



# Plain Language Leadership: Converting Buzzspeak to REALspeak

---

This template is designed to help you walk through steps to communicate clearly with your audience. If you will be **speaking** to your audience, this guide will help you connect with your audience so that they hear and understand you. If you will be communicating in **writing**, be sure your document is well-organized and follows key plain language rules like using a conversational tone, active voice and shorter sentences.

## THE STEPS

### Step 1: Ask yourself:

1. What's my message? *For this very first draft of your message, don't filter or edit yourself as you write. Just write what comes to mind.*



What's my message (continued from Page 1)?

2. What's my point? *We sometimes get so caught up in making things sound pretty that we fail to nail the bottom line.*

3. What do I most need listeners to hear and understand?



The “grandparent” version (continued):

### Step 3: Tailor your simpler, jargon-free language.

1. Who is my audience? *Always, always write for your audience. If you don't know much about your audience, take the time to do your research. Talk to them one-on-one.*
  
2. Get the answers to these questions:
  - a. How is their experience different than mine? *Consider where they are in the organization and what exposure they've had (or not) to the corporate side of things.*



*If your message doesn't have to be delivered in a directive way, use language that will open, rather than shut down dialogue. But be sure you really mean it. If you're not really open to feedback, you will lose credibility by pretending you are.*

Use the following scale to consider your current level of flexibility with regard to delivering this message, from completely directive (possibly as a reprimand) to actively seeking a collaborative conversation:

Completely Directive	Resistant to input	One-way delivery of information	Neutral	Willing to answer questions	Seeking feedback	Fully Open
----------------------	--------------------	---------------------------------	---------	-----------------------------	------------------	------------

a. If I'm not open to dialogue, why not? Is this choice about me, or is it for the good of the organization?

b. Is there some element of my message on which I can be more flexible?

4. Once you understand your audience's perspective and the level of dialogue you're willing to support, rewrite your message again, tailored to focus on what they need to hear from you.





d. Do I completely believe what I'm selling? *This is critically important. If you don't buy it, they won't either.*

e. If I'm not buying my own message, what needs to change?

2. **Inspiring loyalty and trust** through difficult messaging.

a. *Keeping in mind what's meaningful to your audience, look at your answer to Step 3, Question 2c, above:* what does my audience worry about, and how might my message trigger those worries?

b. What can I say to acknowledge their concerns?

c. What can I say to address and mitigate their concerns? *Even if the answer is “Not much” at this point, validating their perspective and committing to look for solutions will go a long way toward building trust.*

d. What questions should I anticipate, and how will I answer them?

e. What will I say if I don't have an answer to a question they ask? *Be prepared for this. It's better to say you'll have to check into something than to make up an answer to avoid looking clueless. Your audience knows the difference, and you'll instantly lose credibility.*

## Finalize and test your message.

*Add the inspirational elements that will resonate with your audience and finalize your message. If you have enough lead time, run your newly transformed message past a test group of your audience to see if it resonates. Get feedback from people who understand your audience far better than you do, and adjust as appropriate. Consider having a trusted pool of advisors on hand for such occasions and check in with them on a regular basis to ensure you're aware of what's going on at different levels within the organization.*

If you will be communicating in writing, run the information through formal editing and an informal check by your trusted advisors. For more editing tips, check out the plain language resources at the [Center for Plain Language](#).