WASHINGTON

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UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

Establishing Plain Talk at UTC

Executive Policy Number: 5.5
Effective Date: March 21, 2006

Purpose
- Plain talk is the way we communicate with the public.
- Plain talk is clear and concise. It uses familiar terms, simple prose, and a common vocabulary. It avoids acronyms, legalese, and technical jargon.
- The goal of plain talk is to communicate more effectively to a general audience in written material. Plain talk documents present the reader with essential information in a logical sequence using active voice and shorter sentences.

Policy
- Plain talk is UTC policy.
- This policy applies to all UTC employees.

The UTC Applies Plain Talk Principles to Many Documents
Documents include:

- Letters and correspondence
- Instructions and applications
- Fact sheets
- Public notices
- Presentations
- Permits and forms
- Memos and orders for open meetings
- Orders and notices in formal cases
- Reports
- E-mail

Employees Use Plain Talk Principles to Write Documents
Employees must use the plain talk principles below:

- Use clear language that will be easily understood by the intended audience.
- Focus on information the recipient needs.

- Present information in a logical sequence.
- Use short sentences.
- Write in an active voice.
- Design the document so the reader can understand its message on the first try. Use:
- Adequate white space
- Bulleted lists
- Visual aids such as tables
- Helpful headings
- Other proven techniques

Plain Talk Coordinator Leads Effort
The Executive Secretary appoints a plain talk coordinator. The coordinator leads the agency's efforts to implement the Plain Talk Executive Order, 05-03.

Plain Talk Team Supports Effort
The plain talk coordinator and Senior Management Team recruit or appoint employees to serve on the plain talk team. Each plain talk team member helps edit the documents reviewed by the plain talk team and helps employees apply plain talk principles in his or her division.

Plain Talk Is A Way of Business
The UTC expects each manager and employee to learn and apply plain talk principles. Managers will offer employees the opportunity to receive plain talk training through the Department of Personnel. Employees will use plain talk principles and the UTC Style Guide in their writing and editing.

Each UTC manager will work with his or her designated plain talk team member to set priorities:

- The manager and plain talk team member identify the documents that will provide the greatest benefit from plain talk editing. The plain talk team will rewrite these documents. The manager will review the edited document and is responsible for final approval.
- The manager will work with his or her plain talk team member and section to rewrite the other, lower priority documents using plain talk principles and to ensure that employees use plain talk principles in writing new documents.

Documents are User-Tested
User-testing is a way to evaluate if a target audience can understand a document. You are encouraged to incorporate user-testing into the process where feasible, cost-effective, and sensible. The plain talk coordinator user-tests documents when appropriate.

References
Executive Order 05-03
UTC Style Guide

Contact
Plain Talk Coordinator