sentences to cover the 5 w's
- Remaining paragraphs provide more details
- Think “140” characters/sentence (1 thought)



Readability Statistics

- Readability statistics determine the grade level of your writing
- Turn them on in Microsoft Word



Page Layout References Mailings Review View

12 A A Aa Find Replace Select Editing

Font

Heading 2

Readability Statistics

Counts	
Words	98
Characters	476
Paragraphs	4
Sentences	7
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	2.3
Words per Sentence	12.4
Characters per Word	4.5
Readability	
Passive Sentences	0%
Flesch Reading Ease	65.8
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	7.1

OK

The Readability section

Passive Sentences

Flesch Reading Ease

score, the easier it is to read. The score to be between 60 and 70.

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level – This test rates text on a U.S. school grade level. For example, a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader can understand the document. For most documents, aim for a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0.

1

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1

Page Layout References Mailings Review View

Font

12 A A Aa AaBbCcD AaBbCcD AaBbCc AaBbCc

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OK

The Readability section

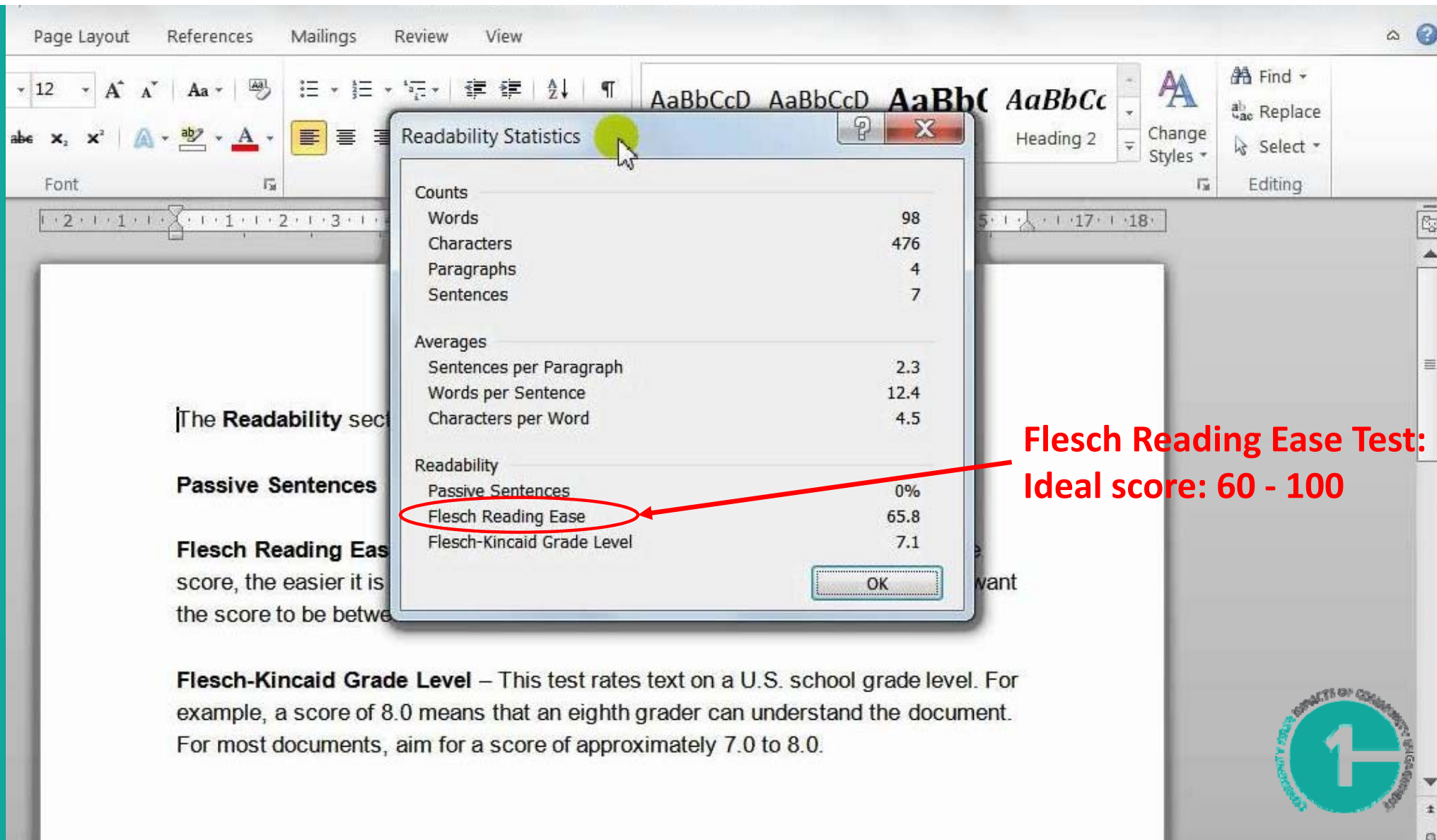
Passive Sentences

Flesch Reading Ease

score, the easier it is to read the document. The score to be between 60 and 100.

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Flesch Reading Ease Test:
Ideal score: 60 - 100



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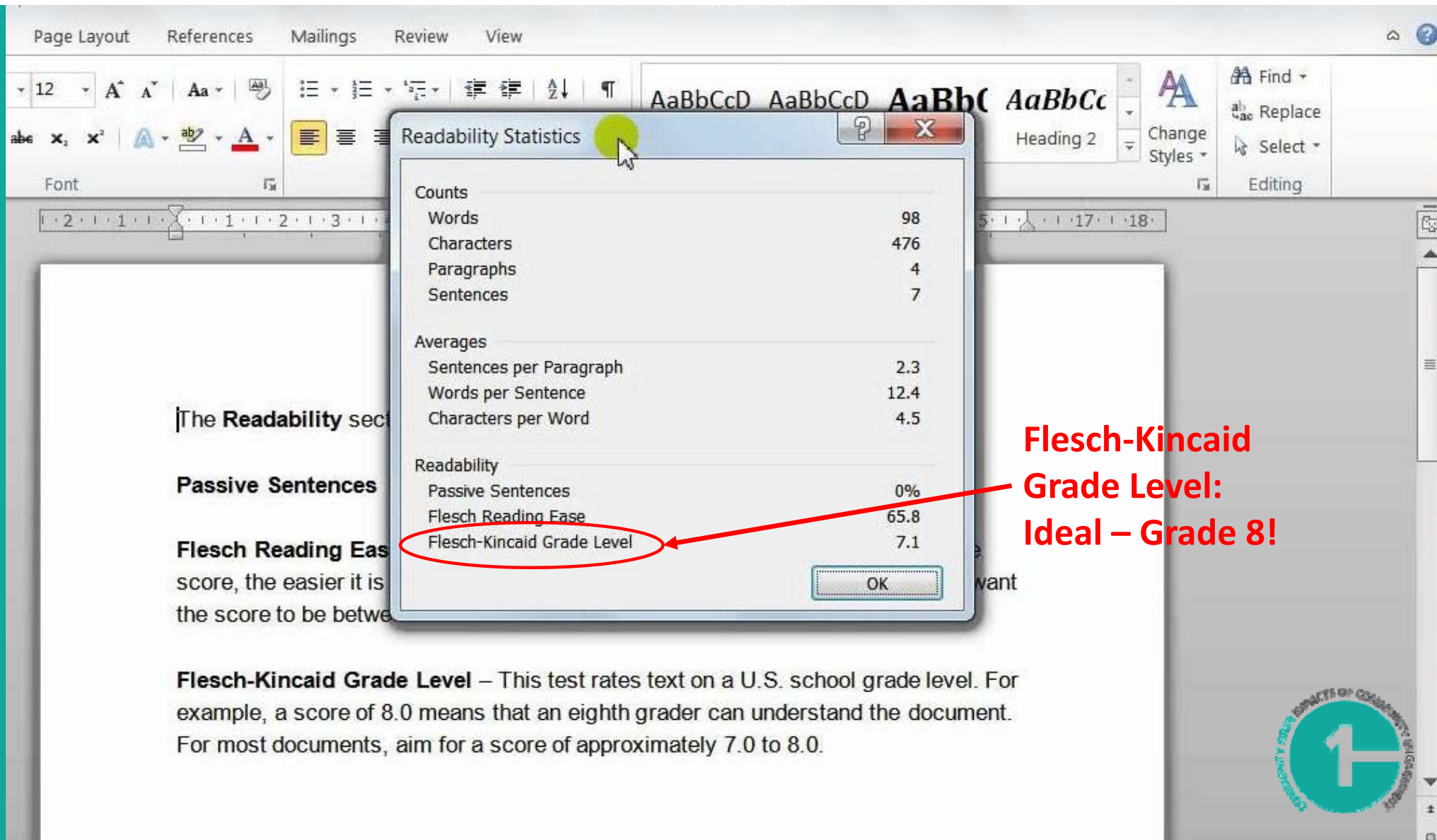
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Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: Ideal – Grade 8!



Page Layout References Mailings Review View

Font

12 A A Aa

AaBbCcD AaBbCcD AaBbCc AaBbCc

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Passive sentences
Ideal: MAX 15%

1

Page Layout References Mailings Review View

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Font [ruler] 2 1 1 2 3

[The Readability section]

Passive Sentences

Flesch Reading Ease
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Want

Readability Statistics

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OK

http://www.hemingwayapp.com/

Hemingway

Save as Word Doc

Desktop Version

Tweet

Hemingway makes your writing bold and clear.

Hemingway highlights long, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow highlight, shorten the sentence or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red.

Adverbs are **helpfully** shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick verbs with force instead.

You can **utilize** a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over it for hints.

Phrases in green have **been marked** to show passive voice.

Paste in something you're working on and edit away. Or, click the Write button to compose something new.

Write Edit

Readability



Grade 7

Good

Paragraphs: 6
Sentences: 10
Words: 122
Characters: 581

1 of 10 sentences are hard to read.

1 of 10 sentences are very hard to read.

1 adverbs. Aim for 2 or fewer.

1 words or phrases can be simpler.

1 uses of passive voice. Aim for 2 or fewer.

Resources

- Target Audience Profile sheet
- Editing checklist
- Perfect Blog Post Template



Additional Tools

- The Hemingway App (<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>)
- CFICE's Plain Language Writing video and resources on readability statistics on Youtube
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBTI20OpK5o>

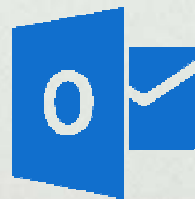




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Our Partners



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sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

