

# **Supersolidaria's Plain and Inclusive Language Guide**



# Supersolidaria




Citizen relations group - General Secretariat

—

Superintendencia de la Economía Solidaria  
2025

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Translated from Spanish to English by: Jaime Alberto Molina Rodriguez, Specialized Professional, Citizen  
Engagement Group (Profesional Especializado Grupo de Relacionamiento con la Ciudadanía)

 <b>Supersolidaria</b>	<b>PLAIN AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE</b>	<b>Code :</b> GU-GEI-002
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## Presentation


Plain language is not just a writing technique it is a global movement that is transforming the relationship between the State and its citizens. Its growing importance in the public sector, together with the commitment of the Superintendencia de la Economía Solidaria (SES) or Supersolidaria to the individuals it serves, is driving the adoption of this practice.

Plain language means conveying messages—both written and spoken—in a simple and direct manner, to ensure understanding and strengthen the relationship between the State and society (Red de Lenguaje Claro de Colombia, 2018).

At Supersolidaria, we promote a culture of effective communication. We believe that every public servant is a change agent who helps bring the State closer to the individuals, strengthen institutional trust, and ensure equitable access to information. Applying plain language is more than just a technique—it is an act of respect and citizen empowerment, aligned with the principles of transparency, streamlined procedures, citizen service, and democratic participation.

With this in mind, the Clear and Inclusive Language Guide is presented, a practical tool aimed at strengthening the ability of public servants to communicate with citizens in a clear, approachable, and inclusive way.


ELABORATE BY	CHECKED BY	APPROVED BY
<b>Name:</b> María Fernanda Gutiérrez Vargas y Quentin Casier <b>Post:</b> Contratista - Practicante Grupo de Relacionamento con la Ciudadanía	<b>Name:</b> Marcela Margarita Vidal Marquez <b>Post:</b> Coordinadora Grupo de Relacionamento con la Ciudadanía	<b>Name:</b> Ivan Mauricio Aleman Peñaranda <b>Post:</b> Secretario General

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## 1. Purpose and Approaches


There is no single way to write; each person has their own style and vocabulary. However, in many fields, technical language tends to dominate, making it difficult to understand for those unfamiliar with it. Complex writing is often perceived as a sign of intelligence when, in reality, plain language requires genuine pedagogical effort.

Adopting plain language at the Superintendencia de la Economía Solidaria means communicating in a simple and effective manner, which brings multiple benefits:

- It facilitates stakeholders and interest groups to exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities.
- It reduces errors and unnecessary clarifications, thereby lowering administrative and operational costs.
- It increases efficiency in handling citizen requests.
- It effectively supports Rendering of Accounts by Supersolidaria.
- It promotes transparency, access to public information, and citizen participation—key strategies of the Citizen relations Policy.
- It drives social inclusion for individuals with disabilities, ensuring the full enjoyment of their rights on equal terms (Departamento Nacional de Planeación – DNP, 2015).

In this regard, plain language represents a commitment to administrative innovation. Integrating good communication practices into inspection processes and citizen service strengthens institutional legitimacy, encourages dialogue with supervised organizations, and brings the State closer to the public in a more human, efficient, and transparent way.

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## 2. The ABC Of Plain Language

The ABC begins with the definition of plain language and the key criteria—**structure, content, and design**—continues with a step-by-step process for creating plain language documents and concludes with the application of a methodology called the "*Simplification Lab*." In Part 4 of this guide, a more developed methodology is presented.

### Before Drafting the response:

- Identify the citizen and their need: Carefully read the request or inquiry.
- Define the purpose of the message: What action, information, or decision does the person need?
- Adapt the tone: Keep it respectful, friendly, and approachable. Use "you" and avoid unnecessary technical terms.
- Organize your ideas: Make a brief list of the key points to include.


### While Drafting:

- Be brief but complete: Stick to one idea per sentence and one topic per paragraph.
- Use simple, everyday words: Replace technical terms or explain them in parentheses.
  - Example: Instead of "your procedure will be inadmissible," write "your request cannot be accepted because..."
  - Example: Instead of "it is unusual for the SES to issue a monitoring certificate without first verifying all requirements," write "to issue the monitoring certificate, you must submit the following documents."
- Write in a logical order:
  - *Introduction*: Provide context in one sentence.
  - *Body*: Explain the key points in a clear sequence.
  - *Closing*: Clearly state the next step or action the citizen should take.
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms without explanation.
- Prefer positive wording over negative: "You must submit these documents" instead of "Don't forget that if you don't submit..."
- Review spelling and punctuation.

### After Drafting:


- Validate comprehension. Ask yourself:
  - Will the person understand what they need to do?
  - Did I use simple and respectful language?

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- Would a 10-year-old understand the purpose of the response?
- Check format and information: Make sure names, dates, and requirements are correct and up to date.
- Ask for a second opinion. If possible, have a colleague read the response to detect imprecisions.
- **Quick checklist before sending:**
  - ☐ I answered all the citizen's questions.
  - ☐ I used a respectful and friendly tone.
  - ☐ I avoided technical terms and explained acronyms.
  - ☐ I included the steps or documents the citizen must follow.
  - ☐ I reviewed spelling, content, and consistency.

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### 3. Context and foundations

#### 3.1. Why does plain language transform public management?

Plain language transforms public management by reducing communication obstacles between the State and its citizens, making interactions more transparent, efficient, and democratic. When citizens understand institutional messages — such as procedures, regulations, and decisions — they are better equipped to exercise their rights, fulfill their responsibilities, and actively participate in public affairs.

In addition, plain language promotes institutional openness: it reduces errors, unnecessary clarifications, and rework efforts. Resources (time, staff, and costs) are optimized by avoiding confusion. It also contributes to strengthening citizens' trust in public administration, as clear communication reinforces accountability and improves the perception that the State acts with clarity, respect, and commitment.


#### 3.2. International framework

Plain language originated in the United States in the 1970s with the Plain English Movement, whose goal was simple: to ensure that any citizen could understand laws and administrative procedures. Over time, this effort evolved into national policy. In 2010, the *Plain Writing Act* required all federal agencies to use clear and understandable language in their communications. This practical approach views clarity as a tool for efficiency: it reduces errors, saves time and resources, and enhances transparency.

In France, the emphasis has been on equality. Since the 1990s, the country has mandated clarity in official documents and forms. The *Conseil pour le langage clair* (Council for Plain Language) works to make information more accessible, and initiatives such as the *Charte du langage clair* or *Facile à lire et à comprendre* (Easy to Read and Understand French) aim to ensure that no one is excluded, especially in areas such as justice, health, and public services.

Other countries have also made progress. The United Kingdom has actively fought bureaucratic jargon since the 1970s through the *Plain English Campaign*. Australia and Canada have developed manuals and research centers to promote plain communication in public services. Chile launched the *Ley Fácil* (Easy Law) program to help citizens understand complex regulations. In 2022, New Zealand passed the *Plain Language Law*, which requires all public institutions to communicate in an accessible manner. Mexico, Spain, and Argentina have also created guides and support networks to promote plain language in government.

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These examples show that plain language is a key tool for public innovation, inclusion, and good governance. Its impact goes beyond communication, it transforms the way institutions fulfill their social role. Given its multicultural richness, **Colombia** must employ and further develop this tool to fully harness its benefits, building its own model that combines efficiency, transparency, and inclusion.

### **3.3. National regulatory and Technical framework**

In Colombia, the legal and technical framework promoting the use of plain language in public management is structured across several levels.

At the legislative level, Law 1712 of 2014, on Transparency and the Right of Access to Public Information, requires public entities to disclose information that is truthful, complete, accessible, and understandable to all citizens. This is followed by Law 1757 of 2015, the Statute of Democratic Participation, which mandates accountability (*rendición de cuentas*) using language that is easy to understand, ensuring that the public can grasp government processes, decisions, and outcomes. More recently, Law 2052 of 2020 established in Article 28 the obligation to use plain language in forms, procedures, communication schemes, and publications, thereby facilitating the relationship between the State and its citizens.

In terms of official directives, Circular 100-010 of 2021, issued by the *Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública* (DAFP), provides specific guidelines to strengthen the implementation of plain language within public entities. These guidelines apply to regulations, procedures, websites, and official responses.


Regarding public policy documents, CONPES 3785 of 2013, the *National Policy for Administrative Efficiency in Citizen Services*, had already identified as a priority the need to provide information in plain and understandable language in order to improve the quality of public services.

Finally, in terms of technical tools and inter-institutional coordination, the *Integrated Planning and Management Model* (MIPG), in its most recent version, incorporates plain language as a core principle of institutional performance and of the State-citizen relationship.

Likewise, the Red de Lenguaje Claro de Colombia facilitates as an inter-institutional initiative that promotes common standards, provides training, facilitates the exchange of best practices, and tools to strengthen the use of plain language in public institutions.

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### 3.4. *Principles of Plain and Inclusive Language*

To ensure that public communication meets standards of clarity and inclusion, the following core principles should guide its development:

- **Clarity:** Information must be presented in a way that the intended audience can understand without the need for intermediaries. Avoid confusing language or language that could be interpreted in different ways, unnecessary technical terms, or uncommon words.
- **Simplicity:** Use everyday words, short sentences, logical structure, and direct phrasing. Focus on what is essential and avoid redundancies.
- **Transparency:** Clearly state requirements, deadlines, responsibilities, rights, duties, and consequences. Do not omit relevant information.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure that content is available in appropriate formats (digital, print, multimedia), and adapted for individuals with disabilities, non-native speakers, and individuals with low literacy levels.
- **Relevance:** Tailor messages to the target audience—considering their cultural context, educational level, technical knowledge, and specific conditions. Avoid generic or overly standardized language that overlooks diversity.
- **Efficiency:** Minimize the bureaucratic burden on citizens by minimizing unnecessary procedures, repetitive responses, and overly complex forms. Improve communication timelines and streamline processes.
- **Humanization and Respect:** Treat citizens with dignity, empathy, and care. Avoid cold, impersonal, or intimidating expressions.

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## 4. Methodology

The writing process consists of three key stages: planning, drafting, and validating. Each stage requires the use of specific strategies and tools to produce content that is clear and accessible. This involves choosing appropriate inclusive language, structuring paragraphs coherently, using familiar vocabulary, and incorporating examples, demonstrations, and audiovisual aids, among other aspects.

### 4.1. Planning

As Goethe<sup>1</sup> once said, the first condition for writing is having something to say. To achieve this, it is essential to thoroughly understand the topic, identify the audience, and put yourself in their shoes.


To achieve this understanding, it is important to identify who the document we are creating is intended for. This makes it possible to put ourselves in the citizens' place, to show empathy towards them, and thus to develop an appropriate response. At this stage, it is recommended to ask oneself the following questions:



Source: Own elaboration, 2025. Information taken from: Departamento Nacional de Planeación-DNP, 2015.

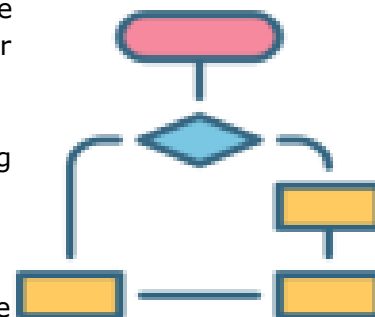
<sup>1</sup> CONTÉ Alassane. *Guide pratique de la rédaction administrative* (Guía práctica de la redacción administrativa), 2012, Paris

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Next, list the ideas and key elements you want to communicate. Once this is done, it is necessary to create a structure that highlights the most important points. The basic structure includes: *an introduction, body, and conclusion.*

- **Introduction:** Provides context for the topic, presents the question the text aims to answer, and introduces the main idea or key message.
- **Body:** Develops and explains the response in detail, offering examples, arguments, or supporting data.
- **Conclusion:** Restates the main message and summarizes the explanations presented in the body of the text.



## 4.2. Drafting

With the structure defined, the text should be written with the audience in mind. Ideally, use short paragraphs arranged in a logical sequence: 1) a clear main idea, 2) an explanation of that idea, and 3) an illustration using an example or concrete data.


It is important to ensure that each paragraph contributes to the overall topic; if it does not, it should be removed.

When drafting, it is helpful to keep the following recommendations in mind:

- Write short sentences following the logical order: subject, verb, and complement.
- Always place the main idea at the beginning of the paragraph. Technical terms, if necessary should appear at the end as an explanation of the idea.
- Use simple words. Making an effort to be pedagogical shows greater intelligence than using complex language.
- Adapt the tone and language according to the target audience—remember, those who understand complex texts can also understand simple ones.
- Avoid unnecessary legal or technical terms; refer only to relevant regulations, if needed.
- Use punctuation effectively, as it helps maintain the reader's focus and comprehension.

## 4.3. Validating

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The validation stage is essential to ensure that the document fulfills its purpose of clear communication.

This involves having the text reviewed by individuals other than the author—ideally, members from the target audience. If this is not possible, at least two individuals with no prior knowledge of the topic should review it to check whether it is easy to understand.

This exercise helps identify potential confusions, improve the structure, design, and content, and confirm that the language used is truly accessible.

In addition, conducting validation sessions with members of the public or with staff from other departments enriches the perspective on the document and helps refine both its form and substance.

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## 5. Simplification Labs

The Simplification Lab is a participatory strategy that the Superintendencia de la Economía Solidaria has been systematically implementing to transform technical, complex, or overly formal documents into clear, understandable, and useful for the public. This methodology aims to ensure that information related to procedures, regulations, programs, and responses to requests is accessible to all individuals, thereby facilitating the effective exercise of their rights and responsibilities.

### - Purpose and Benefits

**Facilitate understanding:** Reduces confusion and errors that may arise from technical or ambiguous texts.

**Save time and resources:** Lowers the need for rework, clarification requests, and complaints.

**Strengthen public trust:** Clear communication improves perceptions of transparency and service quality.

**Promote participation:** Engages both public servants and citizens in the co-creation of documents.

### - Methodology Applied by Supersolidaria


The Simplification Lab at *Supersolidaria* is carried out in three main phases:

#### Diagnosis

- Priority documents are identified based on their complexity or the number of questions they generate among citizens (for example: procedure forms, responses to PQRSDF<sup>2</sup>, or regulatory guidelines)
- An inventory of documents is created and categorized according to their purpose, frequency of use, and target audience.
- A working group is formed, composed of public servants, contract staff, citizens representatives, or other relevant stakeholders.

<sup>2</sup>PQRSDF refers to petitions, complaints, claims, suggestions, compliments, and requests for access to information (from its initials in Spanish)

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### Collaborative simplification


Through working groups or participatory workshops, the team analyzes texts using tools such as the “Comprehension Traffic Light”:

- **Red:** Words or phrases that are not understood.
  - **Yellow:** Content that can be improved.
  - **Green:** Parts that are clear and effective.
- Documents are rewritten applying plain language principles, including short sentences, logical structure, respectful tone, simple explanations of technical terms, and the use of visual aids (lists, tables, diagrams).
  - Specific accessibility needs are considered (for example: individuals with disabilities, rural populations, or varying educational levels).

### Validation and adoption

- The revised version is shared again with the participant group for validation.
- Texts are adjusted based on feedback, and approval is obtained for official use.
- Finally, the simplified document is published or distributed to the relevant citizens and shared internally as a best practice.

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## 6. Inclusive Language


The use of inclusive language at Supersolidaria ensures that our communications are respectful, accessible, and reflective of the diversity of the individuals we serve. Below are key principles and clear examples of how to write and speak in a way that promotes dignity and equity.

### Principles for Respectful and Inclusive Communication

- Use collective and gender-neutral terms: Prefer terms like *"the community," "the society," "individuals,"* or *"users"* instead of exclusive expressions like *"citizens"* or *"users"*, when used in a gendered or limited sense.
- Name groups fully and accurately when needed: For example, say *"Ladies and Gentleman"*, rather than using generalized or incomplete terms.
- Put the person before the condition: Use expressions such as *"individuals with disabilities"*, instead of *"the disabled."*
- Adapt language to your audience and respect self-identification: For instance, refer to *"LGBTIQ+ communities"*, as appropriate, acknowledging how groups choose to be named.
- Maintain a respectful and empathetic tone, avoiding language that minimizes, excludes, or stigmatizes.
- Acknowledge cultural and ethnic diversity: Use terms such as *"Native individuals," "Afro-descendant communities,"* or *"migrants with regular or irregular status"*, as appropriate to the context.

The inclusive language glossary, available in the annexes of this document, will serve as a valuable resource for writing in a more inclusive and equitable manner.

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## 7. Conclusions

In conclusion, plain language should not be understood merely as a writing technique, but as a strategic tool for democracy. It ensures that communication between institutions and the society is understandable, accessible, and useful to all individuals—regardless of their educational background or social condition. The stages of planning, drafting, and validating not only ensure the quality of documents but also build trust in public institutions.


Choosing plain language means choosing transparency, inclusion, and respect for Society. A message that is clearly understood is a message that fulfills its purpose and strengthens the legitimacy of the State.

New challenges have emerged on this path. One of them is inclusive language, which helps recognize and make all individuals visible. Another is digital communication, which presents risks of exclusion for vulnerable groups—such as individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and rural communities—while also offering opportunities to expand the reach of plain language through tools for translation, simplification, and accessibility.

For this reason, public administrations should not limit the use of plain language to written documents; rather, they should adopt it as a cross-cutting principle of public innovation. If Colombia combines clarity, inclusion, and digitalization, it can become a regional leader—showing that a State that communicates with simplicity is also a State that is more accessible, efficient, and democratic.

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## Annexes

### 1. *Inclusive Language Glossary*

Category	Recommended Term	Use in context
General Groups	Society / Population	The society may submit their application online.
Children and Youth	Children / Youth	The program is aimed at children and youth.
Adults and Elderly	Older Adults	The health program will benefit elderly in the country.
Ethnic Diversity	Native individuals / Afro - descendant community, pueblo gitano / gypsy populations	The Afro-descendant community is leading this cultural project.
Disability	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with disabilities have access to priority service routes.
Migration and victims	Migrant persons / victims of the armed conflict / internally displaced persons	Guidance will be provided to migrant persons and support to conflict-affected populations.
Sexual and gender diversity	Individuals from LGBTIQ+ social sectors / trans persons / Individuals with trans life experience / Individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI)	Rights are guaranteed for individuals from LGBTIQ+ communities, and respect is ensured for the chosen names of trans persons.

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<b>Name:</b> María Fernanda Gutiérrez Vargas y Quentin Casier <b>Post:</b> Contratista - Practicante Grupo de Relacionamento con la Ciudadanía	<b>Name:</b> Marcela Margarita Vidal Marquez <b>Post:</b> Coordinadora Grupo de Relacionamento con la Ciudadanía	<b>Name:</b> Ivan Mauricio Aleman Peñaranda <b>Post:</b> Secretario General


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Social conditions	Individuals in vulnerable situations / individuals deprived of liberty / individuals engaged in sex work	The institution provides assistance to individuals in vulnerable situations.
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## 2. *Technical terms glossary*

- **CAIP** (Consultas de Acceso a la Información Pública) : Public Information Access Requests
- **DAFP** (Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública) : Administrative Department of Public Service
- **DNP** (Departamento Nacional de Planeación) : National Planning Department
- **GRC** (Grupo de Relacionamento con la Ciudadanía) : Citizen Relations Group
- **Grupo de valor** : Natural persons (citizens) or legal entities (public or private organizations) that have a direct relationship with Supersolidaria through the use of its services and procedures, or that participate directly or indirectly in fulfilling its mission.
- **Grupo de interés** : Natural persons (citizens) or legal entities (public or private organizations) that have a special interest in the management or results of the Entity, or are potential users of its services and procedures.
- **OPA** (Otros Procedimientos Administrativos) : Other Administrative Procedures
- **PQRSDF** (Peticiones, Quejas, Reclamos, Sugerencias, Denuncias y Felicitaciones) : Requests, Complaints, Claims, Suggestions, Reports, and Compliments
- **SES** (Superintendencia de la Economía Solidaria) : Superintendency of Solidarity Economy

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### Version history

VERSION	DATE	REASON OF THE UPDATE
0	December 2020	First version of the document.
1	August 2023	Update of logos.
2	May 2024	Update of the document's content regarding clear language guidelines and the respective implementation and evaluation tools.
3	September 2025	Update and simplification of the guide to ensure its alignment with the principles of plain language, incorporating complementary annexes that strengthen its usefulness and application.

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