

Motivating your staff to embrace plain language

- Accommodating different needs and challenges -

Tara Droog, Cancer Information Editor, Irish Cancer Society

The Irish Cancer Society

- Over 140 staff
- €14,000,000 on cancer research, patient care and support each year



The Irish Cancer Society...2

- Cancer services



- Cancer prevention
- Fundraising
- Communications
- Advocacy
- Finance / IT / HR

In the beginning...

- 2014: Creation of the Information Development Team
- Executive support



Literacy audit

- Literacy audit by NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency):
 - What we already did to support people with literacy and numeracy difficulties
 - What we could do better to support them
- Benefit of external expertise
- Three audit areas:
 - Policies and procedures
 - Communications
 - Staff training and development



Action plan

Main recommendations for **plain language culture**:

- We are a literacy-friendly organisation!
- Create an editorial policy and style guide
- Provide literacy awareness and training for all staff



We are a literacy-friendly organisation!

- Nailing our colours to the mast!
- The basics:
 - Looking out for possible signs of a literacy need
 - Not just about literacy needs
 - Clear spoken communication
 - Checking that people understand what we tell them



Need help?



We Can Help

Editorial Policy and Style Guide

- **Empowers** employees to write clearly, concisely and professionally

BUT!

- Link and promote wherever possible
- Pop quizzes!



Staff training

- External expertise for initial training
- Train key people across the organisation
- New staff induction
- Quarterly workshops for new and all staff
- Constructive feedback
- Regular emails with plain language tips
- Use humour 😊

Bite-sized



People digest information better when it's fed to them in small chunks.

Each sentence represents an idea. Together they build your message in the mind of your reader.

Load too much information into one sentence and your reader may not be able to process it all at once.

Active and passive voice



These famous slogans aren't quite as catchy here, are they? That's because they're in the passive voice. And very often, the passive voice sounds vague, wordy and stuffy.

It's fun to chop



You may be tempted to want to tell your reader everything they 'need' to know.

The fact is, the more you try to say, the less they'll hear.

For example:

11-word sentences: 90% of the content is remembered

35-word sentences: 10% is remembered

Perplexed by punctuation? Niggles about naming our services? Not sure about non-discriminatory language?

The [Information Development Style Guide](#) is here to the rescue!



Get the mix right

- Techniques of plain language don't change
- But in different departments, some techniques are more relevant than others



Another level of engagement



1. **Consultation.** Take time to understand the unique needs and challenges of a department
2. **Tailored plan.** Combine this with your knowledge of plain language theory and practice
3. **Workshop.** Present a relevant case for embracing plain language with a focus on practical tips and examples

Our Travel and Finance Department

- **Motivation: reduced workload**
- Overheard staff dealing with a lot of confused callers
- Offered to take a look at the forms



Travel2Care Application Form A: Assessment and Investigation



The National Cancer Strategy – *A Strategy for Cancer Control in Ireland* – was published in 2006 and recommended that all major cancer treatment be delivered in eight designated specialist cancer centres and approved satellite centre. The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) has responsibility for the implementation of the strategy and involves overseeing the transfer of all major cancer diagnostic and surgical treatments to the designated centres.

Some people who are referred to a designated cancer centre may need help with the costs of travelling to their appointment(s). This is a fact recognised by the NCCP. As a result, the NCCP has agreed to fund a Travel2Care scheme that is managed separately by the Irish Cancer Society on behalf of the NCCP.

The aim of the scheme is to help patients with some travel costs if they have genuine financial hardship or need due to travelling to a designated cancer centre or satellite centre. Travel2Care will provide **some** financial help towards the costs of public transport, such as trains, buses, private transport costs, or petrol and parking.



Travel2Care Application Form A: Travel expenses for cancer tests



Travel2Care Form A is for people who need help with the cost of travelling to their appointment(s) for cancer tests at a designated cancer centre.

The Travel2Care scheme is for patients who are experiencing genuine financial hardship and provides help towards the cost of train or bus tickets, petrol and parking.

Our Fundraising Department

- **Motivation: increased revenue**
 - A 2014 survey found that 23 percent of respondents were interested in making a **gift** to charity in their will. By contrast, only 12 percent were interested in making a **bequest gift** to charity.
- Plain language is **not** just for people with limited literacy
- How / where their message may land

Chances are you may not have your readers' full attention if they're reading your content on their phone...



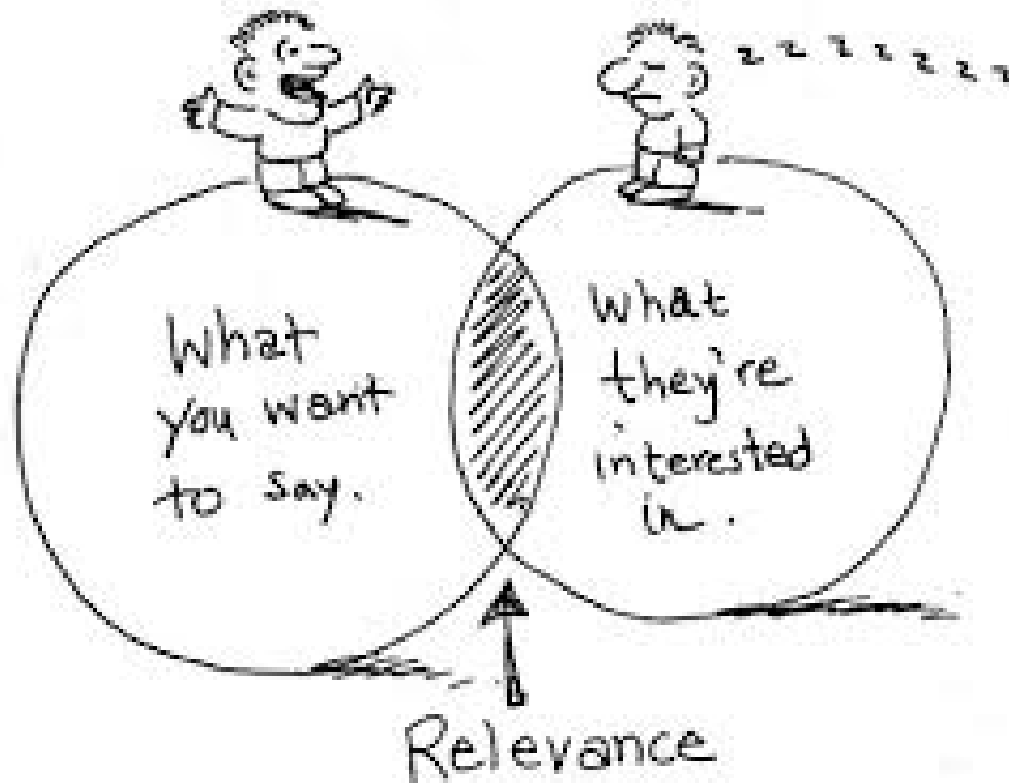
Plain language can be your best communication ally in our modern busy lives – and make your message catch your reader's attention...

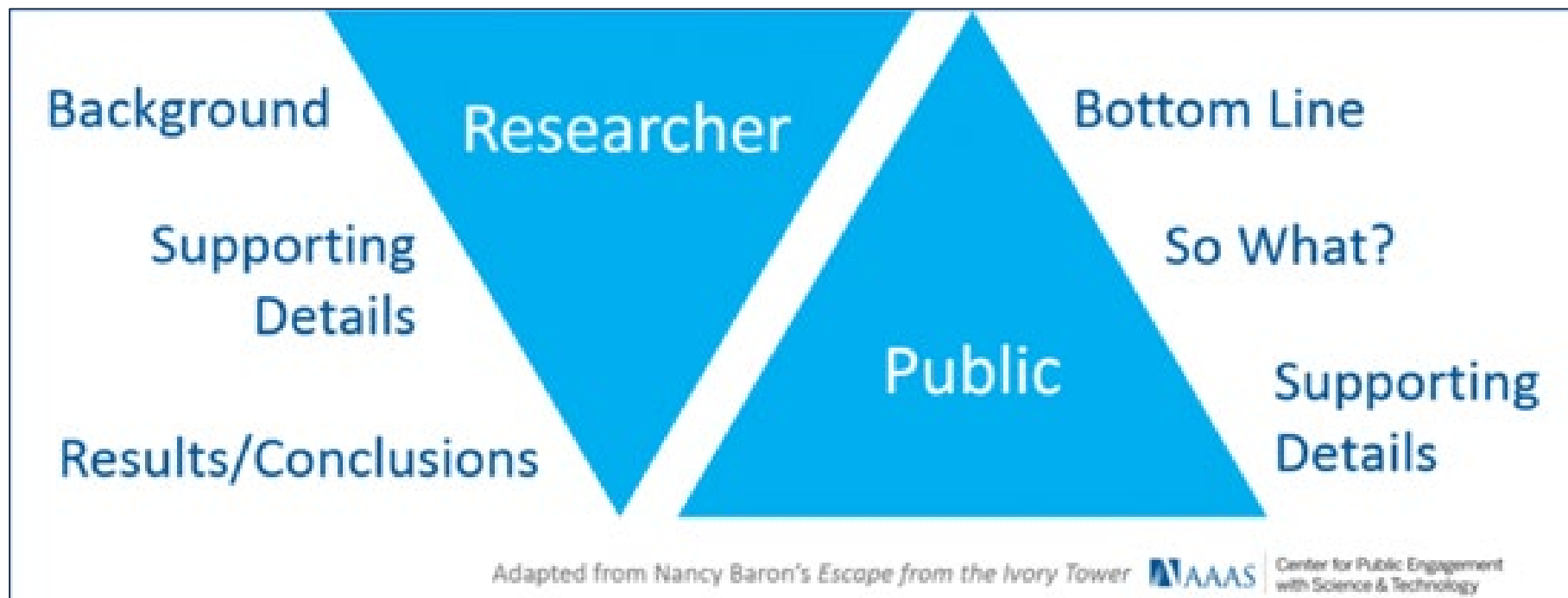


Our Research Department

- **Motivation: bringing researchers' work to a wider audience**
- Busting the 'dumbing down' myth
- Focus on how plain language will make research more visible and accessible

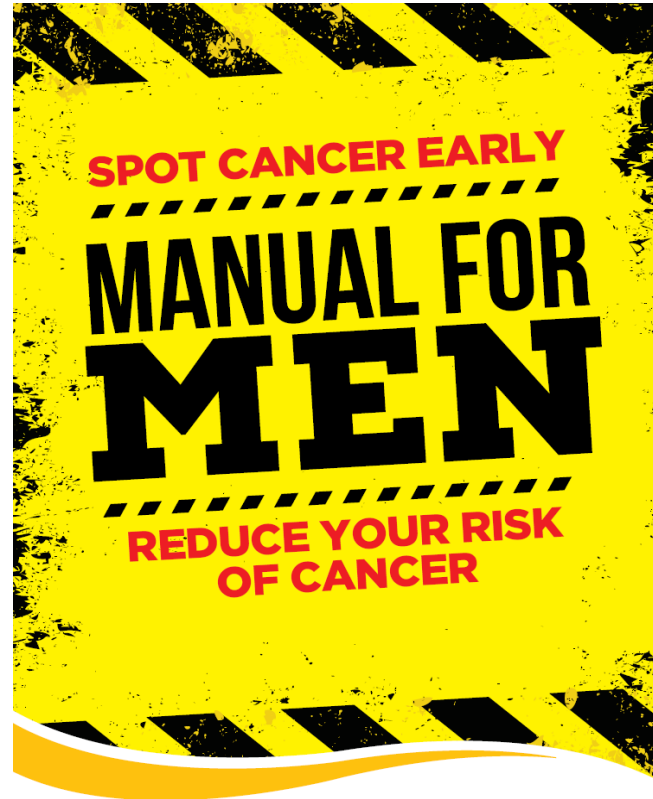
Write for your audience!





Our Cancer Prevention Department

- **Motivation: reward and recognition**
- Award-winning publication





Tara Droog

Cancer Information Editor

Irish Cancer Society

www.cancer.ie

[tdroog\(at\)irishcancer.ie](mailto:tdroog@irishcancer.ie)