

County of Los Angeles  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

*10 Things We've Learned About*  
**PLAIN LANGUAGE**

- 1) Plain language is language that your audience can understand. When writing and designing a document, you need to know your audience.
- 2) 80% of adults read at or below the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level. Less than 15% of adults read at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level or higher.
- 3) Even college graduates cannot comprehend spoken language above the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level. Something to consider when writing speeches, recorded information messages and scripts.
- 4) Just because *you* understand what you've written doesn't mean anyone else will. Test documents before you release them.
- 5) Writing in plain language requires you to know the material better than you do now.
- 6) Plain language is more than simple words and short sentences. Plain language documents give you the information you need in a simple, concise fashion. Plain language documents are logically organized, nicely formatted and understandable the first time you read them.
- 7) Do you want your reader to know something, or do something? If you want your readers to take action, spell out the steps: "Here are three things you must do, 1...2....3." This makes it easy for the reader to take action.
- 8) Plain language is not "dumbing down." Plain language documents make the reader feel intelligent and empowered. People rarely complain that a document was too easy to read and understand.
- 9) Plain Language saves you money. If readers don't understand your materials, they pick up the telephone; and fielding calls costs you money.
- 10) Microsoft Word will tell you the grade level and readability of your documents. Click on Tools – Options – Spelling and Grammar – Show Readability Statistics. When writing for the general public, aim for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level with a reading ease score of 70.