

A grayscale photograph of a person's head and shoulders. The person is covering their eyes with both hands, palms facing forward. They are wearing a watch on their left wrist. The image is dark and serves as a background for the text.

Writing in Plain Language for Digital Accessibility

**Don't Make Me Read!**

A grayscale photograph of a person's head and shoulders. They have their hands pressed against their face, covering their eyes and forehead, which is a common gesture of frustration, stress, or feeling overwhelmed. The person is wearing a watch on their left wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

Information Overload

**Don't Make Me Read  
Anything Extra!**

**What is effective digital content?**

# Effective Digital Content

- Audience can quickly and easily:
  - **Find** what they need
  - **Understand** what they find
  - **Use** this information to take action

**How do you write  
effective digital content?**

# Writing Effective Digital Content

- Write **for the audience**
- Only what is needed **by the audience**
- Write **in the audience's words**



You need a passport.

**Which would you rather use?**

# Passports V1:

358 words (excluding link text). 5 links under zero headings.



## Passports

For more information see [Passport Application Processing Times](#).

The Passport Services Office provides information and services to American citizens about how to obtain, replace or change a passport.

A passport is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer. A valid U.S. passport is required to enter and leave most foreign countries. Only the U.S. Department of State has the authority to grant, issue or verify United States passports.

### New Application for a U.S. Passport

To obtain a passport for the first time, you need to go in person to one of over [9,000 passport acceptance facilities](#) located throughout the United States with two photographs of yourself, proof of U.S. citizenship, and a valid form of photo identification such as a driver's license.

Acceptance facilities include many Federal, state and probate courts, post offices, some public libraries and a number of county and municipal offices. There are also [13 regional passport agencies](#), and 1 Gateway City Agency, which serve customers who are traveling within 2 weeks (14 days), or who need foreign visas for travel. Appointments are required in such cases.

You'll need to apply in person if you are applying for a U.S. passport for the first time: if your expired U.S. passport is not in your possession; if your previous U.S. passport has expired and was issued more than 15 years ago; if your previous U.S. passport was issued when you were under age 16; or if your currently valid U.S. passport has been lost or stolen.

For more information on getting a new passport, please visit [How to get a passport](#) page.

### Renewal of a U.S. Passport

You can renew by mail if: Your most recent passport is available to submit and it is not damaged; you received the passport within the past 15 years; you were over age 16 when it was issued; you still have the same name, or can legally document your name change.

You can get a passport renewal application form by downloading it from this site.

If your passport has been, altered or damaged, you cannot apply by mail. You must apply in person.

For more information on how to renew a passport, please visit [How to renew a passport](#) page.



# Passports V2:

14 words (excluding link text) 19 links under 4 headings.

## Get or replace a passport



[I'm applying for the first time as an adult](#)

[Children under age 16](#)

[Children age 16 and 17](#)

[I'm an adult renewing by mail](#)

[I'm an adult renewing online](#)

[Report it lost or stolen](#)

[Change my name or correct an error](#)

## Prepare to apply



[Compare a passport book and card](#)

[Find processing times](#)

[Take a photo](#)

[Calculate your fees](#)

[Fill out your form and print it](#)

[Get citizenship evidence](#)

[Get photo identification](#)

## Rush my passport



[I need it in less than 6 weeks](#)

[I need it even faster in less than 2-3 weeks. Restrictions apply.](#)

## After I apply



[Get email updates about my application status](#)

[Respond to a letter or email](#)

[Using your new passport](#)

# What are the differences?

## Passports

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# The difference

- Plain Language
- Readability
- Logical Design



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Easy to understand

# Plain Language

# Plain Language is

- Active voice
- Short sentences
- Personal pronouns
- Concrete, familiar words
- No extra words
- No jargon

# Plain Language Usability

Plain language increases usability for anyone:

- Impatience
- Short attention span
- Multi-tasking/partial attention
- Low literacy
- ESL
- Slow readers
- Careful and thorough readers
- Cautious clickers
- Cognitive disabilities

# EasyRead

EasyRead is a specific format for people with cognitive disabilities.

Plain Language  
is **not**  
EasyRead

## Top tips

Some things to do before you go to the doctor or hospital

- Make a list of your most important questions. Or get someone else to write them down for you.



- Make a list or bring any medicines and pills that you take with you.



- Write down your symptoms. Symptoms are the aches, pains or feelings you have that tell you that you are ill.



- Write down when your symptoms started and say what makes them better or worse.

- Ask your doctor or hospital for someone to support you if you want help at the doctor or hospital.



Plain Language is **Pure**



**Plain Language is Powerful**

Plain Language is Usable

# Specific Usability Needs



- Some Teens
  - impatient
  - short attention span
- Low literacy and ESL
  - slower readers
  - may focus on central content
- Some Older adults
  - careful and thorough readers
  - cautious clickers

# Breakthrough #1

## Cognitive disabilities amplify normal barriers

- Human perception is a spectrum of abilities
  - Disability is an extreme point
  - Individuals vary in ability based on context
- 
- Cognitive disability = severe usability problem
  - First step: Increase Usability for Everyone

Source Clayton Lewis, presentation to TEITAC

# Breakthrough #2

## Same guidelines work for different reasons

Teens	Older Adults	Low Literacy
Write simply Use words in their vocabulary	Use words that they know, especially for technology	Put the most important information first
Be concise and get to the point	Write with short, simple and straightforward sentences	Write text with a simple sentence structure. Keep pages, paragraphs, sentences short

# Similar guidelines for different reasons. Are we more alike than we think?

## Same guidelines work for different reasons

Teens	Older Adults	Low Literacy
Use relatively large font sizes (10 points or more)	Make the default type size 12-point or larger	Make text large: 12 or 14 point
Avoid using pictures that don't show anything meaningful	Use captions or meaningful alternative text for images, video and animation	Use information graphics and animations to show processes and relationships

**Which is easier to read?**

# Prescription 1

Rx 145077- 0 04/12/00  
 MONOPRIL 10MG TABLET  
 Do you require counseling? [ ] YES [ ] NO  
 ID: 2165 IPD/030310100 PP: PCS Auth#93828830  
 R AVICAR \_\_\_\_\_



**Abacus**

7800 Camino Real • Miami, FL 33143

(305) 595-7494 (305) 633-8057

Rx 145077 Dr DELGADO, RUBEN

AVICAR, ROBERT M

TAKE ONE TABLET BY MOUTH DAILY.

\*NSL\* \*NH\*

#30

MONOPRIL 10MG TABLET

SG /

Qty 30 TA 04/12/00 Discard after: 04/01/01

3 refills allowed before 04/12/01 MEAD JOHN

CAUTION: Federal law prohibits transfer of this drug to any person other than patient for whom prescribed.

Rx 145077- 0/MONOPRIL 10MG TABL #30 04/12/00

0 of 3 PP=PCS T=631.13 C=610.00 A=632.86

Dr DELGADO BD0630877 362-6828 SG /



# Prescription 2



# Improving Design

Rx 145077- 0 04/12/00  
 MONOPRIL 10MG TABLET  
 Do you require counseling? [ ] YES [ ] NO  
 ID: 2165 IPD/030310100 PP: PCS Auth#93828830  
 R AVICAR \_\_\_\_\_

 **Abacus** \*NSC\* \*NH\*  
 7800 Camino Real • Miami, FL 33143  
 (305) 595-7494 (305) 633-8057  
 Rx 145077 Dr DELGADO, RUBEN  
**AVICAR, ROBERT M**  
 TAKE ONE TABLET BY MOUTH DAILY.

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 Rx 145077- 0/MONOPRIL 10MG TABL #30 04/12/00  
 0 of 3 PP=PCS T=631.13 C=610.00 A=632.06  
 Dr DELGADO BD0630877 362-6820 SG /

**Avicar, Robert**

**AMOXICILLIN 500MG**

Take: One capsule by mouth  
 three times daily.

qty: 30  
 refills: No  
**Dr. Smith**  
 disp: 02/27/05 REL  
 mfr: GENEVA NDC: 00781-2613-05  
 (877) 798-2743 Rx: 1234567-0000

 **TARGET PHARMACY**  
 900 Nicollet Mall  
 Minneapolis, MN 55401

**PATIENT INFO CARD**

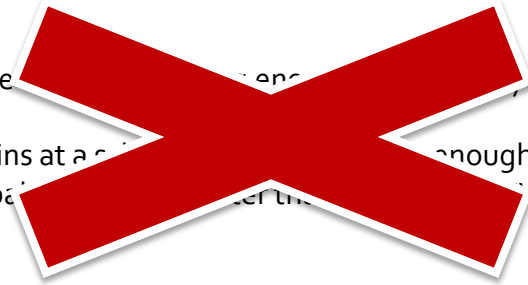
Easy to read

# Readability

# Readability & Line Length

## #1 (140 characters wide)

Gilbert Hicks is an anomaly. He's been principal at the same school long enough for a three-year gym membership purchased in 2007 to expire. Twenty or 30 years ago, when a principal took the reins at a school, he was there long enough to see three or four kids in the same family pass through the hallowed halls. Now, newly hired principals are exiting faster than you can say, "Where's your hall pass?"



## #2 (60 characters wide)

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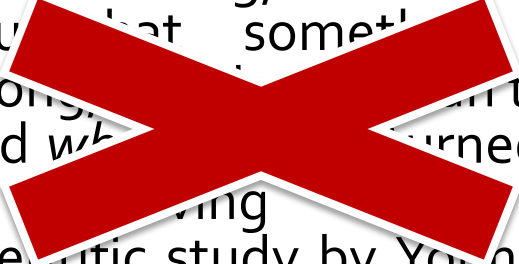
# Readability & Justification 1

## Left Justified / Right Ragged

Parents who've faced a new principal at the same school each year, for eight or nine years running, could have told you that something was wrong, but they couldn't have said *why* the job's turned into a revolving door. The scientific study by Young and Fuller is the first to address the scope of the retention and tenure problem in Texas and search for the reasons behind it.

## Left & Right Justified

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# Readability & Justification 2

## Left Justified / Right Ragged

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## Centered

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# Readability & Case

## Mixed Case

Parents who've faced a new principal at the same school each year, for eight or nine years running, could have told you that something was wrong, but they couldn't have said *why* the job's turned into a revolving door. The scientific study by Young and Fuller is the first to address the scope of the retention and tenure problem in Texas and search for the reasons behind it.

## Upper Case

PARENTS WHO'VE FACED A NEW PRINCIPAL AT THE SAME SCHOOL EACH YEAR, FOR EIGHT OR NINE YEARS RUNNING, COULD HAVE TOLD YOU THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG, BUT THEY COULDN'T HAVE SAID WHY THE JOB'S TURNED INTO A REVOLVING DOOR. THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY BY YOUNG AND FULLER IS THE FIRST TO ADDRESS THE SCOPE OF THE RETENTION AND TENURE PROBLEM IN TEXAS AND SEARCH FOR THE REASONS BEHIND IT.



# Readability Guide: Paragraphs


- Paragraphs
  - 65 characters or less per line
  - Justify left margin but not right margin
  - Do not center text
  - Use mixed case



# Readable Fonts – Old Rule

## Serif

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## Sans-Serif

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# Readable Fonts: New Rule

## Adobe Research: Online Reading Speed 16 Fonts

- **Glanceable:** few words
- **Interlude:** short passages
- **Long-form:** book

### Metrics

- User preference
- Reading speed
- Comprehension score

#	Font	Words Per Minute
1	Garamond	312
2	Oswald	295
3	Lato	292
4	Helvetica	283
5	Times	277
6	Calibri	277
7	Utopia	275
8	Noto Sans	272
9	Montserrat	271
10	Franklin Gothic	271
11	Arial	270
12	Roboto	268
13	Poynter Gothic	266
14	Avenir Next	264
15	Avant Garde	261
16	Open Sans	254

# Adobe Research Results

- No single font is best for all users.
- People usually do **not** pick the font that's best for them.

Source:

[www.nngroup.com/articles/best-font-for-online-reading](http://www.nngroup.com/articles/best-font-for-online-reading)

[How to choose a font for responsive web interfaces](#) by Jake Giltsoff

Consider

- Languages
- Suggests sans-serif
- Legibility
- Readability


# Font Size

- Research
  - Larger font size increases readability
    - especially reading speed
- Recommendation
  - 12 to 14 point font for all audiences

# Readable Styles 1

## *Italics*

*Parents who've faced a new principal at the same school each year, for eight or nine years running, could have told you that something was wrong, but they couldn't have said why the job's turned into a revolving door. The scientific study by Young and Fuller is the first to address the scope of the retention and tenure problem in Texas and search for the reasons behind it.*

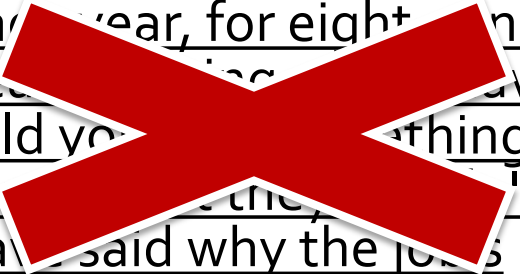


## Normal

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# Readable Styles 2

## Underlined

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# Readability Guide: Text


- Paragraphs
  - Make lines 65 characters or less
  - Justify left margin but not right margin
  - Do not center text
  - Use mixed case
- Text
  - Sans-serif
  - Set font size to 12-14 point
  - Underline is only for links
  - Don't use italics

# Reader View/Mode in Browsers

Allows reader to focus on main content

Removes distractions (ads, sidebars, backgrounds...)

Adjust font size, contrast, layout as needed

- Firefox (Reader View)
  - Click Reader View icon in address bar 
- Chrome (Reader Mode)
  - Select the More tools menu in the top right corner
  - Select Reading mode
  - Use the toolbar to adjust the font, background color, or font size
  - Drag the side panel to make it larger or smaller



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# Lasers could take broadband where fiber optics can't | CNN Business

*Jacopo Prisco*

8–9 minutes

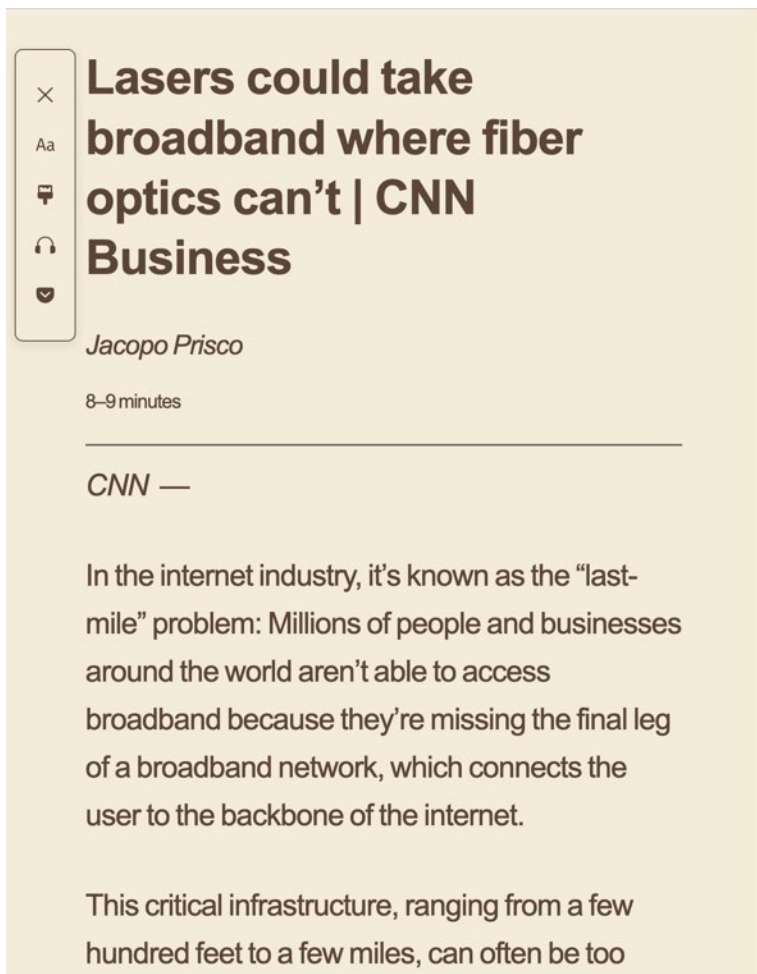
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CNN —

In the internet industry, it's known as the “last-mile” problem: Millions of people and businesses around the world aren't able to access broadband because they're missing the final leg of a broadband network, which connects the user to the backbone of the internet.

This critical infrastructure, ranging from a few hundred feet to a few miles, can often be too

# Personalize Reader View Settings



A screenshot of a CNN article in Reader View. On the left, a vertical sidebar contains icons for closing the view (X), text settings (Aa), a dark theme icon, a speech bubble icon, and a heart icon. The article title is "Lasers could take broadband where fiber optics can't | CNN Business" by Jacopo Prisco, with an estimated reading time of 8-9 minutes. The CNN logo is visible. The article text begins with "In the internet industry, it's known as the 'last-mile' problem: Millions of people and businesses around the world aren't able to access broadband because they're missing the final leg of a broadband network, which connects the user to the backbone of the internet."

Lasers could take broadband where fiber optics can't | CNN Business

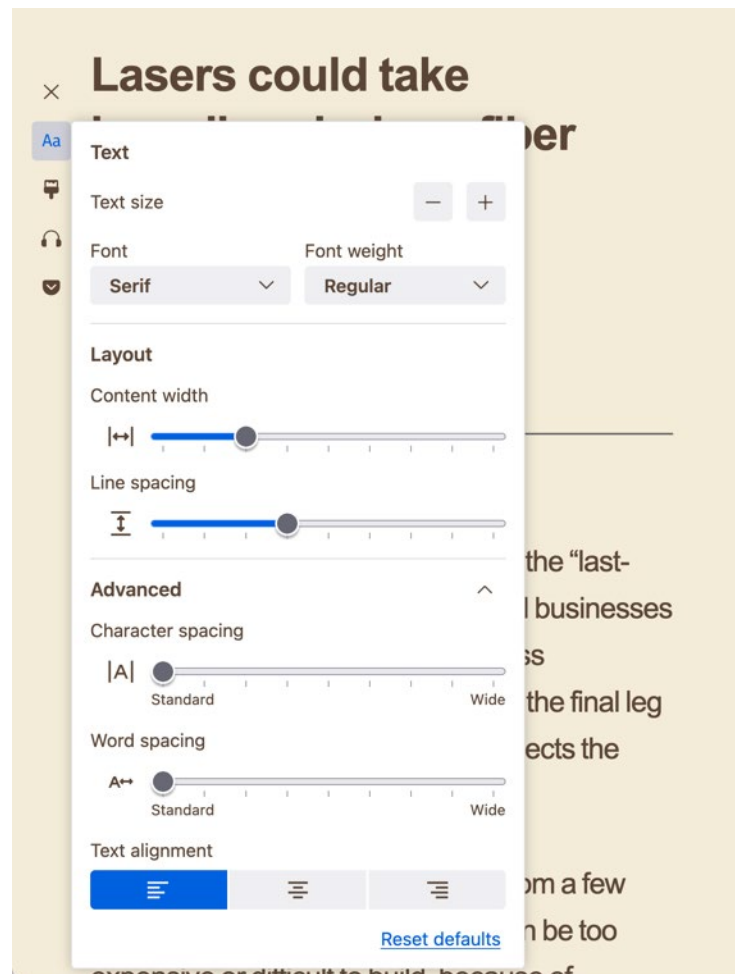
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A screenshot of the Reader View settings menu overlaid on the article. The menu is titled "Text" and includes sections for "Text size" (with minus and plus buttons), "Font" (set to "Serif"), "Font weight" (set to "Regular"), "Layout" (with sliders for "Content width" and "Line spacing"), "Advanced" (with sliders for "Character spacing" and "Word spacing"), and "Text alignment" (with three options: left, center, and right, where left is selected). A "Reset defaults" link is at the bottom right.

Lasers could take

Text

Text size

Font

Font weight

Serif

Regular

Layout

Content width

Line spacing

Advanced

Character spacing

Word spacing

Text alignment

Reset defaults

# Color Contrast Matters

- Can you read me?
- Can you read me now?
- Can you read me now?
- Can you read me now?
- Can you read me now?

# Color Contrast

- Text
  - Contrast must be at least 4.5 to 1 between
    - Text color
    - Background color
  - Large Text: 3 to 1
    - Large = at least 18 point or 14 point bold
- Non-Text
  - Non-text elements must have contrast of 3 to 1
- Tools
  - [dequeuniversity.com/color-contrast](https://dequeuniversity.com/color-contrast)
  - [www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/](https://www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/)

Use design and layout  
that increase comprehension

# Logical Design

# Is This Easy to Read?

## DOTD Issues Winter Weather Travel Advisory

Baton Rouge: With the possibility of snow and rain in the forecast throughout the Mardi Gras holiday weekend, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) announced that department staff is prepared to deal with winter weather. Maintenance forces will be on standby to apply sand and salt over any affected bridges and roadways, to remove fallen trees from the roadway, and to close any roads as needed.

Interim Secretary Sherri LeBas urges motorists to take the threat of winter weather seriously. "In the event of adverse weather conditions, the department will strive to maintain access to Louisiana's highways and interstates; however, we encourage the motoring public to avoid traveling during snow and ice, if at all possible," said LeBas.

During winter weather conditions, the best thing motorists can do is drive slowly and carefully, and avoid driving while distracted. Always allow for extra driving time, reduce speeds when visibility is low, and make sure there is plenty of room between vehicles. Also, look out for black ice, which can form on bridges, overpasses, off-ramps and in shady spots. As always, DOTD reminds motorists to buckle up and refrain from drinking and driving.

Citizens can get the latest updates on real-time traffic and road conditions by using the 511 Traveler Information System simply by dialing 511 from their telephone and saying the route or region about which they are seeking information. Travelers can also access this information by visiting the 511 Traveler Information Web site at [www.511la.org](http://www.511la.org).

Motorists can also obtain information regarding road closures by contacting DOTD's Customer Service Center at 1-877-4LA-DOTD (1-877-452-3683). The center is open 7:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

# Wall of Words

## DOTD Issues Winter Weather Travel Advisory

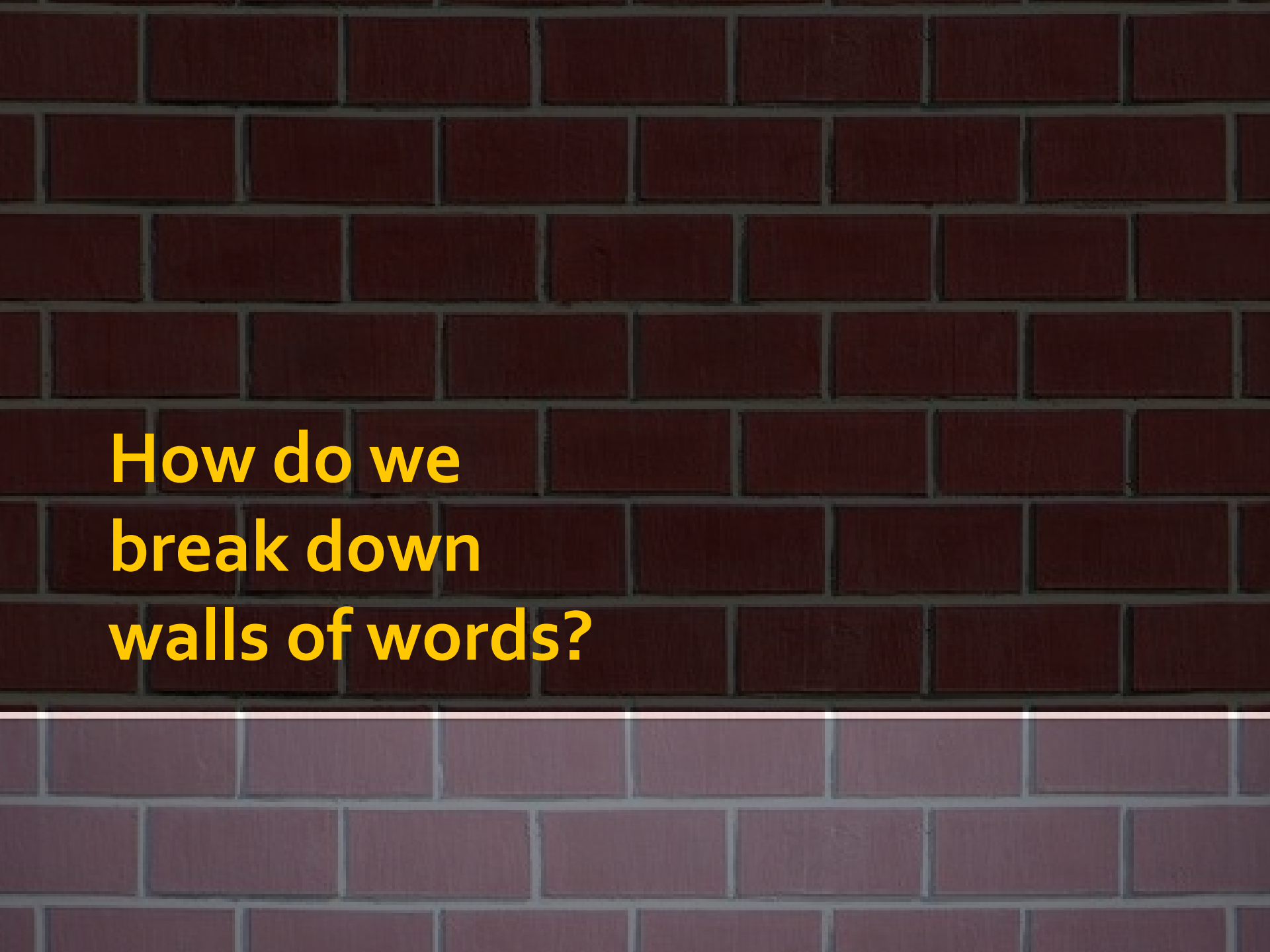
Baton Rouge: With the possibility of snow and rain in the forecast throughout the Mardi Gras holiday weekend, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) announced that department staff is prepared to deal with winter weather. Maintenance forces will be on standby to apply sand and salt over any affected bridges and roadways, to remove fallen trees from the roadway, and to close any roads as needed.

Interim Secretary Sherri LeBas urges motorists to take the threat of winter weather seriously. "In the event of adverse weather conditions, the department will strive to maintain access to Louisiana's highways and interstates; however, we encourage the motoring public to avoid traveling during snow and ice, if at all possible," said LeBas.

During winter weather conditions, the best thing motorists can do is drive slowly and carefully, and avoid driving while distracted. Always allow for extra driving time, reduce speeds when visibility is low, and make sure there is plenty of room between vehicles. Also, look out for black ice, which can form on bridges, overpasses, off-ramps and in shady spots. As always, DOTD reminds motorists to buckle up and refrain from drinking and driving.

Citizens can get the latest updates on real-time traffic and road conditions by using the 511 Traveler Information System simply by dialing 511 from their telephone and saying the route or region about which they are seeking information. Travelers can also access this information by visiting the 511 Traveler Information Web site at [www.511la.org](http://www.511la.org).

Motorists can also obtain information regarding road closures by contacting DOTD's Customer Service Center at 1-877-4LA-DOTD (1-877-452-3683). The center is open 7:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.



**How do we  
break down  
walls of words?**

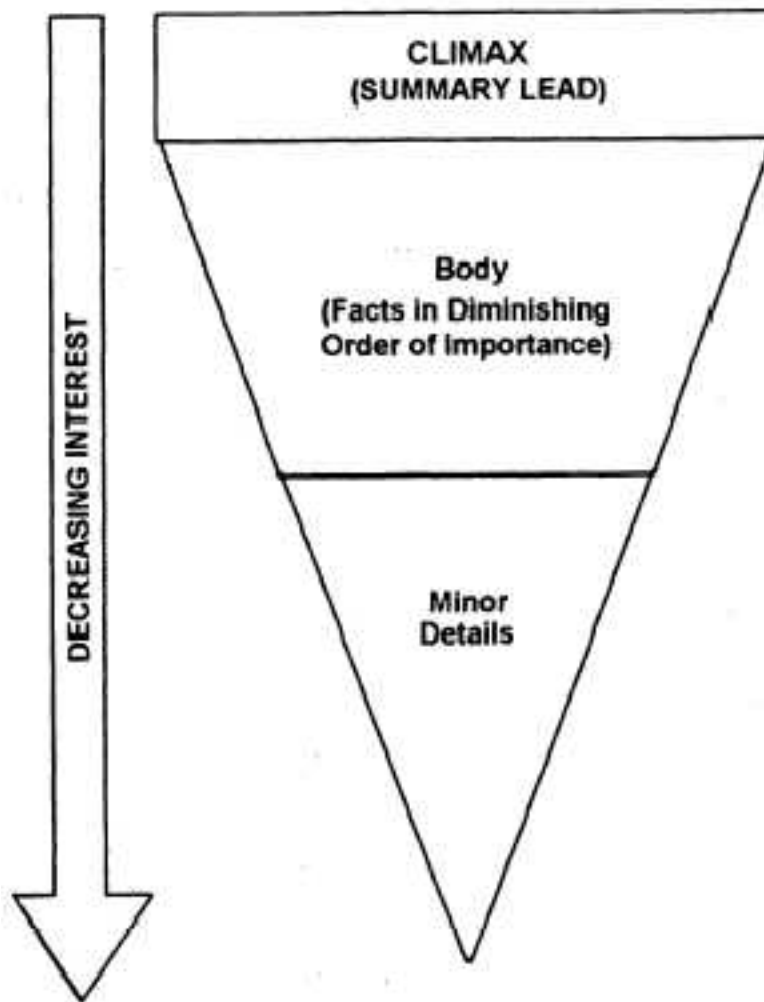


**Plain Language +  
Readability +  
Logical Design  
equals  
Digital Content That Works**

# Scannable: Essential Message

- Give people only what they need
- Cut! Cut! Cut! And cut again!
- Start with key point (inverted pyramid)
- Break down wall of words
- Layer information

# Scannable: Start with Key Points



# Scannable: Headings

- Outline your content with headings
  - Good headings help readers
  - Good headings help writers
- Make heading levels obvious
- Use site visitor's words in headings

# Scannable: Lists

- Lists make information easy to grab
- Keep lists short
- Number lists for instructions
- Turn paragraphs into steps
- Keep sentence structure in parallel

# Scannable: Tables

- Use tables when you have
  - numbers to compare
  - series of “if, then” sentences
- Keep tables simple
- Do not center text in tables

# Scannable: Links

- Make link meaningful out of context
- Make visited and unvisited links obvious
- Use action phrases for action links

# Effective Web Content

- Plain Language
- Readable
- Scannable
  - Headings
  - Lists
  - Tables
  - Links



**Perfection is achieved,  
not when there is nothing more to add,  
but  
when there is nothing left to take away.**

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery

# Learn More

- Plain Language [plainlanguage.gov/](http://plainlanguage.gov/)
- NIH Plain Language  
[nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/plain-language](http://nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/plain-language)
- **Letting go of the Words**  
by Janice (Ginny) Redish

