

 Plain  
Language  
Awards



Who's the clearest  
of them all?

Judging the  
Plain Language Awards in 2023

# Thank you for joining us today

In this webinar, we'll cover:

- key dates for the Awards this year
- how the judging process works, including how we use Submittable to manage the scoring and comments
- a few points from our head judge.

# Thank you to Simon Hertnon

Simon is head judge for us this year and will speak to us later.

The role of the head judge is:

- **assisting decision-making:** assisting lead judges if they are having difficulty reaching agreement within their panel
- **promoting best practice across the judging process**, including by providing advice about plain language technicalities, so that all judges best serve the entrants and support the Awards administrators
- **speaking on behalf of the judges.**

## Key dates for the judging timeline

- **Monday, 31 July:** Entries close. All judges have set up individual accounts in Submittable.
- **By Friday, 4 August:** The Awards team check entries for eligibility, and assign to judges.
- **Between 4 and 10 August:** Judges use the thumbs-up / thumbs-down voting system to decide on a shortlist. Comment on entries that don't go through. Where numbers allow, aim for five shortlisted entries.
- **By 10am Friday, 11 August:** Judges have decided on their shortlist. Lead judges send their shortlist to [hellie@write.co.nz](mailto:hellie@write.co.nz)

## Judging timeline continued

- **On Friday, 11 August:** We'll switch over from thumbs-up / thumbs-down to reviewing mode for all shortlisted entries.
- **Between 11 and 17 August:** Judges review and comment on all shortlisted entries, using the Submittable judging forms. Also, lead judges compile a rationale for each entry not progressing.
- **By 10am Friday, 18 August:** Judges will have decided on the three finalists and the winner of their category. Lead judges will send these decisions and the rationale for each non-progressing entry, to [hellie@write.co.nz](mailto:hellie@write.co.nz)

## Judging timeline continued

- **Between 18 and 24 August:** Lead judges compile reviews for all shortlisted entries to make sure the comments are appropriate and helpful.
- **By Friday, 25 August:** Lead judges to send Hellie a collated review for each shortlisted entry in their category.
- **Between 25 and 31 August:** Lead judges collate feedback of finalist entries for the website.
- **By Friday, 1 September:** Lead judges to send Hellie a collated summary for the website for each finalist entry in their category.

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Phase 1

Learn the

Submittable system

# Step 1. You must create an account to join Submittable

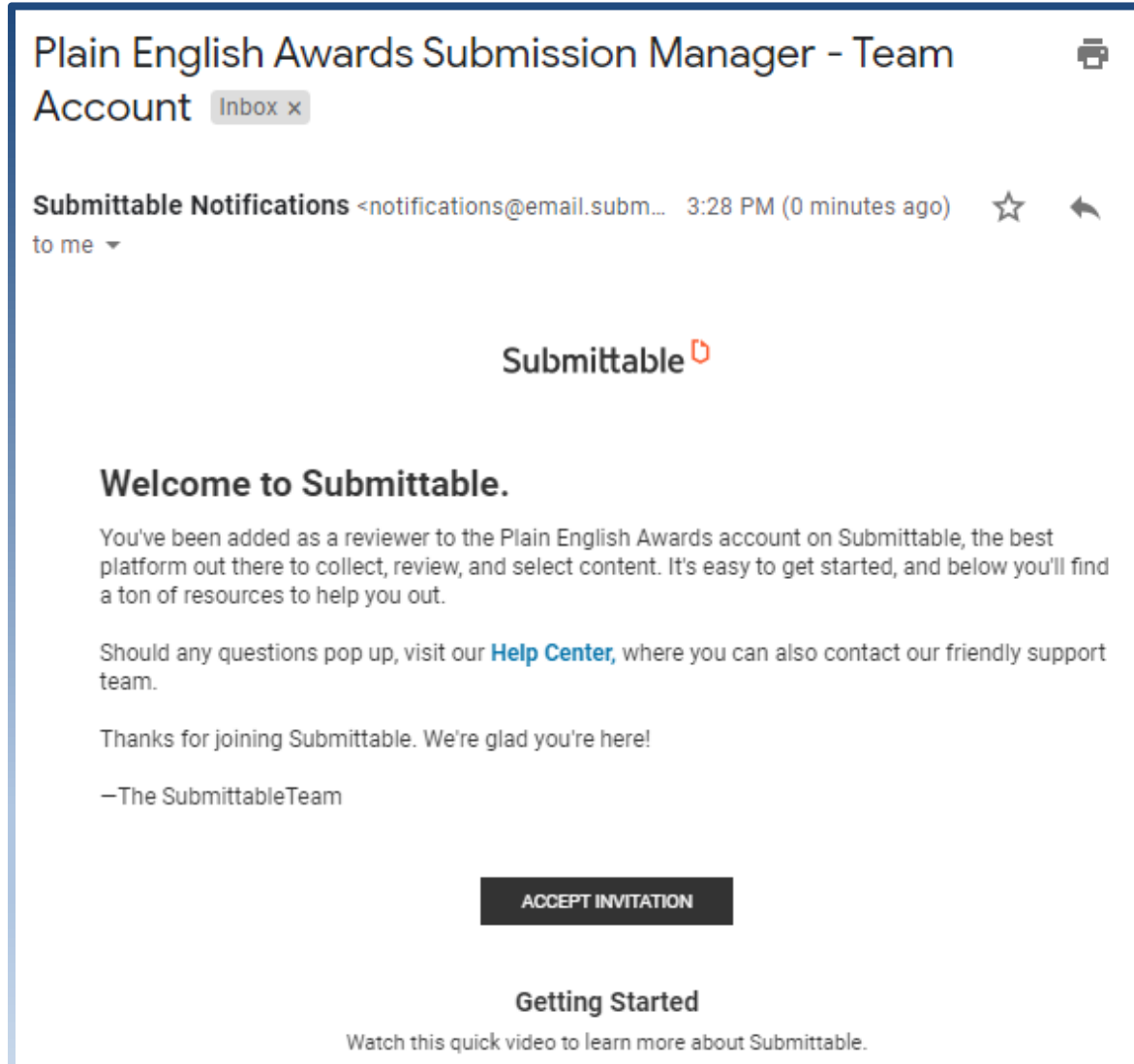
We will add you as a reviewer in

**Submittable** 

You will get an email inviting you to accept your invitation.

Click the 'Accept invitation' button and set up a password.

Submittable is where you will be given your entry materials to review.



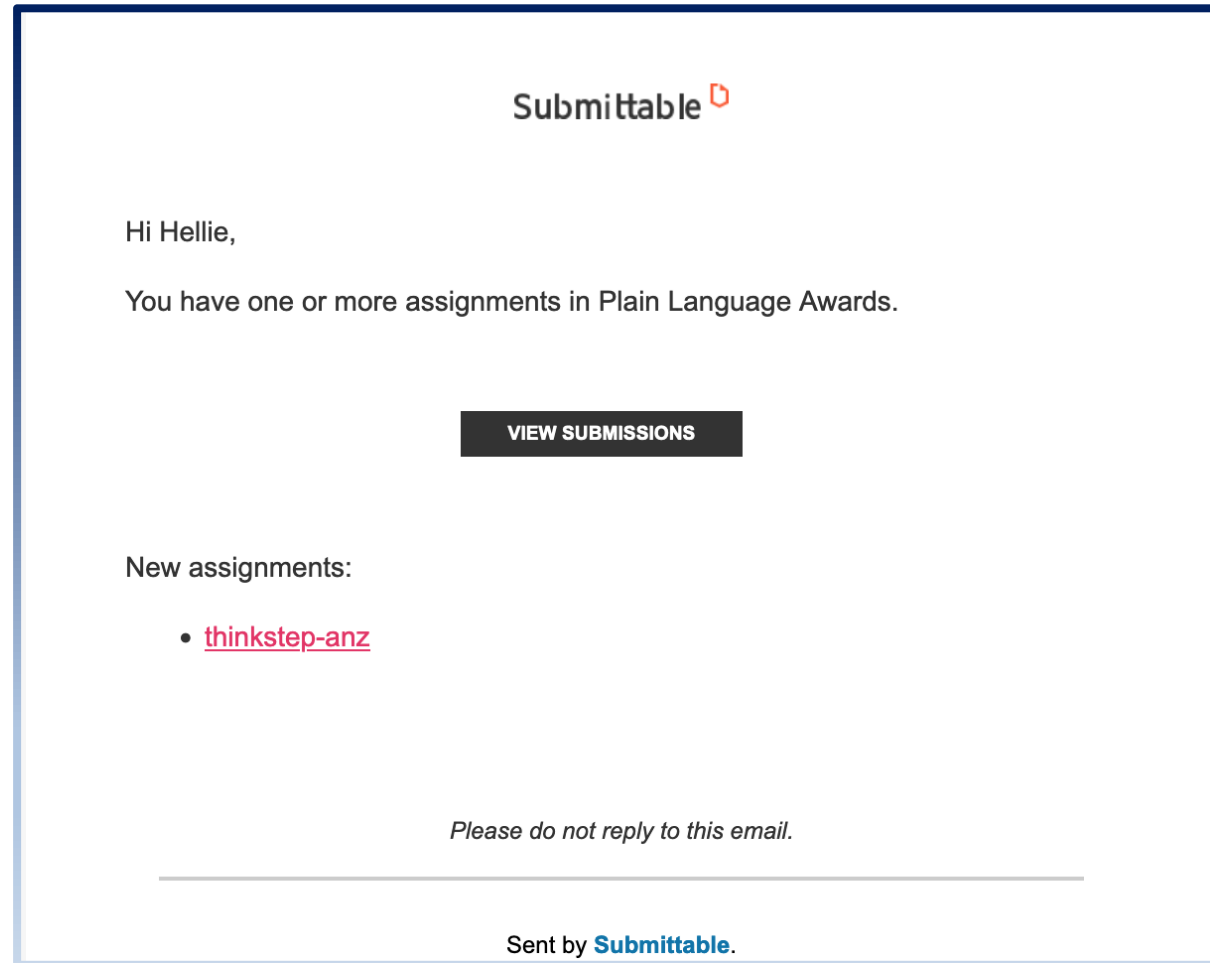


## Step 2. We'll assign entries to your panel

Each time we assign you an entry, we'll send you an email.

You can get to the entry by clicking the link in the email (which will log in for you).

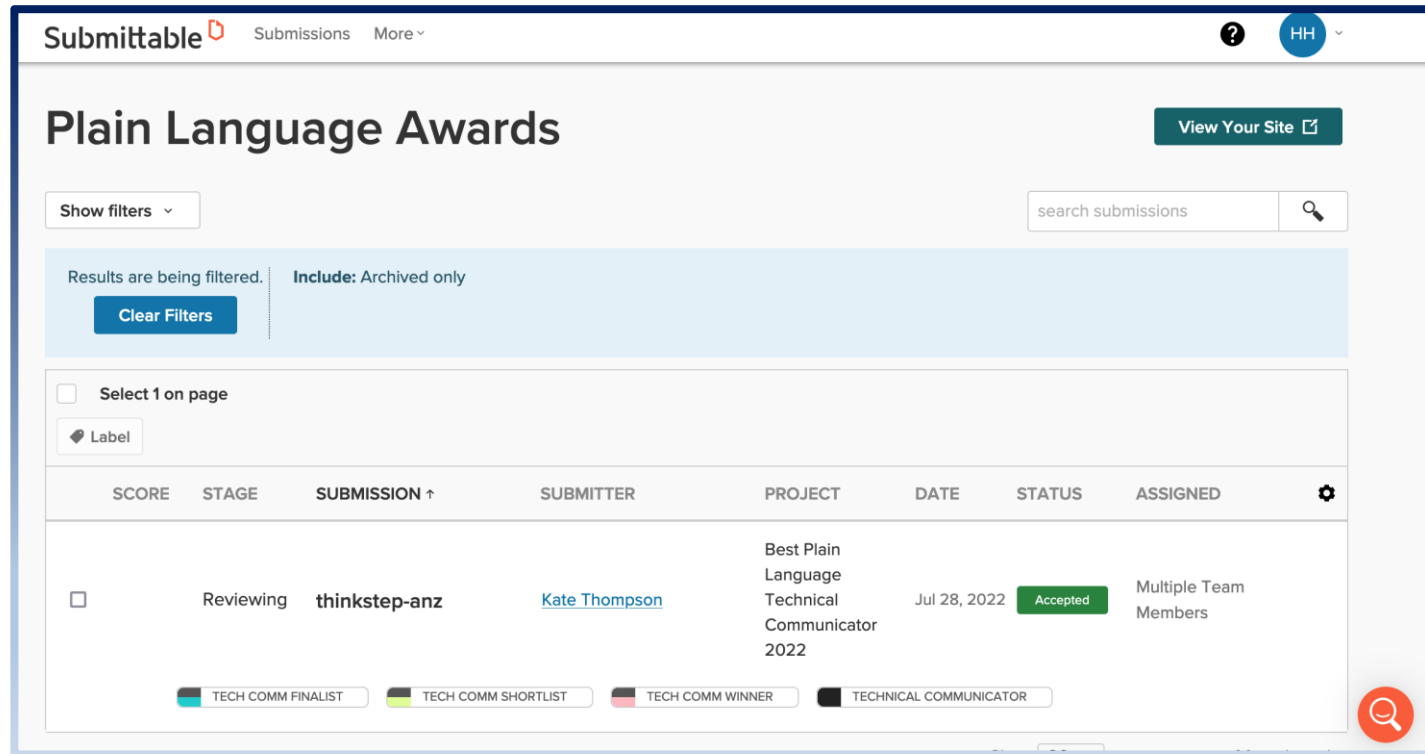
We recommend saving these emails in a folder so you can go back to them later.



## Step 3. You'll see the list of entries assigned to you

When you log in, you will see a list of the entries assigned to your panel.

Access entry details by clicking on the submission title.



The screenshot shows the Submittable interface for the 'Plain Language Awards'. The page title is 'Plain Language Awards' and the user is logged in as 'HH'. The interface includes a search bar, a filter section with 'Show filters' and 'Clear Filters' buttons, and a table of submissions. The table has columns for SCORE, STAGE, SUBMISSION, SUBMITTER, PROJECT, DATE, STATUS, and ASSIGNED. A single submission is visible, with a status of 'Accepted' and assigned to 'Multiple Team Members'. Below the table are four status filters: TECH COMM FINALIST, TECH COMM SHORTLIST, TECH COMM WINNER, and TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR.

SCORE	STAGE	SUBMISSION ↑	SUBMITTER	PROJECT	DATE	STATUS	ASSIGNED
	Reviewing	thinkstep-anz	<a href="#">Kate Thompson</a>	Best Plain Language Technical Communicator 2022	Jul 28, 2022	Accepted	Multiple Team Members

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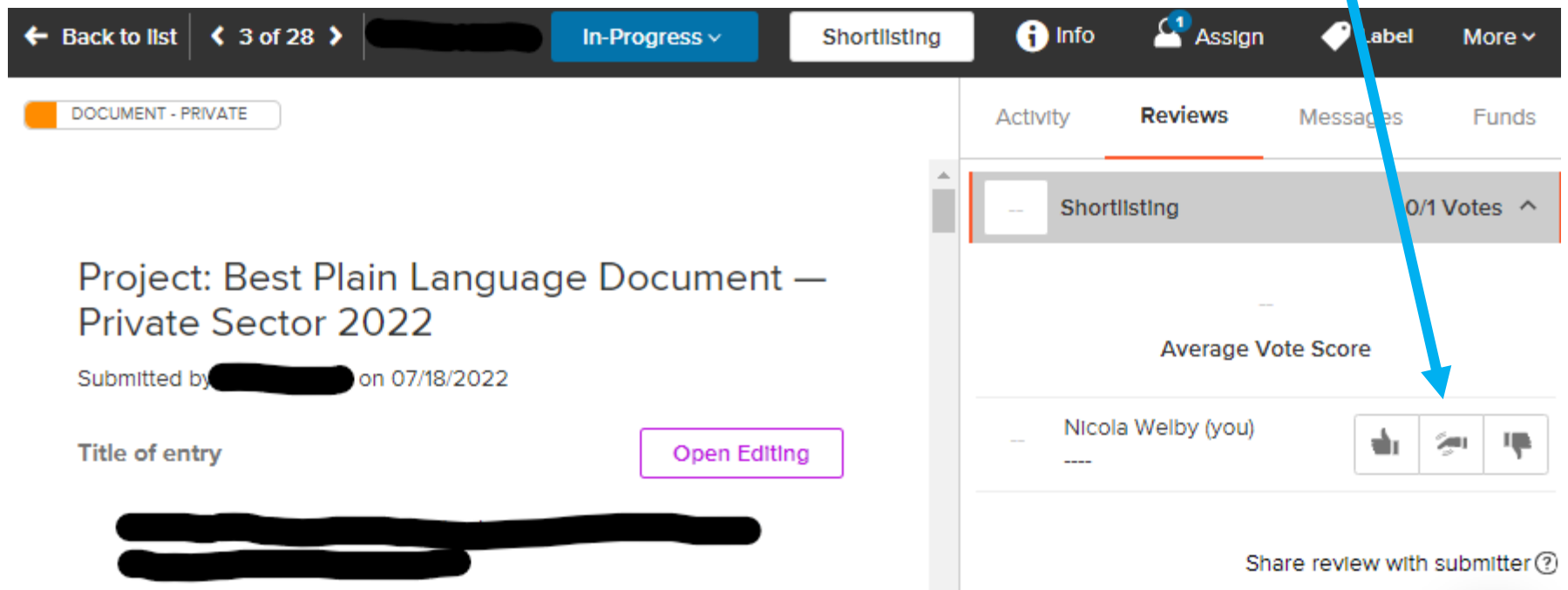
Phase 2

Select your  
shortlist

## Step 4. Click on an entry to see the details and do your thumbs-up / thumbs-down round

If you'd like to shortlist an entry, vote thumbs-up in Submittable. If not, vote thumbs-down. If you're not sure, vote 'maybe' and come back later.

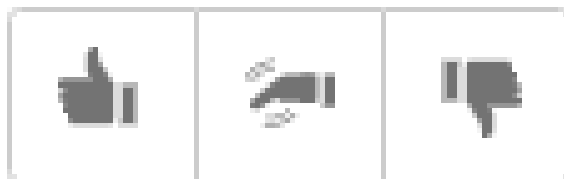
Aim for five entries on your shortlist, if entry numbers permit.



The screenshot displays the Submittable interface for a document entry. At the top, a navigation bar includes "Back to list", "3 of 28", "In-Progress", "Shortlisting", "Info", "Assign", "Label", and "More". Below this, a "DOCUMENT - PRIVATE" tag is visible. The main content area shows the project title "Project: Best Plain Language Document — Private Sector 2022" and the submission date "Submitted by [redacted] on 07/18/2022". The entry title is redacted, and an "Open Editing" button is present. On the right, a "Reviews" panel shows the entry is in "Shortlisting" status with "0/1 Votes". The "Average Vote Score" is displayed as a dash. A review by "Nicola Welby (you)" is shown with three voting buttons: thumbs-up, thumbs-down, and a middle button. A blue arrow points from the text above to the thumbs-up button. At the bottom right, there is a "Share review with submitter" link.

## Explaining the thumbs-up and thumbs-down buttons

- **Thumbs-up** = could conceivably win the category
- **Thumbs-down** = would definitely not win the category
- **Maybe** (wavering hand) = not sure – change to thumbs-up or thumbs-down when ready



## Step 5. Establish the shortlist for your category

- Your thumbs-up entries become your shortlist.
- If, within your panel, you cannot agree on your shortlist, your lead judge should guide you to an agreement.
- Once you have agreed on your shortlist, your lead judge will send this list to [hellie@write.co.nz](mailto:hellie@write.co.nz)

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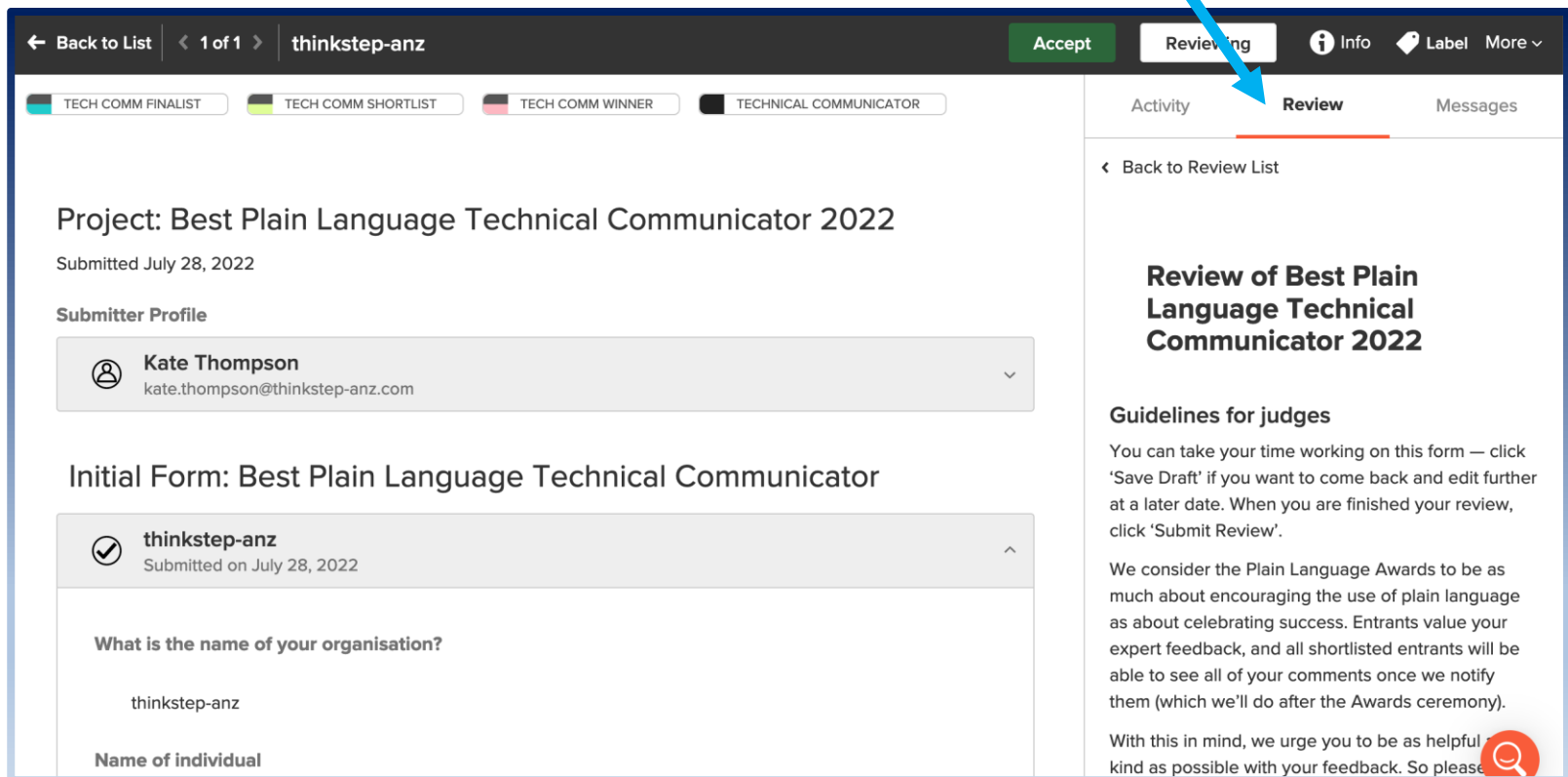
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Phase 3

Review your  
shortlisted entries

# Step 6. Once you've created your shortlist, we'll switch Submittable over to reviewing and commenting mode

Click 'Start Review' and read the 'Guidelines for judges' under the Review tab.



The screenshot shows the Submittable review interface. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Back to List', '1 of 1', and 'thinkstep-anz'. On the right, there are buttons for 'Accept', 'Reviewing', 'Info', 'Label', and 'More'. Below the navigation, there are four status tabs: 'TECH COMM FINALIST', 'TECH COMM SHORTLIST', 'TECH COMM WINNER', and 'TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR'. The main content area is titled 'Project: Best Plain Language Technical Communicator 2022' and shows it was submitted on July 28, 2022. The submitter profile is 'Kate Thompson' with email 'kate.thompson@thinkstep-anz.com'. The initial form is titled 'Initial Form: Best Plain Language Technical Communicator' and shows a submission from 'thinkstep-anz' on July 28, 2022. The form content includes the question 'What is the name of your organisation?' with the answer 'thinkstep-anz' and the label 'Name of individual'. On the right side, there are tabs for 'Activity', 'Review', and 'Messages'. The 'Review' tab is selected, showing a 'Review of Best Plain Language Technical Communicator 2022' with 'Guidelines for judges'. The guidelines text reads: 'You can take your time working on this form — click 'Save Draft' if you want to come back and edit further at a later date. When you are finished your review, click 'Submit Review'. We consider the Plain Language Awards to be as much about encouraging the use of plain language as about celebrating success. Entrants value your expert feedback, and all shortlisted entrants will be able to see all of your comments once we notify them (which we'll do after the Awards ceremony). With this in mind, we urge you to be as helpful and kind as possible with your feedback. So please'.



# Step 7. Rate and comment on your team's thumbs-up entries to determine your finalists and winner

Read all the information about the entry, including links and uploaded files.

The screenshot shows a web interface for reviewing an entry. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Back to List', '1 of 1', and 'thinkstep-anz'. A green 'Accept' button is visible. The entry is titled 'Project: Best Plain Language Technical Communicator 2022' and was submitted on July 28, 2022. The submitter is Kate Thompson. The initial form question is 'What is the name of your organisation?' with the answer 'thinkstep-anz'. On the right, the 'Review' section is active, showing a rating scale for 'Rate the purpose of the documents' with options: Poor, Fair, Good, Very good, and Excellent. Below this is a question 'Does the content support the purpose of the documents?' with a text input field. A 'Submit Review' button is at the bottom.

Select a rating for each section.

Provide clear, constructive feedback, including examples that model possible improvements.

## Step 8. Save the draft for later review and editing, if needed

You don't have to complete the review in one sitting. You can save the review as a draft and come back later.

Make sure you save your draft **often** as you work.

Give the technical communicator's work an overall rating \*


Poor

Fair

Good

Very good

Excellent



## Step 9. Once you are sure you've finished your review, click 'Submit Review'

Rate the headings and main messages \*

Poor

Fair

Good

Very good

Excellent

**Submit Review** Save Draft

If you do need to edit your final comments after feedback from your lead judge, make your changes and click 'Update Review'.

Give the communication an overall rating \*

Poor

Fair

Good

Very good

Excellent

**Update Review**

# Some important points about reviews

- The Plain Language Awards are as much about encouraging the use of plain language as about celebrating success. We'd like feedback to reflect the spirit of the Awards.
- Please respect the confidentiality of all entrants — keep comments and judging results within your respective panels.
- We urge you to be as helpful and kind as possible with your feedback. So please keep your comments fair and balanced.
- Make sure your feedback is accurate, clear, well written, and helpful.
- Proofread your comments. We send your feedback to entrants, and that's easier when reviews don't need any editing or proofreading.
- Keep in mind that entrants find great value in the feedback you give them.

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The banner features a dark blue background with a variety of white symbols and text. Symbols include circles, squares, arrows, and abstract shapes. Text includes the words "stet", "sm cap", "wf", and "bf" in different fonts and orientations.

Phase 4

Choose your  
finalists and  
winner

## Step 10. Choose your top three finalists and your winner

1. Submittable will average your ratings. Use this information to choose your finalists and winner.
2. When all members of your panel have finished reviewing the entries on your shortlist, you'll all be able to see the numbered ratings for each entry. You'll also be able to read each other's comments.
3. From here, your panel will decide your top three finalists (as long as they're all worthy of being a finalist). Choose one winner from these finalists.

## Step 11. Lead judges send results

1. Your lead judge will send a list of your three finalists, including your winner, to [hellie@write.co.nz](mailto:hellie@write.co.nz)
2. Your lead judge will confirm that they are happy with all final written comments for the shortlisted entries in your category.
3. Once we've received your results, we'll close Submittable for editing. If you need to make any changes after that point, please email us.

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Useful links



## Some how-to links to help you through the process

1. Submittable: Getting started for reviewers (video and FAQ)  
<https://submittable.help/en/articles/3935413-getting-started-for-reviewers-video-and-faq>
2. Submittable: How to rate submissions with custom review  
<https://submittable.help/en/articles/928297-how-do-i-review-make-a-note-on-and-rate-a-submission>

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Questions?

# Simon Hertnon



Head judge of the  
2023 Plain Language Awards

# Plain language essentials

‘a style of writing in which the **language**,  
**structure**, and **presentation** of a document  
all work together to **help the reader**’

[www.plainlanguageawards.org.nz](http://www.plainlanguageawards.org.nz)

# You'll judge entries against the Write Plain Language Standard

Our review forms in Submittable will prompt you to review each shortlisted entry against the following elements of plain language.

## **'Big Picture' elements**

- The purpose of the document is clear at the start
- The content supports the purpose of the document
- The structure of the document is clear and logical to the reader
- The headings signal the key content

## **Language elements**

- The paragraphs are mostly short and focus on one topic
- The sentences are mostly short and straightforward
- The words are precise and familiar
- The tone supports the purpose of the document

## **Presentation elements**

- The layout and presentation help the reader absorb the message quickly and easily
- The document is free of errors

# You'll select a rating for each of the criteria

5

## **Excellent — Thought-provoking and inspiring; shows impact**

Plain language principles are applied consistently and well. We discovered new ideas and strategies from this entry that we want to use in our own work. We want to tell other people about this entry and think readers and users will tell other people too. We can see the positive impact of this entry for the organisation or its customers.

4

## **Very good — Solid use of principles**

Applies principles consistently and effectively. Changes we might make would fall into the polishing or nit-picking category. They are unlikely to change the impact of the entry overall. This is a very strong example, but it didn't inspire us to say 'Wow! Look at this one!'

3

## **Good — Uses mostly plain language principles, but misses subtleties**

Mostly uses plain language principles, but misses subtleties and opportunities. The entry may get the point across, but more focus on plain language principles could measurably improve it.

2

## **Fair — Inconsistent use of plain language principles**

Uses some plain language principles, but misses other critical ones. May misapply or over-apply strategies. The authors would benefit from training and mentoring.

1

## **Poor — Poor or no use of principles**

The poor use of plain language principles in this entry interferes with readers' ability to understand and act on the information. If testing was done, it seems to have had little or no impact on the final version.

# More plain language considerations

Relevant. Findable. Understandable. Usable.

ISO Plain Language Standard

‘clear, concise, and well organised’

Plain Language Act 2022

*Purposeful and impactful?*

*Simple and friendly?*

*Well designed?*

# Sticking points

In past years, a few things have gone awry...

- Panels working out communication schedules
- Reviewing timeframes
- Quality of reviews



# Review process part one

## **For entries not progressing**

- While doing your initial scan of an entry, make notes of positive and negative aspects.
- If an entry is not progressing, send your initial comments to your lead judge.
- Lead judges, please make sure to discuss with your panel when you expect their comments, so that you have enough time to collate these into ONE SINGLE RATIONALE per entry. You will need to send these final rationales to Hellie by 18 August.

## I start with a plain language scan

Before looking 'judging' the 10 elements, I scan for:

- Clarity of purpose
- Brevity in relation to purpose
- Document design ('TLC')

Then, on behalf of the intended audience, I ask:

'Would I find the information engaging, clear, and useful?'

# Review process part two

## **For all shortlisted entries**

- When you have your shortlist, work through the Write Standard questions and fill out your review for each entry.
- Send this review to your lead judge. They will tell you when you need to have these in by.
- Lead judges, please collate these into **ONE SINGLE FINAL REVIEW** per entry. Send these to Hellie by 25 August.

# Review process part three

## **For all finalist entries**

- Lead judges, please write ONE SINGLE FEEDBACK SUMMARY per entry for the website. These will be based on the previous shortlist reviews. Send these to Hellie by 3 September.

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