

## Cost and Time Benefits of Using Plain Language

Use of plain language has many benefits. Plain language communicates ideas or instructions so the reader understands and can use them. This leads to measurable savings in both time and costs. The examples that follow come from a variety of studies and reports:

- **Time Savings:** Using plain language cuts down the time spent on answering questions from the reader or user. For example:

“The Navy found the plain English style reduced reading time by between 17-23 per cent.”

Source: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/library/savings.htm>

“The Federal Communications Commission issued its regulations for citizen band radios written in traditional legal language. It required five staff members full time to answer the public’s questions. After the rewritten plain language regulation was issued, the questions stopped, and all five people could be assigned to other duties.”

Source: <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/CostSaving.html>

Computer manufacturer Allen-Bradley rewrote computer manuals in clear English and reduced helpdesk calls by 99%. Support calls went from 50 a day to 2 a month.

Source: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/library/savings.htm>

“The [United Kingdom] Passport Office found 52% of people sending in a passport application form could not fill it in properly. However, when they redesigned and rewrote the form in plain English, only 3% of people failed to fill it in properly. The new form saved 370,000 hours of administration a year.”

Source: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/library/savings.htm>

- **Cost Savings:** Writing in plain language saves money. Problems caused by poor communications can be as much as 40% of the total cost of managing all business transactions.\* Some examples:

“A study by the U.S. Navy concluded that business memos written in plain language could save between \$27 and \$37 million of their offices’ time each year.”

Source: <http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/benefits.htm>

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\* Source: <http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/benefits.htm>

“Alberta Agriculture rewrote 92 forms in plain English and estimated the savings at \$350 million Canadian dollars [about \$233 million in U.S. dollars].”

Source: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/library/savings.htm>

The Department of Veterans Affairs began to use plain language in its form letters. Support calls went from 1.5 to 0.27 per letter. Savings from just one letter totaled \$40,000 per year.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) rewrote in plain language a letter used to locate beneficiaries to pay claims. It asks insured veterans to update their beneficiary information. A test mailing got a 75% increase in responses. VBA expects the full mailing to save \$8 million. It will decrease the need to track down beneficiaries in order to pay claims.

Source: <http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/benefits.htm>

General Electric Information Services rewrote a software manual in plain language and saved up to \$375,000 a year in helpdesk staff costs.

Source: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/library/savings.htm>

Federal Express used plain language ground-operations manuals and saved \$400,000 in the first year.

Source: <http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/benefits.htm>

- **Time and Cost Savings:** Following is an example of documented time and cost savings:

In the United Kingdom, civilian employees of the Department of Defence submit about 750,000 claims for travel expenses each year. Rewriting forms in plain language cut the error rate by 50%. The time required to fill out forms was cut by 10%, and processing time by 15%. These revisions cost about \$16,300 in U.S. dollars. They saved \$545,000 per year.

Source: <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/CostSavings.html>