

The single biggest problem in communication is  
the illusion that it has taken place.

- George Bernard Shaw

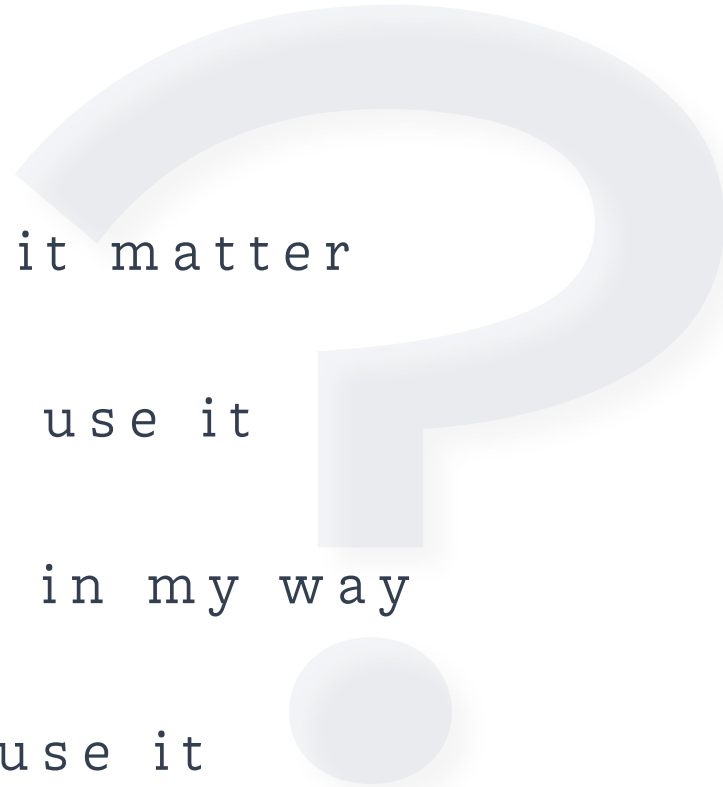
# CHOOSING WORDS THAT WORK

## A Practical Plan for Plain

David Allen Kelly | Red Clay Consulting

# Plain Language

- Why does it matter
- When do I use it
- What gets in my way
- How do I use it



## Why I'm here.

Healthcare providers become more engaged and derive meaning when incorporating patient perspectives and stories are incorporated into education for healthcare providers engages learners and builds more meaning into the curriculum. At UHNN, we leveraged this principle by integrated authentic patient perspectives into training for healthcare providers and learners through the development of 4-part patient stories video series.

Creating patient and family education materials that are easy to read and understand Patient and Family education is always vital—but even more so been has been the corner stone of keeping patients, families and staff safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, maintaining those materials and making that education them accessible, however, has been a challenging challenge and problematic.

To address this issue, The Office of Patient and Family Education and Health Literacy at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford in partnership partnered with marketingMarketing, and our patient instruction vendor to develop an engaging, accessible, and search-engaging friendly website.

During this session, we will discuss the our process and as well as lessons learnedour learnings. During from this session, we will gain insights learn about options to improve their your

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literature. The project applies are; applied to an innovative diverse Hispanics with able for an at-risk population. able, and easily developed for specific needs. The stories helped r diabetes, and And though not tested in the research, they may th outcomes, although this was not tested in the research. The only adaptable to other settings, health concerns, and cultures.

As my good friend Gloria Estefan  
so often says ...



*Words get in the way.  
There's so much I want to say ...*

So let's talk about words.

Let's talk about the ones you want to say.

And let's talk about the ones that get in the way.

**Spoiler Alert:** You can't say everything you want to say.

We'll focus, primarily, on the *scourge* of plain language:

CONCEPT DENSITY

Pssst ... write this down.

Avoid **redundancies** like the plague!

And, also ...

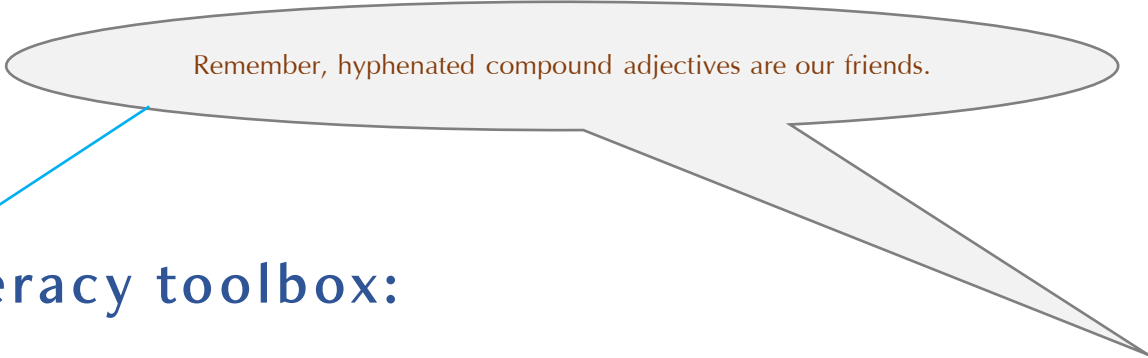
**cliches.**

That focus is divided into 2 divisions:

# STRUCTURE

and

# WORDS



Remember, hyphenated compound adjectives are our friends.

But first ... a resource for your health-literacy toolbox:

## Plain Language.gov

They offer tips for managing concept density.

1. For sentences, use 20 words or fewer.
2. For paragraphs, use no more than 150 words in 3 to 8 sentences.

Paragraphs should never be longer than 250 words.

Now, you *could* do that ... counting words and all.

But, instead of counting words, consider counting **concepts**.

We'll call this **Example 1**.

Concept (noun)

'kän- sept

1: something conceived in the mind

For example, imagine you must convey the information below.

How many **concepts** are you expecting your reader to *conceive*?

Joseph walks home.

This sentence isn't brief. So, let's revise:

How many concepts must your reader conceive?

1 2 3  
Joseph walks home.

You're expecting the reader to conceive (and hopefully retain) **3** ideas:

1. He must understand that Joseph is the sentence subject.
2. He must understand that walks is the action Joseph performs.
3. And he must understand that home is Joseph's destination.

The reader must conceive these **3** concepts if he is to understand your message.

*easy-peasy*

**Example 2 :** How many concepts are in this sentence?

The Marketing Analyst Professional Credentialing Video Series consists of 18 segments across 8 marketing analyst modules developed to enhance your formal education and matter-of-course skills.

## Example 2:

### 1 SENTENCE

The Marketing Analyst Professional Credentialing Video

Series

consists of 18 segments

across 8 marketing analyst modules

developed to enhance your formal education

and matter-of-course skills.

### 5 CONCEPTS

1. The Marketing Analyst Professional Credentialing

Video Series

2. consists of 18 segments

3. across 8 marketing analyst modules

4. developed to enhance your formal education

5. and [developed to enhance] matter-of-course skills.

## Example 2, Identifying Problems:

The Marketing Analyst Professional Credentialing Video Series consists of 18 segments across 8 marketing analyst modules developed to enhance your formal education and matter-of-course skills.

### PROBLEMS:

1. When too many concepts are crammed into one sentence, we have concept density. We want the *opposite* of concept density.
2. The subject has too many words. Having to stumble over this many ideas at the beginning becomes a barrier to reading.

Move this information elsewhere.

1. Don't use 2 words when 1 will work.
2. Don't weaken your verbs.
3. Avoid unnecessary words.

## Example 2, Revised:

BEFORE – 1 sentence / 5 concepts

The Marketing Analyst Professional

Credentialing Video Series

consists of

18 segments across 8 marketing

analyst modules

developed to enhance

your formal education and matter-of-

course skills.

AFTER – 2 sentences / 6 concepts

This series

includes

18 segments across 8 marketing

analyst modules.

These videos

will enhance

your professional skills.

## Example 2 Recap — Here's what we did.

A quick note on “key ideas.” We may want to emphasize certain ideas. Depending on the context, we can position them where they'll achieve maximum effect.

1. We **separated each individual idea** in the sentence.  
We **identified each concept** the reader should *conceive*.
2. We **reviewed** each concept separately **to identify problems** (e.g., *too wordy, unnecessary words, weak verbs*)
3. We **revised** each individual concept **as needed**.
4. We **reviewed** the sentence(s) **as a whole** to ensure logic and flow.
5. To make sure we didn't miss anything, we proofread the piece one last time.

We could have written **#5** as:

We proofread the piece one last time to make sure we didn't miss anything.

By moving “we proofread one last time” to the end, it, arguably, becomes the reader's last thought and, therefore, more likely to be remembered.

But ... one could argue that **emphasis** is entirely subjective. It's probably a more-art-than-science kind of thing.

Nurses, medical practitioners, medical assistants, and other healthcare professionals are often required to create personalized printed information for patients – procedural results memos, post-visit reviews, emergency care and hospital discharge statements, and electronic correspondence -- quickly at the time of patient-centered care. This aptitude-enhancing session will utilize time-proven strategies to help attendants effectively produce customized detailed reports, and will be especially applicable for those programs that enable registrants to participate from the starting point to higher training of health literacy standards.



# SAME

## Example 3

## 2 SENTENCES / 16 CONCEPTS

## PROBLEMS

## REVISION

|     |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                |                                                                                         |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Nurses, medical practitioners, medical assistants, and other healthcare professionals                                           | Too many items-in-a-series overwhelms readers.                 | Healthcare professionals                                                                |
| 2.  | are often required to create                                                                                                    | Use strong verbs. Avoid unnecessary words.                     | often create                                                                            |
| 3.  | personalized printed information for patients -                                                                                 | Omit unnecessary words. Choose most effective word.            | information for patients                                                                |
| 4.  | procedural results memos, post-visit reviews, emergency care and hospital discharge statements, and electronic correspondence - | Don't overwhelm reader with too much information.              | at the time of care.                                                                    |
| 5.  | quickly at the time of patient-centered care.                                                                                   | Avoid awkward placement of modifiers.                          | This information includes test results, post-visit summaries, and discharge statements. |
| 6.  | This aptitude-enhancing session                                                                                                 | Omit superfluous words.                                        |                                                                                         |
| 7.  | will utilize time-proven strategies                                                                                             | Use most appropriate word.                                     |                                                                                         |
| 8.  | to help attendants                                                                                                              | Omit unnecessary words.                                        |                                                                                         |
| 9.  | effectively produce                                                                                                             | Omit unnecessary words.                                        |                                                                                         |
| 10. | customized detailed reports,                                                                                                    | Omit unnecessary words.                                        |                                                                                         |
| 11. | and will be especially applicable                                                                                               | Avoid over-long sentences. Remember: small, digestible chunks. | Appropriate for attendees                                                               |
| 12. | for those programs                                                                                                              |                                                                | with wide ranges of experience,                                                         |
| 13. | that enable registrants to participate                                                                                          | Use strong verbs. Avoid unnecessary words.                     | this session                                                                            |
| 14. | from the starting point                                                                                                         | Avoid awkward placement of modifiers.                          | uses proven strategies                                                                  |
| 15. | to higher training                                                                                                              | Avoid awkward placement of modifiers.                          | to effectively produce                                                                  |
| 16. | of health literacy standards.                                                                                                   | Avoid awkward placement of modifiers.                          | detailed reports.                                                                       |

### Example 3 Recap — Here's what we did.

#### BEFORE – 2 SENTENCES / 16 CONCEPTS

1. Nurses, medical practitioners, medical assistants, and other healthcare professionals
2. are often required to create
3. personalized printed information for patients –
4. procedural results memos, post-visit reviews, emergency care and hospital discharge statements, and electronic correspondence –
5. quickly at the time of patient-centered care.
6. This aptitude-enhancing session
7. will utilize time-proven strategies
8. to help attendants
9. effectively produce
10. customized detailed reports,
11. and will be especially applicable
12. for those programs
13. that enable registrants to participate
14. from the starting point
15. to higher training
16. of health literacy standards.

#### AFTER – 3 sentences / 11 concepts

Healthcare professionals  
often create  
information for patients at the time of care.  
This information includes test results, post-visit summaries, and discharge statements.  
Appropriate for attendees  
with wide ranges of experience,  
this session  
uses proven strategies  
to effectively produce  
detailed reports.

**“It takes  
a lot of  
hard work  
to make  
something  
simple.”**

— Steve Jobs

[www.stojanovic.com](http://www.stojanovic.com)

Questions

Thoughts

Comments

THE MOST  
COMPLICATED SKILL  
IS TO BE SIMPLE