# TRANSLATING COMPLEX PROJECTS INTO COMMON LANGUAGE

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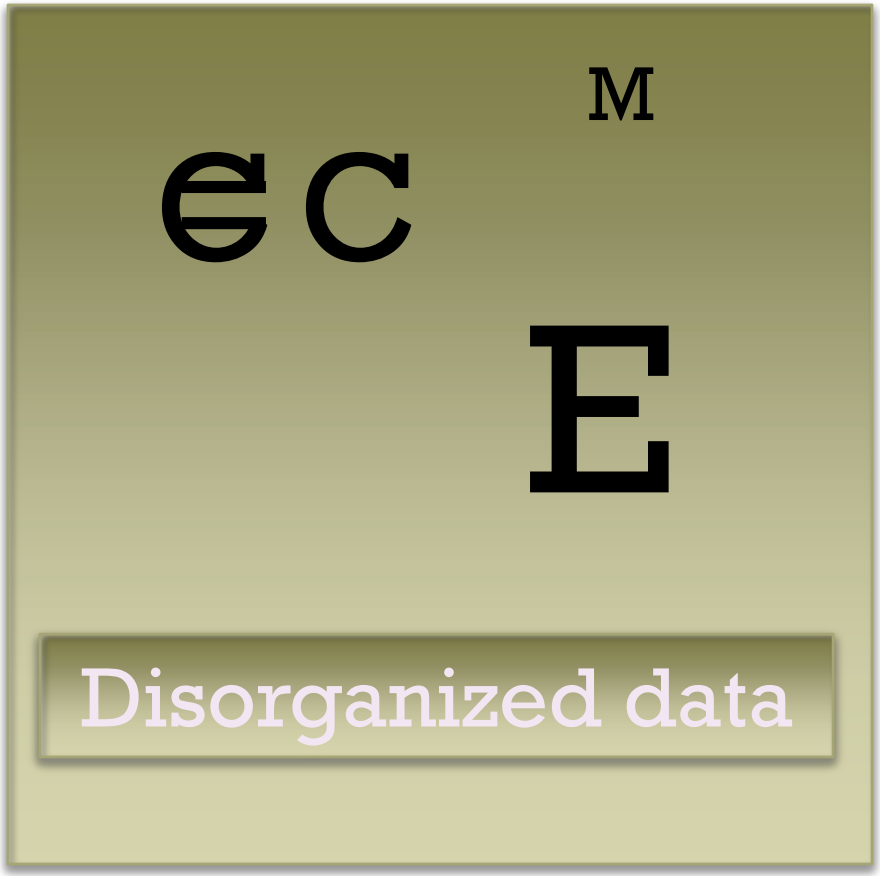
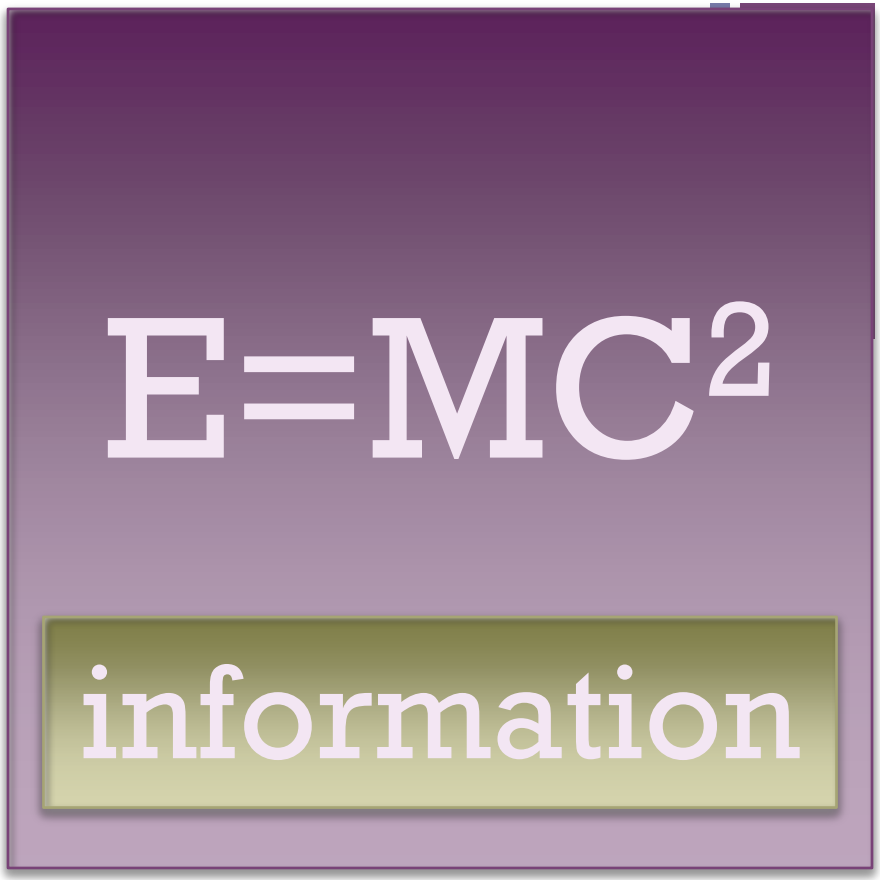



Simplification = Organization & Classification

Data (Organized + Classified) = Information

Methods: Plain Talk, Narrative, Data Visualization

# What is Simplification? Simplification is not dumbing down.

Dumb down: to lower the level of difficulty and the intellectual content of (as a textbook); *also* : to lower the general level of intelligence in <the *dumbing down* of society>

- Dumbing down places the blame on the reader for not understanding the information

- Simplification places the burden on the writer to communicate effectively

http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dumb%20down

# Why Simplification?

## Solves problems associated with accountability and efficiency

2010 AGA (Association of Govt. Accountants) Survey:

- Dissatisfied citizens
- Reporting is too technical
- Distrust in government

Citizens believe they are entitled to transparent financial info and believe governments have an obligation to provide info

Washington Plain Talk: Improves compliance and call times.

http://www.agacgfm.org/AGA/Documents/Research/WhatCitizensWant_LeadershipHandbook-1-.pdf

# Successful person credibility time.

"Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains."

-Steve Jobs

http://www.businessweek.com/stories/1998-05-24/back-to-the-future-at-apple

# PROBLEM #1: Giving Instructions

## Simplifying Writing with Plain Talk Guidelines

- November 2005 – Washington State - Executive Order 05-03
- Required communications to be "written and designed so they could be easily understood."
- Plain Talk programs have resulted in measurable improvements:
  - Reduced phone calls and questions from customers;
  - Fewer complaints about difficulties of doing business with state
  - Improved compliance with regulations

http://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/GovernorGregoire/priorities/plaintalk/ptguidelines/default.asp

# PROBLEM #1: Giving Instructions

## Simplifying Writing with Plain Talk Guidelines

- Understand customer needs
  - Interview staff who work directly with customers for advice
  - Speak to customers
  - Readability Tests (Flesch-Kincaid, Gunning Fog Index)
  - Test the document out before final print
- Include only relevant information (classification = hierarchy)
  - Stick to the basics by including only key information
  - Direct customer to primary source of info online for more info
- Speak to the customer in their words
  - Use the plain word instead of the formal word

# PROBLEM #1: Giving Instructions

## Simplifying Writing with Plain Talk Guidelines

- Use the Active Voice and Personal Pronouns
  - Begin sentence with the subject.
  - Use personal pronouns.
  - Ex. – The office is opened by Planning staff… (passive) vs. We open the office… (active).
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short
  - Remove unnecessary words.
  - Make one point per paragraph.
  - Layer information. Important information first.

# PROBLEM #1: Giving Instructions

## Simplifying Writing with Plain Talk Guidelines

- Design Clear Pages
  - One or two fonts at 12 point.
  - Boldface headlines.
  - Use boldface and italics for important info sparingly.
  - Stick to one bullet style.
  - Use numbers for directions and outlines.
  - Create white space.
  - Justify your text.

# Case Study #1
# Website Language

- "The permit process is used by the County to examine changes property owners wish to make on or to their property, to provide feedback to the property owner, to ensure that the changes are consistent with neighborhood, community, and County goals, and to protect the interests of the property owner and all other affected parties."

# Case Study #1
# Website Language

- "The permit process (PASSIVE) is used by the County (PERSONAL PRONOUN) to examine changes property owners (PERSONAL PRONOUN) wish to make on or to their property, to provide feedback to the property owner (REDUNDANT), to ensure that the changes are consistent (CUSTOMER WORDS) with neighborhood, community, and County goals (CUSTOMER WORDS), and to protect the interests of the property owner and all other affected parties. (LENGTHY SINGLE SENTENCE. MULTIPLE POINTS.)"
- Flesch-Kincaid: 9.5 (bad). 56 words.

# Case Study #1
# Website Language

- "We use the permit process to examine the changes you wish to make to your property. We provide feedback and ensure your changes fit with the neighborhood, community, and County goals. We want to protect your interests as well as your neighbor's interests."
- Flesch-Kincaid score: 68 (good) with 42 words (previous: 9.5/56)
- 20% fewer words
- Three times as many sentences

# Problem #2: Data into Information

## Simplifying Processes & Programs through Visualization

- Information design uses photos, symbols, colors, and words to communicate ideas, illustrate information, and express relationships visually.
  - Visualization makes messages **clear**:
    - Make complex information easier to understand
  - Visualization makes messages **compelling**:
    - Visuals grab attention
  - Visualization makes messages **convincing**:
    - Pictures are worth a thousand words and are therefore more efficient when making an argument

http://archive.tacticaltech.org/infodesign.html

# Problem #2: Data into Information What Are Infographics?

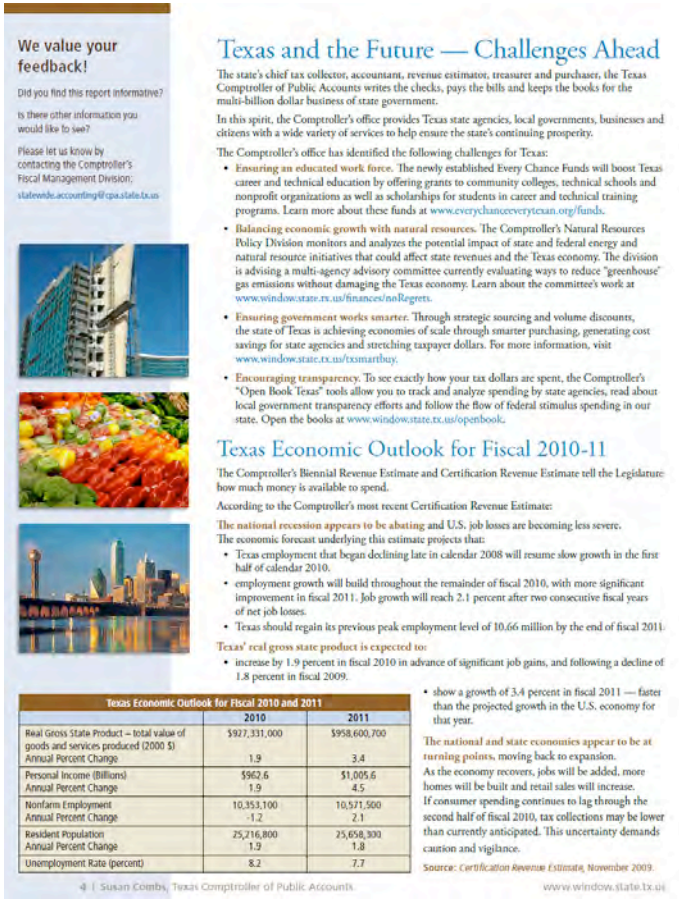
- Infographic:
  - A visualization of data or ideas that tries to convey complex information to an audience in a manner that can be quickly consumed and easily understood.
- The Science of Visualization
  - 50% of the brain is dedicated to visual functions.
  - The brain processes images & symbols quicker than words and sentences.
- Using infographics makes it physically easier for the reader to comprehend your message.

Definition: The Power of Infographics. Mark Smiciklas. Pearson Education, Inc. 2012.
Visual Functions: http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/1996/visualprocessing.html
Processing Images: bit.ly/s3lseP

Trees spaced to
reduce fire spread
Trees trimmed
at least 10′
from chimney
50′
50′
Lower tree limbs
removed to reduce
"fire ladder"
Space plants and shrubs
to prevent fire from spreading

# Visualization
# Citizen-Centric Reporting

- Association of Government Accountants
- Focus on organizing financial data
- Maximum four pages
- No overly bright or clashing colors
- Limited color palette (2-3)
- Use of white space
- Include pictures from community
- Seal and logo on front
- Charts and graphs whenever possible



We value your feedback!

Did you find this report informative?

Is there other information you would like to see?

Please let us know by contacting the Comptroller's Fiscal Management Division:

statewide.accounting@cpa.state.tx.us

## Texas and the Future — Challenges Ahead

The state's chief tax collector, accountant, revenue estimator, treasurer and purchaser, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts writes the checks, pays the bills and keeps the books for the multi-billion dollar business of state government.

In this spirit, the Comptroller's office provides Texas state agencies, local governments, businesses and citizens with a wide variety of services to help ensure the state's continuing prosperity.

The Comptroller's office has identified the following challenges for Texas:

- **Ensuring an educated work force.** The newly established Every Chance Funds will boost Texas career and technical education by offering grants to community colleges, technical schools and nonprofit organizations as well as scholarships for students in career and technical training programs. Learn more about these funds at www.everychanceeverytexan.org/funds.
- **Balancing economic growth with natural resources.** The Comptroller's Natural Resources Policy Division monitors and analyzes the potential impact of state and federal energy and natural resource initiatives that could affect state revenues and the Texas economy. The division is advising a multi-agency advisory committee currently evaluating ways to reduce "greenhouse" gas emissions without damaging the Texas economy. Learn about the committee's work at www.window.state.tx.us/finances/noRegrets.
- **Ensuring government works smarter.** Through strategic sourcing and volume discounts, the state of Texas is achieving economies of scale through smarter purchasing, generating cost savings for state agencies and stretching taxpayer dollars. For more information, visit www.window.state.tx.us/txsmartbuy.
- **Encouraging transparency.** To see exactly how your tax dollars are spent, the Comptroller's "Open Book Texas" tools allow you to track and analyze spending by state agencies, read about local government transparency efforts and follow the flow of federal stimulus spending in our state. Open the books at www.window.state.tx.us/openbook.

## Texas Economic Outlook for Fiscal 2010-11

The Comptroller's Biennial Revenue Estimate and Certification Revenue Estimate tell the Legislature how much money is available to spend.

According to the Comptroller's most recent Certification Revenue Estimate:

**The national recession appears to be abating** and U.S. job losses are becoming less severe. The economic forecast underlying this estimate projects that:

- Texas employment that began declining late in calendar 2008 will resume slow growth in the first half of calendar 2010.
- employment growth will build throughout the remainder of fiscal 2010, with more significant improvement in fiscal 2011. Job growth will reach 2.1 percent after two consecutive fiscal years of net job losses.
- Texas should regain its previous peak employment level of 10.66 million by the end of fiscal 2011.

**Texas' real gross state product is expected to:**

- increase by 1.9 percent in fiscal 2010 in advance of significant job gains, and following a decline of 1.8 percent in fiscal 2009.
- show a growth of 3.4 percent in fiscal 2011 — faster than the projected growth in the U.S. economy for that year.

**The national and state economies appear to be at turning points,** moving back to expansion. As the economy recovers, jobs will be added, more homes will be built and retail sales will increase. If consumer spending continues to lag through the second half of fiscal 2010, tax collections may be lower than currently anticipated. This uncertainty demands caution and vigilance.

Source: *Certification Revenue Estimate*, November 2009.

**Texas Economic Outlook for Fiscal 2010 and 2011**

| | 2010 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|
| Real Gross State Product – total value of goods and services produced (2000 $) | $927,331,000 | $958,600,700 |
| Annual Percent Change | 1.9 | 3.4 |
| Personal Income (Billions) | $962.6 | $1,005.6 |
| Annual Percent Change | 1.9 | 4.5 |
| Nonfarm Employment | 10,353,100 | 10,571,500 |
| Annual Percent Change | -1.2 | 2.1 |
| Resident Population | 25,216,800 | 25,658,300 |
| Annual Percent Change | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| Unemployment Rate (percent) | 8.2 | 7.7 |

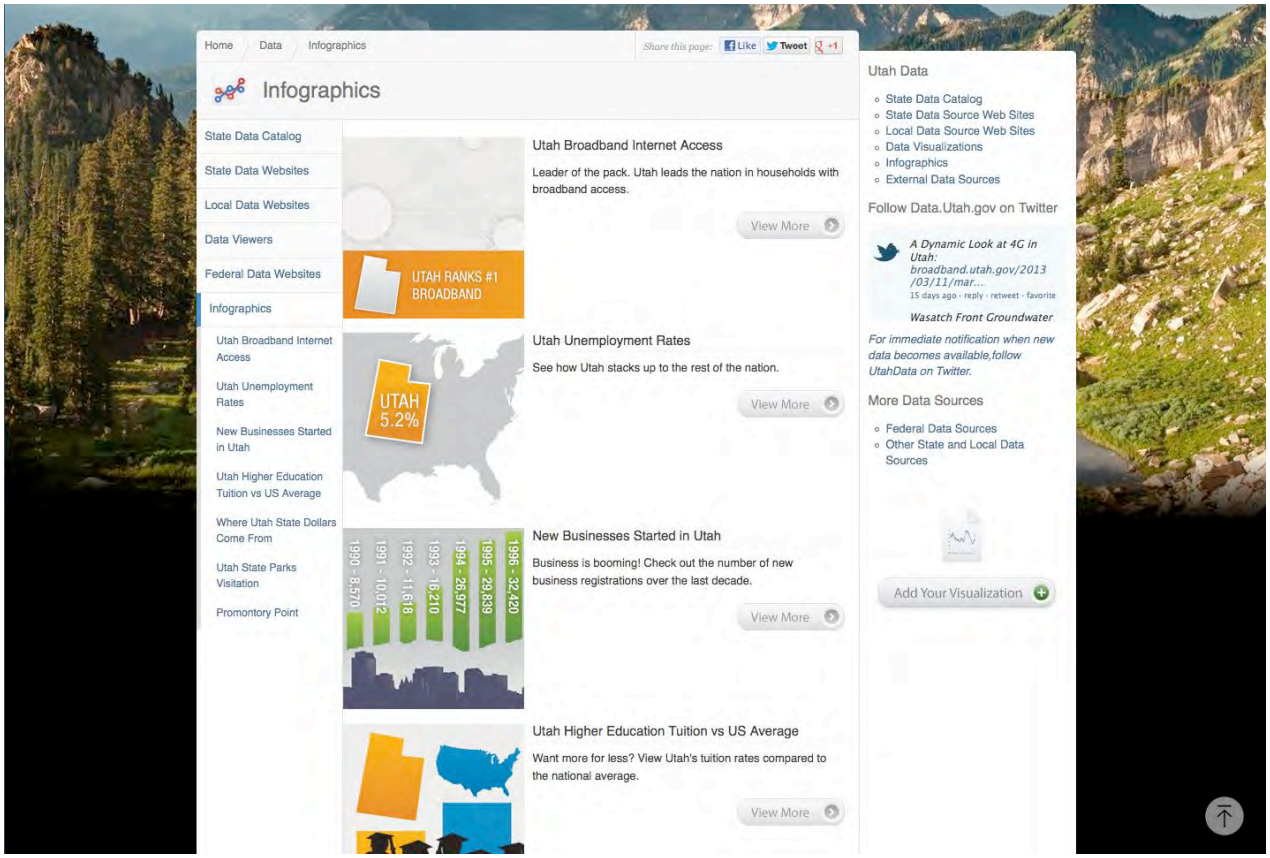


http://www.agacgfm.org/citizen/

# Visualization
# SB County 2012-13 Budget Video

# Case Study #2
# Utah.gov

- http://www.utah.gov/data/infographics/



Home > Data > Infographics

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# Infographics

- State Data Catalog
- State Data Websites
- Local Data Websites
- Data Viewers
- Federal Data Websites
- Infographics
  - Utah Broadband Internet Access
  - Utah Unemployment Rates
  - New Businesses Started in Utah
  - Utah Higher Education Tuition vs US Average
  - Where Utah State Dollars Come From
  - Utah State Parks Visitation
  - Promontory Point

## Utah Broadband Internet Access

Leader of the pack. Utah leads the nation in households with broadband access.

View More

## Utah Unemployment Rates

See how Utah stacks up to the rest of the nation.

View More

## New Businesses Started in Utah

Business is booming! Check out the number of new business registrations over the last decade.

View More

## Utah Higher Education Tuition vs US Average

Want more for less? View Utah's tuition rates compared to the national average.

View More

## Utah Data

- State Data Catalog
- State Data Source Web Sites
- Local Data Source Web Sites
- Data Visualizations
- Infographics
- External Data Sources

## Follow Data.Utah.gov on Twitter

*A Dynamic Look at 4G in Utah: broadband.utah.gov/2013/03/11/mar...*
15 days ago · reply · retweet · favorite

*Wasatch Front Groundwater*

*For immediate notification when new data becomes available, follow UtahData on Twitter.*

## More Data Sources

- Federal Data Sources
- Other State and Local Data Sources

Add Your Visualization

# Problem #3: Promoting Values

## Simplifying Processes & Programs through Narrative

- Narrative = fancy word for story.
  - Expresses goals and values (e.g., don't drive drunk)
  - Provides retention of context/Helps you remember values
  - Indirect method of communication/avoids controversy
- You can explain and encourage government values through story and people will spread those values by spreading that story
- Presentation should reflect the viewer's values and not the government's values (fear of safety vs. fear of controversy)
- Stories simplify complex processes by organizing the information and making it easier to recall

http://tap.sagepub.com/content/6/1/47.abstract

# Case Study #3: Narrative

- Case Study: UK Texting While Driving ad
  - Challenges students to think about texting, driving, and personal safety
  - Car crash aftermath simulation tells story that promotes law enforcement values
  - Further viewing: Every 15 Minutes

Every 15 Minutes: http://www.chp.ca.gov/programs/fifteen.html
UK Texting While Driving: http://youtu.be/R0LCmStIw9E

# Narrative:
# Stages of Narrative

- Exposition = Setting
  - Students driving
- Inciting Incident = Situation Changes
  - Student texts while driving
- Rising Action = tension between the characters
  - Car veers into the other lane against traffic
- Climax = point of no return. Incident will be resolved for the better or worse. The outcome of the climax dictates the moral.
  - Car accident
- Resolution = The moral of the story
  - Don't text and drive

# Case Study #4
# Press Release

- Adding Plain Language, Narrative, and Visualization to simplify message.

- Problems:
  - Can't find Op-Ed from home site. (home>DA's Office>Press>In The News.)
  - Lengthy – 5 pages. Op-Ed = 2 pages. Remaining info = 3 pages.
  - Scanned instead of typed. Difficult to share or search for info.
  - Flesch-Kinkaid Reading Ease: 33.3/Grade Level: 12.0
  - Op-ed says there is information on the DA website. Where?
  - Op-ed about abuse should give information on who to contact regarding elder abuse.

http://www.countyofsb.org/da/msm_county/documents/OP_ED_MANDATED%20REPORTERS_op_ed.pdf

# Case Study #4
# Press Release - Language

- Problem sentence examples:
  - Vulnerable victims are often victimized because they are vulnerable to repeated acts of assault, abuse or neglect.
  - The overall goal of our mandated reporting laws is to channel information regarding suspected assaultive, abusive, or neglectful conduct to those agencies that are both trained and adequately equipped to conduct the necessary investigations.

# Case Study #4
# Press Release - Language

- Problem sentence examples:
  - Vulnerable victims are often victimized (TENSE – can't be a victim prior to being victimized) because they are vulnerable (REPETITIVE) to repeated acts of assault, abuse or neglect.
  - The overall (EXCESSIVE) goal of our mandated reporting laws is to channel information (TOO ACADEMIC) regarding suspected assaultive, abusive, or neglectful (TWO WORDS-SAME MEANING) conduct (LEGALESE) to those agencies that are both (EXCESSIVE) trained and adequately (EXCESSIVE) equipped to conduct the necessary (EXCESSIVE) investigations.

# Case Study #4
# Press Release - Language

- Problem sentence examples:
  - Children and the elderly are often victimized because they have little defense against those who abuse or neglect them.
    - Before: 25.3 reading ease
    - After: 49.5 reading ease
  - The goal of our mandated reporting laws is to share information with agencies that are trained and equipped to conduct investigations.
    - Before: .6 reading ease.
    - After: 40.4 reading ease.

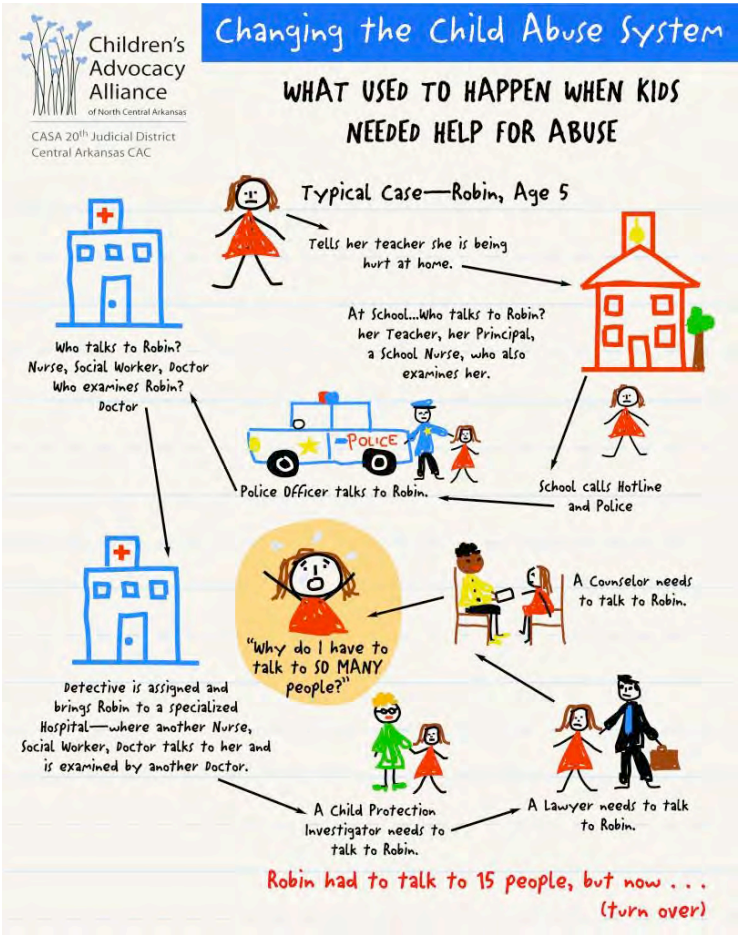
# Case Study #4
# Press Release - Narrative

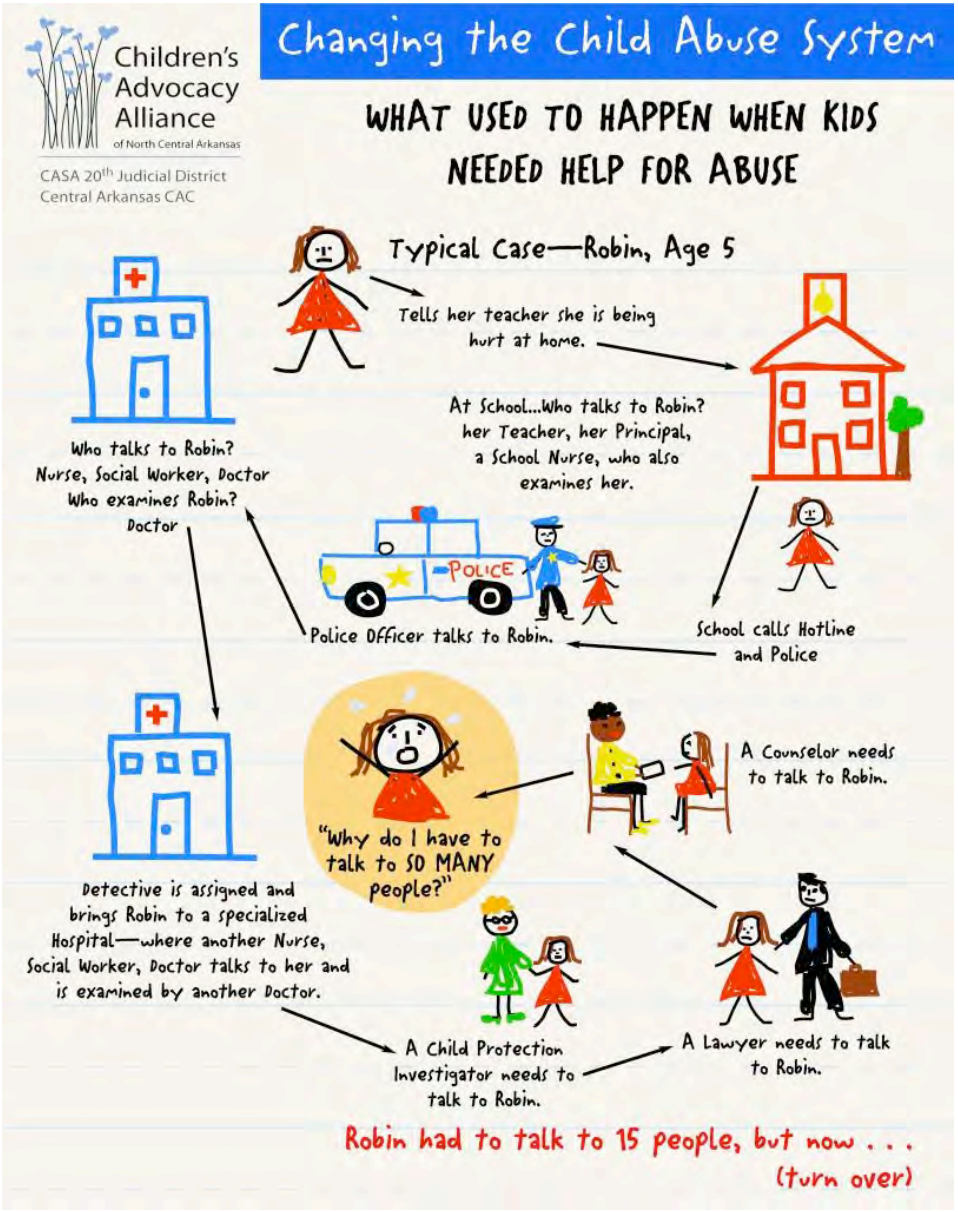
- Exposition: School administrators are mandatory reporters. Define necessity of mandatory reporting.
- Inciting Incident: Abuse occurs.
- Rising Action: Two school administrators neglected to report abuse.
- Climax: Charges filed.
- Resolution: We are going to tell you everything you need to know about mandatory reporting so this never happens again.
  - Here's where you go to learn more (website/phone). Here's where you go to report abuse (website/phone).

# Case Study #4
# Press Release - Narrative

- Attachment of rewritten narrative of op-ed.
- Compare Flesch-Kincaid scores.
- Original: FK Grade – 14.13. Revise: 11.24 (3 grades lower)
- Words: 780/276 (-65%)
- Words per sentence: 19.5/14.5 (-20%)

# Case Study #4
# Press Release - Visualization






http://students.cis.uab.edu/archived/williem/Historic%20View%20of%20Child%20Neglect.html

http://students.cis.uab.edu/archived/williem/Historic%20View%20of%20Child%20Neglect.html

# Recap:

- Technical language and jargon complicate simple messages
- Simplification solves problems associated with distrust of government
- Define your message:
  - Who is your audience?
  - What is your message? (Organization)
  - Why is it important? (Classification)
- Write and design your message so it can be easily understood
- Write and design a message that reflects reader values
- Use Plain Talk guidelines for writing
- Use narrative for explaining a process
- Use visualization to make messages clear, compelling, and convincing

# Resources:

- Health: Plain Language Thesaurus
  - stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11500/
- Plain Language
  - www.plainlanguage.gov
- Visualizing Information for Advocacy
  - www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/visualizing_20080311.pdf
- AGA Citizen-Centric Reporting (CCR)
  - www.agacgfm.org/citizen/
- Flesch-kincaide
  - http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp

# Questions?

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OP-ED: ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Our office recently filed criminal charges against two school administrators who we alleged failed to fulfill their legal duties to report child sex abuse to law enforcement. The case, which is now in court, involves two high-school girls who allegedly were sexually assaulted by fellow students. We recognize that this case may raise questions in some people's minds as to who is obligated to report such abuse, and under what circumstances.

Vulnerable victims are often victimized because they are vulnerable to repeated acts of assault, abuse or neglect. Many times victims, in general, but more often vulnerable victims are reluctant to tell the police what happened due to fear, trauma, embarrassment, or even guilt. But many will provide clues or details of their victimization to someone outside of law enforcement. Vulnerable victims often choose someone who is not a parent, guardian, or relative with whom to share their experience. And it's not unusual for such victims to ask the people they confide in never to tell anyone.

In some cases, the victim's request for secrecy must be denied because California law designates "mandatory reporters." Mandatory reporters are individuals who are legally obligated to report suspected cases of abuse, assault or neglect to law enforcement. If the receiver of the information is a mandatory reporter and the information s/he receives meets the criteria below, then s/he faces criminal penalties by failing to contact law enforcement immediately and make a report. The reason for this is to protect the present and potential vulnerable victim and to discourage individuals who are not adequately trained in the investigation of such matters from assuming a role they

are ill-equipped to handle.

So who is a mandatory reporter? The list is lengthy and includes a wide variety of positions in education, youth recreation, child services, public services, counseling and the clergy. Some examples include teachers and instructors, in both public and private schools; librarians; bus drivers; youth counselors; daycare workers; social workers; probation officers; law enforcement officers; firefighters; doctors; nurses and other medical personnel; alcohol and drug counselors; priests, ministers and rabbis (except information gained during "penitential communication"). (Penal Code section 11165.7(a).)

These are just examples. The entire list is available on our website: http://www.countyofsb.org/da. The next question is what must be reported? Generally, the acts that must be reported fall under the headings of neglect, harm/endangerment, unlawful corporal punishment and sexual abuse/assault/exploitation.

Neglect means anything involving the intentional or negligent failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care for a child.

Harm/Endangerment includes any willful harm or injury inflicted upon a child, or conduct that endangers the child.

Unlawful Corporal Punishment involves cruel and inhuman physical punishment resulting in a traumatic condition; i.e., bruising, scarring, burns, welts, etc.

Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault, Sexual Exploitation includes any touching of the intimate parts of the child, or by the child of the perpetrator, if done for sexual arousal.

People who are mandated reporters sometimes worry about what will happen if they are wrong and it turns out the person wasn't abused or neglected. In those cases,

there is no penalty for a mandated reporter when s/he follows the legal obligation to report. As an incentive to encourage the mandated reporter to follow the law, the reporter is given absolute immunity from civil or criminal liability from making the required report, s/he is entitled to confidentiality, and is protected from retaliation or discipline by his or her employer for making the required report.

Sometimes confusion arises when the child, his/her parents or the mandatory reporter's boss says that they will make the report. It's important to know that that does not eliminate the obligation of the mandatory reporter to also report. In short, this obligation cannot be delegated.

All employers of mandated reporters must provide their employees with copies of the relevant reporting laws, as well as an explanation of their reporting obligations, and the criminal penalties for failing to report. Any person who requires a license or certificate to practice a profession or occupation defined as a mandated reporter should also receive similar notification.

The Elder Abuse and Dependent Adult Reporting and Civil Protection Act mirrors the above obligations of, and protections afforded to, the mandated reporters who report suspected abuse, neglect or abandonment of this vulnerable victim class.

The overall goal of our mandated reporting laws is to channel information regarding suspected assaultive, abusive, or neglectful conduct to those agencies that are both trained and adequately equipped to conduct the necessary investigations. The swift reporting and investigation of such alleged conduct is essential in preventing future victimization as well as identifying those reports that are unfounded.

OP-ED: PLAIN LANGUAGE EXAMPLE

Children and seniors are sometimes abused because they are defenseless. While abuse victims can fear asking for help, they may confide in someone but ask them to keep their abuse a secret. However, State law requires mandated reporters to tell law enforcement about alleged cases of abuse, assault, or neglect.

Last month, we filed charges against two high school supervisors for not reporting two sexual abuse cases. We want to help everyone recognize what is required of a mandatory reporter because abuse victims need to be heard. Mandated reporters include school staff, medical professionals, and child care providers. Priests, ministers, and rabbis are also mandated reporters, but the law allows them to hear confession without having to report what a confessor says. However, a mandatory reporter can face criminal charges if they hear of a case of abuse and do not immediately contact law enforcement.

Mandated reporters should investigate cases of physical and sexual abuse and neglect, harm, or endangerment. Reporters will not be charged with a crime if it turns out the person was not abused or neglected. Reporters cannot be disciplined by their workplace or sued as a result of their investigation. They must also file a report even if a family says they will file a report instead. All reports remain confidential.

Reports and investigations are essential to preventing abuse and identifying unfounded reports. If you know of an unreported case of abuse, please call the Santa Barbara County Hotline at (800) 367-0166. If you are a mandatory reporter, make sure you are trained and able to conduct an investigation. For more information, visit our Mandated Reporters website at www.countyofsb.org/DA/MantatoryReporters.