Plain language – what is it?

How do you apply plain language to your documentation?
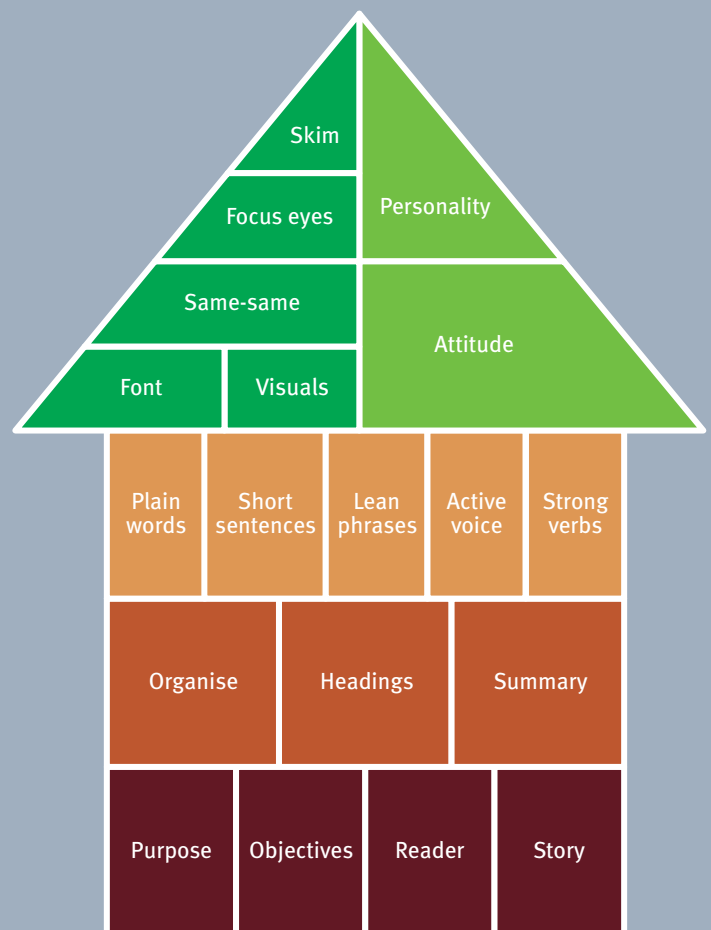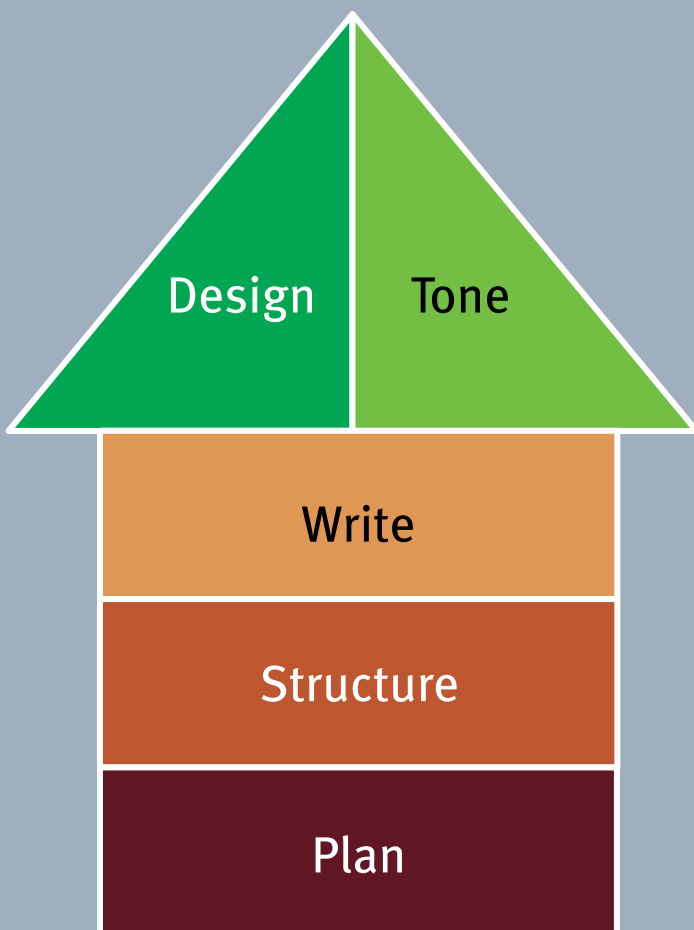
ISTC

Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Spring 2018

Guidelines for e-learning localisation and; video

Learn more about Gestalt principles for designing visuals

Design

Tone

Write

Structure

Plan

Skim

Focus eyes

Personality

Same-same

Attitude

Font

Visuals

| Plain words | Short sentences | Lean phrases | Active voice | Strong verbs |

| Organise | Headings | Summary |

| Purpose | Objectives | Reader | Story |

Simplified - an approach to plain language as a process

Read a case study on Miele and SCHEMA ST4

Re-ignite your career with MadCap Flare

President's view

These past few months have been extremely busy ones for my husband and me. In addition to being elected President of this great institute, I have also taken on a lot more responsibilities at work. Although we have been succession planning for the last year, those final few months were a lot tougher than I thought as we put the last pieces of the puzzle into place. It's a steep learning curve, but I am enjoying the new responsibilities that come with the job. My husband, in addition to taking on a personal challenge of running a number of marathons this year has been elected as a Parish Councillor. While we both are enjoying our new roles and volunteer work, we are finding it tricky managing our time so that everything that needs doing gets done in time, and most importantly that will still have time for us.

Those who know me, will agree that I am extremely well organised. I'm a firm believer in to-do lists and getting things done well within a deadline. However, just like everyone else in this world, I do have my off days and I procrastinate over things. Taking on more work responsibilities and extra volunteer work has meant that my organisation system no longer works as well as it did. I've spent a lot of time these last few months trying out some new approaches and new systems in hopes of finding something that will allow me to track my time better, and ensure I actually do the tasks. I'm sure I'm not alone in getting sidetracked with a task and before I know it, two hours have gone by and I'm still working on page one! This has consequences as I have a lot more management tasks that need to be completely every week so it's important that I stick to a schedule to complete these tasks in time.

The obvious choice is the Pomdoro technique. For those of you that are not familiar with this, the idea is you set a timer for 25 minutes and spend that time focused on one task. Then you take a 5 minute break and repeat the process. I love the concept of this, and it works really well for administration tasks and report writing. For me, it doesn't work well for other writing tasks such as documentation work. I find it can often take 25 minutes to really get your head around project specs and just as you are ready to write some proper notes on it, the timer goes off and you need to break. There are times I find myself checking the timer to see how much time is left on the clock, which is just a distraction.

I am a life-long list maker. In the past, I used to write my lists on post-it notes and stick them to the back of my phone and they worked great at reminding me to do stuff. I stopped when it became apparent people thought I was a bit strange for doing this when instead I could just use a mobile app for it. I have tried my fair share of digital to-do lists, but I don't find them great. I currently use Google Keep as it enables tasks that pop into your head to be jotted down with ease. People have suggested I use the alarm reminders in my phone for tasks, but I don't like them at all.

For the first time in at least four years I have bought myself a paper diary. It's small and I can carry it in my bag so it's with me at all times. There is something really satisfying about taking a red pen and crossing off something from a to-do list. That feeling of accomplishment cannot be replicated with a mobile or web app. It's the same feeling you get when editing a paper copy of a chapter that you or someone else has written. The only better feeling is when you have made all the changes needed from that edit and you scrunch up that paper and throw it in the bin.

Time management and organisation are extremely important skills for technical communicators. As we all know, technical communication is about more than just writing. It can be easy to forget this and think your whole time is taken up with writing. Tracking my work has shown that although I spend a good portion of my time writing, I spend a significant portion researching the content, talking to developers, writing up reports, and amending processes.

Technical communication news

In the world of technical communication news: the location for TCUK 2018 has been announced. It will be held 25 to 27 September 2018 at the DeVere Hotel in the Staverton Estate in Daventry, Northamptonshire. TCUK is always a great conference and well worth adding to your conference calendar. For more information, see the TCUK website.

The latest ISTC book, Current Practices and Trends in Technical and Professional Communication is available for purchase. For more information, see the ISTC website.
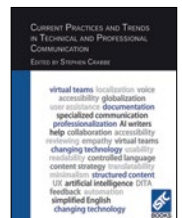
In January, I had my first ever interview for a podcast for the ISTC channel. In the podcast, Derek Cooper asks me a few questions about the presidency. I hope you all find it interesting. So don't forget to check it out.

All that's left for me to say is Beannachtaí na Cásca oraibh. **C**

References and further reading:

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