

Clear Language and Design Guidelines

Who should use Clear Language?

Clear language is useful for anyone who has information they need understood. In the trucking industry, managers, dispatchers, administration staff, trainers and anyone who has information to communicate will find the tips in this guide useful.

What is Clear language?

Clear language is a way of communicating with people so that your message is easy to understand the first time. Clear language speaks directly to the reader or listener in a clear, short and concise manner.

Why use Clear Language?

There are many benefits to using clear language:

- Information is more easily read and better understood
- Messages reach more people
- Mistakes and misunderstandings are reduced, saving time and money
- Performance improvements for employees and businesses

Clear Language and Design Quick Reference

Tip 1: Organize Information

- Put the most important first.
- Group information by main points.
- Use headers.

Tip 2: Make it short

- Use only necessary words.
- Write only necessary information.

Tip 3: Make it easy to find information

- Leave lots of white space.
- Use tables, lists, flowcharts, pictures and graphics.
- Align margins to the left.
- Use a table of contents for longer documents.

Tip 4: Choose a layout that is easy to read

- Keep your text font size 12 point for text, more for headings.
- Use Bullets and numbered lists.
- Chose upper and lower case letters. Text written in all capitals is harder to read.

Tip 5: Make it clear and direct.

- State information directly.
- Use “you” and “we” sentences.
- State why information is important.
- Explain what to do with the information and how to do it.

Tip 6: Write simple sentences

- Use action words.
- Use short sentence (10-20 words); one idea per sentence.

Tip 7: Use everyday words

- Choose common, familiar words.

- Avoid acronyms, jargon, and technical terms. Explain jargon in everyday words, and spell out acronyms if you must use them.

Edit wordy phrases

Give every word you use a job to do. Only use words that are essential to your meaning. Unnecessary words clutter your sentences and crowd out your meaning. Eliminate jargon and unnecessary words.

Make your sentences shorter

Aim for sentences of 15–20 words in print and 9–12 online. Short, clear sentences will get you results.

Vary the length of your sentences to make your writing more interesting.

Easy swap words for clearer sentences

Instead of:	Use:
accomplish	do
accordingly	so
addressees	you
adequate number	enough
approximately	about
at a later date	later
at the present time	now, currently
commence	begin, start
comply	do, follow
components	parts
consequently	so
co-operate	help
deficiency	not enough
demonstrate	show
entails	involves
failed to	didn't
for the purpose of	to, for

initial	first
in accordance with	under
in order to	to
in the event that	if
negligent	not careful
occur	happen
on a monthly basis	monthly
option	choice
pertaining to	of, about
regarding	about

Style Guide for THRSC clear language and design samples

A style guide sets a standard for writing documents within your organization. It can be as simple as a one page reference sheet outlining font, spacing, treatment of text and terms. Below is the style guide applied to the before and after sample documents.

Fonts

- Headers Arial 18 pt, 16 pt and 14 pt
- No Bold
- Text 12 pt

Text treatment

- No bold
- No italic
- Not all capital letters

Paragraph and line spacing

- line space in paragraphs increased from 12 to 14 pt for a bit more white space
- 6 pt space added following paragraph return
- 6 pts between bulleted points

Terms

Alphabetic list of common workplace terms.

Cell numbers - mobile #

For example - e.g.

Numbers - #

Telephone numbers – Telephone #

Etc.

Examples of Clear Language in Action

Example 1: Tarp Rolling

- Made introduction clear and direct – described what, stated who is responsible and the number of steps
- Used table to put pictures beside text
- Simplified title
- Used headings to list steps
- Used bullets to show the order of tasks in each step
- Applied style guide for fonts, treatment of text and line spacing

Before

Tarp Rolling

The procedure is as follows:

- **The driver unhooks the hold downs for the tarp. He then inserts the crank handle in the end of the tarp pole and rolls the tarp into the cradle for loading.**



Operator inserting 25 lb crank handle into tarp pipe to unroll tarp over top of trailer



This is a picture of the tarp already rolled in its cradle

- He directs the loader operator how much to put in the trailer so the load is not too high and proper weight.
- He then takes the rope attached to the tarp pole and pulls the tarp across the top of the trailer.



Operator pulling tarp over trailer

- He secures the tarp into position with the hold downs.
- He is then ready to take the load.

After

Changed title



How to put a tarp on a trailer

Made the introduction clear and direct



The truck driver or operator is responsible for putting the tarp on the trailer.

There are four steps to putting a tarp on a trailer.

Used table so instructions are next to pictures

Used headings to list steps

Used bullets to show the order of tasks in each step

Applied style guide

Used direct and personal language



Step 1: Prepare the tarp.

- A. Unhook the hold-downs for the tarp.
- B. Insert the crank handle in the end of the tarp pole.
- C. Roll the tarp into the cradle for loading.



The operator inserted the 25 lb crank handle into the tarp pole to unroll the tarp over the top of the trailer.



The tarp is rolled in its cradle.



Step 2: Communicate with the load operator.

- A. Tell the loader operator how much to put in the trailer so the load is not too high and has the correct weight.



Step 3: Pull the tarp over the trailer.

- B. Take the rope attached to the tarp pole. Pull the tarp across the top of the trailer.

The operator is pulling the tarp over the trailer.



Step 4: Secure the tarp.

- A. Secure the tarp into position with the hold downs.

The load is ready to go.

This is a typical tarp hold down cable and bungee arrangement.

Example 2: Onsite Short Shipment or Damage Report

Before

Doc D

Version 1: 12/27/12

Onsite Short Shipment / Damage Report

OSD Tag #

TMW Claim # _____

(Complete in full. Mark boxes with an "X" where appropriate)

4. Consignment & Customer Details

Date & Time: _____ Freight Bill #: _____ Trace # _____ Trailer Number: _____

Customer Company Name: _____ Location: _____

Customer Contact Name: _____ Telephone No: _____

Item(s) was short shipped by shipper? Yes ☐ No ☐ (if yes, complete paragraph 2)

Item(s) are damaged? Yes ☐ No ☐ (if yes, complete paragraph 3)

3. Short Shipment Details

No of Pieces Short Shipped: _____

Description of Articles Short Shipped: _____

2. Damage Details

The damage to the consignment was caused...

☐ Prior to Loading ☐ During Loading ☐ During Transportation ☐ During Unloading

Description of Damage: _____

Photographs taken? Yes ☐ No ☐ Forwarded to: _____

1. Report Details & Signatures

Report details passed to (Dispatcher name): _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Drivers Name (Print): _____ Signature (x): _____ Date: _____

Customer Rep Name (Print): _____ Customer Rep Signature (x): _____ Date: _____

COMPLETE IMMEDIATELY UPON DISCOVERY & FAX TO DISPATCH

After

Doc D

Version 1: 12/09/14

OSD Tag # _____

TMW Claim # _____

Onsite Short Shipment or Damage Report

Complete in full immediately. Mark boxes with an "X" where appropriate. Send to Dispatch.

1. Consignment & Customer Details

Date _____ Time: _____ Freight Bill #: _____

Trace # _____ Trailer Number: _____

Customer Company Name: _____ Location: _____

Customer Contact Name: _____ Telephone No: _____

Short shipped by shipper? Yes ☐ If yes, complete Section 2. No ☐

Damaged? Yes ☐ If yes, complete Section 3. No ☐

2. Short Shipment Details

Number of pieces short shipped: _____

Description: _____

3. Damage Details

The damage to consignment happened.....

☐ Prior to Loading ☐ During Loading ☐ During Transportation ☐ During Unloading

Photographs? Yes ☐ Photos sent to: _____ No ☐

Describe the damage:

4. Report Details and Signatures

Report details passed to (Dispatcher name): _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Drivers Name (Print): _____ Signature (x): _____ Date: _____

Customer Rep Name (Print): _____ Customer Rep Signature (x): _____

Date of Customer Rep Signature: _____

Complete immediately upon discovery of short shipment or damage and send this report to Dispatch.

Example 3: Accident Report

Before

			Accident Report #	
Accident Data	Driver	Date of Accident	Time	
	Phone where you can be reached			
	Location (town, city, province, state)			
	Roadway (route, street, hwy.)			
	Landmarks (milepost, building, signs, etc.)			
	Are you hauling hazardous materials?	Classification?		
Death & Injury	Description of accident:			
	Has anyone been injured? Name(s) and injuries:			
	Where were the injured people taken?			
	Were there any passengers in your vehicle?			
Vehicle & Cargo	Ambulance or medical personnel at the scene?			
	Damage to your vehicle?	Extent of damage		
	Damage to other vehicle(s)?	Extent of damage		
	Describe cargo	Extent of damage		
	Can you continue under your own power?	Need wrecker?		
	Environmental damage?			
Roadway	Accident occurred on:		# of Lanes:	Visibility:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Straightaway		<input type="checkbox"/> 2-Lane	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear
	<input type="checkbox"/> Hilltop		<input type="checkbox"/> 3-Lane	<input type="checkbox"/> Rain
	<input type="checkbox"/> Level		<input type="checkbox"/> 4-Lane	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleet
	<input type="checkbox"/> Curve		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Snow
	<input type="checkbox"/> Exit Ramp			<input type="checkbox"/> Fog
	<input type="checkbox"/> Entrance Ramp			<input type="checkbox"/> Other
	Type of roadway:		Roadways:	Road Surface:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Divided		<input type="checkbox"/> Lighted	<input type="checkbox"/> Dry
	<input type="checkbox"/> Undivided		<input type="checkbox"/> Unlighted	<input type="checkbox"/> Wet
<input type="checkbox"/> Limited Access		<input type="checkbox"/> Marked	<input type="checkbox"/> Snow	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Unmarked	<input type="checkbox"/> Ice	
Remind	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete Driver's Report		<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss accident with proper authorities only	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Set warning devices		<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol Test: If required, at which location? _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Obtain witnesses		<input type="checkbox"/> protect vehicle and cargo	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Drug Test: If required, at which location? _____	
Person dispatched to scene		Title		
Person receiving report		Title		
Date		Time		

Accident Report

Accident Report # _____

Used black text only

No bold

Removed writing on side

Used style guide text for font size and text and line treatment

Changed words with all capitals to upper and lower case words

Deleted extra words
“Vehicle Information
~~Truck/Trailer Driving~~”

Changed words One Two Three to numbers for section headers.

Added Yes and No check boxes

Added space between lines to 1.5 lines to increase writing space

Wrote out acronyms, e.g. Prov / State

Made it direct to professional driver

Changes third party to Vehicle 1 and 2

Section 1 Professional Driver Information

Date and time of accident or incident: _____

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____ License # _____

Expiration of license _____ Province of License _____

Section 2 Vehicle Information

Describe the tractor and trailer that you were driving at the time of the accident or incident.

Year: _____ Make: _____

VIN: _____ Unit #: _____

Year _____ Make: _____

Trailer # _____ VIN _____

Section 3 Cargo Loss Information

Was the cargo damaged? Yes ☐ Describe below. No ☐ Go to Section 4 on the next page.

Describe the damage to the cargo:

Section 4 Accident information

Date of accident or incident: _____ Time: _____

Number of vehicles involved: _____

Street name where the accident occurred: _____

City: _____ Province or State: _____

Landmarks nearby: _____

What direction were you travelling? _____

Just prior to the accident, what speed were you travelling? _____ ☐ kmh ☐ mph

Were your headlights on when the accident happened? Yes ☐ No ☐

Describe the weather conditions:

Describe the road conditions:

Describe the details of the accident:

Section 5: Other Driver(s) and Other Vehicle(s) Information

Vehicle 1

Year of Vehicle 1: _____ Make : _____

Colour of Vehicle 1: _____ Plate #: _____

Driver's name: _____

Driver's address: _____

Driver's phone: () _____

Driver's license #: _____

Province or State of license: _____

Date of expiration: _____

Vehicle VIN: _____

Trailer's VIN: _____

Unit number: _____ Trailer number: _____

Vehicle Owner or Driver's employer's name: _____

Vehicle Owner or Driver's employer's address: _____

How many people were in Vehicle 1: _____

Was anyone in the vehicle injured Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, was it the driver or a passenger?: _____

Insurance company for Vehicle 1: _____

Insurance Policy #: _____

Section 6: Police Information

Were the police present at the scene? _____

Officer (s) name (s) and badge # (s):

Police Department or Agency _____

Police Phone # () _____

Police report #: _____

Was anyone arrested? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, name of the person (s) arrested: _____

Section 7: Additional Notes

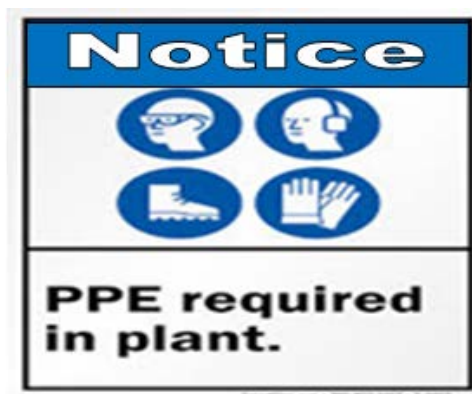
[illegible]

Example 4: Personal Protection Equipment Signs

Before



After



Main message is clear

After signs tell the reader what is required

Easier for reader to remember the message

Example 5: Parking Signs

Before



After



Removed all capitals

Examples use everyday words

Example 3 uses personal “You” and clear everyday words

