WRITING IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

Plain language is communication that is clear, straightforward, and easy to understand without unnecessary complexity or jargon. Its goal is to convey information in a way that the intended audience can quickly read and comprehend. This approach considers a wide spectrum of readers, including those with various reading abilities and from different language backgrounds.

When crafting written content for your courses (especially assessments), try using the plain language writing techniques listed below. Using these techniques will increase the likelihood that your students have fully read your instructions and understand what they should do or know.

A CLOSER LOOK

Make simple sentence-level changes to enhance understanding.

Clarity at the sentence level ensures your students know what they are supposed to do or learn. Here are some techniques to enhance understanding at the sentence level:

Use "you" to speak directly to a single student.

Students in this course will learn how…	**You** will learn how…

Use the simplest form of the verb.

In this course, you **are going to be able to understand** the basic structure of the U.S. government.	In this course, you **will learn** the basic structure of the U.S. government.

Use the present tense.

If you **analyzed** the constitutional amendments relevant to voting rights, then you should **have included** historical context in your assignment.	If you **analyze** the constitutional amendments relevant to voting rights, then you **should include** historical context in your assignment.

Use the same term to refer to a specific assignment, thought, or item.

In this **report**, you must **analyze** the factors that impede voting in the United States. Choose three states on which to focus your **assessment**. Consider how both the government itself and the citizenry are affected in each state. Your **paper** should be clearly written and provide a thorough **breakdown** of the topic in no more than five pages.	In this **report**, you must **analyze** the factors that impede voting in the United States. Choose three states on which to focus your **analysis**. Consider how both the government itself and the citizenry are affected in each state. Your **report** should be clearly written and provide a thorough **analysis** of the topic in no more than five pages.

Format your text and headings for readability.

The type of formatting you use can significantly improve the readability of your assignments. Here are some techniques to enhance clarity using formatting:

Use detailed headings written as questions or statements.

Voter ID Project Overview	What Impact Do Voter ID Laws Have on Different Groups?
You will analyze the effects of voter ID laws on electoral participation among demographic groups…	In this project, you will analyze the effects of voter ID laws on electoral participation among demographic groups…

Use only bold or italics for emphasis—and sparingly.

Write an ANALYTICAL essay discussing the impact of **lobbying** on legislative decision-making in the U.S. Congress. Your essay **must be** double-spaced and 3-5 pages in length. ***Any paper over five pages will not be accepted and will receive a zero.***	Write an analytical essay discussing the impact of lobbying on legislative decision-making in the U.S. Congress. Your essay must be double-spaced and 3-5 pages in length. **Any paper over five pages will not be accepted and will receive a zero.**

Use lists and tables to break up complex instructions or information.

When formatting your essay, you must use 12-point Times New Roman font, set your margins to one inch on all sides, double-space the entire document, include a title page with your name, course number, and date, use headings and subheadings, insert page numbers in the top right corner of each page, and follow APA (7th edition) style to properly attribute all your sources.	Format your essay according to the following guidelines: • Use 12-point Times New Roman font. • Set your margins to one inch on all sides. • Double-space the entire document. • Include a title page with your name, course number, and date. • Use headings and subheadings. • Insert page numbers in the top right corner of each page. • Cite all your sources using APA style (7th edition).

Carefully revise writing drafted by AI.

AI writing tools can often produce text that is riddled with jargon, clichés, and unnecessary complexity, especially depending on the subject matter. It's essential to be mindful of this tendency when using AI tools to draft your writing. Here's an example where the AI-generated text has been rewritten using plain language techniques:

You will commence an enlightening journey to decode the intricacies of political strategies, dissecting the myriad facets of government. This journey will cultivate a foundation in theoretical paradigms, focusing on how our government and its entities operate, along with the election process and Constitution—the keystones of our political landscape.	You will learn how the U.S. government works, including the roles of the President, Congress, and Supreme Court. You will also study the Constitution, learn how laws are made, and explore the election process and political parties in the United States.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

• Federal Plain Language Guidelines - These guidelines were developed as part of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 to assist government agencies in writing documents for the general public.

• Plain Language Web Writing Tips and Checklist - Download this checklist from Digital.gov to use as a guide while writing your course content.

• AI Tools - Prompt your preferred AI tool to rewrite text or summarize highly technical material in plain language. Make sure to review the output carefully, and do not share personal, proprietary, or other sensitive information.