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Chapter 9

The Plain English Movement

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FOR at least the past decade, government and private businesses have been trying to reduce the paperwork burden on themselves and their clients. Reducing this burden has two complementary aspects – eliminating some paperwork entirely and simplifying the rest. The effort to simplify the language in legal, government, business, technical, and academic documents has been called the "plain English movement."

This paper is an overview of the plain English movement as it developed in the 1970s and as it is progressing in the 1980s. In the first half of the paper, I discuss what plain English is (and isn't), where plain English applies, and what's been happening in the plain English movement. In the second half of the paper, I explore what the plain English movement has accomplished, and where resistance comes from that keeps it from accomplishing more.

1. What is Plain English?

Plain English means writing that is straightforward, that reads as if it were spoken. It means writing that is unadorned with archaic, multisyllabic words and majestic turns of phrase that even educated readers cannot understand. Plain English is clear, direct, and simple; but good plain English has both clarity and grace (to borrow the title of Joseph Williams' excellent new English textbook).

Unfortunately, many people – both opponents and proponents of the plain English movement – assume that plain English means limiting the writer to one-clause sentences with words of one or two syllables. Some people are put off by writing like that; some worry that it can't be sufficient to convey the law.

The *Quarterly Review of Doublespeak* recently reported that one airline had a plain English version of its policy on overselling seats on a sign on its counter: "We overbook. You may get bumped. We will pay you" (*QRD*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Feb. 1982). That is certainly plain English, but lawyers will be quick to point out that these ten words aren't enough to explain the legal intricacies of the policy on bumping passengers. The plain English movement says the legal document can also be put into language that ordinary people can understand – perhaps not in ten words, not in two- three- and four-word sentences, but in clear, comprehensible language.

Lawyers, in a state that requires plain English in service agreements for consumers, developed new forms that begin, "You are the client. Your name

and address are ... I am your lawyer." Some lawyers worry about legal documents written in such simple language. They complain that their clients may be put off by the excessive simplicity; and they may be right. Only a test with a variety of clients will tell us if the new forms are appropriate. These forms are in plain English; but they could also be written in a more sophisticated style and still be in plain English.

The objective of the plain English movement is to have writers *communicate effectively* with their readers. The appropriate level for the writing depends in part on the characteristics of the audience and the purpose of the document. For a document to be in plain English, the people who use it must be able to

find the information they need easily, and

understand it the first time they read it.

See Figures 1, 2, and 3 below.

2. Where Does Plain English Apply?

Although the phrase "plain English" has been used primarily for legal and bureaucratic documents, interest in plain English extends far beyond government. The intent of the plain English movement – making documents easily understandable to busy readers – and the techniques that are being developed and taught by plain English writers are equally applicable to business, technical, and academic writing.

Executives are interested in plain English because clear, direct communication can save them reading time now and save them the costs of misunderstanding later. Computer manufacturers are becoming more interested in plain English as their businesses expand to reach consumers who have no training in computer technology or computer jargon.

University teachers in many fields are interested in the plain English movement because it offers an alternative to the philosophy that writing is an art that can be shown but not taught. Writing in plain English is not the same as

Figure 1

This sentence is part of the "covenants and conditions" of an installment sales agreement (a loan for a new car). The spelling and wording are reprinted *exactly* as they appear on the document.

The buyer further promises to pay the holder hereof a delinquency and collection charge for default in the payment of any instalments above recited, where such default has continued for a period of ten days, such charge not to exceed five per cent of the instalments in default or the sum of five dollars, whichever is the lesser.

A plain English version of this sentence might be:

You also promise to pay a late fee if your payment is more than 10 days overdue. This late fee will be

five percent of the amount overdue or

five dollars

whichever is less.

Figure 2

This letter, addressed to a job applicant, is not in plain English. It is much too wordy; the writer uses pompous words unnecessarily. The important message (Sorry, we aren't going to ask you to an interview) is buried in an impersonal sentence in the third paragraph (Regrettably, your candidacy was affected.)

We sincerely appreciate the time, effort and interest you took in responding to our advertisement. Moreover, we are gratified that you made us cognizant of qualifications that may be applicable to our rapidly growing company.

While the response was most gratifying, its magnitude unfortunately precludes personal contact with each candidate. In order to at least communicate in some practical manner, however, it is necessary to utilize a rather impersonal vehicle that in no way can truly express our appreciation for sharing your personal and professional qualifications with us.

Recently we have reviewed candidates' qualifications relative to the position of your interest, and have narrowed the field of applicants. Regrettably, your candidacy was affected. Accordingly, we will retain your résumé for future consideration. Be assured that complete confidence will be maintained.

We thank you for sharing your qualifications with us. Hopefully a subsequent position opening will provide us the opportunity to discuss career opportunities, in depth, together.

Sincerely.

Figure 3

These are the headings from two different agencies' versions of an application form for loans to college students. Which do you wish was the form you had to understand?

1. PRIVACY ACT NOTICE
   RIGHT TO FINANCIAL PRIVACY ACT NOTICE
   CRIMINAL PENALTIES
   NOTICE
   GUARANTEED STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM
   TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF LOANS
   GUARANTEE FEE
   ELIGIBLE STUDENT BORROWERS
   ELIGIBLE LENDERS
   ELIGIBLE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

2. What is the guaranteed student loan program?
   Who is eligible to apply for a guaranteed student loan?
   To whom do I apply for a loan?
   How much can I borrow?
   How much should I borrow?
   What are the terms of a guaranteed student loan?
   What will my monthly repayment be after graduation?
   When should I apply for a loan?
   How do I apply for a guaranteed student loan?

crafting fiction à la Faulkner or James Joyce. The skills needed to write clear, succinct non-fiction prose or to develop useful, understandable forms can be taught; and the ability to write well is a highly valued skill in a highly competitive world.

3. What Has Been Happening? (A brief history of the plain English movement)

Before the 1970s

The plain English movement isn't really new. Stuart Chase in *The Power of Words* (1953) bemoaned the "gobbledygook" that flourished then in the bureaucracy, in the law, and in universities.

Even before the plain English movement was revived in the 1970s, John O'Hayre, an employee of the Bureau of Land Management (part of the Department of the Interior), wrote a book called *Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go*. The sixteen essays in the book still make an excellent easy-to-read text on how to write plain English.

For the writer, inside or outside of government, who wanted to write plain English, other sources were also available before the 1970s. These ranged from George Orwell's six principles in his classic essay, "Politics and the English Language," to Strunk and White's slim volume of good advice, to Rudolf Flesch's books with titles like *The Art of Readable Writing*.

What was missing before the 1970s was any mandate that lawyers and bureaucrats write so that consumers could understand. Exhortations by essayists and style books by writing specialists carried little weight against centuries of tradition. In the 1970s, the plain English movement acquired greater legitimacy through a federal commission, presidential executive orders, and new laws and regulations on the federal and state levels.

What happened to make plain English an issue worthy of new laws and regulations? Two major concerns came together to produce the plain English movement of the 1970s. One was the tremendous growth in the size of the federal government and the inordinate amount of paperwork that new government programs generated. The other was the rise in consumer activism.

Since 1970: Plain English at the federal level

Since 1970, plain English has been mandated in a few federal laws and regulations governing consumer documents. The Magnuson–Moss Act sets requirements for readable warranties. The Truth-in-Lending regulation (Reg. Z) sets requirements for language and print in credit documents. The Electronic Funds Transfer Act requires clear writing in automatic banking rules. ERISA (the Employment Retirement Income Security Act) requires readable pension plan summaries (Black, 1981, pp. 267–268). In all of these cases, the laws themselves are not models of plain English and many experts quarrel with the specific requirements. Nevertheless, the intent is to make legal documents clear to the non-legally trained consumer.

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The Paperwork Commission. The concern for the amount of paperwork the government imposes on individuals and businesses led first to the Commission on Federal Paperwork. Established by an act of Congress in 1974, the Commission spent two and a half years studying the paperwork burden and recommending ways to alleviate it.

The Commission's thirty-six reports on federal programs, cross-program problems, and the impact of paperwork on people contain a total of 520 recommendations. In its *Final Summary Report* (dated 3 October 1977), the Commission estimated the cost of federal paperwork at "more than $100 billion a year or about $500 for each person in this country." The Commission concluded that "a substantial portion of the cost is unnecessary" and, moreover, that "federal paperwork hurts most those least able to fend for themselves." One of the strongest messages in the Commission's report was that the government needed to rewrite its documents into understandable language and formats that were clear to consumers.

President Carter's Executive Orders. Many of the Commission's recommendations were adopted by the Carter administration. Some were placed as requirements on federal agencies through two executive orders. In Executive Order 12044 (24 March 1978), President Carter established a regulatory reform program. One part of that program was the requirement that all major regulations "[be] written in plain English and [be] understandable to those who must comply with [them]."

President Carter also issued an Executive Order requiring agencies to reduce the burden that forms put on individuals and businesses (EO 12174, 30 November 1979). Again, the agencies were to reduce burden in two ways – by only using necessary forms and by keeping necessary forms "as short as possible . . . elicit[ing] information in a simple, straightforward fashion." EO 12174 also required each executive agency to prepare an annual paperwork budget, not in terms of dollars, but in terms of the hours required to comply with its requests for information. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) was given the authority to review and modify the agencies' paperwork budgets.

The Paperwork Reduction Act. When he issued EO 12174, President Carter also sent proposals for a paperwork control program to Congress. Part of that program was to put the provisions of EO 12174 into law and, furthermore, to extend OMB's authority to agencies whose paperwork had not previously been reviewed by OMB.

The Reagan Administration. President Carter signed the Paperwork Reduction Act in late 1980, but the new law did not take effect until after the change in administrations. In the Reagan administration, the emphasis has shifted from a consumer orientation to a business orientation, from plain English to eliminating paper. On the one hand, one of President Reagan's first acts in office was to rescind both of President Carter's executive orders (12044 and 12174) in favor of an order on regulatory reform that said nothing about clear

language (EO 12291, February 17, 1981). On the other hand, OMB in the current administration is taking the Paperwork Reduction Act very seriously, slashing paperwork budgets and refusing to allow agencies to collect information as they traditionally have.

The official government positions, however, have had less impact on what actually happens than the conviction of an agency's administrator. Administrators in the Carter days who had no interest in plain English paid lip service to the executive orders and did nothing. Administrators who understand that clarity in documents saves money for businesses and for the government are still simplifying their documents.

Since 1970: Plain English at the state level

Government documents. Until very recently, most of the action to improve government documents has been at the federal level. Two state legislatures, however, have just passed laws affecting state government documents. In California, beginning 1 January 1983, all state agencies will have to write their documents in "plain, straightforward language." In Michigan, all state forms that are reviewed under the new *state* Paperwork Reduction Act will have to be in plain language.

Consumer documents. Most of the plain English action at the state level has been in attempts to legislate clarity and comprehensibility in consumer contracts. Seven states now have plain English laws: New York, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, West Virginia, and Minnesota. Similar bills are pending in several states and have been introduced but defeated in others. (I'll discuss some of the objections that have caused these defeats in Section 5 below.)

The plain English laws vary somewhat from state to state, although most follow the model of the first – New York's Sullivan Law (named for its sponsor, State Assemblyman Peter Sullivan). The laws typically cover only agreements between a consumer and a person or organization acting as a business (that means a landlord as well as a bank). Leases, mortgages, service contracts, credit applications, and loan forms are typical of the documents covered. Some of the state laws don't cover insurance policies because they are covered by different laws. Some of the state laws set a maximum amount that can be involved, and that excludes many real estate documents.

Most of the state laws have only a vague definition of plain English – for example, "written in a clear and coherent manner using words with common and everyday meanings; appropriately divided and captioned by its various sections." Only New Jersey and Connecticut offer more detailed clear writing guidelines as part of the law. In New Jersey, the guidelines are for judges to consider when a case is presented. In Connecticut, the guidelines are one of two possible tests a judge may use to determine if a document is in plain English. The second acceptable test in Connecticut is a readability score.

Connecticut is the only state that sets a readability score as an acceptable test of plain English in consumer contracts. Many states, however, use readability

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scores as the test of plain English in insurance policies. Readability formulas are very poor measures of how comprehensible and useful a document is. They don't tell if a document is well organized or well designed. They don't consider the grammar of the sentences at all. The use of readability scores as relevant measures of plain English is a very important and controversial topic. Unfortunately, I don't have space to discuss it at length here. (See Redish, 1979, 1980, 1981; Charrow, 1979; Charrow and Charrow, 1980; Selzer, 1983.)

The plain English laws have had a beneficial effect beyond the limited scope of their technical application. They have served their purpose not by sending people to court over incomprehensible documents, but by being catalysts for change. Consumers in states that have not passed plain English laws have also often benefited, as businesses that operate in several states usually use their new documents wherever they do business.

Since 1970: Plain English in the private sector

Insurance companies began to simplify their policies in the mid-1970s even before any of the state laws on consumer credit documents were passed. By 1979, thirty states had passed or proposed laws or regulations requiring readable policies in at least some types of insurance (Pressman, 1979). Many home insurance, property and casualty insurance, and life insurance policies have now been simplified. In addition, many banks and loan agencies that are not affected by state plain English laws have seen the value of clear English for their own staff and their consumers and have rewritten their documents.

4. What Has the Plain English Movement Accomplished?

Since the mid-1970s, a handful of government documents and many insurance and banking documents have been rewritten into plain English. There are new handbooks and training programs to help writers, designers, and teachers. There has been an upsurge of interest in research on language and design. As examples appear in new fields and are accepted by lawyers and consumers, it becomes easier for other writers in the same field to follow the examples. It also becomes a little easier to persuade writers in other fields of the acceptability of simplifying their documents.

In order for a movement like plain English to succeed, we must

increase awareness of the problems that traditional documents cause,
understand what causes the problems,
develop ways to solve the problems,
apply the solutions, and
teach others how to apply the solutions.

In the past decade, work has been carried out on all of these aspects of the plain English movement.

Examples of increasing awareness: Simply Stated, the newsletter that we put out at the Document Design Center, began with a circulation of 300 in 1979 and now goes to more than 10,000 people. The Practising Law Institute courses on Drafting Documents in Plain Language in 1979 and again in 1981 drew lawyers from around the country who wanted to learn about plain English laws and how to comply with them (MacDonald, 1979; Given, 1981).

Examples of understanding the problems and developing solutions. Much of the work on understanding the problems and developing solutions has been done here at the Document Design Center where an interdisciplinary team has pulled together research from many academic fields which we apply when we analyze and rewrite documents (Felker, 1980; Felker *et al.*, 1981; Charrow, 1981). Research has shown that the *organization* of public documents is as much a problem as the length of the sentences and the difficulty of specific words. Research at Carnegie–Mellon University has shown that readers trying to make sense out of traditional legal documents translate them into scenes in which there are people doing actions. Important and relevant research is also being done in Great Britain and Europe (Wright, 1980; Hartley, 1981; Jonassen, 1982).

Examples of solutions. The examples in Figures 4 and 5 show how writers have applied the solutions to produce examples of plain English.

Examples of teaching others. Teaching others to write in plain English encompasses both retraining writers on the job and changing the curriculum in writing courses for people still in school. Workshops in clear writing are now available from many sources. Interest in "practical" writing courses has grown immensely in colleges and professional schools.

During the 1960s, many schools abolished their writing requirement; during the 1970s they expanded their writing programs. The focus of freshman English courses changed from literature to composition. Writing specialists set up labs on most campuses where students can get help in learning basic writing skills. The National Endowment for the Humanities helped establish programs linking writing specialists and subject-matter specialists on the premise that writing is a skill every discipline requires. Research about writing in non-academic settings began to change academic courses (Faigley and Miller, 1982; Goswami, Redish, Felker, and Siegel, 1981; Anderson *et al.*, 1983). Books on clear English for lawyers began to appear (Wydick, 1979; Felsenfeld and Siegel, 1978; see also the material in MacDonald, 1979 and Given, 1981). The Document Design Center is now developing a new course in clear legal writing for first year law students (see *Simply Stated*, p. 22). In the summer of 1982, eighty teachers of legal writing came to a two-day institute to learn about these materials and to get ideas for teaching future lawyers how to write in clear English.

The plain English network grows steadily. Examples of documents in plain English continue to appear. Yet all of the plain English material together represents only a small fraction of the documents in circulation. Why?

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Figure 4

Plain English in legal notices (on an application form for a student loan).

The Privacy Act of 1974 allows us to require you to give your Social Security Number (SSN) in order to receive a loan. We need your SSN to identify you on our records, to keep track of your eligibility and school attendance, and to record your payments. If you do not put your SSN on the application in item 2, you will not receive a loan.

The Right to Financial Privacy Act allows the U.S. Department of Education to have access to any information about you that we keep because we have made a loan to you. If you get a loan, we will tell a credit bureau how much you have borrowed from us and whether you repaid it when you should. If you want to keep a good credit rating, you should make sure that you are never late in making your loan payments.

If you lie on this application, and get a loan that you would not have gotten if you had told the truth, you may have to pay a fine or go to jail or both.

Figure 5

Plain English in a handbook on insurance benefits:

How long will my spouse receive the Spouse's Benefit?

How long your spouse receives these benefits will depend on how much service you have at the time of your death.

If you have less than 20 years of service, then your spouse will receive payments for a period that is 2 times the length of your service. For example, if you die after putting in 18 years of service, your spouse will receive monthly benefit payments for twice this amount of time, or for 36 years.

If you have 20 years or more of service at the time of your death, your spouse will get these benefits until he or she dies.

We may require proof of age, family status, and other facts relating to any person's qualifications to receive Spouse's Benefits. All proof must be satisfactory to us.

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5. Why Hasn't the Plain English Movement Accomplished More?

I have written at length elsewhere about some of the forces that keep writers from using plain English (Redish, 1983). Let me briefly review them.

The pressure of budgets and deadlines. Clear writing and consumers' problems take a back seat to all of the other pressures with which most writers in government and business must contend.

Inertia. It's easier to do what has always been done.

Fear of taking risks. If the demand for clear English is not made from or supported by the top echelon in the agency or company, writers are going to hesitate to change traditional styles.

Distance from the people who use the documents. Many documents are written and reviewed by teams of subject matter specialists, but no one represents the people who must read and understand the document. These subject matter specialists have become so familiar with the material that they can't put themselves in the place of the reader for whom the material is new and complex. In a case with which I am very familiar, a forms design team includes subject-matter specialists, data processors, and representatives of several offices in the agency that use data from the form. No one represents the client who must fill out the form, and the goal of making the form easy for the client gets lost as each member of the team negotiates to get the needs of his or her group met.

Desire to be seen as part of an elite group. Writers hesitate to give up the jargon or traditional style of the documents in their field because being able to read and write in a non-plain style is a mark of distinction to them.

Lack of knowledge of how to write in plain English. Writers follow the models they have seen and most of the documents they see in their fields are not well written. Most documents are written by people who were not trained to be writers but to be lawyers or computer programmers or doctors or insurance executives. They had little training in writing in school and what they had didn't deal with writing documents for clients or consumers.

In order to understand the sources of resistance to the plain English movement, we also have to explore some of the concerns raised by language purists, by lawyers, and by business people. If you listen to what people say in their roles as consumers, you will almost always find that they favor plain English. They want to be able to understand their leases, notices, warranties, loan agreements, and insurance policies. When they are not thinking of themselves as consumers, however, you may also detect other attitudes – attitudes that have slowed the acceptance of plain English. Let us examine a few of these negative attitudes.

Some people are concerned that plain English will lower our standards of good English. Some people worry that the plain English movement will destroy the beauty and richness of English. They think of plain English as writing down to people. They think we are catering to the "lowest common denominator" or treating people in a condescending manner by acting as if people can't handle the intricacies of legal or technical documents.

We must remember, however, that we are not talking about English literature, but about public documents. The *purpose* of the documents that we want to put into plain English is to convey critical information. To be effective, a document must reach its audience at the audience's reading level.

Sometimes this means writing very simply because the audience is not highly educated. If the purpose of a technical manual is to show army mechanics how to fix a tank and we know that most army mechanics read at a tenth-grade level, the document won't serve its purpose if we write it at a post-college level. Improving the mechanics' literacy skills is also an important goal; but, if we want the tanks fixed correctly now, the technical manual is not the place to demand reading skills that the mechanics do not have.

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Sometimes it means writing in a direct, straightforward manner because the audience, although highly educated, doesn't have the time to hunt through the traditional document's disorganization and convoluted style. A computer specialist, reacting recently to a draft of a new computer manual, objected to the questions and participial forms (looking, finding, signing on) we put in the headings, to the short straightforward sentences in which we addressed the reader as "you," and to the active and imperative verbs. "Unprofessional," "juvenile," and "condescending" were her comments.

In our experience, however, these features help people. We tested the Federal Communications Commission's new marine radio regulations, which have questions as headings and plain English as the text, against the old regulations, which have single nouns as headings and text in traditional bureaucratic style. Readers who had the new rules found the information they needed more quickly, answered more questions correctly, and rated the rules easier to use (Felker and Rose, 1981; Redish, Felker and Rose, 1981).

In a test of product warranties with and without informative questions as headings, more than 90 percent of the subjects said they preferred the warranties with the question headings (Charrow and Redish, 1980). A manual that the Document Design Center helped to organize and write has won an award as the best piece of internal communications in the insurance industry. The manual explains insurance benefits to the company's employees; and we used questions as headings, personal pronouns, clear, active sentences, lots of examples, and other features of plain English in the text. Clearly, some people liked it!

Sometimes writing in plain English means translating non-standard into standard English. Even highly educated speakers of standard English do not understand the legal and bureaucratic documents they receive. They may be having problems because these documents violate the rules of current standard English.

Consider, for example, this sentence from an automobile loan form currently in use:

> The buyer shall not remove the said car from the county where he now resides without written notification to the holder hereof.

I don't think the borrower has to write to the lender every time he *drives* the car into another county, although that is what "remove" means today. I assume the borrower must notify the lender if he *moves* (i.e. changes residence). The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that the word "remove" in the meaning "change one's place of residence" was very common in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English. It isn't used that way now by any speaker of standard American English. In plain (standard) English, the form might say:

> You must notify us in writing if you change your address.

Language changes; languages always have. We can argue about whether English today is richer or poorer for the changes, but the argument isn't going to alter the dynamic nature of language. Why should we expect speakers of standard modern English to understand vocabulary and sentence structures

that were easily understood in the seventeenth century but that are not part of today's standard language?

Some people are concerned that a plain English legal document isn't going to stand up in court. Many consumers don't believe that a document can be legal without the magic and mystery of the special legal words and indecipherable phrases. Some lawyers remain skeptical that legal documents can be written in plain English and still be legally precise. Lawyers argue that many of the words in legal documents have developed their meaning over years of litigation and cannot be translated into clearer English. It is true that certain words are "terms of art" that have no common English equivalents. However, the individual words are not the major cause of incomprehensible legal documents. Poor organization and writing in the nominal style (long sentences, nouns instead of verbs, passive voice, etc.) are the problem. Moreover, according to David Mellinkoff, Professor of Law at UCLA and author of several books on legal language, most words that lawyers think are untranslatable "terms of art" *can* be defined for the lay person – and for the lawyer who does not specialize in that particular topic.

The growing number of examples of plain English legal documents that have been accepted by attorneys shows that documents can be written that are both legally accurate and understandable to non-lawyers. The irony in the lawyers' position is that most of the legal documents that my colleagues and I have helped to rewrite were, in fact, not legally sufficient or precise in the original. They had gaps the lawyers did not mean to leave. They were ambiguous in ways the lawyers did not intend.

Furthermore, failing to write in clear English can cause legal problems. Incomprehensible English has been the cause of many lawsuits. The sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled recently that a loan agreement violated the Truth in Lending Act because of its indecipherable language (*Simply Stated*, 22).

Some people are concerned that plain language costs a lot for little return. Opposition to plain language bills in many states has come from the businesses that would be affected. In part, they object because of the concern I've just discussed – the fear of changing proven legal language. In part, they object that the extra cost is not offset by added benefits. They argue that rewriting and reprinting documents is expensive and that consumers don't care and don't read the documents anyway. I know of no definitive study that has investigated the cost–benefit trade-off of plain English documents. Unfortunately, few businesses are in touch with their consumers' reactions to their documents – good or bad; and few have done any research on the effectiveness of their old or their new documents.

Poor documents can be very costly to businesses. Most businesses must maintain expensive operations to offset the problems caused by incomprehensible documents. They spend millions of dollars a year answering letters and toll-free telephone calls because customers don't understand the procedures for using the company's equipment or services. Computer companies, for example, are now trying to write more self-explanatory (user-friendly) manuals

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to cut the extremely high costs of staffing "consumer inquiry offices." Most companies also have offices just to answer employees' questions about documents they can't understand (such as their insurance benefits).

The expense of answering consumers' and employees' questions includes the cost of space, equipment, labor, manuals (in plain English?) and training for the people who answer the questions. How much of this cost could be saved by plain English documents is not yet known, but it could be substantial.

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Chapter 10

Attitudes of
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HAROLD B. ALLEN

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