

A BVA/LABRADOR STUDY



THE EFFECTIVENESS  
OF **PLAIN LANGUAGE**  
PROVEN BY DATA

JULY 2020



LABRADOR  
LANGUAGE SERVICES

LABRADOR  
MAVERICK

# CONVERGING PERSPECTIVES



**PIERRE LEBRETON**

Director, Labrador Language Services,  
Creator of Plainly

*“The financial and environmental impacts of plain language are huge when applied to billions of words read each day by billions of people in the course of their professional activities – both online and offline. The following results hopefully will encourage all companies to adopt this simple but very effective writing method for their corporate communication.”*



**JEAN-FRANÇOIS LEVIONNOIS**

Head of Office of BVA Group

*“Labrador called on BVA to compare the performance of four texts written in “ordinary language” (“BEFORE”) and four texts written in plain language (“AFTER”).*

*The results offer statistical proof that plain language is effective. Our study shows that texts rewritten in plain language are better than the original versions in terms of clarity, comprehension, and organization, and that readers are more likely to remember the information presented.”*



**MOLLY DORAN**

Director of Advisory Services

*“For over 20 years in Europe and 10 years in the US, Labrador has advocated clear and transparent corporate disclosure, in part because clear and transparent communication generates a valuable but intangible asset: trust.*

*We had already run several surveys with shareholders, students and analysts to prove this point, but never on a large scale. Now, thanks to this data-driven study, conducted in partnership with BVA, the benefits of plain language for readers are proven by statistics.”*

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLAIN LANGUAGE PROVEN BY DATA

Over the past 50 years, many studies have linked a specific plain language criteria to a reader benefit such as reading speed, message retention or message comprehension. However, very few studies have taken a statistical approach to plain language as a whole.

**More than 2 out of 3 survey respondents described a text in plain language as “clear.” But what concrete benefits does plain language actually bring to readers?**

The indicators measured by the BVA/Labrador study show that plain language increases the performance of communication, as we discuss below. But this communication performance does not only benefit the reader, who reads, understands and remembers the message more easily. It also benefits the author, whose plain language messages are more effective than, and preferable to, those written in “ordinary language.”

## 1<sup>ST</sup> BENEFIT

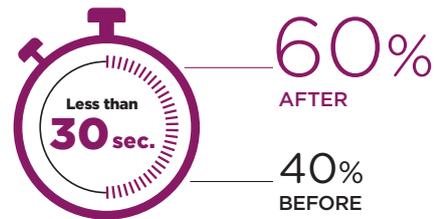
### Fast reading

Fewer words and shorter sentences mean **less time spent reading or rereading** a text to understand it.

It took **less than 30 seconds** for **6 out of 10 respondents** to read a 100-word paragraph in plain language.

That is nearly 50% better than for a non-plain text.

*“How long do you think it took you to read and understand this text example?”*



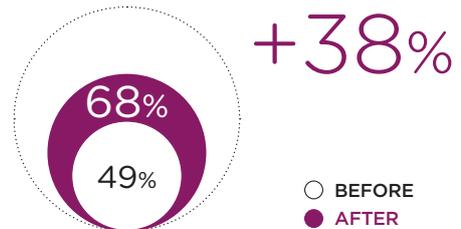
## 2<sup>ND</sup> BENEFIT

### Quick understanding

You might think increased reading speed would hinder comprehension, but our study shows the opposite is true!

Readers **are almost 40%** more likely to understand text written in plain language.

*“I understood what I read”*



Plain language combines efficiency and clarity.

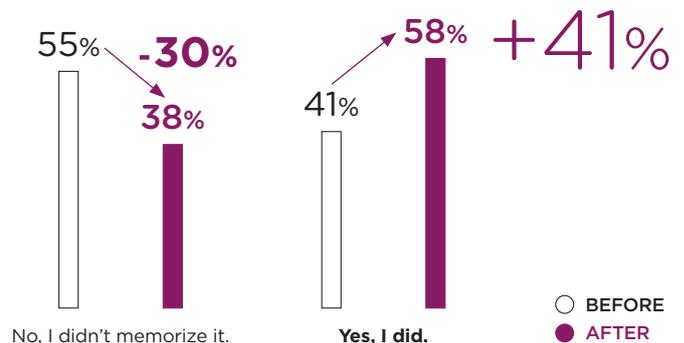
## 3<sup>RD</sup> BENEFIT

### Better message retention

Faster reading and comprehension also allow for better retention of key information.

The number of readers who memorized the main information **increased by 40%** thanks to plain language.

*“Do you feel that you have memorized the information this text contains?”*





**4<sup>TH</sup> BENEFIT**

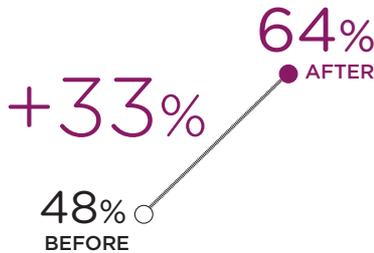
**Clarity creates preference**

The first three benefits stated above were about saving time and making sure that the reader understands and remembers key messages.

The fourth finding highlighted in our study results from the first three, **and benefits the author**: plain language content is perceived as clearer, and readers are more inclined to accept and appreciate the message conveyed.

a) First, a text written in plain language is perceived as well written.

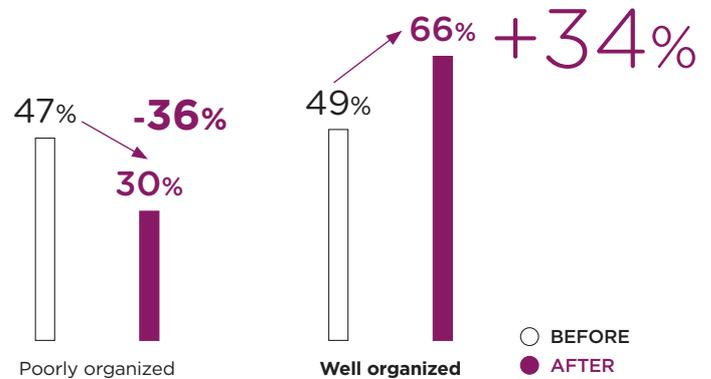
*“The text is well written”*



64% of the respondents think that a plain language text is well written.

b) At the same time, the organization of the text allows the reader to more easily follow the document’s structure.

*“The information is well organized”*



Readers are 34% more likely to say that a text written in plain language is well organized.

The figures above tell us that readers objectively find a plain language text more pleasant to read.

But what does the reader feel when reading a corporate disclosure document?

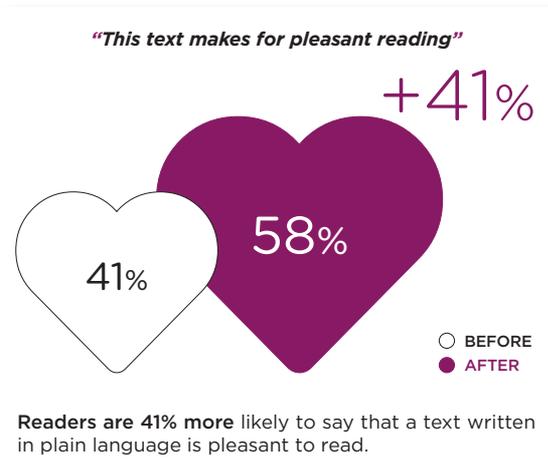
Thanks to this study, for the first time, we understand the subjective feelings of our readers.

Their responses are indisputable: a text written in plain language is subjectively **more pleasant to read**.

A reader prefers one text to another based on both objective and subjective criteria. The previous benefits show that plain language convinces a majority on both counts.

To validate this hypothesis, **one last question** remained: what type of text do readers find clearer?

**More than 7 out of 10 respondents** referred to plain language text as clear. This approval rate confirms a clear preference for plain language.



**72%**  
of readers describe a text written in plain language as clear

# METHODOLOGY

## **THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study is to provide statistical proof, on a large scale, of the effectiveness of plain language.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Online surveys conducted between March 6 and 12, 2020, among 503 Americans aged 18 and above.

Nationally representative sample in terms of age, gender, annual household income and region.

**Test protocol:** We constructed an experimental design using eight texts. Some of our samples were written in traditional corporate language (the “before” copy) and others were rewritten in plain language (the “after” copy). Each respondent was invited to read three of the eight texts, selected at random, and evaluate them.



### LABRADOR PLAINLY

Plainly, the most powerful plain language tool on the market, analyzes the clarity of your text in just three clicks. It helps you tell your story in a way that is easier to understand, more likely to be remembered, and perceived as trustworthy.

Connect with Labrador to see how easy it is to say what you mean, Plainly.

[www.labrador-company.com/plainly/](http://www.labrador-company.com/plainly/)

#### CONTACT

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### ABOUT BVA

BVA is a fast-growing research and consulting firm, expert in behavioural science, ranked in the top 20 worldwide agencies. BVA brings data to life and converts deep understanding of customers and citizens into behaviour change strategies. BVA operates both for public and private clients with methodologies fuelled by data-science and behavioural science.

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### ABOUT LABRADOR

After eight years in the US and two decades in Europe, Labrador's mission remains the same: to design and publish reader-centric documents that generate trust with shareholders, reinforcing their investment decisions. Focusing exclusively on corporate disclosure documents, and with 300 clients worldwide, we have unique insight into industry trends and best practices. Labrador brings together more than 40 business experts, structured around a research laboratory and two agencies: **Labrador Information Design** (which concentrates on regulated communication and readability) and **Labrador Language Services** (which concentrates on plain language and translation). **Labrador Maverick**, our corporate information research laboratory, collects, tests, and shares the knowledge and innovations that create sustainable value for regulated and sensitive business information. Together, we spark award-winning innovation and initiatives.

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