



Professional Communication Plain Language

Linked Competency: Adapting Communication for Diverse Audiences

Switching between academic and accessible language is an essential component of professional communication. When someone can present their knowledge and skills to different audiences with impact and engagement, they showcase their skills and knowledge beyond academia. In this lesson, participants will demonstrate the ability to switch between academic jargon and accessible language by rewriting passages of text through three different activities.

This learning activity is directly linked to **Adapting Knowledge for Diverse Audiences** to support personal and professional goals within the **Professional Communication** competency.

Outcome:

- Students can rewrite passages of text for a new audience.
- Students can justify why using plain language in text is important in broadening the impact of their research and skills.

Adapting Communication for Diverse Audiences			
Exploring		Implementing	
I am familiar with writing in plain language and the difference between academic jargon and simple equitable words.	I am practicing writing in plain language and switching between academic jargon and simple equitable words.	I can effectively switch between academic jargon and simple equitable words and adapt my language based on an accurate interpretation of my audience's current level of understanding.	In addition to switching between academic jargon and simple equitable words I can connect my communication to the audience's prior experiences.

Remind your students to reflect, add, and annotate evidence of competency to their portfolios.

- **Reflect** on their experiences and what they learned through the activities and feedback.
- **Add** evidence of competency to their portfolios.
- **Annotate** the evidence to highlight their specific competency.





Materials

There is Power-Point presentation that accompanies this document. The information and activities in the PPT are adapted from <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/training/create-your-own-class/> from the public domain with a creative common's attribution license.

TIME:

One 55-MINUTE SESSION.

Learning Activities:

1. Present PPT slides describing plain language and its importance.
2. **Academic Jargon Showdown (10 min).** *This activity is also used in the learning activity elevator pitch 3 ways*
 - Using the blank bracket sheet in the PPT, have the students brainstorm 16 words for contenders as the top academic jargon words used in grad studies. Type the words in the bracket sheet so the class can see.
 - Have students vote on each paired category, drag the words with the most votes to the next bracket, until they have the top academic jargon word for their class.
 - Use an online poll, such as Poll Everywhere, for voting with larger classes. For smaller classes, use a show of hands.
 - For an added challenge, have them try not to use that word for one day.

Discussion: (5 min)

- In small groups students discuss why academic words can alienate some, confuse others, and at times reflect negatively on your ability to communicate beyond academia.
- Ask for a few volunteers from the small groups to share with the class.

For this exercise, you may want to demonstrate the activity as a class first before having students try this on their own.

3. Activity Option 1: (also included in the PPT)
 - a. **Instructions:**
 - i. Copy a paragraph of text from a website or from a document on your computer into a blank Microsoft Word document.
 - ii. Use the spell checker to obtain a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level for the page. Aim for a grade 6-8 reading level.
 - iii. Use the [Plain Language Checklist](#) to edit the text. Simplify, clarify, and improve the content.
4. Activity Option 2: (also included in the PPT)
 - a. **Instructions:**

