

# Inclusive steps

## **How to Write in Plain Language for Teaching**

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<https://www.techlearning.com/how-to/how-to-write-in-plain-language-for-teaching>

Using plain language for school websites and family communication is an effective way to assure understanding, especially when translation is involved. Inclusive websites are written in plain language. “Communication needs to be instantaneous. People need information at their fingertips.” By using everyday language, potential users can more easily:

- Find what they’re looking for
- Understand it
- Get a better translation from online tools

During the recent Beyond Access Forum, a workshop dedicated to supporting educators gave participants a number of ways to ensure that what they write meets these goals. “If you make accessible content, it doesn’t just benefit the population you’re trying to help, it really benefits everybody,” said presenter Laura Ogando, program manager for the Office of Digital Literacy & Inclusion, NYC Department of Education.

Writing for effective translation ensures:

- An inclusive experience for students and families
- Speakers of all languages can access content
- Content is more accessible to English readers
- translatable text is easier for everyone to read

Also, when writing for effective translation, it's a good practice to lower the reading level (target grade 6-9), be mindful of sentence subject language, and include relative pronouns.

Writing in Plain Language

Plain language is writing designed to be easily understood by all readers the first time it is read.

Writing in plain language makes information more easily:

- Found through online searches
- Understood by all readers, including those with disabilities
- Translated using online tools

When thinking about vocabulary, consider the three tiers:

- **Tier 1:** Frequently used words, such as clock, baby, happy, walk
- **Tier 2:** General academic words, such as obvious, complex, establish
- **Tier 3:** Domain specific words, such as scaffold, inquiry, pedagogy -

Avoid Tier 3 words, said Ogando, which is hard for teachers who are used to using a lot of domain specific language. "We sometimes realize that when we use these words, our," she said. For example, every teacher knows what scaffolded instruction is, but if you ask any parent what it is, chances are most don't know what it is. "We're taking a word from the construction world and marrying it to an education concept, and then add on top of that the idea of translating it into another language.

Also be wary of acronyms, said Ogando, such as SEL (social-emotional learning). Spell it out the first time, and then you can use it in the rest of your communication.

Avoid passive voice, as it can be unclear and typically leaves out the subject. Active voice makes it clear that the subject of a sentence is taking the action. "Active voice leads to better understanding," said Ogando.

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