

The Effectiveness of Plain Language Proven by Data

An Ipsos BVA/Labrador Transparency study

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Labrador Transparency

Converging Perspectives



The financial and environmental impacts of plain language are huge when applied to billions of words read each day by billions of people in the course of their professional activities – both online and offline.

The following results hopefully will encourage all companies to adopt

this simple but very effective writing method for their corporate communication.

Pierre Lebreton

**Director Language Services,
Creator of Plainly**
Labrador Transparency

Converging Perspectives



Labrador Transparency called on Ipsos BVA to compare the performance of four texts written in “ordinary language” (“BEFORE”) and four texts written in plain language (“AFTER”).

The results offer statistical proof that plain language is effective. Our study shows that texts rewritten in plain language are better than the original versions in terms of clarity, comprehension, and

organization, and that readers are more likely to remember the information presented.

Jean-François Levionnois

Head of Office
Ipsos BVA Group

Converging Perspectives



For over 20 years in Europe and 10 years in the US, Labrador Transparency has advocated clear and transparent corporate disclosure, in part because clear and transparent communication generates a valuable but intangible asset: trust.

We had already run several surveys with shareholders, students and analysts to prove this point, but never on a large

scale. Now, thanks to this data-driven study, conducted in partnership with Ipsos BVA, the benefits of plain language for readers are proven by statistics

Molly Doran

Director of Advisory Services
Labrador Transparency

The Effectiveness Of Plain Language Proven By Data

Over the past 50 years, many studies have linked a specific plain language criteria to a reader benefit such as reading speed, message retention or message comprehension. However, very few studies have taken a statistical approach to plain language as a whole.

More than 2 out of 3 survey respondents described a text in plain language as clear. “But what concrete benefits does plain language actually bring to readers?”

The indicators measured by the Ipsos BVA/Labrador Transaprency study show that plain language increases the performance of communication, as we discuss below. But this communication performance does not only benefit the reader, who reads, understands and remembers the message more easily. It also benefits the author, whose plain language messages are more effective than, and preferable to, those written in “ordinary language.”



Faster reading

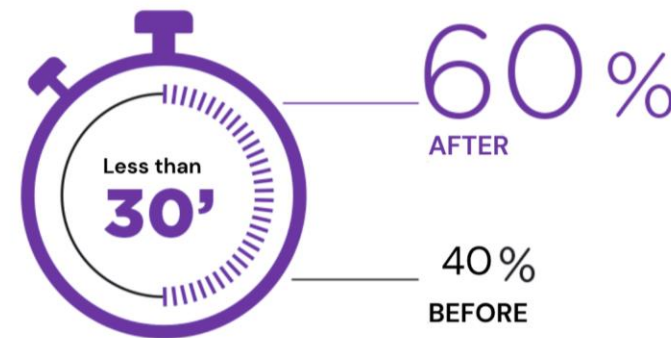
Benefit #1

Fewer words and shorter sentences mean less time spent reading or rereading a text to understand it.

It took **less than 30 seconds for 6 out of 10 respondents** to read a 100-word paragraph in plain language.

That is nearly 50% better than for a non-plain text.

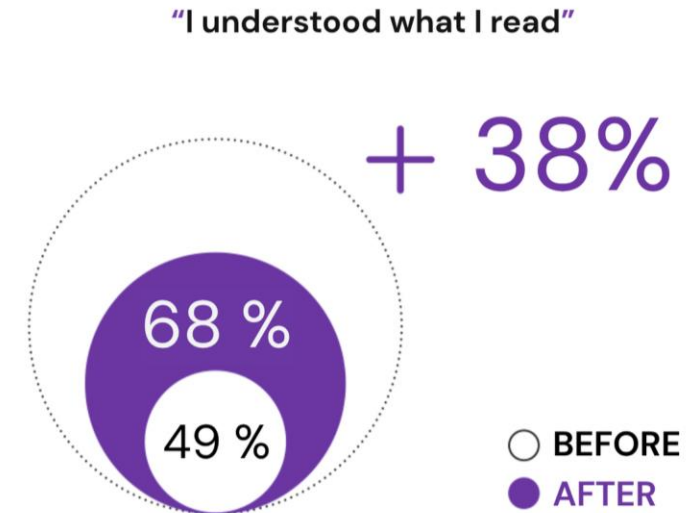
“How long do you think it took you to read and understand this text example?”



Quick understanding

Benefit #2

You might think increased reading speed would hinder comprehension, but our study shows the opposite is true! Readers are almost **40% more likely to understand text** written in plain language.

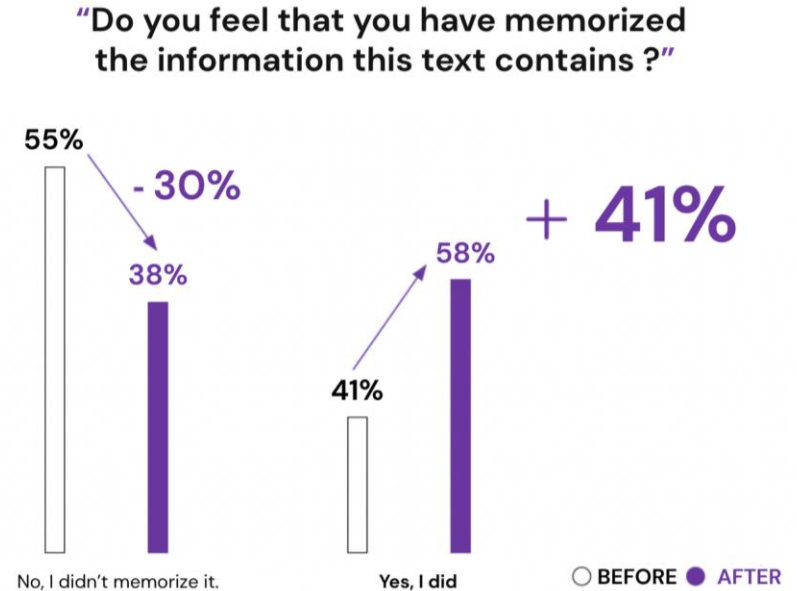


Better message retention

Benefit #3

Faster reading and comprehension also allow for better retention of key information.

The **number of readers who memorized the main information increased by 40%** thanks to plain language.



Clarity creates preference

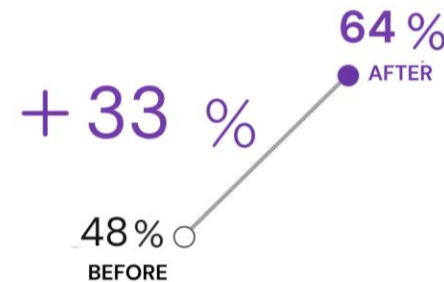
Benefit #4

The first three benefits stated above were about saving time and making sure that the reader understands and remembers key messages.

The fourth finding highlighted in our study results from the first three, and benefits the author: plain language content is perceived as clearer, and **readers are more inclined to accept and appreciate the message conveyed.**

a) First, a text written in plain language is perceived as well written.

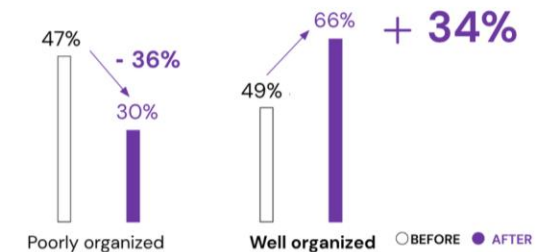
"The text is well written"



64% of the respondents think that a plain language text is well written.

b) At the same time, the organization of the text allows the reader to more easily follow the document's structure.

"The information is well organized"



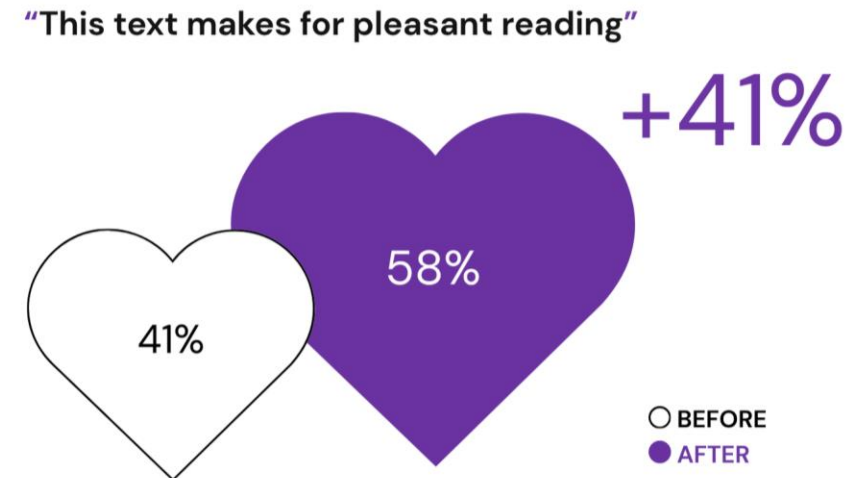
Readers are 34% more likely to say that a text written in plain language is well organized.

The figures above tell us that readers objectively find a plain language text more pleasant to read.

But what does the reader feel when reading a corporate disclosure document?

Thanks to this study, for the first time, we understand the subjective feelings of our readers.

Their responses are indisputable: **a text written in plain language is subjectively more pleasant to read.**



Readers are 41% more likely to say that a text written in plain language is pleasant to read.

A reader prefers one text to another based on both objective and subjective criteria. The previous benefits show that plain language convinces a majority on both counts.

To validate this hypothesis, one last question remained: **what type of text do readers find clearer?**

More than 7 out of 10 respondents referred to plain language text as clear. This approval rate confirms a clear preference for plain language

72 %
of readers
describe a text written
in plain language as clear

Methodology



Methodology

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to provide statistical proof, on a large scale, of the effectiveness of plain language.

METHODOLOGY

Online surveys conducted between March 6 and 12, 2020, among 503 Americans aged 18 and above.

Nationally representative sample in terms of age, gender, annual household income and region.

Test protocol: We constructed an experimental design using eight texts. Some of our samples were written in traditional corporate language (the “BEFORE” copy) and others were rewritten in plain language (the “AFTER” copy). Each respondent was invited to read three of the eight texts, selected at random, and evaluate them.



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