

## Plain Talk Writing Tip #1

### “Sincere Desire to Inform” is Key to Plain Talk Success

Why are you writing?

Your motivation when you write plays a large role in the outcome. Are you writing to impress your audience with your vast vocabulary and mastery of the language? Or are you writing to share information?

The mission of government agencies is to provide information to our customers in a way that allows them to act on that information after one reading.

This kind of writing is different from what most of us learned in school. In school, our motivation was to get a good grade. Unfortunately, that grade seemed to be tied to big words, complex sentences and piles of information.

Plain Talk asks exactly the opposite. When you write using Plain Talk, you use common words, short sentences and you get directly to the point.

As written on the state’s plain talk web site, “Translating long, difficult messages takes everyone a lot of time. It also can lead to errors, misunderstandings and frustration.”

Even worse, it can teach people to ignore your documents. Instead of trying to decipher difficult messages, they’ll pick up the phone to ask what you were trying to say. Now, instead of just writing, you have to write and spend time talking on the phone.

There are tips that can help you become a better Plain Talk writer.

Warren Buffet, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, is a strong proponent of Plain Talk. In the preface to the Securities and Exchange Commission Plain English Handbook, he offers this tip:

*... Write with a specific person in mind. When writing Berkshire Hathaway’s annual report, I pretend that I’m talking to my sisters. I have no trouble picturing them: Though highly intelligent, they are not experts in accounting or finance. They will understand plain English, but jargon may puzzle them. My goal is simply to give them the information I would wish them to supply me if our positions were reversed. To succeed, I don’t need to be Shakespeare; I must, though, have a sincere desire to inform.*

He concludes with this:

*No siblings to write to? Borrow mine: Just begin with “Dear Doris and Bertie.”*

So keep your audience in mind. Explain it to them the way you would explain it to a friend or family member. And remember, the goal is to inform, not to dazzle.

Watch for another Plain Talk tip next month. And work on those contest entries.

Happy Plain Talking!

Explore the [state’s Plain Talk web site](#).

Browse the Security and Exchange Commission’s [Plain English Handbook](#).