# Policy 820 - Plain Language Policy

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to help ensure that Lower Columbia College employees prepare content that is clear, concise, inclusive and easy to understand for the intended audiences.

Washington state agencies are expected to produce clear communications that improve a person's ability to understand how to access services, comply with requirements, and participate in state government (Governor's Executive Order 23-02).

This policy is not intended to address curriculum and related materials. However, faculty are encouraged to consider plain language principles when communicating with students to promote equity.

## Background

Plain language writing and design strategies are proven techniques for improving communication and reducing misunderstandings and frustration. Benefits of plain language include:

- Achieving better services and results for students and other college stakeholders.
- Improving stakeholders' ability to understand and comply with requirements or action items.
- Making Lower Columbia College's operations more efficient and cost-effective.
- Improving Lower Columbia College's ability to meet accessibility standards and provide culturally appropriate translations.
- Advancing equity.
- Supporting transparency.

Plain language supports Washington state's Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) efforts. It demonstrates Lower Columbia College's  commitment to ensuring all people in Washington have equitable access to public information and opportunities to participate in higher education. This includes but is not limited to: enrollment, procurement and contracting opportunities, employment opportunities, rule-making or public comment opportunities, and grants or benefits programs.

## Scope

This policy applies to written and online content, excluding curriculum and related materials, that includes information or action items that need to be understood regardless of the audience's level of familiarity with the subject matter, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

At Lower Columbia College, these communications include the following:

- Letters and other correspondence

- Contract language developed by Lower Columbia College (excluding collective bargaining agreements)
- Forms, instructions, and applications
- Talking points, FAQs, telephone and other audio scripts, and Q&A documents
- Reports
- Publications including but not limited to:
  - Brochures
  - Fliers
  - Fact sheets
  - Booklets
  - Posters
  - Announcements
  - News releases
  - Advertisements
  - Newsletters
- Email
- Webpages
- Blog and social media posts
- Presentations and meeting materials
- Any other written, printed, or published material

This policy strongly encourages the use of plain language principles in internal communications as well.

This policy excludes Washington Administrative Code (WAC) and Revised Code of Washington (RCW) language that follows requirements of the Office of the Code Reviser. However, Lower Columbia College should provide WAC or RCW explanations in plain language when the college refers to these laws in publications, forms, letters, and other communications. Exceptions related to external compliance, such as institutional and programmatic accreditation, may also be necessary.

## Definitions

- Audience: The intended recipients of a specific communication.
- Culturally appropriate: Accounting for a set of values, beliefs, norms, perceptions, experiences, and customs that a group of people share.
- Culturally sensitive: Being aware of people's lived experiences and recognizing that words have different meanings for everyone. Approaching the language we use with care, humility, intention, and inclusiveness.
- Stakeholders: Individuals and organizations with whom Lower Columbia College serves and works.
- Plain language: The result of a process that creates or revises documents and online content to reflect plain language writing and design principles.

- User testing: The process of making content easier for the audience to understand by testing it with recommended technology tools and/or members of the intended audience, and incorporating that feedback.

## Requirements

1. Employees of Lower Columbia College are expected to use plain language principles in written communications with internal and external constituents, other individuals, and organizations we communicate with about Lower Columbia College's programs, activities, and decisions with the exceptions noted above including curriculum and related materials. User-testing, while not required, is encouraged where feasible, cost-effective, and sensible. Plain language principles include:
   a. Write for your audience, not for yourself.  Organize information based on what your audience needs to know and the questions they are most likely to ask.
   b. Use common words, short sentences, and short paragraphs.
   c. Avoid jargon and legal or technical language.
   d. Use unambiguous language that is culturally appropriate for the intended audience.
   e. Use active voice writing to make it clear who is responsible for what. Note: Some cultures prefer passive voice; it is important to understand the audience's preference. However, research shows active voice helps the reader more than passive voice.
   f.  Layout and design that help the reader understand important information on the first try. This includes adequate white space, bulleted lists, helpful headings, and other proven techniques.
2. Lower Columbia College employees in the following areas/roles are recommended to complete the plain language training at the Department of Enterprise Services or equivalent training:
   a. Executive leadership team
   b. Contracts management
   c. Human Resources
   d. College Relations
   e. Department directors
3. Supervisors and managers should consider plain language training for all employees and support employee professional development in plain language principles.
4. All employees are encouraged to continually review their documents and content subject to this policy to improve upon the writing and design.

## Historic Information

- Adopted - May 8, 2024
- Campus Review - April 23 - May 7, 2024
- Reviewed by UMCC - April 16, 2024
- Reviewed by Governance Council - April 3, 2024
- Reviewed by the Leadership Team - February 28, 2024

| Resource/Reference/ Procedure | Title | Unit Responsibility |
|---|---|---|
| Governmental resources on plain language | **plainlanguage.gov ( www. plainlanguage.gov/ )** | |
| Department of Enterprise Services | **Writing Documents in Plain Talk* ( des.wa.gov/s ervices/training/courses? courseid=1252 )** | |
| Reading level checkers | **Gunning Fog Index ( http:/ /gunning-fog-index.com/ )** | |
| | **Edit Central's Readability Calculators ( www.webfx. com/tools/read-able/ )** | |
| | **Juicy Studios readability test ( juicystudio.com/ser vices/readability )** | |
| | **Readability Analyzer ( dat ayze.com/readability-anal yzer )** | |
| | **Online Utility Readability Calculator ( www.online-u tility.org/english/readabilit y_test_and_improve.jsp )** | |
| | **Get Your Document's Readability and Statistics (Microsoft Word) ( suppor t.microsoft.com/en-us/offi ce/get-your-document-s-r eadability-and-level-statist ics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8 dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2 )** | |
| Branding guidelines | **LCC Brand and Style Guide ( services4.lowerco lumbia.edu/info/webresou rces2/Internal/Department s/CollegeRelations/LCC_B rand_Style_Guide.pdf )** | Effectiveness and College Relations |

*Note: *In November 2023, Executive Order 23-02 took effect, replacing Executive Order 05-03. DES is reviewing this curriculum to ensure it meets learning requirements outlined in the new executive order. DES will update this course description when it is determined if the current course meets the updated learning requirements.*