Through Crisis and Complexity: Using Plain Language to Enhance Trauma-Informed Practices

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Activating Change

Training Objectives

- Define plain language and its importance in providing services.
- Evaluate printed materials for plain language.
- Apply plain language principles to create accessible print materials.

Poll

How much experience do you have using plain language?

→A lot of experience.

→A little experience.

→No experience.

Language and Trauma

Discussion

→ What is language?

→ What does language mean to you?

Discussion (2)

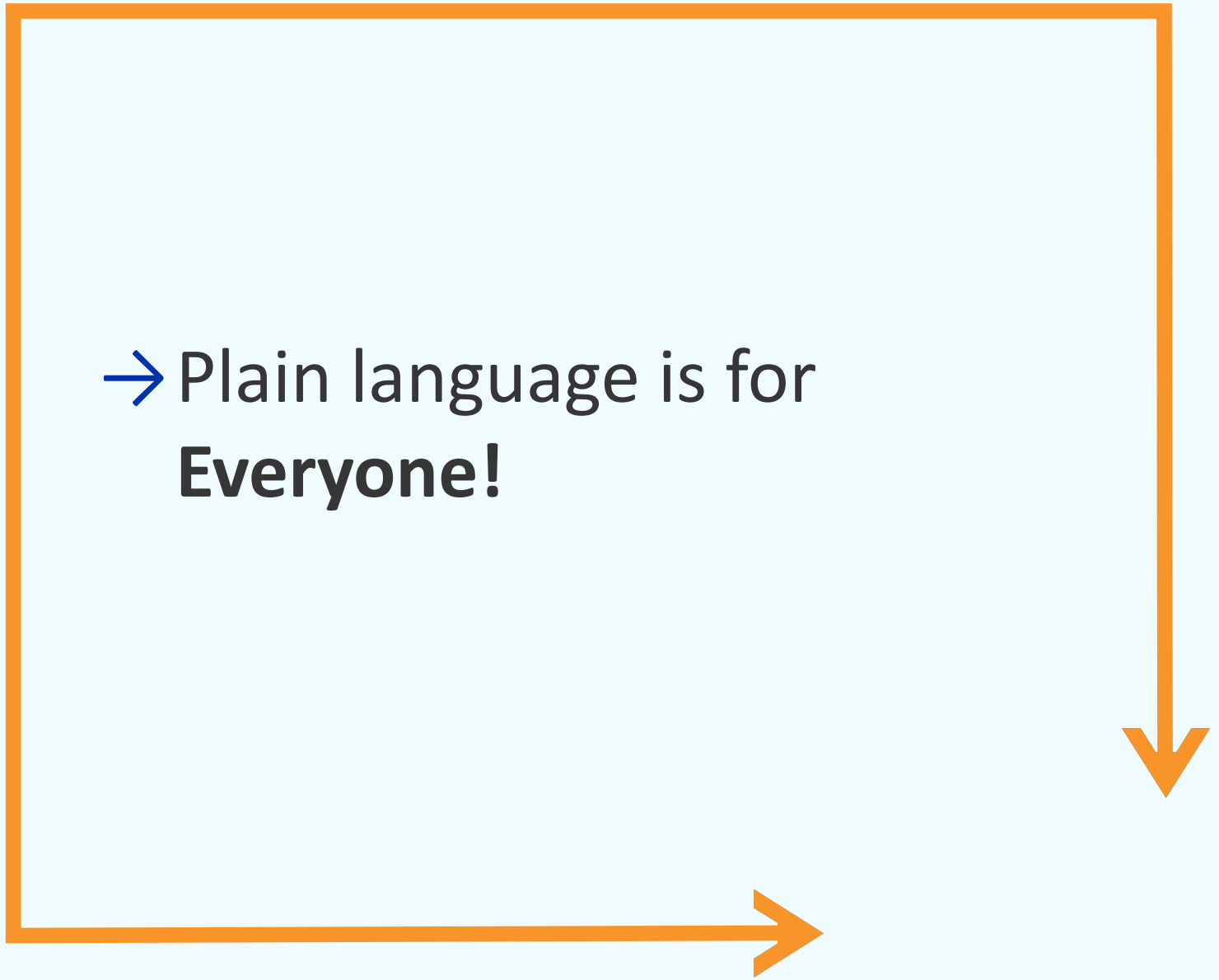
→ How does stress impact your relationship with language?

→ How does trauma impact language?

What is Plain Language, and Who is it For?

Who is Plain Language For?

→ Plain language is for **Everyone!**



What is Plain Language?

→ Communication that your audience can understand quickly, easily, and completely.

Can Your Audience…

→ Find what they need.

→ Understand what they find the first time.

→ Use what they find to meet their needs.

Plain Language is NOT

→ Condescending/ infantilizing

→ Boring

→ Only for some people

→ Grade level

Plain Language and Trauma-Informed Services

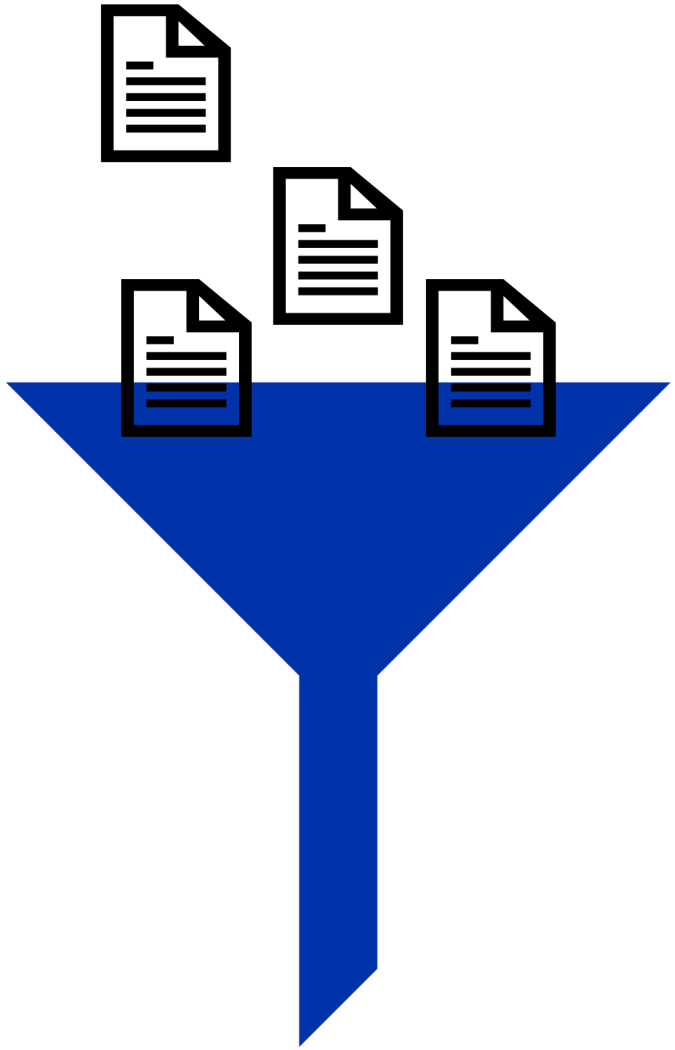
- → Safety
- → Trustworthiness and transparency
- → Peer support
- → Collaboration
- → Empowerment, voice, and choice
- → Cultural, historical, and gender issues

Elements of Plain Language

Features of Plain Language

- → Short sentences, 1 idea per sentence.
- → No jargon or figures of speech.
- → No unnecessary words or phrases.
- → Contractions (“isn’t” instead of “is not.”)
- → Explain acronyms.
- → Conversational; informal, friendly tones.
- → Engage the audience by talking to them (using “You”, “We”, and “I.”)
- → Use tables when sharing “If, Then” statements.

Getting To What is Important



Information readers can understand quickly, easily, and completely.

Sharing the Important Stuff First

- → It is more accessible for all survivors when you organize information logically.
- → “Call [hotline] to speak with a counselor now.”
- → “We are located at [address] in [city/neighborhood].”
- → “Do you need help?”
- → “You are not alone.”
- → “All of our services are free and confidential.”
- → “We are here for you. Let’s talk.”
- → “Looking for support? We can help.”
- → “You can call our hotline anytime, 24 hours a day.”

Write To and For Your Audience

- → Survivors are a broad, diverse group.
- → Survivors can be part of any audience.
- → What do survivors already know? What is familiar to my audience?
- → What do survivors need to know?
- → What questions would you anticipate from survivors who read your information?

Content and Organization

→ Clearly distinguish “need to know” information from “nice to know” information.

→ Organize information to serve the reader’s needs.

Tone

- → Be specific and comprehensive. Do not assume people’s knowledge or that they know what to do.
- → Speak directly to the reader, using “you” and “your.”

Tone (2)

More Understandable

We believe that to accomplish our goals, we must provide you opportunities for feedback. We offer you written surveys and encourage open discussion and positive conflict resolution. However, there may be times when our differences cannot be resolved through these methods. This document explains a procedure you can use to address those differences.

Less Understandable

We believe that to accomplish our goals, we must provide forums for those we serve to give feedback. We offer written surveys and encourage open discussion and positive conflict resolution. However, there may be times when differences cannot be resolved through such methods. This document explains a procedure that can be used to address those differences.

Conveying One Idea Per Sentence

Original

While the Program values the confidentiality of your information, should it become necessary to make a mandatory report of abuse you disclose to us to the authorities, the Program will notify you and invite you to be part of the process, but will proceed without your permission.

Strategy: Split and Disconnect

The program values the confidentiality of your information. However, if you disclose abuse to us, we may need to report it to the authorities. We will let you know when we need to make a report. We encourage you to be a part of that process with us. But, because of the law, we will need to make a report even if you decide not to participate.

Using Tables

After sexual assault:

If:	Then:
you want to talk to an advocate, anonymously	you can call our 24-hour hotline to speak to a counselor.
you go to the hospital to get evidence collected	we can send a medical advocate to support you.

Using Lists

- → Lists help the reader focus on the important material.
- → Focus on clarity and readability.
- → Use left justification.
- → Use no more than two or thre levels.

Be flexible.

People with disabilities and Deaf people may need to meet at a particular time of day, more frequently, or for longer or shorter durations.

- **Mobility:** later meeting times or more time to work around a paratransit schedule, which can be irregular
- **Vision:** earlier meeting times because it can be easier to see more clearly and strain less in the beginning of the day
- **d/Deaf, hard of hearing**, or **DeafBlind:** allow more time for sign language interpretation, captions, or Video Relay
- **Comprehension** and **mental processing:** shorter and more meetings to process information

Offer to send reminders.

- Victims with disabilities that impact **attention** and **memory** may request a reminder about the meeting.

Ask about communication preferences.

Victims may have communication preferences for scheduling, reminders, or following up about a meeting.

- **Mental health:** communicate by text or email instead of phone because of anxiety or trauma
- **d/Deaf, hard of hearing**, or **DeafBlind:** communicate over text or email rather than by phone

Using Active Voice

Passive Voice

Domestic violence and sexual assault occur at epidemic rates against people with disabilities. A safe place to disclose these experiences and be linked to victim services is critical. Thus, screening for domestic and sexual violence will take place in a safe and confidential setting for all clients.

Active Voice

People with disabilities experience domestic violence and sexual assault at epidemic rates. Survivors need a safe place to disclose these experiences and to be linked to victim services. Thus, the Agency will screen all clients for domestic violence and sexual assault in a safe and confidential setting.

Words in Plain Language

Common Words/Phrases	Plain Language
> It is often the case that	> Often
> As a consequence of	> Because
> During the time that	> While
> In close proximity	> Near
> Utilize	> Use
> Subsequent	> After

Jargon and Acronyms

- Jargon and acronyms are like code language that we use to communicate with other people who work in our organization.
- It can be exclusionary for others outside of our organizations.

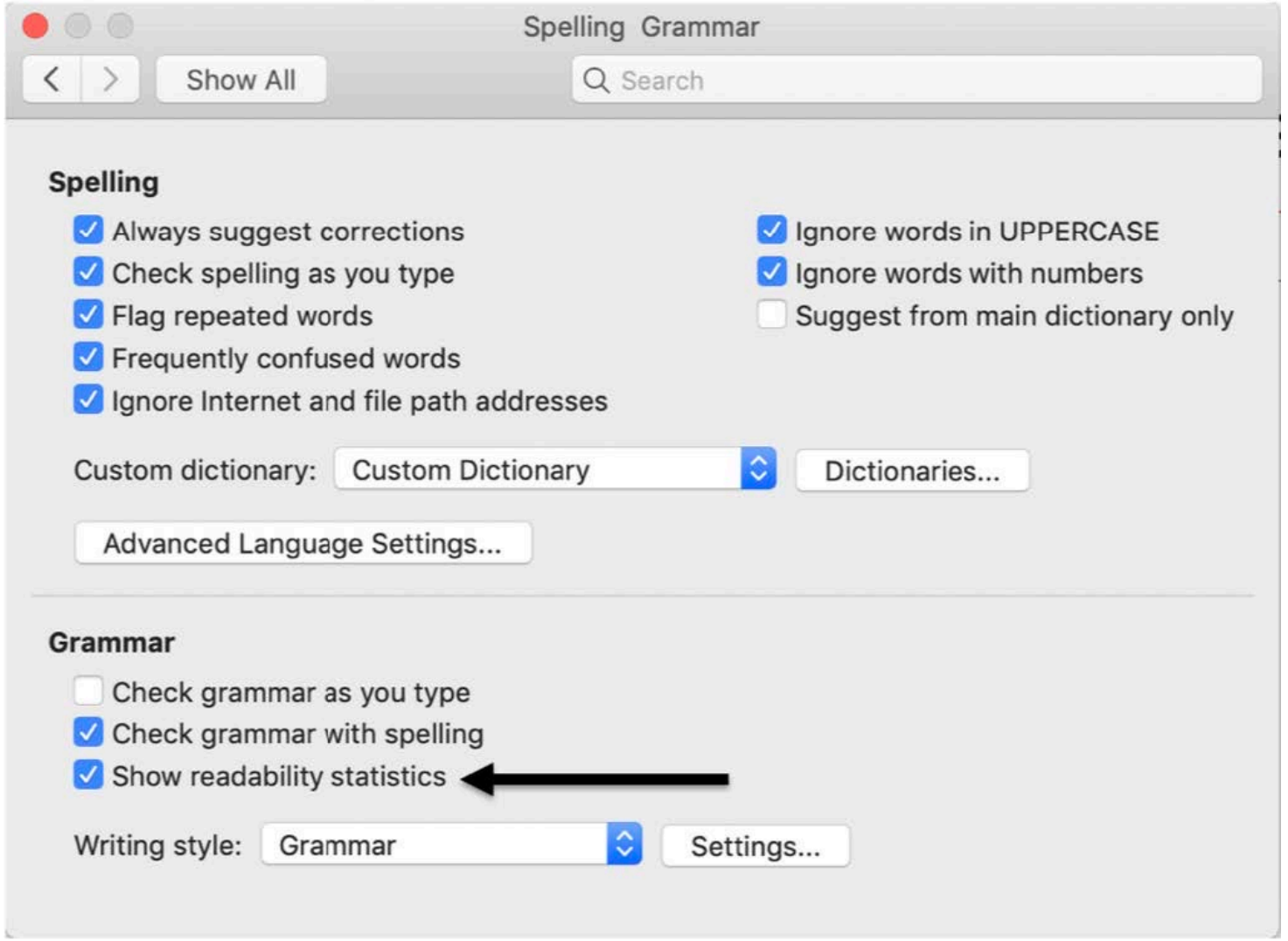
Discussion

→ What kind of jargon have you experienced working at a non-profit?

Checking Your Printed Materials For Plain Language

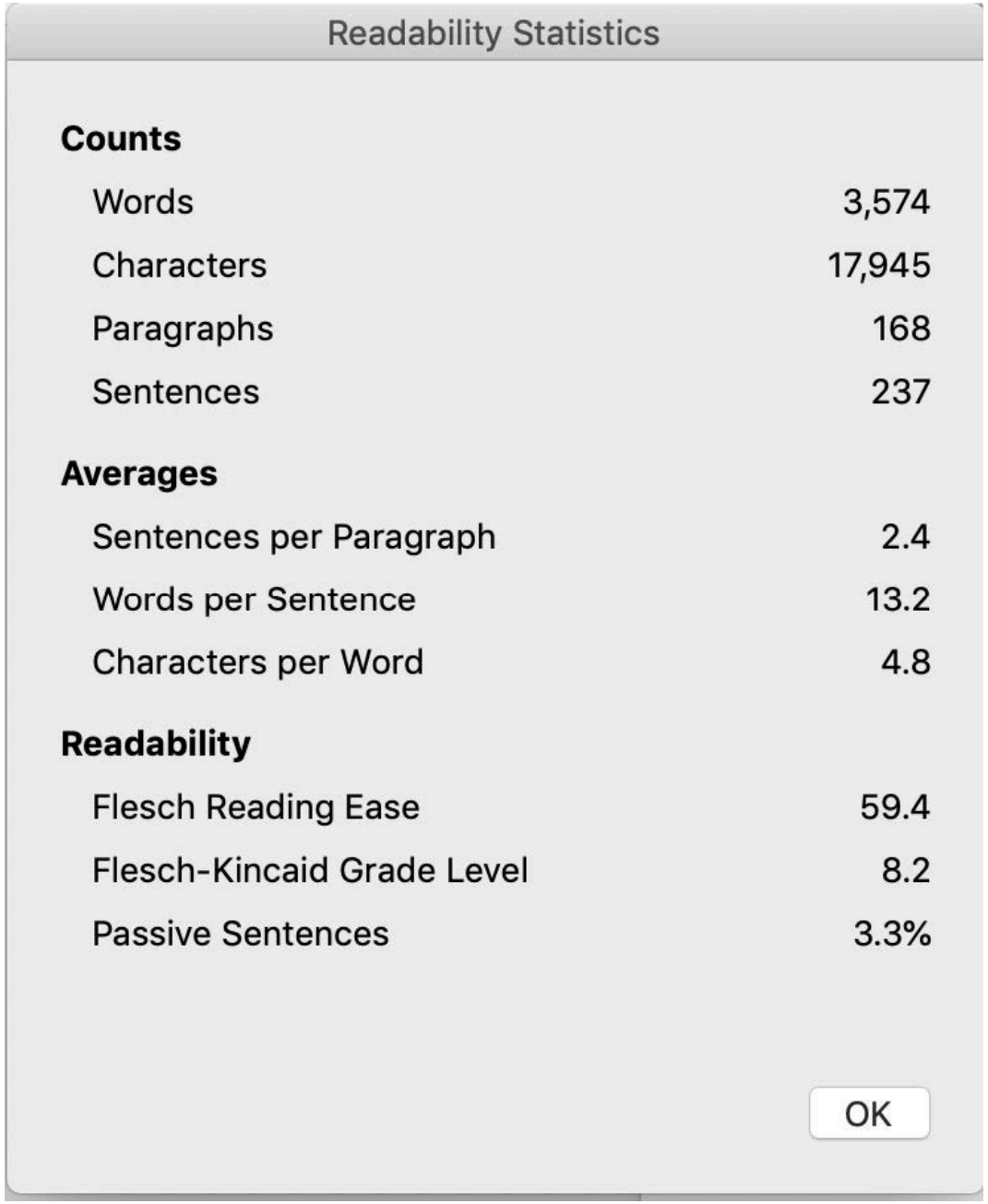
Microsoft Word Readability Tool

→ Check the box under Grammar that says, "**Show Readability Statistics**"



Microsoft Word Readability Tool (2)

→ Go to the Tools menu and select Spelling and Grammar from the list.



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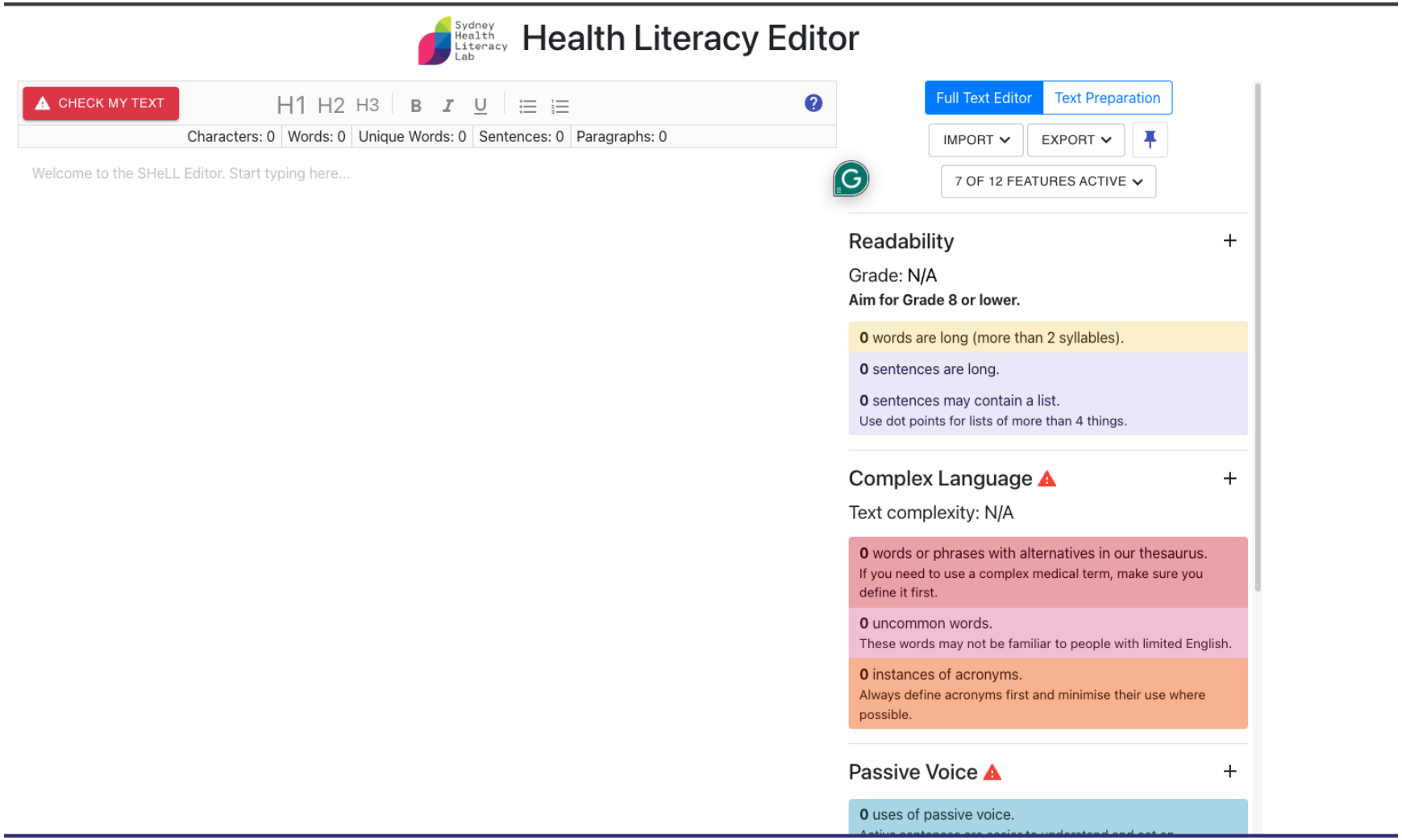
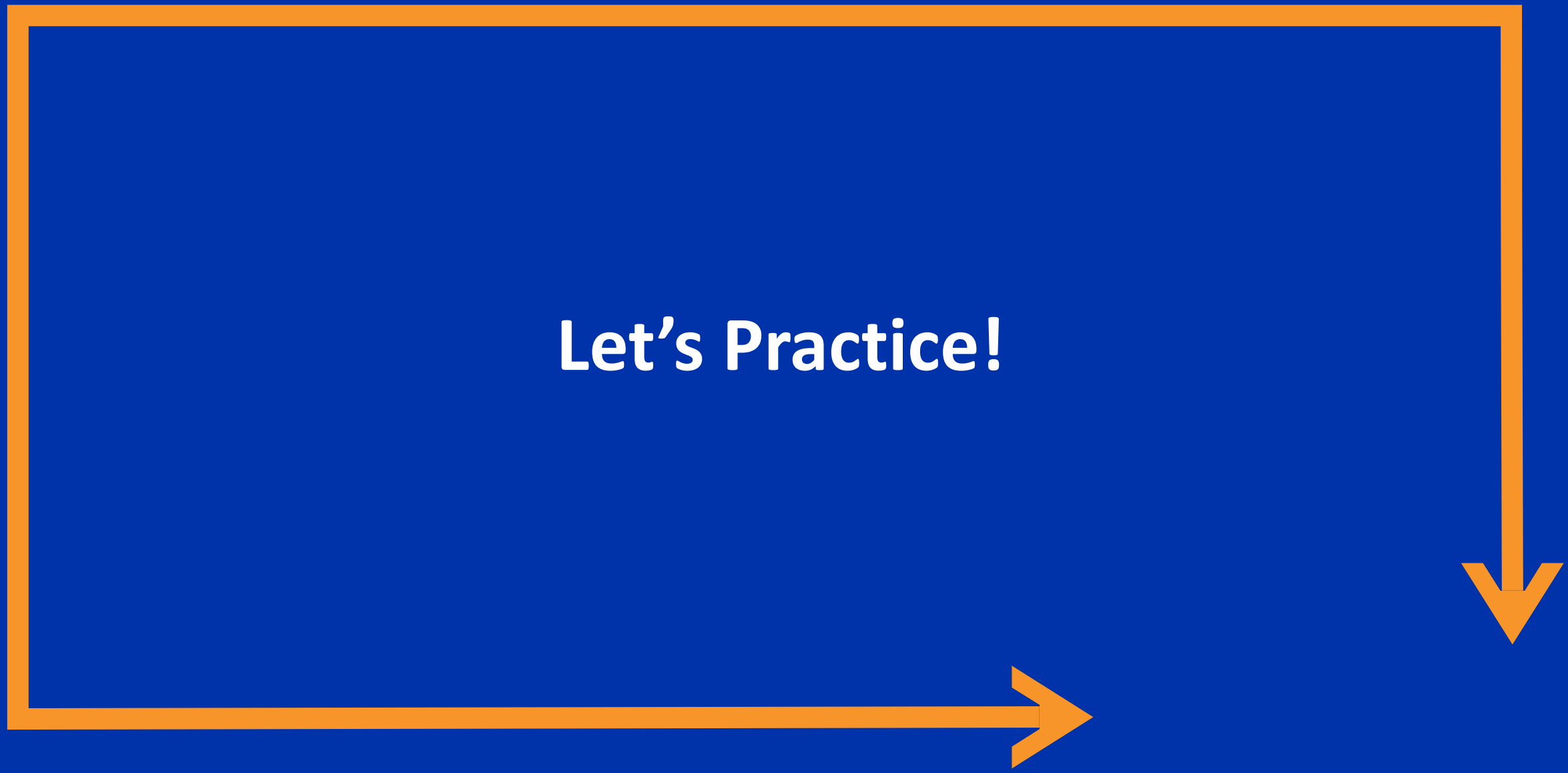


Build Partnerships

- Identify disability service providers and self advocate groups in your community
  - Resource: Supporting Crime Victims with Disabilities from Crisis to Healing: https://www.endabusepwd.org/resource/supporting-crime-victims-with-disabilities-online-training-toolkit/
- Develop collaborations
  - Resource: Forging New Collaborations: https://www.endabusepwd.org/resource/forging-new-collaborations/

Let’s Practice!



Plain Language in Action

Not Plain:

"People with an intellectual disability of any kind have an age-adjusted rate of rape or sexual assault that is more than seven times the rate for people without disabilities."

Plain:

People with intellectual disabilities are 7 times more likely to experience sexual assault than people without disabilities.

Plain Language in Action (2)

Create a Plain Language Alternative

Spring is a truly delightful season that brings a sense of rejuvenation and expansion. As the weather begins to warm up, the days get longer, and the world around us comes back to life, we're reminded of the beauty of transformation. One of the most notable features of spring is the blooming of flowers and trees, adding a vibrant and colorful touch to the scenery. The sweet fragrances of cherry blossoms, daffodils, and tulips are visible everywhere and are a lovely sight after the long and dreary winter.

Plain Language in Action (3)

Create a plain language alternative

The foundation of trustworthiness and transparency within an organization is built upon a culture of meaningful connections in relationships. Every interaction holds significance, from the simple warmth of a smile during a greeting to the handling of conflicts in a safe and respectful manner. Conflict is a natural aspect of human relationships, but the manner in which it is managed can have a profound impact, potentially leading to trauma. Many individuals have encountered distressing experiences in educational and professional environments as a result. It is imperative to establish robust relationships that possess the resilience to navigate conflicts in a transformative manner.

Plain Language in Action (4)

- If you are able, select one of your organization's printed materials.
  - Brochure, flyer, intake materials, or announcement.
- Review your materials for plain language.
  - What could be changed?

Reminder, your audience should…

→ Find what they need.

→ Understand what they find the first time.

→ Use what they find to meet their needs.

Questions?

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