Plain Language: A Brief Introduction
Accessibility Video Tutorials

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What we will cover in this video

In this video, we will discuss & demonstrate:

- ✓ What is **plain language** and why does **plain language** matter for survivors with disabilities?

- ✓ How can we communicate using **plain language**? What are some examples of **plain language**?

- ✓ How can we use built-in Microsoft Office tools to check for **plain language**?

What is Plain Language?

Writing that readers can understand quickly, easily, and completely.

- ***Plain Language is for Everyone***

- We want **all survivors** to understand our written materials. Ideally, survivors will not have to read critical information more than once to understand what it means.

Plain Language is *not*:

- **Condescending.** Sometimes we replace simple words with complex words to try to impress people. This helps no one.

- **Boring.** In fact, plain language can be more engaging and memorable for the reader.

- **Just for some people**. Plain language helps everyone. Expect that survivors will scan and skim your materials rather than read them word for word. *Your information is crucial for survivors to understand.*

Elements of Plain Language

What does plain language look like in practice?

Features of Plain Language

- Short sentences, 1 idea per sentence

- No jargon or figures of speech

- No unnecessary words or phrases

- Explain acronyms

- Conversational; informal, friendly tones

- Engage the audience by talking to them (using "You", "We", and "I")

- Contractions ("isn't" instead of "is not")

Use tables when sharing "If, Then" statements.

After sexual assault:

If:	Then:
you want to talk to an advocate, anonymously	you can call our 24-hour hotline to speak to a counselor.
you go to the hospital to get evidence collected	we can send a medical advocate to support you.

Jargon

Jargon is like code language that we use to communicate with other people who work in our professions. Generally, people who don't work in our profession don't understand the language. For example…

Non-Profit Jargon:

- "We work in silos here."

- "Let's take this conversation off-line."

- "I want to piggyback off of what Jessica was saying…"

- "Let's circle-back about that later."

How can we use plain language?

Examples of how to use plain language

Who is your audience?

- Survivors are a broad, diverse group.

- Survivors can be part of any audience.

- **What do survivors already know?** What is familiar to my audience?

- What do survivors **need to know**?

- What questions would you anticipate from survivors who read your information?

Sharing the important stuff first

It is more accessible for all survivors when you organize information logically.

- "Call [hotline] to speak with a counselor now"

- "We are located at [address] in [city/neighborhood]"

- "Do you need help?"

- "You are not alone"

- "All of our services are free and confidential"

- "We are here for you. Let's talk"

- "Looking for support? We can help"

- "You can call our hotline anytime, 24 hours a day"

Plain Language is not just for emergencies

Consider how to share information in your factsheets and other resources:

Not Plain:

"People with an intellectual disability of any kind have an age-adjusted rate of rape or sexual assault that is more than seven times the rate for people without disabilities."

Plain:

People with intellectual disabilities are 7 times more likely to experience sexual assault than people without disabilities.

Plain Language Example: Brochure

Not Plain

"Emotional effects of an assault may impair functioning at work and attendance resulting in loss of income. A survivor may struggle to pay bills. Social benefits, unpaid leave, or other relief may be available"

Plain

It can be overwhelming to go back to work after an assault. You might feel distracted and emotionally worn-out. We can help you figure out how to pay your bills.

Plain Language Example: Intake Materials

Not plain

"Please provide the following information for our records. Leave blank any question you would rather not answer, or would prefer to discuss with your therapist. Information you provide here is held to the same standards of confidentiality as our counseling practices."

Plain

Please fill out this form. Let us know if you need help answering any questions. You don't have to answer any questions unless you want to. We will not share this information with anyone unless you say that you plan to hurt yourself or someone else.

Microsoft Word Readability Tool
Checking for Plain Language in Microsoft Word

Using the Readability Tool

- The readability tool is **not** comprehensive, but can help let you know if your document is too complex.

- Readability statistics will give you information about the reading ease, grade level, average number of letters in your words, and percentage of passive sentences.

To use the tool:

- Go the menu, **Preferences**

- Under Preferences, go to **Spelling and Grammar**
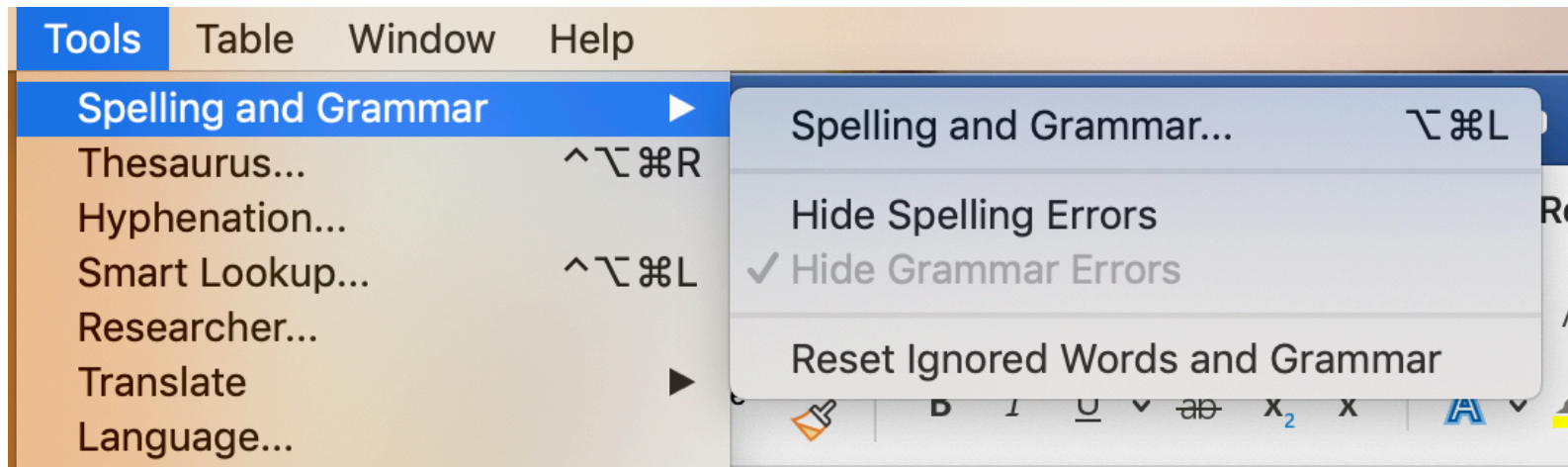
Get Readability Statistics

Check the box under Grammar that says, "**Show Readability Statistics**"
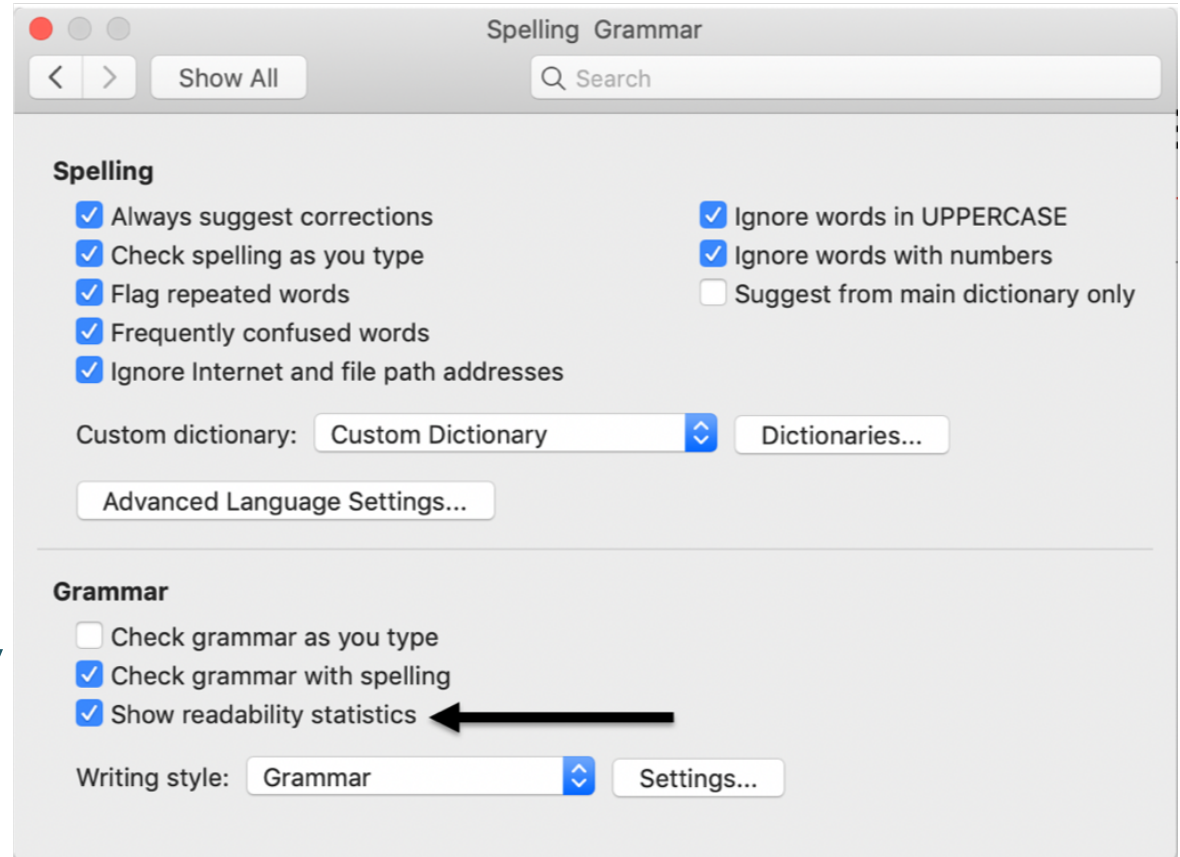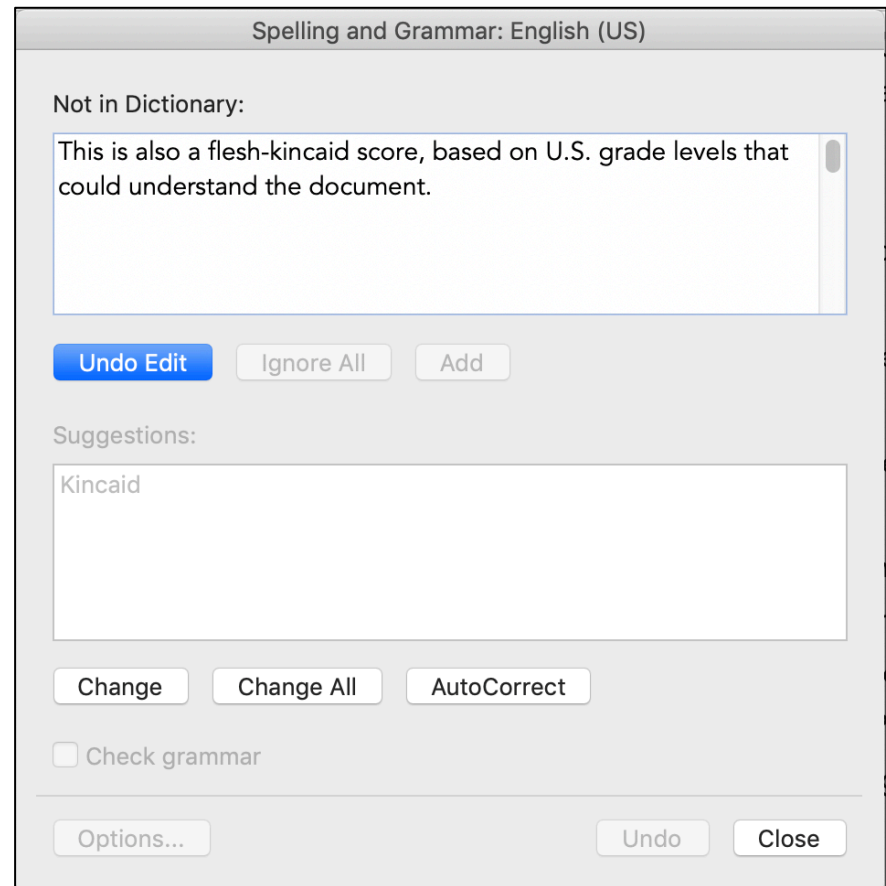
Do a Spelling and Grammar check

- Go to the **Tools** menu, and select **Spelling and Grammar** from the list.

- Select "**Spelling and Grammar**" again, from the drop-down menu.

Spelling and Grammar Check (2)

- A **Spelling and Grammar** box will pop up.

- Go all the way through the Spelling and Grammar check.

- After the Spelling and Grammar check, the readability statistics will pop up.

Spelling and Grammar: English (US)

Not in Dictionary:

This is also a flesh-kincaid score, based on U.S. grade levels that could understand the document.

Undo Edit   Ignore All   Add

Suggestions:

Kincaid

Change   Change All   AutoCorrect

☐ Check grammar

Options...   Undo   Close

Readability Results

Reading Ease:
Aim for above 70

Grade Level: Aim
for below 6

**Passive
Sentences:** Aim
for 0%

Readability Statistics	
Counts	
Words	3,574
Characters	17,945
Paragraphs	168
Sentences	237
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	2.4
Words per Sentence	13.2
Characters per Word	4.8
Readability	
Flesch Reading Ease	59.4
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	8.2
Passive Sentences	3.3%

OK

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Plain Writing Act of 2010

- The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires U.S. **federal agencies** use "clear government communication that the public can understand and use."

- The **Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN)** hosts the plain language guidelines online.

- They also offer resources and **examples of using plain language**.

To Recap: Plain Language

Plain language is for everyone!

✓ Write for your average audience of survivors. Don't write to impress your imaginary English teacher.

✓ Keep it **conversational**. Use active voice; short sentences with one idea per sentence; and common words and phrases.

✓ **Avoid jargon** and figures of speech.

✓ You can **check for readability** in your Word documents

✓ The **Plain Language Action and Information Network** offer more guidance on plain language.

Thank you!

For more information and videos about accessible content, visit: www.endabusepwd.org

Ending abuse of people with disabilities is a team effort.

Contact us for support:

End Abuse Email Address: cvs@vera.org

End Abuse Phone Number: (212) 376-3096

End Abuse Toll Free Phone Number: (855) 274-8222