

Your role as a judge in the 2023 Plain Language Awards

This document is a summary of the information we presented in our judges' webinar on 25 July.

Timeline for judging

A reminder of important dates for you.

- **Monday, 31 July:** Entries close.
- **By Friday, 4 August:** We check entries for eligibility, and assign entries to judges.
- **Between 5 and 11 August:** Use the thumbs-up / thumbs-down voting system to decide on a shortlist. Where numbers allow, aim for five shortlisted (and eventually three finalists and one winner). Write some comments on each entry that doesn't make it to the shortlist to let them know what they did well and how they could improve.
- **By 10am, Friday, 11 August:** Judges have decided on their shortlist. Lead judges send their shortlist to hellie@write.co.nz
- **On Friday, 11 August:** We'll switch over from thumbs-up / thumbs-down to reviewing mode for all shortlisted entries.
- **Between 11 and 18 August:** Judges review and comment on all shortlisted entries using the Submittable judging forms. Also, lead judges collate comments on entries not progressing.
- **By 10am Friday, 18 August:** Judges will have decided on the three finalists and the winner of each of their categories. Lead judges will send these decisions to hellie@write.co.nz. Lead judges will also send Hellie a collated rationale for each non-progressing entry in their category.
- **Between 18 and 25 August:** Lead judges compile written reviews for all shortlisted entries, making sure the comments are appropriate and helpful.
- **By 5pm Friday, 25 August:** Lead judges submit a collated final review for each shortlisted entry in their category.
- **Between 25 and 31 August:** Lead judges compile 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.

Judging has four phases

1. Learn the Submittable system
2. Select your shortlist
3. Review your shortlisted entries
4. Choose your finalists and winner

Phase 1: Learn the Submittable system

By Friday, 21 July, you'll need to have created a Submittable account.

1. You'll receive an email saying you've been added as a reviewer to the Plain Language Awards account on Submittable. You'll then need to set up your Submittable account. Click the 'Accept invitation' button and set up a password. The entire set-up process should be relatively straightforward. If you run into any problems, please ask us for help.
2. Until we categorise and assign entries, you won't see much happening in Submittable. After entries have closed, we'll assign entries to you. (Each time we assign you an entry, we'll send you an email.)

Phase 2: Select your shortlist with the thumbs-up / thumbs-down voting system

By 4 August, we'll assign the entries we've received in your category to the people in your panel. You'll be notified of this through Submittable. Please note that the faster you get through this phase, the sooner your category panel can move to the next, more detailed, phase.

1. When you log in to Submittable, you will see a list of the entries assigned to your panel. Click on each entry to get to the entry form.
2. Download the entries to your computer, iPad, Kindle, or other device where you will be working. Choose a download option under the 'Options' tab.
3. Skim read the entries in your category to gain an impression of which entries should progress to the shortlist phase. Please make a few notes in Submittable as you skim, so you have some feedback for those who don't progress.
4. Vote thumbs-up or thumbs-down to determine the shortlisted entries.
5. You need to finish this shortlisting phase **by 10am Friday, 11 August**. If your panel cannot decide on a shortlisted entry, our head judge will help you come to a decision.

All judges in each category must complete thumbs-up / thumbs-down voting before we can switch the Submittable system over to reviewing and commenting mode.

Phase 3 – Review your shortlisted entries

Between 11 and 17 August, you'll need to carefully review and comment on the entries you shortlisted in Phase 2. Also during this week, lead judges will compile a rationale, for each entry not progressing, from your initial comments.

1. You'll receive a list of the shortlisted entries from Submittable as well as a notice that reviewing can start.
2. In the email Submittable sends, click on each entry to open the entry in Submittable.

3. Click 'Start Review' and read the 'Guidelines for judges' under the Review tab. Answer the questions about the different elements of the plain language standard (such as purpose and structure). You'll also be prompted to rate each of these elements from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).
4. Work your way through the different criteria being judged, saving your draft frequently. Submittable will calculate your scores for each element, to help you and your panel agree on a few contenders for finalists and winner of the category.
5. Remember that your feedback must be balanced, fair, and helpful. All entrants value expert feedback — your job is to help them do even better by making suggestions and giving examples for improvement. Please be aware that your lead judge will need to collate your comments for us to send to the entrant.
6. Click on 'Save Draft' if you want to come back and edit further. Click on 'Finalize Review' if you believe your feedback and comments are accurate, clear, well written, and proofread.

Phase 4 – Choose your finalists and winner, and submit reviews

Submittable will average your ratings and give a numerical score. Use this information to choose your finalists and winner. Make sure your comments reflect the score.

1. **By Thursday, 17 August**, each judging panel will have decided its top three finalists (as long as they're all worthy of being a finalist). You'll need to choose one winner from these finalists. Your lead judge will manage your decision-making process and submit your final decision. Your goal is to achieve consensus, not necessarily unanimity.
2. **By 10am Friday, 18 August**, lead judges will send a list of the three finalists including one winner to hellie@write.co.nz. Lead judges will also send Hellie a collated rationale for each non-progressing entry in their category.
3. **Between 18 and 24 August**, lead judges will collect your reviews for all shortlisted entries to make sure they are appropriate and helpful. They will then compile a single final review for each shortlisted entry.
4. **By 10am, Friday, 25 August**, lead judges will submit their compiled reviews for the shortlisted entries in their category.
5. **Between 25 and 31 August**: Lead judges will collate your feedback for the finalist entries in your category. They will then write a single, cohesive summary per finalist for publication on the website.
6. **By 5pm, Friday, 1 September**: Lead judges to send Hellie a collated summary for the website for each finalist entry in their category. Once we've received your final summaries, we'll close Submittable for editing. If you need to make any changes after that point, please email us.

Celebrate with us

Once you've completed these tasks, the only thing left is for you to join us at our ceremony where we announce our winners!

We'll announce finalists online on **Friday, 15 September**. We'll then announce winners on **Thursday, 26 October** at our ceremony, held in the beautiful rooms of Parliament in Wellington, New Zealand. We'd love you to join us, but if you can't make it, we will also be livestreaming the event. We hope you'll join us to celebrate, one way or the other!

Thanks to all of you for everything you've done and will be doing.

More information

The following pages contain more information about judging the Plain Language Awards and the requirements for our different categories.

More information about the judging process and the different categories

We use the Submittable platform to manage and judge the Awards entries.

Submittable assigns a score based on your ratings

Before we get into the detailed judging, you'll triage your entries and create a shortlist using the thumbs-up and thumbs-down buttons in Submittable. Then you'll look more closely at each entry.

Submittable assigns a numerical value from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) based on your ratings, which should also reflect your review comments. Submittable will combine the ratings from all members of the panel for the category and give an average, summary score. The final score needs to reflect your assessment of the best entries in your category. Feel free to discuss your ratings with your panel and adjust if necessary.

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.

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!'

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 putting more focus on plain language principles could measurably improve it.

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 may benefit from training and mentoring.

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.

You'll judge entries against the Write Plain Language Standard

The form you'll use for judging will cover the following elements of the Write Plain Language Standard — also available under a Creative Commons licence from <https://write.co.nz/resources/free-tools/>

Assess these elements in the context of purpose and audience.

'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 messages quickly and easily
- The document is free of errors

Types of user-testing you should look for

We've included information on our website about the types of user-testing that entrants may have used in their entries. Please comment on the types of user testing the entrant may have used.

[What types of user testing do judges look for?](#)

Requirements for each Awards category

Please follow the links below to read the requirements for your category.

[Plain Language Champion — Best Organisation](#)

[Plain Language Champion — Best Individual or Team](#)

[Best Plain Language Document — Public Sector](#)

[Best Plain Language Document — Private Sector](#)

[Best Plain Language Website — Public Sector](#)

[Best Plain Language Website — Private Sector](#)

[Best Plain Language Sentence Transformation](#)

[Best Plain Language Annual Report](#)

[Best Plain Language Legal Document](#)

[Best Plain Language Technical Communicator](#)

[Best Plain Language Turnaround](#)

[People's Choice — Best Plain Language Communication](#)

[People's Choice — Worst Brainstrain Communication](#)