Please stand by for realtime captions.

Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar. As a reminder all attendees will be muted. And are encouraged to ask questions by the chat box. Questions will be answered for the end of the event during the Q&A portion of the event. As a reminder, this session is being recorded and will be posted to DigitalGov. A link for live captioning for today's event is included in the chat. Thank you for joining us. I will turn it over to the plain language community manager, Catherine.

Thank you. Thank you for joining us today. We have featured David before and he is the person in charge of the federal report card and he has spoken to us before. I know we will give us good updates. When you have questions, what we will do is go through this, his presentation and then we will open for questions. Put your questions in the chat. That is how we manage it.

Thank you, Katherine. It is always a delight to speak. Thank you for inviting me. Happy new year to everybody. It is a weird time to be in Washington DC.in Washington DC. But let's cast our minds back to October, 2020. That is when we released the federal report card. The 2020 federal report card. What I will do, I will talk very briefly, in case there is anybody on the line who is not completely familiar with the report card. And review some of the conclusions from this past year. And that I want to dive into some discussion of where we want to go from here, as well as questions you have about this past year. And what you and your teams can do to improve your scores. Let's get into it. I think everyone on the line probably knows that the federal report card is run by the Center for plain language. It is our way of evaluating how well people are doing, uploading the 20 Tuan -- 2010 Plain Writing Act. This is year number 10. A decade of the plane writing act. We have a new administration coming in. It is a time to look back not only at the last year about look back at the 10 years and the first decade and figure out how we want to do this for the next next decade as well. Let's take a look at a little bit more. Most of you know this but for those that do not, the federal plain language report card divided into two grades. You always have two grades. One is organizational compliance grade, that is to see just the checkmarks. Do we have the plain language officers in place? Are they responsive? To emails. The reporting on the required plain language website. And do you have the yearly annual report? And those annual reports, do you have the training? Do you cover what exactly your agency has been doing regarding training? That is the organizational compliance. Writing grade, as you know, usually great two pages every year. A little more detail on that. This past year we graded first the urgent help page that we had graded in 2019. We regraded one of your pagesof your pages from the previous year. This is ideal for us because -- I hope for you. Because it gives everyone a chance to improve. To take into account the excellent feedback that you get from judges and to see how well your team can revise, based on those good comments. Each year we grade something new. There is overlap. This past year we graded each agencies coronavirus page. Something that every agency launched last year. We are going to regrade that page this coming year. And we will grade a new page that is yet to be determined. We would love you put on that as well. How did we do overall? For the organizational compliance, about half of the agencies.A level grades on organizational compliance. A good 50% are doing really well. As far as staffing, training, reporting. All of the basics of this. Unfortunately about one third failed. And that is primarily because, I think, we had a lot of turnover in the last couple of years. And some

agencies amid all the things that have gone on in the last couple of years have just stopped completing the required reporting. And it is something we have to restart. I think that is definitely something that we want to give a little bit of attention to. Certainly, I do. I want to make sure that the one third of the group we are grading which is about 22 agencies each year, that we get those teams back on track. As far as the writing, we had some really good improvement in the urgent help pages. That was great to see. We had wonderful things. Not only did the VA continue to do well. The Interior Department, incredibly wonderful rewrite of water purification page. Which was terrific. As far as the coronavirus pages go, not so great. Overall, the pages -- it was a weird year. These pages had to come up very quickly. We understand that. Overall, they were far too focused on the agencies themselves. Really not -- someone really PR pages to just kind of like tout with the agency has done, instead of really focusing the audience and what the audience needs are. On the public. The information, a lot of things that we seem to have been doing really well the last 10 years, did not really apply that well to the coronavirus pages. Some of the pages were just lists of links. And almost random order. Very hard to find. Headings were category headings that did not really supply much information. Very difficult to navigate, for the most part. We can take a look at one exemplary page. This one is from CFPB. HHS also did a great job. But I chose to look at CFPB as a kind of exemplary page because frankly, they are an example of how you can do well on the coronavirus page, when you are not a health oriented agency. The CFPB focusing on consumer financial protection. One of the things right from the start of this, you can see they focused on the consumer. The agency's name, besides at the top, it is not all about CFPB. It is about the consumer. And the public. You, featured 19 times on the page. The headings are addressed directly, speaking directly to the audience about how CFPB can be helpful in terms of how CFPB can be helpful in terms of getting through the pandemic. And the sections were short, type, no long lists. Easy to navigate. Easy to go through. Really terrific. It was verb driven. Pay your mortgage. We had imperative mood. It is beautiful here is what you do. Links told people what they can find. And the videos supported text. This is true of the pictures on the page. They were helpful. On other pages, on some of the pages you have these enormous photos or enormous videos that took up all of this real estate. And were not really that focused on the consumer itself. Here is an example of an agency that could improve. This is the Commerce Department. You can see it is the mirror image or opposite here. Agency name appears 15 times, whereas obviously the consumer does not appear. It is not written directly addressing the reader, directly addressing the audience. It is all about the agency and the agency is the star of the page. The headings are abstract. The commerce CARES Act implementation plan, a noun string, the whole of government approach, I know this was something discussed last year. It is jargon. It is everywhere in these coronavirus pages. Vague verbs. Implement, facilitate. Instead of the kind of word you have any CFPB pages. Here is an example of long lists of links. Filled with acronyms. This kept on going for I think 20 more links. It was a long one. What we did, we went through these. We graded them and more important, I think émigrés, are the comments that the judges wrote. Which I hope everyone has received at this point. The next point here is to think about how we are going to revise these in the coming year. Obviously coronavirus, we are in a new vaccine stage and it is exciting. But we are also obviously going to be dealing with the coronavirus, dealing with a pandemic environment through the rest of the fiscal year. So when we come about to a grade once again, the federal report card, we will be looking at the coronavirus pages once again. I

think that we can make a lot of progress on these. We would love to celebrate. I have zero interest in dinging people with the federal report card. And more and more, at this point after 10 years, let's just really try to celebrate what we are doing in terms of plain language. That is the end of my presentation. I think everybody knows that on the site -- let me stop sharing.

I will go to our site. On the site, if you go to center for plain language, and you click on the report card. From the report card you can see, this will give you the actual one page report card and give everybody's grades. But not only will you see the key findings and what we graded, how we graded, who did the grading and you can download the report card itself. If you ever have a quick question, you can always ask me. With that, I know that was fairly quick. We are only 15 minutes into this. But I am kind of done in terms of what I wanted to give as a brief overview. I am happy to discuss in more detail. Do we have any questions coming in?

So far, non-yet.

Okay. One of the things I do want to make sure everybody has in terms of how we graded, let me click on that piece. In case anybody has any questions about the compliance grade, and the writing evaluation, how that works. These are the grading criteria. These are here as well. Any questions, you can come back and see what we graded from each agency as well as who did the grading.

Not to interrupt, we have a few questions coming in. What is the biggest mark that is consistently missed with the agencies language?

Consistently, that is a great question. I am not sure. The most common, especially this last year was this focus on the agency. And the second thing would be, what you would call normalizations. These are verbs that are turned into nouns. Like implementation. Taking a big verb like implement and turning it into a word. Something that is even more vague, such as implementation. This kind of language is really pretty typical that we see quite a bit. It is a kind of noun string but it is also full of abstract language. Plain language is language that is going to get your reader to immediately understand it. And be able to respond to it. Because we are talking about human beings, that means we want to speak in the most concrete language we can. By concrete language we are talking about language that evokes images. Language that appeals to the senses. Often especially site, because we are very visually oriented. But also things we can hear, taste, touch, smell. That these are the things that are going to work best with our readers. The language of human beings. Jargon is a particular type of abstract language. It is kind of inside language. A shortcut language. It still falls into that larger category of not concrete. Not something that is going to evoke images. That is what we want. We want the readers to immediately get it, by seeing it. That was a long answer.

Thank you, David. This question noticed that there are two organizations as most improved for last report card. What contributed to the improved rankings in these examples?

In both cases, this is the State Department's passport application status page. They did a

reorganization in both cases and the interior, two ways to purify water. In both cases they reorganized. To really address leaders top concerns. The passport application status page was much cleaner and they simplify the language. So the reader could immediately find the information on the page because of the new organization. The headings were clear. Each section was brief. It was not just a cascade of links and other things. Sorry. I thought I turned that off. Series apologies about that. In both cases, they made it so much easier for the reader to find, understand, and use the page. In both of these cases they were really important. The urgent help pages, how quickly can someone get a sense of, where is my passport? I have to leave in two weeks, and I need to know what is happening with my passport. It was a terrific job of really thinking, we thinking the page through the reader and with the interior department, the water purification. It was a lovely job. Reorganizing the page about how to, instead of a list of things. It was smartly done and guiding the reader and assuming that the reader is probably going to have something like this. That is the best thing you will have in a national park. You need to figure out, what do I do and how can I get water. They did it in a beautifully, simplified, elegant way in both cases. The language was simple. The organization was elegant. And easy. It made everything easy to find and understand and use. Again, that was a long answer.

Thanks. There are a couple of questions that came in regarding training sessions on plain language. Which I can answer. Yes. We offer a few workshops a year. I would encourage everyone to go on digital dock of events page and check out when those are. We don't have any plan for 2021 yet. But the co-leads will always promote the trainings and workshops to the community, plain language community of practice when we get those on the books. Michelle is wondering if operating divisions within each agency, are they also graded as well?

That is a great question. The question we get every year. Currently, we can only grade the department level agencies. Yes, we grade pages often within. For instance I mentioned the interior department and we graded a page that was actually from the National Park Service. For the urgent help page. We are limited. We are limited in staff. Each department level agency, the 15 cabinet level agencies +7 others, that is what we grade. In some beautiful future where we have an endless number of volunteers and I have more bandwidth to train lots of judges and organize lots of judges, we could offer more feedback at the more sub agency level feedback. Is that what you were getting at?

Excellent. Karen is wondering what are the data points and analytics you look for when grading the pages if any?

Is there a way to get more from Karen in terms of what she means? We have criteria. We don't have any formulas. We are not using readability formulas or anything like that. We have six different categories we go through. Understanding audience needs. Style, structure, information design, navigation. The use of multimedia and the degree that works with everything else. And the overall grade. We use something called submersible. Or submit a bowl. Which enables us to work. We have a lot of judges in each grade it's judged and we average for each page. As far as metrics or analytics, in terms of page views or -- that is not part of our scope.

If I can interrupt, there was a point where one of the pages you judged was the most visited page. As long as it was not the homepage and there are good reasons for that. Sometimes analytics plays a part.

Yes. In terms of what we choose. In every case we want to choose high profile pages that matter to the general public. We are not analyzing pages that are never seen. These are all pages that pop up and are highly rated. As Katherine mentioned, a few years ago, for two years in a row we graded each agencies most visited page. This year coronavirus was top of everyone's mind. And that was something that was high-profile. What exactly we choose this coming year, I am not sure yet. I would love input on that.

Excellent. You had mentioned the judges. Marcie is asking, do you ever ask members of the public for their input on these pages?

That is a great question. You know, we have not. It is a great question. I think it is a brilliant question. I am just not sure of how to do that in a way that we could make it happen. I love the thinking and the idea. And given that plain language is all about the reader. Plain language is writing and documents that put the reader first. Getting the readers input and evaluation on this, you would think that would be a good way to go about this. It is how to do that and how to do that in a way across agencies in a way that is comparable and doable with volunteer staff. We have not figured that out yet. It is a great question. Marcie, if you have any ideas, start firing away.

Excellent. This may be a question for Catherine. Michael is asking, the federal plain language guidelines have last been revised in May 2011. He is asking if there any plans to update or refresh these guidelines. If there is a need for any specific changes and or are there opportunities for agencies to suggest any changes.

I can take that. The guidelines are being revised as we speak. We will next have the job of getting them up. You can always suggest changes. One of the things is guidelines are not going to be agency specific. We look for, will this benefit other people, other agencies. David, you may want to address the who is included in the report card. It is executive level. I will also say that when I say it is only executive level, it is not Congress. Everybody always laughs.

Right. Most of the agencies in the federal government our executive branch. There are really that many congressional branch agencies. They are all executive branch. We limit it to 15 cabinet level agencies, department level, plus seven obvious ones. Social Security Administration. Katherine, that is great to hear. And I would love to, not now, at some point love to learn more about the revisions. Obviously, whatever you do, we need to be coordinating that. So the report card reflects exactly the expectations that are spelled out within the guidelines. That is great to hear. Exciting.

Excellent. For the plain language summit, suggested that lawyers are the main source of

opposition to plain language practices. Can you elaborate on what is holding these failing agencies back?

The agencies that are not doing well in terms of basic compliance, organizational compliance, those who have not published an annual plain language report since 2015 or 2016, a lot of that is like the initial advocates who were there from 2010 until 2016, left. In the kind of specific things we are talking about, a lot of it is staff and staff turnover. So we've got what's happened in the last 10 years you have some agencies that are doing incredibly well and have amazing training, USDA, there are lots of agencies that are doing really well. The culture that embraces plain language. But then you have other agencies, at least at the department level where that is not true. And you have some agencies or departments where some of the sub agencies have embraced plain language even more than the department. I think right now we have an opportunity with the change in administration to reinvigorate our commitment to plain language and to restart or cultivate plain language within some of the departments that have not done that much in the last couple of years. Is that a politician answer?[laughter]

Absolutely. Thank you. I am not sure which agency you are referring to, Kim, but maybe this could be more general. Put our agency have a review of certain pages and/or sections?

I would love to do that. It is staff. And time. We all have day jobs. I would love to. I would love to figure out a way to do that. You can write to me and maybe we can figure out a way to do it. It is hard. It is resources.

To follow on I saw in the chat someone someone asking when the guidelines were going to be posted. As I always say, my cloning efforts continue. We will post the guidelines when we get them ready and onto the site.

Thanks. Joe has a question and I assume this is a follow-up to Michelle's original question about the analytics. Just curious why not include readability formulas and scores, I rely on them often.

That is a great question. The readability scores -- again I will have to be delicate in the way I answer this. I think readability scores can give you a great shortcut and there are a lot of quantitative approaches that can give you great shortcuts. Sentence length and word length and things like that, the kinds of things that go into readability scores that are quantifiable go into a formula like that. They are often helpful in their initial signs. But we don't use them because they too often have become replacements for really looking at the kind of things that are really important to readers. Which is what you're looking at right now. The formula not only included what you have today as the readability formula, reading ease formula. But also included, personal pronouns. Are you directly addressing the reader and things like that. In the late 40s it slid into some things and some of the good stuff got lost and it sounds like he might have regretted that as well. I could give a long answer to this. I think as long as readability scores don't replace the kind of real measures which have to be about the reader and really trying to think in terms of the reader. At this point it is not easily quantifiable. Not to say that it will not be. Currently, I have not seen any readability formulas that I want to use.

If I could add on to that, I feel like every time I say this I am doing evil so good may come, which we know will not work. For people who like readability formulas, the sheer number, your content came in at 38.5, the fact of the number can often get people to accept edits on the content where they might not if you said your content needs to be plainer. Sometimes the 8.5 is convincing.

I perhaps was a little extreme on that. In terms of our grading, let me answer it in terms of -- I am not against readability formulas. I think they can be useful. We have not found a good way to incorporate them into our grading system. Let's put it that way.

Thanks. Joe made a good comment. While scores can aid, but not replace the human factor for interpretation and readability.

That is nicely put.

Are there any other questions? For David or Catherine. It was like we have been able to tackle most in the chat. Feel free to chime in now. David, is there anything?

Can I as the group a question and maybe we can answer in the chat. I will leave it open. I will state this in a broad form. What changes would you like to see to the federal report card in the coming years?

While you are pondering that question that David posed, Katie has said she agrees and there is a tool. Helpful maybe when working with data. Referencing the readability. That we need to be used by professionals to do their own review and they can really be problematic. Just another comment. Our previous years report cards available, and if so where?

If you go up here, here is the 2020 report card. I'm sorry. If you go up here -- why is this -- here we go. Federal report cards. You click on that. Why is that not -- it looks like we just rearranged this. I know they are here somewhere. Report cards, 2012 until 2019. Here they are. You can get all the older report cards. All the old reports are available on the website, Center for plain language.

Thank you. Marcie and Melanie echoing this sentiment. Marcie said it would be really helpful to see an analysis at the agency level. May be a concerted effort to be made to bulk up on volunteers, assess what would be needed in terms of numbers for volunteers. A huge undertaking. Maybe this is more of a tram on question.

One thing we do is we have asked people, we have asked a list to volunteer for the grading. But you can also go to the Center for plain language because they do the grading and sign up as a volunteer.

I think that is another way to do this. Maybe instead of keeping things all centered within the

center, may be one of our jobs should be in the next year that we start thinking about how we can train more judges within agencies. And foster a culture within individual agencies of doing these kinds of evaluations. That is how I can see things happening. In the center could help foster the kind of culture. And continue with the annual federal report card, but maybe that is something we could take on. And could work more closely with the plain language leads, within particular agencies. Currently, within agencies, you get tapped to be the plain language officer. It is not exactly like you are paid for that. We obviously don't want to make that job onerous in any way. It is a great question. Is a tough nut to crack. I think more brainstorming and we can get creative about it. It is a kind of cultural shift. But if we can make this kind of evaluation more decentralized, I think that is the smartest way to.

Excellent. Thanks, David.

I would love to hear more on that.

There is definitely a lot of interest in the chat about data progression on agencies for multiple years. Sub agencies being all over the map. If there could be a way to look at that over time. Year over year type thing. There is a question. I am not sure if this is a David question or a Katherine question. I am not sure if this was address, can you provide insight on how to address pushback from OGC, office of -- sorry. OGC on plain language changes. This is something we can consistently deal with.

This is Katherine answering that. I have found that one of the things that I think is key with plain language is always sitting, your audience. Not what you want to say but what does your audience need to know and what language do they have it in. Not that I am recommending this but I have often played stupid, and it was not that hard of a thing to say, what does this mean. What do you mean by that? What is this acronym? One of the things that I found a little more useful than that is to say, we know how people read. We have some evidence on how people read. I forwarded to the list a while ago and I can do it again. There is a talk by Kate Moran about how people read online. And it takes a while but they eventually get to the plain language which is, short paragraphs, short sentences, active voice, pronouns, no jargon and fewer acronyms. I have also found that saying, I want to make sure people grasp your excellent points and do what you want them to do rather than say, another big document. I will read that later and later never comes. You can play it either way. That is something I found useful. I want to make sure that people actually read this.

Thank you so much.

That does get us back to lawyers. And bridging that gap.

Excellent. The Department of Education uses that model for their reviews of the effectiveness of interventions. And they train researchers now on the criteria so they can make sure their work meets the standards of the formal review. Very interesting.

Great.

Katie is making a comment. The lawyer comment. With lawyers I have found it can help to ask them gently what they found inaccurate about the plain language version of the phrasing and sometimes understanding what occurred as long can help you offer an edit that is more of a compromise.

That is very good.

It looks like there's a lull in the questions. This is been a really good conversation. Does anyone have any additional last-minute questions? David and Katherine do you have any closing remarks or news or upcoming stuff that you would like to share ?

I will reiterate what has been the main focus of today. That we have reached the 10 year mark. It is a good time to evaluate where we are and what we are doing with the federal report card. And how we can be better. You can email me. I really would love to continue the work that the center has done in the last 10 years with the federal government. It is incredibly important. I think we all know. To continue the work of plain language. We want to celebrate things and we want to celebrate what is going on. If there are other ways that we can do that, celebrate the good work that you are doing, brainstorm with us. Come up with ideas. Send me an email. I am happy to do a one-on-one Zoom with you to talk about it.

Thank you so much. That really is very generous offer. It looks like we don't have anymore questions. We did drop a feedback survey for folks to fill out and tell us how we can make our events better. Any topics you are looking forward to reviewing and going over in 2021. We have had some good suggestions in the chat. Thank you so much for joining. David, excellent presentation.

Thank you.

Thank you so much for talking, even delayed, a welcomed piece about plain language work and we will hope for a good 2021 with starting the new decade. And thank you for joining us and having opinions and questions. I will write up something with some of the links we have included and send it to the community of practice. And we've got someone from Australia. That is so exciting. Very glad you all came. We are hoping -- I cannot remember what we are doing in February. I think we are having a presentation on how to train remotely. How to do remote training. Remote plain language training. I will be posting that to the list, when we get it up. Everyone have a great day and enjoy your extra three minutes.

Thank you.

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Talking Heads

Presenting/Instructing via Streaming Video Using the Techniques of TV Pros

Wendy Wagner-Smith

wendywagnersmith@gmail.com

301-509-9942

*Credit—All images from adobe.stock.com

Mechanics (Congratulations! You're TV)

- Putting your best foot forward
- Timing and pacing
- Techniques of TV new anchors
- Mastering the technology

Virtual Teaching Techniques

- Virtual classroom management
- Planting seeds and getting the students engaged
- How to deliver "sticky" material
- Parting gifts
- Calls to action
- Hacks

Meet Your Host-- Wendy Wagner-Smith

Mechanics: Congratulations! You're TV

Techniques of TV Anchors

SMILE

AND NEVER STOP SMILING BEFORE, DURING, OR AFTER YOU TEACH

Lift the camera (raise the laptop) so you must look slightly upward

Best posture, chin parallel, shoulders down and relaxed and SMILE

Hands should be quiet. No hands waving or gesturing**

**Assumes you are sitting at a laptop or other computer using built-in camera

Classy Not Flashy

- **Comfort is key.** In virtual training, you're sitting for an hour or more

- Keep water nearby—sips only!

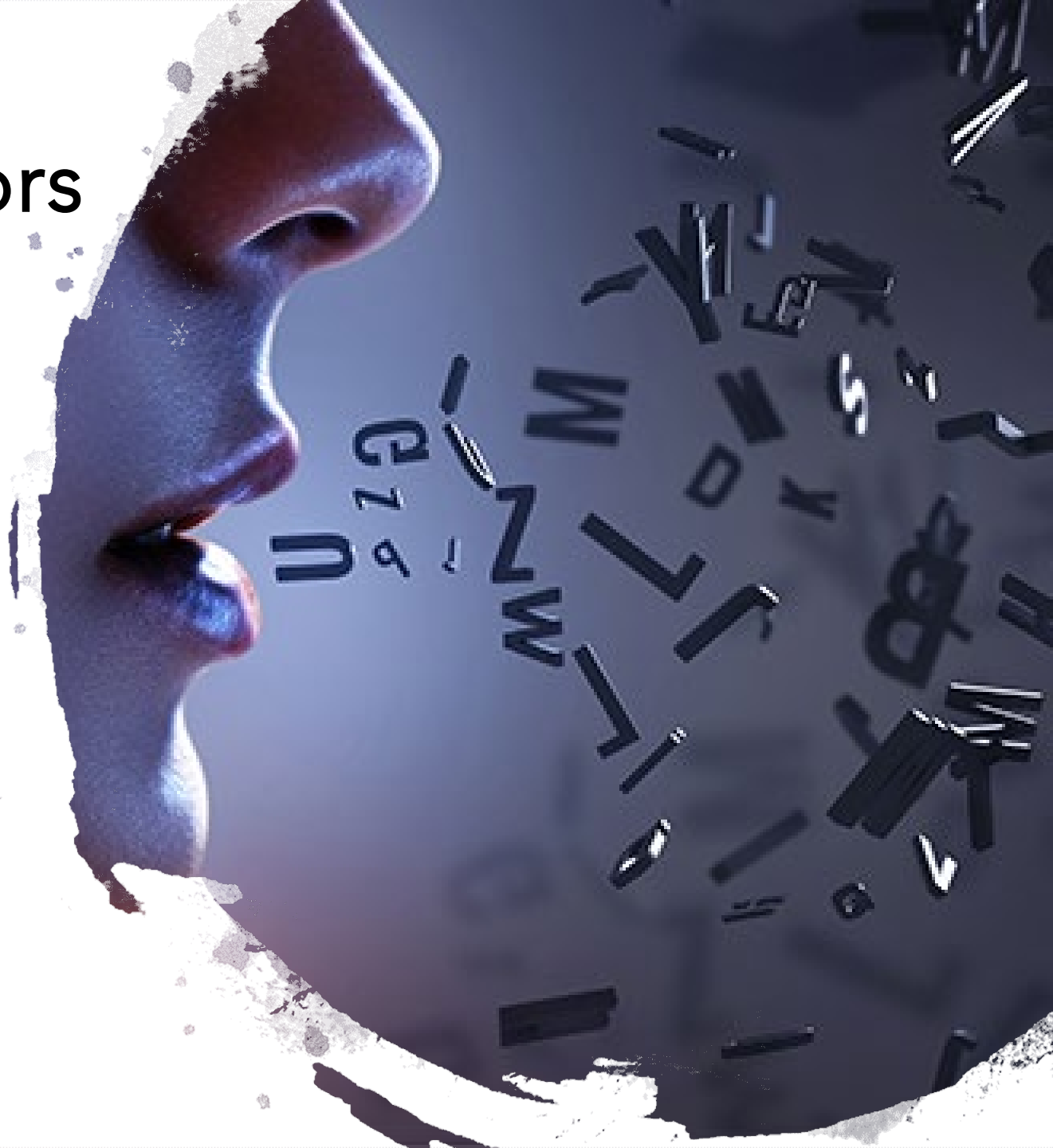
- **Accessories should be simple and not distracting**—no jingly earrings, no attention-grabbing hair accessories, or ostentatious clothes

- No plaids, overwhelming patterns, pinstripes

Techniques of TV Anchors

- Speak clearly and at a moderate speed (120-130 words per minute)

- Enunciate clearly, pronounce correctly

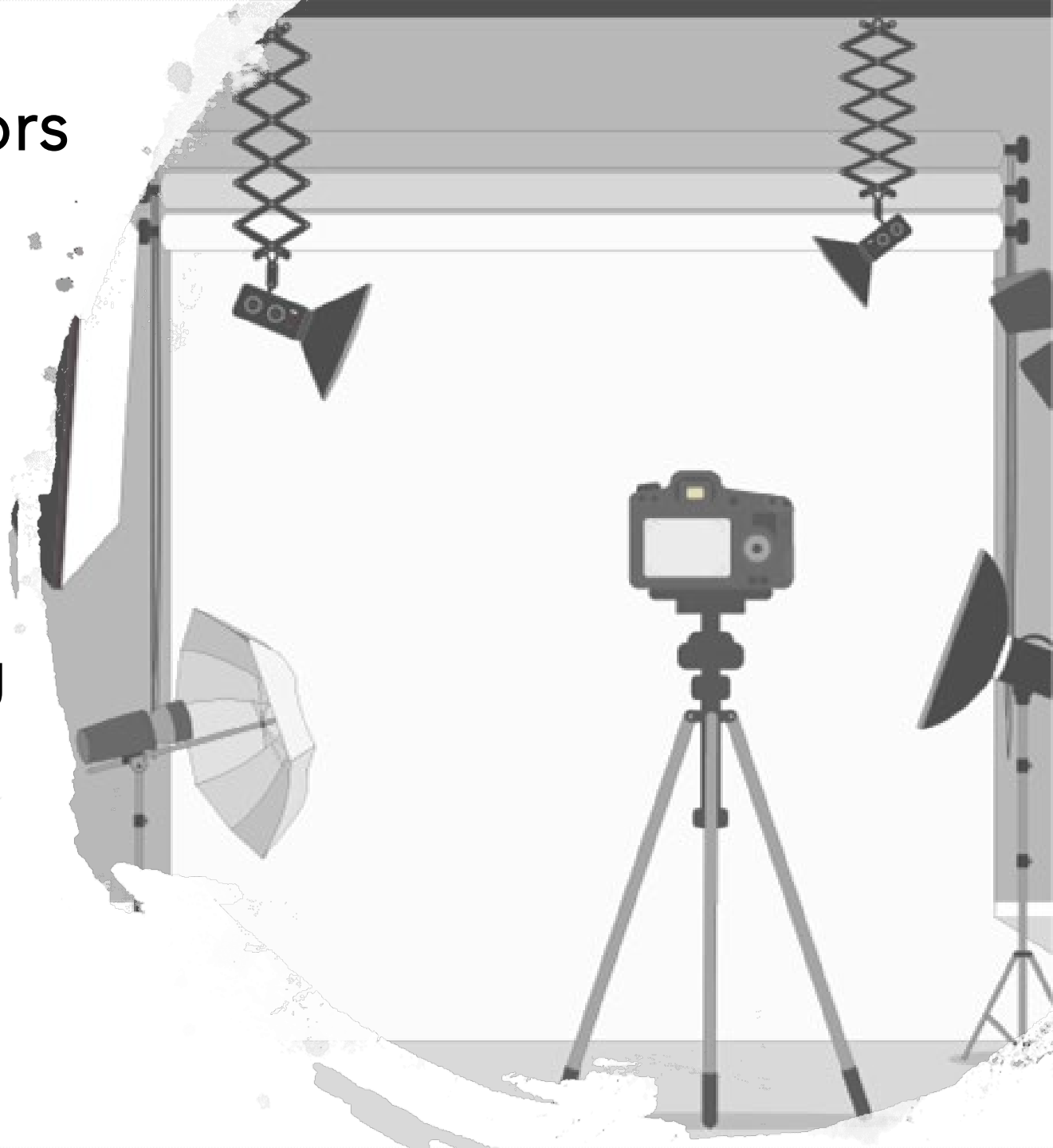


More Techniques of TV Anchors

- Lighting should be in front of you

- Position so you are just behind and underneath ceiling lights

- No lights behind or from strong angles



Master the Technology

- Learn the differences between Zoom, WebEx, MSTeams, etc., and practice, practice, practice

- Don’t get fancy with features such as breakout rooms until you are sure you can work each function quickly and smoothly

Credit: yan4ik - stock.adobe.com

Master the Technology

- Laptop cameras and home lighting are not long-term solutions for professional presentation streaming.

Consider investing in ring lights and stands, backdrops, better camera (iPhone is an option!)

- Consider paying for an account if you find you need full features or more time

Credit: yan4ik - stock.adobe.com

Timing & Pacing

Start on time –

but don't start *teaching* exactly on time or more than 3-4 minutes past time

Try to keep your pace a wee bit on the brisk side

PACE

A little too fast is better than dragging

:20

Research shows adult humans can focus intently for only about 20 to 22 minutes.

Try to avoid oddly timed sections (23 minutes, 18 minutes, etc.; go for 15 minutes, 20, 30, etc.)

Try to time the beginning of a new section or topic on a :05 or :00

Golden Rule of Virtual Teaching

People have 50-minute bladders

Keep the lines open during breaks to take questions from the eager or confused

:50

Always plan to end just a bit early but have a plan if you run late

Give permission to leave on time but appeal and ask students to stay if they are able

Virtual Teaching Techniques

Virtual Classroom Management

- Virtual training makes it easier for students to decline to actively participate in discussions or exercises

- Encourage liberal use of the chat feature. **Keep it public and open to everyone unless the class is unresponsive.**

Avoid sidebars

You may have to become the wizard behind the curtain to create the illusion that students are engaged and participating to prompt students to participate

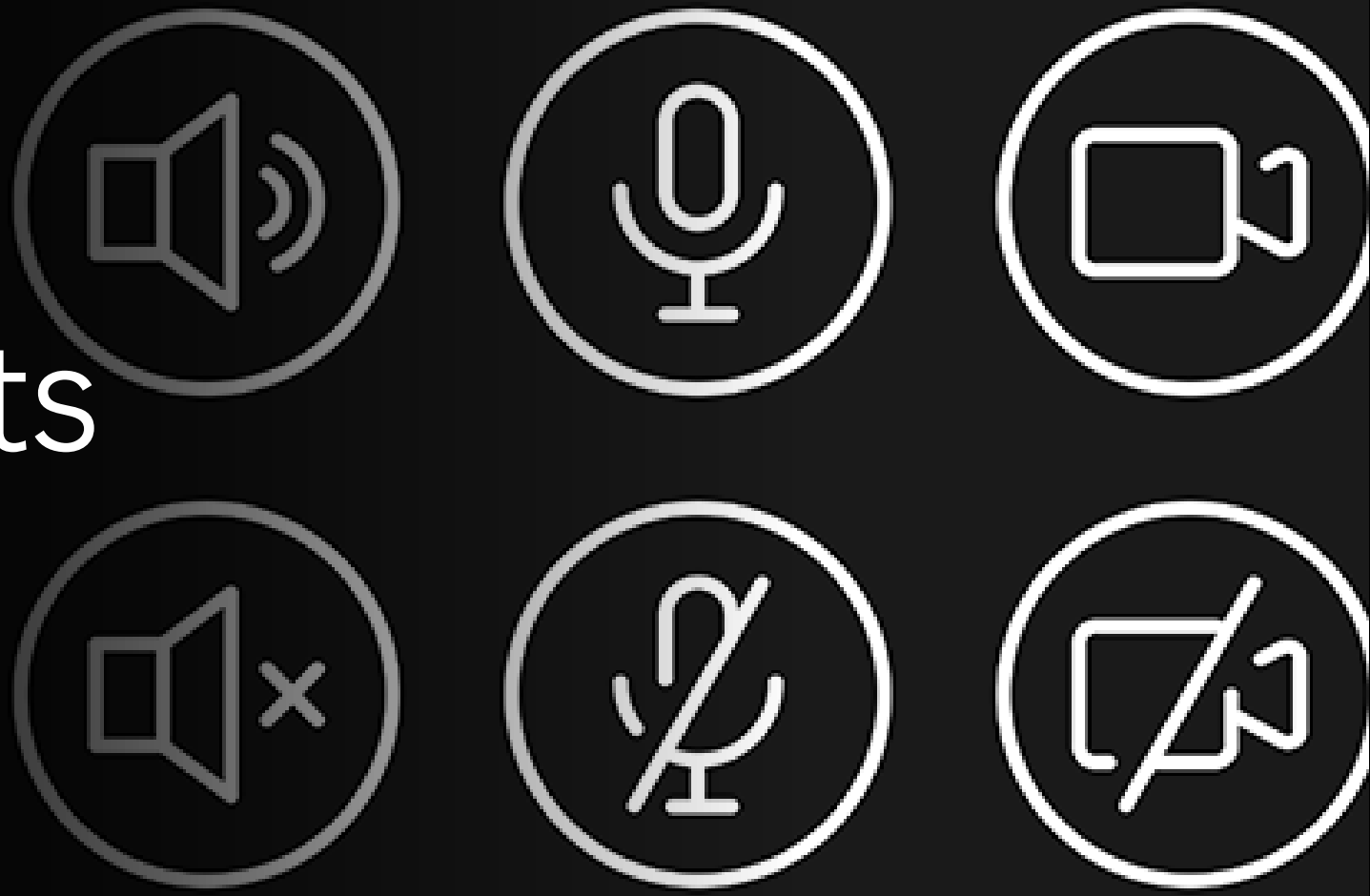
Virtual Classroom Management

- Acknowledge that many people prefer to stay off camera but ask that people stay on camera if possible

- Let the class know when you need to see faces; also cue them when it's ok for them to turn off the camera

Virtual Classroom Management

Mics **off** for all participants



Teach the spacebar feature

Planting Seeds & Engaging Students

- Immediately present a question, mystery, problem, or outrageous example
- Funny also counts—be humorous with care
- Ask students to verbally respond to the question or mystery or give an explanation of why/what makes your example a problem or outrageous

How to Deliver "Sticky" Material

- Research shows all humans need repetition to learn and record a new concept, but adult humans need more repetition than children or teenagers

- **Some research shows adults must receive a message seven times before it sticks; other research says at least three**

- Most adults absorb messages more readily with visual and aural stimulation (images, graphics, video, music, catchy jingles; think about the cereal commercials of our childhoods)

3

More “Sticky” Material

- Confidently prime the students’ readiness and expectation. “You’re going to find this one thing more than any other will help with…”
- Drop “gold nuggets” and mini calls to action throughout
- Reinforce important concepts with practice exercise. Ideal—written exercises in a classroom; online, a typed exercise is ok; **participatory verbal exercise is best!**

Perfect the Outro

Cue that the end is near

Sum it up—repeat the most important concepts again

Repeat the mini calls to action you've noted throughout and give the class a significant action to take immediately after the class. Ask them to decide what actions they will take and how.

Answer any remaining questions or open forum for questions

Parting Gifts

Adult learners are more likely to feel incomplete after a class if they do not have HANDOUTS

Develop a checklist tool and give it to students as the parting gift

Avoid sharing digital files you did not create unless you have a license or rights to distribute

Life Hacks for Virtual Teachers

- Practice out loud at least three times before you teach the class
- Have a bottle of water and a mint or gum handy
- Always have a pen and pad and timekeeping device
- Always have a print-out of your class materials handy. It may save your life some day. Be ready to do the whole class with no (or glitchy) technology if necessary

Overcome the Zoomies—Helpful Resources

- 6 Options for Presenting PowerPoint Slides in Zoom | Think Outside The Slide
- Zoom-mindful-meetings-checklist.pdf
- 10 Secret Zoom Tips for Masterful and Stress-Free Online Presenting (leapica.com)
- George Kau Training Video Zoom Meeting: How To Use (with example of a Breakout Group) - YouTube

Hello, thank you so much for joining. We are just going to give folks another minute or two to join in from previous meetings and their lunch breaks.

Okay, everyone. Thank you so much for joining today's session. As a reminder to all attendees, folks will be muted and encouraged to ask questions via the chat box. For band width and latency, and in order to have this be available for folks afterwards on digital.gov we encourage folks to also turn their cameras off. Questions will be answered during the end of the event, during the Q&A portion, so feel free to drop in questions as they arise, and wendy and Catherine and Xatina can address them. The session is being recorded and will be posted to digital.gov after the event. A link for live captioning is included in the chat. Thanks again for joining us. With that, I will turn it over to plain language community of practice editor, Katherine. Take it away.

Hello, welcome, everyone. It is so gratifying to see so many people show up on time and even a little bit late, to hear one of our best speakers on a topic that is really important, particularly in these troubling times as we are home and forced to zoom. I wanted to let you know that I am thrilled to announce that Wendy Wagner-Smith is a career communication professional and excellent in usable design, currently a senior writer editor for the small business administration, and Wendy has taught plain language to federal employees in more than 55 agencies and offices of the national federal government, as well as employees of state and local governments across the country. I know her best from her work, 2012-2018, Wendy coordinated the training for the federal plain language action and information network, and managed a core of volunteer instructor coordinating all the plain language training requests from across the government. So I know that she has been doing a lot of this training herself, I am eager to hear what she has to say, and I am sure we all look forward to your questions in the chat later on. Thank you so much, Wendy.

Thank you, man, you made me sound so awesome. Thank you. Welcome, everybody, I am so glad you are spending your afternoon this way. It tells me that there are things that you really feel you need to learn, and I am so excited to get to teach you that. But let me make sure that I point one thing out before we do anything else at all today, today I am not teaching you how to work zoom, web X, MS teams, I am not teaching you how to do those technical things. I am going to teach you, instead, how to take what you already do, which is teach plain language or

make presentations about this, that, and the other hopefully including plain language and change that from what you would normally do live in a classroom with a group of adult students in an agency, to this forum where we are communicating through streaming media on a screen. Lets see, why is -- there we go. My button is a little sticky today. There are a number of takeaways we are going to look for today, and there are a couple of things I want to make sure that you take with you before the end of the day. The first thing is remembering that this interphase where we are communicating through screens is very different than being in the room with someone, and what you are going to do as the person delivering the instruction is going to be ever so slightly different, but ultimately it is like historians say about people from olden times, verses people of today, I think by the end of our class you are going to see that teaching online has much more in common than teaching with teaching in person, than not. So don't be afraid, this is going to be fun, and we are going to take this little trip together.

The first important thing for you to understand, of right now, I am doing wrong, I am shifting around, moving, lifting my chin and eyes, and I can't do that anymore, the way I would in a classroom, because right now I am TV. Congratulations, when you move to this format, you become your very own self, a television anchor, and it is very important to realize that television anchors are trained for a long time and have a lot of practice to be really good at what they do. So, we are just going to try and do the same thing, maybe with a little less practice, but starting from now, we are going to work towards expertise.

So we start with how TV anchors do things, and I would like you to take a look at this young lady here, for just a moment. Notice the position of her eyes, chin, mouth, and hands, those are all very important factors when you are teaching through a streaming interface. The first thing is smile, and never ever stop. We must be on guard for rough resting ugly face, every single moment that we are live on stream when we are presenting or teaching. I am going to show you something that very few people besides my family have ever seen, I think it will be a very dramatic kind of demo for you. In just less than half a second I am going to transform completely from myself to my grandmother. Watch. That is resting ugly face. I let all of the muscles in my entire face and head relax, and gravity took over and suddenly I was no longer Wendy, I was Helen. So, it is important to remember that we need to keep smiling, keep our cheek muscles and jaw muscle engages, and keep our chin parallel to the floor. When you are on screen especially if you are a person like me with a glass face, meaning that people can see right

through me, they know exactly what I am thinking, you have to adopt a habit of purposely making your face look happy, friendly, accessible, and open.

Now, part of that is a trick, because it really has to do with the equipment that we have. If I am a television anchor I have an entire crew just on the other side of the room making everything easy for me, but I am in my dining room. What am I going to do? the first thing I am going to do is what the pros do. I am going to lift the camera up. You can't see this, but my camera, my laptop is actually sitting on a small shelf from a high school locker. It is the perfect height, and it makes it so that I have to lift my eyes ever so slightly to look into the camera. That gives you the impression I am looking directly at you. If I look straight into the screen, now you can see that I am looking slightly down. So it is a little trick of positioning. The other thing, and this time I am going to adjust the camera, because it is important. Best posture. Spine is straight, shoulders are back and down, chin is parallel to the floor, and most importantly, relax, relax. You can always tell on screen when someone is nervous or frightened because they will instantly appear to stiffen. And I can do that for you. We can go from this to -- instantly. And, when I stiffen, the corners of my mouth will automatically turn down and I will become my grandmother again. I wand to guard against that by practicing in every single meeting, and if you are like me, you have a lot of those, practice on screen, smiling keeping your chin up, and looking up into the camera.

Now, the one thing you will notice I am a gesturer, I tend to talk with my hands. But when you are sitting stationary, that is not really good. Part of the advantage of lifting your camera is that if you need to move your hands, you can sort of do it under the camera level. And yet I still forget. I know you have already seen me lift my fingers a few times into your view, so I have to be aware of that and constantly practice. The one thing we don't want to do, unless it is the end and we are saying a cheerful goodbye, is get into any hand waving, measuring, gestureing, pointing on the screen. The cameras used and laptops are notoriously bad for something called fish eyeing. That makes a concave image into a convex image, and distorts the way you look. It will also distort the way your hands look, and if someone has a poor connection, it can cause them a lot of confusion about what is happening on the screen. Keep your hands and shoulders quiet, let your head do the moving, let your chin stay up, and remember, smile, smile, smile.

Come on. What is happening now? I hate it. I hate it. There we go. Now, again, this assumes

you are sitting still, if you go out and look at the amazing information available on the Internet, you will see there is a big movement right now, probably because of what we call Zoom Fatigue, or screen meeting fatigue, for people to begin standing while they present, it is not as easy as it sounds. In one of my other lives I teach yoga online once a week, I am standing, bending, lying down, everything else, while the images streaming from the lap top so there are different techniques you would use in the same way probably professors in a classroom would use different techniques if they were being filmed by a camera. We are strictly talking about what we normally do now in our quarantine environment, sitting upright, in front of a laptop, and delivering information or a message.

Also, the pros, classy, not flashing. How you dress and present does matter in the same way that it would matter when you were in a live classroom. You want to be comfortable. You are going to be sitting, as we are all sitting right now, for an hour or more. In the same way that I would train the plain trainers, remember, you are going to be on your feet, standing in front of the class, for four hours be ready, same thing happens when you are sitting for a long time. You will notice as I have been talking, my voice has become a little less crisp and a little more croaky, so I always have water nearby, but I only take a sip because I am going to be here for an hour or more. If we were going to have GRAK, you, the students would have the break, but I would be here to take your questions and help you. I need to make sure that my throat is moist, but I am not putting myself into any uncomfortable situation. Same thing with clothes, and jewelry, just remember anything that catches your eye will catch the eyes of your audience a thousand times over. You will become very aware of what presenters on television are wearing and all of their accessories, now that we are talking about it. But you will notice that as a general rule, no wacky hair styles, this is wacky enough for me today, because, you know, the higher the hair, the closer to God. No jingling earrings, nothing overwhelming. SICHLTal, and what grandma would call tasteful. And also, watch out for patterns, pin stripes, and plaids. That can cause a blurring effect on the screen as you move or as you turn your head.

Speak clearly and at a moderate speed. About 120-130 words per minute, which is the recommendation for folks who give speeches. I did speech writing for a long time, and I had one executive who was a really slow talker. But he got by with it because he was pretty interesting. But if I went at this pace for the rest of our time together, you would all find yourselves in quite a sleepy state, within the next few minutes. So keep your speech at a normal pace, enunciate

each word clearly, and pronounce the words correctly. But don't stress if you have an accent, if you are not a native speaker of English, or if you come from a region where the way people talk is, lets say distinguishable, it is okay. Differences make us who we are, and I bet every one of you already has figured out that I am not from here, oh no, I am from way down south. But it is okay if I pronounce the words in a way that all of the people in the audience can clearly understand them. I don't have to be weir worried that I have an accent, I just need to be worried that I am speaking the language in a way that is accessible to everyone who is listening.

Now, more things about TV anchors, again, you can always see a small amount of what is happening in the room around me, but -- and here is my hand, just above me and in front of me is a light in the ceilingb and I have it set for exactly the right amount of light, because we have a dimmer switch, thank goodness, so it is not too bright and not too dark. The key here is the light should always be in front of you and not behind, and if you are using overhead lighting, you need to be just behind and underneath the ceiling light. Never allow the lighting to come from a strong side angle or from behind you. What will happen is you will create an unexpected and unintended, and very disorienting silhouetting effect. Again, remember you have got to keep smiling, and you have to look approachable. If suddenly you go into shadow and the corners of your mouth begin to turn down, your audience will immediately sense a change in the mood and become very alarmed about what is happening in the class. As soon as that happens, they lose concentration.

I started by telling you we are not going to learn the technology today, but it is crucial that you learn the technology at some point. When we were getting warmed up, as you guys were coming into the waiting room today, I was telling my team of wizards who are behind the curtain to help keep this a smooth technological experience for us all, that I use MS teams in my office, I use Zoom for my other stuff, I am involved with a group that uses Cisco WebX. Each week I have to reLRN those platforms and remember this feature is here in this particular software application. So the most important thing is don't get fancy with features when you aare teaching unless you know that YOI know that you are an expert. There is always a work around, but the most important thing is keeping things moving.

Laptop cameras and home lighting, not a good long-term solution. It is fine for a work meeting, and an event like this, or a singular class, you can usually set things up in your home office or

home environment so that you have good light, and good positioning. But if you do this often, and I amcourage you all to do this often, it is incredibly important, it is really worth the investment of about $50 for a table top light stand, a ring light, or an LED stand light, and a better camera. You can also use old i pads or i phones that have kind of outlived their usefulness. These days the cameras on iPHONES ARE REALLY QUITE INCREDIBLY iPHONES ARE REALLY QUITE INCREDIBLY HIGH QUALITY. FRZ

Consider upgrading a little bit. It will will do more for your credibility and help your students learn better than anything else

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Timing, here is an important thing. Timing and pacing. When I am in a live classroom, all sorts of things can happen that can't happen right here as I sit in my dining room. For example, I can move around, I can go from student to student see how they are doing. I can walk up to the screen and point to important concepts I want to emphasize. There are all sorts of things I can do. I can go slow because the class is having a hard time, or we had a long conversation, or I can go fast. But that is very different here in the screen world. In the screen world two seconds dead air is immediately noticeable, and any lull is going to cause people's attention to begin to wander. One moment of lost attention essentially means an 80% higher chance that you will end up with a lost student.

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130 words per minute is roughly the guideline TV minute is roughly the guideline TV news anchors follow.

The result of new research in the past 10 years, in the of new research in the past 10 years, in the past decade. One of them is that we now know, thanks to the Internet, the Internet changed everything. Human ability has dramatically decreased. Since the 19 TH century.

Research says 20 to 22 minutes. Ability to intensely focus. Keep in mind research is done by people who have an interest in whatever is being researched. FRZ esI think you will find the realty is it is roughly past this. People can really only focus intently for maybe 10-12 minutes. 20-22 minutes is a stretch. that means as you are pacing your class, you want to avoid oddly-timed sections. Try to keep each section or each new unit that you are teaching limited to

roughly 10 minutes, 15 minutes, something on the zeros or the 5s OF THE CLOCK. TRY TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT LETTING YOUR SECTIONS SHOW UP ON ODD-NUMBER MINUTES BECAUSE THAT WILL THROW OFF THE TIMING AND ACCOUNT AS YOU PACE YOURSELF.

As we always do, and I never manage, but I always try, I am going to plan, plan, to end just a little bit early. But if I run late, I am going to appeal to your better nature and your need for the last little bit of the information, and stay an extra two or three moments, but remember, people have to log out or have to jump into the next meeting for something else quickly and they may not have the extra flexibility that they would normally have, if they were in the classroom with you. so, since we are doing okay, lets talk a little bit about virtual teaching techniques. if I am in the classroom, and most federal buildings and other office buildings don't look like this classroom, of course, but they look similar, they may instead of having desks, they may have a conference table or something like that, or some other sort of seating for the students, but there can also be a screen, a white board, perhaps a clip board in the front, for me, as the instructor to use, and there is almost always a prop. So the difference here is that now I am not really in and among all of you as you sit in your rhymes waiting for me to enlighten you with my wisdom. Now I am aware that, as you all have today, you can decline not to actively participate and you don't even have to do anything except a click. And that makes it a little challenging as the instructor so we encourage liberal use of the chat feature. I know you have all heard the same, or something similar, to what our folks told you at the beginning; put questions in the chat, add comments, we will be getting to them. If you are the instructor and, for some reason you are on your own, open to the public or open to everyone, open to all, whatever the feature is in the particular type of software which of the platforms we are using. There is always the possibility and it happens, it happened just in the past nine months, every now and again, sometimes on a Wednesday, like today, mid week, every one is tired and knowing they still have a lot to do before the weekend. And they will log in to your class or session and be completely unresponsive. Each person thinks it is just me, I am going to bail out today and listen. Suddenly you have 50 people who are just bowing bowing out and listening. If the chat is opened, to everyone, we don't have any private conversations happening among students, and that is good. No side bars. But if no one is responding now I have to play the role of the wizard behind the curtain, and create illusion. Hopefully this will never happen, but if it ever does, and you are run into a class or presentation where everyone is tired, everyone is off camera, everybody is muted, you have no idea if anyone is listening to you or not, then set your chat to private with

me only. So that everyone thinks they are only communicating with you. The reason you want to do that is because you, as instructor, will begin answering the questions as though you got an answer in the chat. You want to start generating a little bit of energy, a little bit of buzz, and give students who, for whatever reason, feel they just can't bare it today, that it is okay to go ahead and join in, to type into the chat, or unmute and answer a question.

I always like to acknowledge to everyone in my class that I understand that people prefer to stay off camera. This is a new thing for me, anyway, I just began doing this kind of teaching on a regular basis, early last summer, like the rest of the world. In fact, here is one of my dirty secrets, not only can I turn into my grandmother instantly, but I can also turn into an 18 TH century farm girl in the blink of an eye. In the early 2000s and early mid 2000s, 2010 shortly after the plane writing act passed and all the desire for plain language classes suddenly went to 0 to everybody in the federal government, there was a lot ofof -- we had maybe two or three years of debating, worked with different agencies, some agencies insisted ultimately, we decided we would leave it up to the individual instructors about whether or not they felt comfortable doing virtual training on video. [Captioners transitioning] FRZEach time I tried it I felt I could not interact with my students and for me that is a large part of my teaching technique. So for me to finally find in 2020 that I am teaching all of the time, virtually, meant that I had to rethink how virtual learning happens. A lot of you who have worked with me or been in other classes with me know that it does not take much at all for me to get off on a long speech about all of the research I do and that is into how we learn. And the neurology of taking in messaging. What happens in our brains, when we are listening. When we are looking when we are hearing or otherwise sensing a message that is being delivered to this. For me it was very important in the beginning to acknowledge my own neurological need and all of the information that was available way back in the olden times of last summer. Tell everyone to turn on their cameras. And I was even teaching other teachers, let your class know that you need to see faces, you can't just teach to a black screen or dead air. You need to see people who need human interaction. Tried to convince them to keep their cameras on. I developed a really, really heartfelt message that I was giving before each presentation. And, yes. Maybe 20% of all people who work listening to me would actually keep their cameras on. At first I was frustrated by it and then I became curious. What is happening that is making this so hard for people? Is it because we are all in our pajamas? Is it because we are all secretly introverts and we just never admitted it before? It turns out those are big factors, but there are other things as well that happen when we are in our safe space of our home, or our home office and we have to expose our faces. So

notice next time your doorbell rings, when you were not expecting anybody, how comfortable you feel opening the door without peeking out first. It is a thing that happens in human brains, and we need to be very careful to let people know that we understand that they may want to be off-camera. Here is my new recommendation. I have been using this the last couple of months and I am finding it is much more effective. I tell people I would really like it if you would stay on camera but it is fine if you prefer not to. At different points in our time together, I may ask you to go on camera and it would be really great if you felt comfortable enough at that point to turn your camera on. The other thing I want you to be very, very aware of is all of the streaming interfaces have options so that a person can keep their microphone muted but still speak. In Zoom, you just press the space bar and you will see people leaning forward, most of the time it is because they press the spacebar to ask their question or speak, but keep that feature for folks when you are getting them all settled in for the class. We always start out with microphones off for all participants, we teach the spacebar future. Now, if everyone is hidden behind a curtain with only their name showing, just a screen after all, and you have no idea whether or not they are engaged, and if you have any concern at all about the magnetism and dynamism of your material, you must get your students engaged immediately. That is not a new concept, that is exactly what you have to do in the classroom. As soon as the last person sits in the chair and the introducer, who is probably the point of contact from the agency, introduces you, you have got to come out of the gate and immediately get your folks interested. But how do you do that on screen? Here are techniques that I have been using that seem to be really effective and as I research and learn more I understand why. Try immediately, opening your class with a question. Some mystery or problem, or even better, some outrageous, unbelievable example of something that is relevant to what you will be teaching. Now, you can also start out with something funny but you must be humorous with care. I bet everyone of us can remember some story about someone who told what they thought was an innocent joke. Remember, for the person who is offended by a particular joke or a humorous and over, it was not innocent. Things that tend to work in terms of humor without taking the risk of offending or hurting someone really has more to do with how we all identify together. So I am going to bet that at least one of you out there listening today, when I showed you how I turn into my grandmother, Helen, I bet you chuckled. And it is okay that you chuckled. I wanted you to. And I want us to show that experience, that we understand that as we move through time, and we are not aware of how we look when we are concentrating or not paying attention and actively engaging our faces, that we may just remind ourselves or others of family members of previous generations. Hardly a great way to get a laugh, hopefully no one would be offended because it is more about

how we all identify Van looking for a situation that we can dig the humor out of. Once I present my question, or my mystery, or throw out my outrageous example, I want my students to engage. And I already know, from practice and research, that many of them are still not going to go on camera. And it would be an absolute disaster for me to unmute everyone's camera, everyone's microphone, excuse me, which is why it is so critical to teach them how to use the spacebar future because as soon as I give that example I am going to invite them to hit the spacebar and join in. You probably are also familiar with the raised hand features, and other features in some of the software. That is great, but I like to leave those specifically for folks who have a question that is of burning importance, while I am teaching. And sometimes I may ask them still, to hold on until the end, but I usually tell my class, if you raise your hand I am going to acknowledge you [Silence]

Wendy?

Hi Katherine Cook I believe Wendy's audio and video froze so we will allow her a couple of moments to join back in.

Okay.

This, I have to say, this is Gabby from digital.gov team, while we are waiting for Wendy to rejoin, this session has been helpful from our point of view because we have been able to get some really good feedback from you all as far as, you know, how we typically manage these events of allowing a few extra minutes for folks to join in and that has been really helpful to get your guys' feedback. I really appreciate that. And to note for folks, one of the main reasons why we don't ask folks to have the cameras turned on, or to be able to speak aloud is because our aim at digital.gov is for as many folks as possible to access this event. So we always strive to put these events up on our digital.gov website, these recordings. And if we had everyone on camera we would have to get permission from all of you folks. [Laughter] so just to kind of go further from what Wendy was discussing, that has been very helpful. Hopefully Wendy can rejoin us, Catherine, do you have anything for your community at present?

I was just going to say, you know, I have just emailed her, reminded her she is frozen, you know,

sometimes it is difficult to know what is going on. And hoping that she is joining us. But if you could put your questions in the chat, you know, just about this in general, that is a big help. So we have something waiting for her when she returns. And I was also -- yes, it is being recorded. It will be on digital.gov, we are developing a tips sheet as well so you don't have to email that particular question. But one of the things that Gerry McGovern has been talking about recently, and Gerry McGovern is the usability expert who started the whole top tasksis the usability expert who started the whole top tasks movement, which is essentially people don't come to your page for fundon't come to your page for fun when they come to do something make sure you know what it is and make it easy for them. He has started talking about worldwide something make sure you know what it is and make it easy for them. He has started talking about worldwide waste, which is the problem of digital waste, which people don't necessarily think about. And if Wendy is back we can certainlydigital waste, which people don't necessarily think about. And if Wendy is back we can certainly --

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Wendy, you should be a co-host again. Thank you so much.

Thank you! I don't know what happened, but Zoom just completely be a co-host again. Thank you so much.

Thank you! I don't know what happened, but Zoom just completely disappeared and crashed on me.

Bad

Bad Zoom.

Yes, bad them. I am glad everyone is still with me. I am going to re-share and finish up with that is okay? I am glad everyone is still with me. I am going to re-share and finish up with that is okay? I did not want to interrupt if Catherine needed to finish a thought?

No, the only thing I was going to reinforce was if Catherine needed to finish a thought?

No, the only thing I was going to reinforce was please put your questions in the chat, we can seize that opportunity and if youchat, we can seize that opportunity and if you want to finish up that would be great. We can get to the questions.

Excellent. Let's do that.would be great. We can get to the questions.

Excellent. Let's do that. Now, can everyone see that?

I see

I see you. I don't see --

Okay, this is a great example of

Okay, this is a great example of how the technology can thwart to you at every possible moment.thwart to you at every possible moment. Let's try one more time to share. Can you see it now? to share. Can you see it now?

Yes.

Wonderful. Okay, so, we will --

You might want to -- there you go.

We will go ahead and we will --

You might want to -- there you go.

We will go ahead and speed on through. Okay, so sticky material, this is really

important.material, this is really important. You must repeat, repeat, repeat. We know that adult We know that adult humans need to hear a message either three or up to seven timesmessage either three or up to seven times for it to stick. Don't get hung up on, I have only repeated that four times. Think of it this way. When you were a get hung up on, I have only repeated that four times. Think of it this way. When you were a child and you got up on Saturday morning and made your bowl of cereal and turned on the televisionSaturday morning and made your bowl of cereal and turned on the television , what happened? You are bombarded with images and graphics and video with images and graphics and video and most of all, music, music, music. So most of usmusic. So most of us , and I am no longer a spring chicken, most of us can remember almost all of the music from thea spring chicken, most of us can remember almost all of the music from the cereal commercials of our childhoods because we heard the repeated and repeated and repeated and repeated so we absorbed because we heard the repeated and repeated and repeated and repeated so we absorbed the message. What you want to do is make your message stickyto do is make your message sticky so that the person still has it in their mind, in their neurology,has it in their mind, in their neurology, while they are in the process of absorbing it. process of absorbing it. Because he would not be able to repeat it 4000 times but you would to repeat it 4000 times but you would need to repeat things two or three or four or five times. For example,or three or four or five times. For example, let's just remember for a moment that we just keep smiling. People have, what? 50-minute bladders. You remembered it, before I even said it. a moment that we just keep smiling. People have, what? 50-minute bladders. You remembered it, before I even said it. Okay, sticky material. I primed you when we began talking by telling you what you were going to experience.when we began talking by telling you what you were going to experience. Sounds like it should not work but it is incredibly effective. If I tell youwork but it is incredibly effective. If I tell you today we are going to learn the principles of plain language and when you finish this class you are going to be fundamentally different and learn the principles of plain language and when you finish this class you are going to be fundamentally different and you are going to notice things that you never noticed before, and think of things in a way you never thought of them before. That statement that you never noticed before, and think of things in a way you never thought of them before. That statement right there opens a neural pathway in your brain and makes you more receptive. It also in your brain and makes you more receptive. It also makes you aware of all of those things that will stick and figure out, I am going to those things that will stick and figure out, I am going to drop little calls to action and what I calland what I call gold nuggets. Gold nuggets are the little extra bits that we teach likethe little extra bits that we teach like teach your students how to use the

spacebar touse the spacebar to unmute their microphone. And then when they let go, the spacebarwhen they let go, the spacebar , they are muted again. Those are little gold nuggets of extra information that people are not expecting.are little gold nuggets of extra information that people are not expecting. The miniature call to action is like this,is like this, now, when you get back to your office, the first thing I want you to doto your office, the first thing I want you to do , and then tell them. And you will be surprised how many students will come to youyou will be surprised how many students will come to you in later years and say, you know, I still have that sticky note reminding me of the better word choiceyou know, I still have that sticky note reminding me of the better word choice on my computer monitor. And then you will know you did it, you got through to them and they took something back to then you will know you did it, you got through to them and they took something back to their desk that they could use immediately that would change their immediately that would change their writing immediately. That is what sticky means. Always use exercises, sticky means. Always use exercises, even in this kind of formatformat , in the classroom we would use the written exercises but in this format, now, I wantwould use the written exercises but in this format, now, I want to push the verbal participation. I want everybody to join in and I will even I want everybody to join in and I will even sometimes say in my major exercise, I only have one major exercise inexercise, I only have one major exercise in there, and two small ones in the shorter class, or online, I will even say, now, everyonein the shorter class, or online, I will even say, now, everyone unmute, just yell it out, if you know the answer.if you know the answer. It causes a little cacophony for a few moments but it is fun and it does get people involved as for a few moments but it is fun and it does get people involved as well as engaged. Towards the end,end, The outro of your classes very, very important. classes very, very important. It is called queuing, letting the person know what is coming, I am going to sum up what we have learned and then I am the person know what is coming, I am going to sum up what we have learned and then I am going to repeat those many calls to action. So we have learned today that teachingto action. So we have learned today that teaching plain language through streaming is a little bit different, but not dramatically different than teaching in a classroom.a little bit different, but not dramatically different than teaching in a classroom. It is simply a matter of switching your headof switching your head , your own idea of how you will deliver you will deliver the message and taking into account the realities that your students are experiencing. I will repeat the collection, whenaccount the realities that your students are experiencing. I will repeat the collection, when you leave here I want you to put that sticky note on your laptop, monitor. Oryou to put that sticky note on your laptop, monitor. Or thinking this through, or I want you to fire up zoom and practice

opening breakout rooms. One of those thingswant you to fire up zoom and practice opening breakout rooms. One of those things that I have given as a call to action throughout the class I am going to remind you to go and do them before we a call to action throughout the class I am going to remind you to go and do them before we end up and then I am going to open up a forum for your end in questions.am going to open up a forum for your end in questions. Now, always make sure, whether you are live, in person, or are streamingyou are live, in person, or are streaming , that you give your students a parting gift. We do know from research that adult learners, a parting gift. We do know from research that adult learners, especially folks who work in white-collar occupations, say they feel incompleteoccupations, say they feel incomplete if they leave a training session and they have nothing to carry with them.session and they have nothing to carry with them. So that basically equals handouts. People are used to getting notebooks and handouts and books and various things that go along People are used to getting notebooks and handouts and books and various things that go along with training. If they just close the laptop with nothing,close the laptop with nothing, it does not feel like they were done. So I recommendthey were done. So I recommend develop, if you don't have one, a checklist tool or something that you can always give to your studentsone, a checklist tool or something that you can always give to your students the day you are going to receive the plain language action and information network, editing checklist that goes with our standard, basic principles of plain to receive the plain language action and information network, editing checklist that goes with our standard, basic principles of plain language class. It is an outstanding tool and if Katherine oroutstanding tool and if Katherine or Beth are on with us today,today, let's all give them a hand. It is an incredible tool to use and I want you to have it as our gift today. They hand. It is an incredible tool to use and I want you to have it as our gift today. They are going to post it so that you can grab it and that you can grab it and if you are not able to grab it, you can contact me at any time. Do be aware we have to grab it, you can contact me at any time. Do be aware we have to all be careful about digital files, don't email cartoons or anything copyrighted, don'tfiles, don't email cartoons or anything copyrighted, don't draw licensed items like pictures or intellectual property into the chator intellectual property into the chat . Always try to make sure that either you created the item or you have the rights to distribute it.that either you created the item or you have the rights to distribute it. And then here we go, we are nearly done, two more things and we are going to finish up and take we are nearly done, two more things and we are going to finish up and take her questions. Virtual teachers like all classroom teachers need life hacks, always have your warm waterall classroom teachers need life hacks, always have your warm water , always have your mint, always have youralways have your pad for your notes,

always have a pen, and always have, no matter what, whether you are online or in person, have a printout of have a pen, and always have, no matter what, whether you are online or in person, have a printout of your class. You never know when it is going to save your life or when zoom is going to completely crash like it did for when it is going to save your life or when zoom is going to completely crash like it did for me. And that, my friends, is the end.the end. Here are some resources, this is on the tip sheet you will receive. These are really helpfulis on the tip sheet you will receive. These are really helpful . There are 1 million of them, I would say 999 million are not helpful, these are really helpful online resourcesthem, I would say 999 million are not helpful, these are really helpful online resources or online presenting and teaching and and I will now be quiet and let Katherine and Gabby and let Katherine and Gabby and Catina tell me the questions and see how I can help you. These to have a couple more minutes before we have to and see how I can help you. These to have a couple more minutes before we have to go. Did I lose everyone?

Not at all, it just takes us a few moments to find the questions.

Not at all, it just takes us a few moments to find the questions.

That is okay.

Yes.

Again, I instantly reacted because there was a second ofYes.

Again, I instantly reacted because there was a second of lull, a second of lull, one second is enough for your students to go, what one second is enough for your students to go, what is wrong? So --

---

What happened? What happened? Yes.

What happened? Think about it, if you are driving and one What happened? What happened? Yes.

What happened? Think about it, if you are driving and one of those public alert things comes on and there is a second of dead air on the radio you instantly are frightened. Same things happened comes on and there is a second of dead air on the radio you instantly are frightened. Same things happened on television.

One question I seem to have gotten to the questions, is how can seem to have gotten to the questions, is how can you measure your rate of speed to get into the right range? Someone said, you know, in the chat, you know,speed to get into the right range? Someone said, you know, in the chat, you know, you just get a block of text and read itof text and read it and count the numbers. I am sure there is a better idea. And the other part of that question is what is your am sure there is a better idea. And the other part of that question is what is your opinion of slide-o and other technologies for keeping people engaged?

Okay, let me answer those in ordertechnologies for keeping people engaged?

Okay, let me answer those in order . So first, how do we measure our rate of speaking? Here is a trick, I would hand themwe measure our rate of speaking? Here is a trick, I would hand them the first page of the speech, roughly about 200 to 250 words on a full 8.5 by 11 page. 250 wordsspeech, roughly about 200 to 250 words on a full 8.5 by 11 page. 250 words , read and this. Don't read the title. And I would time them. Your phones now have these great the title. And I would time them. Your phones now have these great options where you can set a timer and read to yourself or you can actually talka timer and read to yourself or you can actually talk your class to yourself and time yourself and then just do the division. Or you can get an apptime yourself and then just do the division. Or you can get an app . I actually have an app on my phone, it is not very good so I am not going to tell you the name of it on my phone, it is not very good so I am not going to tell you the name of it and recommend it, plus I don't know the legal implications of that, butknow the legal implications of that, but if I get worried, and sometimes I do because I tend to go too fast, I can get up into the 150 words per minute sometimes I do because I tend to go too fast, I can get up into the 150 words per minute range, which basically

sounds like a stream of consciousness to everyone listening.stream of consciousness to everyone listening. So I actually will speak into my memo recorder into my memo recorder or my phone, and let my app tell me what my rate was. There are a number of different ways you can do that in my app tell me what my rate was. There are a number of different ways you can do that in practice. So if one does not work, try another.work, try another. And if none of them work, send me an email and we will explore it to gather. To answer the question about work, send me an email and we will explore it to gather. To answer the question about slide-o, I have not had an occasion to use it. an occasion to use it. I had to rate it for another program that I did, and I understand how it works, but I have not used it yet. However, for another program that I did, and I understand how it works, but I have not used it yet. However, I believe that the situation that we have found ourselves in that we have found ourselves in is going to bring incredible innovations. Slido will not be the last and it may or may not end up being the best. There Slido will not be the last and it may or may not end up being the best. There will be many such apps that come along that help us with engagement. And more importantly, measuring our engagement.come along that helps us with engagement. And more importantly, measuring our engagement. Because as communicators we have to always be trying to figure out how we are going to explain the rate of return to always be trying to figure out how we are going to explain the rate of return on what we do for our bosses. I am sorry I don't have a great answer for that, but I do know more technologies than our bosses. I am sorry I don't have a great answer for that, but I do know more technologies are coming and then hopefully the next time we meet I will have a better answer.

Yes.the next time we meet I will have a better answer.

Yes. Do you have just a few moments for questions?few moments for questions? For --

---

Yes I do.

Okay.

I do.

I am trying to find out -- there isdo.

Okay.

I do.

I am trying to find out -- there is somebody -- okay. I am so sorry. We don't actually have many more questions although I did drop something in the so sorry. We don't actually have many more questions although I did drop something in the chat about Gerry McGovern and worldwide waste. He is talking about worldwide waste. He is talking about how people need to curate and manage their content and manage their content and also he talks about what we had not been thinking about which is, you know, how much what we had not been thinking about which is, you know, how much digital do meetings consume. Obviously if you are not using video, if you are not using it, if you are not using video, if you are not using chat you are shrinking your usage. There is one quick question, the requirements for background that you can use.

Thank you, that is a usage. There is one quick question, the requirements for background that you can use.

Thank you, that is a great question. Backgrounds, okay. Recently, I was in a presentation through my jobRecently, I was in a presentation through my job and the presentation was great butbut the person had chosen an unfortunate background that was outer space withunfortunate background that was outer space with lots of weird colors and cosmic stars and I spent most ofcosmic stars and I spent most of the time looking at the backdrop around her head backdrop around her head and I found that it was very hard for me, even though I was deeply engaged in the topic, to understand and was very hard for me, even though I was deeply engaged in the topic, to understand and keep up because I kept losing my attention focus. So my rule of losing my attention focus. So my rule of thumb is avoid fancy backgrounds if you are teaching. If you are in a meeting with all of your coworkers or if your if you are teaching. If you are in a meeting with all of your coworkers or if your agency requires you to use a branded background,branded background, for any meetings that involve external folks, then absolutelyexternal folks, then

absolutely do what you need to do in terms of your job. But if you are teaching a large group online, keep itdo in terms of your job. But if you are teaching a large group online, keep it as unobtrusive as possible. Remember, classy. This is just my dining room wall, but it is not detracting from what I am saying, hopefully, or classy. This is just my dining room wall, but it is not detracting from what I am saying, hopefully, or causing you to lose your focus and attention, and remember, focus equals attention. If you focus on me you are automatically paying attention to and attention, and remember, focus equals attention. If you focus on me you are automatically paying attention to me. I just can't control how long you pay attention to me. I want you to stay focused.long you pay attention to me. I want you to stay focused.

Right, that is an excellent question. I mean that is an excellent answer. Thank you so much I am going to have to excellent question. I mean that is an excellent answer. Thank you so much I am going to have to wrap up, we will be posting the links and sending the documents to people. Unfortunately all of the questions in the chatposting the links and sending the documents to people. Unfortunately all of the questions in the chat about the links, which I could not do anything about, drown out some of the questions. We are going to be going through these and could not do anything about, drown out some of the questions. We are going to be going through these and we will send Wendy the questions and maybe she can post it back and we can either put that in the community or we questions and maybe she can post it back and we can either put that in the community or we can send it back to the participants. But, thank you, Wendy. That was a splendid.

Absolutely.

That was just incredible. So much information, the participants. But, thank you, Wendy. That was a splendid.

Absolutely.

That was just incredible. So much information, so many compliments. It is just, you know, it was an amazing presentation and you have spurred me to action on two things. So, you know, you know, it was an amazing presentation and you have spurred me to action on two things. So, you

know, fantastic for you and we greatly appreciate your time appreciate your time and all of the effort you went to with the presentation and thinking it through. Gabby, do we have any last minute, you went to with the presentation and thinking it through. Gabby, do we have any last minute, Gabby or Maura, do we have any last minute things we need to let the group know?

No, all that is to say, do we have any last minute things we need to let the group know?

No, all that is to say thank for joining, and just a reminder, folks, that I put in the chat a couple of times, this zoom for a reminder, folks, that I put in the chat a couple of times, this zoom for government is through GSA, our agency. Unfortunately there is agency. Unfortunately there is a blocker that does not allow for most folks and agencies to download the PDF that was provided in the chat window. All that being said, they will be available and we will be sure to send this to everyone who joined thank you so much, we will be sure to send this to everyone who joined thank you so much, thank you, Wendy, thank you, Katherine.

Can I add one last thing? I make a promise to every class that I teach, no matter Katherine.

Can I add one last thing? I make a promise to every class that I teach, no matter the topic, that if you contact me with a question I will always get back to you as soon contact me with a question I will always get back to you as soon as possible. We will make sure that you have the correct emails to reach me, and feel free to get in touch anytime. sure that you have the correct emails to reach me, and feel free to get in touch anytime. Thank you. Thanks for spending the day with me, everybody.

Thank you so much, Wendy. This was, as I said, absolutely splendid.

Thank you so much, Wendy. This was, as I said, absolutely splendid. I know we learned a lot and as Gabby will be saying, we will have this recording posted onGabby will be saying, we will have this recording posted on digital.gov and the tips sheet made available as well. So thank you all, for your attention.made available as well. So thank you all, for your attention.

And now I am going to waive. Bye, everybody.

Bye.going to waive. Bye, everybody.

Bye.

[Event concluded] This message is intended only for the use of the Addressee and may contain information that is PRIVILEGED and CONFIDENTIAL. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any dissemination of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please erase all copies of the message and its attachments and notify us immediately.

"Please stand by for realtime captions."

"Please stand by for realtime captions."

Thank you so much for joining us today. We will get started in a few minutes. We are waiting for everybody to get back from lunch so thank you for joining.

Hello, folks. Just testing my volume to confirm it is better now?

Sounds good. Thanks.

Excellent. It is to: 01 and we will get started. Everyone thank you so much for joining today's plain language webinar. This is really exciting because we have with us today Alex and Bethany two accessibility 508 members of that community of practice joining us. A couple of things today. This event is being recorded. Just for everyone's awareness due to the number of folks in the event today and joining us, we will have all of the participants on mute but feel free throughout the event to ask questions into the chat box and we will address them towards the end of the event we will have a dedicated Q&A portion. In the chat box is defaulted to chat to all panelists. If you can just select the drop down and change to all panelists and attendees that way we can all see your questions that would be wonderful. A link for live captioning for today's event is included in the chat and if at any time anyone wants the link resent, we will be happy to do that. Thanks again for joining us. I will turn it over to play language community of practice manager, Catherine.

Thank you. I was wondering if I could unmute myself are not and I see that I'm absolutely able to so I am very pleased to have all you joining us. I see that we are past the 450 mark which is fantastic and we are so happy to bring you something that you will find useful in your day-to-day work. Just to clarify speaking today yes, this is going to be recording recorded and we will send it out when it's done and we've posted also where it's going to live on the site. It will also be listed to the plain language community of practice. We have Bethany Letalien who is the section 508 project manager at OPM and that's almost too many PMs in one phrase. We are pleased to hear from her since she spoke last year on the intersection of plain language and section 508 and we also have Alex Wilson from GSA's office of governmentwide policy with a lot of really useful tips on how to make content work for our readers and for government readers I don't know whether we call them users or clients or readers or whatever but they have to interact with us. They don't necessarily have a choice about doing it so we have to make it easy and make sure that everyone can do it. I am thrilled to the clear this webinar opened. Take it away, Bethany.

All right. Thank you, Catherine, and thank you everyone for having me in taking one hour, one hour and a half out of your lives to have this conversation and especially thanks to Alex for helping me out here. I am going to try to use best practices in accessible presentations as well so I will start by describing the first slide. Our OPM slides have their mostly gray and white with some blue and on the top and this will be for all of our slides there is RCL and we have our website which is OPM.GOV and on the bottom we have what we currently will change soon but currently it says mission plus service plus stewardship and on all subsequent slides you will have a slide number. But the slides are pretty much the same. The title of the presentation is accessibility and plain language in government. And it says that we are here at the plain language meeting, March 2021 and again, my name is Bethany Letalien I am the OPM section 508 program manager. I am going to shut my video off so I can see that screen entirely. What we will cover. We will have three sections the first the which is the accessibility in the federal government where I will talk very briefly about the 508 standards and a couple of different ways of thinking about what kinds of disabilities. There is a range of ways of thinking about disabilities that we will not get into now but at least some shared understanding. Secondly, we are going to talk and this is the main part of the presentation about the intersection of accessibility and plain language. We will talk about word choice, typography and layout and headings lists and tables and graphics and for future reference some resources and contact information and again, you will get a copy of this deck. Accessibility in the federal government. To whom and what does section 508 applies? There's a lot of confusion around this but the law is quite clear that section 508 of the rehabilitation act -- and this is not the Americans with disabilities act . It retains to anyone with a disability who is trying to access agency information. That means both members of the public and federal employees. It does not mean that if you want information from the FBI and you have no right to it you get it anyway. You get comparable or another term the office uses is substantially equivalent access to the information that you're authorized to have. Regardless of your disability. Today we will be focusing on the information communication technologies the agency has developed for maintaining use, that is what section 508 covers. So the standard put out for the access board, the U.S. access Board and they were not so recently back in 2017 effective 2018 updated to conform -- to use of the retina content accessibility guideline or WCAG however you want to pronounce it to put out levels A and AA. That's what is used worldwide. If someone tells you that 508 is so difficult, it's just a stupid U.S. federal government that's no longer the case. It is in fact the entire world and much of the world uses the newer standard 2.1. There's also a higher standard which is AAA so we're not actually asking for everything under the sun. Those guidelines besides those guidelines section 508 standards require us to think about four kinds of functional criteria. One is around your eyes so you have without vision which would be people who use screen readers. You have limited vision which you may not use any assistive technology but could have limited peripheral vision, could have limited lower vision any number of things and without perception of color which usually does not mean complete color blindness but some perception that different than the average. And you have limited hearing and without speech. And then you have a limited manipulation with limited reach and strength, and with limited language, cognitive, and learning abilities. The last one is limited cognitive language and learning abilities is where we have the most overlap with play language although I would say that a lot of the vision concerns also overlap greatly with play language concerns. And this is also the part that is least well covered by WCAG 2.0 and A and AA and a lot of what I'm recommending an Alex is recommending is not actually in WCAG. Other ways of thinking about disabilities. We have to remember that not every disability is permanent. It can also be temporary or situational and even among people who have a permanent disability, they could have had it their whole lives, they could've gotten 20 years ago, it could have started two weeks ago, it could've been from an accident or something genetic, or the Boston city Marathon bombing where a number of people acquired disabilities very abruptly. So all of those things are going to affect how you interact with your disability or disabilities. And also you can have a temporary disability. I was hit in the eye with the water polo ball once and spent a number weeks having a very hard time with spreadsheets that I myself had created and were accessible but very hard to use because I could not see out of one eye. But it was temporary and he cleared up. You can have a situational disability and it can be something as simple as you are in allowed office and you cannot hear the audio. Or you are in a really quiet place and you have any earphones and you should not try to -- you need captions pretty simple. And then of course there's no guarantee that anyone has one disability has only one disability. So the same goes and it is applied to other groups not just people with disabilities but the same goes if you met one person with a disability, you met one person with a disability. Now we get to the fun stuff. Plain language. Our communities have a lot in common. First of all, we share a goal and is a very simple goal but it turned out to be very difficult to achieve often. We just want to make it possible for everyone to understand in our context and to access all the content. First of all, we know that if you are in a hurry and you get distracted and you're tired and anxious, if you're dealing with [Indiscernible] when I your cognitive function is probably decreased so we just want to keep everything easy for people. We want to design and organize our content for our audiences, the people who will be using our websites, documents, what have you. And both groups are very concerned about consistency because consistency helps you understand. One of the things we need to be working on in both communities is helping people understand when they begin to write and they begin to create a project that we need to be involved from the beginning and that will help both with the outcome and with the process and it will be a whole lot less painful for everyone involved. And then finally not only do we need to work together, on the plain language in the fives rate community but we also need to engage the user experience community, graphic design communities and I'm sure many others. From notes on word choice that I think are pertinent to all and I do not ask you to discuss the boards of using descriptive language.

One of the things and I'm hoping everyone can hear me. It is hard to gauge.

Yes.

One of the things we have is an issue and I have seen this a number of places where people use click here or click or even read more or get more information and that does not help very much because people using assistive devices simply see something which is a list of click here, click here, click here if that is what is linked. That is not very helpful. That does not tell people where they are going. I have put in the chat a link to a pretty good

article which shows you what people a screenshot of what people see on their assistive devices when it is just click here but that really does clarify why you should not be using click here and I feel that I see it everywhere which is ridiculous so one of the things I am going to be doing is running a search on some of the webpages I do and simply search for click here and work on replacing that particular language. There is almost always a better verb to use. Sometimes select or choose one is in the chat and I will send it again. Is to 14 if you want to search in the chat but it really does not help anyone particular the 508 community to just click here. If you fix it in one place you're fixing it for more than one audience.

Thank you, Catherine. The other thing I see is sometimes when you do away with click here, you write the sentence with forward for your and just words better for everyone like I said. I have noted the WCAG number is 2.4.4, that's a single layer requirement. It has to be a single layer requirement and it's that the link has to be intelligible in context if the rest of the sentence explains where you go but like Kathryn said, just underline the part that makes sense to people going through using a screen reader and that will be a AAA requirement so we are not held to it but how hard is it? Let's just agree to do it. The next thing is the be consistent. Don't use the same word meaning different things and that's 3.2.4 consisted identification which is particularly a concern in navigation or buttons and don't use different words to mean the same thing. Please don't confuse your reader. I we get tired of using the same word parts we are not writing novels for the government. And this third thing I have other be consistent is not actually belong under word choice. My apologies but style lists and tables consistently. Also be careful that you don't use the same language to go to two different URLs. That is equally confusing. Consider your use of abbreviations carefully if you use an abbreviation at the beginning and now you are six pages in you might want to want to spell it back out again if you have not using it for six pages and that will also when we get to talking about typography there's another piece to that and finally, make sure your document properties are properly filled out and you have your title and it matches the title on this screen and it matches sufficiently matches your file name. Obviously there are other concerns for filename and you have the author, and is probably your agency name. The subject and the keyword and this all helps with your optimization as well. Typography and layout. First of all, you probably have graphic designers. If you can get to talk to them that is really helpful. Keep in mind graphic designers are looking at the page and they want it to look pretty and you will have to have a conversation about making sure that they understand that it also needs to be readable but your agency's expert should be able to help you pick out proper fonts is what people call them. If you use proper typography and you use your way out carefully you will increase readability and you will increase cognitive load. Minimize distractions. Pictures are nice, they really are but if it's just going to be a distraction you probably don't want it and furthermore, if it is flashing, you really don't want it. Provide enough white space. If you have a limited field of vision you want to get enough into that field of vision that you can see whole words or sentences but someone with dyslexia or any number of other cognitive impairments may find the white space helps them or learning disabilities that the white space helps them make sense of the words so that's where if you are using a website and making it giving your users options is fantastic but obviously much of the work we do is. Is just a little more than you would normally use is the right amount. Pay attention to color contrast that is at 1.4.3 all you can do is just -- use ALL CAPS for acronyms and initialisms don't emphasize or headings and no angry writing because that's how it comes off but the other reason for that using ALL CAPS that are acronyms and initialisms is it's extraordinarily difficult on people with dyslexia. That same size that every letter is the same type makes things many times harder. Also any of us are going to slow down reading ALL CAPS for the same reason and some older screen readers depending on the length of the word they may end up spelling the word out. So please just don't do that and use it for the same kind the reason you use italics sparingly. Underlined text only in links. People expect to be able to click on text that's just underlined. This is 2021 and is bad enough when it is a black text with underlying. It is worst if it's blue text with underlying. I have been doing this for years and I still try to click on a link and something I was reviewing only to realize that it was just blue and underlined. It was not actually a link. Keep in mind people of color impairments may not be able to tell the difference between your link text in your non-link text. Don't confuse people by underlining. In your file name you don't want to put any spaces because if it gets posted like that the % 2020 spaces go and that's no good. Also some special characters will cause trouble just technically. In it may not be visible once you have underlined for a link. Not that you usually want to use URLs as links anyway and really if you feel like you must use a special character use a hyphen but I actually avoid them as much as I can. Another note on all ALL CAPS and underlining, those are holdovers from typewriters but it's hard to find a typewriter nowadays. Nobody uses that in a very long time so it's time to move on. So Alex you going to jump in on the next slide, headings, lists, tables will help your readers get a sense of a document or webpage at a glance. Or you can, use them. They have help break up long content, giving your eyes and brain a break but you have to create them properly so that people behind the scenes so that people with certain disabilities will be able to access and understand them and that is WCAG 1.3.1 . Take it away, Alex.

Thank you, Bethany. Just to go into for headings and tables specifically and we get into more specific information if there is direct questions on that, we can do that at the end as well because some of this information it might be easier to talk to the certain sections are just look at Excel or Word as an example. But I will go through here and we can cover questions at the end as with the rest of the presentation. So with respect to headings specifically and this is really written into a more of a word format as an example so Microsoft Word is an example and when you're creating a document a Word document or similar then use the primary stylesheet. It is called stylesheet in the program and currently the most recent it's right in the middle the most recent version of Microsoft Word is right in the middle and it says styles. When you use that you select it and it will say like normal text or title Textor heading 1, heading 2. There is a range any select that because it allows screen years screen readers to understand until the next heading of that level is kind of subordinate to that text. Actually this is one of the examples where using those styles, those built-in features as opposed to selecting the text and making it 25 point font or an bolding or whatever, if you use these styles when you create a table of content it automatically populates as opposed to the program not being sure what information is so if you actually use the stylesheets re-created table of content it auto creates. You want to break it into logical sections and use those sheets and the tip is to try to keep it relatively short. You want to put too much information because it is difficult to follow which section you are in if there's too much information in their. The repeat headings that's for all the programs especially if you're creating a PowerPoint, either Google slides or PowerPoint if you use the same title for each of the slides, you don't know which one you're on. Using a different title both for the slides or for sections in the document they need to be different. One of the ways around that if you're portraying the same information especially for slides you would say for example, list of tables 1 of 2 that's a way to get around that if you cannot fit all the information easily into one slider into one section. With respect to the built-in features that again using the word processor software like Microsoft word or Google docs you use the bullet which in word is under the paragraph tab. The bullet ties to function or the bullets or 1.1 or 1.8 many different styles you can use but using those instead of hitting tab and then hand typing in a Daesh dash the system does not understand that and it doesn't understand that that is subordinate to the text above if you don't use of the features. For tables and again, this is specifically for word when you are creating word tables and is the table is too big and he breaks across pages, you go in and actually this is on the next slide, you go in and just select the header row when you go into the table properties either on the top bar where you can hit the table and table properties or you do the right click which brings up this table menu. You would select repeat header row and when you select the whole table, you can also de-select break allow cells to break across pages so all the information is in the same place and the entire cell is on one page. It's a lot easier to read in general. I find that hard to follow for myself but it's also easier for screen readers to use. One of the things that people don't use a lot people especially within GSA they often times have experience with building Google slides and Google docs but not as much with Google sheets or Excel and that's one of the things we find we have to provide some context and a little bit more assistance to make sure those are accessible/remediate that's because they are just not as used as often as some of those other things. With respect to Excel specifically one of the things you have to do is the information once you put it into a table in order for the program to actually understand that that is a table in Excel in and of itself, you select the information and you select create table. Either again with the right click or in the top under insert. That allows the program as is being read to understand that all of that information is together. One of the things we find that people often do when a screen reader is reading the information it uses only one row and one column. The first column and the header row for referencing of every cell. What I mean by that is if you have information in a very large table it only aligns was in the first column and whatever -- I'm sorry, in the first column and whatever is in the header row to show that example. If you are saying for instance the information you're trying to present is a date, whatever you're looking at, when the policy was created in the data looks at both of those and select that. But if you have other information that's before that column, it is going to reference that other information and therefore whoever is using the screen reader will not be able to see it. Again, I don't want to go into too many details. We have the ability to just go into an example in Excel or PowerPoint or word after if we need to. It's a little hard to talk to the different caps. These are a few of the things we found people have difficulty because they don't know information so they kind of create things and then have to work around and remediate them. It's always much easier to do it either the correct way or the most successful way the first time. One of the things I did forget actually is try not to or just don't use merge cells. Either in the header or somewhere within the table. It is not -- the screener cannot understand that but also it is really hard to follow the general perspective for everyone. Just make sure that each cell is broken out so that people can understand and it can follow easier.

I think that's it from me, Bethany. Again, we can cover the questions at the end specifically around Excel because this is more related to word but we can show where the tabs are or if people have those kind of questions.

Thank you. Do keep in mind that if you find that you cannot get out of mergers, we have chosen to use either HTML or PDF as your file format. Those are the only ways to make a complex table accessible so what I was do if I asked people, are there ways you can turn this complex table into a simple one? And often people do things like they put the caption inside the table and all you have to do is pull the caption out and all of a sudden your table is simple do that. On the earlier slide I mentioned accept parallel structure in the heading accept parallel structure. What I meant by that is let's say you have a report and it's about 12 different agencies and you have to say the same three things about those 12 different agencies. You have your heading level 2 for an agency and each of your heading level 3, if they are the same four things on the same order for each of those agencies you are doing okay. Otherwise please, don't repeat headings. But you have that context if you use that parallel structure. The last thing we have to talk about that isn't just references is graphics. I know this is a language thing but I also know that we all encounter draft graphs and graphics. If it's a complex graphic it's to provide a table. Does not get you out of things like making sure that the color contract is sufficient. All the other things for vision does not undo those requirements. But if you have a table, you solve the screen reader problem if you do the tables correctly however, people who use screen readers are not the only people with disabilities. Let's talk about alt text. People usually understand alt text can be the stuff that you're right click and you say under alt text and you put a little sentence or two. That's true but there's a wider world of alternative way of providing text for an image. You can have a caption, you can have nearby text or it can be decorative and you can market as a decorative. Why is this important? Because the white click type of alt text is a clunky and not super usable. You cannot use formatting you cannot include if someone is using a screen reader they cannot grab part of the text they cannot go back or forth by a letter or a word or a sentence. It is all or nothing. Older screen readers may cut them off. Where you can put it in writing where everyone can see or hear you are better off. But sometimes you legitimately require some alt text. Please do not start with image of because the screen reader will already announce that it is an image so the only time you should be saying that something is an image would be if you're writing an article about [Indiscernible] versus photographs than the kind of image it is matters but in other cases say what it is. And the marking decorative images is okay, 1.1.1 nontext content. Here is the really interesting part and it's more for graphs. Don't use sensory characteristics as the only way to convey meaning. 1.3.3 I'm actually going to read this for you. Sensory characteristics quote instructions provided for understanding and operating content do not rely solely on sensory characteristics justice shape, color, size, visual location, orientation, or sound. And related 1.4.1 use of color. Color is not used as the only visual means of conveying information. Including and indicating an action, [Indiscernible] a response or distinguishing and visual element. What we are saying here is that somebody was looking at the screen has to be able to and somebody's not looking at the screen needs to be able to tell things apart. What you can do is make required fields in red or say, everything on the left side is X and we have to fix the plain language website on this. All items in bold are block. This does not pass. When as far as using sensory characters you can use two as long as you have an alternative you can use two to mean something never just one. Now that I have thoroughly confused all of you for future reference you will get this a deck and you will see that there is a link to the law, to the standards and here it should be her favorite place to go always is section 508.gov which has created digital accessible products and you will find documentation on PDFs, Word documents, Excel etc.. Find your 508 program manager if you do not work for OPM you have a program manager as well so that way you can contact me and some links to accessibility training. The Social Security Administration alt text guide is old and fantastic so I tried to [Indiscernible] as little as possible and send people to it. The WCAG reference when you open it up you will find that it's that information about how to do things in HTML that might not be useful but if you keep it nice and close up you can see the list of criteria and you can see what we are held to and and color contrast checkers one is downloadable and has an eyedropper so if for some reason you don't have access to the color codes, then you can grab it with an eyedropper. That pharmacy is not going to be as accurate as you actually have the values so the last link is to the color checker that you can use if you have values. You can also check in the values on the color contrasted. Is a fantastic tool. Finally, these were approved to be for Alex, Trent and I will not spell out my name because you have it in your email but my email is bethany.letalien@opm.gov.

Such an interesting session. I feel like I have learned a lot and have my work cut out for me for the next couple weeks. Let's -- thanks so much. Let's start with some of the things in the Q&A and I need people -- I mean , I'm so pleased that there is comments like awesome, thank you, fantastic, I really appreciate that and so will our speakers but it makes it hard to get to the questions. So I'm not entirely sure how to handle that so let's just go on to the question and Alex, you and Bethany can fight over who gets to answer. I don't care how you do that virtually. If you have ALL CAPS as a font style so the words are not typed in sentence case but it just renders as ALL CAPS.

That will help with screen readers but it will not help people who have dyslexia.

Cut the ALL CAPS out as much as you can.

So that will not help people who have dyslexia.

What about gutters? I heard about gutters and how they drain cognitive load of users with dyslexia. Is that what is meant by white space?

Gutters? You mean along the edge?

I don't know.

I am not a typography person. I am not a graphic designer so if there's any graphic designers that want to jump on and tell me what gutters are.

Maybe we can go back. The only thing I can think of is --

Okay. Obviously if you have a pair of columns you want to put them's some space between them. The rivers you are talking about our the text lines up so that you have something visual that might distract you because there is space that lines up into like a snake, right? It can be really hard to control to your own web obviously. Keeping everything left justified and not fully justified is always a good idea.

Another thing that's not what is meant by white space. White space is how you part a long paragraph but go ahead.

It is the space between lines and between paragraphs is what I meant anyway. And margins to, margins definitely help. Generally, giving text and up space to breathe. Giving text enough space to breathe.

A rather scary question which is, which is the best top restaurant typography font to use in a think we could have a week discussion about that.

Make sure that you use what are they called?

I was going to say we tend to use specifically we tend to use public sense if you're using Google as the three font sizes and we default to Arial at that specific by rule I'm not sure but the Sam's without the bars at the bottom of the text because that's much harder to read.

Also a number of people have said the agency has probably fixed that in a style guide so whatever your agency says is what you should do.

Maybe or if your agency uses times new Roman your agency may need some rethinking.

You can probably approach that from the standpoint of 508 compliance or compliance and accessibility. Not using ALL CAPS and report headings is tricky what is your advice instead?

I think Alex simply said that you need to use the header options in style, right, Alex?

Yes. I'm not sure but when you are creating the header you go to within word specifically there is a section called styles. It's right in the newest version in office 365 it is right in the middle and you just select the first one it defaults to normal, that's the one on the left but if you're doing a title I believe that's one or two over and you scroll over, it's normal subheading title subtitle heading 1, heading 2 etc. and that is you select the text that you want and you just click on that and it assigns that to say header 1 or as a title or is normal text and that way the software knows that it's at the appropriate level.

But if the question is your agency insists on having ALL CAPS for titles well, then it's time to have the hard conversation with your agency about the fact that this is not the 1970s or 80s and we don't use typewriters anymore and that title case is the appropriate case and that's beyond 508 at that point. That is with your designer. Headers are one across every page and is the opposite of suitors and headings are what marks different sections. Keep in mind that when you go to PDF from say word headers and footers do not get picked up so they are a bad place to put your title. They will not get picked up in the text.

Would you discourage the use of responsive web navigation tools such as collapsible menus on websites sometimes known as hamburger?

I would rather not see a hamburger. I would rather not see one. But this is a plain language conversation so we do not really get into that stuff.

As opposed to hyphens is section 508 on board with using M and dashes?

Somewhere on the web you can find what each of each what is appropriate for but-is the only way you can use in a filename.

That may be where that was coming from and I used to have the M -- HTML code memorized. Not anymore though. There is some comments and there is --

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There is a title heading, Shelley. The problem is it will not be picked up in PDF so you have to make a decision and the argument in this direction this is way too in the weeds but if you use the title heading basically your title is going to be just a regular paragraph in PDF. You can do that and then with your H 1 B6 chapters or whatever and you can or you can make the title of your entire document in H 1 and then start with H 2 for your sections. Sorry about that. Just wanted to catch that.

There is a question about well, a statement, a downloadable file also needs to pass accessibility standards as well.

Yes. Anything you put on your website has to be accessible. And I was assuming when I wrote these slides originally that this was a plain language group and that we were mostly talking about PDF. So sorry about any --

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We have got some questions I have seen flashing up on the screen about are we going to do in-depth technical training on I guess how to make a document compliant. The answer is no. The plain language community of practice is not going to offer that training. Please check with your agency's 508 group or section 508.gov. That material exists elsewhere and I don't think I don't think we need to duplicate it. Thank you for everyone who is including the HTML code for M and dash.

I will jump in here. That's a way -- that will make it compliant so the documents and to your point on section 508.gov there is tips on how to make it from the start accessible including the styles with respect to PowerPoints, making sure that the tables and the headings and the reading order specifically that there is alt text or graphic and when you actually want to make sure that it is accessible, use those accessibility checkers that are native within the tool. The used to previously be in the file, the click down file and the file drop-down in the file transfer specifically but now they were in the actual tool itself and it just says check for accessibility under tools, check for accessibility and I will tell you what the issues are and what you need to fix.

If you fail that, you failed but if you pass, it does not mean you pass.

Reading order tells you for instance it will tell you to check in and want to check it, it says that it is good but it might not be the most the best conceptual way to read the information. This is specifically talking about a PowerPoint slide. We need to check accessibility it will say check or not is really an error but it will be a warning message to check the reading order. When you go in it automatically resolves but that does not necessarily mean that's the best way. For instance I did one recently where if you had if you read the slide and the page number on the slide first or if you read the title first it passed in both instances. What you did was just figure out the best way or the way in which you want it read and then make every slide the same way I guess is the key to make sure that is is repeated and repeatable across slides.

Do you have platform tips for social media? How to improve accessibility for Facebook, Instagram?

No. I do not.

Fair enough. There is the social media community of practice which probably would do this but Alex?

There's a few things on section 508 on social media. When you go to section 508 at that of/create 508.gov/create a lot of it points to digital.gov which has multiple sections and blog posts and articles on how to create accessible social media. It is on both but a lot of information on section 508.gov because it is a library of information points to other sites specifically with social media it points to a lot of the digital.gov blogs.

I was also thinking that two things I found about fairly recently for accessibility and social media is using camel case for hashtags. If you're using plain language as a tag, that we capitalized the P in plane and the L in language because that makes it better on devices. I'm thinking that that's the case.

On all of us.

We all learn at the rate we want to.

You definitely want to capitalize the L because you're assuring showing the web index.

And similarly adding alt text to photos you can apparently do that in a social media which is a new thing and I'm looking forward to having a photo to share in social media so I can do that. So section 508.gov and let's see. I have a lot of questions here.

I see a question on Kenny too complex sales and art IDs to read the table correctly? The issue with [Indiscernible] it cannot reference more than one column. Or more than one a row. You don't want to use merge cells but just in general, especially when building a spreadsheet, if you create a merge cell you cannot filter or sort the table. It becomes as an actual processing and spreadsheet software it loses its value because you can't filter any of the arose. Excel cannot do that. It cannot filter or merge cells so if you add merge cells you cannot use it for its design purposes. From a screenreader point of view it's not good but also from a general use and design point of you you don't want to do that because you cannot actually use the software that way.

Fortunately since this community is mostly going to be using word to PDF for occasionally HTML you can make a complex table but then the question is do you really want to? Is that really helping your users or are you going to make it harder to understand?

I forgot to mention that. If it is too complex and if you don't think the information is conveyed, if you put two columns into one say this is policy or guidance and you say policy website policy or policy document creation, document creation or guidance document creation, if you need two separate tables or if you if the information is not go on one table just creates two tables or two tabs and a spreadsheet to convey the same information and it will make it easier to read that way.

One question I like a great deal is can you talk about the consequences for an agency. I would love to impress upon my agencies writers that plain language and section 508 is extremely important. What are some of your tips for explaining the consequences?

So we start with the obvious biggest one, you can get sued and it does happen. Losses lawsuits under both the ADA and WCAG have been going up and they have been for years and they will continue to go up. So that fear factor there is that. You can also have employees who cannot do their jobs and that's obviously not helpful to any agency. Nobody has enough people. And complaints and things of that sort. Any more specific consequences would depend on the context but yes, you can get sued.

And is also somewhat softer thing is not reaching audiences.

The right. Not just your own employees but people. But if you're looking to can mismanagement they have to do it, getting sued as an actual thing that happens regularly and all work will stop if that happens.

For people who need the thread and people who can be swayed by the other thing. Quick question coming up in the chat. I appreciate the helpfulness but again, it is getting hard to see questions. One question that did come up is using instead of click here using learn more about that's actually the same problem if that's what you a link because if you look at the article I linked to, what the screenreader user see is just a list of things that say learn more, learn more, learn more, and that does not help what people are getting. So you have to consider that that that is not actually useful text because that's what they see even that program using a word it's inappropriate but that does not help someone using assistive devices to figure out what information they want to get. That is why click here and learn more are equivalent for that. There is nothing magical or not magical about click or learn. It's just that at this not give enough information and you should use material that is descriptive, even if it's repetitive but you should do that.

If you can go up one slide they have great examples right above on your slide. For instance the for create accessible digital products you could have put click here and have the hyperlink on their click here to create accessible products but instead, you just hyperlink or you select as the text for the hyperlink creating accessible digital products so provide that information with that URL in the background so people know when they follow that, that's where it's going as opposed to just click here for create accessible products.

Exactly. One quick question came up. Do you advise a double space after the periods and I think you said earlier, Bethany, just one space when we were talking about rivers of text?

I usually care deeply about things like the, use it. I don't have strong opinion about periods after spaces because they have been studied in both directions so just be consistent.

That's always a big thing. Alex, should the title be labeled as a Cheryle one, heading 1 or I think there is an actual title case at the GSA we mainly use Google and Google docs so I am used to using the title and the level headings below that but have not used word.

Word also has a style that's called the title so yes, you would select that and then heading would be the first level of like the paragraphs that you use so section 1, section 2, section 3 would be heading 1. You can actually change those headings. If you don't like the style that's in there and generally cover each document you want people create something different, there's a standard template but when you use those styles, you can Select-and-Say update heading 2 to this text. You can create whatever you want it to look like and make sure that it is easily readable and accessible but you can create and change what that heading 2 looks like or heading 1 or title any of the styles you can update those styles to whatever you want it to look like. The problem or best practice is just to use the styles that are in their. If you wanted to look different you create the text selected and say update heading 2 or whatever style it references to, update that style to this layout. That's a way to get around and that's a way to use the built-in features but to customize it a little bit.

To keep in mind that the title style in word translates to a regular old paragraphing PDF. That's why I never use it. But it is okay. You can certainly do the regular paragraph. Everybody knows that the first thing in the document is probably the title. But you lose this is the heading when you go over to PDF.

That's all.

Before I forget I put my information, Alex Wilson, Alex is actually my middle name so I am putting my email in the chat zone when we have the output it will be in the chat.

There is an excellent question here. Is there a site that can help us experience what it's like to use a assistive technology?

Just google it. I don't know the names of anything offhand but yes. Especially color contrast -- not color contrast but colorblindness. There's a ton of things that will show you how that works.

I think the article I the link to which I put in the chat with something like that for me because I was working developing content and somebody said don't use this, don't use a learn more and I was thinking why? Is better than click here and somebody said this is what I see. When people use click here or learn more and it was that little screenshot of that and I thought oh, my, that does not help anyone at all. It's just not useful and I thought how terrible it would be to be in the situation where you wanted to follow up on links and all you had was that. I don't have another answer for you but I appreciate the experience. Question here. How does 508 apply to downloadable content? Such as PDF, Word, and Excel etc. and I wanted to say that I am hoping that agency websites have their webpages accessibility built in, particularly if they are using the U.S. web design of systems but it is always worth checking. How about 508 to the downloadable content?

If it is publicly available is covered by the standards. If it is not publicly available like if it's on your intranet there is a list of things that are covered by the standards. It is in E 205.

It's like playing bingo.

Basically, emergency notifications, things of that sort, doesn't matter where they are. They have to be accessible and everything public facing has to be accessible.

Let me double check that I got all the questions out of the Q&A? Yes. There was a note not specifically a question. People who speak English as a second language and some people on the autism spectrum can have a difficult time with negative contractions like don't so this persons agency says don't use don't. Go ahead and spell it out. That is a useful tip. Let me see. I keep trying to get into the chat. I guess all the questions are at the very bottom. Could there be a bar chart, Alex, that does not use century characters to distinguish?

One of the things you would do if you're creating a bar chart is to put labels on each of the bars. That's a way to do it for any type of graphs if you're using a line graph Excel or whatever software have the ability to each of the points are the dots can be a different figure. It can have a circle or a diamond or a X. If there is multiple lines or multiple types of bars, you can either put a different as I said a different indicator so circle, square, whatever or you can label them separately as well.

I had another sensory characteristics question which is, is it accessible to use a red asterisk next to a field to indicate that it is required?

Yes. As long as you note that red asterisk is required and also don't use*for things that are not required. That will be the one caveat. Because what you are relying on there is the**and that is text.

How do you balance text and visuals for visual learners?

That's really going to depend on your content.

I was going to say sometimes the content in a table is just I'm sorry in a graph for graphic is really a lot so you have to just spell it out either in a table or in the text as Bethany mentioned earlier to make sure the information is conveyed. Sometimes there is no way if the graph is so detailed, there is no way -- you cannot put that in Alt Text because it's too much and there's no way doesn't matter how many different icons you use whether it's on a line graph or a circle or a square, if the information is so packed, you just have to talk to it in the document and it just depends on the information and what you're trying to convey. Keep it as simple as possible to Bethany's point earlier is the best way to do it.

And often choosing the right kind of chart or graph. A pie chart is not appropriate when you have 16 places. It's just not.

Exactly. Similar to the spreadsheet if there's so much information instead of trying to layered information on one graph just create two or three graphs. It's easier to see if you're only presenting three or four things as opposed to 16 things Bethany, to your point in one graph. There's always a way in which this subsection information make it easier to present visually into the table.

The whole typewriter thing the other part of that is paper was expensive. Inc. was expensive, carbon copies were expensive. We don't live in that world anymore. If it takes two pages instead of one, use two pages. And I know some people will be scared off because all condo condo have to re-two pages so you cannot win but you have to do the most for the most people.

That's a good point because it's one of the things that people misunderstand frequently about plain language with is is all about making it shorter and sometimes it is and sometimes in the sense of its cutting out information that's not relevant and sometimes it does mean that you are making it longer but you're making it clearer. Your hitting that balance where people can use again. A question is can -- should hyperlinks and websites use the title text attribute the hover text?

I have not done web design in 15 years.

I'm not a web designer but when you hover over a text that's accessible because it just treats it as alt text for a screen reader so that is accessible on a website. You can use it, it depends on the system you're using. We have used Google sites and re-created our text on that but it just depends on the actual code and the program you are using but as a general rule that is not inaccessible. That is accessible because it treats it as alt text.

I am looking through the huge number of questions. It is hard to know people are really good about sharing information and tips and links sent here I am trying to find out what is the actual question so it is sort of like a game in the sense of --

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I just think everyone in the chat for all the support. You guys are great.

This is been really informative and helpful. You are something. I have been allowing the use of CSV for a lot of the graphs. What is the way around that? I don't even know what that means.

You can save things as CSUB which is files specifically like a straight text is like a plain text version of an Excel. I don't think it has the ability to do a lot of the functionality. I personally instead of using a CSV even some programs if you data extract out of a tableau or something you can save it as a CSV but I personally just use save it to an regular Excel file as well.

Somebody pointed out that CSV is , separated value. My webwork I mostly use Notepad so I don't -- [Indiscernible - multiple speakers] but I have to actually write something in a word, Google Doc? It's just not something I have been doing. Good question. How do you determine the best accessible web format to use for web documents when you post a PowerPoint or PDF? I'm going to lead with an answer which is, try to make it a webpage. Webpages are going to be better choices, faster and more accessible. Any time you do a PowerPoint or a PDF you are almost saying this is dead content.

I agree that you want to a webpage whatever you can. I also recognize that's not always possible. Sometimes you need to allow people to download or perhaps your web team costs too much money and is cheaper for you to make a PDF. Just like in the old days you cannot assume that everybody has access to readers for everything already on their machines and the favorite thing if it's not HTML is PDF. The other thing for PDF for me is that if somebody gives me a document and I was supposed to finalize it, I can get under the hood with Acrobat. Unless I created the document, I am not convinced, no matter how many checks I do in word or in PowerPoint that is actually accessible. But if I port it to PDF you can see the tag then you can see under the hood, it's much easier to tell if anything went wrong. Those are the two reasons.

One of the things we find a lot of people don't have Acrobat Pro especially within GSA so that which has the accessibility checker in it. If you post things to PDF which is likely to your point the best format what I tend to do, especially because I did not have Acrobat Pro until recently is because we use slides like the Google platform as a primary I would save it as a PowerPoint, use the native checker that's in that, and once that is clear, you post to PDF and someone or you would save it as PDF and make sure everything is covered to your point. Now that I have Acrobat Pro I can do it either way but I'm just used to doing it in PowerPoint and then doing the final check in PDF.

You want to make your source file as possible and actually, when I get a file from someone, I will put it over PDF to see where the problems are and then I go back and fix the source file in back to PDF and even if you have everything fixed in the source file, there are additional things that have to be done in Acrobat to finalize. For example is simple stupid thing like all of your tags need to be enveloped in the document and for some reason that's not the way they come from word or from PowerPoint. I don't know why. You actually cannot finalize in PDF without Acrobat or similar.

But you can do what you can and then handed off to the people who will finalize it.

It is certainly the case that I am seeing more people less willing to use PDFs for a number of what I consider are great reasons. That it is also very very hard to get people out of that particular habit.

Honestly, if you don't have access to do your own webpages, it may not be realistic for you to create your document. That's what it comes down to. PDF liquid may help with some of it but they are not generally super mobile friendly. They're not easy to edit. They are not ideal. But they are realistic under certain circumstances.

One of the things you might want to consider is actually checking your analytics which I used to do for this particular thing every quarter otherwise it was every month. We used to check our -- are people using their mobile phones? To get our webpages. We never saw anything significant but it was an increase every month, month over month. Is still was not as much as people using chrome or even safari or Internet Explorer but it's worth keeping an eye on to find out what are people using because at some point, you need to allow for that.

And that's in respect to the content to. If you're putting up an annual report that you put up every year and only Congress cares about it, maybe PDF is the right thing.

It can be tricky. We had a question about style guide. We don't tend to get that excited about style guides. Whatever your agency uses is a generally what you have to use. I know that we have in our division we have a set of exceptions to AP styles which we find to be more useful. You just have to keep a list of those and remember that you do have some exceptions. People even just create their house style. The whole point of a house style guide you have to make the same decisions every month which is a great thing to not have to do. But it's not going to make it good content. Is not going to make it accessible content. It just means you don't have to keep the siding if you have to capitalize F in federal.

It saves time and makes the content more consistent which actually does help. With readability and accessibility. Just not in a major way that you might think.

Not sure we have -- digital.gov , thank you for posting that on the style guides. Somebody posted something maybe if Alex is still on, somebody about the DHS trusted tester training.

I may trusted tester.

I am actually helping somebody that's coming out is going to be the ICT baseline which is a way in which to create many or to have your testing process actually verified and in part of the testing library. DHS trusted tester is one of them but I don't know Bethany if you want to talk to about it but trusted tester is around what site makes it assessable.

Trusted testers for testing websites. Quite a few of us are trusted testers at this point. And like you said we are working on the baseline saying the hope is that eventually they will be a set of tests that any organization that wants to say hey, realign to the federal 508 requirements. If there process passes those tests then they align and hopefully, we will eventually expand that to things like hardware and documents but I would not hold your breath because it will be a long time before all that comes out. But yes, baseline, yay.

Are there any final questions in the chat?

We have about five minutes and I want to make sure that we got information. Yes, we will be sharing the deck and the recording on digital.gov it will be later. We give ourselves at least two weeks because sometimes it is difficult to get those. This has been fantastic. Thank you for participating. Thank you so much to Bethany and Alex. You cannot see me but I am clapping. I guess one last question. If you describe an image with a caption what should you do regarding the alt text?

You can mark it as decorative or you can provide a little more information in the alt text. If the image is a graph and just the titles in the caption and you have a table later and providing all of the data all you say in the alt text is see table below. Explain where the table is.

I wanted to invite all of you to next month meeting which is somewhere. We have the link somewhere. Tomorrow or Gabby if you can repost that at the end. We have Jenny talking about how to test documents for usability. We have tested today we talked about plain language and talked about section 508 and accessibility and next month we have how to test your documents, not webpages to make sure that they are good for your users or the readers or the people who has have to use them so there we go. Testing your documents can improve plain language compliance it is open and posted it today so you can be in the first thing and we expect that to sell out completely. A quick question for the team. Will the live captioning transcript be part of this file? I am not sure about that but again our deep thanks to Bethany and Alex for a completely absorbing one hour and a half for one hour and 28 minutes and really got to what these sort of information is that we need. I wanted to thank you both and thank you and we will hope to see you next month.

Thank you. I hope we made some sensed everybody and thanks again everyone. It's been fantastic.

[Event concluded]

Event Description:

Plain Language

Please select which file format you wish to download:

Word Document (.docx)

Please stand by for realtime captions.

Thank you, everyone, so much for joining us. We are going to get started in just one moment. We will give folks just until the top of the hour. Folks are probably trickling in from previous meetings and lunch breaks.

Okay. It looks like we are about to: 01. As a reminder, all attendees will mutated be muted. Questions will be answered towards the end of the event during the Q&A portion of it. In the chat box, select chat to all panelists and attendees as the default option is chat to panelists only. You will have to make the change. As a reminder, this session is being recorded. We will post it to the page where you registered. A link for live captioning for today's event is included in the chat. I will drop it again, shortly. Finally, thank you for joining us. I will turn it over to our plain language community manager.

Thank you, so much. We have a stellar event today. I should admit before we say anything more about it, that it will be recorded. You will also get copies of the slides as part of that recording. You do not have to ask through the chat if those things are going to happen, because they are. Many thanks to digital.gov for hosting this. Many thanks to the panelists today. I don't know if I can call them panelists, our speaker, Ginny Redish , and you can put that on your business card, Ginny. Font of wisdom, and leave it at that. And, the brave people who have volunteered to test. We have David Lipscomb, he spoke for us a few months ago about the report card, and we have two other testers from GSA. We have Allison Kohler, and we have Amanda Dean who is in the DC office and working in the information technology category. Again, this is being recorded. We have lots of material to cover. Please put your questions into the chat. Ginny, I pass it over to you. Thank you so much.

Thank you so much, Catherine, for the introduction. Yes, thank you to my three volunteers whom you will meet sequentially during the webinar. Thank you to Gabby and Alex for lunch for the logistics. Thank you to all of you who are joining us today who are here to learn more about testing documents. I am primarily thinking about things on paper. When we normally think about usability testing as testing websites, though I will tell you, I was doing visibility testing before the web existed. I want to start by telling you that this webinar is actually based on an article in "UXmatters". It's a very influential online newsletter that comes a couple of times a month. There are columns, there are separate papers in it. As Kathryn says, don't rush to put down the web link. You will get all of this when the recording is posted and the slides are posted. You can also just Google my name and my co author on this. I did something I did not mean to do. I went to "UXmatters" which is not what I meant to do. Let me get back to my PowerPoint, here. There, I am going to move that out of the way so that I can go to my next slide, which is to tell you that Caroline Jarrett wrote this article with me . If you are not familiar with Caroline, you should be. She is an expert on forms. That is why her twitter handle has forms. A very exciting thing, Caroline is about to come out with a book on web surveys, I'm sorry, on survey design from Rosenfeld media. You should look at that.

Let me explain what we are going to do in these 90 minute study that you are here with me. We are first going to set the context. I think I need to give you arguments you might need to use with the folks you need to convince to let you do usability testing on documents, and why it's really critical. A brief review of usability testing, and some resources for those of you who are not familiar with it. The heart of our time together is going to be three techniques for doing usability testing. Tell me in your own words, which technically, is called paraphrasing. Mark positives and negatives, and finding an answer or do something, which we can think of as task-based or scenario-based. That's very similar to what we do for a typical website, but we do it with a paper document to show you that it applies there as well. In the end, I am also going to add a technique that you can use when you can't test for users. Of course, I would love for us all to usability test every document, but that is not feasible. You are going to be testing documents that are going to go to lots and lots of people. When you don't have a large audience, or can't afford to do usability testing at all, or even before you do usability testing, this is a technique you can use on an email that you are sending to one person. We will do that at the end. As Alex mentioned, there will be Q&A. In addition to that, I am asking you folks to participate with me in this webinar . There are going to be times when I ask you to contribute and you will be doing that in the chat box and they will be sharing some of the responses that some of you folks give in chat. Please make sure you have the chat box open and you are going to chat with me at particular times, as well as asking questions. Let's start with setting the context. Why should we be testing paper documents? I think the first reason is that everything we write at work has a purpose. That's probably one of these three purposes. To get people to do something, for example, to send in a payment, or to help people make good decisions. You can see this couple is working on the computer. Notice all the paper they are surrounded with. Those papers, documents, were really critical to help them get on the computer to make the decision. Or, the third major purpose, to answer peoples questions like this young lady looking something up in a paper document. If everything has a purpose, we need for people to be able to accomplish that purpose. The second why is for you to make your organizations goals, your own goals. We know that for that to happen, the people that get your documents must be able to find what they need, understand what they find, and use what they find to meet their needs. If that sounds familiar, it should because that is the official definition of plain language for the U.S. government. It's also the definition that has been adopted in several other countries. As part of the definition that the international plain language Federation is using that feeds into what we hope will be an international standard. We will be looking at find, understand, and use. For each of the techniques that we are going to look at, I will be pointing out how they help us with the different aspects of the find, understand, and use. Someone just wrote that this definition has been updated in healthy people 2030. Yes, it has been used throughout the government. Now is the time when I actually want you folks to contribute with me. I think the third thing we have to remember is that there are consequences. If people don't understand what we write in our letters, or are notices, or our fax sheets, or manuals, or brochures, or things that are not websites but just communications that we produce, what are the possible consequences? I am looking for the chat box. Someone says people may perish. Yes. It could be a matter of life or death. Okay, lots of things. People will do the wrong thing. It can impact their health. It won't accomplish our goals. People can make bad decisions. They can lose money. Exactly. We lose trust, thank you, this is wonderful, the reactions that we have. Confusions and misunderstandings. What are the consequences of that confusion and misunderstanding? It's more work for staff, yes. They miss opportunities for benefits. In fact, I will tell a brief story here. Many years ago, when I was at the American Institute for research, leading the group call the document design center, we did a project with AARP that advocates for older people. In one issue of their magazine, we ask people to tell us a story of when a document caused them trouble. We got over 3000 responses. Many with the document attached, and their stories. We did an analysis of it. In more than a third of the cases, people gave up on getting benefits they were entitled to because they did not understand, they could not deal with the document. Some of the consequences are more phone calls. One of the arguments you can make is that we will reduce unnecessary calls if we do better. We will have fewer extra documents. We will keep people from being frustrated. We will avoid litigation. The last thing we want to do is -- Right, cause you to have to go to court, which of course, costs money. I appreciate all of the responses in chat. That's wonderful. It costs more time and money and leads to misperceptions that are hard to change. It's harder to get people to deal with the second and third documents when they didn't understand the first one. Exact. I hope that all of that gnome not only convinces you, but because you are here, I assume you're already convinced, but it gives you arguments to convince others to let you do usability testing on your documents. What is a usability test?

For usability tests, you only have to have these three Mac things. You have to have a draft of what you are worried about. Letter, notice, fact sheet, whatever you are worried about. You need to have a few people who are representative of those who need to use your document. My three wonderful volunteers are playing the role of people who would actually be getting the documents they are working with. That's okay for the webinar, but it's not okay for real usability testing. In a real usability test, you cannot use your fellow employees if they are not the people who would actually be getting the document. In a usability test, the type we're talking about today, just a usability test of a website, you're basically working with one person at a time. Maybe like the couple who were surrounded by paper, making a decision on the computer, this is not a group activity. As for example, a focus group would be a group activity. Usability testing is an individual activity. The third thing you need is a method that will let you know how well the document works for those people. There are many possible methods. Today, we are going to be looking at these three, the paraphrase, the plus and minus, and the task based. The other thing I want to say is that all the guidelines for good usability tests apply to testing paper documents as well. In the first place, the most important is that you take care of your participants, that you treat them with respect, make sure they are comfortable. Watch their body language if you are either in person or remotely as we are, here, on a videoconference. I am going to show you that you can also do this by phone. A few other caveats, if you will, you should be recording these sessions because you are going to want to look at what they said and did to your

document. You need to get consent. I will be doing that in each of our three sessions. You need to set expectations for time and keep to that time. Again, for usability testing, your job is to listen, not to talk. And to make sure that you ask Weston's mutually. That's really all the time I have to go into talking about usability testing. If you are not familiar with usability testing, you want to learn more, I have some resources for you. Again, don't rush to write this down. You will get it when the slides are available afterwards. You can go to my website, redish.net , and on the homepage, I have a

link to a one-day workshop on honing your usability testing skills. It's only the slides, not the entire workshop, but you can get a good overview of usability testing through that. The U.S. government also has a wonderful site. If you are primarily interested in moderating, that is the part of the usability test session that I am going to be doing with my three volunteers, you might be interested in moderating usability tests. If you want the whole story, you can go to any of the books about it from the most recent books that are listed here.

With that, if there are any questions, I hope you will remember them till the end on this. I want to dive into the first of the techniques we are going to look at. For that, I need Amanda. Amanda, if you will unmute yourself and be on-screen. Hi, Amanda.

Hello.

Having done that, I'm going to ask you to stand by because we are going to talk about the technique we are going to use, and then we will get into the session. This, tell me in your own words, the paraphrase technique, is one in which we ask someone to actually go through the document. It focuses mostly on understanding. It is not really about finding information because we are going to go from the beginning of the document to the end of the document. Therefore, it is really good for relatively short documents, like an email you're sending out, a one page fax sheet, or a mailer. As in any usability test, you don't actually see somebody use an informational document. Now, how would you get it to people? If you are a person, you are just going to hand it. If you are remotely, with screen sharing, you will do what I am going to do, which is put it on the screen. Your user is getting a first look at it. They don't have it beforehand. Therefore, and I recently did this, I did a usability test of a letter remotely by phone in which we emailed the letter to the person just at the beginning of the session, so they opened it when they were told to open it. How would you run the session? Just like any usability test. You will introduce people, you will explain how the session will go, and set the scene. What we are going to look at in our three are the differences in the second slide. In the paraphrase, you have people read a piece of the document. A heading, a few sentences, whatever it is. A small coherent unit, and then tell me in your own words, what that meant. What you are going to be listening for are the words the person stumbles over. When they say it in their own words, do they get the meaning correctly or wrong, or did they leave it out? And then get their comments on what they did or did not understand. At the closing, you might ask them a few questions and do the closing as you would in any usability test. For this one, you all have the role of notetaker. While Amanda and I are working, I want you all to take notes. Afterwards, I will ask you to share something of what you learned through this session. In a real usability test, you wouldn't do just one session, but we are going to do one of each today. If we are ready, Amanda, let's try it. Let me give you the scenario. You live in Minnesota. Unfortunately, you have a problem with the tax department. You don't know this, maybe you do, or maybe you don't, but in the mail, you get a letter from the Minnesota Department of revenue. When you open it, this is what it says. Of course, at the top, it has their letterhead and your name and address and some internal information. After the salutation, this is the body of the letter. What I would like you to do, is just read that first bold line at the top. Read it out loud and then tell me, in your own words, what it means. Can you do that for me?

The subject line?

Excuse me, let me back up. I am terribly sorry. This is me, jumping in. I did not do the beginning of this. Amanda, thank you very much for joining us today, and for doing this with me. The first thing I have to ask you, is if you are okay recording this session. Normally, I would tell you that only the people helping to make our communications better, the team I'm working with, would see and hear what we do today, but this is a public recording and I want to make sure you're comfortable with recording what you and I do here today. Are you?

Yes.

Okay, thank you very much. The second thing is that we are going to be together for about 10 minutes and I'm going to show you a document and ask you to go through that document little by little. Any questions before we get started on that?

No. All good.

I apologize to our 500 attendees. That is the way you begin. Only now, do I say the scenario which I already gave you. Now, the document, we will go back to where we should have been had I done that better to start with. Would you read that top bit and tell me in your own words?

Sure. It says subject, notice of intent to offset.

Please, tell me in your own words.

I could not tell you what that means. I don't know that it has a clear definition. I would say that it means that something is going to happen. Someone intends to do something. I do not know what offset means.

Thank you for that explanation. Would you read that next short paragraph, and again, tell me in your own words.

Sure. It says our records show that you owe a state that to the Minnesota Department of revenue. If this is a joint debt, each debtor may receive a separate notice. So, that one, because I work for the government, is a little bit more clear. I owe some kind of a debt to the revenue department and if there is another person on it, we may both receive notices.

Okay. How about the next little bit? I didn't want to actually put your name in there. But it would list the person's name.

Debt type, 2009 individual income text. If I received this today, I would wonder why it's from 2009. But it does say it's about income tax. It says amount due, $1541.63. We intend to file a claim with the U.S. Treasury offset program for this amount. This federal program allows the Department of revenue to claim your federal tasks three friends and federal nontax payments and apply them to your debt. Should I do line by line, or paragraph by paragraph?

Why don't you tell me what that means?

Again, that offset program, it talks about the program but not what it is. It says we intend to file a claim, I would guess that means something is coming, probably a bill because of that amount above. This is government easy, but I would guess that it means that they can automatically debit your bank account or something for nonpayment to take that payment out. Some nontax payments such as Social Security are ineligible or offset. I am seeing offset over and over. I'm guessing they would do something to your account. That adds another department in there, the U.S. Treasury. In addition, they will deduct a fee for each transaction before they send their payment to us. That sounds like I'm going to be paying more than what they told me because there is a fee involved. The U.S. Treasury sets the amount of this fee and may change it annually. We may have already filed a claim with this program for other state debts you owe. So, again, it keeps going back to this program which it seems like you have to understand that to understand the rest of it. It sounds like the fee can change, but I might not know about the change. Having an active payment agreement will not

prevent us from filing a claim. That sounds like they can take from you from multiple streams if they want to because it doesn't sound like there's any guidelines. If your federal tax refund and or federal nontax payment applies to your debt, your payment agreement may end earlier than scheduled. It sounds like that might mean that if you are are to get a tax refund, that's more than your debt maybe you will get that money, or it could go towards this. Your payment agreement will automatically end when either you will no longer have a balance due with the Department of revenue, or all scheduled payments have been requested. That basically says you have this payment agreement until the payment is made in full, it sounds like. If you currently have a payment agreement in place with the Department of revenue, continue to follow the terms of agreement. So, if you have already made that agreement --

Thank you very much for that, that is where we will stop. I really appreciate what you did there. If this was a real usability test, I would now say, what are you going to do? You've got this letter, now what? What are you going to actually do?

I would have to continue to read, because I still haven't been given anything that I have to do which is interesting. It sounds like the lead is very buried. To avoid this claim from being filed, you must pay the amount due in full immediately commitment it gives you options for making that payment. You can do it electronically, credit card, check, or money order. If it's telling me that I owe $1500, I would probably just try to pay that immediately.

What if you couldn't pay it all immediately?

I would try to find the phone number that would give me the closest thing to a live person that I could ask a question of. Unfortunately, there are several of them listed here. I would probably try that automatic debit one just to see if they can answer any of my questions unless there is information on the envelope or something that tells you to follow up with.

Thank you very, very much. Hang in with us for the rest of the webinar, but we really appreciate you, Amanda. Let's move on. Folks, contribute, what did you learn? Did you learn anything by listening to Amanda's for paraphrase about the document? Yes, someone says it's not clear what it means. It's going so fast. Call to action -- Just confusing. You want to be more specific. In order for us to make it a better document, we have to know what was confusing. The fact that it was very dense is really important. Yes. The word offset right at the beginning, obviously, is a problem for people who don't know this offset program. How would an ordinary person who has a debt, like they owe child support, or they owe a school loan debt? What is a nonfederal tax payment? Yes. What is this about a payment agreement? She really didn't make that connection. We want to be very specific when you are reporting the results of you to usability testing, you want to think very specifically. Someone said there is no phone number to call if you have questions. I have to say that I am not sure the original letter, if I cut that off the top or the bottom by cutting off the heading in the footer of the thing. If it's going to generate a phone call, it wasn't a successful letter. Right? It didn't say how urgent it was. That's very interesting. Are there legal constraints that moved to this type of language? In fact, I am going to show you that there are. This was part of a project when the Department of revenue and Minnesota adopted plain language. This is the after that you are looking at on the slide, now. What do you notice? I'm going to change what you are doing in chat to say, what do you notice about the after? The revision of that document. What do you notice right away in the very top old-line? Again, I have cut off the header and all of this stuff at the top. Someone says well formatted. Let's look just at the part where, originally, it said subject offset. What does the subject line say now? Yes, the subject is way more clear. It does not have the jargon term in the subject. It is saying it may take your federal payments. What else do you notice about the way this is formatted compared to the original? Bold headings. Yes. Q&A, exactly. Instead of the joint debtors, and says each person responsible for paying this debt may receive a copy of this letter. It has what happens next, and now I will show you, in fact, this letter has a second side. There are the payment -- The question is how can I stop this. It reads like a conversation. That is exactly right. If you have read my book, "Letting Go of the Words" which is about making great websites, but it's about making great paper documents as well. Everything we write is actually part of a conversation. The more you write it like a conversation, the more successful you will be. This, in fact, won an award. Amanda, I see you there. Not that you would have wanted any letters saying you owed money, but what if you had gotten this letter instead of the one you paraphrased?

I don't know if I would be any happier. It still makes the classic mistake of phasing it back on the organization versus the person receiving information and what they need to do. It's like we are allowed to take your money, not here is how you avoid us taking your money. If you want people to respond, this may be a fear tactic that they are using here, but maybe make it a little more action focused in the users direction.

That could be. It's also one of the things about plain language. When we moved from something like the original to this, it is so much better, but then when we look at this, we think well, we could even do better than that. It is several generations to get, perhaps, to the best. This one is actually, I think you will agree, much better.

Better. Yes. Thank you, I appreciate it.

I would say you should do something to keep us from taking your federal payments. Here is what you have to do. Okay. There are going to be lots of questions that we will have to wait and take at the end. I hope you will remember your questions and we can come back to the example. This is one technique you can use. It's called paraphrasing. It's for relatively short documents when you are primarily interested in what people understand, which words are not going to work for them, whether or not they really get your messages. Okay. I want to move on to the next technique with David. I see David, hi, David, thank you very much for joining us. We are going to be looking, in this case, at a notice. If you just stand by for a moment, I will talk a little bit about this technique and then we will get to actually demonstrating this technique. This is positives and negatives, also known as the plus/minus technique. The idea of the plus/minus technique, is basically that you send the document to people beforehand, or you handed to them. They, then use the document themselves, first, marking pluses and minuses, positives and negatives about whatever aspect of the document you are particularly concerned about. Again, it's generally not a find thing. It's mostly on if they understand the document. Again, relatively short documents, emails, notices, letters, fax sheets, et cetera. Again, you can get questions at the end. The other thing that this technique gives that we didn't see in the paraphrase, we did get affect, that is people's emotional response, by listening to what Amanda said and watching her body language and her frustrations. But, this technique, with the plus/minus, you can specifically ask for "affect." In this case, you would email it beforehand with instructions. In this case, I gave David these instructions, which, I don't know if they are too small for you to read, but basically, I sent it with a thank you and the example. I sent a scenario which I will give to David again in a moment when we start the demonstration. Also, then, instructions to markup this notice. I said notes, you don't have to markup everything, only words or sentences, any parts you want to point out as positives and negatives. We do ask people, if they are doing it, where they can use color, to use one color for positives, another for negatives. What I said is, for example, and I suggested samples. We never suggest red for negatives. We also let people choose whatever colors they want, as long as they tell us which is the positive end which is the negative, although they should be able to see it if they really do pluses and minuses. Negatives that you do not understand easily can have negative feelings towards the sender, or are worried or concerned about what it says. Kind of setting what you are looking for in terms of -- We never choose red for negatives, because it's very strong, emotionally. When I was directing a group of writer/editor is, and it was my job to markup their drafts, and I heard one of my staff say Jenny has bled all over my document again, I decided purple was better. Something that didn't arouse that emotion so strongly. Then, it says I would appreciate if you would add a comment for each positive and negative. Start the comment with a plus or a minus and get people to tell you why they did it. The point of this technique is really the interview after the person has marked up the document. That is when you are discussing the pluses and minuses. Then, of course, you want the person to share it back with you. Again, getting ready for this session, the only real point here is that you should both have copies of the marked up things so you can talk about it. The opening is the same as in any other technique. Here is the middle in which you are going to go through the document with the participant discussing the pluses and minuses. Again, your job is to listen. You want to remind them that you are there, ask for clarifications if you need, and ask the person to expand. One

of the things that I have done in the slide deck is to put in a table of the kinds of probes you might find useful in any usability test or any interview when you are trying to gather information rather than have a real two-way conversation. Again, this will be in the slide deck when you get it. In the end of the session, it's very much the same as in the previous method that we showed. David, I think we are ready to get started. Folks, your job is notetaker. Where going to ask, at the end, what you learned about the document. Be as specific as you can. Yes, it is great to say it was confusing, or whatever. In order to be able to make a better document, we need specifics. So, David, let's try it. Let me start by thanking you for joining me today to do this session. I do have to let you know that we would like to record the session. In fact, it is being recorded. Again, normally, in a real usability test, it would be just for the team working on the document, but this is a public webinar. Are you okay with recording what you hear?

I am. Yes.

Thank you very much. We are just going to spend about 10 minutes going over that document that you marked up and I'm going to ask you about all of your comments on the document. For everybody that wasn't with us before this in this particular demonstration, let me set this scenario. I know you are a professor at Georgetown, but you also are a consultant with your own little consulting company in the state of Maryland. The document we are

looking at, actually, is from a different state, but Maryland might have the same type of documents. As a business owner, when you open your mail one day, addressed to you in the business, what is inside that envelope is this notice that I sent you, that you marked up. Now, we are going to look at this. It had the actual states name. You put both a plus and a minus there. Can you tell me about that?

I am opening my mail and I see this and I put a plus there, because I definitely know I'm not going to throw it away and that helps me because the special notice is so big, so prominent, that it's a signal that -- Because I'm going to be throwing away most of it. With paper mail, especially, I'm just trying to get rid of stuff. It obviously raises the question, it's got my nerves incredibly anxious, because I see Department of revenue, special notice. I go what is this? I don't see any obvious answer right away. It definitely got my attention.

Okay. I hear that I got your attention, but you don't know what it is.

Right.

Okay. The next thing is to file a no use tax return. You wrote something next to that.

Yeah. The first time I read it, no use tax return, a tax return that's no use? I am not familiar with this term, use tax. No use tax return, it's no good? That was my first reaction. Then, I kind of puzzled out that there is something called a use tax return.

Yes. Okay, hold on. It actually is from a specific state, it had the states name, I have just made it anonymous. It actually does have a heading from the State Department of revenue with all the things that you would expect at the state. I have simply made this -- It also had a date. I have made this more anonymous. This is an actual document from an actual states. This is the before. We will see the after. This document, exact exactly as David saw it, went out to every business in the state. It is a real document. Someone says David has a PhD, would this skew the results? Again, I want everybody to know that my three volunteers are doing this, but in a real usability test, they would not be the actual --

I might have a PhD, but I'm clueless.

It's also true that PhD's do not mean that anybody would necessarily understand. The person who wrote that, you are actually, you are right. You want to make sure you have a variety of people from his bald small business owners. In this particular notice, in both states that these two documents that these come from, there are huge corporations that have thousands of employees and hundreds of lawyers but 90+ percent of the businesses in each of these states are mom-and-pop shops. Little consultancies, dry cleaners, retail people, people who are spending all their day to try and make money from their business and have no background in law or accounting. Let me go on. You got to use tax obligations of menaces. You had a minus over one side, let's talk about that first. That line.

Sure. I'm still trying to puzzle out, at this stage, is it use as a verb, or use as a noun? Use tax obligations, so it's all like three different nouns, what is it? Because of my anxiety level because this is Department of revenue, there is this urgency to figure this out. I'm having trouble.

Okay. I really appreciate your comments. I hope my notetakers are all taking good notes about it. I am hearing lots of things that could be changed here. What about that first paragraph?

On the other thing, of businesses, I am just wondering, is it about me? Is it about my business? I don't see anything that says it's about me, it's just about businesses. Tell me.

Okay, thank you. That's an extremely useful comment. Can we just go on a little bit? We are probably not going to get all the way through the document in our demo today. In a real test, we would be spending a whole half an hour or more on it. I appreciate you having marked up the whole document. What about the next question, I see on the left in my being audited? What made you worry about that?

I see the Department of revenue routinely reviews, when I see reviews, does that mean I'm being audited? That's what I'm scared of. As a business owner. It just pops into my head.

Okay. Then, you had some more negatives, or would you rather talk about a few positives that you have on the other side?

I will mention a positive come of that second sentence begins with we are York -- We are contacting you. I am relieved when I hear language about that. I suddenly get a sense that okay, there is a we and they are contacting me. That is the first time I am a peer here. You have not recently reported, so, again, I'm getting a noun and a verb where I am involved, so I am relieved, I feel like I am a little more secure. I anticipate that I'm going to learn something, understand something at this point. But then, I get to use tax again on the combined excise tax returns. I don't know what either one of those things are. I just wrote comment.

Okay. Let's look a little bit further on the next paragraph.

The next paragraph begins with businesses oh owe. The next sentence, generally sales tax should be paid -- Does that mean I should pay? I want this to be about me. Finally, it does do that towards the end of the paragraph. If you did not pay tax on such purchases, you need to report use tax. Suddenly, working backwards, I'm able to tease this out. It seems to me, now, that use tax means that I owe on any purchases I made from sellers in states that didn't charge sales tax. But I had to tease that out from that sentence. It was hard.

Okay, thank you. I would love to go through this all, but we really don't have time to. I hope that everybody who was watching and listening to us is finding this really interesting and useful for doing a usability text for a paper document. Chat, what did -- What really important thing did you learn? Start with you. Okay. One of the things I want us all to learn, is that on doing the usability test, we really have -- We want desperately, as plain language people, to jump to the solution. If we don't understand the problems, we might not get to the right solution. Therefore, it's really important to

untangle the problems first, and then see how we can make it better. David needed personal pronouns, or it doesn't have personal pronouns. The content produced anxiety, absolutely. Why did it produce anxiety is what we would want to understand in order to make this a better document. Again, I love it. You are all jumping to the solution and that is, eventually, fine. But it is really important to say, yes, use tax is not a familiar term. In fact, actually, the statement we should make is, David did not know what use tax meant. That's the first statement. Then, we have to say, okay, of all of our usability test people, how many didn't understand what use tax meant. How are we going to solve the problem? We would want to think about it that way. David read the word review and the thought of auditing. We have to understand his level of anxiety. That's the kind of specifics we would want to have. That's terrific. David, and everybody, David, I think you have actually seen the after of this before, but especially for the person who is worried that this wasn't real, it really was. What happened to the use tax notice, first of all, they turned it into a letter, a personal letter that went out with the taxpayer's name. It started with -- Now, I will tell you that the people who get this probably do know what the combined excise tax return is because they file that every quarter. That is the name of the state tax like the 1040. But, even this, it doesn't start with explaining what use tax is. I will say, the letter, and what looked like -- A

This is much easier. I am less anxious just looking at it. It's talking to me, it's in a conversation with me, just right from the start. According to our records, you have not recently done this, and what to look for. You can just scan it and see that the subheadings are about me. If you owe use tax, if you do not owe use tax. I can tell somebody is trying to help me. That makes me relax a little bit more incentive somebody was trying to catch me.

Exactly. Exactly. In fact, this is one of our best stories in plain language. Despite the fact that it was special notice, and you, David, at least kept it, in the first one that went out, 97% of the people did not do that.

Is interesting.

Only 3% of people responded in any way. By making it a personal letter, and thereby reducing that anxiety, making it a little bit more clear. The letter, of course, did say hey, taxpayer, employer, businessperson, we are talking to you. In the revised version, it wasn't perfect, and if I were to be able to help do it again, it would be different, and I do want to give credit to Janet and Alyson who did this. It was a huge difference, even if it wasn't perfect. They collected $800,000 more than the goal they set. Someone said I would've seen the term special notice and marked it as span. As you can see, 97% of people who got this decided that, that was the case. My point, today, is to help you with this technique to show you how useful doing this plus/minus technique can be. I do want to go on to the third one because I want to leave time for our questions and answers. David, thank you very much. We will turn to Allison. Allison, are you there?

Yes, I am here.

Standby while I talk about this technique. Again, this third technique, find, understand, you something, is something we use on our website. It can be useful for a paper document as well. This is the one that allows you to look at finding as well as understanding. Again, getting that use with questions. I didn't ask David what he would probably do, but you saw from the slide that what, in reality, most people did with the other one. This one helps you get more at whether or not the design is working. Again, as with the first one, you really don't want the person to deal with it before. You want to set up the situation where, in fact, in reality, they would first come to the document. Again, the opening of the session would be the same. It's the middle part, where you are going to give people scenarios or tasks and you are primarily watching and listening for where they look, what they find, and what they understand as well as, of course, all of their comments. Again, the closing would be very similar. Once again, you folks are the notetakers. Watch and listen. Again, try to be as specific as we can about what we learn. What is the problem? What, therefore, can we think about as a solution after we understand, in detail, the specific problems? Alison, let's try it . Thank you for being with me in this. We are recording. Normally, I would just say that the people on this project would be the only ones to see and listen to what you and I do, but this is a public recording. A public webinar. I have to be sure that you are okay with that. Are you okay with recording what you and I do?

Yes.

Okay. Thank you. We are only going to spend maybe five or 10 minutes together. We probably won't do everything with the document. For everybody who is here with us in the webinar, you would most often use this technique with a longer document. The other techniques are best with relatively short letters, notices, and fact sheets. This is a brochure, a manual, a report. Because Alison and I are only going to have a few minutes, I have, in fact, picked a very short document for this. Alison, here is our scenario. You have moved to Washington state, to Seattle, and you have started a small business. You left the government and started a small business. As you set up your business, you know that in many states, you have to get various kinds of insurance as a business owner. You aren't sure about what you might need, particularly insurance that, in many states, would be paid for if somebody in your company, in your business, if you have to let them go, or you have to stop the business. Whether or not you have to have state insurance to cover that situation. But, you haven't incorporated, you just have the small business, just yourself and your family and maybe a few employees. Does that make sense? Again, for everybody listening, Alison has been wonderful doing this with me, but in reality, I would only go to people who were in this kind of situation. Here is the document. Someone says to you, when you say, am I going to need insurance if I start, when I start this little business? They say here, look at this information. My first question is, what's your first impression of this document?

My eye goes to the numbers. The fonts don't match, but that's just my own problem.

Okay. Any other first impressions?

Coming into it, I was expecting I owe money somewhere, I was scanning for what amount of money I might be owing.

Okay.

So, the 480 hours per quarter, I am trying to figure out what that means. A 480 hours -- Go ahead.

You first just went to the numbers, as you said. Go ahead and talk.

That's okay. The 480 hours, I'm just trying to figure out if that's the hours I work or all of my employees combined.

Okay. Let me ask you a question at the beginning. As the owner of this little company that you didn't incorporate, but is a business, do you need to take out this insurance?

It's optional. The word can elect coverage. It's in the second sentence. The shortest sentence.

Okay. That was an interesting comment. What does that mean to you?

I can decline by doing nothing or I can opt in by following the directions in the long paragraph at the end.

Okay. Let's say you decide to take this insurance and you are married and your spouse does the bookkeeping for you. In addition to their regular job with a different company. Do you need to include your spouse in this coverage?

I can't because my spouse is exempt. But, wait, maybe the spouse is covered if they work for the business, and my spouse and my bookkeeper, so I guess they would be covered.

Okay. Where'd you come down on that? I am sort of hearing both sides from you. What would you do?

I would probably see if -- The spouse was extra money. And if so, if I felt like the spouse would be covered, I would include it. If it's extra money, I would probably opt out in case he would be exempt anyway.

He would opt out of the whole --

Including the spouse.

Including the spouse. Okay. Thank you. How do you sign up for coverage? Tell me where you find that. Have you been reading every word of this? Tell me how you have been approaching this document.

I have been skimming. Certain words are popping out of me and I'm just making an assumption without reading the whole sentence. Now I am figuring out that I'm actually opted in already and I need to fill out a cancellation form to opt out instead of the other way around. I thought can elect means that you have to do that action to opt in. I would go to the website or the field office. If they don't hear from me, then my coverage will begin at 12:01 unless they get a cancellation. Now, I am seeing that the application -- I do submit the application with the date to start it, so I'm not already covered and needing to opt out. I don't really know what's going on. I would probably hand it to somebody else and ask them to make sense of it and tell me what to do.

Thank you very much, Alison. Again, folks, this was a relatively short document, and we learned a lot about it. In the longer document, we would learn more about finding where people were looking back and forth, and even the three paragraphs, here, taught us a lot. This technique is like the website technique for longer documents as well. Thank you, very much. To all three of my volunteers. You are welcome to add in here. What did we learn? We would look to see what context of the document is. I just pulled the document for our demonstration. But, in context, we would want to know the local phone number. Confusing is not as useful as what about it was specifically confusing? Her quotes are great, but in order to change it, yes, the numbers a standout, but it seems contradictory. Again, instructions should look more like a recipe. That's a wonderful solution, but whether or not we have the problem that she wasn't sure whether or not she should, or not, she found it contradictory. Again, you are solving the problem. If I were doing this as a workshop with usability testing, we would always get the problem first, and not the solution, until we understood the problems. In the interest of time, this is the after document. This was part of a larger project. As Dana says, this particular piece was not usability tested. There is a piece that one a clear mark from Lord award but it was too long to use as the example. Is there anything that is better about this revision?

White space.

Yes. Okay. White space.

Old. Bold.

It has headings. Right.

I think, also, I was so hung up on trying to interpret what that 480 hours per quarter meant and then getting into what to report, hours wise.

Rights. One more thing, the title was clear. Yes. The references, which, again, are at the bottom, the legal references are at the bottom, not the top. Good.legal references are at the bottom, not the top. Good. Dana, if you are on, you should feel good. The comments coming into chatyou should feel good. The comments coming into chat are saying this is much, much better. I hope everybodymuch better. I hope everybody -- That this rapid run through analysis, thank you all very much, lots of applause from everybody for my run-through analysis, thank you all very much, lots of applause from everybody for my three volunteers. I hope this gave you an overview gave you an overview of the fact that you can test paper documentstest paper documents and you can test them, in many ways, but these three techniques, paraphrasing, plus/minus, in many ways, but these three techniques, paraphrasing, plus/minus, for shorter documents, and then scenario-based for longer documents.scenario-based for longer documents. What if you can't test with users? What if it's not possible?with users? What if it's not possible? I want to tell you, very briefly, about this technique, and then we will have 15 minutes for very briefly, about this technique, and then we will have 15 minutes for Q&A. I have a typo on my slide, and you're going to permit meon my slide, and you're going to permit me to fix that. We will move this out of the wayWe will move this out of the way -- I will put it back up with my typo fixed. Use your it back up with my typo fixed. Use your personas, or create as realistic a persona as you can. A persona, if persona as you can. A persona, if you don't work them with them, is simply a person you are going to have a conversation with as you them, is simply a person you are going to have a conversation with as you write the document. You can create personas to represent your audience. The personas to represent your audience. The more things you know about your audience, the betteraudience, the better and more realistic your persona is, of course. Unlike some people who say you can't useis, of course. Unlike some people who say you can't use personas if you haven't done the data, I think that you can't have a conversation withoutthe data, I think that you can't have a conversation without a persona. You can't write without having a conversation. Therefore, you have to have without having a conversation. Therefore, you have to have a persona. You can generally think of it. If you were think of it. If you were writing about how to make an appointment today, with an appointment today, with the pediatrician, you would not have trouble having an image of an anxioushave trouble having an image of an anxious parent with a sick child. If you are a business owner If you are a business owner in a mom-and-pop shop doing your business all day long and reading your mail at 11:00 at night,your business all day long and reading your mail at 11:00 at night, you would not have trouble imagining the person getting that notice.imagining the person getting that notice. I think you can come up with a persona. up with a persona. The methodology I want to explain to you is that you thenexplain to you is that you then become that persona. You have a split brain in which you are the persona, and you walk a split brain in which you are the persona, and you walk your persona through the conversation. It's a great technique for critiquing drafts. You can even do it with an email It's a great technique for critiquing drafts. You can even do it with an email in five seconds before you send the email. You be the persona, and you talkthe email. You be the persona, and you talk through the experience and reactions as the persona.as the persona. What is your day like today when you get this document? How did you get it? What do you do today when you get this document? How did you get it? What do you do with it when you first get it? Do you read it right away? it? Do you read it right away? What part of it you go to first? Does it your questions? What are you going to do now? In other to first? Does it your questions? What are you going to do now? In other words, you can imagine a usability test, if you will, that would be a really important way to get a usability test, if you will, that would be a really important way to get a first look at, are you conversing successfully? conversing successfully? With that, I will open it to questions. I know there were some questions it to questions. I know there were some questions beforehand which are probably way back in the chat. If you did put in a question earlier, please put it back in the chat. If you did put in a question earlier, please put it in again. We are recording this, and it will be posted and sharedthis, and it will be posted and shared as soon as they get it ready. I am also always open it ready. I am also always open to email questions. The only thing you have to remember is the name does not only thing you have to remember is the name does not come from the color, so it only has one D, not it only has one D, not two. Do we have any other questions?other questions? We might write with bias -- Yes, I agree.-- Yes, I agree. There is potential bias in any persona that you develop. There areany persona that you develop. There are 10 potential biases even based on data. Having any personaon data. Having any persona is better than writing from the content without imaginingthe content without imagining and without seeing the person who is on the other end of it.who is on the other end of it. It would be wonderful to do this, go through this, walk your

persona through the conversation several times with do this, go through this, walk your persona through the conversation several times with different people. With different personas in mind to get over in mind to get over the bias. We should all worry about stereotyping in our personas. Again, having no persona worry about stereotyping in our personas. Again, having no persona is worse. I really will stand by that.stand by that.

There was a nice question about usability. What does the term question about usability. What does the term usability add to the term readability?

Readability, readability?

Readability, readability is a very fraught term, especially to me.term, especially to me. Let's start with legibility. One of the things we want to look at is, is the of the things we want to look at is, is the document legible? That has to do withdo with the font you use. Is it a readable font? The font size, the contrast between the paper and it a readable font? The font size, the contrast between the paper and the color of the paper and the color of the font. Readability paper and the color of the font. Readability would say, can somebody actually read every word, and to read every word, and to a certain extent, paraphrase? That is is readable. What words do people stumble over? I don't stumble over? I don't have time to get into my soapbox on why my soapbox on why not to use a readability formula, which is a number which is a number that tells you how long your sentences are and how big your words are, but it does not tell you sentences are and how big your words are, but it does not tell you if anybody can actually even read the document because it doesn't tell you if it has the document because it doesn't tell you if it has grammatical words in it. Usability has to do with whether Usability has to do with whether or not someone understands the document. Whether document. Whether they can actually read it word by word is not the same as by word is not the same as whether or not they get the message, whether it has the right contentmessage, whether it has the right content , answers their questions, or they understand your message. To paraphraseunderstand your message. To paraphrase is a way to get usability in the sense of notusability in the sense of not only can they read each word, but do they understand the messages that you are putting in the word, but do they understand the messages that you are putting in the document. That is one definition of usability with the paraphrase technique. With the of usability with the paraphrase technique. With the plus/minus technique, usability is also that, but it's also getting even morealso that, but it's also getting even more at the affects, the emotion, people's anxiety which people's anxiety which keeps them from being able to read and understand. The third techniqueread and understand. The third technique gets into usability in the full sense of, can people find, understand, and then in all cases, usabilityfull sense of, can people find, understand, and then in all cases, usability includes the word use. Everything we write in the workplaceEverything we write in the workplace has a purpose, and almost always has the purpose of getting people to do something or not do

something, it's always has the purpose of getting people to do something or not do something, it's very important to understand and find out what people would do find out what people would do when they get the document. That's the usability. Again, they could read the whole thing, but if they don't understand, That's the usability. Again, they could read the whole thing, but if they don't understand, if they aren't going to act appropriately, than the documentappropriately, than the document can't be successful. I hope that helps. Is there that helps. Is there another question? Dana, hi! After you get a few usability tests under your belt, it gets much After you get a few usability tests under your belt, it gets much easier to develop personas. Yes, because you have actually met a number of actual users.you have actually met a number of actual users. Assuming that you do find people who people who are among the people who would be getting your document, that is huge. be getting your document, that is huge. That is data. That is real people, and that's wonderful.real people, and that's wonderful. Someone says, okay, I have a letter to test that is 8+ pages.have a letter to test that is 8+ pages. -- The question is, how much tolerance to the people you have, have for how much tolerance to the people you have, have for going through eight pages? I would be a little hesitant about I would be a little hesitant about plus minus for that long of a document. My guess is anything that is not long, people are not going of a document. My guess is anything that is not long, people are not going to read all of it. They are going to skim, scan, and jump are going to skim, scan, and jump around. It's going to work as a reference document. Therefore, it a reference document. Therefore, it is really best for the last techniquetechnique in which you figure out, what would people do? You can ask themwhat would people do? You can ask them what their first impression is, and then you can also ask them, what would be the first thing they would and then you can also ask them, what would be the first thing they would want from the document? And how would they approach it.how would they approach it. When you get there first question, you ask them to, okay, here is the document. What would you do with question, you ask them to, okay, here is the document. What would you do with it when you had that question? You would have them give you the scenario for it.You would have them give you the scenario for it. There is a good question. Where can I read and learn about more tech geeks to use?Where can I read and learn about more tech geeks to use? Usability.gov has more and different techniques. There are references in the slides, particularly to my last techniqueand different techniques. There are references in the slides, particularly to my last technique about walking your persona through the conversation.the conversation. Playinglanguage.gov, the last guidelines which is evaluate your document has a page on paraphrasingguidelines which is evaluate your document has a page on paraphrasing and a page on the scenario-based technique.scenario-based technique. Any advice for working with documents that will be translated? Yes.with documents that will be translated? Yes. The clearer, more simple, more plain language your document is, the easier it is to translate. One thing plain language your document is, the easier it is to translate. One thing you want to remember, is that more languages take more languages take more space to write the same messages as English does. If you are worried about cramming everything into a messages as English does. If you are worried about cramming everything into a one page letter and it's going to be translated I don't cram English down to the bottom of going to be translated I don't cram English down to the bottom of the letter. Great, people are putting links to answers putting links to answers to some of the needs in the chat.the chat. Catherine, is there some way to capture those and get them to people?

Yes, we are definitely capturing them to capture those and get them to people?

Yes, we are definitely capturing them and we will figure out how to clean out the recommendations and the sources and things to clean out the recommendations and the sources and things like that. It looks like we are a minute past our time.

Oh.

we are a minute past our time.

Oh.

Yes, we are recording. You will getwill get the PowerPoint and the recording when we get it posted. It will be announced to the list. It when we get it posted. It will be announced to the list. It will be on digital.gov as well. Many, many thanks which I am seeing echoed Many, many thanks which I am seeing echoed in the chat to Ginny and our braveour brave volunteers, David, Amanda, and Alison, and our helpers, Alex, and Gabby for getting all this running and our helpers, Alex, and Gabby for getting all this running so successfully. It's incredible to have all of this information from such an have all of this information from such an expert source. Very helpful, indeed. I always enjoy, I learned somethingI always enjoy, I learned something every time you graciously presented to us.

Thank you, Catherine for organizing to us.

Thank you, Catherine for organizing all of this. Thank everybody for doing it. If you didn't get your question answered,for doing it. If you didn't get your question answered, you are welcome to write to me and I will try to answer directlyto me and I will try to answer directly to you. Thank you, all. Again, thanks to my three volunteers,Again, thanks to my three volunteers, and thanks to Gabby and Alex for organizing this. Thanks for catching me. I don't watch the time as well Alex for organizing this. Thanks for catching me. I don't watch the time as well as I should. [Event concluded]concluded]
Event Description:

Plain Language

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Positioning Yourself as a Plain Language Editor

Wendy Wagner-Smith

Plain Language Consultant

THE BOTTOM LINE

- To position yourself as a plain language editor, you must have editing skills and experience
- You must know and adopt plain language
- You must be competent to the point of expert in editing according to the principles of plain language (clarity)

Positioning = Self-Marketing=Branding

Personal branding is the practice of **marketing people and their careers as brands**

It is an ongoing process of **developing and maintaining a reputation and impression** of an individual, group, or organization. (Gary Henderson, digitalmarketing.org)

Positioning = Branding

What do you want to be known for?

If someone mentions your name, business, or brand what do you want them to say?

Personal branding is also **essential** for any influencer, business coach, or person who wants to share their *story* with the world. (Gary Henderson, digitalmarketing.org)

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Am I passionate about plain language? Why?
- Do I want to attach a label to my career? Why?
- How do I establish my credibility?
- Am I an expert?

What Makes an Expert

Consistently and overwhelmingly, the evidence show(s) that experts are always made, not born.

Harvard Business Review

The Making of an Expert (hbr.org)

What Makes an Expert

Websters: (Noun) One with the special skill, **experience**, or knowledge representing mastery of a particular subject;

(adj) having, involving, or displaying special skill or knowledge derived from training or **experience**

Know Yourself

Experience is the key credibility factor

Do you have a lot or a little?

Do you like putting yourself forward at work, in social situations, or do you prefer to step back a bit?

Are you willing to spend time building your reputation as a plain language editor?

Are you willing to work on your plain language brand every day in every way?

Extroverted Personality

Extroverts generally have an easier time establishing their brand. Extroverts excel at

Finding speaking and presenting opportunities

Teaching and coaching

Pursuing public activities that open opportunities to speak about or demonstrate plain language

Introverted Personality

Play to your strengths. Introverts tend to be more comfortable with personal interactions such as coaching and longer forms of communication such as writing blogs

Look for and seize every opportunity to help (coach) coworkers on plain language, especially managers; look for and seize every opportunity to write about or advocate for plain language while editing, in meetings, in blog posts, etc.

Time Is on Your Side

Establishing any brand takes time—Don’t rush

Expect to spend 5 to 10 years building your national brand/reputation

Expect to spend 2 to 5 years building your “local” brand

Begin today and take small steps every week

Steps to Establish Your Brand & Position Yourself

1. Plan
2. Create
3. Communicate

Steps to Establish Your Brand & Position Yourself

1. Plan

Move your ideas from your head to paper. Draw up a long-term strategic plan for **personal branding** . Write down (and order) as many feasible actions as possible

Steps to Establish Your Brand & Position Yourself

1. Plan

List actions you will take to solidify your brand as a plain language editor/expert EACH

Week (coach coworkers? Develop PL blog ideas? Dev social media posts)

Month (submit PL advocacy article to agency newsletter? Write/publish a blog?)

Steps to Establish Your Brand & Position Yourself

1. Plan

List actions you will take to solidify your brand as a plain language editor/expert EACH

Quarter (Deliver presentation? Initiate large-scale listserv conversation?)

Year (Attend workshops, seminars? Teach courses?)

Steps to Establish Your Brand

2. Create

Build a website or blog site, social media following, slate of speaking opportunities

Build a network of plain language experts (yay!)

Build a buzz about your plain language work (word of mouth, evaluations, testimonials)

Steps to Establish Your Brand

2. Create

Creating also includes relationships—Find a mentor who has successfully created a brand you'd like to emulate and become an apprentice

Volunteer with PLAIN or consider becoming a trainer

Steps to Establish Your Brand

2. Create

Create an automatic neural response through repetition—more on this next

Steps to Establish Your Brand

3. Communicate. Find useful and appropriate ways to mention your plain language expertise every day.

Repeat, repeat, repeat

When Do I Communicate My Brand?

Always

In job interviews
Round robins
Trainings

While working
Intros and bios
Social media

email signature
Networking
Social occasions

ea12524f6c56cecd0a30c666fb602cca.jpg (3538×2794) (pinimg.com)

Sing Out, Louise

Immediately change your language and begin introducing yourself as a plain language editor. No one will know if you don’t tell them—over and over…

ea12524f6c56cecd0a30c666fb602cca.jpg (3538×2794) (pinimg.com)

Let Social Media Do Most of the Work

Include your brand –plain language editor—in all social media profiles, business and personal

Join listservs, communities of practice, online discussion forums and participate

Positioning/Branding Dos & Don’ts

Do have opinions; don’t post anything remotely political

Do stay positive; don’t argue fine points with trolls

Do write “jingle” style posts; don’t post long essays or op-eds

Do quote existing research; don’t make unprovable claims

Do be clear about **your** stance or opinion, thoughts or wisdom so your voice is one of authority; don’t just follow other experts or echo others’ opinions

Know the Market

Plain Writing Act of 2010

Plain Language Action and Information Network

Clarity International

PLAIN International

International Government Orgs (Canada, U.K., South Africa, Spain, etc.)

Resources

- www.plainlanguage.gov
- Clarity – The international association promoting plain legal language (clarity-international.org)
- Home - Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) (plainlanguagenetwork.org)
- Coursera.org
- Forbes.com

All right. It looks like people are rolling and so I think I will give it one more minute before starting to make sure we have a good amount of people in the meeting.

All right. Hello everyone and welcome to today's webinar. As a reminder, all attendees will be muted and encouraged to ask questions via the chat box. Questions will be answered toward the end of the event during the Q&A portion. In the chat box, select chat to all panelists and attendees because the default option just will be panelists only. So make sure that everyone can see what you are messaging by selecting all panelists and attendees. It's very important. As a reminder, this session is being recorded and will be posted to digital.gov in a couple weeks. A league for live captioning in today's event is included in the chat. Gabby is putting it there. Thanks for joining us and with that I will turn it over to the plain language community practice manager, Catherine spicy.

Thank you so much. I just saw this chat. I'm just reminding you that we are recording. It will be posted on digital.gov and sent to all the attendees. So I wanted to thank all of you for joining us today to listen to Wendy Wagner Smith on positioning yourself as a plain language editor. And this is a fantastic opportunity for those who are with us earlier this spring on presentation tips from the pros, from the TV prose. I know that Wendy packs a great deal of excellent information into a very small amount of time. But I wanted to let you know that in addition to knowing how to present, she's an excellent, excellent plain language person. She has been a professional trainer for nearly 20 years and she has a career communications professional expert in plain language and usable design. She is currently a senior writer editor for the small business administration and they are very lucky to have her. And Wendy has taught plain language to employees and more than 55 agencies and offices of the federal government, and a state and local governments across the country. Some of you may know her from her work from about 2012 to 2018 when she was our training coordinator. She coordinated all of the training requests that poured in for years and managed the core volunteer added structures and got people from Boot Camp to trading status. I feel like we are in for a treat. I'm looking forward to learning a great deal from Wendy. And take away. Thank you so much.

Thank you so much. What a wonderful intro. I really appreciate it. Hello everyone, welcome, welcome, welcome. This is so thrilling. As Catherine mentioned, I was here in March, I will believe, talking about how to do this exact thing, presenting in this virtual environment. Today I'm going to talk about positioning yourself, particularly with plain language as an editor or expert. I know what to tell you a little bit about how this came about. I was out of government for a while through the end of 2018 until mid-2020. And I was sort of a freelance agent. I was contracted to work with a corporation and then they asked me to come in and give a plain language class to some of their top communications folks. And after the class, the students were really fascinated about the plain language movement and how I came to be there that day, teaching them plain language and preparing to go and teach in the state government. So we spent about an hour just chatting and these are all the things that I just had off the top of my head.

A couple weeks later they asked me to make it into a presentation and come back and present

to their editors globally virtually to explain to the how I ended up being the person chosen to teach them. So today I would like to share this with you and get you started on a road that may or may not change your career. So here's the bottom line. Let's just make it clear, if you're going to position yourself as a plain language editor, you must have editing skills and experience. I do have a lot of people ask me sometimes, well, I'm a policy analyst or I'm this or I that. I don't think your title manners. I think what matters is your skill set. You do a lot of writing entity in the course of your job or outside of your job, make sure that you really understand plain language and you need to adopt it in every way, every day.

When it comes down to, you need to be competent as an editor and competent in plain language to begin this positioning process. As you can see here, I say you need to be competent to the point of expert. We are going to talk a little bit about what that means in just a minute. What is positioning? It's basically self marketing or another what word you may be familiar with is branding. We are all plain language pros and we know it is very bad to talk in jargon and I promise that I will not throw a lot of marketing jargon at you. But this is the most important word in the marketing field for people like us. Branding.

We are looking at branding ourselves personally. It's basically the practice of marketing yourself as a pro in a particular career. The most important thing to take away today is that it's an ongoing process. Participating today, teaching a class or two will certainly set you on the road. But it's a long-term process, and it's one where you are really working on building a long-term reputation with a very large group of people. And it comes down to deciding, what do you want to be known for? That's the first step in branding yourself or positioning yourself within your career. How do you want people to think of you? If someone mentions your name, or your business, or your activities, what you want the other people who hear them say your name to say in response? It's essential to look at yourself as an influencer.

All of us who are in this field, essentially our influencers and branding is essential for any influencer because without it, you will never actually be able to influence the opinions and actions of others. So we are going to start off asking ourselves some questions. These are really crucial to determining exactly where you want to be, how you want to be, and what you want to be as a plain language editor. First of all, am I passionate about plain language? Him and the person who gets into arguments about plain language and word choices with supervisors? Consequences, fall where they may? Absolutely. And if I passionate about about plain language, why? Why is this important to me? And a very important question to ask yourself is do I want to attach a label to my career, and why?

How will it help me in my long-term career goals to become well known as a plain language person, as a plain language trainer, as a plain language editor. And how do I establish my credibility as a plain language editor? The big question we all ask ourselves at some point in our careers, am I an expert? How do I know if I'm an expert? And that's a really crucial thing to think about if you are looking to position yourself in a plain language world. So what makes an expert? One thing we do know is that experts are made and not born. So if you are sitting here today thinking I'm not an expert, I'll never be an expert, take heart. You can, you will be if you

choose to be and start now doing the things and taking the steps that are going to build that reputation with you as an expert. So plain old dictionary definition, expert, you have a special skill, experience, or knowledge rest representing mastery. Remember, you want to be competent in plain language to the point of expert. And expert's mastery.

And remember the adjective form of expert is means you are displaying that expertise training mastery and experience. So, think about what that definition really had, both those definitions had in common. Experience. So you credibility factor is going to be your expense. Another question to ask yourself, do I have a lot or little experience? Do I like putting myself forward either in the context of my office with my coworkers or in social situations? Or do I like to step back and? Another question is are you willing to spend time and effort and potentially now and then, even a little money building your reputation as a plain language editor/expert? It's very important to know yourself and what you are good at so that you can play to your strengths. I often have people say to me, I'm an intense introvert. I don't think I could ever be a trainer and be up in front of a group of people. And my answer is, that's great. You don't have to be. As long as you know what your strengths are, you can always build a plan that will help you reach your goals.

And finally, if you ask those other questions of yourself and you have decided, yes, I went to position myself in this way, the most key question to really get real with yourself about is, are you willing to work on this brand, your plain language brand every day, in every way? That means plain language will always be part of the answer that springs through your lips whenever there's a question about anything involving writing or communication, understanding, comprehension, accessibility, these are all things that involve plain language. You will want to always have your ears perked for a chance to speak about plain language.

So knowing yourself is really important and I will bet you walking Cass that I have an extroverted personality. That has really been great for me over the years that I have been working to position myself as a plain language expert editor advocate and all-around champion because it makes it so much easier for me to be involved in activities like teaching, coaching, public speaking. But it doesn't mean that I don't often have to think very hard about the opportunities and whether or not it's going to be the right thing. Introverts, on the other hand, are often very nervous. They think perhaps I'm going to have to put myself in situations that I'm just not comfortable in.

It makes it so that people feel that they do not have a role in advocating for plain language if they are not necessarily extroverted. But the great news I have for you today is no matter which side of the personality spectrum you fall on, there are literally thousands of opportunities for you to begin positioning yourself as one of the people who is a go to person for plain language advice or information. You can always look at other options and ways to be involved such as coaching or writing blogs, getting involved heavily in social media, and believe me, there are many, many rolls behind the scenes in any organization where a very focused person who doesn't necessarily need the spotlight can really thrive and shine.

I want to encourage you, look for every single opportunity to help. The best way you can establish yourself as an expert is to always be there, ready with the right answer when someone has a question. Look for every opportunity at work to help your coworkers. There are still a lot of agencies within the federal government and goodness knows, a lot of agencies in state and local governments where managers especially do not have an understanding of what plain language is or what it's for. They may think it's some onerous unfunded mandates or it's just a lot of more talk. It's just a new phase. And you can be really instrumental in changing their understanding.

Look for every opportunity to write about plain language or advocate about plain language as I am here today. Plain language is absolutely essential for our government to function. And for the people we serve to understand what their government is doing for them and their role in government. So try to find opportunities to use plain language when you are at work, if you are in meetings. Write blog posts. Add in comments in your regular editing. Point out, I have made this change because it's a plain language principle. Take every chance you find to let people know you are acting from the perspective of being a plain language editor. Now remember, time is on your side. When we were doing our text check earlier, I mentioned to our wonderful wizards behind the scenes, Debbie and Mara and Catherine, who is the ultimate plain language editor, that establishing your plain language brand takes time.

I joined the federal government originally in 2004. I attended my first meeting of plain language action and information network in mid 2005. I taught my first class at the national Cancer institute in 2007, even before the plane writing act had been passed. So I have been working to establish this brand for a really long time. It takes time and it takes patience. And the real clear strategy. So don't rush. You expect to spend 5 to 10 years building a national or global reputation. And you can expect to spend at least a couple years and up to a about five years building your local reputation or your local brand, positioning yourself within your job or agency. And local means exactly what we think. It means in your job, in your community, and the DC Metro area. Perhaps even local to the federal government. So, be willing to spend time and understand that there are a number of steps you are going to want to take to truly position and brand yourself.

Here is my call for action for you all today. Begin today. Start now. Take small steps every day, every week, every month. So, that's all very inspirational, and I hope that you already have the gears spinning in your head going, what do I need to do? Yes, yes, I am passionate. Yes, I do want my career to be marked as a plain language career. So exactly how do I do that? So there are three steps that I was taught for branding anything, including myself. Plan, create, communicate. Let's look at planning. Exactly how do I plan to brand or position myself?

First, and this is very important, you must have a roadmap to get where you are going if you have never been there before. So please remove all your ideas from your head to paper. Scrap paper is fine. You don't have to have any particular format. You don't even have to make a little bullet.. Just start drawing up a list and let that list become that long term strategic plan for your

personal branding as a plain language editor. The first thing you are going to do is slop out a bunch of ideas. And then go back and put them in as close of a logical orator as you can kind of guess at and try to include as many feasible actions as possible. What is a feasible action? A feasible action is something I actually have an option of being able to do if I went to brand myself as a plain language editor, which is what I decided way back in 2007 that I wanted to do.

I don't want to put at the top of my list that I'm going to give a tech talk within two years. That may not be a feasible action for me. It's going to require resources that I don't even know how to find right now. But becoming a plain language trainer with my extroverted personality was a feasible action that I could work toward and become excellent at. So begin right now making your long-term strategic plan. As you list your actions, think about how each one is going to work on a weekly basis. What will you do each week? Will you try to coach her coworker? Will you develop a blog idea? Maybe you will write a social media post. Please keep in mind all the things I'm telling you today, these are ideas. They are just some of the many thousands of ideas that are out there.

Part of the difficulty of this format is that I really thrive when I see people's faces when I'm teaching or presenting. And it would be wonderful for me to be able to look at you all today and say, here's what you do right now. One, two, and three. But, I have learned that the hive mind is so much greater than mine so I know you are all out there and you are already coming up with ideas for what you will do next week. And that's going to be the exciting thing. If we can find a way to begin sharing all of that and helping each other position ourselves, that will be the ultimate goal here. First, let's start with our personal list. When am I doing next week to begin positioning myself?

What will I do this month to begin positioning myself? Look for opportunities every place you go. Maybe you can send an article into the newsletter. Maybe you can write a blog. Maybe you can get involved with plane. List the actions that you want to take next quarter. Perhaps you want to deliver a presentation and what you can do is contact plane and volunteer. Maybe you want to initiate a conversation on the listserv. If you have not participated in the listserv, and I assume all of you have because that's how you found out about our presentation today. You definitely want to be a part of that. I keep a very close eye on it because almost every time someone throws a question, I end up learning something invaluable that I will not ever have found otherwise except that people were sharing.

And if you are an expert plain language editor, you are in the perfect position to get involved in these conversations. But also to initiate them. And finally, what steps am I going to take over the course of a year to begin positioning myself? I started with workshops, seminars, getting involved in plane, beginning to learn how to teach and teach courses. That worked really well for me and who I am. Think about who you are and what your strengths are and what you can do each day, week, month, quarter, and year to begin building that reputation so that people will always know who you are and what you are about. It's what you are going to be known for from this point forward. So the second thing we wanted to once we map out our strategic plan and really think through where we want to be a month from now, three months from now, a year from

now, five years from now, or even 10 years. It's time to start creating that personal brand. Now, don't panic.

This is not a requirement, just an idea. You could start a blog on a regular blog site like logger or you can build a website of your own. Maybe that's not feasible. Strike it off your list if it's not a feasible action. But if it is, begin planning and timing when you will do those things. Build a social media following. It is very easy to begin advocating on social media and generating conversation. You are going to build a lot of followers and followers watch out for your name so that if you are giving a presentation, they can attend. And start looking for opportunities to speak, or offer if you are necessarily a speaker, offer value where you can. Build a network of plain language experts they you can turn to at all times.

You already have the first a network of plain language experts and I present to you that this network here is one of the greatest in the world and begin to build a buzz about your plain language work. If he even if you are not a person who likes to brag on yourself, especially verbally, start looking for ways to bring attention to your good work and ask for feedback. That's why I listed evaluations and testimonials here. Several years ago, I was asked by someone, would you like me to put a testimonial on your linked insight? And at first I started to laugh. You don't have to, no. And then I turned to my mentor and asked, is that a good idea? And my mentor said any time other people recommend you, it makes people who are looking for you sit up and take notice and it helps them find you. So ask for people to write testimonials on your social media sites or your LinkedIn profile. Ask for the evaluation. Keep them and use them. Use the comments or evaluations to help further put you in a better spot as a plain language editor.

Keep in mind that creating includes building relationships. Building your brand is all about becoming known in and by people. I recommend whenever I'm talking to someone, find a mentor who has done or is doing what you want to do. Go to them, ask them to take you under their wing. Become the apprentice. Emulate them. You know the old saying about the finest form of flattery? This is a form of flattery that not only helps the mentor or helps you but also helps the mentor. I've learned more from the people who have been my mentees I think then any other circumstance. It can be invaluable. And of course I have to throw a plug in here because "Plain" is my home. Please consider volunteering with the plain language action and information network if you are a federal employee or consider being a trainer if you are a person who thinks that you would enjoy going out.

Is primarily through repetition. Repetition creates an automatic neurologic response that we almost cannot ignore. I'm sure at some point today, if you watch television, a commercial will come on and you will either already know the words to the whole commercial or you will already know the words to the whole theme song to the commercial. And the reason is because it has been repeated in your experience so many times. We are going to talk a little bit about that in just a moment, too. Third step, communicate. Communicate. Communicate.

Find useful and appropriate ways to mention your plain language background and expertise

pretty much every day. If you actually work in an editing field or a field where you do a heavy amount of writing, whether or not your actual job title is writer or editor or in the federal government, writer -- editor, there are going to be meetings and emails all day long where you can slip in, let's say, a mention of well, I would make this choice because it's the best plain language option. Or I discourage that because that doesn't meet the plain language rule or it's not one of the plain language principles. Find ways to communicate about plain language. And whenever someone asks you what is plain language, always, always take a breath, smile, and give them the answer. Plain language just means clear communication for the audience you are targeting.

Let me tell you more about the techniques. And never miss a chance to explain what plain language is. And remember, repeat, repeat, repeat, and then say it again. So how do I communicate my brand? And when do I communicate my brand? Here's the short answer. Always. You never stop communicating your brand. You're going to want to communicate your brand in job interviews. My last interview for the position I currently hold, I was asked, why should we choose you for the job? And what you want us to know that we have not asked? And I have a stock answer. I told them they should choose me for the job because I was the best, I had the most experience, and I have the best skill level that they would find. And what did I want them to know that they had not asked me. I'm a plain language editor, it colors everything into. I was make sure that whatever I've edited is clear and easy to understand for the audience we are targeting. So I think it's very important for you to know that I'm a plain language editor.

Lucky me, that was the right answer. It was very important to my new boss is and my agency. Don't be afraid to cook for yourself in every situation. Of course we have talked about advocating your brand while you're working and you can also put something in your email signature if your agency allows or even in your personal email. But please be careful about coming across as being cliché. My mentor has urged me many times not to put anything in my email signature that could possibly be considered to be a cliché. In particular, she has urged me never to call myself a goo room of anything. So to advocate for yourself, to consider putting something about plain language in your signature, but make sure that you choose a phrase or word that is going to be seen as giving you more credibility and not less. Think about all the other options and all the times that you can communicate your brand as a plain language editor. Whenever you're in a meeting and there's a round robin of introduction, you want to say hi, I'm Joe, I'm Janet, I'm a plain language editor. In an intro or a bio as the lovely Catherine did for me at the beginning of this presentation. That you all knew before I even started that I'm a plain language expert and trainer and that this is part of what I have devoted my entire career to for more than a decade.

When you are neck working, it can be something as simple as sending an email to a colleague in another agency and mentioning all by the way, I work in the plain language group if you're ever interested it. Whenever you are in a training class and I ask you what you do and how you do it, be sure to mention that you are a plain language expert. Never miss a chance on social media to advocate for plain language and to show your expertise. Be careful about Tom. Tom is important when we are establishing friend. You can establish your brand as an expert to

someone that people are attracted to because they are open and friendly and what to give value. Or you can establish yourself as kind of an expert who is seen this kind of arrogance or maybe a little condescending. Try your best never to be seen that way. Plain language is about helping people understand and being a plain language editor means that you are positioning yourself in a helping mode. Helping people understand is honorable and good. And that would be the tone that I would urge you to think about adopting in your social media posts. And social occasions. Now, I know many of you quickly reread the list and went social occasions, why would I ever take talk about plain language at a social occasion? You'd be shocked at how many times I have talked about plain language at cookouts, at meetings of my husband's historical societies, with a stamp collecting group, with my neighbors. Whenever I have the option or the opportunity to say something about plain language, had my role in it, I take that opportunity. Now, you have to be appropriate. He want to think it through, but you will find that you can talk to people about plain language and they are not going to zone out. They are most likely going to perk up a bit and go wow. That is wonderful. We need more of that in the world.

It comes down to this. I know that this is a little hard to read but it's just so cute. This photograph of this Neil point, he who has a thing to selling goes and whispers in a well is not so apt to get the dollars is he who comes the tree and haulers. So sing out Louise, it's very important to immediately change your self talk and yourself language and start today. Today, today. Introduce yourself introducing yourself as a plain language editor. Here's the thing. None of you would be here today, not a single soul in the DMV or on the East Coast would have ever heard of my name unless they stumbled upon it on a Google search if I hadn't spent the last -- Years making sure to tell everyone over and over and the plain language expert, I'm a plain language editor, I'm a plain language advocate. I immediately let people know who I am and what I am. I want to encourage you again to make that part of yourself introduction. And for those of us who are a little more introverted or who are maybe not comfortable, immediately taking steps to put out there, start today and let social media to a lot of this to work for you. I say maybe even most of the work for you. Your brand, as a plain language editor, should be part of all your social media profiles, business and personal.

Now, someone is going to send me an email later this week and say I found you on Facebook and there's not a single mention of plain language. That's correct. Because I have a plain language profile and a personal profile for my music friends and family. But think about many of the things you have already done and basically are here today as a result of doing list serves, people who are interested in writing, editing, plain language, marketing, there are many do digital.gov and other resources. Think how well you would fit in in the accessibility community of practice. They always have questions about plain language in those listserv discussions and meetings. Look for online forums where you can discuss ideas and new things and become a participant.

But there are do's and don'ts like anything else. When you are on social media, do you have opinions, it's important to have opinions, that's part of advocacy. My opinion is, plain language is really important for everyone so they can understand what the government is doing or can-do for them. But be very, very careful never to post anything remotely political or having anything to

do with social issues that could potentially be controversial and blow up on here and divert attention from your plain language message. So be very careful to keep your message focused and targeted and stay away from the back to pause any conversation you elicit to go in the direction or get into a negative frown that you don't want to have happen. You never want to have yourself associated with a negative or a productive conversation that's happening online.

Stay positive. There will always be someone who is having a bad day or who just particularly enjoys making negative comments to try and get a rise out of you. Just don't argue fine points with trolls. Stay positive, stay on your own personal brand message. Write your post as more pithy jingles that will stick in people's heads unless you are writing a long essay or an op-ed or a long log Heary keep everything short. The longer things are, the less time you have with your reader. The reader is going to leave and you want them to get your message. So keep that message short and punchy. That keeps it more compelling. You will find a lot of that on the Nielsen Norman website or any of their is the two ships that have researched, the center of plain language studies have has a lot of information that you're going to really want to become familiar with.

Be sure to quote that. It's important for people to know that plain language is not just something that we have made up and we are trying to make it into a thing. There's actual research out there that ask planes how people take in information and under handed, how the brains work and what they need from rain communications to be able to fully understand the message. But be very careful to never make unprovable claims. So don't quote research or statistics unless you can then put your fingers on it later. And it's okay to have an opinion. Be clear about your stance. Your thoughts, your opinion, your wisdom, your voice as an expert is one of authority. Remember, we are influencers. Each of us who as part of this unity of prep this is influencing how the world and the government and perhaps all governments are going to go in relationship to communicating with their citizens.

It's okay to have an opinion, just stay away from the political stuff and don't just echo other people's opinions unless you believe what they are saying so strongly that you feel that it is your opinion. And finally, I think I'm very, very early which is shocking to me, know your market. Become aware of and read and understand the plain writing act of 2010 and the April, 2011 OPM document that instructed agencies how to put that act in place. That document actually has way more information than the written form of law. You are going to want to become familiar with an expert with both of those documents. Look for ways they can be involved and do more. I can tell you, that Catherine and -- Always. For help. If you are a person who can be relied on to actually help and take actions and to work here and there, you are going to be an absolutely essential part of that community. So look at how you can begin positioning yourself within the community that you already are in.

Look into clarity international and PLAIN international. They are larger plain language groups. Consider joining. Find more of their information, and look into all the resources they have. And then finally, become very familiar with all of the plain language movements in the world. This is not just an American thing. It's not just a single place thing. This is a global movement to

advocate for the regular people in every country to be able to understand all the communications from the governments that served them. Look into Canada, looking to the UK and the history. They sort of started at all. The South Africans are doing some amazing work in language. Of the other European countries like Spain and Brussels are working very hard in plain language. The European Union government has a large plain language of her and you can hear about things that are going on in other parts the world that might just help about positioning yourself.

And finally, before we get into questions, and I come on Kimber, you know, bookmark and park on plain language.go. I think at least once every couple weeks someone asks me a question and I send them a link with a very nice and helpful explanation of what they need to look at and an offer to help the more. Look into clarity. The of the international Association. And look at plain language international to find resources from all of these organizations and put them to work in your efforts to position yourself as a plain language editor. And finally these are resources that we just had amazing good luck. Universities and colleges offer them. I've been able to take some amazing online courses through this. And Forbes.com has a tremendous amount of information about branding, positioning, different forms of self marketing, and believe it or not, plain language and understanding clear writing on their website. There are a lot, a lot, a lot of articles the dig into build yourself a little file as you are creating your strategic plan and keep hold of all those resources. You never know when you're going to need them. And then finally, my last big plug, again, PLAIN is my home. If you have interest in finding a mentor or becoming a trainer and getting out there teaching in the federal agencies or beyond, please let PLAIN know. We are always looking for more people to get involved. And I know that Jamie Stark, the training coordinator and Katina Stapleton and Catherine spy V are always looking for people who want to pull their sleeves up and C has plain language editors. So I'm going to end there. I see that we have, I see that we have a number of things going on in the chat. So I'm going to un-share my screen now and, on camera and wait for your questions and see if I can help you more.

I've been keeping a list of the questions. So I can send you some. Let's see. One is, do we need to manage AP or APA style manuals to be a plain language editor?

Can you repeat the first part?

Do we need to be able to manage AP or APA style manuals to be a plain language editor? And I have an answer to that. Which I can add after yours if you like.

And I will try to keep it short so you can follow up on that. Here's what I would say. No and yes it's it doesn't matter if it's a peer APA or Chicago, if you are in the editing field, more than likely, you have to have more than a passing under ending with a number of established styles. No one style is specific to plain language. If there is one, AP would be closer but even that is a stretch to make as an argument. What I would say is, whatever style you need to use in the course of your work, you need to understand how the plain language principles fit into what that style requires. And that usually has to do with the way sentences, paragraphs, and paragraphs

are built and word choice. Less than grammar and usage. It will also usually has something to do with the actual visual formatting. Remember, what do we say all the time in plain language? White space is your friend. White space tells your eyewear to go and makes it easier to find information. So make sure, whatever style you use, you understand what it says users should be doing and how that relates to the plain language principles. So I now kick it back to you, Catherine.

I was just going to say, my usual response to the frequently asked question about style manuals is that plain language operates no matter what the style manual is. Or the style guide. We are officially style guide agnostic.

Exactly. Because all the style guides are basically just about creating consistency and a body of work for an agency. They are not specific to plain language. However, plain language principles matter in writing. So how do the plain language principles that you are following matchup with the rules that are set forth in whatever your style guide is. You can figure that out, that will also give you an opportunity to begin positioning yourself as you explain that to your superiors, to managers in your agency and and to whose work your editing.

Are there any potential issues for funds when creating websites, social media post related to plain language?

Related to plain language, no, but you do want to check with your agency to make sure that if you have such a thing, a plain language profile on social media or your own website, that it doesn't break any agency rules. And this is a good moment for us all to take a moment and remember the Hatch act. Recall that as federal employees, we have certain rules that we have to follow all the time about what we are doing on social media and out in the public sphere anyway as well as that concern about anything remotely political. Whether or not we are on the job by the Hatch act, so that is important. That is a tangential situation, but those are, those are parameters, let's say, boundaries that should be governing pretty much anything you do anyway if you are a federal employee. So be aware that it may not necessarily be an issue where you have to be concerned about you plain language advocacy, there may be rules of things that you can again do in social media whether you on the job or not. You have to find that out and that will be agency specific Oral-B specific to the rules that all federal employees will in terms of plain language, stick to the formula of keep it simple, unique, and inspiring. KS UI. Keep it simple, unique, and inspiring. That is the key to plain language efficacy right there. I have all different class on that. Simple, unique, and inspiring. So your post should not have a need to stray into any area, that your agency may have some prohibition on if you are sticking --

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How do we understand what we read versus what we hear. Word choices. Design and visual choices. There are so many different aspects of communication that plain language affect, that you're never going to run out of material. And he will be able to make short, punchy, simple, unique and inspiring post, blogs, essays, at all times. Because there is an unending supply of incredible subject matter when we start plain language.

It is guaranteed a job for life. There is no magic point where people are suddenly not needing plain language editing. I say that only out of under my vast experience here. But I have two related questions that you may or may not be able to address which is what branding advice can you give to people who are not working as editors? And I did want to but in and say my first seven years with the federal government, I was a management analyst but what I was doing was writing. So your mileage may vary.

Exactly. That's exactly what I was going to say. I remember in 2011 during the days that we have literally hundreds of requests for plain language classes because the plain writing act of 2010 had gone into effect and suddenly agencies had real pressure to bring plain language training in and get their folks trained up to meet the requirements of the law. And we had very deep discussions at that time about finding enough people to build a training Corps and what do we do when we run out of editors? I remember the question. What do we do when we run out of editors? Here's the thing. On the one hand, I hate having to say this out loud because it's opposite the argument, I'm usually making with my bosses. But if you are working in a federal agency doing knowledge work, and we all pretty much are, we are at our task, we are on our laptops, we are reading, thinking, and writing all the time. It really does not matter if your title is management analyst or associate attorney or editor. If you are working on writing or editing others whether or not your title is editor, you can position yourself as a plain language editor.

The way you will do that is exactly what we were talking about earlier. Every time someone comes to you and says, would you take a look at this and tell me if it makes sense? Or would you read this over and tell me if it's okay to send it to the next step in our reporting chain, or can you help me figure out how to say this? The answer should be, to the extent possible, always be, yes. If you can't do it right this minute, I will be there in half an hour or I will call you in 30 minutes or an hour or whenever. It doesn't matter if you're official title what is technical editor. Most of the work you do involves writing and making changes to their work. Those changes you make, you want to make when the perspective of plain language.

If I can tack onto that. I have found that sometimes people, for whatever reason, resist plain language editing. And what I do at that point to say well, don't do it to please me. But think about the poor people at the call center who are having to respond to the calls because somebody doesn't understand what you have written. Think about the non-experts that this is going to. Think about, it is ambiguous. It can be interpreted at least two ways. Do you want to, so to speak, kick that problem down the road to other people. So sometimes you can get people in the sense of community and relationship with people and they don't want to make it more complicated. Sometimes. We have a question about that entirely which is, I am a state employee and the state guidelines support guideline principles. The problem comes when you submit your text to the states PR people.

Okay.

That always happens.

Yes. So first of all, my heart goes out to you. I learned firsthand, in my year out in the field or year and a half out in the field, that those of us who are working in state and local governments really are in a tough position these days. The federal plain writing act does not apply to you and we only have nine states that have an actual piece of legislation in place that governs some aspect of plain language and they are almost always involving contract law. So you are really swimming against a very, very high tide in state and local government.

Second of all, yes, I saw someone's chat about how you would think that PR people would be better. But that is universally not the case. And that is why I was hired by a global corporation to come and teach PR people how to write clearly. It's kind of funny, and I'm sure we could riff on that for the rest of the day. But here's what it comes down to. PR people are under the Psalms of senior executive managers and they are universally, the least likely to advocate for plain language, least likely to know what plain language is, what the principles are, and PR people, their number one job is get them a message out. Get the bosses message out. It's not their message anymore. What I've been learning and really working with some people on, and this is kind of my current focus, is people who have forgotten how to communicate clearly, even verbally. I would stop short because I said to someone, well, you wouldn't talk this way.

And the person said, yes, yes I do talk that way. And I love that word, and I don't under and why you want to substitute that word was aware that his not as good. So you are going to run into very strongly held opinions and beliefs about actual words or sentence structure. Sometimes people want to fight over it and you are going to find a lot of people who may be started in school with a bright, shiny face and desire to communicate to the world, but somehow now they are in the mid 40s that doesn't even get to the last paragraph. So that's where you are going to play your role. Folks like that just need to be helped to remember. They'll be coming to you with these kinds of questions because their ultimate problem is not that they can't write they have been funneled into a form of writing to please bosses for so long that now they have forgotten. So right now I'm working with a number of folks in that situation. They are not corporate PRR estate PR but it's all essentially the same situation, just with a little bit different label. You know, government bureaucrats who make it to very high level job titles, generally have become so steeped in bureaucratic language that true to form, they can't even speak clearly anymore. True story. I work for great folks who are totally advocates for plain language. And yet, we do have some senior-level float? Who cannot even do the task assignment clearly. We have to ask, does he want a copy edit? What does he want? We have to go back to them and ask a number of very clear, specific questions to get them to narrow down and be able to formulate the thought clearly and then speak it clearly and simply. So what do you do? You start today taking small steps. Remember, your first goal here is to get all your thoughts out of your head and onto paper to begin drawing yourself the map to get out of the woods. So in your case, I would recommend that not only do you want to create a long term, personal positioning strategic plan, but you also want to make your own strategic plan for how you are going to begin interacting with people at high levels and advocating for plain language in a way that they can hear and accept. You would have to figure that out based on the people that you work with in your state agency or in your particular situation. If you have been there a year or two, you kind of know

where they are coming from and what they will or won't hear as you speak or add something into an email. And when you send things over to the PR people, I don't see any reason at all that you couldn't add a note. I've attached X, Y, Z for you, please note that I have followed very specific, to avoid any legalese leaking in. If you want to make any changes, let us know. In general, if you tell a PR person, in working 35 years with them, if you tell a PR person, you need to check with me before you make changes, they will be less likely to make changes. Checking back with you means it's going to take more time and they don't have time.

I was just going to say, maybe we should have called this Machiavellian secrets for getting plain language editing done which could have been certainly as true as that. We have a quick question. Are there plain language experts associated with the utility sector, energy, water, and telco? Thinking about that, and it must be.

Yes. I can tell you a good place to look. The water and sewer Authority of Southern California, WS SC. I know a lot about that organization because they have been involved in the national Association of government communicators for the past few years, submitting work for the national communications awards, the be a pencil gold spring awards. I have been repeatedly impressed by the work they have done to make all of their materials and brochures for citizens and customers very easy to understand. So they are out there. We just have to all continue connecting in these communities of practice so we can find each other. If you are part of utility or state or local government, please sing out and put your name in the chat so we can all connect with you.

There's also another thing that I learned from my dad who also worked for the government, that, and of course, Alan Alders clear and visit podcast came about because of his scientific work. He found out that a lot of important scientific projects were not getting funded and he was the one who had to go to the scientist and say you are not getting funded because nobody knows what you do.

Nobody knows what you are talking about. Exactly.

I was thinking, we have had some questions about plain language in a variety of fields. And I try not to argue style, and I think we can pretty much write our way out of minutes situations. But I think sometimes, you have to go to analytics. And you can go to page views, if it's a website issue, you can go to call-center, if it's people calling in, because I don't understand my bill. Tie this to business goals. Don't argue style, but go to the mat over meeting our members needs or reaching our audience or even getting the bills paid. That's where you go to the mat.

Absolutely. Absolutely. In my experience working with corporate clients, all of the advocacy positions that I have presented in my training about how this was good for people, helping people understand, how to use human neurology to help your message be planted and repeated, back to you, becoming interactive, none of that mattered. It was all nice to hear. They nodded a lot. But when I started showing that plain language can be tied and is tied to the

bottom line, to corporate earnings to the number of questions retained, customers retained, I saw people noticeably sit up and lean forward to hear more.

Yeah. Looking at some of the case studies on plain language.gov is hugely helpful because it really does clarify that you can make some of these changes in the name of business. I also mentioned Joe Campbell's book, "writing for dollars, writing to please." He has chapters about government before and after his and the results for those. And there's many other fields. We did have questions asking for plain language in social work and for education. And I was hoping that your vast experience has provided you with an answer.

Yes. Absolutely. So in education, we absolutely have a lot of advocacy. In fact, the plain cochair, Christina Stapleton, works for the education department. And I know she has spent many a long year working to advocate for plain language within education. I'm sure she can tell us a whole lot more. I know I saw her on this webinar earlier. So Katina, if you are willing to speak, that would be great. And in social work, there are a number of different organizations that are involved in the social work field where they have plain language versions of information on websites. So I would say, let your fingers do the walking. Google around. Look for people who are in the field, who are writing and writing clearly. And then send them an email. Ping them on social media. Began to talk to them and ask those questions. You will find the people you are looking for. There are so many, many people who are doing this work but they are not involved in something. But you can find them and you can learn from them, too. They will learn things that may be we haven't thought of. I turned on the chat and I'm looking at all your comments and I'm already going, yeah, I learned thing every time I work for professionals. I just wanted to mention one thing. To the lovely person who is fighting uphill against the and/or battle. Two things that will help you. The first is, just make it a rule. Don't use and/or. It's one of or the other, not both. You can also, if you have to prepare documents that need to be file come client, because/is a simple and symbols are problem in 508 compliance and you need to minimize them in narrative as well as in visuals. And/or, you can overcome. I promise.

Also, something to do is, this is an instance perhaps of doing evil so that that good may come. But put that you can't use and/or in the style guide. Sometimes you can use, use style guide as your weapon instead of other people.

Let's say Tuell instead of weapon. It's a powerful tool.

Also, Katina does not have the option to speak, but she did put an answer. Katina Stapleton, the cochair of PLAIN works for the department of education and she very kindly put her email and. So the person winning plain language expertise in government, I'm sorry, in education, please contact her. She has a lot of resources.

Okay. Anything else? I cannot believe we are so early. I was sure I would get to the point where we needed to start taking questions and I would be running late. I probably was speaking of it too fast today.

Not at all. I do have one sort of combination question which is, can you distinguish between helping people understand and educating them from the approach of, I know more than you? And, with that, if you are not comfortable with the word "expert", if you are beginning to learn and apply, what other title would you recommend? Consultant, learner, practitioner. There's a couple of other ones. I want to say also that I echoed this hesitancy to use expert because I feel like I am always learning. I feel that I've got the copy editing for my agency down, but now I'm learning more about inclusive language and that is a new thing for me. I feel like I'm always learning. I call myself expert, because why not?

I think that's very, very good thought. Thanks for sharing that. Because I wanted to say something similar to that just because you are an expert does not mean you know all there is to know. And again, referring back to my wonderful mentor, if you are not always learning, you cannot call yourself an expert. One of the definitions of expert in one source is a person who has reached a level of expertise and mastery that they are able to pass it on and teach it to others but they never stop learning. An expert never stops learning on purpose because to maintain that expertise, you must always be active and aware and constantly learning. Or you become old and stale and you no longer have helpful, useful, and current information to share. So thank you, because that's an important point to make. If you feel comfortable calling yourself an expert, and I remember the first time someone referred to me as expert, and I spent a week trying to wrap my head around that. Am I an expert? What makes me qualified to be an expert? Are people, are they going to look at me warily because I said I'm an expert? I would say, look at words that are less socially charged. I think advocate is one that might work if you are in a world where advocacy is not equated with a political realm in any way. If you are in a world where you can be an advocate and that's okay, that's a good thing because it's a helping role. Then I would say call yourself a plain language advocate. Or a plain language champion. If you don't have a title like writer -- editor and you want to begin branding yourself as a plain language editor, offer to be a reviewer. Look at those other options, those synonyms that mean the same thing but don't have quite the same social connotation. And I think over time, you may find yourself transitioning over to that language of advocate or expert. But you can start softer, especially if you are just now beginning to step into these waters. Because, no one bursts into a room and says hi, I'm here to save you, I'm a plain language expert. However you are currently known in your agency, depends on how long you have been there and the different types of projects and work you have done. And no one is going to hear or believe you if you just suddenly, out of the blue, start calling yourself a plain language expert or plain language editor. So it's an iterative process. Perhaps you are going to transition from, I'm going to set myself up as the plain language advocate in my unit or in my division and then I'm going to begin spreading my influence. Remember, we are influencing people to think about things differently and take different actions. Different actions when writing to help others understand.

Think about, it's okay to start here and slowly begin to spread out because you are going to have a long-term plan of how you advocate for yourself and position yourself. And build your reputation. Remember, you are establishing how you want people to think of you when they hear your name. And it does take time. It has taken me a very long time. 13 years is a long time,

but it's slow and steady wins the race. I don't mind being a turtle if it means that one day, I will be traveling the world to advocate for plain language. And that's what I want to when I have completed my federal career and my child is grown and living as an adult. So I set a goal for myself knowing it wasn't going to happen overnight. That's also true within your agency. It's not going to happen overnight, just make a plan, take a small step every day and think about becoming known as a plain language go to in your unit, department, division first and then begin to spread your influence.

Okay. I think that that has taken us pretty close to the end of the hour. I think this has been magnificent. I think, I have posted a couple of things in the chat about some of the content types people were asking about medical, healthcare, some other things so I added a link from plain language.gov and it does seem as if everyone will be updating their LinkedIn profile the instant they get off of this so that's wonderful.

I know I will be.

I will be sprinkling expert in like it's confetti. But I also put in plains twitter account which is --. That's what we had at the time. And that's a way to get started because I think we are reasonably pretty good at sharing plan language information and when you see people whose posts you like or makes sense to that, you can go ahead and follow them. It sort of like, what is it, you talked about commercials. She told two friends and he told two friends and he told two friends and it's the whole geometric progression and then you get a twitter feed like mine where I've got way too much twitter stuff going on.

Exactly. But those are also great ways to find those mentors who are going to coach you and encourage you and inspire you as you take those steps that you put on your personal strategic plan of the things that I want to do, the way I want to become a plain language editor, and how I want to be seen and regarded professionally as well as personally and why this is important to me. Put all of that on paper and add that in. I'm going to follow, I'm going to go on LinkedIn and when there's a plain language post, I'm going to comment. I'm going to find my try by putting my voice out there.

Excellent. Yes. And Katina had an excellent point. Put plain language on the search bar and linked in and see everything coming up which is fantastic. I hope you join the community. We will be looking at the transcript later to see what we missed because the questions and the comments were coming fast and furious later on. But many, many thanks to Wendy for doing such a fantastic job. This was just so helpful and nice said has inspired so many people. I am just so pleased to have been able to get the feedback from everyone and the thinks and the very, very lively indication from everyone. As another class this morning put it, let's go rescue the verbs. Let's go do some plain language.

We are going to free the verbs whenever we get a chance. I just want to, in closing, remind you all that you absolutely can do it and you absolutely should. If you have been wondering at all how to get started, here's just the vaguest outline of a blueprint for you. And also, the promise I

make and every single presentation and class is this. I am always available to help any student who has ever worked with me. If you have a question or ever need help, you can always contact me. Just remind me, I was in your class on positioning as a plain language editor or I was, I participated in this or that. Just remind me how we know each other and I will always get back to you as soon as I can. It's okay to contact me anytime and I believe Kathryn can put my email in the chat, yes?

I can, give me, or you can do it.

Yeah, let me see if I can do that right now. I will make sure you guys can reach me at any time. And remember everyone, keep it simple, unique, and inspirational and you will always be successful as plain language advocates editor, X, whatever you want to be.

Well, the thinks are rolling in, but Gabby, do you or Mara want to so to speak take us home?

There we go.

I was ready. We can close out now. And I will end the session. This was amazing as always, Wendy, Catherine, great job. Thank you so much. We had such an engaged group here.

Make sure you grab the chat. You know how I am.

We got it.

Thank you so much.

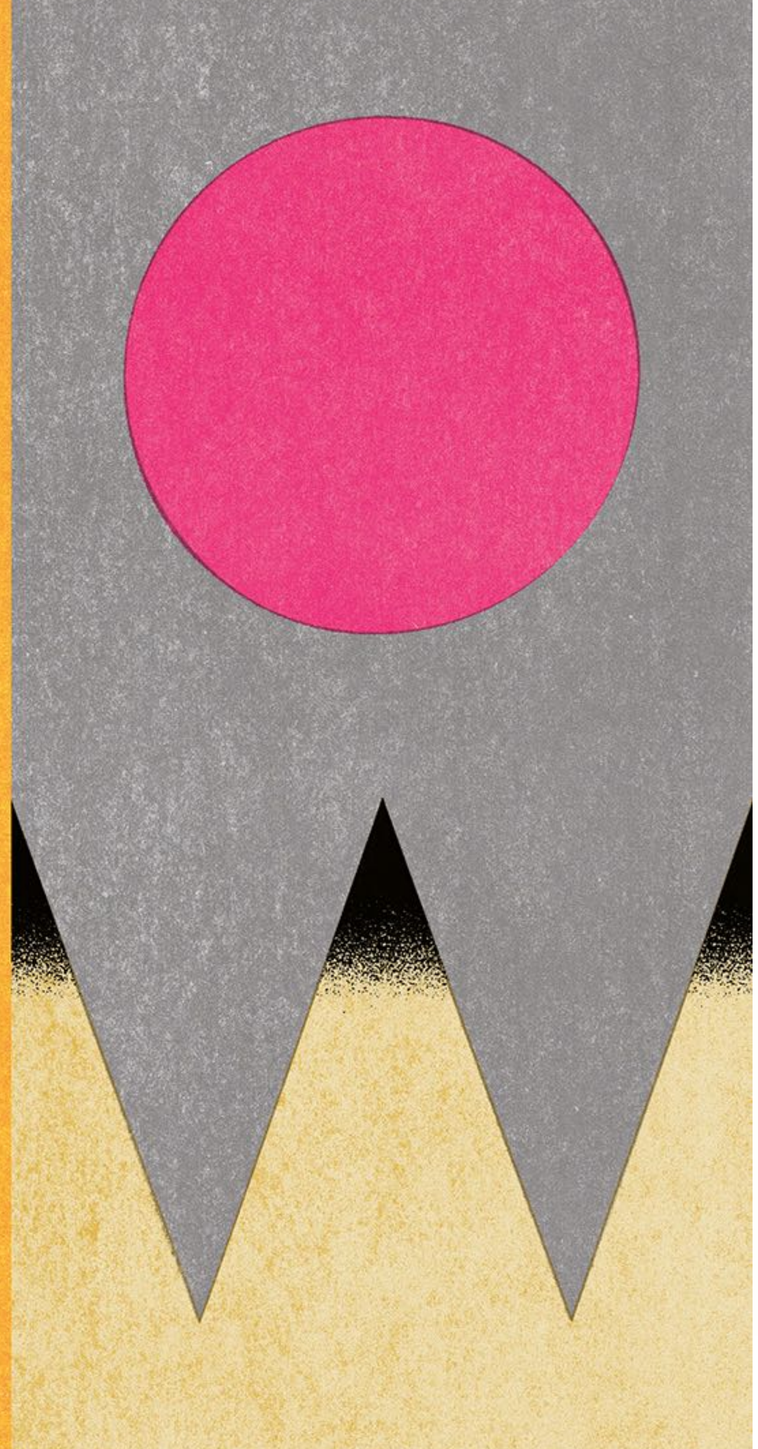
Have a great afternoon, thank you.

Thank you so much. Take the rest of the day off.

By guys.

Thank you, bye-bye.

2



Writing is designing

Words and the user experience

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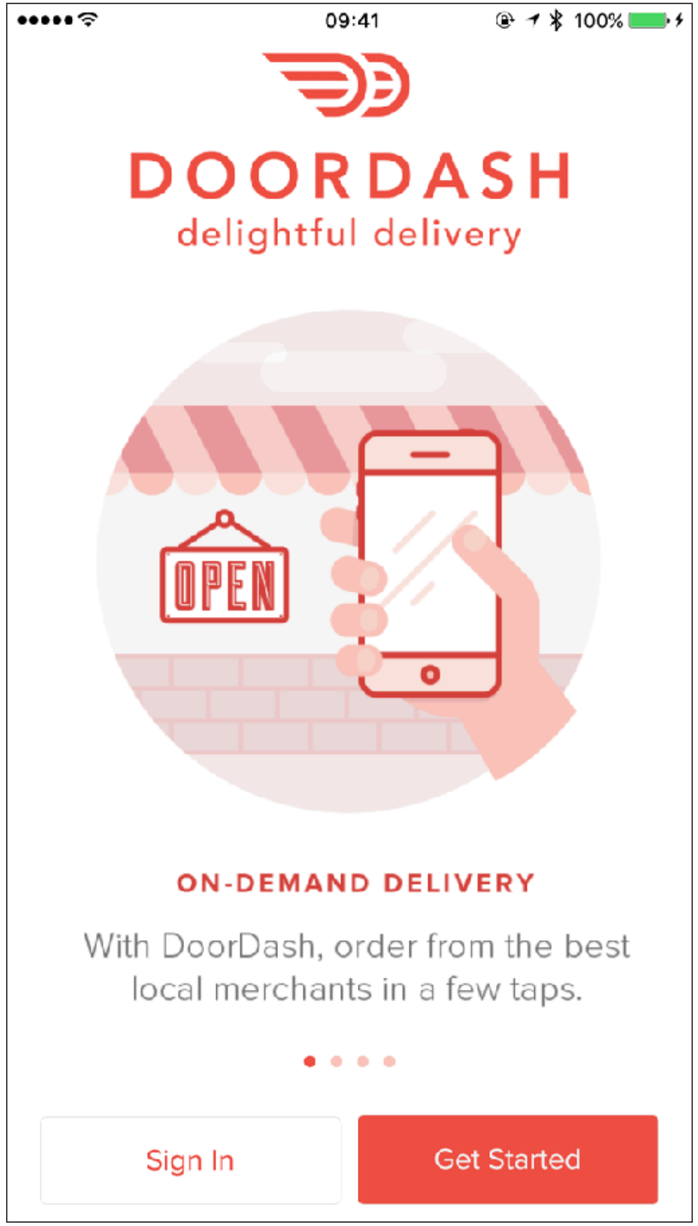
I’m Andy.

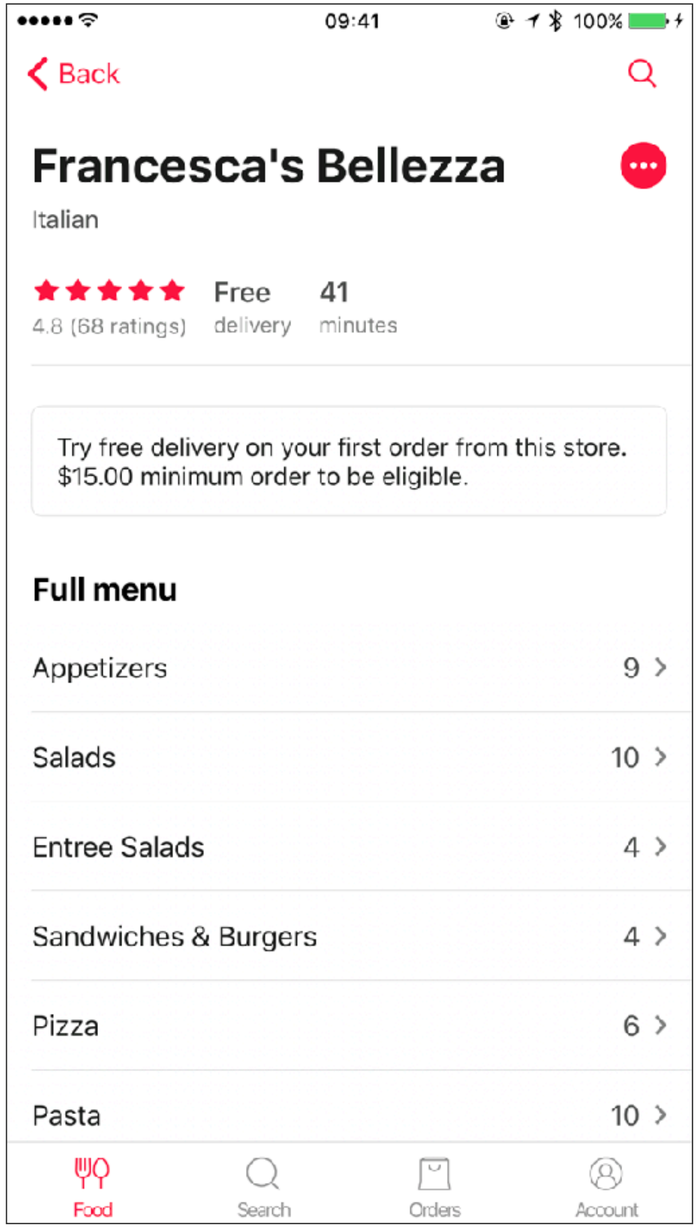
I’m the co-author of *Writing is Designing: Words and the User Experience* and am a content strategy manager at Adobe Design.

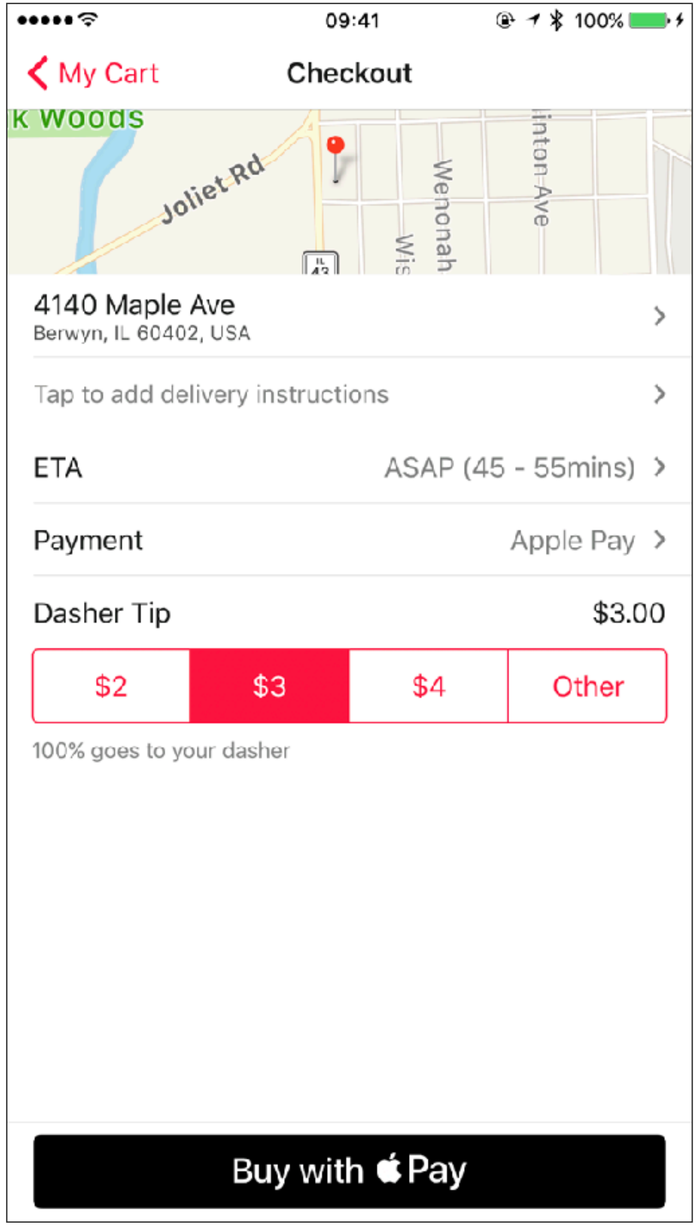
*I use **he/him** pronouns.*

Writing is designing

Find the words for the people you serve







Inspiration: https://m.signalvnoise.com/reminder-design-is-still-about-words/

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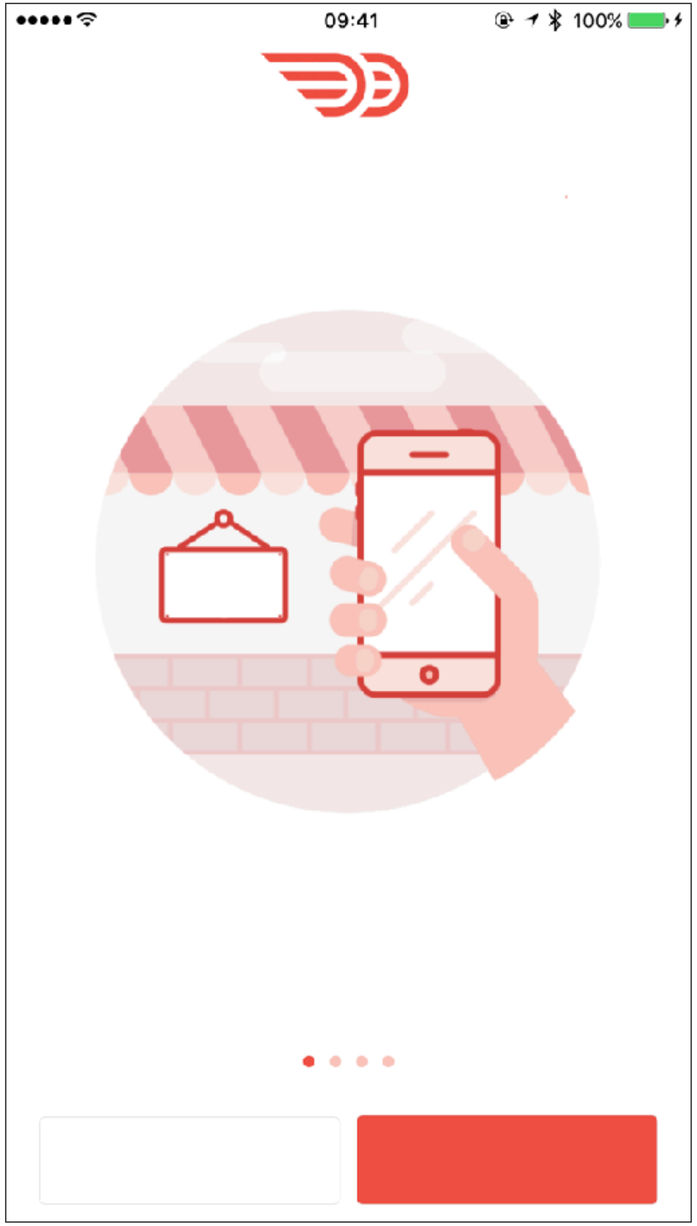

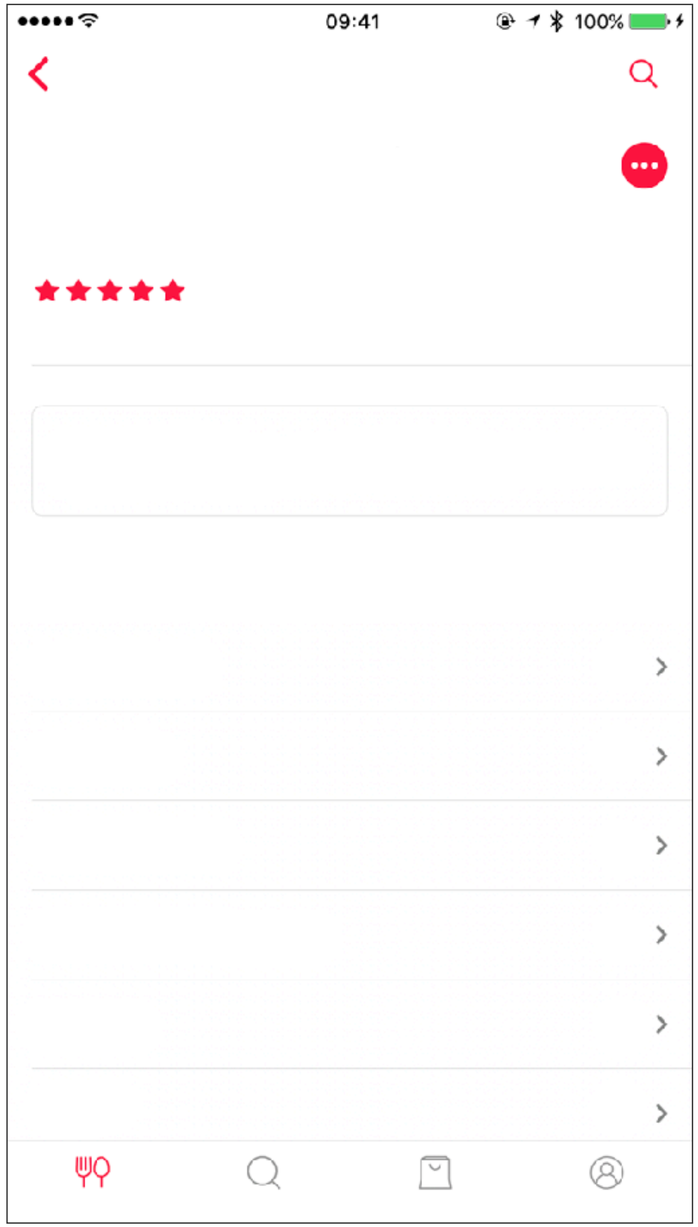

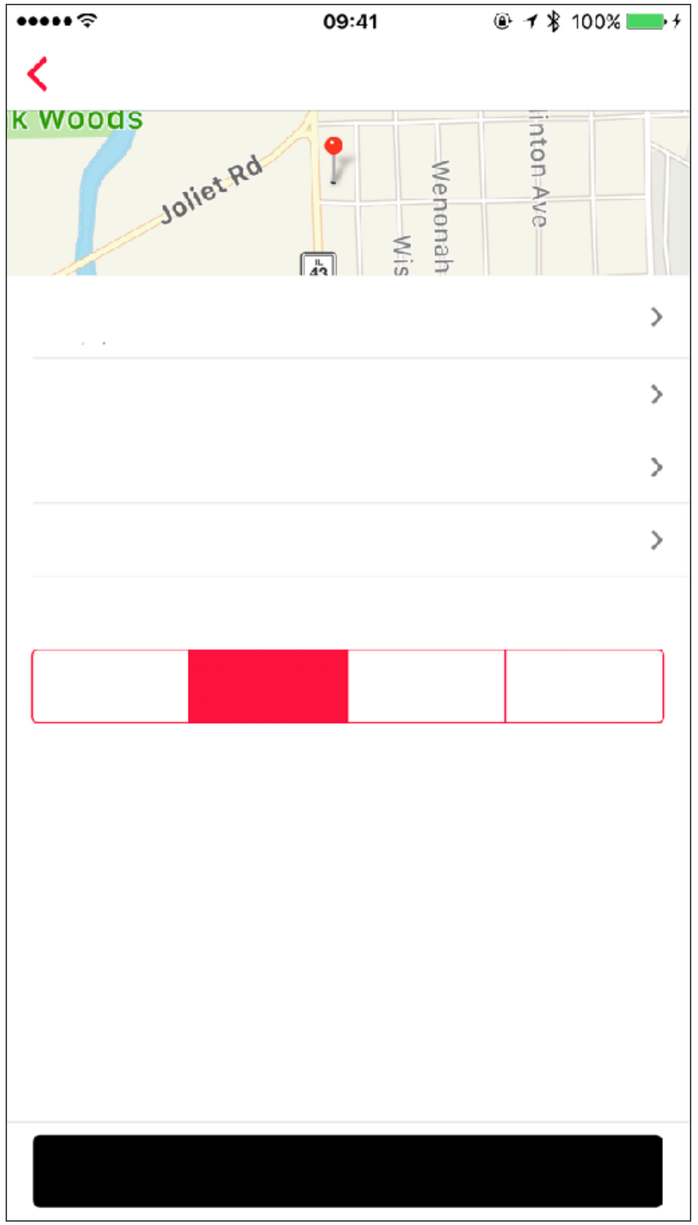

Inspiration: https://m.signalvnoise.com/reminder-design-is-still-about-words/

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To find the right words, **writing** and **design** need to team up in your brain and work together.

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I work on digital products and physical goods, so I'm deeply involved in the design process. But I also want to call out early that my process is the design process. ***I don't write fiction or short stories; I use language to solve problems****—whether that's behind the scenes or in the product itself. I use words as material.*

Nicole Fenton
Co-Author, Nicely Said

Source: http://nicolefenton.com/words-as-material/

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Button

A writer might ask:

- What are the right words for this button?

Button

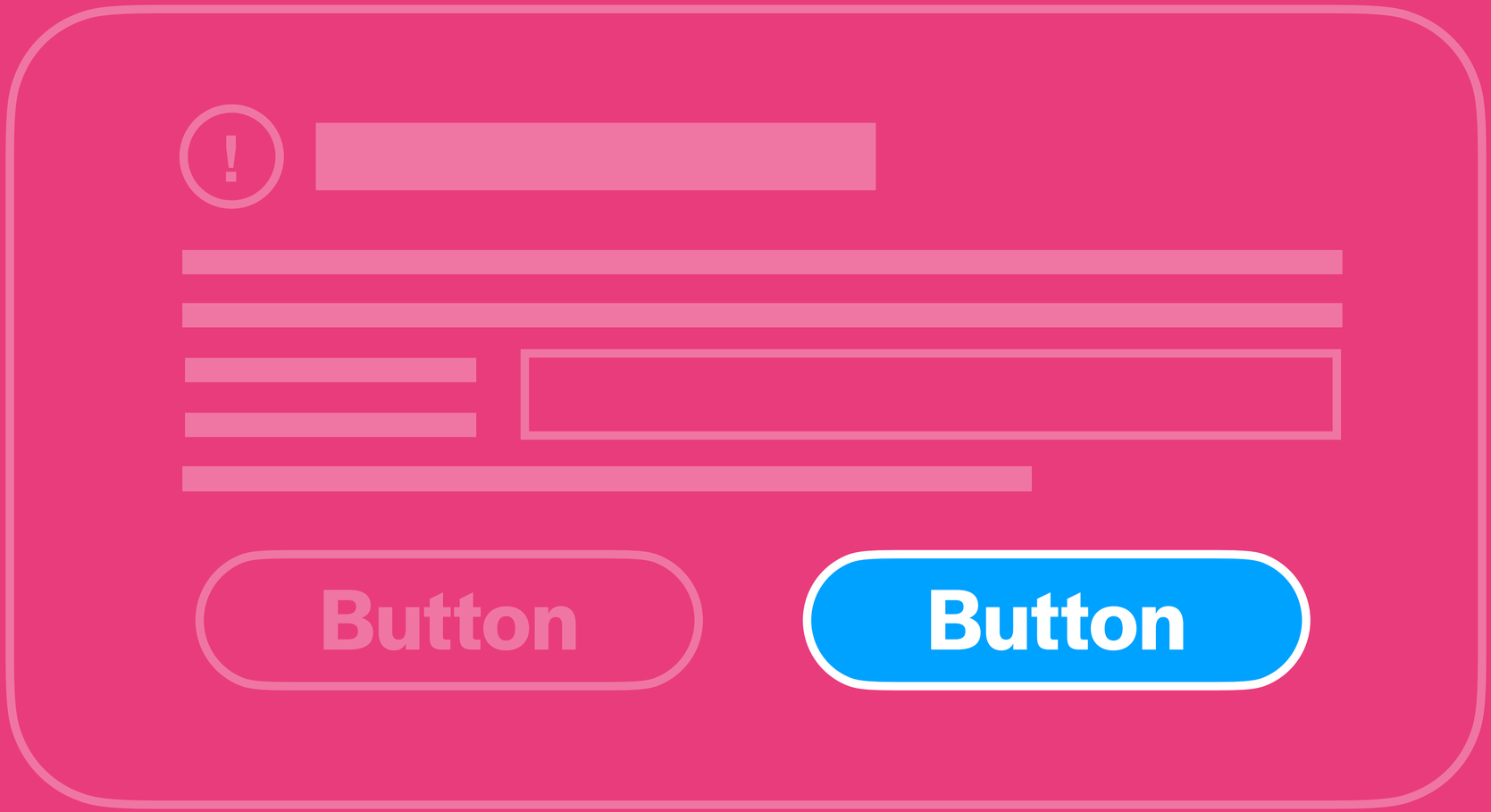
Done? Continue? Finish? Complete?

A UX writer or a designer might ask:

- What are the entry and exit points?
- What action immediately follows pressing this button?
- Are we using the right messaging component here?

Button

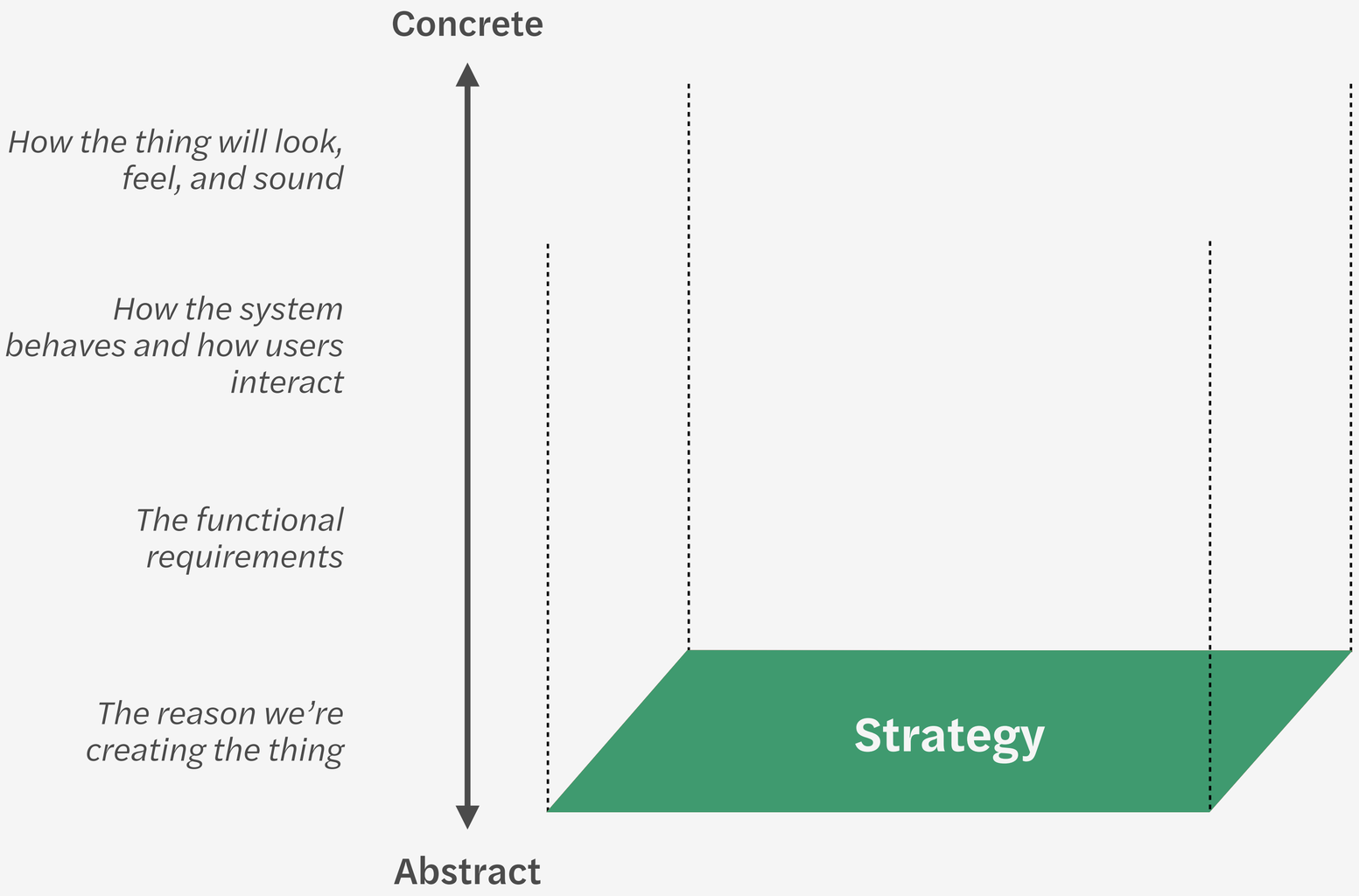
- What’s the inverse action?
- How does it translate/localize?
- Does it fit within our voice and tone strategy?


Button
Button

Writing is about fitting words together.
Designing is about solving problems for your users.

We design with words.

The ~~Five~~ Four Layers of UX



VISUAL DESIGN DELIVERABLES	CONTENT DESIGN DELIVERABLES
The "screens": *components, workflows, etc.*	***The UX writing:*** *microcopy, buttons, dialogs, errors, etc.*
Design system stuff: *component docs, patterns, etc.*	***Style guide stuff:*** *grammar and mechanics, content patterns, terminology*
Timelines, deliverables, roadmap, etc.	
The design strategy: *how the thing will behave and look and feel*	***The content strategy:*** *how to plan, create, and manage content across the product*

Modified from "The Elements of User Experience" by Jesse James Garrett. ***http://www.jjg.net/elements/***

So if **words** are such an important part of **design**, why do we often think of design in terms of **visual tools**?

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Should I use Sketch, Figma, or Adobe XD to design this interface?

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Don't mistake **making a deliverable** with **making a difference.**

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Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

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Your writing should be....

1. Usable

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Help users do stuff

A link that takes you to the app's search feature is way more usable than trying to explain where the search icon is.

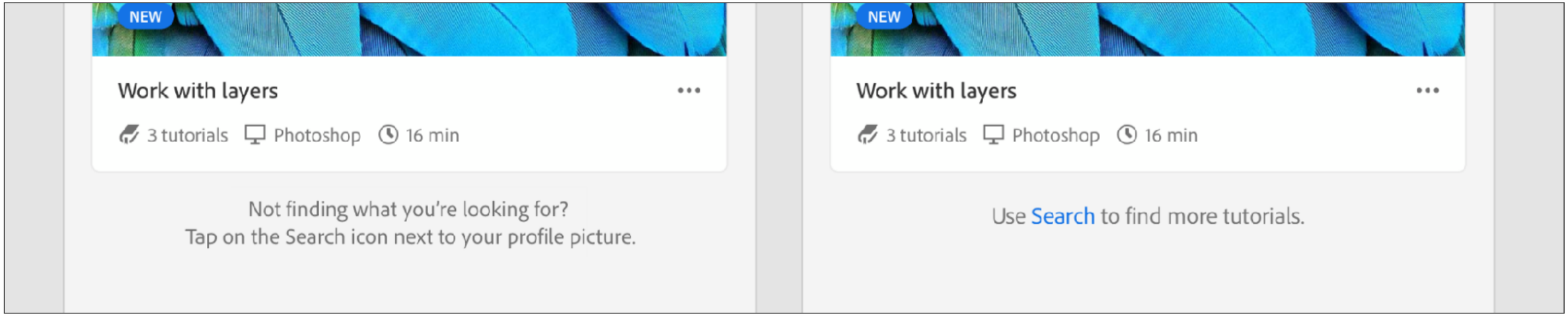

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Figure out if people can **use the words** you've written.

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Sarah Winters, author of *Content Design*, points out that **if the words you write for something aren't accessible to everyone**, you've made a design choice that prevents people from using that thing.

Source: https://www.confabevents.com/videos/accessibility-is-usability

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*In a study with **821 participants**, customer service behavior was found to be one of the **four most important** usability factors out of **76 possibilities**.*

> *"Customer Service Behavior included items that were related to the friendliness and politeness of the system, its speaking pace, and its use of familiar terms."*

Melanie Polkosky, PhD
Toward a Social-Cognitive Psychology of Speech Technology: Affective Responses to Speech-Based e-Service

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/33994535_Toward_a_social-cognitive_psychology_of_speech_technology_electronic_resource_affective_responses_to_speech-based_e-service

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Human communication is the most important gift we have, whether it's through speech or writing. I really do think that human beings are worth fighting for, especially as technology overtakes more and more of what it means to be human.

Melanie Polkosky, PhD
Author, Uncovering Truffles: The Scarcity and Value of Women in STEM

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Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

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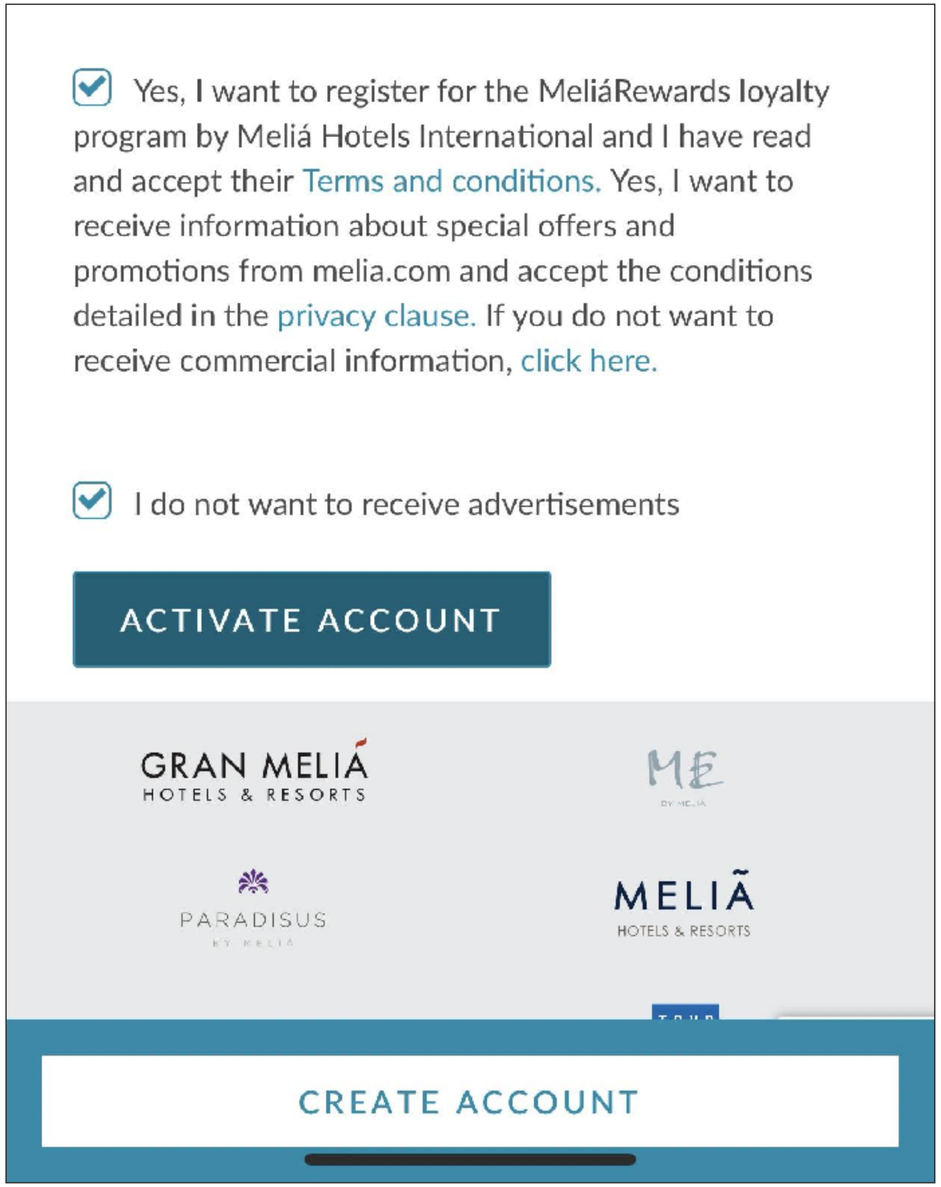

Do what users want

The team responsible for this reservation system is using writing and design to force people into the loyalty program and email lists when they're just trying to book a room.

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Sign up

Pinterest may contain links to third party websites, advertisers, services, special offers, or other events or activities that are not owned or controlled by Pinterest. We don't endorse or assume any responsibility for any such third party sites, information, materials, products, or services. If you access any third party website, service, or content from Pinterest, you do so at your own risk and you agree that Pinterest has no liability arising from your use of or access to any third party website, service, or content.

More simply put

Pinterest has links to content off of Pinterest. Most of that stuff is awesome, but we're not responsible when it's not.

Explain yourself

Creating legal agreements that use plain language so people can actually understand what they're agreeing to? Very useful.

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Writers need to understand a **product's purpose** and their **users' needs** to create useful experiences.

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I feel like I always need the full context of what I'm solving for, so it's best for my work when I'm able to be in environments where I can get it. If you're joining a project at the very end and there's low tolerance for questions, it's a sign your role as writer hasn't been well positioned or isn't well understood.

Katie Lower
Designer and Writer

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Your writing should be....

1. Usable

2. Useful

3. Responsible

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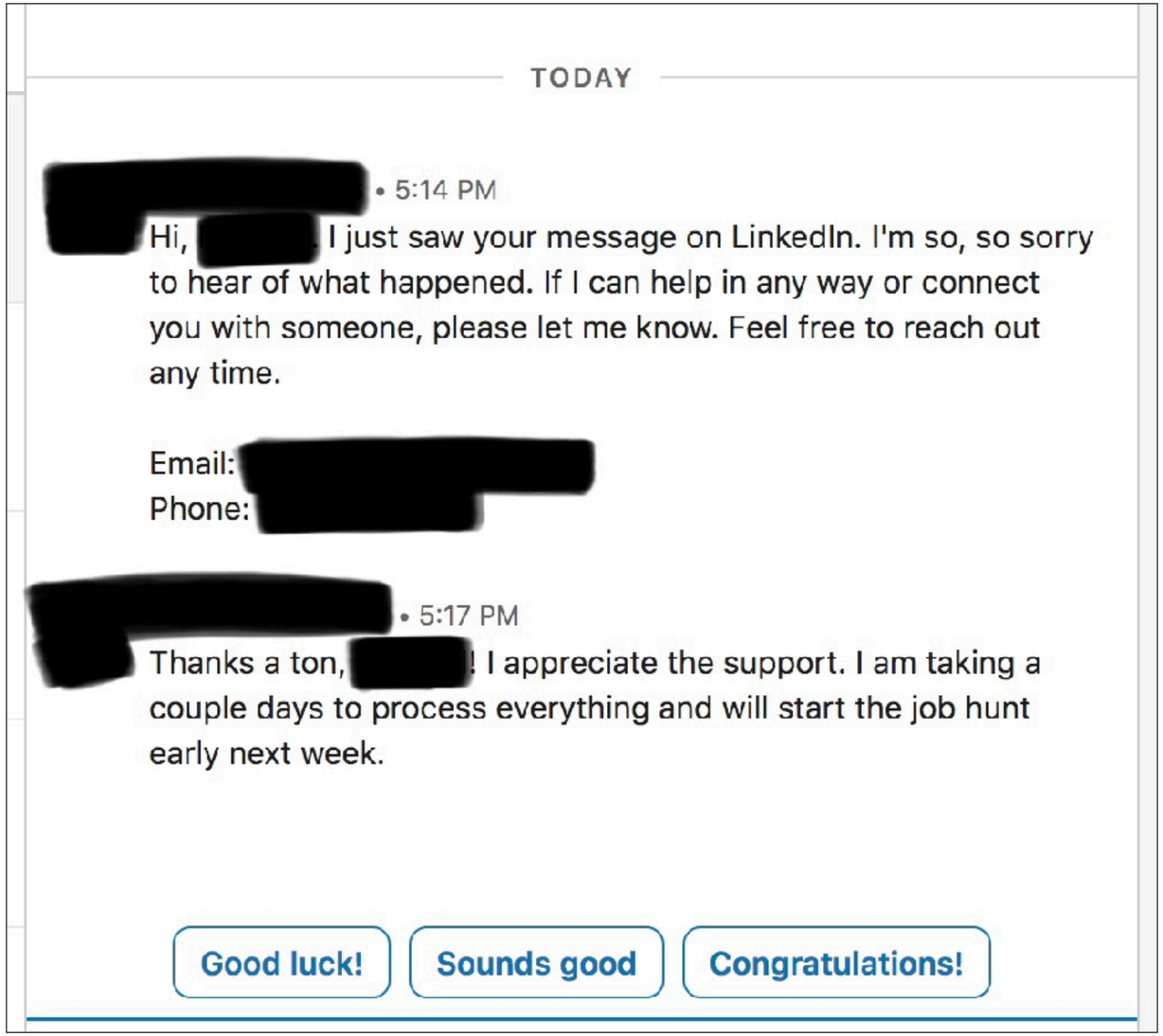

Harmless?

An accidental tap could make you seem like a complete jerk to someone who just lost their job.

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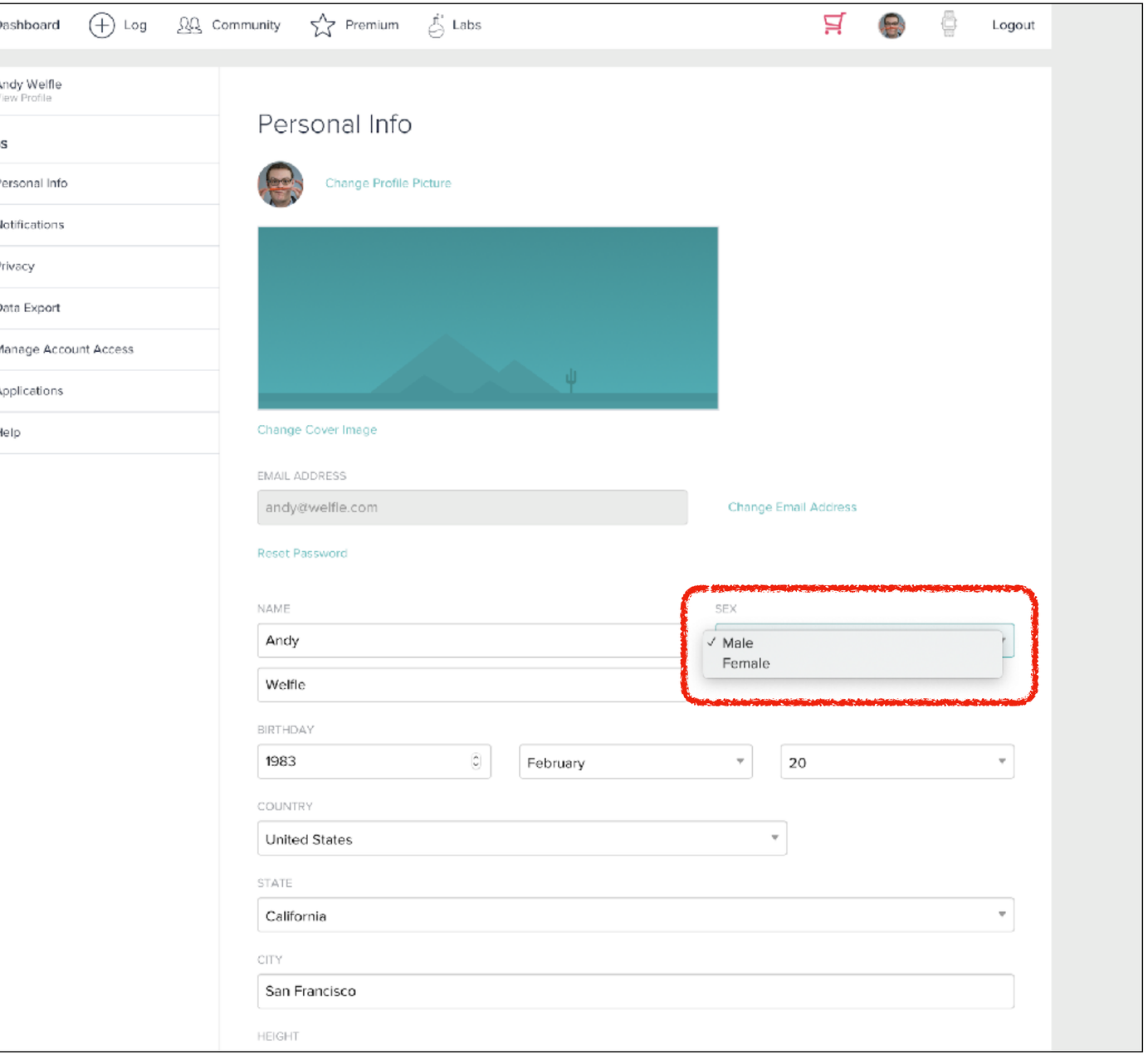

Easy choice?

For someone like me, this is an easy, quick choice.

But think about the experience a trans or non-binary person might have.

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If they were thinking about inclusivity, they'd understand that some questions don't have easy answers. By explaining what they want to know and why, it not only helps people on the margins like me, but anyone who may not be easily categorized—and gets them even better-quality information to act on. It's a win-win for the user and for the company.

Ada Powers
UX Designer,
Community Activist

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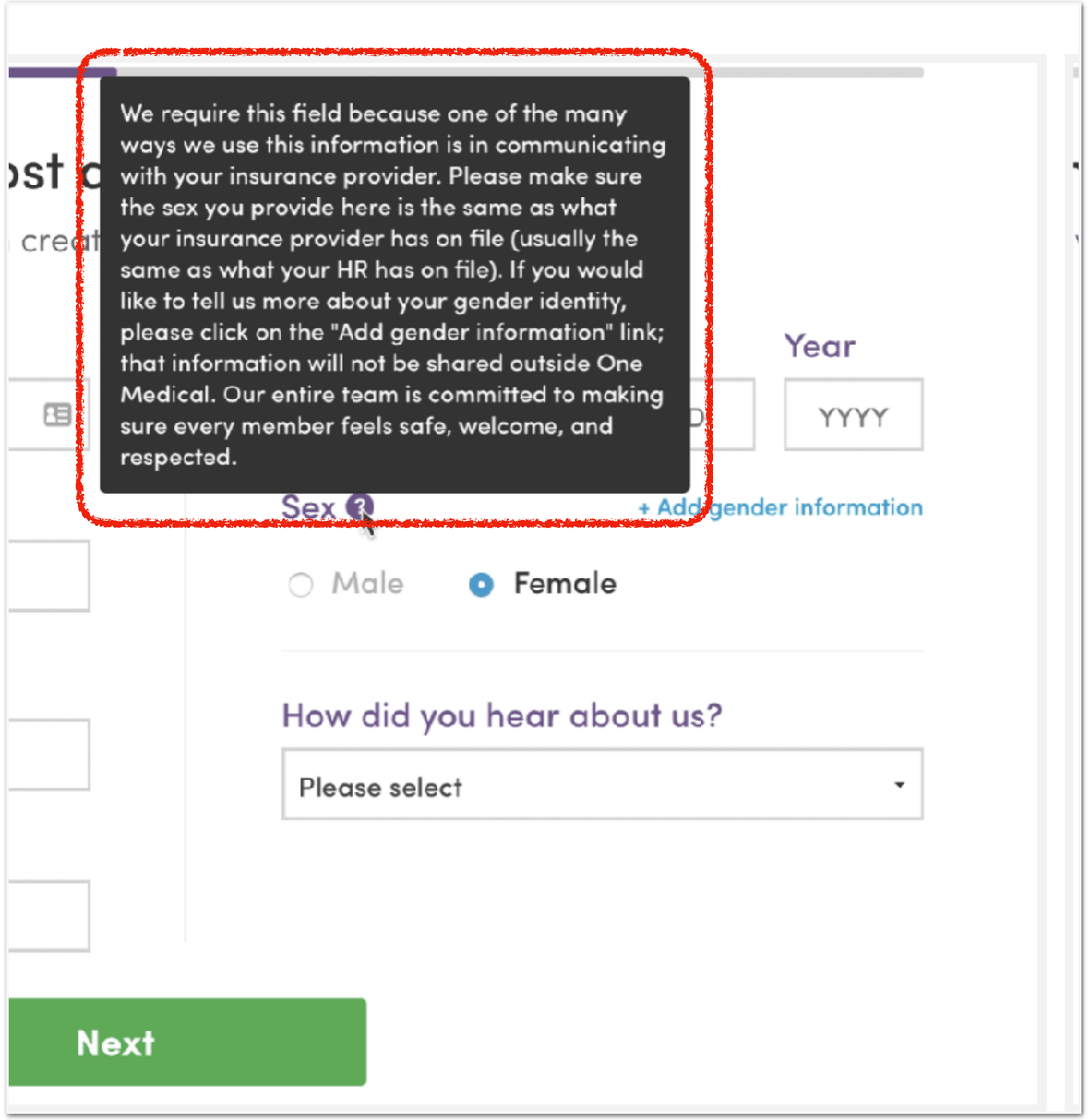

Give context

If you're asking for this kind of information, tell users why you're asking.

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We know that words can really hurt people or help them in their personal lives. We can say really reassuring words to people, and it has this huge impact, and we can say hurtful words, and it can have a years-long impact, but we don't really treat the words we write in interfaces that way.

Natalie Yee
UX Designer

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Think about a **"News Feed"**.

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News is the feedback mechanism of our society; we vote based on the things we learn in the news. When we take a concept like that and we subvert it for commercial use, that's something that should give you pause.

Jorge Arango
Author, Living in Information

Books are available at writingisdesigning.com

Sign up for our newsletter if you'd like to stay in touch!

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Thanks!

Time for some Q&A

All right. So, it is 2:00 Eastern time. This is Mara Goldberg from the Digitalgov team. The session is being recorded. Link for live captioning is included in the chat. As a reminder, all attendees will be muted. You are encouraged to ask questions for the panelists in the separate Q&A box. We have the chat, but if you have a question specifically for the panelists today, please write it in the separate box you will see on your resume at. Questions will be answered toward the end of the event toward the Q&A portion. Feel free to provide comments, your name and agency should be written in the chat box. As always, with these webinars, be sure to select all panelists and attendees because the default option is to just panelists. With that, I will turn it over to Katherine Spivey for a brief introduction.

Thank you so much. We are looking forward to this so much. Andy Welfle on using words to build better digital experiences because we all need help with that. I heard Andy talk at confab . I just realized he was a person who had a lot to say for all of us. I managed to snag him. Let me give you his bio. When Andy was eight, he wanted to be a poet and a paleontologist. 30 years later, he is neither, but he uses those skills in his day job as the content design manager at an American computer software company managing to write under huge constraint and uncovers artifacts from big software interfaces. That sounds like paleontology to me. When he is not working, he is creating podcasts and designed around one of his favorite topics, wooden pencils. If you are interested in wooden pencils, please put that in the chat. Andy, Andy , please.

Thank you, Katherine, thank you very much. I am a big fan of wooden pencils. I was telling people earlier one of the last things I did before everything shutdown was come to the D.C. area and attend the Baltimore- D.C. pen show. My friend and podcast cohost and I did our live show and it was so much fun. We even, afterwards got matching pencil tattoos, which is not the topic of this talk. It is something I think is really fun. I will share my screen here. As you can see, pencils carried through as a design element on our cover. This is what this comes from. Hello, everyone. I am Andy. I am the co-author of writing is designing:words in the experience, along with Michael Metz, who sadly was not able to join us today. This is published by Rosenfeld media and came out last year. I am the content strategy manager at Adobe design coming to you from San Francisco. I use he/him/his pronouns. We will talk about some big ideas and some of the big topics from the book . We will talk about how writing is a form of designing and digging in a little bit to what that means. I should point out this is a talk that is mainly geared toward UX professionals, people designing software interfaces into our writing or designing on those kinds of teams. I am hoping there are still some things that people who are not in that line 04 can get of benefit. Cool. One thing I like to talk about from the start, just to show how important words are to digital experiences, is to show a few screens from a digital app. This is from DoorDash, which, if you are familiar with it, is a food delivery app. If you're not familiar with it, there is 1 million out there like it. In the last few years, we have seen so many of these kinds of apps come out. Something I would like to do to show how important words are is just take them out. This is something that a designer named [Indiscernible] did on a blog post years ago to just show how completely unusable an app can be without the words. In this case, it is so true. You can see on the screen there is a cute little illustration, maybe it shows you are in front of a store and looking at your phone. It is hard to tell what else is on the screen. The second screen you can see here, it kind of looks like a list. There is a rating and icons at the bottom but you really

can't tell what it is you are looking at. On the last screen, you can see some sort of map. You can see there is a pin on the map but you don't know where that is or where it is going. You see some options but there is a big, black button at the bottom but that is about all. This app is really not usable without the words. One might argue with the information structure, it is usable without the design, without the color but not without the words.

This is something, it is something I like to show off here. When we talk about how writing is designing, we are talking about how writing and designing need to team up in your brain and work together when you're trying to find the right words. What do I mean by that? This comes from Nicole Fenton, the co-author of a book called nicely said. I believe she has even worked for the U.S. government in the past. She is hugely influential to our work and to the book. She wrote this blog post in 2014. I won't read the whole thing, just the highlighted parts. I don't write fiction or short stories. Use language to solve problems, whether that is behind-the-scenes or in the product itself. I use words as material. That is kind of the thesis of this whole work, right? Design is about solving problems for users. We use language to solve problems. Therefore, you know, we are designing here. [Indiscernible] what do I mean by that in practice? This is something that happens to me a lot in my role. That is as a designer or project manager that will come up to me and say, Andy, I have this button. It completes our flow . Which should that button say? I am like, okay. Which at that button say? The writer side of my brain might ask, what are the right words for this button? Is it done, continue, finish, complete? What makes the most sense for this completion of the flow? I am seeing some people in the chat say the audio went out. Can people still hear me mostly? I just want to make sure. Okay. Perfect. I will continue. Okay. That is what the writing side of my brain asked. The designing side of my brain has questions. What are the entry and exit points for this button? How do I get to this experience and what happens when I push the button? What action he merely follows pressing it? Are we even using the right messaging? Should it be a button? Should be a dialogue where a little pop up signature? Should be something else? What is the inverse action of this button? If it is follow, should be unfollow. If it is a sign, should it be unassigned? How does that localize? How does a translator localize? When we translate our product into 100 different languages, does this make sense or is it a very American centered thing. How does it fit in with our larger strategy? Do we have a button that says, got it, dude. Does that fit with the rest of the way we talk in other aspects? This is all to say there are a lot of questions and a lot of thoughts that go into this. We really can't see that button without the rest of the context around it. We really have to understand what it is completing. It has to be there with other buttons that might exist. So, if writing is about fitting words together and design is about solving problems for your users, we design with words. That is kind of the big, main topic here.

If any of you are U.S. professionals, you're probably familiar with something like this. This is a heavily adopted abstract from Jesse James Garrett, the writer of a book about UX design. One of the big ideas from that is that UX happens in layer from a base abstract layer all the way to a very concrete surface layer. Very broadly, you have a strategy layer, you have a scoping layer. You think about, Jesse had skeleton and structure is two layers. I will conflate the system for simple vacation. There is the surface layer, the actual weight of the thing and the way it looks, feels and sounds. At Adobe and many other software companies, many other organizations like

this, there are deliverables for visual designers and there are deliverables for content designers and along the way, when you are thinking about the strategy of the thing you are building, the designers are thinking about how something might behave, look and feel. We are thinking about the content strategy, how to create, plan and manage content across the plot up. Your thinking a lot, hopefully we are working together when we are thinking about timelines, deliverables, program apps and things like that. When we are working through the system with the rules of something, designers or thinking about component documentation, they are thinking about patterns. Large, you know, sets of buttons and dialogues and sliders and setting systems, all that stuff. Content designers are thinking about style based stuff, grammar and mechanics. We are thinking about content patterns. We are thinking about terminology, things like that. And then you have that surface layer, the stuff that the user is actually interacting with. A designer is thinking about what we call the screens, the actual mockups, the components, the workflows, prototyping, things like that. The UX writer is thinking about the, the content designers thinking about UX, copy, buttons and errors and things like that. We work together every step along the way, at least we should be.

So if words are such an important part of design, what do we think about design in terms of visual tools a lot? You know, designers, they're always talking about using [Indiscernible] or sketch or XT. Those are design tools. When you are designing an interface for something like this, this is a Google Home pot, like a conversational interface, which of those do you use to design the interface? You can you sketch or Figma but you can design a perfectly great experience using that. This is something that my co-author often likes to say, essentially don't mistake making a delivery with making a difference. This is huge. You can get caught up in your systems and your tools, but how does it affect the user? How does it affect the person actually using the tech you are designing.

We have three big rules from the book we tried to stick to, in order to make sure you are writing something good. This is not something we developed ourselves. We adopted this, it comes from all over the place, but most recently, our friend and mentor Christy [Indiscernible], who runs [Indiscernible] in the conference that Catherine was talking about earlier. She talks a lot about in her book about how content should try to mediate things. [Indiscernible - low volume] let me get into some specifics. First, your writing should be usable. This is pretty important. What do I mean by that? I just mean it should help users do stuff. This is a really real example from I-Team's work at Adobe. If anybody used Adobe products, you know there is a mobile app for the creative cloud, where you can go and you can, you know, download apps, you can look up tutorials, you can do all sorts of stuff. If you are looking at a list of tutorials, let's say for Photoshop, at the bottom of that list, you might see a text string that reads, not finding what you're looking for? Tap on the search icon next to your profile picture. It is very long and it is telling, it is not showing. It is telling you where the search icon is in order to perform a search. That is useful. But, we shortened that and changed it to read, you can search to find more tutorials. We shortened it a lot and we harnessed the power of hyperlinks to make that search palpable to take you to the search experience. And actually, initiate that and show it rather than telling, which I think is really just a good example of making words more usable.

It is important to figure out if people can use the word you have written. You do that through usability testing. You do that through 80 testing, if it exists on the Internet. At least, that is what a lot of weather app companies do. Sarah Winters, formerly Sarah Richards, who I think would be a fantastic guest for this very program, wrote a book called content design. She runs content design and was pretty influential in the redesign of Gov.uk. She says if the word you write for someone or something art accessible to everyone, you've made a design choice that prevents people from using that thing. Obviously, I don't need to tell you that. You are the folks that you run plainlanguage.gov, you are part of this initiative . That is really important. Often times, people are prevented from using something. There is a psychologist, Dr. Melanie Paul Kautsky. She conducted a study about customer-service behavior. There were 821 participants. She found that the four most usability factors out of 76 possibilities, she found they were related to UX writing and the words associated with that experience. Customer-service behavior included items that related to the friendliness and the politeness of the system, the speaking pace and its user familiar terms. I think we have all used, may be some of us design IVR is, phone trees, that rely on a lot of these aspects to get people to complete what can be a very complicated flow. For you, I think you will all recognize those are really important parts as writers, those are things we often can directly control. She also said human communication is the most important if we have, whether it is through speech or writing. I really do think that human beings are worth fighting for, especially as technology overtakes more and more of what it means to be human. I think we have all used plenty of products that is trying to replicate talking to a human but sometimes it falls a little short.

Secondly, your writing should be useful as well as usable. That basically means you should try to do or understand what users want. This is an example my co-author found when he was trying to book a vacation for his family. It is a pretty horrendous opt in screen. In order to create an account, he had to accept two of these terms. I will just read the first one to you. I will just list of the things. Yes, I want to register for the [Indiscernible] loyalty program. I have read and accepted the terms and conditions, yes, I want to receive information about special offers and promotions and receive the details and accept the conditions in the privacy clause. If you do not want to receive the commercial information, click here. There's a second one, I do not want to receive advertisements, which goes directly against what the first one is saying. I am sure for anyone here who has ever worked to make something GDPR compliant, probably is familiar with something like this, you know some product managers are like, we needed to make this GDPR compliant, can we just lied in the checkmark for I do not want to receive advertisements on the mat? It gets really confusing. There is a lot you are agreeing to and not agreeing to and some of it in the same checkmark. Yeah, you are forcing people into the loyalty program or the email list when they are just trying to book a room. That is an example of writing that can be usable.

An example of a good, useful piece of writing if anybody is familiar with the Pinterest terms of service. If anybody has ever looked at that, there is an option, a block of text at the end of each section of those terms of service called, more simply put. They just more simply state the thing that the people are agreeing to within the terms of service. How can this be more useful? You

know the actual legal terms of itself could be written in plain language but, that is often another constraint to a barrier that Pinterest is working on it trying to get to. This is still light years ahead of so many terms of service out there.

Writers need to understand a part of's purpose and the users' needs in order to create a really useful experience. We interview someone named Katy lower, she is a designer and writer. And she said, I feel like I always need the full context of what I am solving for. It is best for my work when I am able to be in environments where I can get it. If you are joining a project at the very end and there is low tolerance for questions, it is assign your role as a writer hasn't been well-positioned or is a well understood. I think this is a sentiment I lot of writers who are on design teams can agree with. I know we are always advocating and always looking toward getting us to be included earlier and earlier in the design process, often with words and concepts that are more valuable. Needs to be changed rather than afterwards when things get hard coded and built into systems. It gets way harder to exchange a lot of that language. Finally, your writing should be responsible. This is pretty important. It is something I think resonates or, like, you know, we stress for that for a lot of people in the private sector. I think a lot of you in the public sector, in government, you get this already. This is something that is core and important to your work. This is an example from my co-author. He's on LinkedIn a friend from his was laid off of his job. Being the nice guy he is, he sent a message saying, I just saw your message on LinkedIn, I am so, so sorry to hear what happened. If I can help in anyway or connect you with someone, please let me know. Feel free to reach out any time. That person reached out, thanks a ton, Michael, I appreciate the support. I am taking a couple of days to process everything and will start the job an early next week. If you know LinkedIn, there are some canned responses you can get at the bottom. Sometimes they make sense and sometimes at the bottom they don't. In this case, you see good luck. It is short but it is different. Another one says sounds good and the other one says congratulations, which is completely inappropriate. Could make you sound like a jerk and just alienate you with somebody. While the triggering algorithm is often outside of the writer's control, it is within their writer's purview to say I am writing these canned messages and I really need to think about when and how this message could hurt someone or this language could cause harm or be used in an inappropriate way. Certainly, that happens a lot. Another thing, that is the case, I think a lot about this. We wrote about this in the book. The Fitbit profile screen, when you're go into Fitbit. Let's say you buy a Fitbit and you want to track your heart rate or your steps or your activity. You go in to fill out your personal info. You go through, you put in your name, your sex, your birthday, maybe you fill out some stuff, like a calorie burning model or the length of your strides. You are also filling out things like your location. For somebody like me, I am assist gender man. This is a quick and easy choice. Think about the experience for a trans person or a non-binary person and what they might have as an experience. Interviewed somebody for a book, aide powers, an activist and a UX designer Anna trans woman. I want to read you this quote that she gave us for this Fitbit experience. She said, I want to get the most out of my Fitbit so I went to understand where they are coming from. Normally, I would assume that they were awkwardly asking me about my gender and I would just answer female. They are also asking me for my height and weight. Maybe they are looking for biological information rather than demographic information. In that case, should I answer mail because of my chromosomes, or should I enter female because the sex hormone in my

body is estrogen. Gets even more complicated than that. If I answer female, do they assume I need period tracking. If I am assist woman, what if I don't have a uterus or one that doesn't function normally? Do they use it to assume hormonal levels for their calorie models? What about people with polycystic ovarian syndrome, which can cause relatively higher levels of testosterone in women? All of this is to say is that none of this is easy and simple, especially if you're trying to include as many users as possible. Here it says, they were thinking about inclusivity they'd understand that some questions don't have easy answers. [Indiscernible - low volume] anyone who may not be easily categorized, it gets them even better and more quality information to act on. If you're doing that, it is important to give context.

Just explain why you are asking for this kind of information. This is an example from one medical, AUS private healthcare provider. This is an extremely wordy example. When you are filling out your profile, you are choosing sex, this is giving you more information about why they are asking. Essentially, we require this field because of insurance providers and they require it. Than they give more information about why they asked for this information and how they will use it and even have a spot for someone to give more gender information. If there is something your doctor should know about that, you can fill that out. Another really fantastic UX designer we interview for the book, [Indiscernible], said that we know that words can really hurt people are help then in their personal lies. We can say really reassuring words to people and it has a huge impact and we can say hurtful words and it have a yearslong impact, but we don't really treat the words rewrite in interfaces that way.

Just to close, we really encourage readers of our book and people working on digital experiences to think about the content of a newsfeed. We are all familiar with the Facebook newsfeed but there also, you know, [Indiscernible] has a newsfeed and Adobe has a newsfeed. When you go to [Indiscernible], which is kind of like a creative sharing social network and portfolio app. You can see recent activity from your friends. The author of a book called living in information, writes a really, really good weekly newsletter with that same name. He talks about this. News is the feedback mechanism of our society. We vote the news. When we take the concept like that and we subverted for commercial use, that is something that should give you pause. This is, of course, something that mostly affects people in the private sector who are putting algorithmically ranked items and advertisements and sponsor posts next to more organic posts and it is just something to think about, something we should make sure we are considering when we are thinking about the information. That is it for the talk portion. Thank you so much. If you go to writingisdesigning.com, you can sign up for our newsletter. I will stop sharing. I am happy to answer some questions. Katherine, if you are talking, I cannot hear you.

Hello. Katherine, are you there? You are muted.

In the meantime, I do see some questions in the Q&A. I can read them out. There are just a few so far. I may not do as good of a job as Katherine, because she is the expert here . [Indiscernible - Multiple Speakers]

Is that Gabby?

Yes, it is. Katherine?

I am on. I had a brief moment of disconcerting, which always happens on webinars. You make one slight change and boom. One question was, will the slides be available afterwards. Yes, they will be. We will send them out with the recording , at least links to the page with the slider and the recording. We had one excellent question, which is, this is a comment instead of a question, but the button example that you gave resonates so much with me. She would like you to know that she really appreciates you using that example to demonstrate how we are designing using words. I am starting you with the best possible way of asking a question, which is giving you a compliment.

Thank you. That is definitely an example I think anybody who, you know, works on a design team, whether or not you are writer, probably gets. Which at this button say? I don't know. That is a really common example. I appreciate that.

We have another question, which is, can all of this, I don't know whether that means the slide or the presentation, can all of this be boiled down to asking to simplify, what do you want the user to understand and to do next?

Yeah. I think that is a really good way to put it. Sometimes in a very nonlinear experience, that question can be a lot more complicated. You know, maybe there are several things that a user needs to do next door needs to understand. Sometimes, maybe what the user needs to understand or do next is not what they think they need to do or understand next. Yeah, that is absolutely something that I think writers for audiences, UX writers and technical writers, which are very much the same thing, and journalists and, you know, people like that, I think we are all questioning, for sure.

We have one, another question, which is, how do you influence others to see that writers should get a seat at the table at the beginning of a product's design? How do you get the design team to see the value that words have for usability?

Gosh, that is the one million-dollar question. I started, when I started at Adobe about 4 1/2 years ago, I was the first content designer there. On the design team. It had been 30+ years and we didn't have a dedicated writer or writing team focused on the words within the experience, as I am sure many of you who use Adobe products can certainly realize. Some of that language is pretty bad. A lot of my job was actually doing UX writing in content design and showing that value but a lot of my job was trying to build influence for it. I have an hour long presentation I have given about how to influence a design team but basically, it boils down to, you know, show value and make sure, if you are given the opportunity to be on the design team or to comment start to show your work, make sure you are finding opportunities to show value [Indiscernible - low volume] and turning that into a little bit of a sales pitch for yourself, right? Evangelizing your

work and sometimes saying no and helping people realize and connect the dots on how writing is designing, which is kind of the thesis of the book. All of that, I think, is important. Really, just understanding for yourself how words and writing can fit into that design process you can talk to others about it. That is extreme T LDR for that but that is a super important topic. It is hard to do.

I want to go back to that later but I want to go to some more the questions that you have. They have disappeared as people ask more questions. What are your thoughts on legalese? Some legal speak technically follows under plain language but still doesn't make sense to the general public. I am a big proponent of making it understandable to the common person, who might not understand fancy lawyer talk, but I get some resistance across the field. Do you have any thoughts on how to address that?

Yeah. Another really good, really hard question. My experience is only working with lawyers in a professional manner and that is through in-house legal departments, people who are thinking about agreements and privacy statements and data sharing and stuff in the product. A lot of that is, honestly, comes down to building relationships, I think. One thing I tried to do when I am working with something, an experience with the legal component is, you know, meet the legal team who are working on it, get together, talk a little bit about what I do and what my job is and try to understand what they are trying to do and what their goal is. Sometimes, hopefully, most of the time, our goals are the same. We want to try to make people understand what it is they are agreeing to or what it is this app or whatever is asking them to do. Hopefully, those are in awe agreement. Sometimes, there are some deceptive patterns out there where people are agreeing and opting into stuff they are not understanding. Really, like understanding how legal language is not some sort of a Bible, you should have a dialogue and a back and forth with your legal team as an UX writer and try to make they are language plainer and simpler and also them making sure that your language is accurate and precise. I think it can be a give and take. Hopefully, it is not a battle. Hopefully you are working in tandem with each other. That is really mostly my experience with legal. I can totally understand how people might be resistant to that. Especially among other organizations, you want people to opt in and use stuff. That is the new thing with iOS. You can ask an app not to track is really interesting. They are just laying it out there. They are showing you, your app is collecting a lot of information about you and you should be in control, you should be able to opt in or out. They plainly say, you should be able to ask them not to track you. A lot of people are opting in to not tracking. Therefore, it is like, you know, throwing a lot of metrics and things that will throw you into chaos, which is an important conversation they need to be having. That was probably the best second answer to that question just because there is a lot of inexperience with legalese.

One way or another, certainly.

Yeah, for sure.

Another question, I generally agree with the concept of show rather than tell. It runs contrary to the concept of teach a man to fish versus a fish given to a man. Do you ever worry we run the risk of shortcutting to the point of prohibiting people from learning to use the tools on their own?

Yeah, that is a great question. I think this might be one of those areas where the way that a technical writer works and writes is sometimes different than the way a UX writer or someone writing words into the experience would write. I absolutely agree there is a learning component to it. Often, when you are writing technical documentation or help center content or something like that, you have outcomes. The user should be able to, like, learn and understand this by the end. A lot of times, you can teach by showing instead of teach by telling, right? Sometimes, just getting people into an experience and getting them to sort of understand the structure of a system happens through repetition and it happens through interactive tours that happen from one experience to this experience. I actually think it is mostly just your tools for doing that. In the UX, you're probably working in tandem with a designer to make sure that, you know, the structure and the information now architectural is clear, understandable and learnable. Whereas, in technical documentation, you're often doing this to clearly structured language. I think, I mean, a lot of Adobe products, for example, kind of fail at this. If you are looking at Photoshop for this first time in your presented with this big, scary, blank canvas and to Lars on the side and you don't know what you need to do first thing in order to accomplish your goals. One of the ways to bring people along on the journey is to slowly introduce a lot of the core tools to them. The first couple times you are launching the app, perhaps you are showing them how to draw shapes and how to edit photos and how to change your campus. By the time they develop proficiency, you are teaching them more. Over and over, usability studies have shown the more interactive this is, the more people are trying to step out on their own and retain it in the product. I think there is so many different approaches to this. That is often where sometimes UX writing in technical writing diverges, even though so much of it is the same and works the same.

Great. I have a question we developed before hand, based on some of your discussions. That is, how do you, as you say, sometimes writers have a hard time getting in on initial meetings. Your had some very good advice on that problem, invite yourself and ask good questions. Can you discuss how that works?

This is something I think actually my co-author, Michael Metts, is really good at. In the book, let me grab it here, we wrote this book together, but there are certain chapters that we kind of authored kind of initially and then we went back through and made sure we were lending our voices to it but he actually has some really good advice on inviting yourself to meetings. I will just cover a little bit of that. If anybody has a copy of this book, go to page 146 for a lot of this. He talks about ways you can invite yourself into meetings and conversations. He says, this is challenging and a bit scary for anyone, but it is especially difficult for introverts. As hard as it is, it will be harder for you to go through the emotional journey of wanting to be invited and finding out later you were not invited over and over again. Some tactics for getting invited, they are listed here, you might say, it sounds like you are making important decisions. Can you just add me so I can listen in? That is a good way to deal with big Ibos big he goes and you are the new guy. There is the ID of the productivity enabler. That is especially, my organization, that is a big one. You might say something like, it seems like that topic relates to what I am working on now. Can you add me to that meeting? I would hate to have any changes, plate and block the dev

team. That is a compelling argument. There is also the helping hand. Shannon says, I missed the name of the book he is reading from. This is, writing is designing. The helping hand, you might say, I know what workshop activity we can do to get this aligned. People love workshops. People like interactive activities. Does that help? Does that make sense?

It does. I have another question. All that you said about writing and design, does that apply to newsletters, blogs and such?

Yeah. I think we had kind of specifically UX text in mind when we were writing this, writing for interfaces and user experiences, but absolutely running text light newsletters and blogs. I think there are a lot of big principles here that are useful for that. Certainly, a lot of those principles, we did not develop them. We are taking principles from content design, we are taking principles from journalism and just trying to apply them to that. For sure, many of you are familiar with the inverted pyramid where you structure the most important information on the top and, you know, you whittle it down to less important details. If you need to cut or trim it or cut it off, you are trimming the least important stuff out. I think a lot of that is really relevant to this work. Another book that I referenced earlier, but I will just advocate for is this book called content design. It is written by Sarah Richards, who now goes by Sarah Winters. It is really reliable and really well structured and a superfast read. It takes its own advice and designs the information in this book in the useful and scalable way. Honestly, it is hugely influential on a work. It is really, really good.

Great. Do you know of research beside your book that supports writer involvement earlier in the process? I know that is a hard thing for us sometimes.

I can think of a lot of books and presentations and people who talk about that. Scott [Indiscernible], did Scott talk to this group before?

He spoke at our summit last year.

That's right. That is what I thought. Scott is a friend of mine. He wrote a book called, writing for designers. We like to joke. His book is for designers about writing in our book is for writers about designing. We are approaching the same problem from different angles.

You are each other's evil twin.

Yes, that is a good way to put it. His book has a lot in there about why writing is important early on. One of the most compelling talks I have heard about this is by someone named Steph hey. I believe she is the head of design at Capital One, at least she was in the past. If I were to get this tattooed on my forehead, it could not be more important but basically, she says words of the lowest cost, lowest risk ways to design. I think that is a really good way to put it. As we have talked about, words are really accessible. Words are a really good way to transmit information, right? It is the language code. If you think about, like, early prototypes, when you're just planning something out, a big piece of it, a big important thing you will do at the beginning is developing your map structure or developing kind of your informational architecture and you can do that

with words. You can do it with pixels, if you want, but you can do it in an ordered list. When you are working through the early explanations of something and you start thinking about big sections, like an about us page and a contact us page and a retail locator page and all the stuff and you are doing that with words, you can change stuff around and you can play with the language and think about the concepts and actions. Once that starts to get designed and committed to pixels and built into an app and gets coded, it is expensive and hard to change that later. Words, it seems like it is something easy to change, but think about how sometimes executives get caught on certain words, words you have written you did not want to appear and a final draft or into the final product and they get built into the business. That is why I think a writer or someone strategically thinking about these were should be involved earlier, for sure. Also, the very first content strategy book I ever read, I was working at a social media strategist firm, I read a really good book called the elements of content strategy. The author did a lot of really good work, I think working with government organizations on COVID tracking the last couple of years.

I will have to look for it.

She is fantastic. She wrote this book. It is free now. She talks about that, too, having word oriented people involved in early design decisions. Those are other really good resources, I think, for that idea.

Great. One question, how do you address situations in which others assume they know how to write because they are literate? There might be a little Snark in that question.

Yeah. Real quick, somebody, somebody asked me to repeat the name of the book. Thank you, Ryan, for posting the link to it. Yeah, that is a good question. I mean, a lot of people can write but not a lot of people can write strategically for audiences. A lot of people can write really well they write in a way that, you know, is very much like their speaking voice and they write to a certain style and that is just how they operate. Certainly, writing for a particular set of audiences or writing for users is definitely a special skill. A lot of it, I think, you are writing but sort of with a hesitate to use this word but design thinking methodology. You are writing to, like with a highly collaborative way, you are writing based, hopefully, on research insights. You are writing in ways that can be tested. You are reiterating on that writing. It is designing, but writing. That is what I think a lot of people don't do or can do. I get a lot of people who were trying to get into the field and they show me my poor full their portfolio and it might have an article they wrote for a magazine and some of their questions are, who is the audience you are writing for? How did that affect the decisions you made when writing this article? Why did you decide to structure it this way? What are some of the strengths and the editing decisions you made? A lot of people are like, I don't know, I just wrote some words down. That is kind of the stuff we want to avoid, that is what kind of things I don't think make a good UX writer. People who can rationalize with they have ridden and point to structural decisions, based on what they know about their audience or their readers, that is a hard kind of writing, the kind of thing I think really shows a good content designer, UX writer, content strata list strategist, whatever.

Which comes first, the words of the graphic design?

[Laughter]

Yeah.

I was thinking to myself, I think it is worse. I know graphic designers may not. It may just be another manifestation, so to speak, but --

If your organization is very heavy on visual design, it is impossible to include writers as early as coming first. At the same time, honestly, I think a lot of these things should happen together. It should be developed out in fidelity and unison. Letter that includes collaboration. There is this really good information out there about peer writing. Pair writing. Sometimes writing as a designer is really useful and thinking about designing is you are thinking about words, that is something that happens in unison. Sometimes your whiteboarding. Maybe you are using one of the whiteboarding apps. I think the more that it can happen and, I should specify this by saying this is for digital experiences. I think the more you are developing these things collaboratively and figuratively, the better.

I have another question for you, which is, you mentioned building communities of support. Plan is that community for us. Some people are developing communities at their own agencies. How did you build your writing community and what are your lessons learned?

Yeah.

You can take a moment for that.

Yeah. So, Adobe is a very large corporation. It is pretty old. When I started, I realized there was going to being a lot of people who probably do UX writing in one capacity or another but maybe that is not their primary job a lot of the times we meet them in meetings, sometimes people reach out, I literally just searched our company directory for content before just to see who is out there to reach out to them. For us, one thing that has been really useful is that we started Slack groups. We use lack for internal communication. We have one that is our core team, our central practice and the other one is the UX writers room. That includes sometimes marketing copywriters, it includes people who are writing technical documentation but also sometimes they are riding user experience words. There are designers who think a lot about words. There are other people and we just use that as a place to, probably much like plain language, we share interest in resources and we help each other out. I might be my, I have a question about, you know, this language. I am trying to accomplish this or get across this message, what do you think? We will try to give each other critique and help each other out. We will coronate for consistency efforts, things like that. Then we have an even larger group beyond the UX writers room, people here to ask us questions and we can answer but we can also , people in that group will answer, as well. One of the things we were planning before COVID shutdown

in-person events was just having kind of like your plain language summit. We wanted to have a day's activity where we talked about UX writing, best practices and our approach to voice and tone and writing for clarity and events, as well. It is very organic and pretty messy. It has been really, really useful. Especially at Adobe where we have really, deep silos, this is a way to bust through those silos and get people talking to each other. We have used that to have other things besides coordinating writing, too. If you can believe it, we have translation localization teams at different parts of the company in different parts of the world. Sometimes they speak to each other. I literally had a meeting to introduce this localization person in India to this localization person in Paris in order to coordinate things they were working on and I was just a go-between person.

One of the last questions is, you know, you were talking about how you should show your work, how writers should show their work. I would like to know exactly what you mean about that. Even when asked not to, I use suggested edits or track changes on documents, simply because I want people to know what changes I have made. I don't want them to just say, I see there are slightly different arrangement of words and I saw before. You know, what do you mean by showing your work?

Yeah. That is really important, especially in situations where you are trying to get involved earlier or trying to build into your team or get more people on board with what you are doing. A lot of that is showing rationale or showing explanations or showing frameworks you might have used. A big one that Adobe has that is really helpful, we have a framework for how we change, how we use tone. Not tone of voice but different tones of language to accomplish goals. Sometimes you want to speak in a motivational way. Sometimes you want to speak in a supportive way. We like to show this is and not an arbitrary decision we are making when we are writing. We had actual consistent reasons going into this. Often when we deliver text strings or deliver the UX writing, I will include a document that has a link to our design system and how we use tone and maybe some explanations and even some reasons why we didn't go with that . [Indiscernible - low volume] this is how we started with something that was really long and didn't fit into something that is a lot shorter and more concise. They can see it is not just me sitting down and writing a bunch of words into a text editor to come up with that to show those are the decisions. Yeah, that is why we do it. Maybe we will get to a point where it is not important to show that but I very much think it will always be at least kind of important. Especially with executives at Adobe, they think this is an easy, arbitrary decision, they feel okay about changing it.

Yeah, as you say. Did you have any research to talk about or to support the UX writing? How do people, you know, what is the first step of explaining UX writing to an employer. When someone is a big company with no tech writer and the person wants to push for a proper UX writing in-house.

When you say research, I assume you're not talking about the usability research that our research team would do for certain experiences, like how people consume --

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Maybe that is the answer, maybe it is a usability research thing. Is there any information like that

available not in-house? I would assume that any company, any agency, when it does user research does not necessarily want that.

There are lots of good examples around when, especially researchers who are trying to build their practice or show what they thought about, there are a lot of researchers that will write publicly about that stuff. Generally, a lot of the specific work we do is based on the research those researchers are doing or sometimes what we do ourselves. There is some really good tools out there for writers and for content people to do their research. I am trying to think. There is a book called just enough research by Erika Hall, who is really great. Hers is more geared toward visual designers, but she herself is also a strategist. There are really good studies for very general readability purposes that is condensed and collected. Sarah Richards, who wrote content design, she and her agency also has this guide called the readability guidelines handbook. If you go to content design. London, you can get a copy of this. She has some really good sources she cites. In fact, when we make decisions, like making things more sentence case or effective link writing or web usability, readability, a lot of those are based on studies you can find. She has collected a lot of good ones.

I was just going to add, there is the other book [Indiscernible].

Really good sources.

I found [Indiscernible] to be revolutionary. I don't speak for any other federal government employee but I personally am so jealous of the work that she did. Consolidating all of those separate agencies.

She is a powerhouse.

She is. The book was, letting go of the words. The readability design guidelines.

Www.contentdesignLondon.com.

Yeah. If you go to www.content design. London, there is a link to that.

Technically, I wanted to check with you, Andy, technically we are scheduled until 3:30. I don't know if you are scheduled until 3:30, or if you have to run and do something else .

I can go for, yet, I can go until 3:30, I think. I don't have a meeting until 4:00 your time. We can keep going, if we can.

We are very fortunate. Would it be the sink and I am not entirely sure what that is referring to, for the commonly heard phrase of we don't need a writer because the article report has been peer-reviewed? I will put myself on mute so I can shriek with laughter about that.

Yeah.

Would it be the same for the commonly heard phrase? I have to say that the work that I do is probably pretty niche compared to what you might be talking about here. I have never encountered that situation. I think a lot of it is because I am steeped in Silicon Valley culture where there is a lot of aspects about this. What I hear about more often is we don't need a writer because we will just have the designer write it or we will just fill in the text field with words later. That is probably more commonly what I hear. The same thing. You can laugh at that, but I think that happens a lot. It is a holdout from latter years of what development and advertising where the design is kind of driving the show and they are leaving boxes for the writers later to fill in. That is not away, you are writing to be truly usable. If it is already locked down and you are waiting for words, sometimes you are applying content as a Band-Aid. You're looking for ways to explain things that could have been easily solved with design decisions or technical constraints.

I was just going to say personally, what I often find in the sorts of things I have been reviewing, at least within the last couple of years, is that often, I feel like I am doing less reviewing than discovering logic problems. It is often, you know, you are using three terms to refer to this. Pick one because I don't know what you were talking about. Or, you are talking about something you don't explain until the next chapter. You can't do that. I feel like the person is avoiding the rules but they are not style guide, they're not punctuation or even word choice, just the logic of this is not going to work for whoever reads this.

Yeah. I think that makes sense to a lot of interactive products, as well. Especially when you're writing onboarding experiences and when you are doing technical writing, your thinking a lot about introducing terminology and defining that and showing how it works. For sure, if you don't have your eye on the bigger picture, that can easily happen. Adobe is a company of many acquisitions. We have acquired a bunch of companies. In our product suite for analytics, we don't just to creative tools, we also have marketing tools. We have acquired a bunch of companies that use, for example, the term conversions in completely different ways. There is one that is about testing and another is about e-commerce and one is getting people through a customer journey. All of them mean something different. When we are trying to slap them together on one interface, there is a lot of what we are kind of calling terminology diplomacy that is happening. Somebody has to give up their term.

We are all writing that phrase down, content and that is a new skill. Content diplomat.

One of the things the team will start to take on, we just started learning about it now, usability terminology. That is the niche of a niche of a niche in how we write and how we think about words and terms. We will be launching a more formal terminology practice soon. We are hoping to do stuff like that and hoping to do some content governance and maintenance, creation, it will be a whole thing that we are going to have to sort of get people to buy in to. We are the experts of this and you have to listen to us. That is probably not the way we will say it but hopefully I can come back to you someday with more information on that.

Much more diplomatically, I am sure.

Hopefully.

We have a new AI community of practice, maybe, I am interested in the question, aside from committing to more real human help desk contacts, what advice can you offer for improving automated prompts, that beautiful example you had about the guy who had been laid off. I use those so seldom I have stopped seeing them.

[Laughter]

I'm just like, no. You never have the exact fancy word I want. I am not using this.

Yeah. That is one area where I wish Michael Metts, my co-author, was able to be here. In a previous life he was a designer. He worked at Allstate and on their AI chat bot. Most of the times, when I talk about AIs and conversational interfaces, it is me trying to talk teams out of using conversational interfaces because it is really easy to do wrong and really hard to do right. I have done some work with our AI machine learning team. Mostly, the way I have gotten involved with them is helping them work on principles.

Yes.

Some of it is just leading through exercises around ways this can go wrong and people can miss use this. A lot of times, executives and product teams, especially when they are trying to build a use case for something, try to be really optimistic and positive. Here is all the ways these can go right. Here are the ways it brings value to users. That is great and the way product should be thought about but some point along the way you have to think about the ways it can harm people in ways it can go wrong. Somebody needs to think about that. Think about, shoot, does anybody remember the Microsoft chap but?

"Flippy"?

No, that is a different subject. It was a machine learning one. It basically turned the chat bot into a racist toward her troll. It was Tae. Based on all the training of the model, the chat bot quickly became a racist troll. There was a lot of that on Twitter and a lot of times, they will target things like that. If somebody at Microsoft was thinking about ways this could go wrong, that would have come out a lot sooner. Anyhow, working with teams on principles and one big, sort of big picture content rules, I think, is important. That is a really big way you can make an impact really early. Honestly, just following up and making sure we are sticking with those principles and rules is important.

Governance is the hard part, of course. To Cindy's point, her question is, what considerations do you give for other people of other languages and cultures? How does that impact your design? You were speaking to people in India and Paris. I thought, definitely a worldwide company.

Yeah. This is really interesting because we try to make sure our writing is internationalized at the beginning but it could be localized into other things, honestly, the biggest problem making sure the language is localized well is, working with others and having meetings and communicating. That seems bananas. Why should that affect the quality of translations. When I started at Adobe, there was hardly any throughput between the design team and the localization team because we were all in our very specific silos. Design would deliver designs to engineers, which would code it out, which would then send spreadsheets full of text strings to the localization team, who would translate it and get it back into the code and make it more dynamic. That meant sometimes there were translators who could not see screenshots. [Indiscernible - low volume] they just saw a spreadsheet full of strings and they did not have that context. When I started, one of the things I tried to do early was go to the localization managers and say, sometimes I will be writing for a new experience. There is context I want to give the translators and also context I want from translators. I want to know how this translates before we even do that work. She got this really panic stricken look on her face and said I don't have to do that. I don't think that can be done. Like many other companies, Adobe hires contractors up on contractors upon contractors and often doesn't know really who it is that is doing this. Since then, there have been a lot of really good advances. Our team is working on a project with another team about terminology management. [Indiscernible - low volume] and finding smarter ways to do that but, to me, a lot of the ways that you get, you know, better translations and get better localized experiences is by having working relationships with the localization team, understanding each other and talking to each other. Meanwhile, there are ways you can make sure your writing is ready for translation. You are not using, we will knock it out of the park. There is a great example we use in our workshops that we give about an elderly example for the a ridesharing app, Lyft. Since then, they have really improved their writing. Early on, as a writer, the first time you got a five star review from a driver, you would get this email that says, could you be anymore awesome? Your driver just gave you a five star rating. You know, as I read that, I am putting the emphasis, it is understood it is a friends reference, Chandler would say something like that to show it was rhetorical. You are as awesome as you can be. A coworker of mine who is not a native English speaker and just came to the U.S. a few months earlier got this email. I don't understand, if I got a perfect rating, why is this app asking me to be more awesome? That was a big wake-up moment. The actual way she interpreted it was the opposite of what the writer intended. That is because they assumed people had that context. That is, I think, really good example of a way to challenge our assumptions. Yeah. That is what I think. Have those meetings with your localization team and also make sure you are writing for localization from the start.

It is always very difficult, of course. Another question about policy. You must be used to that. If the goal is to get people to understand and comply, should complex or bureaucratic language, along with an explainer? I would, of course, say it should be replaced instead of left alone to be bureaucratic and all of those things.

Yeah.

What is your thinking on that?

Real quick, before we do that, somebody in the chat was talking about Adobe connect. I want to say I feel their pain. Adobe connect is no longer maintained by Adobe. There is a third party company that does that and they license the name from us. It makes me cringe. I don't know if we want to put our name anymore on that. I completely feel your pain about the difficulty of using Adobe connect. We don't use it at Adobe anymore, either. Going back to the question.

I am dying of curiosity. What do you use, if you feel you can reveal that?

We used to use something called blue jeans for our connection. Is anybody here familiar with that? It is an old zoom equivalent. I think the 21st of this month we are officially switching over to Microsoft Teams. Adobe has a partnership with Microsoft. That is definitely an adjustment. We are learning how to use teams. Yeah. That is what we are switching to. Going back to that question, can you read it for me one more time, Katherine?

The question about policy? If the government policy, specific for us? If the goal is to get people to specifically comply, should bureaucratic language come with an explainer? What I had said was, it should, of course, be rephrased entirely, but what is your thought on that policy language? How do you deal with that?

Yes. Yeah. I should disclose that I do not write policy. I have enormous respect for people who do. With that being said, it is a lot like documentation. Technical documentation or legal experiences where you are opting in or out or you agree to something. I absolutely agreed that the language itself should be easy to understand and in plain language. However, I know that for many people, that is a massive constraint and undertaking and something that will take so much time and culture changing and systemic change. If there is anyway, yeah, you can advocate for doing that, like Pinterest's terms of service that we showed you earlier where there is something more simply put, the better. I convinced, when I worked at a small agency, I worked with my boss, who would write proposals responding to RFPs that would have a more simply put section. We would talk about these contracts, here is what we are talking about. Here is what these terms mean. That was really fun to do. He was on board with it. I did not have to convince a lot of people. Policy people probably would. Honestly, the trouble is, people who are incentivized to make policy and legalese that people don't understand. I really hesitate to name names in this case, but like --

Thank you.

I will talk about some organizations. I used to work at Facebook. There are so many opt ins and opt out floors, they want to make sure people don't read them. That is something that is structural and happens from the top. There are legislative bodies in the world who have information written in policy into law that they don't want people to understand and read. If you are trying to make it more easy to read or trying to make explainers that go along with it,

sometimes you are fighting the system. You are fighting incentives and people making profits and people who don't want people to understand that. You understand that, I am sure on this call way better than I do. That is absolutely something for knowledge.

What are your recommendations of questions that are useful in understanding the user experience?

What are recommendations of questions that are useful in understanding the user experience?

I will also, in thinking about that, say we do have a user experience community in practice, which you can get to and registration just opened today for the user experience summit.

Just enough research, the book by Erika Hall, which I am just pulling books off my shelf left and right. I have it right here. It is a bright orange book.

That is our favorite way of communicating.

She has a whole chapter in there about asking user questions, asking questions to the user. Asking questions that are leading questions and getting users to walk through their experience see you can glean information out of it. I would absolutely read that. What I try to do, I am really bad about asking leading questions. I try really hard, when there is a usability session or am talking to a user, say things like, what does this word mean to you? What you think about this word? Instead, ask them to describe what will happen upon taking action on something. If you tap that button, what do you think it will do? You get a lot of very open-ended information, but what I listen for his natural language. How do people describe that thing I am doing and describe their experience because maybe they are thinking about this in a way I am not. That is for asking open-ended questions in understanding the model based on that. Sometimes, in certain settings, I think this is really useful, leaving a pregnant pause for people to fill in is very useful. It is like a police interrogation. Hopefully I Molis I am less oppositional. That is really useful. Really, just like, things like, are you familiar with user stories? I don't know if you use this in your work. As a blank, I went to blank so that blank. Being able to sort of articulate between the team and fill in the lines based on data, user stories are just answers to questions. I think that is really useful. That is not exactly probably the asker was asking but hopefully that is useful.

There is also considerable interest in can you provide the URL or the blurb or the media link or whatever for your presentation on showing how writers can be embedded in a project? You can send it to us later, if that is easier. You don't have to do it right now.

Most recently I gave a talk this year. It was a small group discussion of this. As per that talk, they will hold onto it for conference attendees but eventually it will be released. The best thing I might suggest to you, I swear this is not me trying to do a shameless plug, if you go to my website, [Indiscernible], and if you click on speaking, there will be a series of links in there. You can add the past links and it should be available there. Most of the talks I have on there like this,

where I'm just giving big ideas for my book, but I will be filling that in with other talks and other information as we go. That hopefully can be useful. Also, if you subscribe to the newsletter, as we fill in these, as well and we send out the newsletters, I always have a section about stuff we are doing. I will make sure we provide links to that there, as well. Don't have anything I can really share with you now but I will eventually.

That is fantastic. I think we are at the closing, pretty much. We would like to express our incredible gratitude. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk.

It is my honor.

Thank you for keeping us glued to the microphone or the screen or whatever. We are hanging upon your every word. That is definitely where we are. I've never seen a group so engaged, both in the Q&A and the chat. The chat has been answering the questions and I believe it is to accumulate the promised booklist. What I will do is look at that, send it to you and say, to your knowledge, did we miss anything? If you think of anything else, you can just plug it in.

Yeah, honestly, you can go to LinkedIn or Twitter. I am there. I would love to connect with you and chat more.

There are plenty of pictures of pencils, by the way, if you follow him.

Anyone who wants to talk about pencils, I will go on all day about that.

Perhaps another day. Thank you so much. Yes, this chat has been recorded. We will be able to send out things. I know you wanted a transcript. We will get that to you in maybe a day or two.

No worries.

Thank you so much. Everyone, go into great work. Thank you so much, Andy. I am holding up a pencil to honor you.

Peace, everybody. You, too.

Thank you. Goodbye.

Please stand by for realtime captions.

Can you see it, Alex?

Sure can.

Excellent.

All right, Catherine, 1:59, if you want to kick us off at 2:00.

Okay, I will be staring at the timer. Good afternoon, welcome to today's webinar. As a reminder, this session is being recorded. A link for live captioning for today's event is included in the chat. As a reminder, too, all attendees will be muted. We encourage you to ask questions for the panelists by the Q&A box. Do not use chats. I would monitoring the Q&A box for questions, so Bethany, our speaker can answer those. Please do anything else in the chat. We will be forwarding and repeating questions toward the end of the event during the Q&A portion and feel free to provide comments and introduce yourself in the chat box. Be sure that you select chat to all panelists and attendees as the default option is to chat to only the panelists. You really do have to make sure you are communicating to the right place. Just a heads up, we will be -- The slides and the video will be available later. I don't have a definite time in mind right now. There are some things we have to do to make it accessible. Also, if anyone can volunteer to take notes for writeup or summary to go back to the list, please email me or alert me in the chat and I will pick that up. I appreciate your volunteering so much. What we have today is another -- We have a returning speaker, Bethany Blakey spoke at one of our previous summits and we were so pleased to welcome her back. She has worked in the federal government for over 20 years, and is currently the chief modernization strategist and Director of innovation adoption for GSA's technology transformation service centers of excellence. Bethany, over to you.

Thank you so much, Katherine. All right. Welcome, everyone to our storytelling session today. I'm going to focus on using templates to help you assemble stories that you can use, stories with purpose, that were simple in there may be a little misleading. We do want stories in the end to be simple. But I cannot lie, the process of getting there is not simple. Just like the design, it takes a lot of work to get to a good story that seems simple on the backend. That is what we are after today. You can see my parenthetical title here, storytelling for unnatural storytellers. That's really my angle on this and I will explain a little bit more about why I feel like that is actually the most apropos title for what we are going to talk about today. As Katherine said, please do use the chat feature . That is one of the benefits of doing this remotely. If we were all in a classroom together and you were whispering to a neighbor, it would be disruptive to other people around you and probably to me. Because we are in a remote environment, that chat feature is not disruptive at all. I encourage everyone as Alex said, introduce yourselves, tell us who you are, where you are from, your experience in plain language, in storytelling. As I'm talking, feel free to have conversations without me. You all have expertise in a variety of areas and we can learn from each other so I highly recommend lots of activity in the chat space. In addition to that, I will be using the chat space, asking you to use the chat space throughout to share your reactions and stories and answer questions. Get ready to type. And I don't seem to be -- There we go, now I'm able to advance my slide. Today what we will do is I would say this is workshop asked. A true workshop in my mind is learning some material, directly applying the material, getting feedback and what you produced, not really going to do that today. I'm going to give you a variety, lots of background you can use so as I reveal a variety of templates and models you can choose from when you were doing preparing a story, you will have a whole toolkit available to you, and be able to go and find other tools I'm not going to give you today and you will understand the background behind why they are important and how to use them. A little workshop like. I will cover a little bit about where I'm coming from, I have not even gotten to the storytelling business, what a story is and why it works and we will get into the heart of it which is what I am sure you're actually here, the ingredients of the story and how to assemble one. The objective today is really to achieve a working knowledge of story and story ingredients and story construction. It's really to underpin your use of story templates as you go forward in your work doing things on your own. Most of the templates I'm providing today are super simple. It may seem overly simplistic, but I've chosen ones I think works very well and things you could replicate on the back of a napkin in many cases. These are not story templates you need to lock away into a file someplace and access on a regular basis. These are things that once you lock them into your brain, you find the ones that work for you, you can whip out a blank sheet of paper and make it happen for yourself. I do encourage you if you have a blank paper or lined paper around you to grab that, you might want to do a little sketching, a dull journal book. You can create your own story journal books, at the ready to reuse. A whiteboard, sticky notes, any tools like that are really good for assembling your story elements. This is a sampler. I have a ton of material we could do in a four-part four-day series overtime so we are going to get a sampling today but I think I will give you some things that are very easily applicable in your day-to-day work. I will also say I sometimes call that workshop the strategic narrative workshop where story element is a part of it. Luckily, I can save with this audience, words matter. We have a lot of wards out there to describe different things in different ways and I do think they mean different things. There's a quote from an author, Robert McKeen, all stories are narratives. Not all narratives are stories. Part of what we will talk about today or I will talk about today is what makes a story distinct from a narrative. I'm sure there are a lot of experts out there that will say that's not the right definition and I'm not an expert in that space to judge whose definition is right. Today, if you will just come along with me and say all stories are narratives, but not all narratives are stories, there is some specific elements that make a story a story that distinguish it from narrative, one is not better than another but knowing when to use what is actually the important part that I hope you all come away with today. All right. Where am I coming from? Centers of excellence in GSA poor technology transformation services. The centers of excellence, we are the new kid on the block in the technology transformation services only established about three and half years ago. You can see, you know, it's tech, we do infrastructure optimization and cloud adoption. We do data analytics. Data and analytics, we do artificial intelligence, we have contacts in our work, those are the six official centers of the COE. I don't do any of the things, I'm not a technologist at all. There is no innovation, truly, there's no benefit to innovation without adoption. Me and my team focus on the human side and the team side and leadership side of innovation and how to actually bring not just the new technologies and the new tools into the workspace and how to use them, but also how to shift your mindset to get into a continuous innovation mode. Why? For me, personally, is because I come from a organizational performance background. That innovation is really an extension, kind of performance improvement on steroids. We all need to use organizational performance improvement and occasionally we need something a little deeper than I would say is in the innovation space. What we are doing is addressing, assessing and addressing culture, conditions, capabilities in workspaces and teams to accelerate I.T. modernization and successfully drive change now when we have Pacific projects. In the future, creating those basic conditions, in a team or an organization so they can do innovation as they go forward. And so now, some of you are saying what does this have to do do with storytelling? Back in my organizational performance days, I decided it was going to be a really good and helpful thing for me to learn a lot about storytelling because we needed to do better about communicating around performance information. Strategic goals don't do anybody any good unless people are rallied around them. Sharing performance results, not actually useful, people understand what they are and how they can be applied to manage programs better. I did and entered into the storytelling realm in the context of organizational performance and communicating about all things planning and performance. As I learned more and more about it, I realize how helpful it would be in something that was frustrating me to, frankly, throughout my federal career, and that was how to convince people to do the things I absolutely positively knew was a good thing to do. I would assemble all of the data, my arguments were absolutely rational, I lay them out in a very logical manner and was well prepared. I had details, I had everything a decision-maker needed to make the decision I was recommending, and sometimes that worked very well. Sometimes it was a modified version but there were far too many times it did not work at all. And I thought what am I missing? I have all the data. Storytelling and learning the science behind storytelling taught me it's not really how people make decisions. Storytelling has helped me be more successful in all areas of my work. Understanding the human side of how people take in information and how they make decisions, and we will talk about that neuroscience and the third and final background piece as to why I'm doing the storytelling talk and why the focus on templates and why I developed these workshops is because I'm really bad at storytelling. I'm not good at it at all. And you were saying gosh, why on earth do they bring in someone who not an expert on storytelling talk about storytelling? It is precisely because of that. My audience today, although I am absolutely positive their folks in the audience who are expert storytellers and know a lot. Again, use the chat, jump on in and share your wisdom. I feel like what I've been able to do for folks because I'm not a natural storyteller is help give people the mechanics to take advantage of what is so good and useful about storytelling but do it in a way where you don't have to have a natural talent in it at all. Buckle up, we will focus on the mechanics and some of the background behind storytelling. I have told you my story or some of my background on why I care about storytelling and you are here today on this workshop webinar. Please jump in the chat and share why do you care about storytelling? Makes things real for people, thank you for that. It does bring people together, I love that. Getting people interested, making connections. I can see there are some folks here -- Oh yeah. Basic narrative and the way we do things in government sometimes can be boring. This brings interest, it is engaging. Yes. Less

bureaucratic. Great way to talk about success, absolutely. This is fantastic, I can't wait to see the transcript of all the things coming through in the chat. Thank you for the reminder to talk about page numbers. I actually cannot see it on this view. I have -- There we go. We are now moving onto slide number six. What is a story, and why storytelling works. Am I -- Just quick check for folks of someone, either Katherine or Ellis can jump on, are you seeing obstacles on my screen, or am I the only one seeing those? It's good? Thank you. I will ignore the obstacles in my way. In this section, we will talk about the two things that a story must do. These are your goals. These are your objectives. It's not a good story unless it's going to do these two things, and we are going to talk a little bit about the neuroscience of storytelling. First, a definition. Just pulled it from Oxford definitions, a story is an account of an imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment. I grade out the word entertainment because obviously, we are not here for entertainment, we are not here to entertain ourselves, we are not here to entertain others. I hope it is engaging and entertaining and interesting, but that is not the point. We are doing this for strategic purposes. We have an objective, we are telling stories for a reason. That is a theme I will definitely be weaving through out here but some of those keywords there, people and events. So, jumping you back into the chat, question for you before I reveal the answers I have today, this certainly can be others. What two things must a story do, and think in terms of your audience. What two things must a story do for your audience? Inform, engage, excellent. Bring empathy. Yes, got to be relevant, challenge, I love that. Has to resonate. Hold their attention, be understandable, yes. Are plain language experts, thank you for bringing in the understanding. Emotional connection, this is great. Sharing information, yeah. Making sure things are memorable. This is all fantastic. So, again, I think there are lots of answers to this question. I'm going to zoom in on two of them and these become your criteria. Your Goldstar state for storytelling. The two things a story must do, it must capture and hold your audiences attention. And, this is I think the more difficult part, it must transport us, or your audience, into the characters world. I think a lot of folks are comfortable and recognize the need to capture and hold and that's where you get some of those tips and tricks about telling a joke or sharing an anecdote. Yes. Transporting us into the characters world is something we miss most of the time in our government space. We are not used to telling stories about individual humans. We tend to talk about the public. Americans. The country. Citizens, beneficiaries. Yeah. When we are using words that are that elevated, we cannot transport anybody into their world. The public is not a character. We need humans. You give them a name, it can be a persona, they don't have to actually be real. That is something we miss out on and that is why when we believe we are telling stories, we are not actually telling stories, we are in narrative mode. A story has to have a character. Let me talk a little bit more about these two things. Capture and hold, capture and hold your audiences attention. You're going to do this through a variety of mechanisms. Structure is one of them and that is the thing we will get to by the end of the session today. A lot of our experts here in plain language world are certainly going to be keyed in on sentence structure. Absolutely. We are going to elevate that and say it's not just sentence structure or paragraph structure, it's story structure, how do we create a story arc that will both capture the attention at the beginning, hold the tension throughout, and bring them down to that resolution in the end? You will use a variety of communication tech needs to do that capture and hold. If it's a presentation, you will use the pause. If it's graphic, you will use callout boxes. You were going to use, again, if it's in person, you might use visual aids of some kind. There all kinds of medication tech needs you are going to use to reinforce your messages and hone in on them. Language is one of them. The words we use matter, right? Which burdens you are using, are using adjectives? If so, what types of adjectives are using? Are you using words that evoke emotions? What language style are using? Are using pronouns, speaking, first or second person? These are all familiar techniques that are important in a story mode? The piece we miss is that human, you got to have a human. You actually have to have a human, trying to do with the story is give your audience a glimpse into that person's world. What their life is like, what their experience is, super helpful in user experience work, customer experience work, you want them to visit places that they go and the things they do, the experiences they have or it could be more intense. Maybe you want to immerse them in somebody else's world, using video. Using video and language to transport a person into a characters world, that's a much more immersive story experience. The bonus here, and I refer to this often as a strategic narrative even though I'm saying strategic narrative is slightly different than story, but you can insert your own purpose here. That's the third thing I would say a story must do is answer the question, why are you even telling the story in the first place? We will come back around to that. All right. A little bit about the neuroscience of storytelling. Now, I'm not a neuroscientist. There's actually a lot of really cool information out there that is very accessible to folks who are not neuroscientists. I highly encourage you if you are a nerd about that stuff, it is there. We are on slide number nine right now, going to try to keep reminding myself to do that navigation. Stories activate multiple parts of the brain which is what makes it different than basic expedition, right? Just basic regurgitation of words without the things that truly make it a story. What's important about that is it engages portions of the brain that are necessary for learning, for memory, and emotion. And just understanding the basics about a brain, a person can make a decision are not going to be motivated to act unless you tap into things that make things truly, truly relatable to tap into emotions. Let's talk about these for one by one and then a fifth. Neural coupling. Story activates parts of the brain that allow the listener to turn a story into their own ideas and experience. Think of this process called neural coupling. If any of you have had this experience where you were sharing a wonderful idea, maybe through story form, maybe not but you are putting this out there and first there is resistance, maybe there's resistance and eventually, somebody in that meeting where you are engaging them in this grand idea says a different version of what you think you just said. And you are thinking I just said that. It was my idea. It happens all the time, it is very frustrating. I'm going to give you a little bit of an out and say you know what? That means you were successful. It means you successfully engage the person. What happened is you give them information that resonated, they're able to make the synaptic connections in their memory, the things they already knew, and it became part of what they already knew and be what they truly believe was their own idea. I acknowledge that may still be frustrating for you. I hope that maybe takes a little bit of the edge off and you can pat yourself on the back a little bit in a way that says you were successful because they did pull that idea into their own brain and make it their own. Mirroring. Listeners will not only experience similar brain activity to each other, other people in the audience, but also to the speaker. As the stories are being told, the speaker experiences a bit of the emotion that comes along with the story they are telling. Opposite, the idea is to bring your audience into that. That mirroring happens and you can start to see if you are one-on-one, you can start to see behaviors, nonverbal behavior start to match each other, whether it's tensing up, or leaning in, leaning forward, or becoming quizzical. You will see that mirroring behavior happen. Look out for that. For folks who are attuned to nonverbal communication, you're not going to be up to see the brain activity but you will see some behaviors that go along with what is turning in their brain. Dopamine. The brain releases dopamine into the system, your neurological system with the experiences of emotionally charged event. That makes it easier to remember and makes it easier to remember it with greater accuracy. We want this in our workplaces, we especially want this when we are communicating with customers or beneficiaries where we want certain behaviors from them. We want them to fill out a form properly or on time, or we want them to take some action. Maybe we want them to be vaccinated, right? We want to do things that will release the dopamine in their brains, which help them not just pay attention, but become more emotionally invested in what's going on and enriches the experience, right? That makes it easier to remember. And with greater detail because again, there's a dance into that immersion into the story. Fourth one on this page is the cortex activity. When you are processing facts, there are two areas of the brain that are activated. Progress, for speech production, and the Rennie Keyes area for language comprehension. A well told story can engage many additional parts of the brain. Right? We get sensory cortex and the frontal cortex and the motor cortex all functioning, which, again, enhances engagement, enhances the experience and the sense of immersion of people being part of the story. This is what makes storytelling significantly different than narrative where you are not actually using story structure or emotional draws. The one piece that's important but not on this slide is oxytocin, not to be confused with OxyContin, not the same thing. Oxytocin is important in storytelling. We know stories can change behavior, but how? Part of that is oxytocin. What our brains encounter a good story, oxytocin is released, similar to the way dopamine is released, and this is what causes us to feel empathy. For those of you who is set in the chat, empathy was a major portion of why your storytelling works and why you are here, it's oxytocin among other things that is doing that for you. It's that empathy which can propel people to take action. It's one thing to be engaged and listen to the story and nodding your head. That is great. When we are being strategic in our storytelling, we want people to do something. Probably different than what they were doing before. He wanted to take some kind of action. That storytelling releases oxytocin and gives you a better chance of eliciting that behavior that you want to see. It is, despite what I used to believe, it's impossible for a human to make a decision without engaging the portions of their brain that affect memory and emotion. This is why we need to storytelling, but here is the note. We want to use it when it's high-stakes. It's a lot of work to create a really good story unless you are a natural at it. For those of us who are not naturals, it's a lot of work. My recommendation is you are going to storytelling when it's high-stakes, when you do need to move behavior, when you do need to move people to decision or action. You don't want to you story all the time unless you it becomes very comfortable and natural for you. So, with that background then, question for you back into the chat, which plain language principles, guidelines or tips would help you stimulate brain activity so that you can capture and hold your audiences attention and transport your audience into the characters world? This is our slide 10 chat prompt. Use the words the audience uses, yes, simplicity, actively good, definitely. Bulleted lists, easy to follow. First and second pronouns, absolutely. Yeah. No jargon, active voice, yeah. Definitely organize information, were going to deftly dig into structure soon, it's really important. Yeah. Shorter, simpler words, absolutely. You got this. All right. Quick recap, two things a story must do, slide number 11. Capture and hold the audiences attention, and transport the audience into the characters world. Storytelling triggers brain activity that fact alone can never ever do. Again, and more brain activity is better. Now, obviously there's a point where it becomes overload. It is very difficult to move people to decision with facts alone. So, let's engage the brain activity. I'm going to introduce to you the newest agency in the federal

government, this is on slide 12. Just so I can you some examples in the slides of following the messages that follow. It's good to have little examples. We are going to use the department of happiness, exclamation mark as our sample agency. The program area within the Department of happiness, we will call them the happiness program. You've heard of them, things like empowerment zones and historic district. Well, why not have a happiness district, right? The subdivision, the project will be working on is single seniors and how we can bring them simple joys. Single seniors, simple joys grants program. Why Department of happiness? Well, back in the Declaration of Independence, there was this phrase we love to use all the time. About life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Well, I can look at one very obvious and several other smaller agencies that deal with life. Same for liberty. What agencies do we have that are focused on happiness? I think this is missing from our federal government. The Declaration of Independence, it said, I'm going to read a quote from the declaration, we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all, I'm going to do error quotes, man, let's say all people are created equal. That they are endowed by, I do want to bring religious into this, this is the creator, let's your parents, your biological parents, whatever, endowed with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted, again, among men, we will see people, deriving their just powers from the consent of the government. Big question mark, I don't know why we have a promise happiness, it's right there. Background, as we go into our next section, the three ingredients of a story, that's what we are going to cover here and so, of course, I love to issue challenges. So, back into the chat. What do you think the three things, this is now slide number 14, what three things must the story include? Think necessary ingredients. Characters, plot, change of conflict, very good, beginning, middle, and, yes. Characters, challenge, problem solution, I like that. Purpose, yeah. Happy ending, yes. It can be a sadder frustrating ending. People do like the happy ending. Protagonist, excellent. Subject, excellent. A hook, yes. Wonderful. Wonderful. There are lots of different combinations of the magic three of what a story must include. I had to choose something and there are lots of experts in this, I did my homework, showed something I think works, and his I think works, how we are going to discuss it today. Facts, causal relationships and narrative sequencing. And yes, a little after noon, on East Coast time right now, is to: 30 in the afternoon, a little snack would be delightful right now. Let's bake a story here. The facts are like slide number 15, looking at an image here of a recipe called brownie bites that has three ingredients. Flour, eggs, and the tele-. You can make this at home. We are going to use this as a parallel for the three main ingredients of our story. The facts, that is your flower. It's what holds everything together, it's her substance, right? Yes, I know there are flourless chocolate cakes, there's wonderful recipes out there. This is the recipe we are using today for these brownie bites. You've got to have some facts. But they can't just live out there on their own unstructured, we talked about how they need to be structured. Well, one way to begin to structure them is to them in causal relationships. Initially in pairings but you can start stringing them together. Those are your eggs, that's your binding. That's what's holding these things together. You can stop there, and I believe when you stop there, you've got the ingredients you need for narrative. You got the Ingrid and Cindy to put a report together or a slide deck or presentation. I think the magic that makes it a story is that third ingredient, in this case, the metallic gives it its flavor, it's what makes you more interested because you know what? I'm not just eating something made of flour and eggs. He put metallic in it, and now I'm interested. That is the narrative sequencing that helps you assemble those core ingredients, right? And make it appetizing and appealing and make people want to partake. I may just catch up to make sure I'm not skipping anything. Again, there are some other combinations out there, some of you said many of these things, characters, conflict, closure, there are lots of ways to devise the three core ingredients. If you'll indulge me today, key facts, culture relationships, narrative sequencing and by the way, there is your first template. Again, super easy on a blank sheet of paper, just three things. List your facts, Esther causal relationships, and start to assemble your narrative sequencing. There is your first template. Now, is a quite that easy? Not necessarily. The key facts, probably relatively easy so we will talk about that right now and the causal relationships. I will say the narrative sequencing for the very last section because that is the thing that becomes more complex. Here is your second template on slide 16. What counts as a fact? Well, just about anything you can observe or prove or feel, touch, taste, or experience. That is a fact. Simplest way to organize a, who, what, where, when, and why. You need all of them? Not necessarily. You at least have the who and the what, you got a really good start. The where and the when could be conditions on the watch. Why, super important, I'm a bold big lever in starting with white. And the how, depending on what level of detail you actually need to generate in this story, you might need the help. Here is a tip. You are able to list an awful lot of facts before you begin, because you know your field, you are an expert, whatever program you're working on, you know a lot of things, you collect data from grant programs, your research studies, you've got a lot, you have a lot of facts. Here is, again, where it relates so well to what you all do in the plain language community. Edit ruthlessly. Really, the bar here is you don't want to give people everything you know because the story is not about you. The story is about your audience, and the only things they need are exactly the facts that they need to take in and understand in order to do the thing you wanted to do or think the thing you are trying to convey to them or help them understand. Again, you can list a lot of facts, edit ruthlessly, really focus on the who and the watch. Why the who? Because we need characters. You will start with words or folks you work with are going to start with words like the public, right? If you're doing it yourself, or you are going to keep pushing and keep pushing and keep pushing until you have much more targeted representation of people and the who repaired and teed up for your storytelling. Now, cause and effect. When I have done these workshops, we usually refine along and use lots of templates and out worksheets and we are doing a great job, and we get to the cause-and-effect and it's like the brakes, there's something that does not compute. Cause-and-effect, I believe that when you break down stories into their most basic atomic elemental type units, you are stringing together pairings of cause-and-effect. Getting to the cause-and-effect in your initial research, your initial preparation is super important. This is slide number -- Slide number 17. Causes the reason, obviously causes the reason something happens, affect is what happens because of that cause. We have cause-and-effect relationships, this is one of those three key ingredients to storytelling, and there's some signal words. This is a short list, you think of a lot of others I'm sure. Signal was for cause-and-effect relationships. You will want to use these in your stories over and over and over again. They are small, mostly easy words, great connectors. This is what triggers even on a neurolinguistic basis that there is some if/then relationship or cause-and-effect relationships going on here. Slide number 18, here is your next template or guide to templates, cause-and-effect relationships, to take some of those facts that you listed and you start mapping them and pairing them up. Cause, effect. Let's go back, I forgot to use our Department of happiness example. Let's say we are initiating a program in our happiness districts, again, for a single senior to experience joy and cause-and-effect. Well, let's get down to a story level. As people age, you know, family units are not as whole, right? Kids grow up, they move on, they have their own families. We have seniors who have less social connection. You have seniors that maybe had been in the workforce most of their adult lives and perhaps, now they are retired so they don't have the built-in camaraderie and social exchange with people we know that a lot of happiness comes from social relationships. So, we are starting to drop some facts, right? We are experts in this field, we will bubble those things up as fact that we will start to lay them out into these cause-and-effect pairing relationships. One cause, multiple facts, multiple causes into a single effect. These are some initial things to play with as you start to list your facts, you want to start pairing them up so you start to create cause-and-effect relationships because you will string them together and that is what creates your story. That is what creates plot. Yes, another delightful treat on this slide, it is dominoes made up I believe graham crackers and coated in chocolate and designed to look like dominoes lined up and you basically in motion, you trigger one, that cause becomes the affect of the next domino. Well, but you are string them together, select Domino's that was the affect becomes the cause for the third Domino. And so on and so on. That's how you are assembling cause/effect relationships in a story, and that is why I say those causal relationships are incredibly important and that is one of your core ingredients before you can again to assemble a story. This is a little conceptual. I totally get that. Let's just do a quick recap and provide some tips on slide 20 and we will spend the rest of the time looking at story structure and how we might take these ingredients and assemble them. Three ingredients again. Facts, that was your flower, causal relationships, those were your eggs, and the narrative sequencing, that was your not tele-. That's what made it interesting and fun. Three tips, just like if you are baking, it's great to measure out some of your ingredients before you start. Maybe not all of them, I know it uses a few extra dishes and you have to wash afterwards, but if you were going to run out of flour, you want to know before you start baking. If you're going to run out of and only have one egg instead of two, it would have been good to pull those eggs out of the fridge first and make sure you have them. The tip that I mentioned before, edit ruthlessly, you have a lot of ingredients in your baking cabinet, you can plot all kinds of things. You are going to know what you bake before you start and I will make sure you only pull ingredients that you need. All the other stuff is not necessary. Here is the tip that will segue us into the next and final section. Making Faxon causal relationships and sequencing, the facts and causal relationships is not your first step. I'm much you now talk with you about what your first step actually is in how to assemble a delicious story. Slide 21, before you even start, you're going to check in with Pam. Using the acronym Pam, I'm not endorsing the spray you would put into your baking pan as you are baking but it happened to work out quite conveniently that the three things we're talking about, purpose, audience and message actually spell the name Pam and the product Pam and there are other tools you can use as well. These become your guide rails and your storytelling parameters. The following recipe is the final section we are going to work on. That's when we assemble all those ingredients that you have pulled out. Pam, here is your next template. You don't really need to save all these things, you can drop them down in simply in a notebook and easy to remember. Purpose, audience, and message. You think I know what I'm doing I want to jump in and start writing the story, please don't do that. Take a moment and write down your purpose. Answer the question, why am I telling the story, what am I trying to do? I said storytelling is more difficult than spewing facts. Unless you have a purpose, just spew facts. Storytelling is hard. For those of us who were not naturals, what is your purpose? Who is your audience, who are you speaking to? Again, you know, please don't say the American public. It's too broad, you can't speak to all people in order to do the third

thing, which is deliver a clear and concise message. What is it you are actually trying to say to that audience for what purpose? This is a really, really important template, super simple, it's what most of us skip before we start and I can't emphasize enough how important it is to start here so you can come back to it over and over again as you are doing that ruthless editing and say is that factor is that causal relationship actually helping my audience understand? Then Nick said. Just because interesting comments because you think it's great if they don't need it, don't give it to them. It's extraneous. Again, purpose, audience, message, start with Pam. This is a super simple template, here is a version that gives you a little bit more content and guidance. Purpose, slide 23. What are you trying to accomplish? How can telling the story help you accomplish that thing? Unless you can answer the question, you probably don't need a story. Don't go through the trouble. On audience, who do you think -- Who needs to do or think something different than what they are doing or thinking now? That's connected to your objective. What do you know about them? Lots of different ways to think about who your audience is. What kind of information, how they need to receive it, are these people in decision-making power, or other types of influencers? Are they going to give you access or information, are they people you are trying to engage for ideation or creativity, who are the people you are talking to, and why them? Why that audience? Again, what do they need to know in order for them to think or do something differently in the way you are pushing, in that strategic way? Message, what is so important about that, why is it so important? I think I referenced earlier, unless it's high-stakes, you probably don't need story. Again, story is a lot of work. It's meant for that deep engagement. It's meant to move people, draw out that oxytocin and get people to move to action. How is your audience involved and know in advance what they can do? If you're doing it for information say, I'm going to go back to that original definition of storytelling and say it's for entertainment purposes, or light engagement purposes. I would say that is fine. Keep your story simple, relatively anecdotal, you might not want to use the full story structure and go through all the templates to prepare it. If you just want to engage them, if you're trying to move them to action, this is what the story templates are actually four. All right. Now I'm giving you what is my second favorite template of all time, or my first favorite template in storytelling. It's the from to sink do matrix on slide 24. I want to call in this context the Pam three in one. It addresses in a very synthesized way, purpose, audience, and message into this nice, tight little quadrants. So, it helps you check your work, it really goes back to test whether you are clearing your purpose, it helps you get specific about who am I talking to and where are they right now and where do I want them to move to? It helps you to clarify your message to them and helps you prepare your call to action. That in strategic narrative form, real use leverage story techniques, that is what we are trying to do. From to think do matrixes for quadrants, and you match it up. The from to in this case, we got on the vertical and the columns and the think do in the horizontal on Rose and you are just assessing your audience and your purpose and your message and you are locking it down into these cells. Unless you can do this, I would challenge you, you need to do a little bit more work on your purpose and your audience before you start crafting a story and going through the effort. All right. In the interest of time, I'm not going to give examples, I'm notorious about not doing examples. I want to make sure we have plenty of time for questions of the and and I want to make sure we've got plenty of time to show all of the templates you're waiting for. Before we do that, let's close out and say of the six templates I provided to you so far, the preparatory, the prep templates, which ones are you most likely to use most often? And why? Mary, it's going in the circular file unless it has a purpose. Thank you. Justin, you like the cause-and-effect pieces, that's fantastic. No one ever chooses that, I love that you chose that. Cause-and-effect, we are getting lots of cause effect, what a wonderful audience you are. I almost never get that. You are my people. I use it all the time. I use it all the time. Brownies, I did leave that off this list here. Guided Pam, super helpful. If nothing else, you've got some -- Oh goodness, what did I just do here? Oh, goodness. Now what have I done here? Let me see if I can backup. There we go. I'm in the right place. Story arc. We can skip the slide here, but I guess I'm not. Now we are going to talk about the sequencing that the third piece of those ingredients, the first two were easy, the fact that the causal relationships, this is more template, more challenging, this is the magical natality makes it delicious. Story arc, or sequencing. Lots of different examples out there online. You can Google story arc, you can Google story structure and find all kinds of things. Here's a quick sampling on slide 26 of what some of those look like. They have roughly the same elements, but there are variations on the elements. You start with things like exposition or setup. It moves into rising action which may be precipitated in inciting events. That is your long ride up. That's your long ride up, most of the storytelling. Then, you reach the peak that is your climax, that is where there is a turning point. There's something happening and that's where you are in a movie theater and listening and watching the story and listening to a book on tape, this is where you have that sense of it's all going to be okay. That's that moment. Very quickly, you work through your falling action, ordained wall which I cannot pronounce, just examples here. You can find lots of things online. We're going to go through a few examples here. Again, I promised you template so let's do some templates. Super simple, I always like super simple templates. Let's start with just on slide 27, six boxes. Boxes, exposition. Starting point. It's the opening scene of a movie, it's your opening few pages of a book. Right? What's the setup, what's the current state, where are we right now describing the scene? In this particular template, we get into introducing some kind of a conflict. Some of those other examples precipitating, there are some reasons and this is mostly why are you telling the story in the first place? This goes back to your purpose. Again, good thing to have that. There's some conflict here, and it's the thing that's causing the activity, the reason you want to tell the story in the first place because there's something that needs to be resolved or has been resolved and maybe the conflict was in the past and you are looking backwards at that story but there was something that happened that was important that was changing the course of events or that drew attention to your program and something that was happening. The third piece, rising action, this is where you will spend all your time, this is the bulk of your movie, the bulk of your book and where the bulk of those causal relationships are being assembled. The size of the box looks like it's equal and it's not equal. This is a big box. The rising action is huge and it's that series of cause effect, cause effect relationships where something happened to a person, I've lost my example. I'm not going to go back to this, just conceptual at this point if that's okay with everybody. Let's use a movie. In a movie scene, the exposition starts, some ladies having lunch, they look to be friends, they are very friendly, maybe the movie doesn't have dialogue going on but you can watch the behavior and see they are friendly, enjoying their lunch together, they are enjoying each other's company. But then the scene shifts to it's raining outside and now the lunch is breaking up. They have to come out and enter into the rain to go to their cars and go to wherever they are going after that. Now they're all dressed up, looking all nice and now they can step out into the rain. That's a little bit of that conflict, not a huge conflict with the something introduced that is like it such a lovely scene but now it's not a great scene because they are in the rain. This is where the story starts. Now what happens? We're going into rising action. Well, she steps out of the sidewalk, she realizes it's raining, she grabs her jacket and throws it over her head because she doesn't want to get her hair wet and it's coming down harder and she's got to run to her car so a couple things are happening, right? She's looking down, the sidewalks are slippery, she's running because he doesn't want to be out, and now she trips and falls. You are starting to see the cause-and-effect. It's raining so she does all of those things, putting her head down and covering her head. The effect is she trips and falls. Now, that effect becomes a new cause. She trips and falls and she ends up spilling her purse out on the sidewalk. This is not good. That effect becomes the new cause. A stranger comes along and helps her pick up her purse, you can see how now he will never watch a movie in the same way or read a book in the same way, you will see all these causal relationships and it sounds like plot and it is. Again, at its root, and those of the causal relationships that are really important in our work, because we're not doing it for entertainment, developing those are super important. You have all that rising action, and you reach and are invested in the character, you want to transfer people into the characters world, that helps you do that. That cause-and-effect triggers back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, that's what holds the audiences attention. That's why I say most of the stories happening in your rising action and in our government space, we are telling latest challenges and struggles. Maybe from a beneficiary who is having trouble on our website, maybe from folks who have experienced a natural disaster and have lost their home and they think they are getting help, but they can't make their way through the website or they make their way to the website and they submit the form but don't hear anything back or maybe they do hear something back but their battery dies on the phone because they don't have power so these are the stories we can start to tell in our government organizations about our programs when things are happening to draw people in because you were leading to something. That climax in our case is some type of resolution to the story, ideally, if some type of decision or programmatic element you can introduce that's going to help resolve that for that character. Right? It's a government coming in to save the day, let's make it a heroes journey story or a rescue operation, that we are here to help. As soon as you hit that climax of the story? You've got them. You got the audience. They are in there, hooked. If you've done all that work, now you want to get out as quickly as possible, the falling action is all right, well, now we've enhanced the website, and so now the person who experiences this natural disaster can go on the website and get an automated response and you can quickly wrap up all of the things that are the falling action, and at the end of the moving, it's falling into place, that lovely lady who spelled her purse on the sidewalk after all the rigmarole that happened, let's say it's romantic comedy, you know we are going to have a happy ending. Someone mentioned that earlier. We are going to wrap it all up in a bow, they're planning a wedding and it's all resolved, everybody is friends now, this is the quickness of that falling action into your final resolution. That was a simple template. Is a more complex way to view it but perhaps more rich. I'm not going to go into deep detail in all these because I do want to leave a little time, lots of time for discussion. And jump into the chat and see what folks are saying. Story structure, again, we here in this version we have on slide 28, is divided into acts. Ask, one, two, three. The set of, the confrontation and the resolution. In Act I, you've got that gang or exposition, in this case, we have second thoughts but wait a minute, in our program story, our website for helping folks who have experienced natural disaster crisis, we set the scene, the exciting incident is a natural disaster itself, and then we are moving and going on the website, but now they are having second thoughts because they are experiencing the website and it's not working. Something like that, I making these things up on the spot which is not my forte.

Eventually, we will have the climax of Act I. That shift us into Act II, which is the deeper confrontation. Obstacle after obstacle after obstacle after obstacle. Disaster crisis, you see all kinds of negative words here. Now, this is human behavior and it's unfortunate. People are drawn to things that are bad. Things that are bad that are happening to other people, there is neuroscience behind it, the neuroscience behind why people will do rubbernecking on the highway. Listen, I don't want to see injuries. I don't want to see people who have been hurt in car accidents. That is horrific to me. I'm a little bit but I'm not the norm. Most people rub her neck, they want to see what happened. Why? Not because they are sick twisted people, but because it helps them understand what is possible, what bad things might happen to them by watching the other persons experience. Even though in the highway situation, it's just a scene, a very brief episode, we are drawn to that because we want to learn something from it so that if we find ourselves in a situation that seems similar, the circumstances they encountered, we've got plans. That goes back to our very primitive beginnings, our whole existence is to survive and to avoid being killed by the man eating tigers. Humans are drawn to pay attention to and addresses in to the obstacles and these incidents. That's what makes the story. We do the climax of that Act II, and that is where we hit okay, now things are going to be resolved, thank goodness we are about to end for a happy ending, obstacles are resolved, everything is going to be okay. Does not mean is perfect, in any of our stories, doesn't means it's magically going to have world peace but any of our programs we are telling stories about it might be difficult, maybe the person on the website we are going to say listen, I'm sorry but you will have to go into three different sites to do this but we will make it easier if you do that. You don't have to find those three sites yourself, we will give them to you one, two, three, it might not be perfect, it might not be snapping fingers magical, but it's going to be significantly better than it was before. Whenever we are proposing solutions, one we are trying to get people to act on the solutions we have created. Oh, goodness. I have done it again. I hit the wrong buttons. Okay. Let's try this. Okay. I don't know why this is happening. There we go. Hit a different set of buttons. Here is a sparkling for story structure. Slide 29 broken down into acts one, two, and three, beginning, middle, and end. This is the one I like to use. It starts with the what is paint a picture of the realities of the current state that you are putting the audience in that situation. Let's fast-forward to the end, Act III and where you want people to end up. What you are creating in the middle are these series of gaps, and that is what is assembling your story and in some ways a cause effect relationship. This could be amazing, but wait a minute, it would not work because we don't have the budget. But wait, I think we can combine budgets here and here, and reduce budget here and we can apply for the TMF funding. But wait, that's not going to work because you go through these series of what could be, this could be amazing and it's all wonderful. You get people excited about it and you bring them back down to reality and say yeah, but basically in each of those steps up and down, you're creating a positive expectation, getting that emotional investment from people to think about what is possible. You bring them down and you say yeah, you anticipate the next most likely criticism or obstacle that could get in the way of that thing working. Yeah. That's not going to work because but then you resolve it for them. He backed up to what could be but you take and it's that series of what could be and what is up and down and up and down which could sum invested in the story, the beauty of this kind of story structure, it helps resolve their skepticism in advance. You are anticipating what they might resist, this is especially helpful if you are making a pitch for funding or to make a change in the program. Trying to get a person, maybe a beneficiary to give up the way they have been doing something before and do things in a completely different way. Anytime you are setting people up for a major change, any kind of risk or complexity, this is a really good story structure to use. You and them in Act III with the climax, right? Okay, but we've resolved the vast majority of the problem. Here is where we are, right? This is really possible. You take them through that thought process through your story of what was possible and arrived at the new state of what can be and where you are delivering the call to action because you've invested them in the story, triggered that oxytocin, you fired up parts of their brain that they are in and ready to say yes, I support this, let's go. Some version of that. Oh my gosh, I'm sorry, I've got a new computer and I'm still getting used to it. That is not working at all. Here is the second to last template I have for you. The five C's. Just a different way to think about the story, it still has the beginning, the middle, and the end. Beginning is where you start to engage the audience, the middle is where you're showing the challenges, sorry, it's negative, we can't arrive without a negative, and the end is the showing that change. Context is done through back story, catalyst which is that precipitating advantage, your complication or string of complications and obstacles, and that change. In that story, something happens with the character that they have overcome the Dragon and now, the change has happened within them and they are gone on a good path forward, and there are consequences. We want a happy ending so you will in positive consequences and resolution for them because, precisely because they have gone through the context, the catalyst event, the series of complications and they have come through on the top end of that and made the change and good things will not happen. It's a great way to tell a story of you are trying to get customers or users to go through a certain behavior that is not typical for them, tell somebody else a story about how they have worked through that. It was a challenge at first, but by the end, they did it, and it was good. And then, you're able to influence the behaviors of others who that audience then identifies with when there might be, there is resistance, there is no resistance for very good reason and bite evolutionary biological reasons that are absolutely appropriate, because we know this, we need to use things like story and this structure to help people experience what someone similar to the might go through so they can feel comfortable doing the same thing. Here is my final, I know we can do it in narrative and in video and do it in pectorals, but most of us in our work, we use the slides a lot. I pulled this from some prior work I did in another part of GSA and with the performance improvement Council and this was a way for is a five slide sheet sheet how you can create a very simple five slide story without feeling like a story. You're going to bring up some personas or some actual human stories but you will embed the stories within the structure. Slide one is setting the situation, right? The challenge that is presented with a cross agency goal, right? And you will put data in there. Bring data in, bring evidence in, that's part of your facts, part of listing your facts. There's a problem, challenge, indeed, there are likely consequences you might be projecting terrible, horrible things to happen, that is your set up. Slide two, again, it's your struggle, it's hey, we've tried this, we tried that, we tried the other thing and those things have worked but we have not resolved the problem yet. That's why we are talking about it. This is the struggle, the challenges or unforeseen challenges at the time -- This slide is and, this column is in grade because it's the one place where if you know I said it's a five slide story God, if you need to use extra slides, this is where you use them. Most of your story is about the struggle. Slide three is your transformation. That's equivalent to the climax, the moment when that cross agency team says oh my gosh, we are completely missing the picture, this is the way we need to look at it or maybe it was a lucky break. Maybe it wasn't even something you did, maybe it's the point where hard work pays off. We finally pushed through but there some kind of transformation that happens there. Slide four is the progress. It's a new course of action, so now we will be able to do this, be able to do that, to do the other thing, are you oversimplifying it? Yes. You are. The point of telling your story is not to go deep on the progress and slide five, which is one of the next steps. That is for a subsequent conversation or subsequent presentation or subsequent report. Your story is to try to get people on board with the thing you are proposing, right? Proposing that they do or that we all do together. You hook them there right at that transformation slide. If you hook them, don't linger. Get out as quickly as possible and say we've thought about all the things that are falling into place, we're going to do this, we will meet once a week, you are going to gloss through those things very quickly and onto your slide five and the what's next and wrap them up so they have a nice, happy feeling that says and here are all the good things that are going to happen because of it, all the good, projected benefits, all the positive, happy things that are going to take place because you hook them, because they said yes and they're going to take the action you are recommending in the call to action, that will trigger all these things to manifest. So, my last chat for you before we open things up, which story template are you most -- Oh my gosh, which story template are you most likely to use, I'm sorry, I left out a word for your high-stakes story? I will just backup, here is the five-story, five slide story God. A sparkle line. The three act structure. Keeping it super simple in basic boxes. I'm glad you like the five slide story guides. Sparkle line. Yeah.

Bethany, are you ready for some questions?

I am ready for some questions.

Well, the first question we had was transporting to the characters world, doesn't mean the story has to be relatable? Or do we pull them into our narratives, regardless whether it's relatable or not?

Well, you have to find a way to make it relatable. Those are some of the emotional tricks and triggers to draw them in, and that's what's so important about having a character that a person can somehow identify with. Maybe the best way to explain is if you see a movie or a television show, and if none of the characters resonate with you, you are not going to keep watching the show. There's got to be some character in there that you feel like oh, that's a situation I might be in sometimes, I've experienced that before or I feel for that person. There's no way to hook them unless there some way to relate. The beautiful thing is even though we are all very unique human beings, there are some very common experiences and that is what your trick is is to find those common human experiences of people can feel invested in and relate to. The relating has to happen in order to draw them into the story.

Can you give an example of the from to think to do grid?

Yes, no, that's a lovely challenge for me because I did not stick with having my example. Let's see if I can do this on the spot. From to sink do. I find it easier to start with the column, the from state, the current state. Do you want the from state first? Let's see. I created a program a few years ago in the performance world, the ambassador program to help folks who wanted to maybe not performance professionals but wanted to learn more about it and who had a knack for it. Me giving a presentation to my boss the time like why would we do this, this is not part of our mission, if I had done that, I would have said all right audience, being my boss, where are they right now? They are very much in this space what they think is the from state and the think space is we don't have enough staff, enough resources, we got to stay in our lane, let's stick to the mission, I don't want any extra work. In the current state, what are they doing? They are doing all the things that are given to them by their bosses bosses to do and not creating anything new. That is there from state in both thinking space and the doing space. What I want to take them to his thinking differently about the scope of work we should be engaged in. I want to take them too well, we don't have to just stick with the list of tasks on our to do list based on what the bosses say. Our job, I want them to think what is the easiest, best way to get the results that we need as opposed to thinking about things in terms of tasks? The easiest way is a force multiplier. If we can put the information out there into the universe, and get people engaged in this, they can do their performance work better, our jobs will be easier because we will have was adding to do, lest we were to do, less writing to do, and so I want them in the doing space to endorse more proactive programming instead of doing task lists. I'm not sure if that was super helpful. Katherine, I will let you be the judge of that or if I need to create another example.

Well, I do think we have time for more and the questioner said that helped, thank you.

Wonderful.

Is there a quality ranked collection of stories but if federal communications professional that we could obtain to see how others are doing it? I assume that means narrative in stories? I'm guessing here.

Oh gosh. If it exists, I don't know anything about it. I will just tell a very quick story for anyone who works in the Department of Commerce. We did some storytelling, strategic narrative workshop sessions for Ted talk style talks the people could do and so it was a brand-new program that we help folks of the Department of commerce create their performance shop create and it was a brand-new thing for them. The Department of Commerce was able to create a collection of video, Ted talk type stories about the programs. That is the only library that I know of because we helped them create that. I know nothing of the kind.

Right. Thank you for at least answering that. How do you create individualistic narratives on a government level? What is the best strategy to relate to multiple audiences?

That's a great question. A couple things. The way I presented the information today, it's how to tell the story and I did lean towards tell a big, grand story when you have high-stakes. That is important, I still endorse that. Other ways to do it are to introduce anecdotal type stories within larger presentations, partly so you get the practice of creating them, partly so you get your audiences used to hearing stories because I'm sorry, I hope I'm not going to be insulting to anybody but there are certain cultures what I do know that storytelling would be very well received. Even though humans received stories very well, I don't know that there are cultures where that is very acceptable to bring into a presentation or a pitch deck or a report. I think one way to start is to introduce small anecdotes, find examples, one example would be if you are veterans of administration or just dealing with massive amounts of data, you are not in the human business. You are in the data business. But your work relates to humans. You got that root cause analysis drawn all the way back to connecting to organizations in finding some examples, could be a persona, does not have to be a person. But you've got to give that persona and give it a name. I'm not sure I answered the question.

What about using dialoguing quotes? Is there an actual length or word count?

Can you ask that again?

It's two questions. What about using dialogue in quotes?

It's super helpful to weave into the story so that you literally get their voice. I will say on the quotes part, I will say it does not stand in for a story but it does help enhance the story. On dialogue, same thing, actually. If you can have little bits of an exchange that help you here or be immersed in their story or their experience, absolutely very helpful. You are not going to do three pages of dialogue, you're just going to get just enough of the audience to get the point and understand the difficulty, the challenge, the obstacle and you will get out.

Great. Is there an ideal length word count?

No. Story can be, and I've never been able to manage it, but again, I give the five slide version. Five slides, it can be 50 pages, 500 pages. No, as long as you have those main ingredients, again, ruthlessly edit, if you are an excellent editor and your you will probably have a very short story.

I wanted to thank you, you seem to be pulling in the hero's journey, I see many of those references are coming by. You have in fact, Bethany, done two of my guilty pleasures. You mentioned that Tele, which instantly produce the feeling of will be, and you explained why when I watch Devon paradise and there's an important clue and I look at the clock, it's always exactly 9:30. And the rest of the show is merely unwinding all of that into what they can prove but the important clue from the get-go shows up at the half hour mark. I just want to thank you for such an intriguing exploration of things I did not know enough about so you've helped me, and judging from the chat and the Q&A, a lot of people, this is resonated with them and made them think more. I wanted to thank you so much for doing this, and the complements are rolling in, which is always a pleasure. We have just a few moments. If there's any last thing you wanted to say?

No, just, thank you. I'm glad the information is resonating. I hope I was able to help some fellow unnatural storytellers out there, you know it's important and you know you should do it but you just don't know how. I'm glad you're interested, I'm glad you found somethings helpful and may be my last bit of advice is don't do it all. I give you a variety of templates. If all you have time for is from to think do matrix, just do that. I'm just going to do the Pam, just going to do the Pam and go at it. Fine, just to the Pam and go at it. Any little bits of what I've given you today, any bits you do are going to make you incrementally better. Just use them and use them and use them. It will become easy for you and Pam will come natural for you and maybe you graduate later on to some of the more complex story structures. Just use something. Use something is my last little piece of advice.

Well, I can't think of a better way to close and then again to echo our thanks, and there are so many wonderful things rolling in on the chat. I'm sure these are going to be, it has to stop sometime. We have to go to the next meeting. Finally, check back on digital.government for the video, and the slides. Don't look anytime soon, I'm sorry to say that, I just know that the effort that goes on to making things accessible and compliant, it's not quick. So, just warning you, don't start haunting digital.gov for that. So, thank you, everyone. I hope everyone has some chocolate in the house, where they can go and remind themselves of the wonders of chocolate and whatever treat you like best. Enjoy the rest of the day. Bethany, you did such a great job, take the rest of the day off. It's fine, just go.

Thanks, Katherine.

You will innovate in between. Thank you, all.

[Event concluded]
Event Description:

Plain Language

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I'm very pleased to welcome all of you to the fourth federal plain language summit. Wow is the only word I can think of. Was good enough to do one, it's four times as exciting for this to be our fourth. We went in a slightly different direction welcome to all of you. We were looking to do a different summit than we had before. We are excited everyone was able to do it. I would like to start in the conventional way by thanking those who helped make the summit happened. A lot of work goes into these which we are willing to work on later. I would like to thank my cochair, you can see her in pursuit of education sciences. I want to thank her for her support and clever ideas and taking all the tasks that need to happen. We are so lucky to have her as cochair. I would like to thank our social media volunteers. This would be a good time to start. Were going to have some life sharing on social media if everything works out. Which I am positive it will. They're doing a great job keeping us on track. I would like to thank our new virtual students federal service intern, Rachel Lee who jumped right in. We are so thrilled to have her in projects she can work on.

I would like to thank one of our unsung heroes who approves all the membership requests and deals with people who forget their passwords. Thanks very much, this'll be the first official use of my stick here. Jamie is our training coordinator and asked a surprising number of training requests and answered them. Even during COVID-19 people want to plain language training and we were able to do some. I would like to have Miriam Vincent for her wise counsel and astonishing knowledge of all history that went into plane and it keeps us for legal reasons. I would like to thank Laura who updates the website. She's one of those who keeps plain language running an updated and useful. I would like to thank the digital team whom you heard talking. I would like to think critically Gabrielle and her dog for all their hard work handling logistics, details and technical bits. I want to see how they explain in their agencies and how they try to make things easier. I would like to thank the plain community at large. I would like to thank you the plain language community has about 1300 members. Your those who ask questions, answer questions, share articles and lessons learned in good advice and we wouldn't have the wonderful community that we have, the wonderfully supportive community without each of the members. Moving into the summit, I would like you to consider where you can start with plain language . It at your agency, your company, wherever in your job. Where you can start.

If you've already started, please continue. As you'll see from our speakers, plain language helps every agency in every interaction with your audience. There's no reason not to make it plan. In fact, there's good opportunities for us to do it. keep learning, keep testing. Keep thinking about planning which. Our summit is a great place to start. I like to ask, one of many I'm sure during the summer, if you have any before and after case studies, let me know, contact me a noted plain language author is looking to update his book, he would like to update his federal government section. Contact me if you want more information about that. We have some really amazing speakers. Before I go on with that, Gabby, do you want to say anything?

Just welcome, we are glad you can be with us today and make sure you follow us on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn, we are using our hashtag plain language summit.

I should point out, to be accessible, that should have a P in the L in that. I want to talk before we go on to introducing our speakers, I would like to talk more about accessibility. We have a great deal of emphasis. We've always had Section 508 and things we need to do adding captions things accessible to things we try to really. It has really opened up what we do. To give a little bit of an idea, plain language is one way of making things accessible. It means you don't have to wave through information, you know who is doing what. We are looking for is how can plain language breach other audiences. That's where we get into different things right now for how we can reach audiences require different literacy levels. This may be an international movement, definitely adjusting for different audiences. Accessibility is a great deal more. How do you make your content ready for people using assistive devices. You have to have captions, transcripts, alt text, summaries of information. This is something that's particularly important in photo captions. What we need right now is an expanded view. One of the things we faced with the summit, we got clearer guidelines. Got better information. We get an idea of what we needed to do to make things work better for our audience. We spent time and effort into making all those things were together. This is just what we are expected to do. Certainly we're the federal government and have certain requirements. Doesn't want to be hurt? What are you doing, are you learning, what are you focusing on today. That's something for you to think of, not only what am I learning but whom I learning it for. Who do you talk to? Who needs this new way of presenting information? That's where we are. I realize we have moved a little ahead of ourselves. I want to talk about things we are facing. I'm not a pole John F. Kennedy, but I do know we are always looking for volunteers. I wanted to make this upfront. We ended up doing different sorts of things and different kinds of volunteers. If you're interested, if you think you can volunteer and have something to offer, let me know. We are at repeat this info at plain languagedotgo. Will get in touch with you about what you can do. We have significantly more people than we had before.

Hello, thank you for joining today. This is me from digital.gov. A couple of things to note about the summit, folks will be muted and face muted, for lack of a better term. You can put general questions and chat in the chat box. Be sure to use the caret that shows the drop down and select all panelists. For targeted questions for the presenters today, we encourage folks to use Q&A feature. If that pop-up window with two little comic text boxes. You can ask any questions specifically for the presentation. Again, the captioning link for today is included in the chat and will be pasted throughout today. Our code of conduct is also available. For those who want to follow along with presentation, PowerPoint are uploaded and available on the event page. If you go to the event page and again, link will be posted. They are also more than welcome to view those after the presentation. The recording in its entirety will not be posted however, post event, blog posts, key takeaways of video highlights will be available in the coming weeks. Plain language volunteers get those submitted into us. They will be posted so continue to check back. Will make sure as we get those posted on the digital.gov event page, they will be sharing that info out with the community. I have pasted the link here. For those interested, feel free to click that event link. I think that is it.

While we are waiting for our speaker, is there such a role searchable plain language document for general users, if so, can we share this link? I think they're asking for materials on how to use

the plain language techniques. But I'm not sure. If the answer is a quiet which you need, please submit a follow-up.

I was going to take a stab at that. Anything on plain language.gov, you can send a link, you can share and take out billboards, you can create performance art. Interpretive dance, anything that is federal use. I will specifically say, I think this is where you're asking, the guidelines, plainlanguage.gov in the guidelines section . Reposting the email address for volunteering, if you go to plainlanguage.gov, it's right there. If you posted the question, they posted the info. I have to say, if everyone posts a lot of questions, we will not get to them until at least tomorrow. I want to be careful about expectations here. There's a lot of emails and this is all volunteer. I want to clarify where we may be.

Catherine is trying to enter the room right now. Getting in and and wanting the to factor.

Yes, what a nightmare.

That's fine, we will talk about something until she's able to get in. We have plenty of time. We are doing very well. I was given a horrible memory of my most recent new phone which somehow, I got a smart phone, I said the old one back. Thought I programmed it. I don't know if the new smart phone defined what I wanted to happen. I just did something stupid. What happened, it didn't convey any phone capability. Which was distressing when I was trying to do. Only if it's an emergency. Since I have a hate hate relationship with my phone, this was more amusing than not. Which as everything else, why didn't they use plain language with their instructions. We have another question, thank you so much. What is the biggest hurdle you think about changing websites to meet plain language best practices? That's a bit that's a great question.. What I think is the worst part, there's a fundamental disagreement about the audience. People putting the website up, forget who the audience is and they think it's for their boss or the bosses boss or whatever and they forget a ghost other people who need to do some. I know federal websites have a huge range of what they have to cover. Sometimes it's instructions, how to get benefits, all that stuff. You're putting in adjectives of how great you are. We think about that question or do you want to say something else?

I would also add an organization. We have an idea of how the information should be organized. There's a disconnect and digging about how as federal employees, how we would use the website and information we think is important versus our actual audience. Minutes much more complicated when you have multiple audiences. Some solutions are to use portals. Something specific to that audience. As opposed to more generalized lending patient has everything you ever put on the web.

I believe with that 100%. This is why we are such great cochairs. I get lost in my own. That's how I know. One of the things we don't do enough of and I will admit I tend to look at when content more than reports or correspondence. We don't think about contacting the help center. I worked with someone who trained the help center folks I thought that's fantastic. I asked, do you have any feedback on the website? Sometimes it was, this is confusing. We had to go back to

the content owners and say can you make it less confusing. And to find out this is horrible and then find out the answer, the process itself is confusing. That was a much bigger issue than just the website. It's really helpful to talk to the users. This is no surprise. This is where the information to how to make things better and easier. That is a big thing. When things have been doing is trying to look at the analytics. We were doing that. I think it's easier to do not just every month but we were seeing that people are not going to these pages. Are we force to have these pages up? It's useful to put that question to people. Sometimes, I realize this is the best possible answer sometimes, to say that experts years ago.

I don't know how many of you followed Gerry McGovern. He was a gentleman who started talking about top tasks. What website should do. He got me started questioning websites. What are they doing, were they supposed to do, why do we have this? We are still working with Cindy to get her on. You have to listen to me. They have made a major switch from top tasks the point. He still saying it's useful in pointing out we have too much material to answer users questions. Not only do we have too many pages, digital waste, too many videos, this waste is also bad for the environment and he has a whole slew of things on that. Could someone put Gerry McGovern's name in the chat. Thank you it's an interesting way of looking at. I think the conventional view of any government, we produce reports that nobody reads and they just stack up somewhere and for all I know, that used to be true. Now, we have webpages filled with articles that nobody reads. That's not much better. Fewer cheese but we are still seeing an element of things. This is getting back to plain language. Our challenge is, how do we work to balance our organization's desire to be seen, to be heard, to promote what we do. And the desire not to clutter up a busy digital world. If anyone has any ideas on that, that would be fantastic.

To provide an update, Cynthia is in the meeting. I'm waiting on her login info. We should be able to get started in just one moment.

Wonderful, that me know when she is on and I'll introduce her and we can listen to her fantastic presentation.

As I started discussing early come on Gerry McGovern have taken a useful idea which is the top tasks. To just put everything there. Do it for what your customers come to your website for. Someone just mentioned don't make me ink in the chat. That's another thing. Force organizations and agencies to rethink how they are presenting themselves digitally. Is important to consider as we come to the waist element, how we treating that? How are we dealing with the information on our website that is costing time to manage, energy, making things bigger than they need to be, how do we shrink the environmental footprint? He does a weekly email. I found it very useful to keep on top of that. Due much less website management than I used to but it's good to know about that. For example, the cost of running live events, I'm thinking of some with speakers. There is a cost that. Somebody pays at somewhere. You have to figure out how you make? Do we have other questions I may be able to answer? I can get into the chat Q&A.

There's a list of consultants. This comes up a lot. You know that the plain offers free plain

language training to government agencies. Not just one person to there's criteria listed on the page. Sometimes, state and local governments, healthcare organizations, contact us, -- Cynthia seems to be here. As Ingrid. Let me finish about this. Sometimes people ask for training we are not able to provide and we send them to the center for plain language which is center for plain language shot or. They have a list called find the consultants. Cynthia is here with us. We are very pleased that we were able to conquer the very strange, we hope this is the only problem we have all day. If you will let me do the introduction, we you be ready to speak? Cynthia Bower is director of the Horwitz Center for health literacy at the University of Maryland school of public health. Before that, she led health communications and health literacy initiatives at CDC and HHS for almost 20 years. A long career in that. She cocreated the CDC clear communication index which is a set of science-based criteria for clear communication. We are very pleased to have her speak at another summits. She has spoken before and amazed us all with her knowledge and good ideas and clarity. I will turn it over to Cynthia.

Thank you, great job filling all that dead air time. I would also just add to the comments you are making, one of my colleagues from the health communication world had talked about taking brochure where in putting out websites a long time ago. We also have been very aware of people's tendency to load up websites with a lot of that. That's not what I'm here to talk to you about today. We talk about clear communication, plain language and the COVID-19 response. If I can get my slides up, that would be great. This is slide one, I met the school public health at the University of Maryland College Park. I direct center devoted to health literacy. Health literacy includes more than just reading and speaking about health, it also includes how people find information in the decisions they make once they try to make sense of what they five.

I intentionally titled my talk today in the form of a question about what role did plain language really play in the pandemic. I think it's great to be here and talk to a crowd that has been thinking about this a lot. I'm sure in your personal and professional life as I have. If the liquor hasn't been a day that has gone by that I haven't thought about the role of communication and pandemic response. I welcome your thoughts and comments and we should have time, even with the slight delay, we should have time for questions and comments at the end.

I forgot to say the title, would more plain language have saved us from the worst of the pandemic? That is the title of my topic.

I don't need to remind this crowd with the plain language standard is. According to the federal plain language guideline, plain language is medication your audience can understand, the first time they read or hear it. We are in a very interesting space in terms of communicating about health topics. Arguably, there's a lot of inaccurate information or rumors or playing out pulses that people understand the first time they read or hear. That's part of the problem. A lot of the COVID-19 information is understandable but highly inaccurate. We will talk about that today.

I was involved with a colleague of mine at CDC and creating a tool called the CDC clear communication index. I mentioned that in a talk I gave at a prior plain language summit. Just to refresh people's memory, we had created an index as part of the reaction to a prior pandemic.

As you may recall, there was a 2009 flu outbreak. Chris and I had talked about the response that happened in the role clear communication has play. We are very curious about the extent to which clear communication made a difference in the response. We worked with contractors and did some audience testing of some of the terms we found even after the pandemic had concluded, the public still did not know and understand many of the terms used during the response. That led us to conclude the agency really needed to highlight a couple of key elements of clear communication. Having a very explosive main message to offer a very clear action step I focus on numeric and risk expiration because that is core. Something like a pandemic response is about helping people understand those things that are more risky in those things that are less risky. I think we have all experienced that at a personal level that we basically had to run nonstop risk calculations for everything we do about whether we get together with a friend, whether we go nursery shopping, go back to our offices. All those are involving these very technical assessments of risk based on a lot of uncertain information.

Chris and I had concluded that there are many important elements the guidelines made clear. These are some of the most important things you could do if you really wanted to explain critical health information, especially under situations like a pandemic.

I was back at the presentation I had given to this group before and I realized there is a through line over the last several years. While COVID-19 may have made a lot of this information in confusion about public health information more visible, the baseline goes back prior to 2019. I had titled my 2019 talk, looking at new information circulating, talking about bleach as a medicine and some of the problematic outcomes that were happening because people were accepting these recommendations. What we are seeing most recently in the pandemic response, people are gravitating towards other untested and unproven solutions to the current situation. Ivermectin has been in the headline as of late is if you do a Google search, it comes up as the first suggestion. It's not IV or any other words that begin with IV but clearly that's the topic people are searching now it concerns me these trans people are gravitating towards information that does not have science and evidence base behind it as an approach to our current situation. Slide six. I've been thinking all along, I have been taking notes and thinking about the evolution of the pandemic from the very beginning. When I look back about the presentations I was given more than a year ago, and where we started the pandemic, the official response back in January and February of 2020, the risk to the American public was still low. If you look at the news report, if you look at the official news releases, it's been described as low risk. If you just take those two words, low and risk, they would score well on any kind of readability assessment. They meet the criteria of being common in single syllable words. As we all know, many of the long-standing assessments people use for readability are looking at single syllable in shorts and short sentences as the hallmark for clarity. I think we need to ask for my meaning making perspective, does the phrase low risk have the principal plainly which data. Those principal standards we all adhere to, it's communication, your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. In the public health world, risk is a pretty complicated concept. We see the word risk used frequently. Even before the pandemic, information about heart disease or diabetes or cancer or any health topics you can think about, almost always is described in terms of people's risk. They are engaging in risky behaviors or at risk for

something. When we hear the phrase low risk, know that it has something to do with some type of harm or danger. The exact nature of that risk, how low is low? My low maybe you're high in my high maybe your low. That's one of the problems with low risk. Even though those individual words or that phrase may have been very familiar to us, the exact meaning is ambiguous. We need a lot more information than the phrase low risk to pass that principle plain language standard. Is not possible for us to know what low risk means without additional information.

The pandemic, unfortunately did not and after spring fling, and continued on into summer 2020. We saw many of those initial problems really accelerate. We saw the amount of jargon proliferate. We saw words like containment and mitigation and flattening the curb. If you're reading any of the popular media, in the curb was in every story. We are all supposed to engage in behaviors even though very few of us are epidemiologists. There was a strong reliance on digital channel to distribute information. That meant not only was information getting out quickly with people, it was also being shared and re-shared just as rapidly. I think there's a general agreement that while social media has many benefits in terms of distributing information widely and quickly, there still important considerations in terms of difficulty of checking accuracy of information such as rapid dissemination environment.

Saw a lot of information being disseminated but little was tested with audiences. The audience testing was happening when you were seeing what people were liking, or sharing, or getting high engagement metrics on. In terms of the testing that information in finding out what was understandable or not, how do you explain flatten the curve, what does that mean? Network is not happening. The information was just being put out there because the assumption was the situation was changing so rapidly, we just had to get something out there. I think those are often the very real trade-offs. Repeatedly during my federal career, there's a lot of pressure to get information out there and to respond to whether it was legislative requester media request or just changing circumstances on the ground. Without some consideration of what would happen if that information was rapidly put out but just as rapidly misunderstood. I think we really saw the acceleration of those trends during the summer of 2020.

Peasley, we've seen the reliance on morbidity and mortality. Those are very meaningful numbers and then tracking the trajectory of the pandemic. On a day-to-day basis, you have to ask back to back questions. How much to make our decisions based on the rate of illness and death in another county, let alone another state or national level? I know, if you go back and look there was a lot of concern about when the numbers of people dying from coronavirus are trending towards 100,000. There was a lot of speculation that somehow that number was going to shock us all the week and into action and following the behavioral recommendation. We blew by 100,000, 200,000, we have flown by all those numbers. Much more than if you asked people what they thought would be influential behavior. Should be a sobering moment for thinking about leading public information with morbidity and mortality statistics as a motivator for both informing the public but also really motivating people's interest in following behavioral recommendation.

The other challenge from a clear-cut medication perspective, we have been in a situation of high

uncertainty. We know that the coronavirus was initially described as a novel coronavirus meeting it was new to humans. That scientists didn't have a lot of information about how the virus is going to behave once it started moving among human population. In terms of the day-to-day consequences of that uncertainty, there's a lot of changing recommendations. Clear communication is very helpful in levels of situation of answered de-. At the same time, there will still be limits of what's clear communication can do because the uncertainty makes what we can say sometimes very abstract or ambiguous. Initially, we talked about certain population groups being at higher risk. Over time, it became much clearer that the risk was more generalized. It still may affect different groups of our society differently. At the end of the day, with infectious disease like we are dealing with with COVID-19, eventually everyone will be at risk because we didn't get the situation under control in those early weeks and months. There was a lot of confusion for quite some time during 2020 about exactly what was the nature of the risk for people who did not fall in older adults. Even those who qualified was not always well specified in the beginning.

There was a lot of confusion about, initially the recommendation seems to be very straightforward. He didn't need to wear a mask and then suddenly people were being told to use a mask. Of course, it was what kind of mask and how often under what conditions? A lot of uncertainty in terms of the basic information. You can use clear communication techniques. Still, there will be that ambiguity inherent in the level of uncertainty we were dealing with. Some of these recommendations because only over time have we come to understand what masking does. The different kinds of masks provide different levels of protection.

We didn't know about the various risks in different settings. Didn't matter about the indoor, outdoor, how many people? Or was it both? For a while, people being told to mask all the time, whether indoor or outdoor. Then we got more information and the recommendations change to focus more on indoor. There were a lot of questions about ventilation. I had colleagues that were wreaking up all kinds of indoor ventilation system so they could celebrate their holidays with family members. There was changing information about distancing. It started out as six feet and there were lots of graphics and visual showing and helping people visualize what six feet was. Markers on the floor in the grocery store. Those behavioral nudges to understand was six feet Mets. There are questions about was it really 60, was it more? Did you need greater distance under different conditions? And of course, testing has been one of the most confusing parts of the entire response. What kinds of tests can people take, how often do they need to get tested? We had a team that did research asking about testing and focus groups in an urban area. There was a lot of concern and confusion about where to get tested how to get tested how to get results. People felt very confident they could interpret the results if they got positive or negative test results, they felt they could understand that but it was all of the surrounding factors related to those test results that were open to questions.

I worked at CDC with the director. Since he left the CDC, he's been quite active on Twitter for guidance and recommendations about the pandemic response. I found this comment from him in a blog that he wrote back in September of 2020. This again is on that point of uncertainty. He observed there still more we don't know that what we do know about immunity to a new

coronavirus. Humility remains in order. This is a really interesting point to reflect on in the context of clear communication. When I've been in situations or people are asking my advice about how to create something new using clear communication techniques or revise some ding they already have, theirs is feeling that that the clear communication will bring almost a level of certainty. Not just clarity but certainty for the message. I think in these emergency response situations, and coronavirus is probably one of the most extreme that we will experience in our lifetime. It may not be the last but it's probably among the most extreme.

We have to think about how to use clear-cut medication tech needs even when information we are trying to convey is highly uncertain.

I don't have a good answer for that. I have offered a lot of draft messages to people and organizations along the way during the response. A lot of times I hit a wall in terms of the limits of what language can do in the underlying information and knowledge that we have still remains highly variable and changeable and subject to a lot of revision. I have for that is a cautionary tale about the balance we have to strike in terms of what we can offer as clear communicators. In these situations of high answer the.

Obviously, vaccines have been at the forefront of everyone's thinking about COVID-19 response . This term, emergency use authorization, there has been research on it. Actually, there are a lot of things FDA puts out under emergency use authorization. As an acronym, it's probably not a highly familiar acronym. During the coronavirus response, has been used quite repeatedly. Whether or not it's actually falling into the bucket of common acronyms yet, you could probably still find quite a few people who don't exactly know what it would stand for. The phrase emergency it's a fairly common word. The audience research looking at emergency use authorization as a racist people don't trust or accept something with the EUA designation. Even though what the EUA, if you look at the FDA webpage, it's what it says, it gives the agency the ability to authorize something under situations of an emergency. The vernacular and intimidation has come to mean it is somehow rushed. All of the survey research, all the audience testing shows they think EUA means it was a rush process open to challenge. If you read what FDA itself says about what EUA means, it means they needed to approve something because emergency situation was a designated emergency and needed a response that could not be accommodated by the normal process.

What's interesting about how EUA has operated during the pandemic response, people objection seem to have focused in on vaccines as a particular kind of product and not other COVID-19 products. There are many treatments for COVID-19 that are also under an emergency use authorization and people were not willing to get vaccinated are willing to use COVID-19 products treatments even though they are also under an emergency use authorization. From a clear communication perspective, I think EUA offers a really interesting test case to figure out what people are taking away from these bureaucratic terms from an agency perspective how specific meanings and they are useful in describing a process that is necessary for responding to an emergency period at the same time, having a very different effect amongst those responding to the products covered by this designation.

As you all know, one of the vaccines recently approved, there was a lot of speculation among policymakers, people who due to medication research, people trying to get vaccination rates, once there was actual approval of the vaccine, that would change people's minds. That of the word approval would convey a different meaning. What was very interesting, when FDA actually put out its press release, a used word approved. What you saw was the media and a lot of colloquial use describe as fully approved or full approval to distinguish it from this EUA status. From a clear-cut medication perspective, this is another important situation to look at. In FDA, that does not appear to be anything if you are approved or authorized. In terms of the way we were speaking about it, more collectively, we added this descriptor to somehow distinguish there was something different about the process does distinguish from EUA. I put this out there because I think as we think forward to the future emergency situations and what might be required, I think there's some work we need to do in terms of how the processes we need because they're part of the response will be conveyed to the public. We are seeing similar kinds of challenges to what would appear to be very straightforward plain language messages like vaccines or statement effective again, these familiar words, they form a short sentence, they are aligned with a question of audience of why should I get vaccinated. Because these are safe and effective. At the same time, just as we have seen in other examples I have shown, there's a lot of missing information. People ask how do I know they are safe, how do I know you tested them on people like me. Doesn't this mean these vaccines are all extra mental we are all just being experimented on? I think this message of vaccines are safe and effective also challenges to think about what is that additional, we can answer an audience question but what additional information are they going to need to say we have met that plain language standard of helping them understand the first time they see or hear the message.

Here's a screenshot of the search when I was looking for ivermectin. You can see the way Google displays information, it seems temptingly easy to understand what's being said about this topic. You get this nice box, common questions, videos, I think all that looks deceptively easy in terms of understanding the topic. At the same time, this was a very complex set of questions about why are people attracted to this non-studies, not approved treatment for this condition when their perfectly good alternatives that have been reviewed, specifically for that purpose but yet they are still choosing this instead. A few have twitter accounts that have an MD tag in their name, they are tweeting about FDA has approved ivermectin for humans to keep challenging the FDA statements about it's not approved for use in humans. It's approved for very specific purposes but not for COVID-19. This led FDA to tweets you're not a horse, you're not a cow, seriously, stop it. There were a lot of really interesting comments on that. Some people congratulated FDA on his use of plain language, others said, it reflected a weariness about the response and communicating the response. Again, these are complex topics, and agencies are doing as much as they can to try and use plain language techniques. Whenever possible. At the same time, were still running into very serious walls in terms of meeting that standard of communicating in a way people can understand.

This is the webpage associated with that discussion, why should not use ivermectin to treat COVID-19. Provides very specific explanations about what it is approved for. And white has not

been approved for use. There's good examples out there but somehow were still not breaking through. There knock you became the message the agencies are intending to do.

I recommendations, we need the plain language standards. That's always a starting place. Back in my 2019 talk I focused on the need for accuracy. I think COVID-19 has accelerated the need for us to focus on accuracy of information, even under situations of high levels of uncertainty. At this point we have to maintain application techniques can only do so much. People have very different perceptions of what the risk is and that's why you need these additional elements of tools like clear communication index that have us thinking about how we explain the nature. To answer the question I pose, I see plain language is a necessary but not sufficient requirements when we are in these complex medication situations. I believe if we had more plain language explanations early on in the response, it may have given us a much firmer foundation for when we started seeing these changes in our scientific understanding of the situation. I think more plain language would have definitely helped earlier on and I think we have some good examples to reflect on and plan for the future. I will in my talk and thank you for your time and attention. I have seen things coming in both the chat I believe they are carrying on conversation. I'll ask Gabby and Catherine at this time for any questions from the Q&A.

I will jump in and say we have time for one question before we go on to the break. That question which is, we will try and get answers back after the summit, this particular, can you suggest effective strategies for convincing stakeholders to use plain language, even when it might conflict with their immediate needs, political goals and publishing deadlines, et cetera. I'm a big believer in consequences. COVID-19 has given us plenty of examples of how we have not use plain language. I have offered some here in my talk but this is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. I think there are plenty of examples from this last year and half, if you want to show them as examples of what happened when you don't use clear communication of the confusion, not just cognitive but also the actual behavioral and that's what we care about in public health, what people understand, but also what they do. I think the wide range of behavioral responses we have seen to the changing circumstances should be evidence enough of anyone who is at all reluctant to believe clear communication would make a difference. Oftentimes, unfortunately, leaders have to experience it viscerally. They have to be on the receiving end of a very negative response. I think it has been a wide enough experience that hopefully if they have an experience have not express her freshly, experienced it personally and will have some effect on how they think about that.

I think this is splendid, we appreciate your clear warning of the pitfalls of relying solely on plain language. I really love your equation I think that was effective. The plain language plus the other considerations. I think if you excuse a metaphor, ink it all adds up correctly. [Laughter] I did want to give you one of the comments that came in, not a question, just a note of thanks and I love that you called out the term low risk because everyone thinks that's enough and it is since. See a lot of words like that, like limited the just aren't sufficient for meeting making and the person didn't like that phrase. A lot of fans for you today. They really appreciated what you talked about. I'm holding up the flags for you.

I always love being with my fellow plain language people. It's a pleasure to be here and thank you so much for your time.

Thank you. I think, Gabrielle, are we going for 14 minute break and coming back at 11:30?

Yes. Thanks for bearing with us. Anyone whose colleagues may or may not be having an issue in the summit getting in, we did send a workaround info. Just cut several, more than normal, or having issues. If anyone in your agency or anyone who says we able to get in, just have them check their inbox as a workaround. We will see you back at 11:30.

There will be a lunch break at 12:30.

Welcome back to the fourth federal plain language summit. We just had our first rake in a really wonderful presentation by Cynthia Bauer from the CDC. Now we are equally excellent presentation. The content strategy branch and the internal revenue services of online services, he manages content strategy, stakeholder engagement and communications for IRS.gov, one of the largest U.S. federal websites. On his behalf, he does not know where your tax return is. Please do not ask that in the chat. In his spare time, he enjoys time with his family, volunteering, biking and being generally picked on and adored by his team who wrote this bio. I'm not sure I can say anything that would top that some going to turn it over to you José and him. I am the chief content strategist at the Iris for IRS.gov. I want to take your having me join this year annual plain language summit. It's really exciting to be on the side of the screen and sharing the amazing work our folks of the Iris have done to support. I hear some feedback, is that me? I think sometimes it's good to take a pause and pat ourselves on the back for the work we do. We see a lot of the messages on the chat so far this morning and several of your saying we will die on the hill for plain language. I think that's true. We are doing a lot to leader agencies in efforts around ensuring plain language and takes a forefront comes to any kind of digital content and advocate medication. I want to recognize the efforts we have done across the entire federal government space in support of the pad that I. This will be, probably a very popular topic as a previous presentation also covered the response to COVID-19. That's what I'm going to do a little bit. Mine is a little different spin in the title slide is how feedback and planning which help the Iris respond to COVID-19. This has nothing fancy, no one comes here for fun. They have a particular question or task. Our folks able to see the presentation? I think there may be issues accessing. Again, no one comes here for fun. They want to give in, they want information or do a task and get out. I want to share a little bit. In this we see images on desktop and mobile device. It gives information about the magnitude, just in 2020, we had 1.7 billion session in IRS.gov. Had over 30,000 HTML pages we maintain on the side and over hundred 40,000 static files publish media including forms, instructions, document, statistics, tables, videos and other type of files. As you can see, it's a pretty large website. When we put something on there because of that traffic, you can imagine how the huge volume of people that see that information.

Next slide please. To your earlier points, at the beginning, we're talking about making content

plain for our limited English proficient audiences and this has become, over the years, has become a real focus of IRS. Even the last few years, our own Commissioner has taken a very strong decision on ensuring the from multilingual content on IRS.gov and other digital services and platforms. And even on our call centers. Just having access to content that is available to our taxpayers who are limited English proficient.

On the slide you see images on mobile devices where it shows where IRS.gov has been translated into several languages. We have seven languages in particular that you will find in the drop down menu in Spanish, Korean, the attorneys, Russian, Haitian, Creole and citified and traditional Chinese. Roughly 7000 pages are translated into one or more of these languages. Then we also have a particular effort we did over the last two years to have pull together the content in plain language as much as possible to translate the 20 languages the basic information how to file, where do I go and provide all that information. I see a question and we will get to questions at the end. About metrics driving the languages. We can cover that towards the end. The short answer is, there is a method to the madness. There were some metrics involved.

I'm here to talk more about how we leverage the COVID-19 response to create processes. Before I move into this slide and right now, you see an image of people lining up and coverage from the good morning America show, people lining up around buildings, waiting to register to get their unemployment because of the hardships our entire nation face during the early days and even now of the pandemic.

I think it's very important to recognize several of us have a desire, a passion to ensure content is written clearly and in plain language go with that passion, we strive to ensure our agency also adopt that same passion. A lot of times, we face hardships. We face roadblocks, we face challenges in terms of legislation that quickly makes us have to pay that and put content. It's highly regulated by perhaps our counsel offices or they may even be regulated at the highest level of our administration. So, a lot of times feel sometimes discouraged that we have to face those roadblocks. Writing in plain English has not yet been embedded will woven into the fabric of our digital contents or agency. Oftentimes they become an afterthought and we end up having to work really hard from the content strategy and web perspective to try to fix things that happen in have been put up because of agency needs otherwise things that come up that require for content to be placed quickly. In that light, what I will talk about today is how we leverage one of -- obviously it's unprecedented what we have had to face with the pandemic. How we leverage that entire scenario where things were flying in, legislation was coming in hot off the press. We were talking about some of those different things that all of us face. I will talk about how we leverage that to establish on the spot to include better content strategy and improve plain language.

Going back to this slide, what we see as early days of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought a lot of economic hardship. On March 26, several morning shows had coverage around featuring images like the one you see on the slide here with long unemployment lines, they were recording coverage around the stimulus package that had passed the Senate at that time.

People didn't understand what that means. When you hear this legislation has approved, clear thinking yes, it's here, where's my money? Was the check. They don't understand the whole process and needs to now go to the president for signature and there is a gap in time for what it takes. Again, the news was saying, do you know what? The package has passed, they started to tell people right away before it had been finalized and signed to go to IRS.gov to get direct deposit right now before the legislation was even finalized.

In this slide six, you will see an image of our top 10 turns. We ran an analysis of the top terms they were being searched for on that morning. What we found is, because we were monitoring the coverage and we knew it was coming and we were having conversations, we were listening already. When we did this search, we saw, that morning, eight times more searches for direct deposit had hit IRS.gov. Also, there's a search for change of addresses that spiked as well. In doing so, what we did is this is around 10 o'clock. By 11:26, we had it down pat and had identified the top pages that people were visiting. We added an alert box with a link to the page we created and of course, all of you created because that was a mandate that came from the administration that each agency had to create. There was another box to take folks to one page will be provided information that we had available to share. Thus helping folks who were searching desperately for how do I get my direct deposit? I want to pause for a second. The issue around direct deposit here speaks to a lot of folks may get their tax refund via check. They don't have direct deposit or even if they get their tax refund via direct deposit, they weren't sure there is information out there. How will that check come to me if the IRS going to use previous direct deposit information that I had on file? Maybe doesn't keep that information on file. Maybe I need to give you a direct deposit so you get my check. Maybe I close my previous checking account and I want to go as quickly as possible. I know the most popular is, direct deposit is the fastest way to get your refund. If I have it up today, I will get my stimulus check more quickly. As I mentioned, there was a change of address. I want to make sure if I am mailing my check, my address is up-to-date as well.

Next slide please.

On slide seven, we see his image from news coverage that talks about Trump signing the $2 trillion coronavirus bill into law. As companies and households bracer more economic pain. The very next day, we see that now. That relieves $2.2 trillion in aid to the American people. That Iris played a critical role in releasing those billions of dollars in what we called economic impact payments. We were already working on a response. On April 15, we launched what we call the get my payment application. That was in record time. We built this tool in-house to allow folks to go in and get the status were the economic impact payment was and also it allowed the opportunity for folks to provide direct deposit information. It helped Americans figure out when and how they're going to get the stimulus check.

Here we have an image of a graph that shows you the IRS.gov sessions per day. Memory shows you IRS.gov had 1.7 billion sessions in 2020 alone. Here, we see the 2019. The reason why we want to go 2019 is because 2019 was the last year prior to the pandemic so we call it our baseline near. Things are still going normal up to that point. You see this peak here that we

see on the graphic. This shows the spike in sessions of the course April 15 is our tax deadline date. All Americans know that usually unless there is a special year, April 15 is the deadline to submit and file your tax return.

We generally see a spike on that day for our web traffic. Looking at 2019, we see the same graphic but now we have improved the new traffic pattern of sessions that came in. On April 15 of 2020, you see the difference in the spike going from approximately 7 billion views in 2019 and in 2020, we had 78.8's million sessions in one day. I was by far record-breaking for the one day traffic to the website. The magnitude was such that our real-time analytics broke. Google analytics couldn't handle the volume to isolate what was happening. Also we had some survey response on the web. We had 61,265 COVID-19 related survey responses in one day. Just to give you more context, our site survey got less than hundred thousand responses in all of 2019 alone. Hundred thousand an entire year. Had 61,200 and just one day due to COVID-19. April 15 was critical in 2020. Not because it was policies and deadline because that was extended but because that's the day we launched to get my payment application and everyone needed to come to the website to find out whether's economic impact payments. People are coming to us in record numbers for answers and help. We had a develop information quickly. And get it approved faster.

We will start to look at images coming in on the collaborative review processes created on the fly. First, we knew we had to listen to what people were saying. We looked at news coverage as mentioned. We looked at social media. We looked at our survey responses we had on the web. After we gather that information, we responded to the feedback. I'm having issues with my address, I have a Ford address. I am abroad but I'm a U.S. citizen and I need to check how I will get my economic impact payment or stimulus check. We need to respond to that feedback immediately. Again, all of this is happening. By midmorning, we have response to feedback. Now by the afternoon, we review our stakeholders and get in front of them and say we must get this out. We must get this out there. Finally, we share daily actions and decisions internally and across what stakeholders across the IRS. I think that was important because we had a recap. This was on the fly. It was legal to ensure key stakeholders were aligned. What the media was saying, what taxpayers are saying. We were making clear, plain language response. We are drafting clear plane response was happening. This was not the time for jargon, this is not the time to put out the legislation stuff that most people run away from and to understand. This process again, to what I mentioned at the beginning of the presentation, the leverage the critical moment in COVID-19 response to establish a clear and quick process to get plain language content out on the website. This is something we often, again as mentioned earlier, our agency was more worried about getting content out, whether it was plain language or not and this is where we took over and as part of online services, establish the process. Here is the fun part., Fun to me, anyway. The entire IRS was looking to us for the first time to lead this response. That was the amazing point. We put ourselves up and said, let us, we are seeing this stuff, seeing trends in analytics, we are partnering with communications team and we will lead the way to creates plain and clear language in response to what was happening across our country and for our folks and taxpayers.

Next slide.

Slide 11, I will cover an example that talks about meta-description and best bet. You see an image here of a mobile device showing content in search results on the screen. One of the things we were able to do, due to the internal, and external politics and tied to legislation, we will always use the words we wanted on the website. We see this time and again. One example over the last decade, when the affordable care act came out, folks had different names to relates to the affordable care act. One of which was Obamacare at the time. We couldn't go in and put Obamacare on our website. We are still the IRS and were still putting information according to legislation. I didn't stop people from searching the website for Obamacare. One of the things we did, we had a similar situation. You have heard me so far talk about the economic impact payments. That is the name we gave our treasury, our parent agency gave to the payments we would send out on behalf of the federal government under the C.A.R.E.S. Act. People were not calling, they did not know what economic impact payments were. Most were going back to the last time in their particular generation. That the government issue any kind of payment like this in response to a crisis and those were the stimulus checks that were sent out. I believe with the president Bush administration. Folks had stimulus checks. They didn't know what economic impact payments were. What we did, we listened and heard. This is what people are coming in searching for. If you could see on the left, some of those are in the top results here. People researching for stimulus check. Everyone was talking about the stimulus payment. There were not calling it the economic impact payment. They did not know how to search for that. One of the things we did, use plain language concepts for content. We had to consider not only how we as an agency defined and named things but also how the users best recognize them. We put words used in the description and best bets. With that does, they come in right would drive them to the page for the economic impact payment so they can get to the information they need. We are not here to fight with people over what they're calling it versus what we are calling and were not here to slam down her throat that they need to understand what we are calling it. We are not here to point terms but to help taxpayers and serve them and provide much-needed relief that they needed and deserved to have. Those best bets in our terms for the recommended pages that come up on people search. That was critical. Creating and driving the traffic to where they need to go, by creating clear, plain language meta-descriptions that would come up under the Google analytics.[Captioners Transitioning] Next slide. Here we have an example of alerts. One of the other things that we had to be aware of through the pandemic and here we have an example of one of the requests we received for an alert. At the IRS we have centralized publishing to online services where before it was a decentralized process and now when someone wants to put something on the web we have an amazing publishing team that put that into the website. While often most of the time they are just put it up and don't ask any questions, we are always asking questions. Sometimes we win some questions and sometimes we lose some. In this case alerts were coming in fast and furious. In this one the IRS expects to issue all refunds for tax returns in 2020. Where there are no issues for the return. For refunds not issued because the tax return is being corrected reviewer waiting correspondence a refund will be issued as a paper check in 2021. Taxpayers are encouraged to check where's my refund for the personalized refund status.

Wo [Laughter], after I recover from my mild stroke, I reached out to our partners at the IRS across the IRS saying we cannot do that to people. I know we are trying to get the information out there and an alert box on the website is a quick way to say what we have to say, say it quickly and get out. It's a way to communicate something so that led us to, I think what we ended up doing to convert that is to say something, put a clear heading saying covert 19 processing delays and now the person knows what the alert is about immediately and we took the language and converted into plain language that is shaking more than 21 days to issue refunds for mailed and e-filed 2020 returns that require review. Correspondence is taking longer to process also. Thank you for your patience. This could've been plain language even more but it's a big when compared to what we had before and so one of the things that we set out to do again is leveraging, I'm sure we have other IRS folks and leaders on the plain language summit here, if you are here hello. Cover your ears for what I'm about to say, just kidding. One thing we did is we took ownership again for the first time we took ownership into the approval process, something never been done before for online services. We set any alert that comes in in any language must be reviewed by online services and must be cleared by us and we need to attain to the standards and so we did that. We now to this day look at every alert that comes in and we provide plain language version to support it.

Let's move on to the next, I think were wrapping up. Some lessons learned through the pandemic is we have to listen and tune into user needs, it's imperative. Even us as experts in content writing in plain language we need to understand that customers needs and desires are constantly changing and even how they consume the content. We also have to learn, we have to make changes along the way. We have to be willing to make those changes and to step out even in the middle of the pandemic to say hey, we are the experts here and one thing the pandemic does to anyone is if you ever want to know who a true leader as you look to a disaster and you will find out how quickly leaders margin this was the opportunity for us to step in and say we are the experts here and they let us do it and it was amazing and we continue to do what. Connected and use words people understand, forget jargons and forget what we want to name things. We have to be sure we provide clear words to folks. Finally, lead, don't wait for others to do it. Again this is where you have the opportunity to pick up and lead. I cannot tell you how amazing it was for me to sit on calls with executives all across the IRS and the first thing they said is what is online services thing about this? I want to encourage the rest of you it's not something that was built overnight, relationship building is an important part of building plain language because you have to get the buy-in and that's part of how we we then plain language into the fabric of the IRS. Thanks so much and I will pass it on to you. If you have questions, I don't know how much time we have. I might've talk too much [Laughter].

That was an excellent presentation, thank you so much. Unfortunately we don't have time for live Q&A but we have all of the questions and we certainly will distribute them to you if you and Catherine and Betsy can answer them at an earlier date we can post them or put them on digital.gov in the events page section. A great job, this was fascinating stuff in the IRS is always close to my heart because my father was an IRS employee for 30 years so you are appreciated everywhere and thank you so much. With that, Angie.

Angie, can you test your audio? Hello. Angie. You are joined by phone and I have you here. Catherine --

Okay I think you have on muted me.

Okay Angie, hello. Catherine, I will kick it over to you and Mira will post your slides for everyone to see so Catherine, over to you.

This is fantastic. I'm so glad to see you again. You can hear me, yes?

Yes, thank you.

Fantastic. I wanted to say Angie has communicated health for 30+ years at leading public health agencies, EPA and CDC. She has worked on plane writing projects you may recognize. CDC's definition of social distancing and consumer confidence reports you should receive every year if you get your drinking water from a public water system. All have to look and check because I'm not sure. We are delighted to hear from her and looking forward to your presentation on plain language accessibility and environmental justice for all.

Thank you for that lovely introduction Catherine. Hello everyone I'm so glad you are here. I am Angie, I am working with EPA but I am speaking on my own behalf today, not as a representative of the agency. Some of my own ideas gleaned through those 34 years of federal experience doing a lot of writing at government agencies. You will see by the initials on my slide I say BS CHG after my name and that means I have a BS in chemical engineering and I promised myself I would never do that again so I went on to receive a Master in public health and I am now a Doctor of Public health degree at Stanford University so I'm a glutton for punishment and good learning.

My role at EPA is also public health and its community involvement. That involves a lot of communicating but even as an engineer, I did a lot of communicating as well and I served as an engineer for EPA for 11 years in the Atlanta office. Right now I am actually in another state but working for the San Francisco office of EPA. Because I started at the very start of the pandemic last year in March 2020, I did not have to move. Today I'm sharing with you some of the intersections of plain language and assess ability and environmental justice that I've come across. For those not seeing me, I am an olive skinned Italian woman with short brown hair, green eyes and my reading glasses which I have to have to see the screen. I also have hearing loss aided by a hearing aid, not corrected and there is no quick way to describe this situation. I am also a card carrying member of a very fun organization for hearing loss called the say what club. That club and that support is often better than my hearing aid at helping me adjust to a lot of hearing loss. So I also connect by my phone and I want to warn you, it is possible I could get disconnected, I will come back, it takes time to plug-in all those numbers again but hopefully we will be good on the phone connection today as I hear right into my hearing aid from my phone

Bluetooth and it is an absolutely wonderful connection after not having that technology and having a lot of hearing loss happened throughout my life.

My slides today use a Native American theme. With those descriptions I am going to ask to go to the next slide please.

I would like to start us out, you've been in meetings all day and I heard the very last of José's wonderful presentation and I thought his points were spot on. Let's take a little break though and make a reflection. Let's reflect about where we stand in relation to the earth or the land wherever we are. All tell you where I am, I would like you to think about and acknowledge and appreciate where you stand or sit right now. Likely it was Native Americans land many years ago. Most of us live on this piece of land that we do because of horrific injustice to those Native Americans. In a general sense taking of land away from the Native Americans might be the first environmental injustice in a broad general sense. It doesn't meet EPA's definition but that is where I am going. We know the land lies in the legacy of Native Americans were forever changed by colonization of America. So I believe that honor to our native brothers and sisters is due. The land where I stand, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania right now, it was possessed by Hispanic and other tribes. Today I am honoring chief Guy Yasuda of the Seneca tribe. He is the figure pictured on the left of the slide you see here setting in a ready stance, a crouched stance opposite George Washington. It is here on Mount Washington in Pittsburgh that they had a meeting that really determined the fate of this area and who was going to be in charge of the land in this area. This beautiful sculpture is called points of view and it inspired me as I developed this talk and you will see how that works later now the chief lost his land and could be [Indiscernible] today I honor the Seneca chief Guyasuta as peacemaker and brave defender of Seneca who still live in the region although must have migrated toward Western New York, north of here. Maybe you know about the tribes that once disaster possess land in your area or maybe you don't but out of respect for those that lost lands and lost lives I ask you to think about it in your personal time, find out about it if you don't and respect and honor what you have and what was taken away from others. Let's look at another reflection. This time in the mirror on this slide. It is about us.

If you don't need to read captions I will ask you go ahead and close your eyes and think about privilege. Everybody has a different idea about privilege but I want you to think about the most important privilege. That is your life, your breathing right now, thank God you are not on a ventilator right now. You have many many abilities, maybe even a disability or to but you are talented, beautiful, even though I cannot see you all, you are smart and you have so many abilities even if you have that disability are two or more, we have many many gifts and even the disabilities are gifts.

So, I want you to think in terms, next time you hear about privilege or ability privilege, my ability privilege all of us for being on the call and working where we are and living is very very high. Thank you, you can open your eyes now if you have closed them. Let's go on to the next slide please.

Now, we can't cover all of these principles of plain language in the broad intersection of environmental justice and assess ability and one talk. That's really a lifetime of work for many people in public health agencies and for assess ability in all agencies. So today taking my cue from the sculpture seen points of view I would like to give us some guiding principles to keep in mind as we write or speak for the federal government. Points to do that I will talk about our little things we can do to make our work and our world just a little bit more assessable, kind and healed from an onslaught of environmental and other injustices. Go ahead and give me slide 4 please.

Okay, this slide, you don't have to read it. Atlas's out a lot of laws and executive orders, the legal requirements that apply to us. So we have the very earliest one, the rehabilitation act of 1973 and we have of course the one we all know about today, the plain writing act. The rehabilitation act requires accessibility to people with disabilities and it was enforced very recently with an executive order shown on the far right of the screen, executive order 14035 on diversity, equity, inclusion and assess ability in the federal workforce. That applies to us, right? Then we also have Executive Order 12898 that applies to EPA, addressing environmental justice in minority and low income populations. We have 1399 Dion protecting public health and environment and restoring science to tackle the climate crisis. Finally we have on all of us in order put out in 2000, Executive Order 13166 on improving access to services for persons with limited English proficiency and we all are responsible for most of these orders. I noted some of them have a focus on EPA and other public health agencies. These are the legal reasons we have to be assessable and to strive for environmental justice in our work. The best reasons are really people. Go to slide 5 please.

People are who we work for and many or most native, low income communities and communities of color, they are disproportionate burdens on their health and the environment they live in. Blood lead levels in children are significantly higher in these communities, many of these communities are the ones that are lucky enough to live near hazardous waste sites and in these communities climate change indicators measure higher consistently. Then you have the very almost unmeasurable community of people with disabilities and how many people are there? It's difficult to measure. CDC uses six questions about hearing, seeing, functioning, understanding, getting around and performing life activities independently. With their survey they have determined that 26 percent or 1 and 4 Americans have a disability. That's huge, that's the biggest minority population of all that all agencies will deal with. Then you have SAM HSA that says one in five of us have some mental health disability. There is some overlap there obviously but we don't know what the overlap is. The surveys are done in two different ways. We know mental illness is increasing drastically through COVID and we know President Biden spent the summer and recognized long COVID as a possible disability. So let's go to the next slide please.

This is a busy slide and I start here with assess ability primarily for people with disabilities but everyone even if they don't realize they have a disability or if they has a challenge in some area. Dictionary.com gives this easy definition of assess ability. It's something that is easy to approach, read, enter, speak with her understand. I love that plain language definition. Now the

executive order on diversity equity inclusion and assess ability which just got released this summer has a huge definition that takes up about three quarters of a page and I condensed some of it and highlighted some words important to us on this slide. Its information and communication technology, programs, services, ensuring people with disabilities can independently access every outward facing an internal activity or electronic space. We write for electronic spaces almost exclusively these days. Yes, I saw someone come in and say the UK has it on the plain language winner for this and I believe it to. Assess ability to them means people can do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort as someone who does not have a disability. It means people will not be frustrated by something that is poorly designed or implemented. I love that plain language definition, that's why when I thought I had to throw it up there. Environmental justice, EPA is the one who gets the definition for that and I will read it is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. I did not put that one through the readability index either. Nor was I involved in making up that definition. Slide 7 please.

Thank you. I would like to talk about these three points of view principles, guiding principles, we can have it in our minds and right here in our heart and we write when we prepare a talk, when we go before the public. I would like us to think about bringing these points of view with us. Number one in its power. Right now especially and throughout time the power of government perceived by the public is that we have too much. So what do we have to do? We have to serve the public with all their beliefs about our power. A good antidote to a power imbalance have cultural humility for others, for those others not blessed and lucky enough to be working for the federal government for many years as many of us have. We have to infuse our cultural humility in our writing, speaking and interactions. So what is cultural humidity? It's the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance but it's oriented in aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the person. May be a little bit opposite of the points of view sculpture I showed you earlier. That was a kind of ready but equal stance. In this case we have to be laden with respect and realize that we are not equal in some aspects as others and write and speak with that in mind. I will ask you to go, no, let me give you some audiences to think about race here. Parents are anybody who lives in Flint, Michigan or has lived there in the last four or five years. Remember what is happened there is environmental justice, I don't think I need to explain to you. Or people who live near the country's most toxic waste sites called Superfund sites and those are the sites I deal with. Okay, let's go on to slide 8 please.

We have a lot of emotions going on right now, don't we? There is a pandemic, there is unrest, there is all kinds of stuff going on. I want you to think about what's happening these days. What's important to the community, values, risks and the fear they have? I would like you to prepare and that would be the next slide, for all levels of ability to receive and understand. Prepare as many formats as possible and these are just a list of things you should do, set up your file assess ability, use readability checker often throughout drafting, prepare for translations and I give you some resources in the back about how EPA has developed a Spanish-language lottery that it uses as it designs the English translation so the Spanish translation can be better for those people to access. Learn all you can about diversity, equity, inclusion and assess ability.

I gave you a list of wonderful resources there including me up coming forum, I know we had some interaction there and I invite you to come to that next month. Go to the next slide please.

Acknowledge land, community and racial injustices as you side did in the beginning. Acknowledges situation. I gave some great resources there from CDC and ATS DR. Increase respect with order and prominence. On my slide I have a picture of a dome and a feather but I haven't finished it yet but Eddie EPA I found my peers wanting to think about representing state and tribal governments with that dome, that dome is a colonialist kind of image to the tribes so I don't have the right image yet but I am just telling you I worked with my friend and said, let's bring out the tribes as well, let's even list instead of states or federal, state, local and tribal requirements like we normally do, let's put the tribes first for a change. Little things like that can mean a lot when your audience sees it. We are the first one listed, they were thinking about us. Use ADA recommended people first language, I can't stress this enough because I encounter at all of the time. I give you a resource for that on the back on the ABA network. Again, use the current language of your audience and avoid trigger words and topics. Go to slide 11 please.

These are points to do from the accessibility point of view. The first one I would say that I love is CDC vaccine information statement, they start out with the word why and a? That is the immediate thing that tells you I should read this or not. Plan and advertise all pathways the same and realize if you think about these things later the FX come down on the person with the disability. I connect by phone, if I don't get those phone information pieces correct at the same time as a meeting are I get them in another email or after-the-fact or in the chat box, I am still struggling to connect on an equal basis so I want you to think about telephone, video, even phoneline only connections as a possible pathway as well as pathways after-the-fact and before the fact. Before the fact we usually send out slides ahead of time, after-the-fact it would be great if we sent out transcripts ahead, sorry after those meetings so we can read them instead of having to look through a recorded presentation and some of us getting captions. Just easy things to do. One thing we did recently was turned some very hard concepts about remedy criteria, hear those words, they are very hard. We turned them into questions and answers about what we do on Superfund sites. We talked about cleanup options instead of alternative remedies, those words are easier to hear and easier to understand so think about all those things, even things or words that are hard to hear because many people with vision problems are watching or listening to words instead of reading them through a screen reader. I have a couple rolls on acronyms, please please please don't acronym eyes the world. Divide sentences in half if you think about it, divide them in half as you write and make them make sense. Use helpful styles in terms and use that transcript as I said as your end result which to me is the easiest thing when you are doing video and audio. Of course, I didn't mention because they are there, captions and audio description are part of the rehabilitation act which many of you heard about and audio description is what I have been trying to do well in describing my images and my slides in this presentation.

I will ask you to go ahead and go to the next slide that shows some resources for you. I will let Catherine take over and see if there are any questions or things you want to talk about.

Thank you so much, Angie, this was really splendid. Thank you so much. At opened up part of the world we don't know quite so much about. I want to say we don't have any specific questions on your topic. We do not have any specific questions on your topic although there are questions in the chat we might reach back to you to get answered. Thanks, many thanks. What I would like now is to break for lunch and to remind you we have posted slides on digital.gov and I think Gabby can drop that in the chat again. People are very excited about some of your resources so I wanted to let you know. A flood of thanks are pouring into the chat window right now. We get back online at the summit at 1:00 after lunch. Thank you so much, Angie, this was really really interesting and I appreciate your focus on up part that some of us don't know very much about. I appreciate that, thank you very much.

I guess this is it, everyone have a good lunch and I'll see you back a few minutes before 1:00.

Thank you folks. Feel free to remain in the meeting if you would like or rejoin at any time.

[Event is on a lunch break lunch break and will reconvene at 1:00. Captioner standing by]

Hello Allison, thank you so much for joining. I am going to stop sharing this presentation slide placeholder now that you have joined.

Okay.

Thank you again, folks are on a lunch break but with them webinar there is no waiting room or anything so that's why there is still a good and -- amount of books on the call. Thank you for joining. I believe you are the session -- the session moderator should be on as well. I have been on the lookout, I believe it is Megan Scott.

She reached out to me this morning.

Okay. Megan just emailed me, she is getting a note saying please wait for the host to start the meeting.

I'll reach out to her. There have been little technology gremlins.

Some people have had no problem joining in other folks have had that and they have had to basically register for the event via Zoom which is kind of strange. Thank you, Breanna. There is a pop-up thing, I think it is we use the zoom for government version so it assumes everyone is a GSA on prompts people to use ENT. I will send her a note now.

Megan actually just emailed me. Hello Megan. You are in, awesome. All right, Megan I will promote you to panelist. Hello Megan, I'm going to promote you to cohost.

Hello. Hello Gabby and Allison, how are you? Be met great, how about you?

Good, sorry about the delay I wasn't sure which link to use but here we are.

You are not the only person, there is been some interesting zoom stuff happening today.

It would not be a digital event if that did not happen though.

Exactly, thank you for joining. Allison told me that you touched base already. Folks have 11 minutes left for lunch before we get started. Again and everyone knows there is no waiting room so for folks hanging around we are breaking until 1:00. If you have anything to discuss, feel free and also feel free to go on mute and prep. Allison, if you would like to put your slides up now where I can put the placeholder back or you and Megan can talk amongst yourselves.

I can do that to make sure they load as expected.

Do you guys want my camera on, I think I'm the first person to introduce someone else. I can appear with the camera no camera, whatever you think is best.

If you wouldn't mind being on camera for the introduction and welcome and folks have provided a lot of great content today. José and Angie were not able to get to the live Q&A. There is time for some life Q&A if you would not mind, Megan, going back once Allison has done her presentation and if there is time for presentations, if you would not mind going back on camera during that time to ask those questions.

Sure, not at all. I can see the Q&A and questions coming up?

Yes, there is a chat there. I don't know if you see the black bar where it has mute, the start video, participants, there is a Q&A.

It looks like I have a different view than I did before so I should be able to see it. I guess I will check the open questions and save them for the end. I know Allison said she thought her talk was going to go up to 15 minutes so if that is the case we should have some time to go to Q&A. So I will just plan to do that.

All of those starting now, the new questions will be showing up in that open section.

Okay.

If there are any AV questions, Megan, I will pop in and Merrill will pop in and out to check on those who, don't worry about addressing issues. Of questions go into the Q&A you can disregard those.

Awesome.

Gabby I've a question for assess ability. Should I describe myself? For people who cannot see me on camera or is that not a typical thing?

Yes, that is definitely, if you feel comfortable doing that that would be great. Megan, the same for you. If you do not feel comfortable and if you are comfortable providing your preferred pronouns you can do that as well.

Yes, Amy, thank you so much. We are broadcasting. This is our lunch break but zoom webinar does not have a waiting room we can turn off and turn off since this is an all day summit so thank you for bearing with us while we do our last-minute prep. We appreciate it. Thank you for the warning, thank you, Amy. If you would like to describe yourself and if you feel comfortable doing that and you feel comfortable providing your preferred pronouns feel free to do that as well. I know, Allison, we went through and you were great with all of the audio descriptions for the PRA site you will go to on all of that good stuff. With that, if there are no more questions, I'm going to step for a moment to get some water. I will be back on and we will turn the recording on right around 1:00 and give it 30 seconds and then Megan, I will quickly go off mute and do our normal housekeeping things because folks who stepped away from lunch and some could only join in the afternoon so I will let folks know they can have access to the live captioning using the link we will put in the chat, the code of conduct and the link for the presentations if they want to follow along and then I will turn it over to you.

Okay, do you want me to repeat, I don't know if you said that but I didn't hear it, that folks should put their questions for presenter in the Q&A as opposed to chat?

That would be great.

I'll do that.

For general comments on chat, any folks that want to provide general comments or introduce themselves we encourage them to do that in the chat. Those targeted questions for Allison in the presentation to put in the Q&A.

Thanks again, Megan.

No problem at all, thank you for putting this on, it's pretty great.

I will be back in three or four minutes.

If anyone needs anything I will still be here.

My lighting is terrible, I may try to get a different lamp because it's fairly dark in my room.

Okay, I can still see you.

Hi folks. I hope you had a nice lunch break. Up next we have Allison with the GSA. I will turn it over to Megan Scott in a moment. I wanted to remind folks about a few things. One, link for live captioning will be in the chat. I am putting that in right now. Also a link for our code of conduct for participation will also be in the chat. All of the slides and presentations for today are available for anyone who is interested at the digital.gov events page which is also in the chat. With that, I will turn it over to Megan. Thank you so much, Megan.

Thank you, Gabby. Good afternoon and welcome back. My name is Megan Scott I'm a communications specialist at the Department of Agriculture. I'm happy to be attending my fourth plain language summit and to be introducing our speaker Allison. She will talk about how to use online glossaries to meet information needs of people come to your website. She works at GSA office of strategic communication as a regional public affairs officer for region 6. She coordinates GSA high risk and high visibility communication through Missouri, Kansas, [Indiscernible] and Nebraska. She helps people understand the important work in effect on that region. She has been in public service for 15 years. Before that she served in staff positions with the U.S. Army, the emergency management agency and Delphi University. Sees the native of Kansas and a graduate of Kansas University she has a Master of science in journalism and mass communication. If you have questions for Allison, enter them into the Q&A box. We will save time at the end of the presentation for questions. The chat feature is more for your comments and information sharing so few put questions in the Q&A we will get to those at the end. With that I give you Allison Kohler.

Hi, thank you so much, Megan. I am Allison Kohler. I am based out of Kansas City region 6 of GSA. My pronouns are she and her and for persons using assistive technology I'm a white woman with light here I'm waiting a white turtleneck and gray cardigan sweater. I want to talk about online glossaries and maybe by the end you will consider whether an online glossary is right for your website.

The background of how I started on this is one I think other people may have a similar problem. Our audience is made up of different levels of understanding especially when it comes to jargon technicolor slang language. We might have a new employee or member of the public who is really unfamiliar with the way we call things in the language we use and you may have clients or customers or people who interact with you more frequently who have more of an intermediate understanding and probably your employees who have worked for you for a long time are quite fluent in this language and they are able to understand all the acronyms and phrasing people use. With that or without meeting someone to define it with them. For us we thought a potential solution would be to have an online glossary to serve these different levels.

We considered two options, the first is a static page with terms similar to what U.S. citizenship and immigration services has. If I go to their page, it's called glossary, there is a drop down with the letters of the alphabet and a search box to type in a word or phrase and then click search. There are the accordions for each of these terms so there are probably hundreds of terms here but if I click on the word Elian, there is a definition that reads any person not a citizen or national

of the U.S. Noncitizen it looks like they offer an alternative term to use which is a synonym. The second option is terms defined in references throughout your site. This is similar to how the paperwork reduction act. If I go to the paperwork reduction act page and click on when does the act apply, in the first part of the body of the page it says not every request or collection falls under the PRA's scope. Before PRA there is a book icon and if you put your icon over it until kit comes up. If you click on it you will see a glossary that has PRA in the definition for it, the paperwork reduction act the law governing how federal agencies collect information from the American public.

Back on the presentation, third option which we are not considering is a glossary widget on every page. Similar to this, you see in the corner there is a glossary icon, it's the word glossary in a blue box in their is a series or right side rail that pops up in a series of terms that again are in accordion and if you click on a term the definition comes up in the expansion. For backlog the number of requests or administrative appeals that are pending beyond the time period for response.

[No audio]

This is GSA.gov. Recently in September of we created a static page with 60 terms, it's a GSA.gov/reference loss/glossary. If I go to that page it's called glossary, it's a legal disclaimer and also a description it's not an all-inclusive list and if you have feedback about terms that need to be added or if the definition provided did not serve your needs in some way, if you email us that would be good. There are about 60 terms and you will CFI expand the accordion for memorandum of understanding are MOU the definition is an written nonbinding agreement between the GSA and other entities to document lines of authority or responsibility. Back on the presentation, or other pilot is similar to the paperwork reduction page. We picked 20 terms that were on our top visited pages and did a pilot in April 2021. Some examples of how this looks on our site, if I go to this page you will see the little book icon before a couple phrases there is a book icon before GW AC, if I click on that it's actually takes over the whole screen which will need adjusting if we expand on this pilot. It's basically a gray screen with the light gray box on top of it and the definition is a pre-completed multiple award indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contract that agencies can use to buy total IT solutions more efficiently and economically. You can close out of it.

If I go to another page about GSA schedule you will see the book icon before the word schedule and if I click on it the same type of box comes up this is a long-term government wide contracts with commercial firms providing federal, state and local government buyers access to more than 11 million commercial products and services a volume discount pricing. Also called multiple award schedule or federal supply.

Back on the presentation. The pros of a static page option are if your website is pretty much the only one talking about this term, your page should be the one to come up when people search for it and that's what we think most users do. If they come across the term they don't recognize they are going to say hey Siri or hey Google or whatever you are using and type in that phrase

and the webpage should come up and hopefully you can just click on it and see the definition. An example if you try to Google deferred vested participant the second is pension benefit guarantee Corporation's. The other advantage is it's one dedicated place to point other hyperlinks in any digital continent so any product where you have the ability to create a hyperlink you can point people to that definition page. For instance if you wrote a sentence you will sign an occupancy agreement with us and hyperlink the occupancy agreement, it takes the user to the glossary page with occupancy agreement expanded in the definition appears a formal signed agreement between GSA's public building service in a federal agency for specific space assignment.

Back on the presentation on slide 5. This option seems to be a little less resource intensive to begin and to keep it up.

The pros of the sitewide option are we see it is more user-friendly because the user can have the definition right there on the page, they don't have to navigate over to the glossary. In our pilot we collected some date in our first 30 day period with 20 terms. About 15,000 users clicked on the icon generally. Three of the terms had engagement rates over 10 percent. What this means is the number of people who clicked out of the average number of people who sought so we grabbed the page use for this particular page in the last 90 days and then took an average and just kind of just that would be something in the next 90 days. We divided the number of people who clicked out of the number of people who sought essentially meaning that they were engaged with content. Three of the terms, more than 10 percent of users clicked on it. Four of our terms it was between five and 10 percent of the people who sought. For eight terms it was between one and five percent of the people who sought in three terms had an engagement rate under one percent of the people who sought. Generally I think the government benchmark is a engagement rate so we saw those as good numbers.

On slide 7 we talk about what do you need? The first thing is data. At GSA we want to deliver what our users need and invest in appropriate amount of resources for the return we are getting. We use Google analytics for the most viewed pages then we looked at those pages to find terms that we thought people may need to find. We use a report with our top queried terms of what users type into the search page on our website and that gives us kind of a feeling about what people need more information about when they come to our website. We also use site improved to look up the terms, you basically type the term in and it will scroll the entire website and tell you how many occurrences of that term are throughout your site. This is helpful because you will see which terms you are using over and over again. That can be helpful to come up with what people may need extra help understanding.

Continuing on what else you need, slide 8. You need a strategy. We are using a spreadsheet on the backend, columns are termed and we are using those to alphabetize the list. Another with plain definitions and our recommendation is not to ask the subject matter expert, the reason why is because often times they will give you, even a GW AC definition we have today we could greatly improve. They will often give you the slaying are jarred jargon or technical language that they know very well and then it's a lot easier for you as an average person to be able to

describe it in a plane way after you see the source of the information. This is the next column, the URL source for the history in case you needed definition and no what it is, you can go to the source where you pulled it to look at it their. That's essentially what I did is look up each of our terms, figured out the most authoritative source to work with, wrote it in a plain way. The last column is the occurrence count and that is to see which terms or phrases you are using most frequently throughout the website. We suggest including a legal disclaimer, our lawyers thought that was important so you could essentially let people know anything they read on your webpage will not supersede other agreements they might have through contracts or through federal regulations, it's just a way to help people with basic understanding and it not true meanings that changes legal and binding things. We also include a way to give feedback on missing terms so if they need help with a specific term that might not be there or the definition we gave may have created a problem for them and we want to know about that so we can update that. We use accordions to avoid cognitive overload. If the phrases and definitions were all, if you could see it all when you load the page, that can make people feel overwhelmed right away and say I don't want to go through this and try to find what I'm looking for. With the definitions folded up inside the according hopefully they can find a word they are looking for and click on that may have the information they need. We recommend you limit your list, our limit for now is 200 terms, we think that is easier to maintain on our side and also easier to avoid it being a huge catchall for people to throw anything in and then you can find anything anymore. We recommend pruning it, this is a term Catherine loaned me to basically check in on it at least once a year or hopefully twice a year to double check your list is as comprehensive as you want it to be in your definitions are still accurate and it is serving people with high intent.

On slide nine well talk about how to decide on terms. I suggest a user centered approach, this is the greatest lesson learned so far. I first set out to consolidate other glossaries and random places. What I found is those, this is not necessarily what users are coming across on the website. I recommend using your search for data or your site improve occurrences to develop what terms to include. I say avoid asking the subject matter experts what terms they think and the reason why is because specialists that GSA would probably tell me that everyone always asked me about what circulation fact there is. Maybe that person works on a particular thing all day long and that is a question that person gets a lot because of the work they do but generally not a lot of people need to know exactly what that is so it is meant to be serving the greater good rather than what our subject matter experts don't necessarily want to keep answering in their work.

This concludes my presentation. I have put my name and my phone number 816-223-6198 and my email for any follow-up or questions you might have that we don't have time for today. My email is Allison.Kohler at GSA.gov.

Thank you Allison that was interesting. Is someone who worked on web content and technical terms I know how important it is to have definitions for those terms. I like the demonstration of different options for displaying those terms. We have a couple questions. We will start with a couple about accessibility. To questions about accessibility one from Kelly and Michelle about different options you talk about. Which one is the most compliant I guess with ADA 508

requirements in terms of the static option versus the word by word option. Do you have any information on that?

Our web team vetted all of that information and they are pretty clued in with the U.S. web design standards so I believe the icon that the PRA is using that we are borrowing is at least web design standard compliant. I'm not positive about ADA compliant, I don't know if anyone has insight on that but I believe they did the vetting on the icon is.

Okay what about screen readers? Was that part of the test they did? Whether it's possible for the screen reader to read the pop up versus the text on the page and that kind of thing?

I think I mentioned that briefly but for the pilot we wanted the user to click to get the definition because we wanted the analytics to see if people were using at. We would like to do that moving forward now that it's validated is a tooltip for a hover operation so the user doesn't have to click and have it take over their screen, they can just cover over the term in the description will come up for them to see it and then go back. The person again who did the programming in this section 508 trusted tester here at GSA so I think he check with technology but that's a great question to take back to him to make sure.

Thank you. We have a question from Vivienne about that book icon you mentioned in one of the options you showed and she is wondering if that book icon was an established standard to use for the.gov sites and I think you mentioned it was approved. Is that what you meant?

We borrowed it from PRA. I will say what PRA is doing if you remember they have the glossary widget that pops out so essentially what someone who knows [Indiscernible] is it's written so the user clicks on the term and what it does is grabs the term and running it through the glossary as a search as if you have gone over to the glossary and type the word in your self. There is a bit of a problem with that because what's happening man, the keypad on the mobile devices waiting for another term see have to figure out how to get that out of there to close out of that glossary rail and to go back to what you are reading. It seems to function better on a desktop because it flows them and goes back to regular reading but if you are going to expand our site that is something we need to guard against and double check that as well. These are all things we are definitely trying to iron out before we decide which direction to go on a larger scale.

Sure, it sounds like you have a lot of information from the pilot so it's a great starting point. There is another question about the accordion feature. She has been told to avoid accordions because they can interfere with search engine optimized station. She wonders if you have found that at all.

I'm not sure, again we have only had the static page live for a week or so, I not fully proficient with search engine optimization. I tend to agree it could be problematic and if someone has a better solution for how to to keep the page from being so overwhelming with so much information on it, I would love to hear it. This is the best solution we can come up with to avoid

the cognitive overload and I do believe, I will double check the search results but I think I searched a word yesterday and even our online glossary page that is only been up for a week was the first result and obviously it's an accordion layout.

I'm seeing something in the chat, I'm not saying who it's from, from Dorothy who says we use a glossary for our website and accordions and it is not interfered with our SCO and where using the site wide glossary. Thank you Dorothy for that. We have time for a couple more questions.

We had a question from someone who wants to know when it comes to the actual content, the definitions of terms appearing in the glossary, how to handle senior leaders who insist on a legal review of the definitions of those terms. I remember you said don't consult subject matter experts on the definition but sometimes people want to review everything that goes on the site so what you have to say about that?

I wholeheartedly agree. My approach to that is I essentially with my boss and bosses boss and bosses bosses boss about this and let them know the reason why I didn't want to run the document through subject matter experts per se for that reason, sometimes they will rewrite it in no way that is not user friendly so our solution was essentially as far as legal was concerned as long as we have the disclaimer, I know these are not the same definitions you'll find but these are the more user-friendly ways for people to understand it she basically said let's make it clear that we borrowed it from the pension benefit appropriations page it says none of this supersedes the other places so there is no way anyone can complain with saying it's causing a problem legally. As far as reviewing, our position is says. The page invites anyone who has a problem with what we have used whether it's [Indiscernible] to let us know and so it's a little bit, we are not asking your permission, it's more here is what we have and we've had several people look at it and it seems to make sense and they can let us know if there is a more effective way to phrase it and then we can change it.

That is really helpful because yes, it never occurred to me to offer such a disclaimer and to be very open to input on the definition so hopefully that helps folks out there who are dealing with people who want to review it and put their non-plain language and it. I'm looking at the chat and seeing a couple more people have weighed in on the affect of the accordions on optimized station and it looks like it's a headings weather than the text so if you have good headings on point with your keywords and you should be okay on that.

I think that's pretty much the end of the questions so considering that we are approaching the end of time I think we might wrap it up unless there is anything you want to say, Allison, before we finish up.

I don't thing so. I wanted to thank Catherine, she and I have been together every other week for about an hour where she just helps me, I share something I'm working on her whether it's an update or an article, anything I'm working on and then we get on a call together and she goes through and shows me techniques for making it more plain so I highly recommend if you have the opportunity to have access to an expert like we have with Catherine, what I've been doing is

each time we work on something together, as I edit things for other people I'm using some of her tech makes their. It's making a difference and I think it's a great idea and I appreciate Catherine's time. That's all I help.

If I can burst in for a second. If people want to see the legal disclaimer, Allison, can you drop the URL in the chat and people could see the legal disclaimer? Someone has done that.

Yes it's GSA.gov/reference/glossary.

Fantastic I think I interrupted you, Megan. I'm sorry.

I was going to echo what Allison said because I know Catherine help me even outside of GSA so she is a huge resource and she is full of knowledge. I have a posted from her from our meeting years ago which reads when editing doesn't work try formatting and I use that all of the time, Catherine. Shout out to Catherine. Thank you, Allison, so much. It's useful and thank you for your questions and I'll turn it back over to Gabby or Catherine or someone from GSA.

Thank you. I think I'm taking it. I'm happy to do so. It struck me that maybe you have to look at that in chrome, that is just a guess for the legal disclaimer further reference glossary to show up so let's hope that is the case and we have a slightly more expanded URL. Okay. I wanted to go to our next speaker. This has been really an interesting journey to see what different agencies and people are developing and doing and going forward and it's so inspiring. I wanted to let all of you know I've been inspired by everything you have said and I've been writing down tiny Post-it notes that all have to try to figure out what I meant later on but anything that produces Post-it notes is a good thing so I'm looking forward to our next presenter, Danielle. I'm afraid I mispronounced your last name and I'm sorry.

It's Nagel.

That's a plain language lesson for everyone. Danielle is a public program coordinator at the National Weather Service and I have to add here as part of a household that watches the weather Channel with great devotion that she cannot actually influence the weather, no, she cannot Photoshop a tornado or maybe she can, I don't know. What she does is develop policies to enhance service capacity of the national weather service public operations for hazards such as extreme heat, high winds and dust. In other words everything we have seen in the news lately. She also serves as the hazards simplifications senior project advisor, title weekend hope to aspire to and providing social science expertise and managerial support. What a dream job. What she will talk to us about and discussing is one of the key outcomes of the National Weather Service hazard simplification project, removing advisory from watch morning and advisory WW a systems. I have to tell you when I told my family about this there were some members of the family who were appalled and horrified and said what are we going to do without it by series and I told them they could sign up for the summit are I would explain it afterwards. You have two potential fans hanging out right now and just to let you know I feel safer already. If you will go ahead, Danielle.

Sure, I think you guys are going to be showing my slides?

Yes, Danielle, thank you so much. Mira is getting ready to do that. Thank you, Mira.

Thank you guys. I've been listening as much as I can do other talks and I have a slightly different take on things and I will say it is been a huge challenge for us trying to determine how to improve our advisory system and transition to more plain language. Hopefully I can offer a slightly different perspective here. For everyone I have my website up here or our website weather./hazard simplification. If you would like to contact us at any point we actually have an email so feel free if you have more questions. You can go on to the next slide please.

Just to get everyone on a level playing field because we know there are a lot of differences of knowledge out there, this is our current system, our watch morning and advisory system as it stands today. First off watch is issued and you may have seen a winter storm watch or something like that, watch is issued when no life and/or property threatening event as possible but were not certain about it. Warning is issued when no life and/or property threatening event is happening or about to happen. Advisory is less serious and no warning but is also happening or about to happen so it's a lower-level warning in other words. Some of you may have heard of a special weather statement in that is not quite may be as plain language as we are saying but this is issued when an event less serious or assured her duration then advisory is about to happen. We have multiple terms within our system right now that require some amount of investigating basically. Moving on to slide 3.

I want to set the stage for why we went about the hazard simplification project in the beginning. What was the opportunity? It really stemmed back from a congressional act, the weather act for short and section 406 of this actually called on us to really assess our system. I have a couple quotes from section 406. The purpose of NOAA system for issuing watches and warnings shall be risk communication to the general public that performs action to prevent loss of life and property. They said NOAA shall assess their system for issuing watches and warnings regarding hazardous weather and water events. We had asked to assess and improve our system so that's one place where it stemmed from but then in general weather services trying to integrate social and media uneconomic science into their strategic planning so I have a screenshot of one of our goals and that is to reduce the impacts of weather water and climate offense by transforming the way people receive understand and act on information. Drilling down further really is how can we integrate the social behavior uneconomic science to simplify information and promote understanding. Drawing from this, this is what is spent starting and driving forward the hazard simplification project.

This is our road to simplification hopefully. We actually started in 2014 and we started exploratory with focus groups so we found that there is a desire for change. You can see it small I understand but there is a crowded map with our hazards on it at that point in time so we found there are way too many headlines, wit advisory, floods, winter weather advisory, winter storm warnings, all these headlines out there when it comes to water events and weather events. It

can get confusing. This is when we heard the term advisory is may be problematic in some way. Moving on to 2015 weighted case study surveys as well as a large-scale three day workshop where we pulled in a lot of different sectors and partners and stakeholders to do term and what is a realm of possibility, what can we do to help. We found that we need to find a way to simplify and consolidate our system, focusing on impacts rather than meteorological criteria and try to move toward more bolded formats instead of free-form paragraph type of text. In 2017 we took a step back on those because we needed to understand what we could do to change. How institutionalized are the watch warning advisory terms? So we surveyed a bunch of different sec tours, bunch of different organizations and found the warning term was the most embedded in current law and policy, advisory was the least embedded but the good news was most organizations stated they could adjust to change as long as they were given enough lead time. Full steam ahead we explored Moran in 2018 we did public surveys and we step people through scenarios to see what sort of language resonated with them when it comes to communicating on a weather or water hazard. What we found is again advisory is clearly the least understood headline. Another important finding is it's actually conflated with watch so that they are confused with each other could lessen their impact. The past couple years 2020 and 2021 we have done a lot of partner webinars, surveys and focus groups to drill down to our final proposal and ultimate decision needed to be. I'll talk about that in a second. Moving on to slide 5.

I want to drive home the point that one of the main reasons why we are trying to transition to plain language is that our headline terms require interpretation so you will see a graphic here of almost a triangle of watch, warning and advisory. People may ask which is worse, a warning or advisory? Is watch a downgrade, what is the connection between these terms? It's not intuitive, not something people can see and immediately know. Instead just describing the hazard and impact and plain language is much easier and transferable and easy to understand. We found our core partners such as emergency managers prefer the plain language, they can quickly convey to their stakeholders and copy and paste without further explanation. We found continued support for plain language through our engagements. Moving on to slide 6.

What is a major change? There is a piece of this missing, maybe if we click one more time, I'm not sure if there is animation. Know, strange, okay. Unfortunately there is a box missing but we will power through. First off, no worries, we are keeping watch and warning and we continue to hear these are institutionalized and it this point we are not changing them. If we are trying to forecast on a significant life or property threatening event we will use these terms. Watch, you should prepare in this case and way of graphics here of a flashlight and a shopping cart so this is getting your stuff together ahead of an event. Warning, what you should do is take action. We have a tornado shelter and turnaround don't drown signs. These are things you should do immediately or very quickly. Morning means it's happening or about to happen. Advisory and special weather statement, here is where we are making a change. Instead of using terms we are using plain language to describe this. These are things happening that may not impact life or property as long as you exercise caution and do what you need to do. It could be a wind advisory, you are checking for loose branches and putting loose items on your porch away. It could be a winter weather advisory where you need to drive slower so we have images there for

slow down sign, drinking extra water if it's a heat advisory. Instead of using terms to describe that we describe it in plain language. Moving on to slide 7.

Currently we are working on this, this is alive now. We made the decision to remove advisory and special weather statements but we haven't decided on what are plain language will look like. We have three options right now that we are deciding upon. The first one is hazards leading the message, for instance Stowe, Lida, relations today. Option two is caution light snow accumulation today. Optionally -- option three is saying light snow accumulations today. Nuanced I know but words mean a lot so we are trying to figure out what would best resonate with the most people. Moving on to slide 8.

Apologies for how small this is your there are a couple things missing and I will blame myself for probably not transferring the PowerPoint effectively. Sorry, we're not used to working in PowerPoint. On the left side you see current products. Up at the top you have a winter weather advisory and this is our text product so you see a line of code that is computer readable and adjusted by partners and tells what the product is. Below that highlighted you'll see our current headlines, what I mean by this is winter weather advisory in effect from 4:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. Saturday. That's a headline of what you see with advisory. Below that we would reformatted into what where when impact format given the feedback we hear. How will this change? Moving to the right side instead of the winter weather advisory we have one of the options for plain language. For instance snow, light accumulations on Saturday. So it is put in that conversational hazard and impact language. We will retain the where what when impacts. Below this you will see a current special weather statement. The change with this essay will be in the bolded format rather than free-form paragraph so that's an important change for that product. Moving on to slide 9.

If you wonder what will be impacted, these are all of our current advisories. The vast majority will transition to plain language, the exceptions would be small craft advisory which we plan to transition to warning, soon, advisory we have not made a decision yet it may transition to warning her plain language. Moving on to slide 10.

Justin summary of what we have done as part of our journey, we have separated things into two parts, revamp is really the major overall change so that is a removal of the advisory term in favor of the plain language headlines. As I mentioned these are, the options on the right hazard leading the message, caution leading the message or free text are all still in the works and we don't have a final decision on which one is the ultimate replacement for advisory but it will be one of these three. Repair is basically low hanging fruit we have tried to tackle in the meantime over the past six years or so. This is consolidation are reformatting. Consolidation is likely used to have a freezing rain advisory and a winter weather revisory. Now we have one winter weather advisory now. If freezing rain is involved we talk about that in the body of the message. Trying to simplify. Reformatting is the more clear intuitive bulleted format so getting to the point of what where when and impact. Repair is been ongoing and is almost complete at this point. You see a graphic here of the timeline. We are in 2021 and have made the decision to remove advisory but there is a lot to do to make it happen. We have said this will not happen any sooner than 2024

so it will be implemented in 2024 and beyond and there is a mixture of reasons. We have a lot to do to prepare for the change, we need to make sure we update all of our systems and that we have it reflected in our policy but we also want to make sure our public and partners have time to adjust. That was something we were told through feedback that they need that time so we want to be sure to give them time to adjust their systems and educate their stakeholders and also time for everyone to do testing. We have a plan set forth for the next three years to lead us to this path but we are getting there.

I think that would be the last slide. Yes, okay, I'll go back to the summary. I tried my best to leave time for questions.

That's fantastic. We have one really good question. Do you have, do you have to consider word character limits as well for the statements and has that affected your ability to lose use plain language. Sometimes it uses fewer characters but not always.

Are products don't have any character limits beyond what we put on them. Part of my job at the National Weather Service headquarters is to create policy about what goes into the field. If we were to decide these headlines have limitation on characters than we will put that in place. Most likely this will help simplify because when you are in the field are operational meteorologist, it can be hard in the moment in the heat of the battle to type up a large sentence of what is going on and we would not want them to have to do it so putting character limits on their and putting automation into it can help with not only consistency but also simplification and really getting down to the main point. The only thing I will say, the only character limits are with our wireless emergency alert messages and that is a slightly different effort so it would not impact these plain language headlines.

It's gratifying that plain language can be so useful for that. On a lighter note I thought you would like to know in the chat someone wrote in I used to work for the American Red Cross and I had big stickies on my computer to remind me the difference between terms in English and in Spanish. In the end anticipated effects of your policy. Someone else brought up I had seen this somewhere but did not remember it that the Tocco analogy, are you familiar with that?

Yes there is a cupcake and a taco one floating around. Both are genius. I love them.

If you have all the ingredients together at the Tocco watch and if you have them assembled into the tacos it is a warning. Yes, that completely works for me, how that works although some people say I have to look them up because they sound vaguely bad but unless you are totally in the weather place you are not necessarily thinking of what are the various degrees of bad of these things. Another question, do you have any advice on how state departments, sorry I have my Chad open, do you have any advice about how state departments of transportation can mimic the structure when it comes to sending press releases about dangerous road conditions during snow and ice events?

Yes, one thing that led us to the bulleted format of impacts is actually from what we have heard

from emergencies managers who communicate to stakeholders like DOT and their local and regional departments. We like the idea of our text products being easily able to be copy and pasted so you don't need explanation, you can take the body of the message in the headline and the bullets and you can copy and paste. Another thing we are trying to ensure is the and just ability I guess you could say. We have computer readable language in our messages within our text products that can basically be ingested by partners and stakeholders in automatically displayed. Again it's a hope that one of these three options, this plain language can easily be displayed. You will either see a winter storm watch if were preparing for a large event, warning if we know it's a big event or if it's going to be some light snow during morning rush hour maybe we can say that, we have a headline to scroll across screens on a highway board and just say snow, light accumulations during your morning commute. We are trying to work with our partners on what they need, how they can transfer the information to their stakeholders and that's a big part of the next few years.

That sounds fantastic that you are using technology to make it easier as well as a language.

To tighten that up and not have an enormously long thing that people have to look at their screens to find out.

Yes, a lot of this all point out that we don't work alone. This is all part of the broader enterprise. We are one piece of it but we rely heavily on our partners to be the other piece of it, we rely on the private sector or an emergency managers and meteorologists. All of us working together well to get the word out there. It is a team effort. There was a shout out in the chat about for the DC area, this is very low capital whether and they said they have always appreciated the capital whether, or on twitter so if you care about whether on DC you can follow them. A plain language shout out which is interesting because it's a huge area and there are regional variations and a couple streets down may get no rain at all but I'm sure you have heard all possible weather complains one way or another.

Definitely.

I guess your format, the wireless telecom that you are using means you don't necessarily want to use visuals, that is not what this particular system is set up for.

Yes, that's a hard one. One of the challenges of weather services our audiences everybody, literally everybody. We have to always maintain text products in some form for those that cannot receive things through graphics and visuals so we have to make sure we maintain that but at the same time we are very cognizant of the need for what we call impact based decision services for our core partners such as emergency managers. In that case we have more opportunity to provide our information in different ways so of course if you know anything about social behavior science you know it works best to provide things in multiple format and ways so we have text, graphics that are local offices create, we have our national website where we have maps of hazards so ensuring we get the information out in a lot of ways is important and also a challenge. How do we translate a plain language headline in text onto a map for instance

and what is it look like so it's always a challenge to make sure that we are maintaining that balance in its easily transferable to a lot of mediums.

[Captioners transitioning]

We are now ready for a 15 minute break we will continue at 215. Everyone, grab your lunch or if that's appropriate in any drink you care for. We will return in 15 minutes.

Welcome back. I received a recording. We have Melanie, Eden and Kimberly become. I want to remind folks that there is a link for live captioning I'll put in the chat. A link for our code of conduct for attendees will be linked and posted in the chat and finally, all the presentations for today's summit are available to download on digital.gov. On the plain language event page which I will post a link for as well. With that, I will turn it over to Kimberly. Thanks.

Melanie is a writer and editor of digital storytelling and as a senior public affairs specialist, she serves as an award-winning fastback summary. Shifting's degrees.

[Indiscernible - audio issues]

That introduction was a very good one. We will both talk about fast facts today.

We are excited to talk to you about fast facts . We will go to slide to. You may wonder why we are starting with a 1940 memo from Winston Churchill. We are celebrating our centennial this year. Has been hundred years of government oversight through the Government accountability office previously known as a General accounting office. Reissue about 700 reports, testimonies and other publications each year publicly on our website GAO.gov. It such important work. I love this agency. Each of our reports offers insight and recommendation on how the federal government can save money or improve. It's so important that people understand what it is we are saying and can quickly grasp bottom-line findings. Now we get to Winston Churchill. This hangs the office of Public affairs as GAO . Reading this reminds us that while we are talking about communicating in the digital age, the struggle Israel. The plain language struggle Israel. If you go through and read this, some of the things I love, let us have an end of such raises as these, it is also important to bear in mind the following considerations. Or consideration should be given to the possibility of carrying into effect. Most of these phrases are more padding which can be left out altogether or replaced by a single word, let us not shrink from using short expressive phrase even if it's conversational. We love this so much. It's an opportunity to remember that. The plain language is so important, especially trying to communicate with decision-makers.

This is Melanie. This is a timeline of our agency social and digital initiatives. In 2009, we joined Twitter because people were sitting on their phones and we stayed what are they doing? They were on twitter so you want to make sure we reach that audience wherever they are. We did a watchdog report podcast that we launched in 2010. In 2011 we got on Facebook, 2013 we got

on LinkedIn. 2014, we started our watch blog where we talk about our reports and what we saw, we looked at our analytics and we saw people were going to the blog and then I report pages from the blog and when they had that nice plain language introduction, they stayed on the page longer, they viewed more pages and it was really a full success of an initiative. In 2016, when we realized it was doing so well, try to look at revamping our highlight pages. These are the summary page that would be the landing page. It would be a place for you get the fairly comprehensive description of what is in the report and right on the top. We look into revamping those in what we found was they were difficult to read. We decided to do something to make that even shorter and give people that easier entry into the contents. When we were doing those posts, and also the pilot, we found out we had to work together between the indicator and subject matter experts who are auditors and move that process into what they were doing.

This is Eden. We've been going back to Churchill, we're trying to improve how we can indicate make sure we meet our audiences where they are and can clearly provide those findings. The things we compete with our the digital age. This delusion of information, if you're not thinking mobile first, you're not thinking about clear communication. What you can see on this slide is an image from the movie office space where they said sorry, couldn't repast the abstract. They get those busy decision-makers on mobile devices and maybe quick bottom-line information. We knew that was a real struggle and we heard from reviewers, we go and investigate you guys. We're looking on behalf of executive branch agencies and how they operate. We also have people look at our work. We have auditors from other entities look at our products. Our products are fabulous and bulletproof. No one can quibble with our findings. What we found was other auditors struggle to understand, particularly our highlight pages. That initial thing you see online and in reports that provides a one page audit documentation. We knew we had a struggle because plain language is always a struggle. We knew others were struggling to read our work. We have Google analytics on our patient we spent a lot of time looking at that we can access a lot of people within the agency. We look to and you can see things like people coming to our website. Are fabulous website with a wealth of knowledge trending patient designing the lien without looking at anything it's given the content is make sense. We're looking at things like time and other metrics and how people were sharing things like that. We found we really had an opportunity, there was a need and an opportunity to improve. This is the before-and-after. We want people to come in a land at our highlight page. There is huge paragraph and there's no end in sight. This is where people come into our webpage. Is part of the products it has to be audit sufficient. Is very few visuals here. It's not mobile friendly at all. It's a big wall of words and some of the testing we have done, we have those tests on the mobile device and we scroll down to the highlights. Do I have to read this? Thankfully it was usability testing and they didn't. When it's be able to make the experience better.

Here we are on slide six. This was the solution we landed on. Before you saw the screen, a shot of the highlights, now what you see is the fast track. They are very brief, 650 characters with spaces and punctuation. The shorter things are, the harder they are to write their Mitt to communicate bottom-line including a visual. Even at this distance, I don't know how you have your site set up but even at this distance you could recognize there's a zoom on Florida, and the idea is thinking mobile first. Think about your audience, trying to read advice it's two inches

wide. You see this and you saw we saw before it looks easy. Let me talk a little bit about how we got to this language. We built in a plain language review. Melanie mentioned our products have to go through multiple reviews for audit sufficiency. They are bulletproof with fabulous work and it goes through multiple reviews to get there. The issue is for quick online landing page, how are you both precise and accurate and also clear and direct. What we did, we created this plain language review process that brought together subject matter experts who produce the work, do the investigation and we brought them in to all phone calls with the communicator. You heard from others in our role as always talk to this because this is about working hand in glove.'s you have indicators taking the knowledge and making it so the readers are smart and informed as our experts. Something we struggle with. The site if you know what you're talking about, everything seems clear. That curse of knowledge is real. They are nothing if not knowledgeable. Our people are the best what we found was the need to talk to the team. Nobody wants multiple emails with edits or suggestive thoughts and musings how to make it clear. Our biggest lesson learned for getting to short clear bottom-line findings was having conversation and having indicators experts were together to produce on. We had also scale this up. At the same time, we have nearly 3000 agencies so we had to get this on agencywide scale. We new templates and publishing everything and we had to convince the rest of the agency this was the right thing to do. Melanie will tell you how we did that.

We have to file it. We collected so much data. We had Google analytics, we also had internal feedback from someone involved in writing it. And we have set them down and here's the fast fact, tell me what you know. We had specific questions about what they were looking for, how they found it or they didn't find it or that sort of thing. We took all of that data to prove to the rest to better engage our readers. We couldn't just tell people to write shorter. Needed show its value to get the institutional buy-in to make sure we could set up all of those conversations with teams and all that for 700 reports a year. It's a big scale thing. We looked at Google analytics to see how long people stayed on our site. We found it was really good. We have a little comic on this page that illustrates usability testing. You can't be there over someone's shoulder all the time saying this is how you use us and this is where you find this information. We wanted to make sure it's so clear and easy to use. There were times we were testing during the process and we made improvements on the fly. We started making link bowled for recommendations. It was a way we could show the value but also keep improving as we went. This is spectacular to see. We ran the pilot. We eventually issued 700+, whatever. We had within the agency 12-13 teams broken up by the area. Everywhere federal dollars our sense, that's where GAO is. It was great because we did such a large pilot and that meant we posted hundreds of these fast facts online. So we could really do an in-depth analysis of how our readers behaved when they encountered a fast fact versus when they didn't. Not only do they spend substantially longer on our website because again, we have fabulous work and when should spend our time reading GAO.gov. Again, reading on a mobile device resulting Google analytics for nearly 10 times better than for those on desktop. Before you see a visual or white space, that is returnable. Were staying longer, and sharing the reports, and they were in downloading the entire report as well. Data collection is such a powerful tool when it comes to this. Now Melanie will share some quotes from the usability tab.

Fast facts has useful information on the type elected officials should know. The legislative assistant whose job it is to read and digest all this information and communicate it up through the ranks to their member of Congress. We had a Washington Post reporter, and gave enough information to design away to go by research. These are people we want to find our work to use the work and reports on it as well. Is tremendously helpful in increasing useful. Another quote from our clients. We want to make sure we were reaching them because there's one who ultimately is asking for these reports and they need to know what is in them.

It was so satisfying to see all the data. If you never set down in a room with your readers, I'm not talking about the people within your agency who are reviewing drafts on your behalf are providing feedback on internal guidance. I'm talking about outside the building, your targeted audience and how useful it is to hear from them. There are many conversations about, I think this or that would work until you asked the readers, it's unclear. In addition, we did win two different awards this year. Was great. If you've never applied for and were, it's very easy and it's great. You get an opportunity to sign the language on your plain language efforts and you get great feedback from the judges as well. That's another thing we shared.

You froze a little bit.

That is my Max Headroom effect I've been working on. [Laughter]

Here we have a quote we use in our training slides for fast facts. The best way is to leave nothing out. All the folks at GAO.gov want to put everything in and we have to work together to make sure they don't. We are on the ground trying to get people to leave things out all day every day. We can't just set it and forget it. We can always do better. We added something like a photo service and have access to photos we can use for images. We have a couple process improvements in place where we work on centering the committee case analyst we have on staff. We are also going back because they originally were figuring out how to change our highlights page 21 that has of a big. Did be move up for this work, we did.

We will talk about this for sure. Centering writers and designers. There's a lot of focus on the auditors and analysts. Of course, they are the ones who are out there kicking the tires making sure we are getting the best bang for federal dollar. Is a lot of focus there but is not always as much on clearly indicating findings and results. We have process improvement plans in place were we meet monthly with one of the teams and indication analysts and designers. We talk through fast facts in the highlights and all that sort of thing any issues they have anything difficult for them or if they have questions for us, anything like that. We want to spread our influence as much as possible because even though we did staff up for this, we didn't staff up that much. We need as many people thinking about communication as possible. We also offer plain language training and put out guidance periodically and all sorts of guidance because they try to make that happen.

We did not have stock photos before.

Should I read it?

What is the kinkiest process for stock photo service? We didn't have that before. We just had an internal gallery. And many were photos of Eden because we just got our staff photographer to come taste them. That wasn't really sufficient. Getting contracts, it's helpful is not just pictures of Eden anymore even though I do like seeing Eden.

We have some questions. Will put on our last slide here this tells how to keep in touch with us. And you can get information from the rest of the conference. We have a couple of questions here.

From our government website tool provides an option as a mobile user only for computers. Due to the fact so many users on the phone, is there any wish to make that for wealth development tools to provide better mobile user experience? We often have issues like that in there two things that come to my. First, I encourage people to draft emails, just shrink the size of the window. That will quickly imitate what it would look like on a mobile device. The other thing you can do that is cheap and easy is paper prototyping. Is not super fancy. Just open a PowerPoint and design something how would look on the desktop. Then you have super easy and you can just show, it will look like this on desktop. Not ideal but again, with the agency looking to save money. That is sort of our quick and dirty there. The next question, does the red outline on the map reconcile with 508 recommendation? We have alt text enter on all of the images. Some people with low or no vision can get those. The red outline on the map, the color palette should work with people who are colorblind and we have text on images to help machine readers. We can always do better and always improve. Can answer the next one and I will give you the last. The next question is for Michelle. I could use my longer time on screens with better outcomes, how do you know it did mean they couldn't spend more time because they couldn't read or didn't understand the context.

I love this question. We talked about bounce rate, and time on page, we had a lot of data early on showing a lot of people leaving GAO.gov in 10 seconds.

And some people said that's great, they got everything they needed. When it comes to bounce rate, there's not standards but benchmarks out there about if your content site versus e-commerce versus blogger dictionary, benchmarks for what the rate should be. Our rate was too high. In theory yes, we will get some bounce traffic. Everywhere federal dollars are spent you will find a GAO report. You want to expect some to read more than that though. Google analytics is an art as much as a science only benchmark against yourself. Given the content we had in the numbers we see in the way those numbers changed, I'm very confident that was good but I'm also happy to be argued with.

We slice that data a lot of ways. It was pretty convincing and everywhere we sidestep.

It wasn't just us, methodologist were involved.

Some and asked, how did you manage and schedule those conversations? They both seem very outgoing extroverted, advisory teams are more introverted? I mentioned I am actually dealing with that by pairing up. We never take a fast track alone. There's a couple people who do what Eden does which is largely traffic control and making sure all the trains go out on time. There's a bunch to do what I do which is reading and writing and editing we also have a visual editor may be included on the call. If you talk about the visual. How to manage and schedule them? We work a lot. We are very busy. We try to do these meetings for half an hour. Usually they never take that long. We are not group rating. We usually ask about, what does this mean or what did you mean by this change? Can you describe this to us? Can you give a bottom-line finding, talking through what the issues are and eventually we will go and rewrite if we have to. More introverted versus extroverted. Pair up for sure. Find a buddy system. It works really well for us. It's gone pretty well so far. Can we explain what the conversation to produce fast facts sounded like ? I'm not sure if this meant initially or as we continue doing them because we are still doing them. Initially, we talk a lot with people in the agency about the highlight page. We ask, what you think about writing it? What do you think about reading it? Basically, nobody likes it. They all didn't like writing them. They didn't like reading them. They weren't that help of the tool. When we were thinking about doing something shorter to overlay on top of that page, we asked what do people really need? How much do they need? To figure out is this report I'm looking for? That was a concern we heard a lot with people said, I members said I need to find out this report on this particular thing. We asked 18 reports so how will you know quickly, is this the one that I need? We were listening to feedback from the hill and also standards for what's out there in the public. In which questions are asked when we make them, all the questions. We have many robust conversations, Eden, did you want to jump in on that? Back I think we only had a until 245. Thank you for this very kind words and this is the classed, the best class you. Someone else asked, who writes the fast facts and who decides what to include? That was a very conscious effort were either the office of Public affairs will do the initial draft or the team will do the initial draft. Either way, both need to agree to it. Me write something and they say have you lost your mind? And is that we want. We say great, but talk about it. Those words like risk, unlimited and you think you know you say, is that what I think it means you get the conversation. It's really a back-and-forth. To this question of how we got started, in addition, we have this within call the product line steering committee. I don't know how unique or different it is from one other agencies have but it's here with our boss. What's awesome about it, anyone can bring ideas to the group about how we can improve our communication, how we can better share the good word and that also helps with part of that as well and that was really a wonderful group for sharing early results, ideas, brainstorming and how to do things.

We have until three o'clock so we can answer all these questions. Define audiences get confused by what GAO stand for yes, and also we do ? Also yes. And do you intend to qualify that through your communication channels.

Also yes. We were the General accounting office and now we are the Government

accountability office to better reflect the work we do. One of our early watch blog, we have a post about what is in a name about how the name is evolved over time. We would make sure everyone understands what we do and the benefits we provide.

Who writes them and who decides what to include?

Does a great question.

We did it and we can come together and that's with the team meetings are. Sometimes it's easy and we say great. Other times, we do such interesting things. Having team meetings because there is reading the report in talking with experts who know the portfolio and hearing the stories is the highlight. Is the back-and-forth. Someone asked about the fast facts class a mother or not it was offered to people outside and it is not. It's very specific to how we produce our work. We are happy to talk more about how this if you're interested in doing something similar learn more about me how we do this, I know someone asked about staffing and staffing levels and how we got there. We are happy to help teams think through that. Essentially see get some handwaving estimate how we do this, issue 700 products each year. They all get a fast track. We have essentially three people like me to make sure we hit our deadlines and come together. And we have our editor-in-chief and a visual editor, then we have dedicated writer editor, another who is not full-time but a good portion and others we can draw on. We are very lean. We were quickly. That's on the recent have those conversations. Just don't have emails to try and work it out and get a response, just picking up the phone helps move along and helps you hear people say something to you.

I think there was another question. Do we use any tools like readable sir plain language?

Usually, we have 8 million cold readers. It's kind of funny. People wonder, why did this change all of a sudden? Because we had one more person weed and they had a question. I think we try to head off any questions we may get just by having multiple people, readers, those with different backgrounds way in. We have people that do riding someone writes one and I read and I have questions,

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R Rose of anyone paws on anything, it needs to get fixed. Sometimes they paws on something an answer hasn't been explained why they should have been paws on it, answers we need to change this because if you paused on it, and this goes out and about people that are reading this, they will paws on and that could change how we may right. Eyes to the ideas to be finished, not done. Is a process to update or are there multiple versions? There's multiple versions. [Laughter] Reports each have an issue date with a go live on our website. Fast facts only appears on the website version . That is our date. May not change after that. It continues all the way up until that so something was supposed to be 24 hours. If you have to updates, we send our reports about agencies, we send them to the agencies recomment. If they make comments that changes the report, there may be changes needed as well. We make sure it goes to the same review process of the director signs are. Are managing director signs off and

he's there to ensure the clarity. That process can happen multiple times for each one. If something has to be corrected after, we do that in it's like issuing errata.

Is another wonderful here were someone wrote it sounds like you have a wonderful team, jealous. Yes, we have the most amazing team. Your team is not as good as ours [Laughter] I love this group. We worked so critically in such interesting things, it's a wonderful team. Carrie is one of our editors. We have a really good team. I love my people. Speaking of how to get a great team, is are typical background for writers and editors or do they come from various backgrounds with expense et cetera. Do you want to answer that?

I know a lot of communication analysts at GAO they have all sorts of backgrounds. People coming from academia, some from journalism, some from those who just had other careers and decided they wanted to right. Occasionally, we have people who are analysts and decided to write. One of the guys we have on our team, he started out's life as a journalist and then he became a writer editor at GAO. He became an analyst for a little while and did analyst work and then went back to being a writer editor and then retired for a little bit to finish his history PhD and then came back to write for us. It's all very different. Usually you just have to have some subject matter interest and also know how to write and edit.

A lot of people in the GAO public of office affairs, I was an online auditor I worked mostly in healthcare program. Was nice about that, because we work hand in glove with the experts within the agency, having two ears were together people within the agency tell us about the product all that, we understand what they're saying and the rules of the road they follow. We understand audit sufficiency in the work they have to do to get these reports out the door. It also helps that we don't have, there's always like the fantasy, were going to do a big video and we do videos and great videos. We also have audit sufficiency and all that and so helpful so many of our writers and editors and designers are so well-versed on the mission analyst side of the house.

We have a question says you're doing really work that helps the public. Anyone working with the report for plain language?

Good question. Summer wonderful and some take a lot of work to understand.

We have to read those reports to do the fast facts. It can be very rough. Right now, we have a couple of initiatives underway. We are piloting short headers right now. You think that would just be a thing, but no. Everyone wants to be extremely accurate and very careful with how they characterize things. It can be very hard to let go and give a more topical header that might be a good way for folks. We are trying to make that happen, to do a pilot and see how it works. As far as the report language goes, we have classes in our Learning Center. It's our internal Learning Center about plain language and how to write well and how to streamline sentences and streamline paragraphs. There probably needs to be more of that stuff. We always tried to do as much outreach as we can, just because we are here, we have our copies made to stick. I've got

my back here. It's kind of like our Bible and we are just trying to spread the good word. We are working on its but it's a long slow process.

Melissa is another Regulus writer, she did not work in office of Public affairs but is well-versed in fast facts. It's made to stick by Chip and Dan Heath. Highly recommend it, it's a wonderful way to get a sense of how to get the good writing, how to prioritize and make it elegant so those decision-makers can quickly grasp bottom-line findings. Thank you, Monica.

You have been a fabulous audience, thank you for all of the kind words and type of us questions and all of your attention period thank you for all you do to help share your agencies work. Thank you so much.

That was terrific. I think next week, next we have Joanne short.

I see a lot of comments in the chat in case you want to know more about those.

Hello everyone. It has been an amazing summit so far. Here, Joanne, thank you so much for joining. We have a little of the same info we will typing one more time. There is a link for live captioning for today's session. There is a TTS code of conduct that we will be linking to for all attendees. Finally, if anyone is interested, I am outside with my dog Capone who has helped me run the summit. Finally, anyone interested in downloading the presentation, Joanne and anyone else's, we will also have a link for that. That will be available in just one moment. With that, I will kick it over to Catherine. Joanne, your slides are being loaded as we speak.

Is Rhonda on?

Rhonda, I am promoting her right now. She will be rejoining. As a panelist and I have just promoted her to cohost. Apologies, again, thanks everyone. Rhonda, you should be able to unmute.

How is the audio?

It's wonderful.

Thanks everyone, I am a writer editor with Department of commerce. Today I would like to introduce Joanne we'll talk about her experience in the federal employee, how she steered her career by taking on increasing responsibilities outside her job description. She is a multifaceted member of the United States Postal Service, Hawaii team. They rely on her heavily for her technical and communication skills. She is currently pursuing her Greenbelt certification has expense getting projects of any scale done either alone or cordoning a team. Permission as engaging in developing the workforce. Welcome.

Thank you. My first slide is a decorative slide and says part-time. I have a question for the

audience today, what if I could offer more work, more responsibility, more accountability? What would you say? You may opt to work nights, weekends, holidays, sounds good, right? As mentioned, my name is Joanne. I work with an executive to engage, motivate and develop our workforce. I want to share how I turned my part-time passion into a full-time mission doing everything I love and how you could perhaps do the same. Decades ago, when I first started with the Postal Service, I was quite shy and quiet. I was asked to solicit my coworkers to buy U.S. savings bonds. Being a Jew, I thought, that doesn't sound like my cup of tea. Tentatively, reluctantly, I raised my hand. Raising your hands can have a peculiar effect. It can be a catalyst for everything that happens in your life and career from that point forward. Next I was tasked to be a key person for the combined Federal campaign and many of you may be familiar with the CFC.

This shows a group of people holding certificates in the number 1. My work with the CFC was incredibly triggering for me as someone who has quite a bit of anxiety about talking to my coworkers. However, I loved their mission. I persisted. I went from being a unit key person to becoming an assistant, and agency project officer and eventually become the agency project officer myself as shown in the slide and I just love what CFC was doing. I was found my reward was far greater than the efforts I put in. I also write a letter to my fellow workers explaining CFC agencies had come to my aid when my son was born some 23 years ago. With severe medical issues including a brain issue in a genetic disorder. I explained to my fellow workers how I have been contributing for years and years, decades in fact of how those agencies had come to the assistance of my family when we were in the. I want to impart that information that you never know when some type of tragedy may strike your family and how agencies, there are so many and they would be willing to help. With whatever issues you are experiencing.

As I said, I got to lead a team of volunteers and a much through my experience with CFC. I learned teambuilding, how to organize and publicize large events. How to motivate and reward volunteers. If you really want to learn leadership, lead a team of volunteers. They don't need to be there.

I also got my start in dabbling in strategic communication. I was asked to appear on a television show aired on our local cable channel and I appeared in a promotional video.

This slide shows a television screen and three individuals on the morning show. I worked on many projects for another decade with my mentor in strategic location where been very helpful in my career. I learned news writer newsletter writing and editing. I love photography, social media, video filming, all those things. The next thing he asked me to do was appear as the U.S. GS holiday media spokesperson. This was an absolute nightmare. Had to get up at two in the morning. I had answer random questions from TV crews that didn't always understand what our mission was. I also appeared on the show and another.

Although this may be uncomfortable, I just kept pushing my boundaries further and further and I apologize for the noise. I also helped strategic medication needs as they taught media interaction on our neighbor islands. What I would do, travel to the island with them, set up the

room, I would order coffee, lunch, run the slideshow as many volunteers are doing today. I would help build mock interviews. I eventually graduated to help instruct medication workshops on the weekends at career conferences and also after hours because I really believed engaging in developing workforce will only help us to indicate better as managers, communicate well between employees and also to public. Just using plain language to better explain our mission.

This slide shows me holding a microphone and a clicker. I also helped respond to media and congressional inquiries and work as a backup for our emergency management team. Our Hawaii district covers not only Hawaii but various other areas. We encounter a lot of natural disasters or emergencies that we need to respond to. I helped respond to volcanic eruption, hurricanes, typhoons, basically hoping to get information our employees needed to stay safe during these disasters. Natural disasters don't care if it's your day off. Still an introvert but had that willingness to learn and the curiosity and persistence to keep going and keep trying to indicate well with our employees. When it came time to apply for my current job, had the knowledge, skills and ability. Had a page full of references, another page full of awards and accolades, not only for the work I have done here but much of the other work I had volunteered for. I was able to paint the picture for my interview panel about how my varied and broad experience would help them as they were facing this pandemic and can carry that message to our employees. I also was able to show how my technical skills would help our team transition to a more virtual environment. I was able to show not only where I had been but where the team needed to go and how I could help them get there.

This shows an element holding mail in a satchel. I got a call asking me to fill in and one of the largest media markets in the country. I didn't have the education, credentials, what I did have was a strong sense of volunteers and. Number when I was buying coffee for that media team. I would turn things around quickly and I would do whatever I needed to do to get the mission accomplished. I was reviewing television, radio and news clips for the Los Angeles area. I knew I had to find out more. I called and asked them but I was told got me so excited, I found out he was the first in the morning. He was the one who trained and mentored his newer employees. He was the last at night if there is mail that needed to be taken on the streets. I knew I had to tell his story. I also got a call from an international news agency that wanted to follow a carrier through Los Angeles during the pandemic. Last, I was able to facilitate his appearance on a nationwide NBC special. He's a husband, a father, he delivers mail in the sink you to see where he lives in he's an inspiration to other postal workers. I'm back at my regular job. I've been able to incorporates better communication and doing what I have to do and doing what I love to do. I read a monthly engagement newsletter putting together presentations. Every day is your opportunity. Every interaction is your opportunity. Your*her hand, just do it. Thank you.

Spike I see a lot of the CFC, GAO. We on the list but not every employee knows all the acronyms and would mean. To see things in the plainest possible manner, it helps to engage our employees. It helps to engage customers from the public with our mission. Is basically what the mission is. Want to bring up the organization. It's not, the best way to help yourself is to help others.

That sounds wonderful. Have I missed any questions or comments? There is a flood of compliments. You can take a look at those and bring up the organization from one introvert to another, I'm impressed. I don't think there are any questions. Maybe. We may just go on to something up the summit. Are you about ready to start wrapping up? Again, compliments to you, this was fantastic. I will turn it over to you.

Thanks again. That was a wonderful way to close us out. I have's remarks. I love how you close this out. Every day is an opportunity. There are a number of people here saying their job is writing and editing. They think of themselves as editors in plain language fits into that. Then there are the rest of us to have all of these other duties as designed. For those who don't know me, I am at the department of education. I worked in our research office. On the face, I have nothing to do whatsoever with plain language. Some years ago, I noticed we did all sorts of questions. We spent hours and hours of our work day answering questions that really should've been understood by the reader. At some point, I say it's not them, it's actually us. We realize it's all of our jobs whether or not we are sending an email or putting up a report to try to make our work as clear as possible. It's not an excuse for us to say, they just can't understand what we really should be taking is how can we make this clear so all of our readers can understand what going on. That has been a theme of what we heard today. We learned so much in as an organization, I want to say we are really excited to follow up on some of these great ideas. We should all think about how we can start, restart, revitalize, strike a match under plan language efforts in our own offices and across the agency. They could be something as small as clearing up your own email. So they're easier for people to read through working with your office doing a revamp of some major reports or section of your website.

Throughout the day, we've had our wonderful social media team as well as a number of volunteers that have been summarized in session. We put together a list of highlights from the top and I want to share with you. I want to start with our last speaker every day is your opportunity. If you put the customer first, success will be yours. Or other highlights or we should acknowledge privilege, at humility, think about your audience. Communicates bottom-line finding. Avoid cognitive overload. Remember that formatting matters. We should handle low hanging fruit and that can be done easily. Plain language is a necessary but not sufficient requirement in complex communication situations. Relationship building is an important part of building plain language, it doesn't happen overnight. We need to show the value of plain language. Continuous improvement and collaboration are crucial. We should think about using meta-data on our website to help our audiences find information they need. We should remember plain language can and should include providing multilingual content so all of our readers find it accessible. Than last, sometimes we do these things hastily in haste these two ways and confusion. We want to think and pause sometimes before we publish critical messages. Them should always think and rethink jargon to make sure people understand it. if today has helped you in your plain language journey, we are excited. We invite everyone to consider joining plain if you're not already a member . You can go to plainlanguage.gov and sign up. I noticed there are some questions about the social media. If you are on Twitter, Facebook

or LinkedIn, you can follow the hashtag plain language summit . We've been sharing posts around all day. We will share summaries soon on Jewel.gov. I'll pass it back to you.

You have some remarks and some others I scribble all over everything. If we go to plainlanguage.gov and look under law and requirements, you will find if your agency has one, the plain language contacts we have for the agency. We only list the one big agency. Homeland security would include all of the sub agencies. I was going to say, consider volunteering in there's a couple different directions you can go with this. You have to be a federal employee to volunteer with us. That is plain. We have big ideas for next year we love to have help making them happen . I know that's a little squishy but I feel we can make room for any volunteering skill up to and including juggling and balloon animals. If that is your skill, let me know. Check under plainlanguage.gov under law and requirements to see what your federal agency is done, see if you can help. Sometimes when you are the plain language contact, it's hard to sit around and think what should agency do? That's one of the things that plain can do, we can start discussions on what are you planning for your agency , what kind of training are you offering, to have online training, do you have modules? Discussions like that. See what you can share what information you can share with that team. If you're not a federal employee, definitely please follow us on social media. You will see Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn, help us publicize our efforts. We would appreciate that. Please contribute to the list serve. You do not have to be a federal employee to join or participate. There are certain things you cannot do, you cannot endorse. We benefit from your perspective and what you can share. Number of things occur to me as I was listening today, thinking I better not forget that. This entire day has been inspiring. Has been incredible with energy people have brought to their work. The caring, the trying new things, the persisting in the face of being ignored or being actively discouraged. That takes guts. I sticky about what José said in his talk, raise your hands, step in, step up. Be open to learning. That's what a lot of people stress. Learn new things, don't be afraid. Use your energy. See where you can learn and see where you're interested in follow that. I think that is valuable. I think that brings up more energy to everything. I also like what a number of people echoed when they said, have humility. Don't think you know everything about plain language, even if you have been a member of the list forever. Is always something to learn. You can learn from everybody, even people who don't know about plain language because you can learn how to explain that so they do. You can learn from everyone. There's plain language happening in a number of different agencies including state and local. There's groups doing plain language, teams doing plain language and sometimes it was just an accident of personality and sometimes they're pursuing it more actively. Have humility as you are learning. This is the biggest question. I thought this is fantastic. What is holding you back? What's holding you back from doing more plain language volunteering, any of those things? I think Joanne explained really well the advantages. There's a thread throughout how effective it is for our readers and come up with new ways to face things a look at analytics. We need something, here's a solution. Let's stay inspired and humble at the same time which is at times difficult. I wanted to echo what I said at the beginning. To the people who said sure, I would be happy to speak at your summer. To the volunteers who helped us, doing the intro, chasing things down, doing our social media, I checked and thought a good have to go back and reach we all of this. Member, will publish writeups and have some volunteers working on that. We will write up sessions and publish that

on digital got. We can't say when. Had this written down twice. It is the end of the fiscal year coming up. Nothing will happen that quickly. Thank you all for attending, thank you for bringing your energy and setting aside the time, thanks for being part of the plain language community. I think I am finally speechless.

Katherine Spivey - ZMW <katherine.spivey@gsa.gov>

10/13 Huddle agenda/notes

Katherine Spivey - ZC <katherine.spivey@gsa.gov> Tue, Oct 12, 2021 at 1:08 PM
To: Mara Goldberg - QXD-C <mara.goldberg@gsa.gov>
Cc: "Stapleton, Katina" <katina.stapleton@ed.gov>

How I was thinking tomorrow would go:

intro - happy Intl PL Day
<rejoicing>
a quick blurb about the summit - show the slides, explain writeups are on their way, explain why we didn't record

ASK FOR VOLUNTEER TO TAKE NOTES AND WRITE UP THIS HUDDLE
Ask some seed questions:
* what did everyone like about the summit
* what could have been better
* suggestions for speakers, topics for meetings and 2022 summit
* more?

And ... I think that should use up an hour!

Thoughts? Additions? Add away.

Mara, thanks for the prompt.

Katherine Spivey
Co-Chair, Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN)
plainlanguage.gov

Hello everyone, this is our plain language summit huddle through digital.gov. Katina Stapleton and I welcome you. We're both the cochairs of the plain language action and information network. So if you were wondering if you are at the right place, yes. I wanted to let you know this is definitely the right place. It is also international plane language day so thanks for joining us. We are looking forward to the discussion. A brief word about the huddle. A huddle is just a source of sharing question and ask us anything, mostly about the summit. The recent summit that we had. So there's not going to be a presentation. There's not going to be a PowerPoint deck. There's not going to be a test, if that's any consolation to you. So I just wanted to let you know that it is a much more casual thing than some of our other meetings. But we wanted to talk and get your opinions of the summit, what worked, what didn't worked, do we have suggestions for topics or speakers, do you have ideas you want to volunteer for that, I also want to say we have the slides. If you go to plain language.gov and click on the link you'll get -- when you look at the link that says register for the plain language summit, you click on that link, you will see the slide decks that are available and some of the writeups of the session. We are still getting some so we don't have all of them yet but we are hoping to very soon. Katina, did you have anything you wanted to add?

Just want to welcome everyone. I'm so excited that we are here today and we want to start the conversation off with the summit, but if there is other ideas on your mind about what we could help work on over the next year, since we started a new fiscal year, that would be awesome. And the little puppy here in the background is my new sunshine, so I'm going to be on mute most of the time since she's pretty noisy today, but I am here. Thank you, guys.

Mara, you had some administrivia you wanted to share with the group, I think?

Sure, so I put in the chat the TTS code of conduct, so we ask that everyone abide by that, putting the live captioning link to follow along today, and some housekeeping. Catherine is going to give a brief introduction, say some other words. And then -- so for now, everyone is on mute, but after Catherine speaks a little bit more, I will allow everybody to unmute themselves if you wish to unmute and speak, so you can do that by clicking the microphone, or if you called in, you press star six on your phone. So Yep, we will right now everybody is mutated and then we will allow you all to unmute after Katherine gives a brief presentation or introduction.

Great. Thanks. Yes, Asmara said, you will be unmuted in just a few moments, just welcoming more people to the group. Just reminding that you want to -- as Katina mentioned, we are open to anything but we were hoping that we could focus on ways we could improve the summit, the ideas for next year, and that includes our summit and our monthly meetings. Looking for what could work, what are you interested in learning more about. I'd also like to ask, could anyone volunteer to take notes during this, just to make sure that we are capturing everything that can be captured? I think that's a useful thing. And I made a note to myself to explain why we didn't record the summit. We have the previous summits we recorded and posted on digital.gov and linked, but we've been looking at a couple of different things, the resources that we have, to run the summits in the meetings and the return on investment. And we looked at the data of not so much who was looking at the videos, the recordings, but to see what were people looking at and

for how long. And even the most popular of our sessions never got more than -- and this may be even overstating, never got more than 10 minutes of viewing, and this was an hour or more of a recording. So we just could not justify using our resources for something people weren't using. So we are trying to turn from recording and sharing to sharing a writeup. And making that content thicker and more available. And it is something that digital.gov is tracking. The usage, the analytics, the reporting. So it's something you can certainly talk to us about, but we are going to be tracking it and hoping that people find the writeups more valuable than the straight reporting. So as you're thinking of questions, what did you like about the summit, what could've been better? And you have suggestions for speakers or topics for next year's summit, or a monthly meeting. So anything, anything that comes up to you. Mara, if you want to unmute, D mute, whatever the proper word is.

Thanks, Katherine. I will now allow everybody to unmute. You won't be unmuted immediately. You'll still have to unmute yourself if you'd like to say anything.

Katherine, Judy, -- [Inaudible] has to leave early so I'll ask her to jump in first.

Fantastic.

Hello, everyone. How are you doing?

Very well. How are you?

Fine, thank you. I was wondering whether anyone had had time to review the social media that we did during the meeting, during the summit, and whether there were any topics of particular interest that grabbed people's attention. And then second to that, it's great that we have the talks that are available online since it wasn't recorded. Those are the website so that's always a good thing to remind people about. But do you think it's useful to have a summary of those based on papers people can go read themselves, or is what we have up there sufficient?

I think we're combining, for the summit, we got the slides and got them accessible, and that alone was resource intensive. I'm not saying it wasn't worth it. It was. It was very valuable. But we've been sort of stressed doing that, but we wanted a writeup because sometimes people's slides, and I think this is a perfectly valid way of doing it. Slides are not necessarily going to get everyone through. It's not the same as being there. I think we are asking the writeups to make some connections that might not be completely reflected in the slide deck and it also allows that if somebody asks a question and the speaker answers it, and that wasn't necessarily in the slides, that's what we are trying to do with the writeups. Digital.gov and the other communities of practice are looking to do that, too, to get away from just the recordings. But I did want to say, you're right that social media was completely excellent. I can't tell you how cheerful I got looking at it and see in the cards and the quotes and the people, the live tweeting, and can I say live Facebooking? But I just thought that was a huge leap forward from anything we had done before.

Will thank you, and I guess the add-on question would be if we want to write them, do we still have access to the questions that might have popped up in chat?

I think so. Yeah, we do have the questions. You'll just need to tell me what speaker it was, because something that I didn't realize was pretty much the same zoom link and the questions didn't -- the questions aren't necessarily separated, so we have two sort of look at the questions against the agenda and try and figure out who should get those questions. They were -- they turned into a sort of scroll. They weren't as nicely delineated as they were before. we got a note from someone in the chat about, I forgot about the social media posts. So maybe next time we can have some champions that are engaging. We had some of that. People were live tweeting some of the speakers and some of their points, which I thought was, as I said, really, really huge for plane. We hadn't had that so much.

I think in response to her comment it's not so much having the information coming from plane, but correct me if I'm wrong, you were thinking having some of the people in the plain language community agree to retweet during the meeting, so that they can loop their connections into the discussion. Is that what you meant?

Exactly, yeah. There was an announcement at the beginning of the summit that we were going to be doing that, but I don't think there was any reminder. So in my case, I forgot.

Awesome. That's a great suggestion, and the other thing that we didn't do but could is we had speakers that were there that were representing their agencies. So to make sure that their agency's social media teams were informed so they could also push this out.

For sure. My agency, for example, I don't think we did anything with social media during the summit, and we could have.

So we'll definitely take that down as an idea, thank you. So I have a question for everyone. Which programs did you guys think are most engaging? Or which formats? From the summit, since each of them was a little bit different. So I'll go first. I was really intrigued by the IRS session and it was really good to me to see them really break down not only their efforts, but sort of the methodology, how they went about making the changes. And same for the presentation from the weather team. It helped me conceptualize maybe in my job how we would be able to push things out, sort of like in an immediate emergency situation, which is what happened with COVID, and then also in terms of long-term change, which is more the example we got from the weather team.

So more of a before and after?

Not just before and after, the actual process. The thought process for getting by in, for implementing the changes. I thought that that was really useful.

I really liked, because I try for the practical, I really liked Allison Kohler's discussion of online glossaries. I've been working with Allison, but again, I liked seeing how she framed it. I just thought that was really interesting to -- here's a pilot. We are going to test this. We are going to see if we are able to take it from one small thing to a bigger thing, to see if it continues to be useful, and all of that. I just thought that was really a good story.

Yeah, and I, too, Susan just chatted that she liked the GAO presentation. That was hilarious. I know that it should have had a soundtrack and maybe applause and things. And Melanie is on, so . It was really fantastic and I loved their energy. And I think that is a good point to bring out. I think we had a really good mix, but people find -- it's sort of just timing. Sometimes it's good luck that you are in a session that teaches you something, and you can learn from it and maybe replicate it at your home agency. That's always a lot of fun. Lots of love for some of our presenters. What else?

Since we are a relatively small group, were people willing to just do a round-robin? Where people provide their insights or anything they wanted to share. So I'm a former teacher, so hearing no objections, I will assume that we are volunteers. So Judy has already talked about it. Eden, are you willing to share your thoughts?

Yes, if I can find my buttons. I really -- thank you for the kind words in the chat and what were you saying about Melanie and my presentation? We like taking our show on the road. I really liked hearing Cynthia Bauer because she was somebody that we looked into when we -- happy international plain language day, I feel like we should all have a drink in hand. She is somebody we reached out to about doing some plain language presentations because I felt like she's at the nice nexus. We work with people like they just know everything inside and out, real subject matter experts, and I thought he was a great person to sort of thread that needle of yes, you can be accurate and scientifically literate, and all those important things, and still be understood. I feel like that message can't be said enough.

Awesome. Melanie, did you want to follow?

Yeah, I think someone, might have been Catena, might have been someone else, so they want a little more information from us on how we actually do the training and more processed stuff. There is some interest in our meetings that we have with our teams where we are just talking, like how do you do that, and how do you do that if you have an introvert, and how do you do that -- we have answers for those. So I'm wondering if you guys want to have another session or what we can do for you.

Absolutely. I'm going to accept on behalf of everybody on the team. Yes. Not only how you manage your -- I'm thinking writing production meetings may or may not be the word, but I think there would be a lot of interest in how do you deal with -- I feel like saying instead of introvert, I feel like saying fluctuating energies for peopling because sometimes that's how it seems like to me. If I have a day that I'm doing all writing, all editing, all reviewing, I can't be clever and witty

on the phone. You know? I just can't. I'll be as stupid as anyone else. And its a hard trick to learn and I think I'm still developing how I learned that, but how do you prep for a meeting with a bunch of extroverts without going nuts. If you have anything to offer on that.

We don't have a bunch of extroverts. That's not who we work with.

There enough.

There is even. But no, we do have to get answers out of people and that takes some skill.

Well, getting answers out of people comes under stakeholders and how do you manage them. I'm working on the reign of terror, myself. I know that other people do other things, but stakeholder relationship is a huge part of it, and how do you build trust, and how do you show sort of before you work with someone, how do you say I'm going to deliver value and make your life easier?

We actually have a list of things that we do. I don't think we have anything like -- meetings are never more than half an hour, usually they're done in 10 or 15 minutes. We start by explaining to people that I want to live into retirement so we are not writing, tell us what needs fixing, we will take notes and we will get you a revised draft. There is a fair bit of flattery. You guys are really good at letting folks -- reminding people just how hard it is to do this. We are not struggling here because anyone in this room is an idiot. Like you are drinking from this cup for a year, it's just hard to switch gears, to mix metaphors. But yeah, there is a lot of that. You can see them putting together a nice little but as our Learning Center sometimes puts together training videos where they show like, here is an interaction that went well and it's all stage. That didn't and then people have an opportunity to sort of, like you watch somebody going off the rails and then you have a chance to kind of discuss what could it be, editor or organizer, whatever would've done or said differently. It's a lot of -- we often joke that we are just kind of running a psychological experiment.

There enough, fair enough. I see Jenny reddish's Andrew Campbell's eyes light up at the very notion of that. Because it's never just the words, it's never only that so I find that a very intriguing how do you make it work. And I think that I could be mistaken about this, but what a lot of people are looking for are things that they can replicate at their own agency, and a sort of before and after, and I don't mean just the revisions, although those are helpful, but a way of saying we had a really wacky process and then we fixed the process because no one liked it and then we got better or fewer people cried, is a perfectly fine metric to have, to have that go on.

Yeah. So in my notes I just wrote down may be a possible follow-up from Eden and Melanie, rather, and also may be a session just on stakeholder relationships and plain language. Same session or a different session. And as we continue with the round Robin, I want to put out on the table, like if people have ideas for future sessions, please go ahead and pitch them because we are trying to put together for the next year.

This is something we've been trying to figure out and I would love a session on how do you get feedback on content without people line editing. We have literally talked about taking snips or sending images that cannot be edited, because we feel like we get the best feedback when people just tell us what's wrong, and where things go off the rails, and where the tears come is I spent half a day revising this for you because you had these questions or you wanted something. Or we sent it and it didn't look right. I would love to hear something about tips, tools that people use to get the feedback you want on the level that you want at various stages of review.

Handcuffs?

I have a thing about taking digits for doing an appropriate copyediting that no one wants to take me up on.

It's really difficult to get past the insurance and the HR people. They're just not really keen on that. Death threats could be -- that would keep people from editing. How to move people from editing to talking.

What I also heard was getting the appropriate -- getting the edits that you actually ask for.

Oh yeah.

Sometimes they wanted line editing and sometimes you want more feedback, which is the wrong thing that you asked.

Judy, I know that you have to leave at 2:30. Did you have any other questions? Heidi, we'll miss you. I'll send you the link. To the source of the writeup.

There was a comment on there that if anyone does want to see the social media that happened during the conference, that still up. They just have to scroll through Facebook and twitter at the plain language.gov site.

And LinkedIn as well.

I think one thing that really resonated with me, as I remember during the GAO presentation, that a lot of times within our own agencies, a specific, particular department or types of employees will use their own jargon, and often they'll use acronyms that might be, or abbreviations that might be very similar to something that's widely used, just to throw out an example of saying CDC or FBI and something like that is already printed in our brain as one particular thing. So it just did remind me that yes, that's something that I think we as editors, we do struggle with to make sure people understand that yes we want your topic to be widely accessible, but your lingo and jargon might not be understood even by the people who are highly educated, just because it's so particular to your field or the research that you're doing. I really did appreciate

being reminded about that when you spoke about it, and I guess the only comment I would make before I leave is that it would be very heavy from a social media point of view if we could have the papers and presentations may be a week ahead of time, and realize that might be asking a lot, but it would help see where we could draw out questions and how we tweet in advance because people are also paying attention to the presentations, so they might not be as inclined to make a comment at that moment. But if they've had a little time to think about it, they might comments more. Those are my parting suggestions, and I'm sure you have lots of others.

Just going to say that Judy, thanks for joining us and thanks for your fantastic efforts on social media. We had more of a crunch of the decks then I'd like, and that wasn't anyone -- one person's fault unless it was mine. This is definitely something we can try and do before hand. We like as many people joining as possible, and making it last as long as it can. So getting the things to the social media team before would certainly look like -- I can see how that would really help. We will try and do better next time.

Susan, did you have any comments that you want to add? Susan Perez?

No, thank you.

Kerry?

No thank you. I think some of my same points have been made.

Awesome. Amanda?

I think that covers it. Thank you.

Michelle? And then I see a couple of others who send their full name. WHA, I'm not sure who that is. We have a phone number and SM bond. Did you guys have any comments?

I have the terrible VHA pug and my last name in the letter. I don't know, I think the last time I logged into Zoom it was like do you want me to remember this name and I just clicked through yes, and now I cannot figure out how to get it to stop doing that. But this is Laura. I was unable to attend. I had some last-minute family things that came up, so I'm actually really sad to realize we are not going to have the recordings, but totally understand why. I think that makes sense, especially for just everyone's effort. So I don't have anything to share about the presentation or about the summit. But I did want to point out this kooky thing that I've been involved with and I think is not -- I don't know that it's ready for prime time but it might be something that's an interesting topic, whether it is or it isn't, we can discuss. But what we've done within the research community that I work in at the VA's for a couple years now we've had jargon madness, so we do it in March at the same time as March madness, which of course as government employees, we all know, you can't gamble and do that sort of thing at work but we have created a 64 word bracket and people vote on which is the least understandable sort of thing. And it started as a lark. We saw the idea had been done by Forbes and others, and it has

been tremendous in getting the most crotchety stakeholders to engage and then to also stick with these topics. So a lot of these buzzwords and acronyms and stuff, we found that it will continue. Like if people use them in meetings, like during the bracket or after the fact, you would have some words like PhD MD, that's jargon, that got eliminated last week. However, et cetera, et cetera. So I feel like it's one of the things where I've had traction with a wide range of audiences or a wide range of people in talking about and thinking about plain language, and it stuck with groups that I have a harder time connecting with. So if folks are interested in figuring out how to share that information or --

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Oh my God, write that up as a digital goes post because that's so splendid. We could have all the agencies that belong to plain, all the people, we could all do it and then we could have a bracket fest at the end and say which is the worst jargon word your agency uses. Oh my God, short of throwing chocolate at people, I don't know how you could do any better. Well, that is fantastic. Wow, I'm looking forward to March. That's six months from now, but very, very exciting.

One thing to add to it, the real thing I think is a huge issue within the plain language community. So where we've had problems, and this speaks to my technical limitations, because everyone has got a threshold. I do not understand how the program, a bracket on the web that's accessible, so we've been using PDFs that have been burning a hole in my soul with a sense of this is just actually not okay, and I don't know how to get it. If the mechanics of it becomes kind of goofy with regards to 508, so that is like a known vulnerability that we would need some expertise to kind of help sort out. But outside of that part, it's very much something that anybody can do.

I look forward to figuring -- to having someone figure out how we can replicate but I figuring that out so we can replicate it throughout. And for those of you who don't know, Laura is the person who updates plain language.gov. She does a lot of the content work on making that happen, so I'm just thrilled with the possibilities. This is like game application for plain language and I like that.

We got all 64 words multiple times. 64. It was nuts. From people. So we didn't have to pull together the bracket. You tell people we are developing this thing. In the first year we did most of it but since then, people will send me things throughout the year.

Okay.

So it's really interesting and we can talk more.

That really sounds good, and I would check with the section 508 community and saying how can we do this. Someone has got to have better ideas than I do. I was also thinking the challenge community, but that's not exactly. But they might find it amusing.

More to come.

Yeah. That was fantastic. Think of all the things that are coming out of this but you don't necessarily have anything about the summit. Do you have any idea about some meetings that -- meeting topics that you'd like to look at? Or we can just keep talking the way we were before. That's fine, too.

So Katherine, I think that there is an interesting discussion going on and the community of practice on creating buy-in. And I think that would make a good session.

I agree. This is Susan. I agree. I think that's really the hardest part and I love the idea of a bracket where people can kind of contribute and kind of police themselves a little bit. Just other techniques day to day that would kind of show the value that plain language adds, like immeasurable, if it's possible, to do something measurable just some strategies for that would be a wonderful topic of discussion, not just things that people have found work. You know what I mean?

I've been thinking about performance art and since most of our humor is based on early Monty Python, you'll understand some of the limitations of this, may be. But I was thinking, just having someone come in and read, here is a draft email that I'm going to send out, and the person slumps and falls on the floor under the table and hides. Just trying to get the reaction that we feel in our minds, expressed in as broad comedy as we can manage. Or you know that meme, I'm sure everyone has seen it, where a cat just throws things off the table. What I'd like to see is people put big government reports in front of the cat and the cat just -- you know -- or a point where we have, instead of our heads, we have a big pie chart where we say I'm thinking about food, I'm thinking my feet hurt, I'm too cold, I have too much work to do, and now there is this. And they get a little -- you can't see me, I don't think, but little, tiny sliver of brain space ready for someone else's communication. Just to sort of get it across in a sort of Monty Python, broadly comic way, to get people not to tax their audience. we can always make the Spanish Inquisition part of it.

One other question I had --

Levmack.

Plane has relatively limited resources. By that I mean we have no budget of our own, but GSA helps us with things. If we were to have money to create videos for training or other purposes, what would you guys like to see? With the caveat that they would be short, based on what we learned about people not watching long videos?

I personally would like to see some things that could live beyond meetings and summits, but they'd have to be super short. And we'd have to figure out the accessibility and things like that. But literally thinking, showing someone's thinking, so for editing, and I always think we start with a block paragraph and we break it apart and add some headers. May be in part two of that we

edit the sentences after that. But just sometimes breaking it apart makes it so much more readable. Is that what you were thinking of, Katina?

Honestly I'm just brainstorming. I think that's a really good idea. It triggered a completely different shot. Other things will have an edit-athon.

Hack-a-thon, maybe.

Yeah, but for plain language work. Training. Where we offer up tests that we could edit, and I don't think it should be current government things. It may be like -- to make it funny, or other common documents. And I see versions of it on LinkedIn where the whole plain language community outside of the federal government, they often will put forth a paragraph better. These kinds of engaging things.

I bet Leslie would be happy to talk to us. She's done two very well-regarded LinkedIn classes, LinkedIn learning classes for plain language. And I felt that I learned so much from her, just going through her class. Just how to present the information.

Yeah, I'm totally for reaching out to her. I follow her as well.

This is Susan again. For a future summit topic or presentation, would it be possible to do something about visual aids in reports and how those could be used to communicate a whole one-hour presentation on how to do a really effective data visualization or visual aid. I think that might be useful. I think a lot of people look at visual aids as sort of windowdressing as well as decorative, but it's sort of -- it's content now, especially since so many people are looking at things online. I think it's a good time to just remind people of that and give them some good tips and pointers if it goes beyond pie graphs and bar charts and that sort of thing.

We had one a few years ago and it's definitely time to revisit that. Because I think it's worth a larger conversation because I've heard everything from if you don't have a picture, no one will look at it. Particularly with social media. And also it sucks up bandwidth, particularly given video, and even, I'm sorry, any moving things. The things that make it interesting are also the things that make it not evergreen, if I could be permitted the barbarism there. But there is a lot to think of and maybe it's even a series, because it's certainly true that there's the old boring pie charts and things. But sometimes they can be very useful and sometimes you need something else and sometimes using stock photos is almost an insult, but you can't, particularly with the federal government, you can't just go taking pictures of people, honestly. News to me. But there's a lot to think about and to consider, and what you have to make decisions. And I know that I come on one end of the scale and I know other people are like all music, all dancing stuff, and I think that there's a way that we can think through all of these points. I bet they're excellent points.

And there is a conversation going on, about the intersection of plain language and data and how there are sort of two sides of that coin. One is sort of official data, so we have a number of agencies including Ed, where I am, that have rules about how data can be presented from

national data sets. And CDC, things like that. And on the flipside of that coin is all of us have data that we talk about every day and don't necessarily know how to convey that in a way that is clear. And so, what would plain language for data visuals -- or plain data visuals, there may or may not be that much language in it. And the kicker that we had to add to it as someone replied, is it also has to be accessible. From visualizations that are amazingly beautiful, are not accessible. So they are only plain or clear to those who are not doing it with a screen reader. May be those are things that we can try and bring up for future meetings and know that there's a pretty robust data visualization community that we might be able to tap into, and there's a lot of people that do research in this area. We actually fund some of them out of my office and we might be able to do presentation for plain. But this is a question for plain and digital.gov. As you guys may have noticed, all the speakers at the conference were federal, so if we start bringing in non-feds to think about the -- what that means in terms of permissions and the hoops that we need to go through. We may need to go through it because it's such a strong community out there that might be able to talk about this and help us theorize it.

I can see there being room for a couple of avenues for this. I work for an OIG, so all of our stuff is reports, and it's all -- so we are coming at it from what graphics will help us and what visual aids will help us get our audit findings across, whereas someone who works for the CBC is may be more interested in going through the website to look at COVID statistics or something like that. I think there's a lot of sort of inroads into -- or maybe it's not inroads. Maybe it's just branches to the visual aid tree and accessibility is a huge part of that. But also, you know, I guess that was pretty much what I was going to say about that.

There's a lot to consider, and we won't -- I think all we can offer is a framework or the questions. We can't necessarily say here are the answers, all we can say is you've got this balance to keep between accessibility and, you know, being worth the extra pixels, Gerry McGovern's idea, all of the video that we are doing is creating a lot of digital waste. And since I never click on videos unless it's a cat, that's mine, but I think all of these questions are well worth bringing up.

I think a challenge, too, would be -- we would definitely want there to be -- I'm going to sound like a jerk but we want to be sure that the person is actually giving good advice and not sin, you should definitely put a photo and every one of your reports because that will get people's attention. Because people will take that literally. Or they'll say, make everything read if you wanted to show up and the next thing you know you have a completely inaccessible mess and it makes me cry.

Familiar with the phenomenon, yes.

It sounds that we have a veritable fountain of ideas, which is great.

Thank you everybody for coming. Katherine and I kind of predecided before the end that if we naturally ran out of suggestions, we would let people gain back a few minutes in their schedules to transition. So I would like to thank everybody on the behalf of plain for attending the conference and coming here today to give us feedback. And I know sometimes people are

reluctant to give negative feedback in this kind of form, or not negative but constructive criticism, I like to say. So feel free to convey it. Just send us an email if you have feedback on things you think could have been done better, and if you have any other ideas for speakers for next year's conference or the monthly meetings. And also whether or not you guys think this huddle format works. Before COVID we met in person. So we'll all gather together in a room and chat about things. This is sort of the closest that we can replicate with that, so if we are thinking over the next year, what's the balance of formal presentations versus things you should be doing. If you have any feedback on that, that would be awesome.

Katherine?

That is pretty much it. Katina and I are turning into a board. We are doing the mind meld. So whatever she says, I absolutely agree with and sometimes it's the same for me. We appreciate the time. It takes effort to come in and say, okay, I'll help you think through these issues with you, and we appreciate it. I always feel that we have so much to talk about and at some point we have to bring it to an end. If we grab -- if you can grab mostly who was here, I think I've got most of the names. Or if you want to just shoot me an email, all of you, I could send my notes and say, did I capture this accurately, and we can sort of get out the volunteer things, and if you agreed to give us a presentation that we don't want to let that fall by the wayside. So we can just follow up with you and check that we haven't written it down for something you're not going to do. I guess it will come out in the chat transcript, actually. That should be enough. But I don't want to keep talking too much but happy international plain language day, and yeah, everyone have a great rest of the day. I'm going to stop talking. Otherwise I'll use up all of our time. So thank you all. Thank you, Katina. Thank you, Mara, for running this, and we'll be in touch, too. Everybody go have some cake. There, that's the best way to stop. Thank you so much.
Bye-bye.

Hello, everyone. This is Katherine Spivey, cochair of the language action and information network. I am here with Katina Stapleton, the cochair , and our brave supporters, Mara and Gabrielle, and our brave speaker, David Lipscomb, who is going to talk to us about the 2021 federal report card. In a few moments , we have just a little bit of information we have to share first. You are seeing a lot of housekeeping reminders in the chat. I have also asked for a volunteer to write up this. If you would like to volunteer, please let me know in the chat. That would be great. What we do, since we are no longer recording things to post on digital golf, we may do a couple of clips, maybe, but we will not broadcast the whole thing read we are looking to have information we can post to explain what went on here. We already have the slides. This would be sort of explaining what the slides mean, and what David says. Let me know if you are interested in doing that. Also, I wanted to, somebody, sorry, loaded up the slides, so you can see those, and that information is in the chat as well. I wanted to let you know that in January we are having a huddle that is an informal call to discuss -- It's not a presentation like this is, but we are talking about some of the volunteer opportunities. I have put out a couple of calls for volunteers, and a lot of people have responded, and we thought we should probably have a point where we can discuss this and get it clarified. One thing, as always, we can only accept volunteer help from federal employees. Many of you who have volunteered and are not federal employees, I regret not being able to take advantage of your kind offer. We will be announcing that on the plane listserv later. Probably not before Christmas, but it will be on our regular scheduled day, the second Wednesday, in the afternoon. Also, there is a big writeup of this information already. It is on the website, centerforplainlanguage.org, under the report card. So, I am going to welcome you, David, and say how much we are looking forward to what you have to tell us. Gabrielle or Mara, do we have any last minute , do we have any last minute housekeeping announcements that you have not put into the chat, or that you want to say out loud?

I will do a quick housekeeping. Some of it may be repetitive. Take you Katherine, and thank you David. Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the session today. Like Katherine said, it will be recorded , and the link for captioning is in the chat. As a reminder, all attendees will be muted, and encouraged to ask questions via the Q&A box. They are different. You can see the chat and the Q&A box, put your questions in the Q&A box to keep it organized. We will answer questions after the presentation. Feel free to provide comments, and introduce yourself in the chat box. You can select all panelists and attendees, because the default option is to chat with panelists only, so that would only go to a few of us. If you want everyone to see it, be sure to select all panelists and attendees. Those are the housekeeping items for today. They are in the chat as well. I will turn it over to David.

Thank you, Mara , and thank you, Katherine, for that introduction. I'm really happy to be here, everyone . I truly appreciate you coming to this session. I know it is an incredibly busy time of year. It's a busy time of year at Georgetown University where I teach. We are just finishing up the semester. Thank you all. Thank you all for taking the time for this. I am the vice chair of the Center for Plain Language , and the Center for Plain Language sponsors the federal report card each year. Let me share my screen so you can see the quick recitation that I will be getting today. Here we go. I believe you can all see my screen at this point. You are looking at the first

slide, and as you can see, the Center for Plain Language , the little logo on the upper left, to make it clear that, you know, this is the organization that is, in fact, sponsoring things. Today, we are going to keep it very simple. The agenda, the basics of the federal report card. Most of you on the call probably know very much everything I will be covering for that part, but I think it is a good reminder. For anyone who is new, I think it is important. The results from this year's federal report card. That is the important stuff. I also will show a little bit, just a little bit, from the site, the write up, the full writeup that Katherine mentioned earlier , and she gave you the link to the centers page on that. That is an important place to look, to learn, to follow up after this presentation, and learn as much as you can about how to improve, especially how to improve the pages we looked at. Finally, we will have time for questions. We will keep this very brief, my presentation, very brief, so we will have lots of time for questions.

I am on slide three. On slide three, just showing on the right a picture of the law itself from 2010. This is just a quick image, a segment from the law. The law itself, I think most of you probably know. The plain writing act of 2010 requires all agencies in the executive branch to have a plain language contact, and to train employees in plain language, and to report on plain language, including having a webpage, which every single one of our agencies will be graded, has, and also every year to publish an annual report covering what the agency has done in the field of plain language. The act also, most importantly, requires all agencies to communicate in plain language when communicating with the general public.

Moving onto slide four, as you can see, the federal plain language report card is a way of assessing how well each agency that me grade, each agency is doing in terms of complying with the 2010 plain writing act. This is especially important because, like other acts of Congress, the plain writing act does not have what you would call an enforcement mechanism. It doesn't have a way of ensuring that all agencies comply. So, the federal plain language report card, which is sponsored by the center, an independent organization, nonprofit, independent of the government, that works as a kind of watchdog to make sure that we are following the law. We grade on the two things that are most important to the law, the organizational issues, staffing, training, and reporting, give everybody a grade on that, and we give everyone a separate grade for the writing product. Each year, we grade two pages. It is hardly, you know, truly representative. It is a small snapshot of what every agency produces in a given year in their communication to the public. But it is the best we can do given we are a nonprofit. You know, we have a limited number of judges, and time. So, acknowledging that the grades we assign for writing quality represents our evaluation of two and only two pages that an agency produces in a given year.

The good news, for this past year, which, this was the 10th time we have issued the federal report card, and this year, for the first time since 2015, more than two thirds of agencies earned an A for staffing, training and reporting. We had at least one agency that has complied since then. I should note that on the right-hand side of the page, you are viewing the one page version of the federal report card. It is kind of designed to look like a grade, you know, the kind of report card you might have received in high school. That is purposeful. We meant to do that. But again, if you want to see a full discussion, how we grade it, who graded, everything, that is on the site

itself. Also good news, the average grade on the coronavirus pages, which we also graded last year. This year we graded two pages, the coronavirus pages, which every agency is required to create and update, as well as the FOIA request pages, also required by all agencies. We had created the coronavirus pages last year, pretty soon after they were created, and the grades averaged only about a C. Very uneven. There were a few good ones. Everyone was trying to figure out how do we do this. This year , a lot of improvement. A lot of improvement. I don't think anyone went down in terms of their coronavirus pages, in terms of quality. A lot of really great work on that. I think that agencies across the board should be applauded on that work. For the FOIA request pages, this was the first time that we have graded these. We will be re-grading these next year in 2022, followed 2022. The news is less positive, initially. These are very difficult pages, not surprisingly a lot of them have more legalistic language then, you know, is ideal for the audiences that they are trying to reach. This is where we probably want to focus most of our attention as we improve for next year. I should mention right off that the judges are judges, we have 15 judges. We break them into teams of three, so we have five teams to grade all of these. Every page is graded by three separate judges, and those judges also create comments, and write comments addressed to the teams. I have been a little slow on going through all of those comments, and approving them to be sent out, and that is on me. It has been 2 months, but I will in the next, ideally week, get those to the people that haven't received -- The teams that have not received their comments, their judges comments from this year. You will be receiving those. Apologies on the tardiness of that.

The next page, slide six, shows a snapshot from the small business administration's COVID 19 page. We decided to showcase this page because SBA had not done a terrific job last year, also, and they really improved a great deal, and now, I think, you have an exemplary COVID-19 page, and so, applause to SBA. You can also see this is a snapshot of not only the SBA COVID-19 page, but we have callouts on the left-hand side that reveal, that highlight, spotlight the most important things, the most exemplary things that SBA is doing. Overall, the page makes it super easy for a member of the public to come to this page, and to find what they need, understand it, and use it. The information is broken down really well. You can see that from the callouts. The page highlights the resources that the particular audience needs. The graphics are clean, simple. The color palette remains easy, and the language itself is concise, directly addresses the audience, the language in the images on the page work really well together. It is a wonderful page. There are several others that I think are exemplary at this point. Another would be the consumer finance protection Bureau, I think, has a terrific exemplary page on coronavirus. Kudos to everyone on this. We have seen a lot of progress.

We also graded the FOIA pages. I want to begin by highlighting, and this page, this is slide number seven, which highlights some of the good things on the FOIA page for homeland security. What really stood out to our judges was how easy this made the process of figuring out, one, figuring out whether or not you need to submit a FOIA request. Are you able to search around and figure out what the available records are. Two, to really learn how to do it, and to go through the process, and to make it easy. You can see that the page itself, and the image that you have of the page, shows that the steps are numbered, making it very easy for the audience to follow along, and figure out what to do, and how to do it. The text itself is addressed directly

to the audience, without the kind of legalistic language that we found on some other pages. I think it is a model, if you are having trouble with your legal department for how to write a page like this, that keeps everyone safe, and makes everyone in the legal department happy, while also communicating directly to the public, I think this homeland security FOIA page is a great model of how to do just that. Really a terrific page. Take a look at it. I think really a terrific model as we all try to improve our pages for next year. I have a quick image, I don't want to spend too much time.

The Department of Defense has some work to do on the FOIA page. I'm fully confident that the Department of Defense will. We are on slide eight , and it shows an image of the Department of Defense FOIA page , and it needs some work. You have some callouts that go to the right side of the page that show the ways in which this page can be improved. Okay? And one of them is just having a traffic, the current graphic on the pages a little large, and does not really convey much to the reader, other than that this is the FOIA , and this is about the freedom of information act, and it is the Department of Defense. The language itself is something that you probably want to focus in on. I think this is where you really get an example of language that is more to make the legal department happy, then to actually help the audience. You can see, if you Zoom in a little , and it is, granted, it is hard on this screen, but you can do it if you download this presentation, or even better, go again to centerforplainlanguage.org , and check out the full report on the federal report card. I'm going to read the first paragraph of this page, just because I think it is important. Even the notice up top, you will see the same thing. These sentences are very long. In fact, the notice at the very top of the page -- As a result of increases in the health protection condition level, our offices are limited to mission essential personnel only, and maximizing the use of telework for other personnel. This means that we are unable to handle requests, et cetera. It is language that is, you know, it is perhaps an important notice, but could be more directly addressed to the reader here. You don't see any personal pronouns, and that is true if we look below. Here is the first sentence on the main page itself. The freedom of information act enacted in 1966 generally provides that any person has the right to request access to federal agency records and information. The second sentence I want to to look at especially. The federal agencies are required -- So we have the passive voice right there -- To disclose records upon receiving a written request for them, except for those records that are protected from disclosure by any of the nine exemptions, or three exclusions of the FOIA . This right of access is enforceable in court. A lot of legalistic language that is going to make lawyers happy, but going to make nobody else happy, and that continues below, under the heading implementation of the freedom of information act at DOD. Nothing is addressed to the reader of this page. It is really a page, again, that is, can be improved easily. I have every confidence in the Department of Defense, at every confidence that it will be. I think, one of the other reasons we chose to highlight this page -- First of all, because the Department of Defense has a great history of improving pages like this, and they really did a great job with the coronavirus pages, but secondly, it was very typical, the mistakes we are seeing here. The possibility for improvement were typical of what we saw across the board. I think am I looking at these, and looking at the ways that this page can be improved will help everyone.

All right, well, that is it. For us. There we go. I think it is time for questions. Katherine, do we have any questions from our group that have come in ?

We do have some questions -- Yeah, that was pained language, certainly. I wanted to double check with you before I went to the questions, David -- And thank you for explaining this, and pointing out the really good -- I really liked the presentation of the results with the callouts. I mean, it is one thing if you are an expert to be able to see before and after and see, oh yeah, this is what they did. Not everyone is at that level, and it is really useful to be able to say this, this, and that. One of the reasons -- And I will tell you, you are giving me flashbacks to my early federal career. I started mine in homeland security. I worked, although not on that exact FOIA page, but on the journey of the FOIA page. FOIA is also one of the ways that the public can intersect with an agency. You know, and we always think of, okay, if you are, you know, if you are a that, you have to work with the VA. If you are in the Army, or if you are in the military of any sort, you have to work with DOD. There is just no way about it. But FOIA, the freedom of information act, in theory , anybody can contact any federal agency and say, I need some information. So, I mean, I don't know if that played a part in what you chose, but I thought it was a really good touch point since we are talking results, that that was actually something that anybody, anybody can do.

Yeah. I will tell you, it was recommended by one of our judges, and he is actually on this call right now, and I am glad that he did. And he is within the federal government, I should say, and the FOIA pages are , really fit our requirements, really, for the federal report card. They are required by everybody, number one, so it helps us, because we obviously want to look in a somewhat standard way across the board, so that was crucial to us that we have that. Secondly, the new administration has put a real emphasis on transparency, and so that is something that we really wanted to emphasize, and just acknowledge its importance. Third, if I will, I mean, I think we are all newly conscious of accessibility, and just becoming as transparent, and making everything we do as accessible to the most people as possible, and the freedom of information act is very much about that.

Great. Let me go to some of the questions. Very exciting. What are the criteria for grading the plain language quality, it is there a resource you can use for evaluating your site? I am pretty sure that is on the webpage, but perhaps he would like to talk about that a bit more.

Sure. I think, you know, we are always open to helping as much as we can. Limitations, and I have to give this caveat every year. You know, limitations on offering evaluations, on particular pages, it takes time. It takes a lot of volunteer effort. Everyone who works at the center is a volunteer. Nobody gets paid. None of the judges are paid. It is a labor of love, which I think most of the people on this call probably know, because you are all part of this community of plain language, and this is something that you all care about. So. I cannot promise anything, is I think the correct answer here. We are always interested in learning what people would like from us, and how we can help, but I can make no promises, because we are limited.

I think the question was really, you know, what criteria do you use to grade the plain language of the coronavirus and the FOIA pages. I believe that you use the federal plain language guidelines? Which are on plain language.gov?

Correct. And, obviously, we had to make them doable within our system. We use, you know, we have an online system for helping our judges grade rapidly, as well as leave comments, and we, we actually give the specific rubric, which basically is a kind of encapsulated version, a condensed version of what you will find on plain language.gov, and it is divided into six parts. You will see, if you go to the page on our site devoted to how we grade it, and you will see the rubric itself, and you will see those seven sections, and the questions underneath which guided our judges. So, yes, in the simplest answer, it's yes. It is based on plainlanguage.gov . For more detail on the specific ways, you know, that we do that, that we grade, you can see the very specific rubric that we use, by going to the center report card page, and clicking the button that says how we grade it.

Great. Thank you. Obviously, that is a resource that anyone can use to improve their pages on their websites, and any other communication, and of course going straight to the plain language guidelines as well. On an interesting side note, someone wants to know, how can an agency go about developing a plain language report card of their own? We would like to do a baseline reviewed now, and see how our site improves after we rewrite much of our content with more plain language. Are there organizations that could help do this review?

What a great idea. I love that idea. I think within an agency, you know, in terms of outside agencies, I kind of answered that. Inside an agency, all of you have plain language experts. You know, I think that it would be great if we were to, in any way, foster a culture where each agency not only conducted plain language training, and offered plain language resources, but indeed had folks within it that would offer a mini version of the report card, within the agency. It is not hard to set up. I wouldn't think it would be very hard to set up. You know, this is the fourth year that I have run the centers federal report card. You can use the rubric that we have on our page, which is where you can modify it to best fit anything you feel we missed, or, you know, anything you would want to change. As, you know, in terms of your compliance with the 2010 acts. I think that's a great idea, and I would be happy to talk to anybody who wants to try to set that up. And cheer you on, because I think, I mean, that, that is exactly what we want to do, is foster a culture where everybody is really, you know, this is what we want to do, and we want to train. We want to give resources, and we want to measure how well we are doing it. That is awesome.

I do have a hint, or something that I have tried, if you have this software. Not everyone does. GSA uses site improves, which merely speeds up the process. It is an automating tool, but one thing it will give you is a spreadsheet of its opinion on how you have organized your content management system. I'm trying to figure out how best to say this, but it will give you a spreadsheet of pages with the titles, and the URL, and it will give you the reading level. Now, this is not perfect. This is not the rubric, but it does make it faster. I worked on a project, two pieces of it. I looked at our government initiatives section, and look at all of the pages that

scored over 12, and in this, I think they used Flesch Kincaid, so 12 was a high school senior. A lot of times, and then I went through, and I just copied each page into a Google document, and it suggested changes, and then invited people to review what I had done, and explained, of course, you know, I brought your, I brought the lead reading level of your pages, but also, and this is perhaps the most important, it gave the number of times the pages had been viewed during the time period, so I could say, you know, three people look at this page in the last X number of months. Do we need this page? And as I have said before, plain language is not -- You can't get plain language just by using a formula, but you can see which pages may be the worst off, and which need it the most. I mean, that is just a hint. I will try, there is a link to a digital of webinar I did maybe 2 years ago, something on that, that would show more exactly. That is site improve. We have another question for you, David. How do you get legal to be okay with plain language, rather than their lingo? How do they become appropriately involved in the editorial process? Maybe that is not for you.

That's a great question. I think getting by in on plain language is something that we, you know, a lot of people, you know, it is something, you know, it is one thing to give people requirements, but getting, and to train, but I think that's, you know, something that we have talked actually a great deal about in the center. The one thing I would say is that that is another way you can use the federal report card, especially now that we are looking at exemplary pages, and, you know, within government, I think everybody here knows, I mean, people are risk-averse in organizations that, you know, when you are talking about the legal department or compliance department, and to show that another agency, such as homeland security, has done this, and has done it well, and that it has gone through their legal department, and other people have gone down this path of plain language, and it has worked, and it has been called out, and no one's career has suffered for doing this. And, in fact, they are getting all kinds of recognition. I think that is what seems to move legal departments more than anything, is showing precedents.

Certainly. Use the language your audience uses, and to be able to say, well, you know, other people are doing it. It should not be convincing, but it often is. We had another question, which is what exactly does it mean when an agency receives a F on organizational compliance. Does it mean the agency does not have dedicated staff with plain language training to write that agencies reports, and how can they receive an F in organizational compliance, but -- Okay, I think mine runs out from there --

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They said an A in quality.

It's a great question. They are very different rubrics. Okay? So, let me start with that. The organizational compliance looks at staffing. Does the agency actually have these people in place? And what happened, you know, in the turnover that followed the 2016 election is you had a lot of plain language people leave. So, in some organizations, and I will just name the Department of Transportation, you lost some really good people at the department level. They weren't replaced. And even now, as far as I know, there is no plain language officer at the department of transportation. Then, the other, in addition to having a site, you have to have the annual reports. We allow, you know, up to 2 years of lag time, so as long as somebody has had

an annual report in the past 2 years, it has been a tough 2 ears, but you know, there are several agencies that pretty much stopped in 2016. And they haven't recovered. And they have not issued reports, have not put the people in place. So, it just doesn't exist. You can still have, you know, people within the organization that are still committed to plain language, and that is why you will see that sometimes an agency can do very well on the writing quality, and not do well in the checkboxes that actually look at organizational compliance. They are very different. They are actually judged by different people. That is how that happens.

Yeah. And, you know, it is funny, because in addition to the turnover, some of the senior plain language officials are more involved than others, and they are not the ones who write the report. I am the one who writes the reports, and honestly, since I have never been convinced that anyone actually reads them --

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I do.

Great, fantastic. Well done.

I promise I read them.

But seriously, it is the sort of thing that if you read the law, there is no crosschecking. Nobody, there is no central plain language central to verify that anyone has done this. I have cheerfully done it every year, but I have never gotten any feedback. This helps, this does not help.

I should tell you well, and so when I say that we have had a real uptick in the last year, in terms of agency compliance, across-the-board, you know, that is because people are paying attention, and people are writing the reports. So, it is not a thankless task, so I am saying thank you.

I appreciate it, but we were already mutually appreciating before I thought that the center did this, but it is, it is shocking because periodically, you know, I look for an agency's plain language person, even Jesse contact person and I will hit the email, and I will get a no response. Not even no response, but, you know, this is broken. This does not work.

This person no longer works here.

Exactly.

Then I do the follow-up work. When I get those messages, I do the follow-up work, and I look at their LinkedIn page, and it says they left the federal government back in 2017.

Eaten by sharks, yeah.

Eaten by sharks. Right.

A question which you may or may not be able to answer, I know that I could not, does he plain language act also apply to state and local agencies who risk receive federal funds?

As far as I know, no. I know there are a lot of state and local plain language laws. In fact, somebody on the listserv, and I am suddenly forgetting his name, recently published a study of all of the local and state laws in the United States, plain language laws. Really terrific work. Really archival job. And I, you know, and I think we should all be grateful. I have looked at it, and it is terrific. I have forgotten his name, and I apologize for that.

It changes almost as much is the federal, like, I think a few years ago, we met with some people from Oregon's health system. They wanted to know more about plain language, and that is, you know, not necessarily, we gave what help we could, but we don't work with state governments, so we are like, we don't know. You are welcome to use anything on the site, but -- One last -- Go ahead.

I bet people do. That site is terrific, you know, plainlanguage.gov . I told you that before, but I should say it every time. The thing I come back to more than anything come of the terrific before and after's that you have on that website, on plainlanguage.gov . It is what I he is probably more than anything, so, you guys, and it is a great resource.

Thank you. Thank you. Another question, plain language is often an uphill battle. How do you choose the right time and place to do battle?

That is a tough one. Well, I think, I mean, everyone can answer this question differently. It is in a way that is a political question very specific to one's own organization. Those of you who have been in the organization for a while, or know how the organization works, can best answer that in terms of each organization. I will say, again, you know, I am a 60-year-old guy, so I do know some things. One is that success breeds success, so getting recognition from organizations like the center, getting recognition's from others for the good work that you do, and highlighting, spotlighting pages that are terrific in showing that it pays off. Joe Kimball has a terrific book, which a lot of you have seen, and he is updating it, which is full of case studies of how plain language has paid off.

Writing for dollars and writing to please.

I always forget the name of it. But in terms of which ones to choose, I mean, just strategically, it is a political question, but I would choose the ones where you should be able to showcase success, where you will be able to find a payoff, or you will be able to measure it. Whether that is in fewer calls, fewer requests for clarification from consumers from the public, the general public, your audiences, and any other way that you can measure that, it is working, as well as recognition from folks like us.

Actually that is a point I would like to emphasize, that it is really important to work with, if you are

talking about a webpage. Look at the impact, look at the analytics and see is this something that a lot of people use, or is this something that got 36 page views last year. If it got 36 page views, don't. I have found that that has a huge effect on whether people say yes, rewrite, or know, leave it alone, because, just for example, is this the page that people have to go to for benefits? Is this one of the bigger questions? And you have to know that about your site, why do people look at. For GSA.gov, the biggest, biggest page on GSA.gov, no matter what, is the per DM in travel. Over 50% of our traffic is that. So, yeah, working on those pages is a good thing. Working on -- Shoot, now I can't think of anything low-impact enough, but I mean, look at it in the context so you can deliver an impact. What I found is that senior leaders are often looking for really, they don't want editorial beauty. They want better customer service numbers. They want better user experiences. They want less friction. You know, they are serving business goals, so you have to figure out what is the business goal affect of your revising this. You know. Sometimes, it is all you have to say is a lot of our customers come here, and they are leaving very quickly, or they are going to this page, and we don't want them going to this page. We want them to do these things instead, but you have to tie it to what your bosses believe in. Now, if it is not a boss question, and I speak only because I spent it feels like hours last month working on my transit subsidy, just complain. Honestly. Complain when things don't work. You know. Like, I don't know what you mean. I don't know what that means. Stop pretending to understand it, and, you know, get them to do it. Now, this is going to depend on your personality, and your tolerance for repetition, and how much hatred you feel you can bring up, but sometimes you have to be the squeaky wheel. Yeah. And we are seeing a wonderful list of things in the chat box, you know, plain language has many tangible intangible benefits, and it always enhances credibility, reduces errors. You know, those are all good things. If you have someone using the wrong word and leading people astray, that is a problem. It means, you know, you don't look like you care. Very true. Thank you. One more question. Type quickly. Well, maybe that is all.

Great. Well, if I can say one last thing, Katherine, and that is, I just want everybody on the call to know how much I have enjoyed working with the folks within the federal government who are passionate about plain language. You are my people, and the federal report card is a way to applaud the good work that people are doing, as well as to help improve. I see that is my job. I feel the center sees it largely as its job, so, take advantage of us, and influence us in any way you can. So, thank you to all of you, and just know that you have a lot of folks cheering on what you are doing. We will continue to do so, and help in any way we can.

Thank you. Thank you all for attending. David, thank you for your very clear explanation of all of the things going forward. We are having gratitude pouring into the chat, which is very nice. Let me wish you all an excellent holiday season, or two more weeks of cold, whichever comes first, and to remind you that we have, as we mentioned, a volunteer huddle in January. We will send out an announcement to the listserv, and you know, as I said, you have to be a federal employee to play the volunteer game, but we thank you all for joining us today. We really enjoyed it. Thank you so much, David. Thank you.

[Event concluded]