

Michelle Black, M.Ed.

Communications consultant

Plain language writer • Trainer

President, SimplyRead Communications Group

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Versatile communications consultant and writer with 17 years' experience developing a wide range of print and online documents for diverse audiences from low-literacy to sophisticated levels. Accomplished trainer who has taught hundreds of people how to achieve their goals with clear writing. Contracts and clients in corporate, government and not-for-profit settings. Bachelor's degree in languages and Master's in Adult Education (Workplace Learning and Change).

Skills & expertise

- Reader-friendly writing in a variety of styles: basic-level, public interest, journalistic, Web, technical, educational, academic, policy, reporting, sales and marketing, etc.
- Clear visual design for print and online formats
- Stylistic, substantive, structural and plain-language editing
- Teaching, training and designing learning programs
- Research, interviewing and building positive relationships with project stakeholders and subject matter experts at all organizational levels
- Project strategy, planning and management
- Field testing documents with sample readers
- Advanced knowledge with excellent conversational skill in French and Spanish, and extensive experience managing translation projects

Key subjects & industries

- Adult education and training
- Consumer and public information
- Financial services and products including banking, financial processing, and life, health and general (P&C) insurance
- Corporate, marketing and customer communications
- Not-for-profit sector communications
- Public health, consumer health care and health promotion
- Technology, focusing on process documents and manuals
- Human resources and employee communications and policies

Computer skills: Windows family of products up to XP, Lotus Notes 4.6 to R6; advanced MS Word and PowerPoint; basic Excel, HTML, Web publishing tools (Dreamweaver, HomeSite), Adobe Illustrator and PhotoShop, desktop publishing, marketing databases and social media tools.

Clients & projects

Aviva Canada Inc. - Edited consumer guide to Surety bonds; wrote articles and site content for website destined for broker partners; acted as principal writer and editor for corporate intranet read by 3000+ property and casualty insurance employees, 2003 to 2009

BMO Institute for Learning - Wrote online learning content for an internal procurement client; edited and designed PowerPoint presentations, eLearning storyboards and training manuals for the Leadership Development program, 2008 to 2010

Canadian Cancer Society - Edited quit-smoking resource to create low-literacy version; wrote online Frequently Asked Questions about Cancer, 2001 and 2006

Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) - Interviewed academic and clinical paediatricians, wrote original articles and managed the draft process with subject matter experts and CPS employees to ensure an informative, on-time publication for members, 2010 to present

Cancer Care Ontario - Edited letters, forms, privacy notice and call centre scripts to ensure clear communication with more than 200,000 ColonCancerCheck participants, 2009 to 2010

City of Vaughan - Wrote content and developed navigation structure for Fire & Rescue Services website, 2009

Durham Social Services - Edited an information bulletin, program brochure and community survey to make them easier-to-read and help key messages stand out, 2007 to 2011

GRC Inc. - Wrote copy for independent corporate governance consultancy to illustrate benefits and value to potential clients, 2007

Health Canada, Canadian Health Network - Managed project to develop more than 350 online, bilingual FAQs, to educate site visitors in plain language on more than 30 health topics; Authored and edited training materials and guidelines for employees and partners, 1998 to 2000

HealthNexus and Best Start Resource Centre - Edited website copy for both organizations; presented further recommendations for clear Web design to their teams, 2007

The Hospital for Sick Children - Interviewed subject matter experts to analyze patient communication needs, timelines and costs and plan for design, images and field tests; Managed content and production of more than 50 print and Web materials for patients and their families, 2000 to 2002

INTRIA - Developed RFP responses, sales presentations, marketing and Web copy, and employee communications on behalf of this CIBC subsidiary in the B2B marketplace, 2007 to 2008

J Munn Management Inc. - Provided editorial support for contracts and client documents; collaborated on and co-facilitated marketing-communications training program

Clients & projects (cont'd)

Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services - Provided plain language editing for a supportive housing guide for people with disabilities and their families (at Grade 6 reading level), and for a presentation and guide about changes in how to apply for supportive housing (at a Grade 3 - 4 reading level), 2009

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care - Edited business cases, policy options documents and presentations for Ministry decision-makers; developed and executed internal communications strategy for technical project team, 2006

Ontario Public Health Association - Provided report that assessed reading level and design to offer recommendations on a resource for young mothers, 2007

Safe Kids Canada - Edited brochure and Web copy to ensure plain language for a public audience, 2002

Southlake Regional Health Centre - Created workbooks to support a training program for a multi-disciplinary group of clinicians and therapists, 2009

Sun Life Financial - Revised six extensive information pieces destined for customers and advisors, which served as plain language templates for their marketing and product teams; revised contract and process forms and documents for customers and advisors to support a new product, 2010 to 2011

Wheelchair In Motion Inc. - Wrote news release to support launch of a new wheelchair transportation provider, 2009

Teaching, training & presentation

Aviva Canada Inc. • Developed and delivered training sessions, articles and resources to help three departments use the clear, friendly voice of the company brand, 2003 and 2006

Canadian Banking Association - Delivered training to 72 marketing and compliance professionals from several major Canadian banks to help them adopt clear writing techniques and comply with federal legislation, 2011

Canadian Public Health Association • Presented plain language online health resources at Literacy & Health Conference, 2000

Cancer Care Ontario • Designed and delivered four half-day training workshops on how to create clear, effective PowerPoint presentations, 2010

Centre for Literacy of Quebec • Designed and delivered full-day clear communication training to nurses and patient educators at Montreal General Hospital, 2001

CIBC • Designed and delivered two full-day workshops to help branch support teams communicate more clearly with their internal colleagues, 2010

Durham Wraparound • Provided one-to-one coaching to help employees communicate more effectively by email, 2009

Teaching, training & presentation (cont'd)

The Hospital for Sick Children • Presented to health professionals, hosted in-service events and wrote news articles to educate employees about plain language in health education, 2001

Humber College, School of Media Studies • Taught PR and Presentation Skills course, 2000

Literacy Network of Durham Region • Led Essential Skills workshops at community employment organizations throughout Durham Region, 2009

Sun Life Financial • Designed and delivered two half-day sessions to sensitize communications and compliance staff to how plain language would be implemented in their organization; trained a marketing-communications team on how to sharpen their writing; created tools, tips and training to help marketing professionals further adopt plain language as part of the brand 'voice,' 2010 to 2011

Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development (formerly East End Literacy) • Designed and delivered full-day plain language workshop for the Immigrant Women's Integration Program, 2009

Education & professional activities

E.Learn (SkillSoft) • Courses in Leadership, Decision Making, Time Management, 2003 to 2005

International Webmasters Association • Accessible Web Design, 2001

Messages (the SimplyRead blog: www.simplyread.wordpress.com) • 2009 to 2012

Ontario Today, CBC Radio One • Guest on live phone-in about plain language, 2002

Ontario Health Promotion E-mail Bulletin #258.1 • Published article: The 5 C's: Areas to consider for making your health messages accessible to a wider population, 2002

Plain Language Association International (PLAIN), 4th Biennial Conference Co-Chair • Led communications team that quadrupled conference attendance and membership numbers and attracted TV, radio and print coverage; Recruited, trained and managed more than 50 volunteers and designed three-day program with 50+ speakers, 2002

Plain Language in Plain English • Contributed to three chapters of multi-authored guide to clear communication, 2010

Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development • Vice President, Board of Directors, 1999 to 2000; Chair, Personnel Committee, 1998 to 2001

University of Toronto • Master of Education, Adult Education (Program focus: Workplace Learning and Change), 2003 • Honours Bachelor of Arts, French and Spanish, 1992

Professional Memberships: Clarity; Editors' Association of Canada; PLAIN. Former member, International Association of Business Communicators and Society for Technical Communication

References available on request

Selected portfolio samples available at www.simplyread.ca/samples.html