

PLAIN eJournal Contributor Guide

This guide is for contributors of the (Plain Language Association International) *PLAIN eJournal*.

- If you would like to contribute to the journal, please read the guide to see what is involved.
- If you have already agreed to contribute, this guide is an essential reference on how to prepare your submission.

Purpose & audience

Purpose

The journal keeps our members up-to-date with international developments in plain language. We do this by sharing best practices, cases studies, reflections, and discussions about plain language. Examples of article topics that we welcome include:

- discussion about changes in plain language,
- case studies of projects,
- updates in developments in particular countries,
- interviews with plain language leaders, and
- book reviews.

This list is not definite. If you feel inspired to write about something that is not mentioned above, feel free to propose your idea to the managing editor.

Audience

The audience includes PLAIN members from around the world. We have a growing membership in more than 35 countries.

PLAIN's eJournal is published digitally. This means contributors should write for reading on the screen rather than on the page.

All articles will be reviewed and published in English. However, we welcome parallel translations and can publish these with the English version.

Academic authors

We welcome contributions from academics, but the *PLAIN eJournal* is not peer reviewed or indexed.

Length and format

Article length

Articles should be from 800 to 1,000 words. We may be flexible with some feature pieces. In this case the maximum length will be 1,200 to 1,500 words. Be sure to discuss this with the managing editor when you propose your topic.

General advice

Be specific. Include as many examples as possible. Link to projects or resources where readers can learn more. This is OK even if they are only available in one language, as online translators may be helpful, or readers can contact those involved for more information.

It is OK to get personal. Add your own personal insight. What is your background? What did you learn? We want to create a network where people can learn from each other.

Engage with the readers. We want the *PLAIN eJournal* to be a starting point for more discussion about plain language. A call-to-action is a great way to conclude an article. For example, how can others get involved?

Structure

Articles should be organized into sections that are clearly signposted with headings.

If you need help getting started, we have included examples of how articles can be structured in [Appendix A](#). You do not have to use the suggested structure if you feel strongly about another structure.

Headings

Only the title of the article should be heading level one. All others should be level two or three.

Use sentence case for all headings, where only the first letter and proper nouns are capitalized.

Also use the same heading genre throughout, such as topic heading, question heading, or analytical heading:

- Topic heading (for example, The new plain language network),
- Question heading (for example, What is the new network?), or
- Statement heading (for example, How the network will operate).

Do not mix genres by using a question heading then switching to a statement or topic heading.

Paragraphs

As part of our onscreen style, we want to keep paragraphs short, generally with 1 to 3 sentences per paragraph.

Most paragraphs will therefore be between 15 and 50 words, with a maximum length of around 60 words.

Lists, tables, and graphics

We also encourage the use of bulleted and numbered lists to break up the text. These can be one sentence each or stand-alone sentences.

For accessibility, tables cannot have merged, split, or empty cells. This may require some duplication of text.

When using diagrams or images to reinforce the text, please provide alternative (alt) text, which should ideally be fewer than 150 characters including spaces. Consider what you want sighted readers to learn from the figure and explain that to readers who use screen readers.

Expression

All contributions should use plain language expression, such as:

- a conversational style,
- use of pronouns,
- active voice in preference to the passive voice,
- everyday words unless technical words are essential,
- explanation of technical terms where they are used, and
- no redundancy.

Translations

If you would like to include a translation alongside your English version, this is the general process we ask you to follow:

- Submit your English version of article for first draft.
- The managing editor will edit the English version and provide the author with feedback.
- The author reviews the edits and makes adjustments as needed.
- The managing editor finalizes the English version with the author.
- The author or translator implements all necessary edits in the non-English version and sends final version to editor. This version will not be edited for spelling and grammar, so please have a second person review it.

If you need help with translating your article into English, please [email us](#). We may be able to find someone in our membership community to help.

Submitting your work

Deadline

Once your proposal is accepted, we will give you the deadline. It is generally 4 weeks from the idea submission deadline.

If you expect a delay in sending us your final work, email publications@plainlanguagenetwork.org as soon as possible.

Before you send us your article

We only accept text in Microsoft Word documents. We supply a standard template with built-in styles that you can use to write or format your content. Using this will help to streamline the editing process and minimize formatting corrections.

Review our style guide, especially the section about how to include references.

Also make sure:

- all hyperlinks you have included are active and accurate, and
- all the graphics you have included are good quality.

When you are ready to submit your article

Include in your document:

- your full name, title, and institution or company name,
- a biography of 100 or fewer words, and
- your translator's credit (if relevant) including name, company, and biography.

Also attach to your email a photo of yourself that focuses on your head and shoulders. A background that is a single plain light color works best.

How we edit

If you submit a proposal that is the full text, the managing editor will provide a [substantive edit](#), which may include:

- revising, reordering, cutting, or asking for material to be expanded;
- determining whether permissions are necessary for third-party material; and
- recasting material that would be better presented in another form, or revising material for a different medium (such as creating or recasting tables).

The managing editor will return the Word document with comments after they have made a decision on your proposal.

Once the managing editor receives your completed article, they will ensure that everything has been included. The managing editor will then complete a line edit (a combination of a [stylistic and copy edit](#)), which may include:

- eliminating jargon, clichés, and euphemisms;
- establishing or maintaining the language level appropriate for the intended audience, medium, and purpose;
- adjusting the length and structure of sentences and paragraphs;
- establishing or maintaining tone, mood, style, and authorial voice or level of formality;
- editing for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage;
- checking for consistency and continuity of mechanics and facts;

- editing tables, figures, and lists;
- notifying designers of any unusual production requirements;
- following the PLAIN eJournal style guide; and
- correcting or querying general information that should be checked for accuracy.

The managing editor will email the Word document with the editing changes tracked to the author to review. Please accept the changes you agree with and comment on the ones you do not, briefly explaining your concern. Please do not reject them, so the managing editor can either reject them or propose an alternate solution that addresses each of your concerns. Also, please address all the comments asking for clarification and confirmation.

After the text has been finalized, it will go to layout. The layout is [proofread](#) and minor changes are made. The managing editor will not check anything with you at this point.

Distribution and copyright

The journal is shared in a digital format. Because it is a membership benefit, we ask you to follow some guidelines for sharing and promoting it. This will allow us to protect the value of our membership and continue to produce this resource for all members.

All authors retain the copyright to their own text. If you would like a PDF file of your article with the cover and table of contents to include in your profile, please [email us](#).

Please do:

- Share a link to our website where we promote the journal.
- Encourage others to join PLAIN, so they can also read the journal.
- Share a printed copy only with your colleagues who might be interested.

Please do not:

- Circulate digital copies.
- Post images of articles that are not written by you.

Appendix A: Example article structures

Here are a few common types of articles and suggestions for how to structure the content. These are only suggestions, and you can include more sections. For each of these, the first one or two paragraphs should

Case study

- Summary of project: What were the goals at the start? What was the plan? Who was involved?
- Highs and lows: What worked? What did not work?
- Results: What were the outcomes of the project? What was learned?

- Conclusion: What surprised you the most? What are the next steps for you or the client? What is your advice for someone else who wants to work on similar projects?

Research summary

- Summary of research: What were the goals? What disciplines were involved?
- Methods: How did you go about the research?
- Results: What were the outcomes of the project? What was learned?
- Conclusion: How will these results be used? What are the policy implications or practical applications? How should this research be continued?

Expert advice on a topic

- Background: What is your background and experience in this topic?
- Theory: What theoretical information on this topic is important to know?
- Practice: What has been your own experience on this topic? (Be sure to include any specific examples that you can!)
- Conclusion: What advice do you have for people who want to know more about this topic?

General report (for example: plain language in a country, in a specific field, etc.)

- Introduction: What is the history up to this point? What major players have been involved? What is your personal role in this context?
- Highs: What have been major milestones?
- Lows: What have been the major challenges? What work still needs to be done?
- Conclusion: What are the next steps? What is your vision/hope for the future?

Book review

- Background: How did you come across this book? What was your motivation for reading the book? What did you know about it before reading?
- Book summary: What is the author's background? Who is this book written for? How is the book structured?
- Highs and lows: What did you like about or agree with in this book? What not?
- Conclusion: Do you recommend that other people read this book? Why or why not?