NT Plain Language Legal Information Website / Hub

Editorial guidelines for choosing recommended resources

The Northern Territory Community Legal Education Network (CLE Network) is developing a Plain language legal information website for the Northern Territory. The website aims to enable Territorians to access simple, plain language information and tools to assist them to uphold their legal rights and responsibilities and connect people with service providers that can assist them. Through the development of these guidelines, our goals are to ensure:

1) the website contains the best, most straightforward information for Northern Territorians;
2) material produced for the NT is audience-focused and meets the legal information needs of Territorians on priority topics.

Plain language meets the audience’s needs by communicating clear messages so that people can best find the information they need, understand it and use it. A key feature of the project and the website is the promotion of the importance of plain language and the need for this to be embedded in public legal information produced in the Northern Territory.

Below are plain language legal information guidelines, drawn from existing work in other jurisdictions¹ adapted to the Territory’s unique demography. We use an “elements” and “outcomes” focused approach to plain language that takes into consideration both linguistic and visual characteristics when determining how well readers are able to understand and use a document. The guidelines are divided into four sections:

Each section is an important consideration in producing plain language legal information.

Good examples of plain language material in the Northern Territory include:

- ‘What’s the Law’, produced by NT Legal Aid Commission, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MKgKq_oWq&index=3&list=PL7ebY-LcWG4RuRHIHXhLypzl5NjrQkteE

For further information, please see:

1) Victoria Legal Assistance Forum's “Guidelines for Online Legal Information”;
2) Government of South Australia’s “Plain English – a good practice guide”;
5) Victoria Legal Assistance Forum’s “Plain Language Resources”.

¹ Specifically resources 1-4 above.
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<tr>
<th>Organisation:</th>
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<th>Resource link:</th>
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## CONTENT
- Indicates jurisdiction (NT or Cth)
- Has a clear purpose & intended audience
- Relevance to the audience is clearly identified
- Can be understood by its intended audience (and tested by users)² (Is accurate, clear, natural)
- Is from an authoritative body or author (e.g. has expertise in relevant area) and the author/organisation is clearly identified
- Is non-partisan / non-biased
- Is legally accurate
- Is current, and the currency (ie date of production/update) is noted
- Contains links to services and indicates at what point users should seek legal advice
- Written in clear, direct way, avoiding unnecessary detail, considering information load for audience
- Information includes examples and is clearly labelled as an example
- Uses a conversational, rather than a legalistic or formal tone

## PLAIN LANGUAGE
- Where appropriate, is set out in an active voice and avoids the passive voice
- Mainly uses single clause sentences (one sentence, one idea)
- Minimises abstract nouns (replacing with verbs/adjectives where possible) or explains them
- Words and grammar are appropriate and familiar to reader, with unfamiliar and legal words defined separate to the main text (separating ‘what to know’ from ‘what to do’)
- Avoid words with multiple meanings, or words that are not used in their primary (ordinary) sense
- Avoids figurative language, unfamiliar abbreviations and acronyms
- Places cause before effect; put ideas in logical, chronological order

## STRUCTURE
- Has a clear design
- Uses short headings to help predict what is coming up and to make the document clear
- Is ordered by: general (most important), specific, exceptions or IRAC – issue/relevance, law, application, actions
- Writing is brief, succinct: avg. sentence 10-15 words, paragraphs not more than 150 words

## DESIGN
- Font types and sizes are easy to read (Recommend 10-12 pt sans serif typeface)
- Uses ‘bite, snack, meal’ approach. Most important points are repeated / separated from main text
- Avoids blocks of text
- Includes relevant diagrams, tables, charts, maps, illustrations, and text boxes to explain/break up text (e.g. charge sheets, DVOs, court room layout). Captions are supplied for all graphics
- Layout is clear/inviting, drawing attention to important parts, easy to read, containing white space
- The resource is available in multiple formats e.g. html, text, pdf (WCAG-accessible)

## COMMENTS:

² For a good checklist to evaluate your resource, see Step 5 at http://centerforplainlanguage.org/5-steps-to-plain-language/.