# **Write Clearly**

# Write legal content your reader will understand

**Delete words** **and information** your readers do not **need**.

“In fact, the law says, you are certainly allowed to dance after 10pm.” Should be “You can dance after 10pm.”

**Write active**.

Make the subject of the verb **do** the action in the verb, not have the action done **to** them or **by** them. **Hint**: Put the ‘doer’ before the thing they do and try to avoid forms of ‘to be’ like is, was, are, and were.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Original | Clearer |
| The ball was pushed by the boy. | The boy pushed the ball. |
| Delete words that are not needed to make your point. | Delete words you do not need. |

**Write short sentences**.

Limit paragraphs to one idea, and sentences to one thought.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Original | Clearer - But you may need to make some hard choices. |
| When the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has reasonable cause to believe that a child needs to be removed from their home because they are suffering from serious abuse or neglect by a caretaker, usually a parent or guardian, they file a “Care and Protection” petition in the Juvenile Court. (51 words) | If your child’s caretaker neglects or abuses your child, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) may decide to take your child from your home. If DCF decides to take your child, they file a Care and Protection Petition at court. (41 words) |

**Use the best word.**

Do not be fancy. Say what you mean and use the easiest word to read.

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| advise → recommend, tell | option → choice | whereas → because, since |
| commence → begin, start | permit → let | however → but |
| maintain → keep | previous → earlier | evident → clear |

**Learn more**

1. Find out how readable your writing is at  or use Microsoft Word. Turn on the Word readability tool: Word>Options>Proofing> click “Show readability statistics.” Do a spell check of your document. The readability information shows at the end.
2. Get better! Use the [WriteClearly Gadget](https://sites.google.com/a/lawny.org/plain-language-library/home/online-plain-language-gadget). Use it as a Google Doc add-on or paste text into the online tool. It evaluates your text and suggests ways to write more clearly..
3. Learn better words. Check out:

 [A-Z of Alternative Words](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/alternative.pdf) [Plain English Network Word Suggestion](https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/words/use-simple-words-phrases/) [Dale-Chall Word List](http://www.rfp-templates.com/Research-Articles/Dale-Chall-3000-Simple-Word-List)

You can also:

∙ Take a free online course ∙ Visit [PlainLanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/) ∙ See resources on [MassLegalServices.org](https://www.masslegalservices.org/content/making-legal-information-readable-more-plain-language)