

That's clear!

PLAIN LANGUAGE and

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

MODULE 3

TRAINER GUIDE



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Introduction

Module Objectives

By the end of this module, participants should be able to:

- understand why plain language matters;
- identify barriers created by complex communication;
- distinguish between plain language and oversimplification;
- understand the links between plain language and universal design;
- identify the main principles of plain language writing;
- rewrite information using clearer and more inclusive communication;
- reflect on accessibility in their own professional context.

Suggested Duration

2.5 to 3.5 hours

Materials Needed

- projector;
- flipchart or whiteboard;
- printed examples of complex texts;
- worksheets;
- paper and pens;
- internet connection (optional);
- access to plain language resources and AI tools (optional).

Introduction to the Module

Objective

Introduce the concept of plain language and explain its importance in youth work.

Trainer Script

“Today we will explore how communication materials can become clearer, simpler, and more inclusive.”

“This module is not only about writing differently. It is about reducing exclusion and helping more people understand information, participate, and take action.”

“We will work on practical strategies that can help you improve your own communication materials and create resources that are easier to use in your organisation.”

Overview of the Session

Present the different steps:

- Why plain language matters
- Understanding cognitive load
- Plain language principles and international standards
- Rewriting activities
- Co-creation of a practical toolkit

Why Plain Language Matters

Objective

Understand the social and practical impact of unclear communication.

Trainer Explanation

“When information is too complex, people may feel excluded, discouraged, or unable to participate.”

“This is not only about reading difficulties. Complex communication can create stress, confusion, mistakes, and loss of confidence.”

“Plain language helps people:

- understand information faster;
- feel more confident;
- make decisions independently;
- participate more actively.”

Key Ideas to Explain

Plain language is for everyone

It is not designed only for one disability or one specific audience.

It creates a common basis that can be understood by as many people as possible.

Plain language supports autonomy

It helps people:

- understand their rights;
- access services;
- make choices;
- participate in society.

Plain language and universal design work together

Plain language focuses on:

- words;
- vocabulary;
- sentence structure.

Universal design focuses on:

- layout;
- structure;
- visual hierarchy;
- readability;
- user experience.

Suggested Discussion

Ask participants:

- “Have you ever struggled to understand instructions?”
- “What makes information difficult to follow?”
- “Have you ever felt excluded because of complicated language?”

Everyday Examples

Possible examples:

- transport systems;
- administrative forms;
- websites;
- medical information;
- legal documents;
- cooking instructions.

Activity: Understanding Complex Texts

Objective

Experience the difficulties created by overly complex communication.

Organisation

Divide participants into small groups.

Give each group:

- one “official” complex text;
- one plain language version of the same text.

Examples may include:

- GDPR regulations;
- voting rights;
- bank account access;
- university credit systems.

Instructions

Ask participants to discuss:

- What is this text about?
- Was the original version easy to understand?
- What made it difficult?
- What changed in the plain language version?

Suggested Time

20 to 30 minutes.

Debriefing

Main Points to Highlight:

- Long sentences increase difficulty
- Technical vocabulary creates barriers
- Too many references and sub-sections confuse readers
- Dense text increases cognitive effort
- Plain language saves time and reduces stress
- Clear communication builds trust

Important Nuance

Introduce the debate around oversimplification.

Some participants may feel that:

- legal precision is important;
- technical concepts cannot always be simplified;
- some terms are necessary.

Explain:

“Plain language does not mean removing important information.

It means helping people understand essential information more easily.”

Suggested Debate Questions

- “Can information become too simplified?”
- “How do we balance accessibility and precision?”
- “Should institutions always provide both versions?”

Cognitive Load and Accessibility

Objective

Understand how complex texts overload readers.

Trainer Explanation

“When a text contains:

- long sentences;
- unfamiliar words;
- too much information at once;
- complicated structures;

the brain has to work harder.”

“This is called cognitive load.”

Explain the Different Difficulties

Readers may need to:

- decode unfamiliar vocabulary;
- follow long grammatical structures;
- identify important information;
- connect multiple references.

Key Message

“If a text feels difficult to understand, it is not necessarily because the reader lacks ability. Sometimes the text simply asks too much from the brain.”

Link With Universal Design

Explain that universal design helps reduce cognitive load through:

- clearer organisation;
- headings;
- lists;
- spacing;
- visual hierarchy.

Suggested Reflection

Ask participants:

- “Which types of texts create the most cognitive load for you?”
- “What makes you stop reading?”

Plain Language Principles and Standards

Objective

Discover the principles and international recognition of plain language.

Trainer Explanation

“Plain language is now an international movement.”

Explain briefly:

- origins in the 1970s;
- development in North America and Europe;
- public administration reforms;
- accessibility and democratic participation.

Introduce Key References

- International Plain Language Federation
- ISO 24495-1 Standard (2023)
- European Commission “Clear Writing” resources

Key Definition

“Plain language is a way of writing and presenting information so that it can be understood the first time by as many people as possible.”

Main Principles

- Focus on the reader
- Use clear structure
- Keep sentences short
- Prefer active voice
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations

- Highlight essential information
- Use visual support when relevant

Rewriting Activity

Objective

Practice rewriting texts using plain language principles.

Instructions

Give each group a complex text.

Ask them to:

- identify difficult parts;
- simplify vocabulary;
- shorten sentences;
- reorganise information;
- create a clearer version.

Explain the 3 Main Areas of Improvement

Content

- Vocabulary and grammar.

Structure

- Headings, logical order, hierarchy.

Presentation

- Layout, spacing, readability.

Suggested Duration

20 to 30 minutes.

Group Presentations

Invite groups to read:

- the original text;
- their rewritten version.

Trainer Debriefing

Highlight that:

- there is not only one “correct” plain language version;
- different groups may simplify differently;
- adaptation depends on the audience.

Knowing Your Audience

Objective

Understand how audience needs shape communication choices.

Key Questions to Ask Before Writing

Who is your audience?

- age;
- language level;
- cultural background;
- familiarity with the topic;
- disabilities or sensory barriers.

In what context will they read the information?

- online;
- paper;
- mobile phone;
- noisy environment;
- stressful situation.

What do they need to do after reading?

- register;
- vote;
- book an appointment;
- understand rights;
- complete a form.

Trainer Emphasis

“The goal is not only to read.

The goal is to act.”

Suggested Discussion

- “How does context change the way people understand information?”
- “What barriers exist in your organisation?”

Good Practices for Accessible Communication

Objective

Provide practical recommendations for clearer communication.

Recommendations to Present

- Use short sentences
- Organise information logically
- Use headings and lists
- Use action verbs
- Prefer active voice
- Avoid unnecessary jargon
- Use sufficient contrast
- Use readable font sizes
- Avoid dense layouts and multiple columns
- Combine text with visuals when useful
- Present important information in more than one format

Examples:

- written + audio;
- text + visuals;
- infographic + explanation.

Important Reminder

“Accessibility is not only linguistic.

It is also visual, technical, and cognitive.”

Co-Creating a Mini Toolkit

Objective

Create practical tools participants can reuse later.

Group Activity

Ask participants to create:

- A list of 5 plain language tips
- A list of common mistakes to avoid
- One concrete example from their professional context

Suggested Output

The toolkit may later include:

- checklists;
- templates;
- examples;
- recommendations;
- before/after comparisons.

Suggested Questions

- “What advice would you give to a colleague?”
- “Which mistakes are most common in your organisation?”
- “What could you improve immediately?”

Digital Tools and AI Support

Objective

Introduce existing resources and digital tools.

Present Useful Resources

- European Commission “Clear Writing” Guide
- ISO standards
- AI-based simplification tools
- Contrast checkers
- Accessibility evaluation tools

Important Discussion Point

Explain that AI tools can help:

- simplify text;
- suggest alternatives;
- identify difficult structures.

But:

- human review remains essential;
- target-group testing is necessary;
- simplification should not distort meaning.

Conclusion of the Module

Closing Script

“Plain language is not about making information childish or simplistic.

It is about making communication more accessible, more respectful, and more inclusive.”

“When people understand information, they can participate more fully in society.”

Final Reflection Questions

- “What is your main takeaway from this module?”
- “What communication habit would you like to change?”
- “What could become clearer in your organisation?”

Optional Evaluation Activity

Examples:

- one key learning;
- one challenge;
- one action participants want to implement.