



# Simplify Language

**Be understood. Be inclusive.**

**Boulder Chamber DEI Conference – 11/20/24**

**Lee Shainis**

**[www.simplifylanguage.com](http://www.simplifylanguage.com)**

# Agenda

**1** Why and when to simplify?

**2** Tools and tips

**3** Next steps

**Non-verbal communication is important too!**

**I'll share these slides upon request.**

# Language Access

**From a city government:**

**When language access practices are in place, language is no longer a barrier for residents to meaningfully participate in, and benefit from, information, programs, services, and activities, including civic engagement and decision-making processes.**

**Simplified version:**

**When people can communicate with city staff and understand communication from the city, they can:**

- **Be informed.**
- **Be involved.**
- **Access services.**

**\*All examples are real, anonymous, and not meant to criticize.**

# Training objectives

Learn skills to make communication easier for people to quickly understand.

- Literacy barriers
- Language barriers
- People who are neurodivergent
- People who prefer clear and brief communication

Reduce text by 20-80% without changing content.

Improve:

- Access
- Translations
- Trust
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Surveys and data
- Efficiency
- Productivity
- Belonging

Who are your audiences?

## Why I focus on this

1

I've dedicated  
my life to  
cross-cultural  
connection.

2

This problem  
is common.  
The solution is  
quick.

3

I have many  
privileges,  
including  
language, race  
and gender.

# Why is this a problem?

Who speaks up when they don't understand?

What do they do?

- Pretend
- Ignore, disengage
- Misinterpret or assume
- Feel shame, excluded, dumb

We receive a lot communication!

Unpopular messages need to be extra clear.



# Shifting responsibility

**Don't ask "Do you understand?"**

**Ask "How can I \_\_\_\_\_?"**

**Encourage clarifying questions.**

# Power

Not everyone wants others to understand.



*“The language in this contract is wordy and indirect, and uses unnecessary technical words and phrases. I’m very impressed.”*



# Reflection – Discussion

Share about a time you experienced language barriers or language bias.

How would you describe a potential weakness in your communication?

What do your audiences want from your communication?

How can simplifying language impact your work and your audiences?

- Access
- Belonging
- Trust
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Surveys and data
- Efficiency
- Productivity
- Translations



Small group  
conversation

## How to be great

**Practice and humility.**

**Know what your audience  
needs and wants.**

**Mirror.**

**Don't oversimplify.  
Maintain the tone you want.**

**Do it quickly.**

# AI prompt ideas and policies

Remove personal info.

Add human touch.

Check facts.

Simplify and shorten this

Shorten this by 50%

Simplify this to a 10th grade  
reading level

Simplify this using bullet points

Write or paste in your text (no more than 2000 characters)

Clear

Normal  **B** *I* U    

Capital Investment Capacity Building is intended to assist organizations that are seeking capacity-building support and have identified that executing a needed capital project in a current commercial space, or constructing or purchasing a new commercial space, is a likely next step towards ensuring a long-term physical presence in the City.

Score and Shorten

## Your Score

3 / 10

The simplified version reduced your text by 50%.

## Simplified Version

Capital Investment Capacity Building helps organizations:

- Improve their current commercial space
- Build or buy a new commercial space
- Secure a long-term presence in the City

What do you think of the simplified version?

Choose Feedback



Write or paste in your text (no more than 2000 characters)

Clear

Normal  **B** *I* U    

Our students make up the heart of our campus, collaborating with faculty, staff and each other to ensure they have a community that reflects and honors their diversity. They enjoy access to meals that meet all their dietary needs, as well as health and academic support that allows them to flourish. Set in a vibrant residential neighborhood with access to all the city has to offer, you'll experience the benefits of a tight-knit liberal arts school and a big-city university at the same time.

You'll build friendships with students from around the world in student housing. Our academic support services ensure you have expert help on a huge range of topics. Professional on-campus health and counseling services will help you stay healthy and comfortable in your new home.

Our dining hall provides made-from-scratch meals using local and sustainable ingredients, covering cuisines from Mediterranean to Chinese. Abundant vegetarian, vegan and allergy-friendly options ensure everyone has plenty of choices.

Food options mere steps away from campus range from pizza to Thai and Lebanese, and with the rest of the city a bicycle or train ride away, you'll have the the opportunity to take advantage of the city's growing and diverse cultural scene. Whether your tastes run toward taco trucks or tasting menus, thrift stores or boutiques, museums or mosh pits, the city offers excitement and inspiration.

Our students' passion and involvement make our community truly special. From the moment you're welcomed to campus, you'll contribute your thoughts and your voice, blazing a trail that will help lead our dynamic and diverse community into the future. We look forward to you joining us.

Score and Shorten

Simplified Language

## Your Score

2 / 10

The simplified version reduced your text by 67%.

## Simplified Version

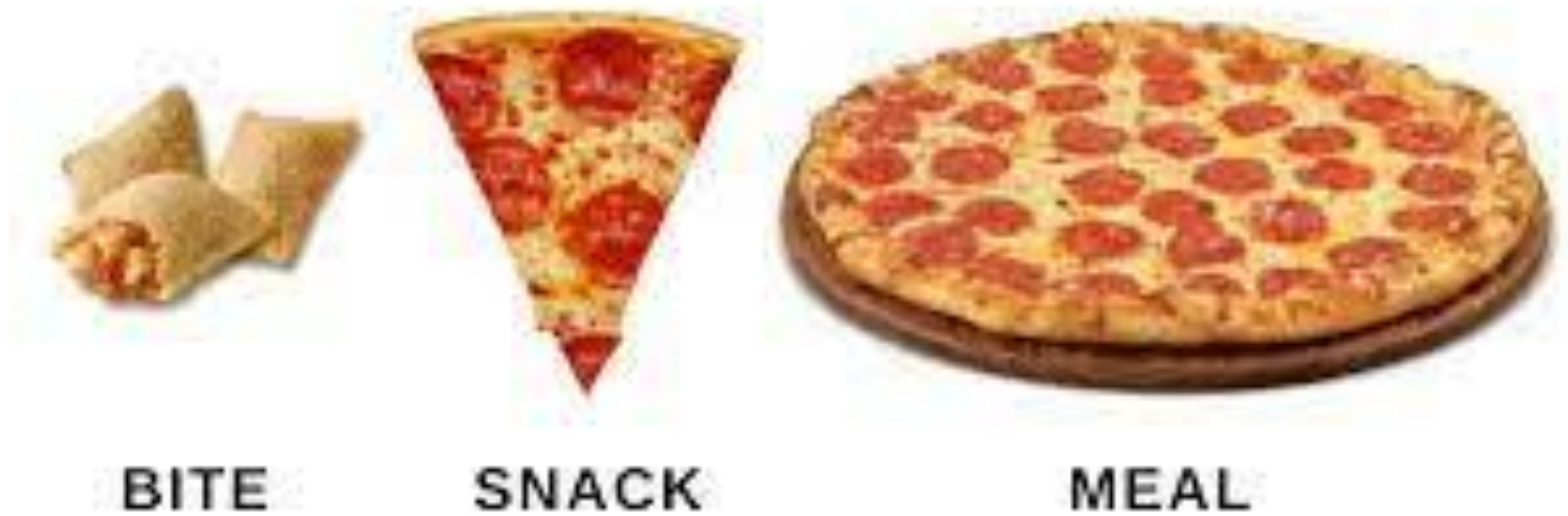
Our diverse students collaborate with faculty, staff, and each other to create a welcoming community. We offer:

- Meals for all dietary needs
- Health and academic support
- A vibrant neighborhood with city access
- Global friendships in student housing
- Expert academic help
- On-campus health and counseling

Our dining hall provides various cuisines with vegetarian, vegan, and allergy-friendly options. Nearby food options include pizza, Thai, and Lebanese. The city offers diverse cultural experiences.

Join our community and contribute your voice to our future.

# Meal Snack Bite



Hello! In this newsletter:

## The essentials:

- Here's what you need to know 1<sup>st</sup>. [Link for more.](#)
- Here's what you need to know 2<sup>nd</sup>. [Link for more.](#)
- Here's what you need to know 3<sup>rd</sup>. [Link for more.](#)

## Here's some other information and news:

- New hires...
- This upcoming event...
- Our recent award...

# Simplifying tips

## 1 Remove excess words

You may know these, but they don't come naturally.

- We do this **in order to** succeed.
- I visited **a number of** sites this week.
- You'll join a strategy group **as well as** a work group...
- The project **exists to provide**...
- The program **is designed to provide**....
- Our company **aims to provide** great services.
- The centers **are dedicated to serving** the needs of older adults.
- Employees' preferences are **taken into consideration**.
- We **would like to extend an invitation for** you to...
- **I'm writing to inform you that we** will be...
- In addition to meeting staff, you can get your general questions answered.

# Practice

- We are excited to **announce that we will be offering** three new programs.
- Please see the website and **be sure to complete** all required forms.
- The new member orientation **will take place on** October 17<sup>th</sup>.
- Our organization **is positioned to help** tackle these challenges.
- **I want to let you know that we are planning on** conducting our survey on Monday.



## Simplifying tips

2 Use simple words and phrases. Avoid jargon or define it.

- intersectionality
- collective impact

- disseminate
- stakeholders

\*Sometimes more words are needed to simplify!

Share your time to help inspire **collective stewardship** and build community.

There are concerns about tax increases on local businesses and residents on **fixed incomes**, along with loss of **direct governance oversight**.

Steer and coordinate the advocacy network, including through the ongoing support of members, meeting **cadences** and agendas, and coordination with the steering

# Practice Activity A – shorten and simplify these

1. If you have any questions about the hiring process or you have general Human Resources questions, please contact us via email or by checking out our website.
2. If selected for an interview, we will request three professional references. Please gather the contact information (phone and email) for three references in preparation for this part of our process.
3. We provide a wide range of services to help you not only get a job, but build a career.
4. We view individual differences as assets to be leveraged.
5. Get ready for streamlined payment options.
6. Through our focus on racial equity, our employee benefits, and the many programs and resources we offer our staff, we continually strive to weave respect for one another into the fabric of our organization.
7. To ensure a seamless user experience for all our users, our current efforts are focused on delivering digital experiences that will work for all users under all circumstances. This is a journey we will forever be committed to, as we value each visitor that takes the time to visit our website.

# Simplifying tips

**3** Define and limit acronyms.  
No more than 2 per page.

- SOM
- GF
- IEP
- PD



# Simplifying tips

## 4 Avoid words with multiple meanings

- wrap up
- give in
- let up
- let down
- kick off
- break down
- make up
- kick back



How did you **make out** on the test?

- For questions, **check out** our website.
- We don't just meet the **bar**, we exceed the **bar**.
- The deadline to apply is **right around the corner**.
- You keep people **on their toes**.
- Working here goes beyond just having a job to **make ends meet**.

# Practice

- I can't **make out** what she's saying.
- We are **wrapping up** our last class.
- The program **kicks off** with a 2-week orientation.
- This training is **in line with** others we have embraced.
- We need to **iron out** a few details.
- It's good to **touch base** with your supervisor every month.

# Simplifying tips

5

**Short sentences**

**Short paragraphs**

**Use bullets and avoid lots of commas**

1.

In addition, the team supports our Employee Resource Groups, offers in-depth training in DEI and social justice topics, and provides all employees with resources, interpersonal skill-building, coaching, and conflict management.

2.

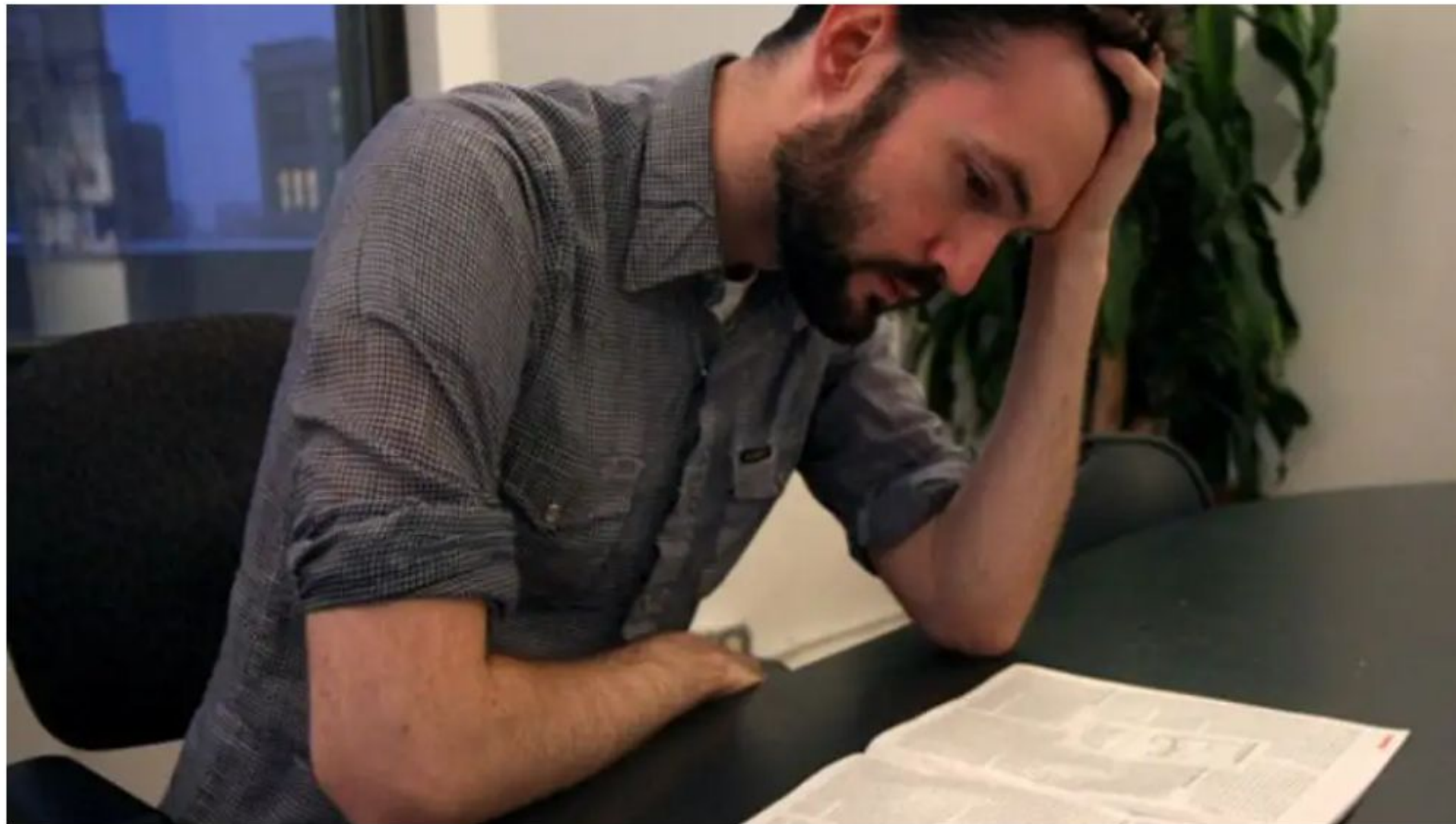
The team also:

- Supports our Employee Resource Groups.
- Offers in-depth training in DEI and social justice topics.
- Provides all employees with resources, interpersonal skill-building, coaching, and conflict management.

NEWS

# Nation Shudders At Large Block Of Uninterrupted Text

Published March 9, 2010



## Simplify writing

Local foods and direct-to-consumer marketing support many of the city's food and agricultural goals (as identified in the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan). They provide an opportunity for people to ask producers questions about where their food came from and how it was grown. Buying direct from a farmer means they can find out as much information as they wish about how livestock and crops were grown, handled, and harvested. This helps build community and fosters greater confidence and satisfaction than can be gained by relying on the advertising claims of food from far-flung and often anonymous sources. Diversifying our agricultural land uses adds new special places for people to visit and appreciate and make part of their lives. People intuitively know that eating food grown closer to home is often healthier for the land, for the community, and for themselves.

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# Simplifying tips

## 6 Simple sentence structure

**Your contributions do not go unnoticed.**

Your contributions are noticed.

**In addition to reserving 155 acres of the site for flood protection and permanent Open Space, the annexation agreement includes the ability for the university to develop 129 acres.**

The annexation agreement reserves...

# Simplify speaking

## 7 Speak clearly and enunciate

Say each sound. Don't merge words.

- Did you  
**Ja**
- Where is he going?  
**Wherzee goin?**
- What are you watching?  
**Whatcha watchin?**
- I'll gettim som'in e likeslot
- Skoden

Sound natural

Adjust volume

# Simplifying tips

Remove excess  
words

Simple words and  
phrases

Use bullets  
Short sentences

Simple sentence  
structure

Avoid words with  
multiple meanings

Avoid or define  
acronyms

**Avoid / and ()**

Enunciate and  
adjust volume

**Slow down**  
**Pause**

# Speaking practice



Pair activity

- **Explain what you do or describe your company to a prospective employee who is a highly advanced English learner.**
- **Listener take notes. Share feedback – 1 effective thing, 1 thing to work on.**



**Brevity is confidence.**

**Length is fear.**

- from the book *Smart Brevity* by Jim VandeHei, Mike Allen, and Roy Schwartz

**I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.**

- Mark Twain



**Get clear on your key message**

## Next steps

1. Practice. Observe. Reflect.

2. What did you learn?

3. Get more training and spread the word 😊.

**Request slides, provide  
feedback, and sign up for my  
newsletter here!**



[www.simplifylanguage.com](http://www.simplifylanguage.com)

 [lee@simplifylanguage.com](mailto:lee@simplifylanguage.com)