



! “Don’t try to sound smart. Try to sound useful!” !

Key Takeaways from LMAEC’s Webinar: Writing in Plain Language For Your Clients

On July 16, 2020, [Stephanie Hart](#), Communications Specialist at BLG, shared her expertise on how to communicate with internal and external stakeholders in a clear and concise way. Whether you are writing an e-mail, press release, blog, or thought leadership, the key takeaways below will help ensure your writing is crisp, engaging and accessible!

Use Point-First Style

Your audience is used to reading only short-form content. With only six seconds to get their attention – make those first words count!

- Craft eye-catching headlines.
- Lead with your argument or key takeaway.
- Consider where your first paragraph will cut off on certain devices so the important details are first.

Write in Plain Language

Plain language can be defined as a **reader-focused** style of writing that champions **clarity**. If you can write clearly, your clients will know that you can think clearly.

- Use short, concise sentences (aim for 10-20 words). Avoid run-ons.
- Limit unnecessary details. Get rid of anything that doesn’t reinforce your point or argument.
- Find alternatives to jargon words or latin (e.g. “in the event of” = “if” or “until such time as” = “when”).

Review Your Tone

- Use an active voice – it is lively, engaged, authoritative and in present tense.
 - **Passive:** Our lawyers are experienced in the negotiation and implementation of commercial activities.
 - **Active:** We negotiate and implement a range of commercial activities, including X, X, and X.
- Always put your subject before your object in a complete sentence.
 - **Passive:** Why was the road crossed (object) by the chicken (subject)?
 - **Active:** Why did the chicken (subject) cross the road (object)?
- Use a conversational tone. Use language that mimics natural speech.

Consider Format

- Use introductions and conclusions to make your point and reinforce it.
- Use headings and subheadings to separate and describe content so that reader can follow your argument and skim to content of value.
- Be attentive to how text will look on a screen.
- Use graphics to help convey an idea and break up text.
- Use lists, bullets or numbered items to avoid lengthy sentences punctuated by commas or semi-colons.

Edit, Edit, Edit

- Change the document from your preferred font to see things you might not otherwise notice.
- Read the document aloud to yourself: Can all of your sentences be read without having to take a breath?
- Don't attempt to edit your work for everything in one pass. Break your read-throughs down so you only read for one thing at a time: grammar, punctuation, structure, cohesion, clarity, syntax, and correct word choice.
- Ask someone to proofread your work. Fresh eyes can help find things that you gloss over after repetitive reading.

Most importantly, no matter what stage of the writing you are in, always keep your audience at the forefront of your mind. Remember, don't try to sound smart, try to sound useful.

