Speak Clearly: How to Avoid Jargon and Connect with Your Audience

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Welcome

- I will be your **moderator** and **technical support**
- Please hold all **questions** until the Q&A portions of this webinar or post questions in the chat
- This webinar will be offering **closed captioning**
- We will be **recording** this webinar
- A recording and all materials will be available within **two business days** on the Illinois Workforce Academy
- **Let's get started with some polls…**
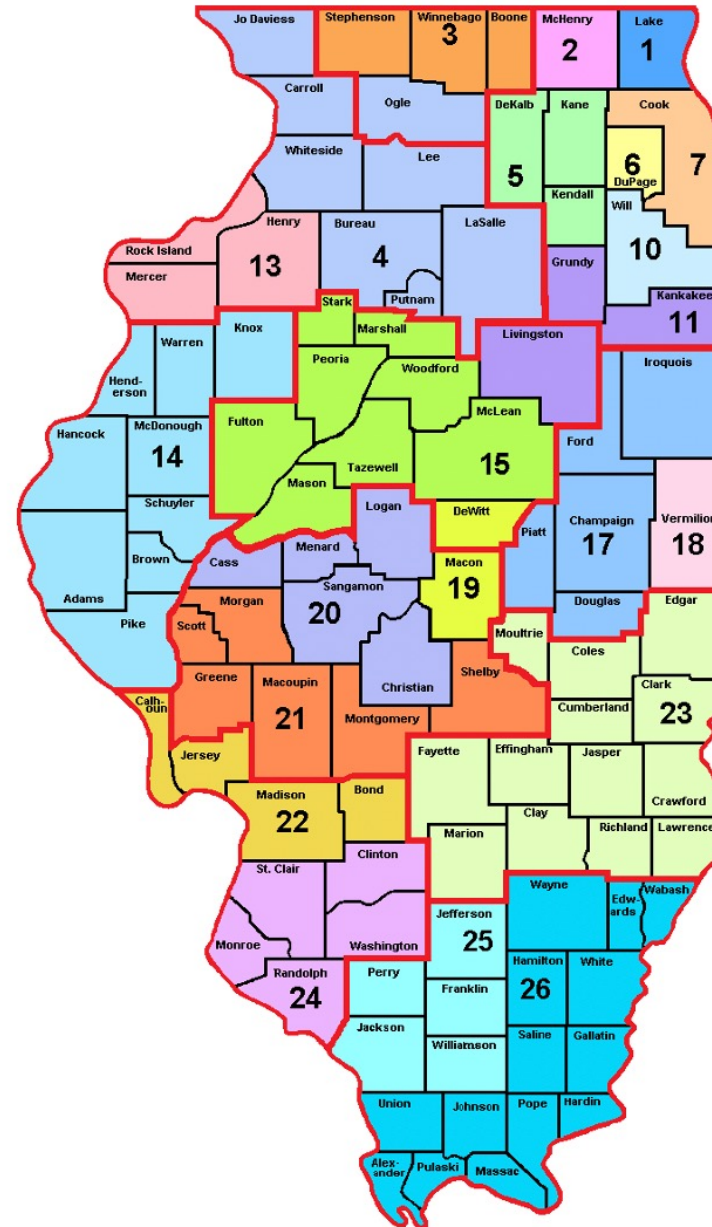
What We Will Be Covering

- Section 1: What is Jargon?
  - How do we avoid jargon?
  - Strategies to avoid jargon.
  - Triangle of Meaning & Language
  - Maintain Your Audiences Attention

- Section 2: Using Plain Language

Section 1: What is jargon?

- Jargon refers to specialized terms, phrases, or language that are used by a specific group, profession, or community. These terms are often not easily understood by people outside of that group, as they are tailored to a particular field or area of expertise.

- For example, medical professionals use terms like "hypertension" or "myocardial infarction," which may be confusing to someone without a medical background.

- Jargon can make communication more efficient within a group, but it may also create barriers for others unfamiliar with the terms.

Tell us your jargon!

- In the text box, share with us what is some jargon that is used in your work setting that other audiences wouldn't understand?
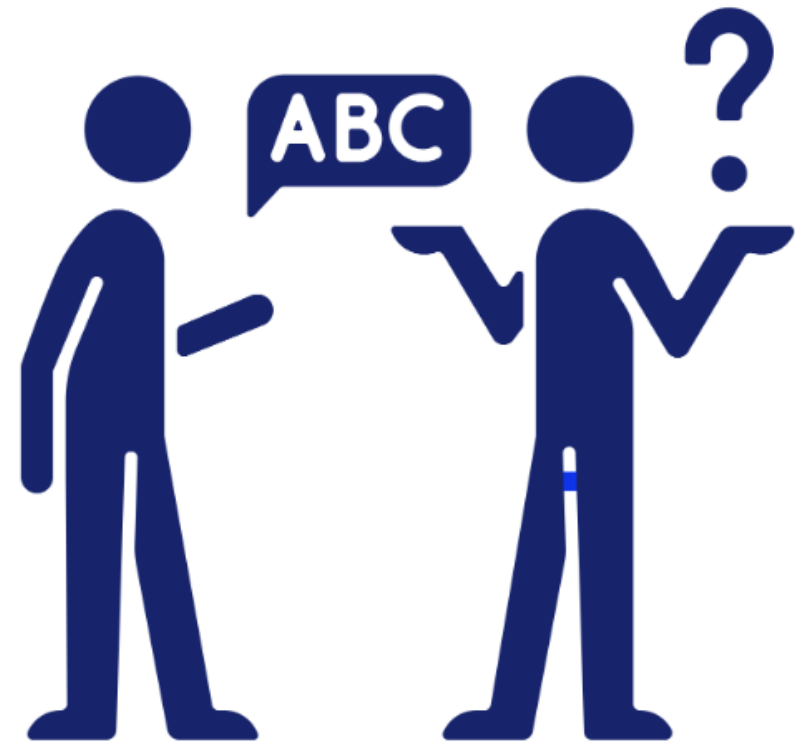
Why should we eliminate jargon?

- Clarity and Understanding
- Engagement
- Inclusivity
- Avoiding Miscommunication
- Building Credibility
- Focus on Key Messages

Hashtag

Debrief Hashtags

- What does hashtag mean to you?
- What does hashtag mean in the video?
- Would it be hard to explain hashtags to someone who doesn't use social media? If so, how?

Language

- Language is symbolic; it means different things to different people at various times.

- Language is also arbitrary; we assign meaning to words, but they do not have meaning on their own.

- Language creates our reality, and there is a social construction around words.

Triangle of Meaning
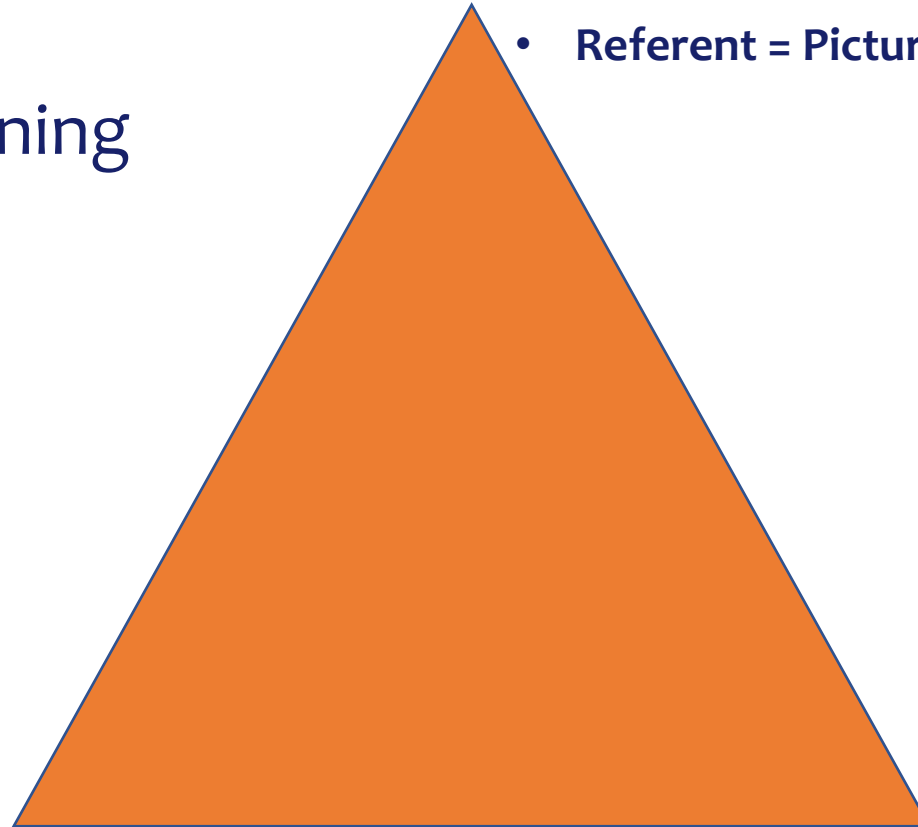
- Triangle of meaning

- Referent = Picture of a Dog

- Word = Dog

- thought = "I want to pet it!"

Triangle of Meaning: Language

- Denotative (dictionary) vs. Connotative (Urban dictionary)
  - Lame
  - Den = physically crippled, especially in the foot or leg
  - Con = (ask them) boring, out of touch
- Lit
  - Den = to set on fire
  - Con = (define it for me) fun, party
- Fire
  - Den = a process of combustion, a destructive burning
  - Con = cool, good
- Definitions of words, and the meaning we give words, change over time.

Strategies to Avoid Jargon

- 1. Know your Audience
- 2. Use simple, everyday language
- 3. Define terms, if you must use them
- 4. Practice empathy
- 5. Use analogies or examples from everyday life
- 6. Avoid acronyms and abbreviations
- 7. Limit technical terms
- 8. Keep it concise
- 9. Ask for feedback

Maintain Audience Attention

- Ask questions
  - Rhetorical questions turning a normal sentence into a question.
  - Ask a question and answer it yourself in order to introduce the next topic.
  - Ask a question to the audience.
  - Question marks are hooks.

- Become a story teller
  - Powerful to keep people's attention and to remember details.
  - For example: Software
    - If your topic is software architecture, tell a story about how you came to have the good software architecture we have today.
    - If your topic is software version control, tell a story about when we didn't have good version control.

Story Telling Format

- It will make your presentations more clear, more focused, and more memorable.

- Simply ask and answer 4 questions.

- 1. What is the problem? Tell the story. How did you encounter this problem, why it's important to you, and why is it important to the audience?

- 2. What is the cause? Why did this problem occur? Tell the story. How you got to bottom of this problem.

- 3. What are possible solutions? Tell us solution A how it failed then how you tried solution B and it worked better.
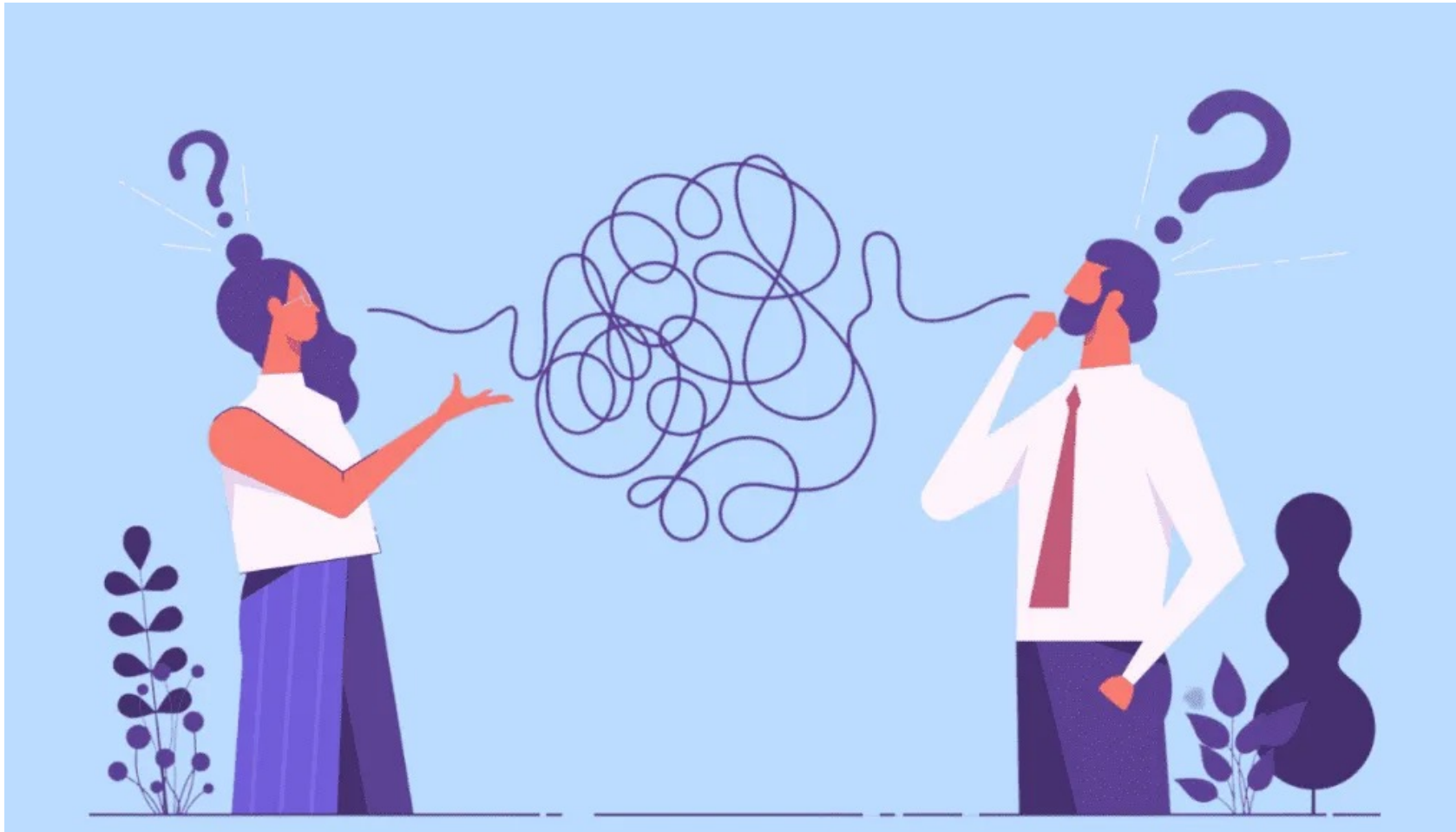
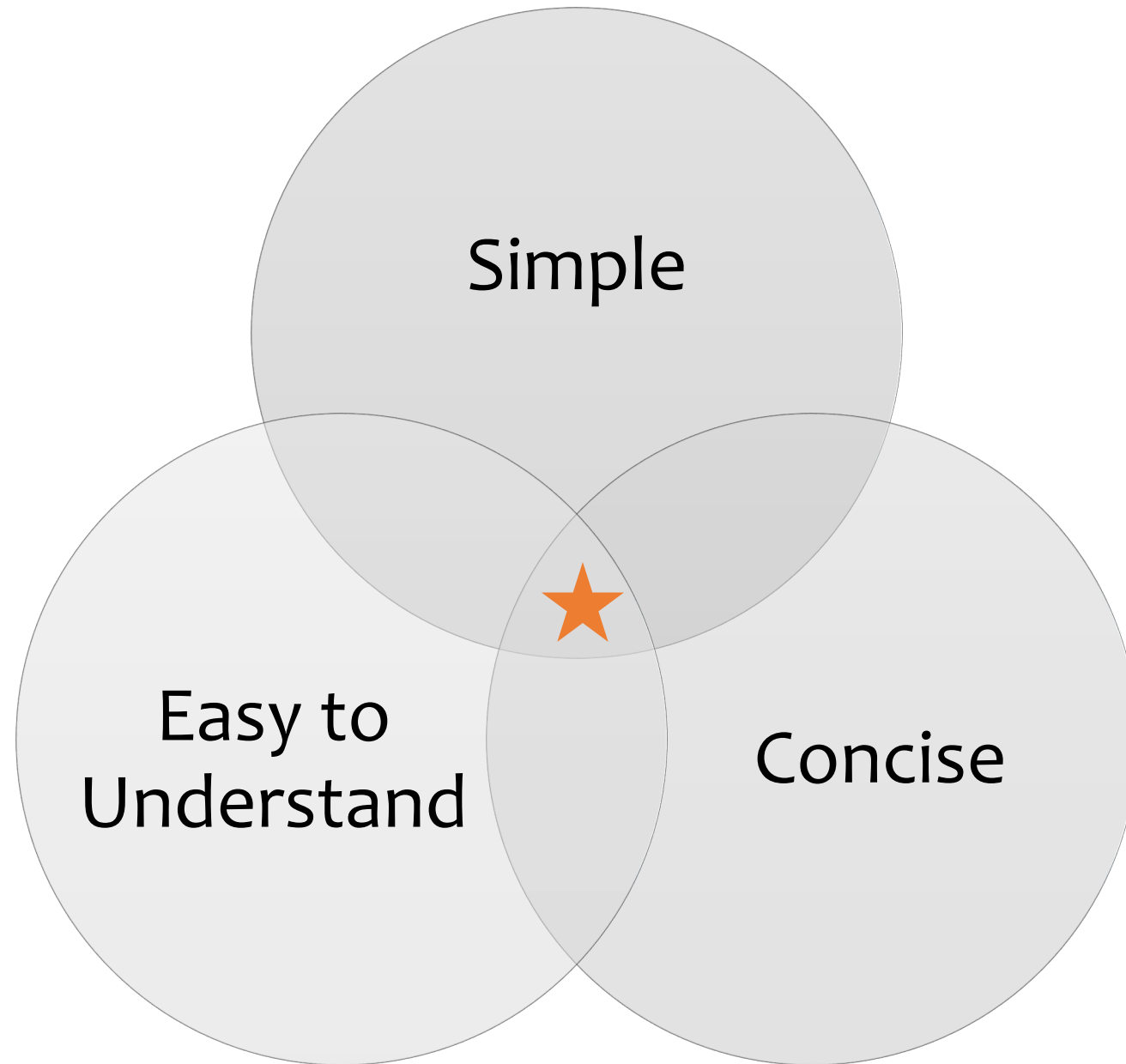# Section 2: Using Plain Language

What is Plain Language?

- A federal push to make government documents **readable for the public**

- A move away from **gatekeepers**
  - "Master's Degree" Language
  - Greek/Latin Terminology
  - The Chomskybot

What is Plain Language?

- A move towards **minimizing mis-understandings**
- A move towards using language in the **same ways**

Some general guidelines…

1. Write for Your Reader

- Don't just "dumb down"
  - Complex ideas: digestible delivery
- Think about your reader:
  - In what circumstances are they receiving this information?
  - What is their technological capacity
  - How easy is it to find your document?
  - What prior knowledge does your reader have?
  - How much time do they have?

2. Write for All Readers

- Be considerate of people with disabilities
  - Blind or low-vision individuals
  - Color-blind individuals
  - Individuals with Intellectual disabilities
- Choose your words
  - Do some research
  - Do your best
- Less is more
  - Language
  - Design

Some Tips…

✓Send participants all materials **ahead of time** if possible

✓Use **built-in structure** (headings, body, bullet points, etc.)

✓Use **alt text** for photos or mark as decorative

✓**Rename** hyperlinks

✓Use a **simple, large font** (24 points for slides, 12 points for documents)

✓Choose colors **thoughtfully**:

  ✓Can you understand the content without it?

  ✓Are the colors high contrast?

Use the Accessibility Checker

✓ Use the **Accessibility Checker**

   ✓ **Microsoft Office:** Review/Accessibility or bottom banner

   ✓ **Adobe Acrobat Pro:** Tools/Prepare for accessibility

If You Would Like to Learn More…

- We have a full Workforce Wednesday Webinar on the subject:
  - "How to Create an Accessible Meeting – October 30, 2024"

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How to Create an **Accessible Meeting** – In Person and Virtual

October 30,2024

3. Major Points First, Details Last

- Make your reader's time a priority
  - ✓ Use an abstract
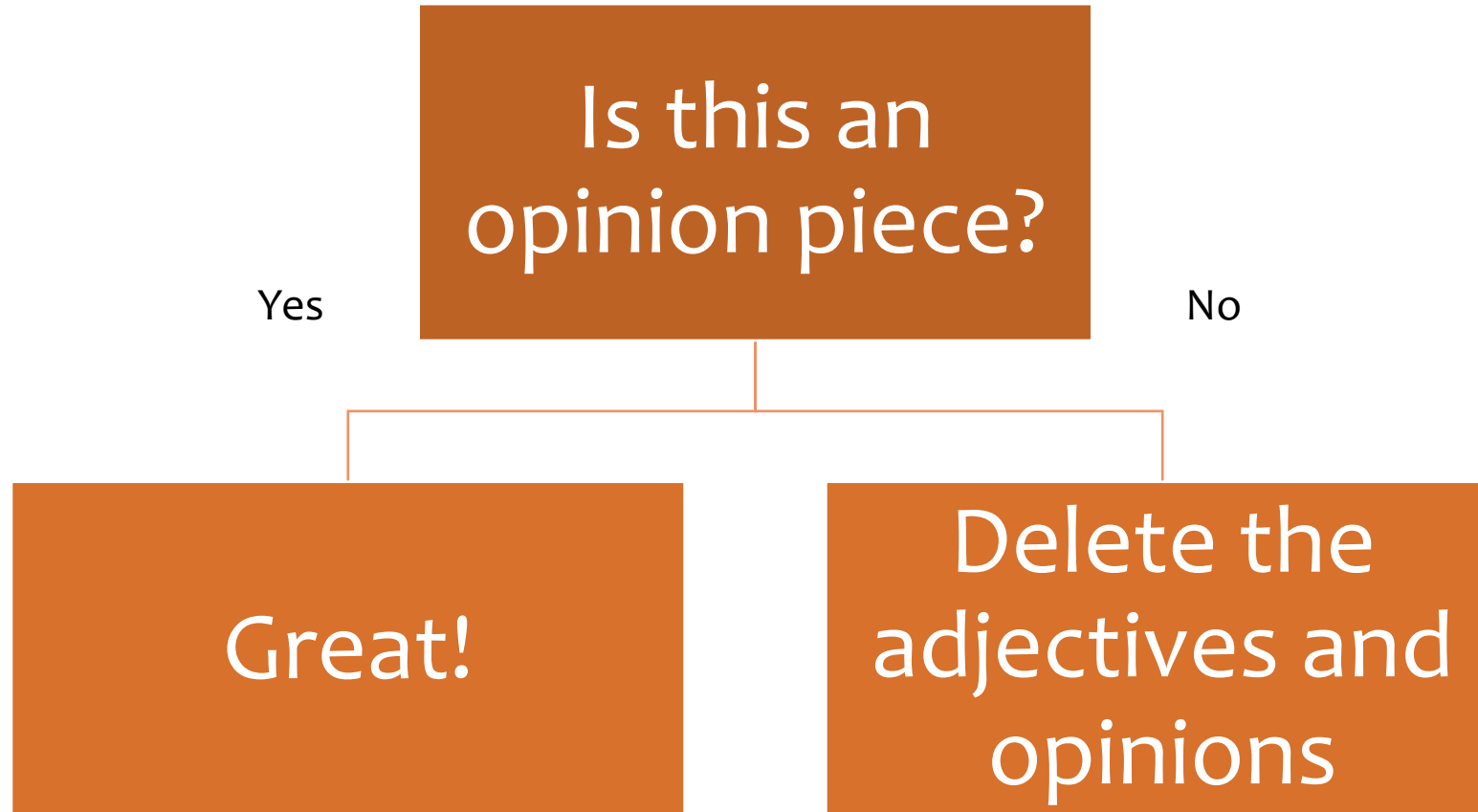 - ✓ Use a table of contents
  - ✓ Use graphics to highlight key phrases

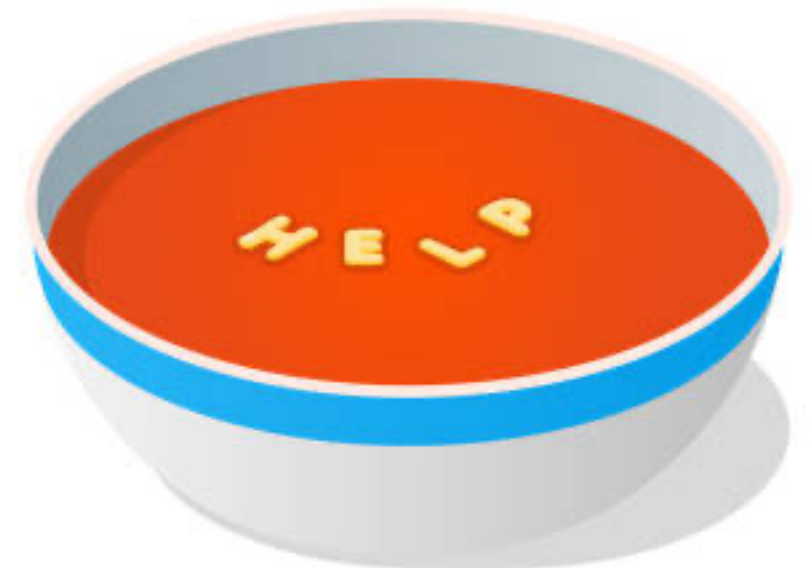How long would it take your reader to walk away with a decent understanding of what you wrote?

5. Minimize Abbreviations

- Could you just use a different word?

- If you simply MUST use an acronym:
  - Spell it out
  - Explain it

6. Use Common Definitions

Belt   Geography vs. Garment vs. Music
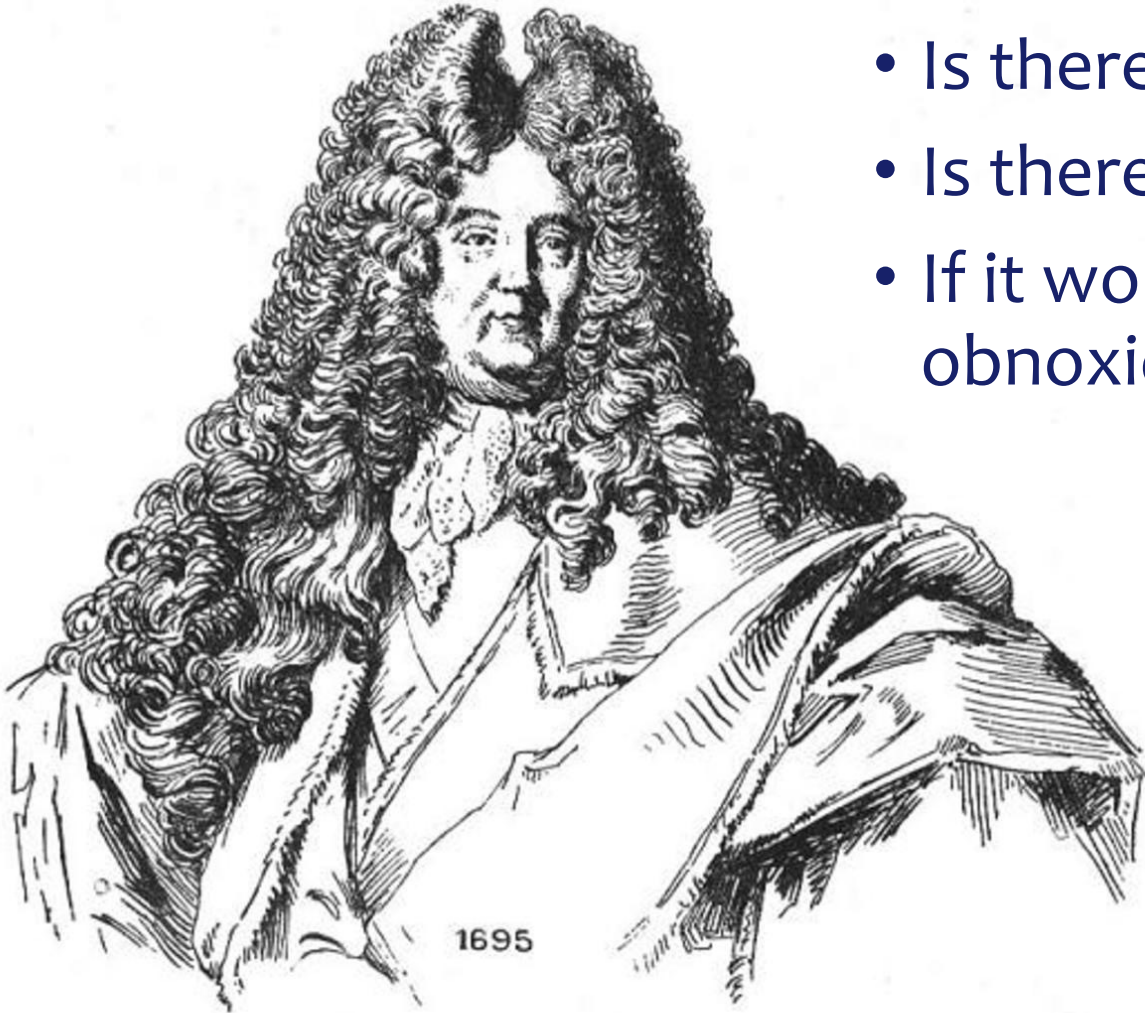
All fields have specialized definitions for certain words

Use the common definition

If unavoidable (or more convoluted to use a different phrase) explain

7. Avoid Legal, Foreign, or Technical Jargon

1695

- Is there an English term?

- Is there a commonly understood term?

- If it would make your document obnoxiously long, have you explained?

Can you say it with a picture?

9. Use Short Paragraphs with Many Headers

- Time feels long when there's no end in sight
  - How long are you going to talk?
  - What are you going to talk about?
  - If you say "one last point", you'd better mean it

- Break up information

- Don't be afraid of blank space

- Use your space interestingly
  - *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski

10. Have a Proofreader

- Best: someone who doesn't know anything about what you're writing
- Second best: a coworker
- This step is non-negotiable

Resources

- Federal Plain Language Guidelines
- Dept. of Labor Plain Language Quick Reference Guide
- Human-Centered Design Guide Series

Any Final **Questions?**

Thank You!