

Literacy is about inclusion! So is clear language!!!

Inclusion means - include as part of a whole – treat or regard as so involved. (Oxford Dictionary)

We've all been at events where we've felt confused or left out because we did not understand what was going on. Sometimes, this happens because of the way people talk or how information is presented.

To counter this dilemma, the CLC, unions like CUPE and federations of labour have taken steps to integrate a literacy and clear language approach into our communications, our courses and our conferences. Together with our commitment to diversity, it is part of the effort to make our labour principles of social justice, equality and inclusion a reality across the work of the union.

Clear Language is a union issue and essentially a way of life for those who appreciate its advantages. Clear language is about power.

Language is an important tool of the powerful elite; institutions use difficult and unclear language to reinforce their status. Unions want to break that stride and include their membership in all levels of the organization.

Clear Language is a different approach to communication. We all want to:

- respect the reader,
- understand his purpose and
- empathize with the reader's needs.

Clear language is a process, not a set of rules. Clear language is reader orientated. When writing a document, we need to be conscious of our audience. The means we use to communicate, be it through a letter, a newsletter, an article in the collective agreement, by-laws, these documents need to be prepared and communicated with the reader in mind.

If documents aimed at our members are written in clear language, as a Union we will be stronger and more informed. Clear language is not simple-minded writing. Unclear messages waste time and cause confusion. Clear language is about empowerment.

Here are a few examples of how unions made clear language work:

- The Canadian Auto Workers Union wrote their constitution in clear language. More members use the constitution now and there are fewer appeals because members can understand it.
- Local 3393 of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) wrote their collective agreement in clear language. The result? Members are more involved in the union and in preparing for bargaining.

Here is an example of how clear language works; this is an article in a collective agreement rewritten in clear language:

Before	After
<p>You can qualify for benefits under section 43 if you are sixty-four or older and unable to work, and that section also provides benefits in the event that you are blind in one eye, or both eyes or are permanently disabled in the course of your employment.</p>	<p>You can qualify for benefits under section 43 if you meet any one of the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are 64 or older and are unable to work, or• You are blind in one eye or both eyes, or• You are permanently disabled in the course of your employment.

In the above *before/after* scenario, the *after* section is written in clear language whereas it's easier to understand the conditions under which you qualify for benefits. Break long sentences into lists to ease the reading.

Here is another example of clear language:

Before	After
<p>To achieve the objectives and purposes of this organization as set forth in this Constitution, the funds of this organization are authorized to be managed, invested, expended or used under this Article and Constitution not only for the purposes and objectives expressly set forth in Article 2 and otherwise in this Constitution, but also for any additional purposes and objectives not inconsistent there with as may be contained at any time in the resolutions and programs adopted and/or ratified by any National Convention or which the National Executive Board believes will further the general interest and welfare of the membership of this organization or any substantial part thereof.</p>	<p>The National Executive Board will manage and use the National Union's funds for the objectives set out in this constitution and other purposes it believes will further the welfare of the members.</p>

In this section, the legalese terms, the never-ending sentence, overflow of phrases, irrelevant information and too much information make this *before* section hard to understand. By the time you are done reading, you'll have to start over because you lost the meaning.

The Clear Language course is an opportunity to become aware of the links between literacy, language, class and power. This course explores why clear language is a union issue. Participants will increase their understanding of the principles and benefits of clear language and design. They will become familiar with tools and techniques of writing in clear language and become more aware of clear design. Participants will also develop their skills so that they can effectively use and advocate for clear language and design in the ongoing work of the union. Clear language can help us fulfill labour's commitment to inclusion, equity, social justice and democracy.

This course is designed to touch every member in the labour movement, members and executive members who want to improve their skills at writing letters, newsletters, by-laws; bargaining committees who would like to improve their skills at writing articles; committee members who write reports....in fact this course will give you what you need to reach out to all your members.