

Presenters' scripts for 2009 Plain English Awards

The comments below are a transcript of the presenters' scripts for announcing winners and finalists in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards.

These scripts are drawn from judges' comments at the judges' meeting, along with comments from People's Choice nomination forms.

Best Sentence Transformation award

Presented by Neil James

The finalists are:

- ACC
- Greater Wellington Regional Council

Comments on finalists

ACC

The ACC entry takes a sentence written for case managers who are helping clients dealing with pain. But the main pain relief here comes courtesy of the editor who has translated a convoluted, longwinded and tortured sentence that was crying out for rehabilitation. The transformation demonstrates it is possible to avoid jargon to increase clarity without losing the most essential medical content.

Greater Wellington Regional Council

The Greater Wellington Regional Council has been a presence in these Awards before, so it's no surprise to us their people are at it again, cleaning up some enviro-officialese-management-babble in the best way possible: ditching the whole thing and starting again.

Winner

And the winner of the Best Sentence Transformation award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a transformation that struck the best balance in conveying the original content in the clearest style ... ACC!

Best Plain English Website — Private Sector award

Presented by Melua Watson

The finalists are:

- Pinnacle Life
- Springload
- Seafood Industry Training Organisation

Comments on finalists

Pinnacle Life — www.pinnaclelife.co.nz

Insurance can be difficult to make engaging. This site uses a conversational tone and makes sure the information is easy for its customers to understand. It has headings that truly work ‘at a glance’.

Springload — www.springload.co.nz

Uses clear, understandable writing that connects with the reader, but was not dry. It has life and expression and the judges particularly enjoyed its use of contractions and humour. The site showed an excellent standard of plain English writing with all of the online reader’s needs in mind.

Seafood Industry Training Organisation — <http://www.seafoodito.co.nz>

The website is clearly written, well structured, and well formatted, which makes it very useful and usable.

Winner

And the winner of the Best Plain English Website — Private Sector award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a website that the judges said ‘showed an excellent standard of plain English writing with all of the online reader’s needs in mind’. It’s ... Springload!

Best Plain English Website — Public Sector award

Presented by pre-recorded video by Kristina Halvorson, United States

The finalists are:

- Inland Revenue
- ACC
- Ministry of Education

Comments on finalists

Inland Revenue

This site had very well written content with good use of bulleted lists and very effective links. Writers made sure the most important information came first — a key feature in good web writing.

ACC

This site was very well organised and used effective labelling and active and clear link-text. Readers would struggle to get lost. A very customer-focused site.

Ministry of Education

This site used plain English well to describe governmental and legalistic terms. A very clean site with lots of information.

Winner

And the clear winner of the Best Plain English Website — Public Sector award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards, a site that showed a clear partnership between writers and designers who all kept the needs of the reader in mind, is ... ACC!

Best Plain English Document — Public Sector award

Presented by Neil James

One of the features of this year's Awards was the strength of the entries for the Best Plain English Document for the Public Sector. Not only were there more of them, but the standards were higher and the competition stronger.

The three finalists from this strong field are:

- Environment Bay of Plenty Regional Council — *Backyard*, issue 17
- Ministry of Justice — *Parenting Plans: Parents' Guide to Making Plans for Their Children after Separation*
- Ministry of Consumer Affairs — *Before You Borrow Money*

Comments on finalists

Environment Bay of Plenty Regional Council

The Environment Bay of Plenty's ten year plan issue of *Backyard* represents something that is still too rare in the world of government: a genuinely consultative document. Its tone generates an effective conversation between citizens and the council, and the structure and design make it engaging, interactive, and clear.

Ministry of Justice

The Ministry of Justice has also thought closely about its audience in its *Parents' Guide to Making Plans for Their Children after Separation*. This takes on the challenging task of speaking to people going through an emotionally fraught time, guiding them through the practical steps that minimise the impact on their children. It's structured in small, management bites, with clever design that presents a kid's perspective.

Ministry of Consumer Affairs

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs brochure *Before you Borrow Money* is also an extremely practical document, setting out in a clear and accessible way the questions everyone should ask before signing on that dotted line during a financial deal. The Ministry knows where people need to use this document — often when under pressure — so it makes the most vital information quickly accessible. This can only help to prevent people getting into further financial difficulty.

Winner

And the winner of the Best Plain English Document — Public Sector award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a document that was ambitious in scope and impact, helping people to manage some of the most difficult days in their lives. It's ... the Ministry of Justice!

Best Plain English Document — Private Sector award

Presented by Neil James

While the public sector documents entered into this year's Awards were the strongest field yet, the private sector did not have the same depth of achievement. Clearly, some private sector organisations could learn a great deal from their public sector colleagues.

Fortunately, our two finalists for a private sector document award were more than capable of matching the best, not only in New Zealand, but anywhere in the world.

The finalists are:

- Pinnacle Life — *Life Cover Policy Document*
- PeopleMedia — *On the Level: A Guide to How We Treat People Around Here*

Comments on finalists

Pinnacle Life

The language used in the Pinnacle Life policy document is not just clear, it's highly sophisticated. I'd even go as far as to say it establishes a personality with whom you rather enjoy having a conversation, and for an insurance document, that's a real achievement.

People Media

PeopleMedia's *On the Level* guide pitches an important message about discrimination and workplace behaviour, but makes it accessible and engaging without belittling or downplaying its subject matter. It is another example of a document that lifted above the pack through excellent structure and design as much as through clear language.

Winner

And the winner of the Best Plain English Document — Private Sector award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is the document the judges describe as 'a best practice example that could stand up to competition anywhere in the world. It provides a model example that other companies in the sector should strive to emulate'. It's ... Pinnacle Life!

People's Choice — Best Plain English Document award

Presented by Jim Mora

The finalists are:

- Air New Zealand — *Grab-A-Seat Weekender Deal: Terms and Conditions*
- Royal Commission on Auckland Governance — *Auckland Governance: Executive Summary*

Comments on finalists

(These are the actual comments that the people nominating the documents put on the People's Choice entry form.)

Air New Zealand — *Grab-A-Seat Weekender Deal: Terms and Conditions*

The member of the public who submitted this document said, 'I think this is a fantastic example of plain English. Terms and conditions are always confusing and in small print and a bit ominous. But these are clear and fun and use non-threatening language that you actually want to read.'

Royal Commission on Auckland Governance — *Auckland Governance: Executive Summary*

The member of the public who submitted this document said, 'As a first year law clerk, I was dreading the prospect of reading the Royal Commission's Report on Auckland Governance. Stories wafted of reports so long and impenetrable that they become mere doorstops in Parliamentary offices. I counted down to the day, and prepared to lock myself away somewhere no one would see me doze off. Imagine my delight, then, when I received the report. Its Executive Summary was laid out beautifully, with short paragraphs, very little jargon, and varied sentence length. It even featured a three word sentence — hallelujah! As the report progressed I noticed all of the features of plain English writing that were pointed out to me in our writing training. In addition, the report was made available in html and PDF versions on the Royal Commission website, and in hard copy. The Commission deserves this award for tackling one of the toughest jobs in the country, assessing the problems and opportunities with dexterity, and presenting it in an approachable, useful, readable document.'

Winner

And the winner of the People's Choice — Best Plain English Document award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a document about which the judges said 'has personality — rare in government documents — and goes beyond just being clear'. It's ... Royal Commission on Auckland Governance — *Auckland Governance: Executive Summary*.

People's Choice — Best Plain English Website award

Presented by David Russell

The finalists are:

- Ministry of Fisheries — fs.fish.govt.nz
- ESL News New Zealand — eslnews.org.nz
- Smith & Wild — www.smithwild.co.nz

Comments on finalists

(These are the actual comments that the people nominating the websites put on the People's Choice entry form.)

Ministry of Fisheries — fs.fish.govt.nz

The member of the public who submitted this website said, 'For such a comprehensive site it is extremely reader-friendly. It has a site navigation feature that allows the reader to tailor their searches to the type of visitor they are. This, along with the very clear wording, makes it easy for people to find the content that is most relevant to their needs.'

ESL News New Zealand — eslnews.org.nz

The member of the public who submitted this website said, 'This website performs an invaluable service for migrants, explaining local news stories in basic English for both reading and listening comprehension. The site is a labour of love, produced by one person. It covers a wide range of issues, which are helpfully sorted into categories for easy access.'

Smith & Wild — www.smithwild.co.nz

The member of the public who submitted this website said, 'It gives me a very clear idea of how I might benefit from the services of Smith & Wild. It's easy to find your way around — I especially like the 'quick links' tabs on the home page. The writing is clear and client-focused.'

Winner

And the winner of the People's Choice — Best Plain English Website award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a website about which the judges said 'successfully covers a huge scope and is an excellent example of New Zealand e-Government at work'. It's ... the Ministry of Fisheries!

People's Choice — 'Brainstrain' Website award

Presented by David Russell

The finalists are:

- Plain Communications — www.plain.co.nz
- Vodafone NZ — Prepay Broadband Terms and Conditions
vodafonez.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/vodafonez.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=7401
- Department of Internal Affairs — dia.govt.nz

Comments on finalists

(These are the actual comments that the people nominating the websites put on the People's Choice entry form.)

Plain Communications — www.plain.co.nz

The member of the public who submitted this website said 'The website does not focus on helping clients find the information they need, and made me leave the site after 5 seconds'.

Vodafone NZ — Prepay Broadband Terms and Conditions

vodafonez.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/vodafonez.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=7401

The member of the public who submitted this website said, 'I thought they were advertising a real prepay mobile broadband account, until I tried to read their terms and conditions. How many people would have the patience to try and understand this convoluted charging structure?'

Department of Internal Affairs — dia.govt.nz

The member of the public who submitted this website said 'The home page alone is a classic example of how not to do hyperlinks — there is link splatter all through the text. The sentences are already very long but links throughout make it even more difficult to read. The way the content is written makes reading it very hard work, which is a shame because there is some really useful content on this website.'

Winner

And the winner of the People's Choice — 'Brainstrain' Website award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a website about which the judges said 'This site has a wide public audience and the written content must focus on readers' needs. That is not the case here'. It's ... Vodafone NZ.

People's Choice — 'Brainstrain' Document award

Presented by Jim Mora

The finalists are:

- Real Estate Institute of New Zealand — *Sale of Real Estate by Auction*
- Ministry of Justice — *Application by One Party for Order Dissolving a Marriage or Civil Union*

Comments on finalists

(These are the actual comments that the people nominating the documents put on the People's Choice entry form.)

Real Estate Institute of New Zealand — *Sale of Real Estate by Auction*

The member of the public who submitted this document said, 'Can't understand a word in it! Buying a house is a huge deal, and to not be able to understand the document that states the condition of the sale is terrible. Also, in the online form the print is small, hard to read, and intimidating!'

Ministry of Justice — *Application by One Party for Order Dissolving a Marriage or Civil Union*

The member of the public who submitted this document said, 'This document caused me considerable frustration. Even though parts of were plain, a lot of it was anything but. It took about 10 times longer to fill in than it should, because I had to work out what they really wanted. Not exactly helpful at a stressful time.'

Winner

And the winner of the People's Choice — 'Brainstrain' Document award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a document the judges called 'A fine example of 19th century legal drafting'. It's ... the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand — *Sale of Real Estate by Auction*.

Plain English Champion — Best Project award

Presented by Jacqueline Harrison

The finalists are:

- ACC — Redesigning www.acc.co.nz
- Cancer Society New Zealand — Questions You May Wish to Ask: A guide for people with cancer
- NZ Transport Agency — Feet First 2009

Comments on finalists

ACC — Redesigning www.acc.co.nz

ACC recognised that they had a problem — their website needed work. They went about resolving the problem in an orderly way, and made sure they involved the whole organisation in the review project. They were self-critical in their analysis. They recognised that a lot of irrelevant material had build up over a period of years and that much of the information was not user-friendly. They edited rigorously, applying plain English principles, and went from 14,000 to 7,000 webpages. This is an excellent start to a long-term project.

Cancer Society New Zealand — Questions You May Wish to Ask: A guide for people with cancer

Very strongly researched, conceived, and executed as a project. We were impressed by the multiple languages making this information accessible and reader-friendly. A very simple but practical way to bridge the information gap between clinicians and patients.

NZ Transport Agency — Feet First 2009

A very well-evidenced entry with detailed information under each of the categories. It is a significant project that covers 400 schools and 122,745 students (and growing). The project is multi-layered and engages everyone at all levels. The project spans 7 years, and the evidence of results is clear. It's plain English from the beginning. Even just the website statistics show the interest in this project.

Winner

And the winner of the Plain English Champion — Best Project award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards is a project about which the judges' said, 'A comprehensive project that used all the principles of plain English to achieve wide reach among its target audience and demonstrate impressive audience engagement'. It's ... NZ Transport Agency!

Plain English Champion — Best Individual or Team award

Presented by Jacqueline Harrison

The finalists are:

- Department of Corrections — Corrections Inmate Employment Team
- Cancer Society New Zealand — Editorial Team
- Simpson Grierson — Julie O'Brien, Professional Development Manager

Comments on finalists

Department of Corrections — Corrections Inmate Employment Team

The team followed a well-structured process, and involved the target group involved at every stage. They contributed to measurable results by markedly lifting the percentage of prisoners participating in employment-related activities.

Cancer Society New Zealand — Editorial Team

The Cancer Society editorial team goes to great lengths, including applying sophisticated testing methods, to check that their documents are in plain English and accessible to all. We were very impressed by their efforts to create plain English documents which could then be accurately translated into multiple languages. Their reader-friendly publications cater well for both doctors and patients, and are a credit to all members of the team.

Simpson Grierson — Julie O'Brien, Professional Development Manager

A true individual entry from a tireless worker, completely committed to an ongoing project in an area traditionally known for jargon and traditional ways of writing. This plain English champion structured the culture-change programme in a textbook way and has single-handedly made a very positive difference to her organisation and its clients.

Winner

And the winner of the Plain English Champion — Best Individual or Team award in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards, about whom the judges' said 'they provided evidence of a significant contribution to clear, reader-friendly communication and a real-world success story. This is plain English in action produced by people who care' is ... Cancer Society New Zealand — Editorial Team!

- Meg Biggs
- Julie Holt
- Liz Wright
- Michelle Gunderson-Reid
- Sarah Stacy-Baynes
- Hohepa MacDougall

Plain English Champion — Best Organisation award

Presented by Lynda Harris

The finalists are:

- Office of the Banking Ombudsman
- Ocean Design
- Waikato District Health Board

Comments on finalists

Office of the Banking Ombudsman

The Office of the Banking Ombudsman provided clear evidence that it was serious about a broad plain English culture change. It showed support from the top driving the process. The entry included 'before and after' rewrites that were refreshing. This entry showed commitment to a diversity of measures across training, templates, and documentation that has already seen some results and is likely to bring lasting change.

Ocean Design

This entry showed a strong commitment to using plain English internally, supported by ongoing and very practical training for all staff and an in-house style guide. Most importantly, Ocean Design showed clear evidence of using plain English as it should be used — in the daily work for the company's clients.

Waikato District Health Board

This was a well-organised entry showing clear evidence of strong support at the top of the organisation. The entry also showed evidence of training and ongoing commitment to spreading the plain English message in this large organisation with diverse audiences.

Winner

The winner of the supreme award, Plain English Champion — Best Organisation in the 2009 WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Awards, about whom the judges' said 'this organisation showed the real impact (supported by hard evidence) of its commitment to plain English' is ... the Office of the Banking Ombudsman!