

Creating Welcoming + Effective Written Communication Part 2: Communicating with a Trauma-Informed Lens



Sarah Glazer, Sr. Program Manager
Clear Language Lab at Literacy Works
June 4, 2025

Welcome + Business

- Participate however you feel most comfortable
- Ask questions as they come up
- We will not take a break - do what you need to do to take care of yourself
- Slides + Resources are in the Training Overview + Resources Doc

Training Resources Google Doc



bit.ly/June4workforcwebinar
(this link is case sensitive)

Sarah Glazer, MA (she + her)

Senior Program
Manager
for the Clear Language
Lab at Literacy Works



Help create clear and usable
communication through training and
materials review



Taught Language Arts + Adult ESL



Something bringing me joy today...

Introduce Yourself

Share in the chat:

1. Your name + pronouns
2. Your role
3. Something bringing you joy today



Literacy Works

a Chicago-based non-profit

We believe access to information is critical for a fair and equitable society

Community Literacy

Member-based program that works to provide training, mentorship, and advocacy alongside the adult literacy sector

Clear Language Lab

We work with a variety of sectors to make everyday communication in systems be more useful, understandable, and equitable

We work to...

Make plain
language the norm
in everyday
communications

Center those that
have been
traditionally
harmed by systems

Co-design
whenever possible

Think broadly
about accessibility

Use
communications to
build connections

Make it easier for
folks to participate
in everyday life

Today we will...



Explain what it means to have a Trauma-Informed approach to communication



Explore why a Trauma-Informed lens is important for workforce communications



Examine what Trauma-Informed principles look like in workforce communications



Think about how we can incorporate opportunities for reflection in our own work

Before we get started...

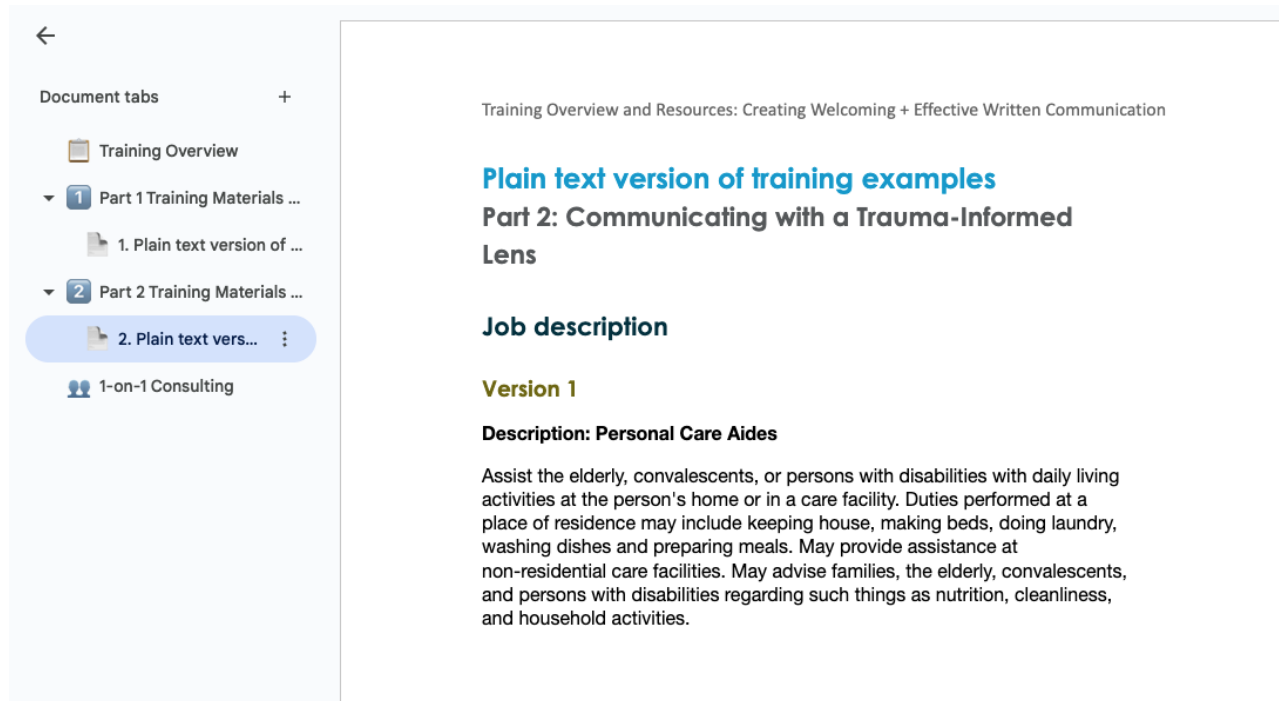
What I'm NOT going to do

- Tell you how to do your job
- Pretend I know all about your work
- Give you a set of hard rules to follow

What I am going to do

- Explore with you what it means to write in a way that centers your audience
- Share a variety of strategies and tools to think about
- Offer a different perspective

Plain Text Examples



The screenshot shows a Google Doc interface. On the left, a sidebar titled 'Document tabs' contains a list of tabs: 'Training Overview', '1 Part 1 Training Materials ...', '1. Plain text version of ...', '2 Part 2 Training Materials ...', '2. Plain text vers...', and '1-on-1 Consulting'. The '2. Plain text vers...' tab is selected. The main content area displays the title 'Training Overview and Resources: Creating Welcoming + Effective Written Communication'. Below this, the text 'Plain text version of training examples' is followed by 'Part 2: Communicating with a Trauma-Informed Lens'. A section titled 'Job description' contains a sub-section 'Version 1' with the heading 'Description: Personal Care Aides'. The description text reads: 'Assist the elderly, convalescents, or persons with disabilities with daily living activities at the person's home or in a care facility. Duties performed at a place of residence may include keeping house, making beds, doing laundry, washing dishes and preparing meals. May provide assistance at non-residential care facilities. May advise families, the elderly, convalescents, and persons with disabilities regarding such things as nutrition, cleanliness, and household activities.'

Training Resources Google Doc



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Creating Clear + Effective Communication

Let's review plain language
strategies





What is plain language?

Share in the chat:

- What do you remember from last week?
- If you weren't here: what do you think it means?

Plain language

Communicating so your **intended audience** can:



Find the information they need



Understand what they find



Use that information to do what they need to do



Reviewing plain language strategies

Unmute or share in the chat:

- What could be challenging about this job description?
- How could we make it easier to understand and use?

Description: Personal Care Aides

Assist the elderly, convalescents, or persons with disabilities with daily living activities at the person's home or in a care facility.

Duties performed at a place of residence may include keeping house, making beds, doing laundry, washing dishes and preparing meals. May provide assistance at non-residential care facilities. May advise families, the elderly, convalescents, and persons with disabilities regarding such things as nutrition, cleanliness, and household activities.

What makes this version clearer?

- Uses everyday language
- Talks directly to the audience
- Uses headings to break up sections
- Removed unnecessarily complex language + jargon:
 - “convalescents”
 - “the incumbent”
 - “in regards to”

Personal Care Aides

If you like helping people, being a personal care aide might be a good job for you.

Who would I help?

You might help many different people:

- An older adult
- A person with a serious illness or who had recent surgery
- A person with a disability



Where would I work?

You might work in:

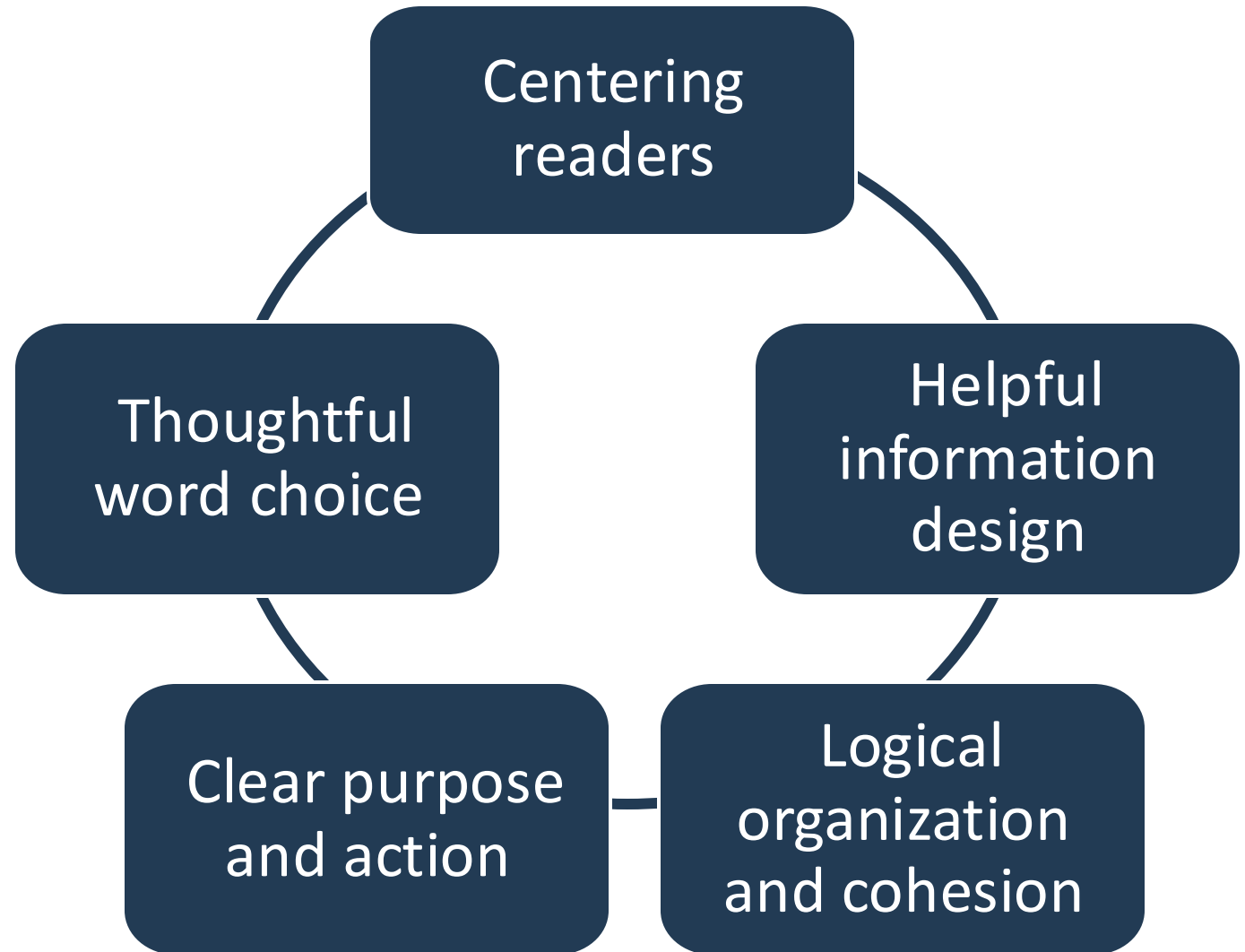
- A person's home
- A day program
- A nursing home where people live

What would I do?

There are many parts of this job. You might:

- Do chores like making beds, doing laundry, or cooking
- Talk with families about important topics like healthy eating

Key elements of plain language



How do we create positive + effective communications?

Part 1

Using plain language strategies

Countering the Curse of Knowledge

Part 2

Applying a Trauma-Informed Approach



A Trauma-Informed Approach

What is it?

What does it have to do with communication?



What does this example have to do with trauma and communication?

Share your thoughts
in the chat



I haven't been sleeping well since I was laid off.

I need to find work, but it's hard to focus long enough to make sense of long, complicated job descriptions or to write a cover letter.

When I do submit an application, I never know if I'll hear back or when, which can make me feel like it's not even worth trying.

Trauma and communication

A few things to think about:

- Feeling tired or fatigued makes it harder to process information
- Stress can make it difficult to focus and to produce content
- Unclear processes can feed anxiety



I haven't been sleeping well since I was laid off.

I need to find work, but it's hard to focus long enough to make sense of long, complicated job descriptions or to write a cover letter.

When I do submit an application, I never know if I'll hear back or when, which can make me feel like it's not even worth trying.

What we know about trauma

Trauma is...

A distressing event or events that impacts someone for a long time

Not something we define for another person

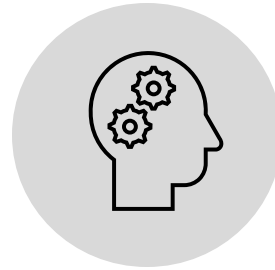
Extremely common

Varied (acute, chronic, complex, historical, intergenerational)

Stress + trauma impact...



What we
remember



How we think and
process information



Our physical
well-being



Our emotional
responses

Trauma-informed programs, orgs, and systems...

- Support potential paths for recovery
- Recognize signs + symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system
- **Integrate knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices**
- **Seek to actively resist re-traumatization**
 - SAMHSA

**Today we'll
focus on the
last two**

It's about...

Creating
welcoming
environments +
processes

**We are so
happy you
are here!**



**So, we can
change this...**



To this!



My local job center helped me enroll in a training to boost my skills and worked with me to improve my resume.

They also connected me to a clinic for my sleeping issues and anxiety.

I'm still nervous about the application process, but I don't feel like I'm going through it alone.



Reflect & share

Unmute or share in the chat:

- Think about a time you had a good experience in a new place (virtual or in-person)
- What made it positive, comfortable, or helpful?

Principles of Trauma-Informed Communication

How do we create safe +
welcoming communications?



Principles of Trauma-Informed Care



Safety



**Trust +
Transparency**



Peer Support



Collaboration



**Empowerment,
Voice, + Choice**



**Humility +
Responsiveness**

**What do these principles look like
in communication, environments,
and processes?**

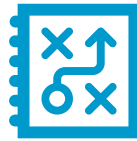
Use what you can, leave what you can't



Safety

We might think about:

- Our tone + word choice
- How we layout and decorate spaces
- Removing uncertainty



People know what to expect before, during, and after an appointment:

- How long it will take
- What you'll talk about
- Any next steps and timelines



Participants can see that they are in a queer-friendly space because of the images, symbols, or language used

Word choice + safety

"About the original [text]: It was all in the English language, yet I could not understand the mumbo-jumbo. This for me feels **condescending** and **corrupt**."

- 2012 Plain Language Legal Study, Trudeau



Trust + Transparency

We might think about:

- Explaining “why”
- Being honest about our limitations
- Using plain language in legal documents + forms



Forms only ask for required personal information and explain:

- Why you’re asking for this information
- How this information will be used
- What happens if I don’t respond



Web content is up-to-date, useful, and easy to navigate.



Peer Support

We might think about:

- Connecting participants with similar experiences
- Building relationships across staff



Staff have opportunities:

- For professional development and learning
- To share their knowledge and gain understanding from others
- Process feelings and commiserate



Staff explore ways for community members to connect with others dealing with similar experiences, like through affinity groups or peer mentoring.



Collaboration

We might think about:

- Using language that feels inviting, rather than authoritative
- How we collect and use feedback



Participants have opportunities to help with things link:

- Choosing quarterly workshop topics
- Reviewing the program handbook annually
- Planning peer support groups



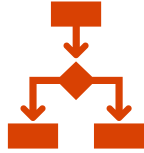
Organizations make meaningful connections with community partners to be able to provide warm referrals.



Empowerment, Voice, + Choice

We might think about:

- Offering meaningful choices
- How we document and address common questions and challenges
- Asking for consent in plain language

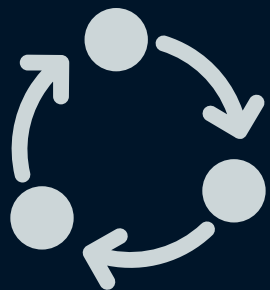


Participants can choose:

- Which services they engage in
- How they access services (in-person, online, asynchronously, etc.)
- How they communicate with staff (phone, email, text, in-person, etc.)



Staff intentionally make space for questions during meetings and presentations. Written content includes contact information for support + questions.



Humility + Responsiveness

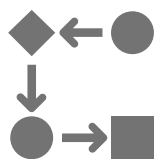
We might think about:

- How images and content reflect the communities we serve
- Exploring and challenging our own biases



Organizations stand by diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives and codify practices that lead to concrete outcomes in these areas, such as:

- Offering Know Your Rights resources
- Using gender-inclusive and gender-affirming language
- Providing translation + interpretation



Systematically reflecting on your work identifying and ways to adjust and improve processes

Examples from your work

Unmute or
share in the
chat



Safety



**Trust +
Transparency**



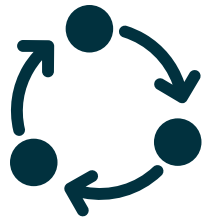
Peer Support



Collaboration



**Empowerment,
Voice, + Choice**



**Humility +
Responsiveness**

Trauma-Informed Communication in Practice

How might the principles apply
to your work?



How is the tone of these questions different?

Unmute or share your thoughts in the chat

I worry I have had difficulty finding or keeping a job due to:

1

- ☐ English is my second language
- ☐ Childcare
- ☐ A visible or invisible disability
- ☐ My education
- ☐ My age
- ☐ No Phone
- ☐ Limited transportation
- ☐ No email
- ☐ Limited work experience
- ☐ My computer skills
- ☐ Justice involvement
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ None of the above

I think this could help me find a job faster:

2

Choose as many options as you need and we will do our best to connect you to resources.

- ☐ Going back to school
- ☐ Learning more English
- ☐ Learning more computer skills
- ☐ Finding childcare
- ☐ Getting a phone
- ☐ Getting better transportation
- ☐ Getting email
- ☐ Getting more work experience
- ☐ Talking about my age or experiences differently
- ☐ Talking about a disability
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ None of the above

What community members said

- Feels like it's blaming me for things out of my control
- Why are you asking? Are you going to help with these things?
- I don't understand what some options mean

I worry I have had difficulty finding or keeping a job due to:

1

- ☐ English is my second language
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- ☐ My age
- ☐ No Phone
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- ☐ Limited work experience
- ☐ My computer skills
- ☐ Justice involvement
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ None of the above

Reframing barriers

- **Safety:**

- Shifted from blaming language to opportunities
- Used everyday language
- Improved readability with grouping + parallel structure

- **Transparency:** Added context and instructions

I think this could help me find a job faster:

2

Choose as many options as you need and we will do our best to connect you to resources.

- ☐ Going back to school
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- ☐ Getting email
- ☐ Getting more work experience
- ☐ Talking about my age or experiences differently
- ☐ Talking about a disability
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ None of the above

Thinking about referrals

Unmute or share in the chat:

- What might make this process difficult for someone to complete?
- What could we change to make it feel easier?




I think you're a good fit for the training program at Pleasantville Community College.

Registration is April 7-18. The address is 1212 N Oak St, Room 22A. You can call 867-5309 if you have any questions.

Referral example: what's different?

Unmute or share in the chat



I think you're a good fit for the training program at Pleasantville Community College. They have daytime and evening classes. Here's a brochure with more information about the program.


Have you been there before?

Let's look up the route together...

Registration is April 7-18, from 10 am to 7 pm. When do you think you can go?

Great! I'll tell my colleague, Kathleen, that you're coming.

What questions do you have about the program or registration? We can email her together.



I think once before. I'm not sure how to get there with the bus.

Probably on Thursday morning, after I drop my kids off at school.

Warm referrals: a few ideas

Safety:

- Can you look up the location and route?
 - Could you schedule the appointment together?
-

Peer support:

- Can you connect them with someone else in the program?
 - Do you have examples of real people who've used this service?
-

Collaboration:

- Is there a specific staff person you can connect someone with?
 - How do you stay up-to-date with what's going on at partner programs?
-

Empowerment, Voice, + Choice

- What choices does the participant have in this process?
- Are you accounting for time to talk about questions and concerns?

Employment services intake process

Unmute or share in the chat:

What could be challenging about this example?

Information will be gathered on the client's work experience, education, and barriers to employment. The initial intake will inform the client about the program and its services and the appropriateness of services for the client. A more detailed assessment of the client's barriers will be made during the completion of the Employment Services Intake Form and a Strength/Needs Assessment. Client will participate in the intake process by sharing information and assessing their strengths, needs, and skills.

Employment services intake process:

How does this version serve the audience better?

Information will be gathered on the client's work experience, education, and barriers to employment. The initial intake will inform the client about the program and its services and the appropriateness of services for the client. A more detailed assessment of the client's problems and needs will be made during the completion of the Employment Services Intake Form and a Strength/Needs Assessment. Client will participate in the intake process by sharing information and assessing their strengths, needs, and skills.

What happens at the intake meeting?

We want to make sure that this program is a good fit for you.
We will go over your goals and how this program could help you.

We will also talk about:

- What you are good at and the types of work you enjoy
- What support you think you need and how we might be able to help you
- Why you are unemployed so we can help you talk about this with employers
- Any questions you have about this program

This meeting usually takes about 1-2 hours. If you have questions before your meeting, respond to this email or call Hugo at 123-456-7890.

Employment services intake process: What changed?

Collaboration: Used “we” + “you” to feel more causal and connect with the audience

Trust + transparency:

- Used everyday language to explain the process + purpose of the interview
- Listed out what to expect
- Gave a time frame

Empowerment + Voice: Included space for questions + concerns

What happens at the intake meeting?

We want to make sure that this program is a good fit for you. We will go over your goals and how this program could help you.

We will also talk about:

- What you are good at and the types of work you enjoy
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- Any questions you have about this program

This meeting usually takes about 1-2 hours. If you have questions before your meeting, respond to this email or call Hugo at 123-456-7890.

**Additional tips
to consider**



Offer meaningful choices

Aim for choices that:

- Make sense for your processes + capacity
- Do not impact the quality of someone's experience
- Honor the different ways people learn and experience the world
- Are limited to 3-5 options

How do I apply if I already have a VA disability rating?

You can apply in any of these 4 ways.

Option 1: Online

 [Apply for VR&E benefits](#)

If you're eligible, we'll invite you to an orientation session at your nearest VA regional office.

Option 2: By mail

Fill out an Application for Veteran Readiness and Employment For Claimants with Service-Connected Disabilities (VA Form 28-1900).

[Get VA Form 28-1900 to download](#)

Send your completed application here:

Department of Veterans Affairs
VR&E Intake Center
PO Box 5210
Janesville, WI
53547-5210

Option 3: In person

Go to a VA regional office and have a VA employee help you.

[Find a VA regional office near you](#)

Option 4: With the help of a trained professional


You can work with an accredited attorney, claims agent, or Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representative to get help applying for VR&E benefits.

[Get help filling out an application](#)

Break up processes into clear steps

Option 1:

Break up content across multiple slides




1

Three phone conversations:

1. Pre-interview call
2. RESEA Interview call
3. Follow up call

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?




2

A Career Coach will:

- Call you in the next week to set up the RESEA interview call
- Review what paperwork you need to submit before the RESEA interview call

1. PRE-INTERVIEW CALL




3

A Career Coach will:

- Explain programs we offer
- Review your resume with you and provide support with it
- Talk with you about job trends, job leads, and your next steps

2. RESEA INTERVIEW CALL



4

A Career Coach will:

- Review your next steps
- Schedule a follow-up call to see how your job search is going and if you need any support

3. FOLLOW UP CALL

Option 2:

Use animations to reveal info in chunks

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT... 1

Pre-Interview Call RESEA Interview Call Follow-Up Call

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT... 2

Pre-Interview Call RESEA Interview Call Follow-Up Call

A Career Coach will:

- Call you in the next week to set up the RESEA interview call
- Review what paperwork you need to submit before the RESEA interview call

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT... 3

Pre-Interview Call RESEA Interview Call Follow-Up Call

A Career Coach will:

- Call you in the next week to set up the RESEA interview call
- Review what paperwork you need to submit before the RESEA interview call

A Career Coach will:

- Explain programs we offer
- Review your resume with you and provide support with it
- Talk with you about job trends, job leads, and your next steps

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT... 4

Pre-Interview Call RESEA Interview Call Follow-Up Call

A Career Coach will:

- Call you in the next week to set up the RESEA interview call
- Review what paperwork you need to submit before the RESEA interview call

A Career Coach will:

- Explain programs we offer
- Review your resume with you and provide support with it
- Talk with you about job trends, job leads, and your next steps

A Career Coach will:

- Review your next steps
- Schedule a follow-up call to see how your job search is going and if you need any support

Consider this:

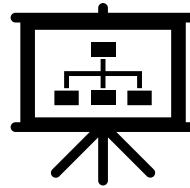
If a process feels impossible to explain in simply, maybe the process needs to change

Spread content across touch points



Bite: Brochure, handout, flyer

- A brief overview of the topic
- Goal: Introduce the information



Snack: Community presentation

- A more detailed explanation of processes
- Goal: Share more detail + answer questions



Meal: Website page

- The full picture
- Goal: A step-by-step guide people can reference when they need to

Use stories to make content relatable

Let's check in on...Kim



- Kim has a substance use disorder and used meth in her teens and 20s
- Kim has a conviction for using meth from about 15 years before
- At 40, she is applying to live in a market-rate apartment with her mother

Can Kim's landlord consider her conviction? Nope!

Why or why not? This happened 15 years ago. She is also not applying for a federally subsidized program (which would still not be an issue since so much time has passed, and she did not have any offenses for manufacturing meth).

Let's check in on...Shawn



- Shawn is 25
- At 15, he spent time in a juvenile detention facility for 6 months related to a theft
- He has never had any other issues with the justice system

Can Shawn's landlord consider his juvenile record? Nope!

Why or why not? It happened 10 years ago AND was part of his juvenile record.

Let's check in on...Tony



- Tony is 21 years old
- He was arrested and charged with assault a year ago, but all charges were dropped.

Can Tony's landlord consider this arrest? Nope!

Why or why not? Even though the incident happened last year, the charges were dropped. Tony never went to trial or pled guilty to anything.

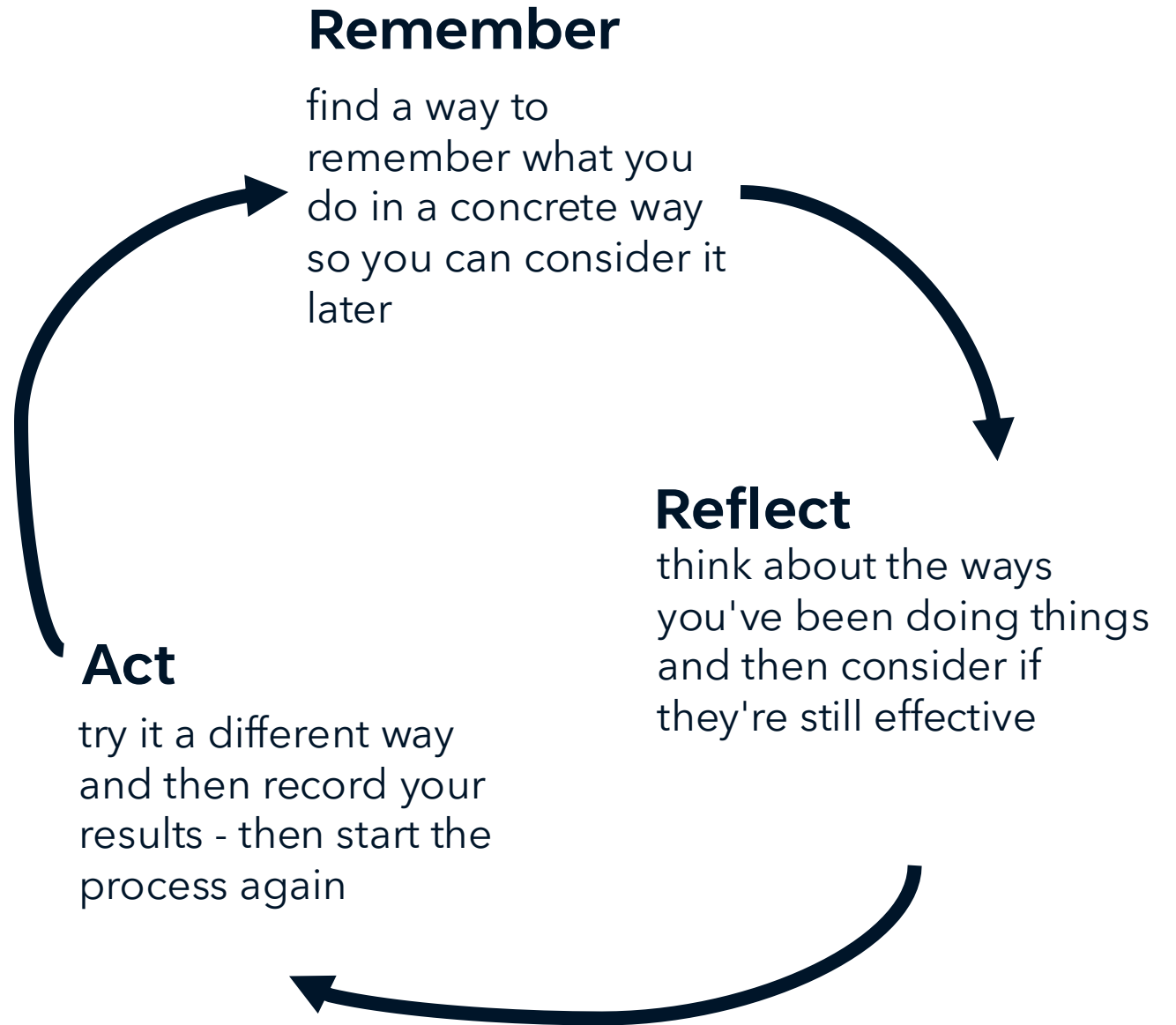
Reflecting on your work



**We do not learn from
experience...we learn from
reflecting on experience.**

– John Dewey, educator

The cycle of reflection



Low-effort ways to “remember”



Create a shared doc that all staff can add to with things like participant questions, challenges, and “mistakes”



Use an event planning checklist that keeps track of where and how you promoted events



Add a recurring agenda item to staff meetings to talk about what folks are trying



When you try something new, keep a sticky note on your desk to tally when goes well and when it doesn't



Building a reflective practice

Unmute or share in the chat:

- How do you reflect on your work now?
- What are some areas of your work that would benefit from more reflection?
Why?

Wrapping Up

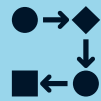
Resources & Next Steps



Remember: Trauma-Informed Communication is about creating welcoming content + processes



Provide clear instructions + signage



Explain all the steps



Give clear timelines



Close the loop



Offer multiple ways to engage



Outline what people need to prepare or bring



Make sure information is accurate



Create space for questions + support

Ideas for normalizing plain language



Schedule regular document reviews



Use templates for your most common types of communication



Encourage staff to use writing checklists



Develop an internal glossary with plain language terms everyone is expected to use



Have a plan for keeping processes + communications aligned and all staff informed

What's on your mind?

Unmute or share in the chat:

- A question you still have
- Something you want to learn more about
- A strategy you're going to try



Training Resources

Google Doc



bit.ly/June4workforcewebinar
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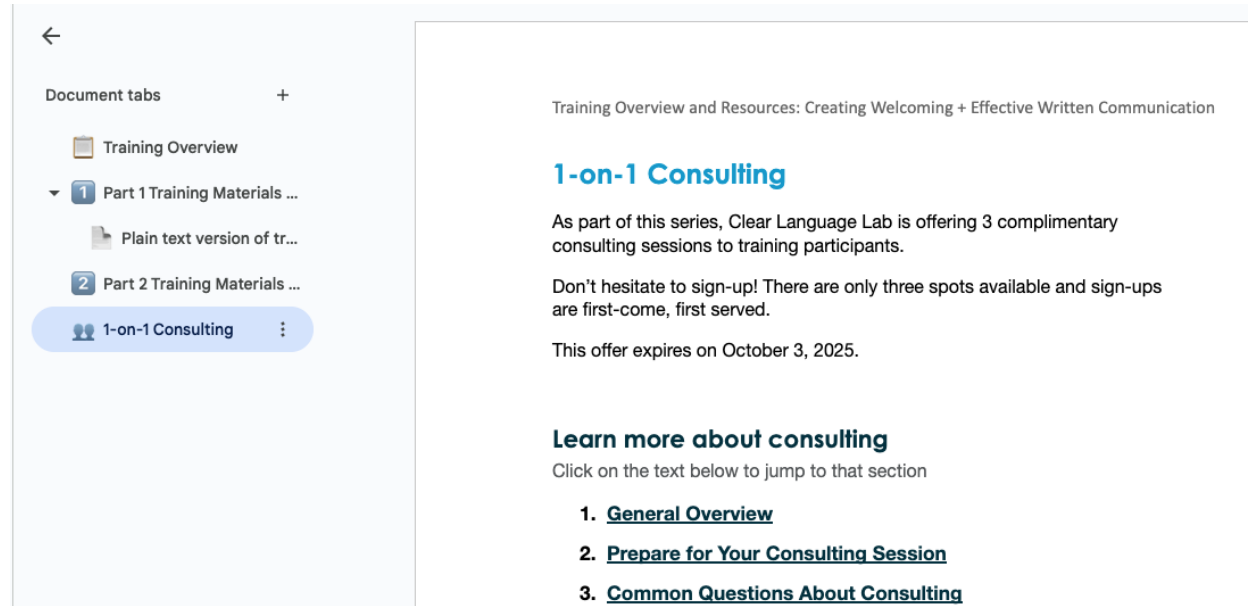


Limited Complimentary Consulting

Three 1-hour sessions

A 1-on-1 or small group collaborative session to talk about your materials or processes, and get concrete, actionable feedback.

Learn more in the resources doc



The screenshot shows a document viewer interface. On the left is a sidebar titled "Document tabs" with a "+" icon. It contains a list of tabs: "Training Overview", "1 Part 1 Training Materials ...", "Plain text version of tr...", "2 Part 2 Training Materials ...", and "1-on-1 Consulting" (which is highlighted in blue). On the right is the main content area, titled "Training Overview and Resources: Creating Welcoming + Effective Written Communication". It features a section header "1-on-1 Consulting" in blue. Below this, the text reads: "As part of this series, Clear Language Lab is offering 3 complimentary consulting sessions to training participants. Don't hesitate to sign-up! There are only three spots available and sign-ups are first-come, first served. This offer expires on October 3, 2025." Further down, there is a section titled "Learn more about consulting" with the instruction "Click on the text below to jump to that section". This section contains three numbered links: "1. [General Overview](#)", "2. [Prepare for Your Consulting Session](#)", and "3. [Common Questions About Consulting](#)".

More from the Clear Language Lab

Sign-up at
litworks.org/cli-trainings

Virtual Office Hours

- Tuesday, June 10
- 10:00 am - 12:00 pm CT

Skill-Builder Writing Workshop: Lists

- Wednesday, June 11
- 12:00-12:30 pm CT

Community of Practice

- Thursday, June 12
- 2:00-3:00 pm CT

Plain Language Foundations Webinar: Disability Pride + Improving Accessibility

- Thursday, July 24
- 2:00-3:15 pm CT

Thank you!

Keep in touch! 😊

✉️ sarah@litworks.org

🌐 LitWorks.org

📷 [@LiteracyWorksChicago](https://www.instagram.com/LiteracyWorksChicago)

🌐 [Literacy Works](https://www.linkedin.com/company/LiteracyWorks)

📘 [Literacy Works](https://www.facebook.com/LiteracyWorks)

Complete the
training survey



bit.ly/CLLSurveyFY25
(this link is case sensitive)