

## Persona - Jennifer



Jennifer is a 37-year-old attorney and supervisor for the Department of Justice in Washington DC. She has wanted to work for “justice” since she was a little girl and Sandra Day O’Connor has been her idol since she was ten. Jennifer’s job requires her to spend a good deal of time traveling to various federal offices across the country. Between the busy travel schedule and long days, when she’s working at the home office Jennifer frequently uses her lunch hour to meet her husband, who works across town, to catch-up.

At DOJ, Jennifer’s primary responsibility as a supervisor is to shadow federal prosecutors and assist in complex trials. As her responsibilities have increased over the past ten years, Jennifer she has spent increasing amounts of time writing and reviewing technical legal documents. Jennifer has been involved in multiple instances when unclear, poorly-written documents caused confusion and resulted in valuable time being lost. She has also heard plenty of horror stories of people not receiving appropriate legal representation because they could not easily comprehend the documents issued by the government. As a result, she understands the importance of using plain language. She makes it a personal goal to ensure that her writing conveys information in a style that can be read and comprehended easily.

Jennifer continually strives to improve her skills as a technical writer. When she receives her documents back from the technical editors, she pays close attention to the corrections and edits made in an effort not to repeat those same mistakes. She also notes if other co-workers have trouble understanding parts of her writing. Although Jennifer has a high-speed Internet connection both at work and at home, and views herself as an expert user of the Internet, Jennifer hasn’t used online resources to increase her knowledge of plain language.

Jennifer regularly receives requests from nonprofits for donations. She makes generous donations to a limited number of organizations that provide assistance to disadvantaged populations. Before deciding to support an organization, she reviews its mission and goals to ensure they align with her values. She doesn’t want her money to go to waste, so she also checks Guidestar.org to ensure that the organization is reputable, financially responsible, and solvent. While she has made donations through snail-mail, she prefers making them online.

### Goals

Jennifer wants the individuals she works with (and the citizens she works for) to have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. She feels like making plain language a priority in her writing will help her communicate in a clear, concise manner.

Jennifer is interested in finding resources on, news about, and training in plain language. Her work will pay for training and conferences related to her job, so she would like to find more information about upcoming plain language conferences and classes.

Because Jennifer understands the intrinsic value of plain language and its application, she may want to support organizations or initiatives that make plain language a priority.

## Scenario 1 – Investigate the Center’s Site

Recently, while she was in Pittsburgh for a case, Jennifer worked with Andrew, an Assistant U.S. Attorney. While working with him, Jennifer noticed that Andrew’s legal briefs were clear, concise, and easy-to-read.

While Jennifer was helping Andrew prepare for a trial, she complimented his writing style and asked him, "Where did you learn to write so clearly?" Andrew replied that he is an advocate of plain language and a member of the Center for Plain Language. He believes that good writing should be easy-to-follow and not filled with jargon. In fact, Andrew recruits his 17-year-old daughter to read his briefs to ensure that his legal argument clearly communicates his position. Jennifer makes a mental note to explore the Center for Plain Language's Web site later that week.

While Jennifer eats a quick lunch at her desk, she decides to run a Google search for: "Center for Plain Language." She easily finds the Center’s site at the top of her search results, and clicks to visit the site where she finds current information on the homepage, including news of recent successes and Center events. She clicks the network directory link and scans the list of names, noticing the variety of occupations held by the members. A well-respected government lawyer and active member of the Center catches her eye. Jennifer continues to browse the directory, recognizing names of other individuals she knows and respects. She begins to think, "I know these people are knowledgeable and busy. If they support the Center, it’s probably a solid organization."

Jennifer still wants to find out more about plain language and clicks on "Plain Language." She figures this area will tell her exactly what plain language is and why she should use it. On the main page of this section, she finds a brief description of plain language. She notices that the content echoes some of the things Andrew had explained to her about using plain language. She clicks on "Why use Plain Language?" and she scans the bullet points of reasons for using it. The information confirms her initial reaction to plain language and she wonders why more people don’t use it.

She clicks on the "Writing with Plain Language" link. This page lists example paragraphs of plain language used in technical papers, briefs, and legislative acts. It provides a thorough description of [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov), explaining how that site can help people put plain language to use at work, school, and in their daily lives. She finds more relevant Web site links with further details about using plain language in the areas of law, finance, and government. Jennifer knows she’ll want to access this information again. She bookmarks the page so she can go back to it later.

Continuing to review the "Plain Language" section, Jennifer finds the page "Convincing Others to Use Plain Language." She reads testimonials from other people who have convinced co-workers and supervisors to adopt plain language practices. She takes note of how recent these testimonials have been updated. There is even an email address next to each person's name so Jennifer can email that person if she wants to ask further questions.

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She is impressed with the quality and effective presentation of the information. Jennifer finds the site does a thorough job of informing her about plain language and referring her to other resources that supplement her knowledge on the topic. She is satisfied by how much she has learned about the Center and plain language in such a short time.

Jennifer notices the "Join the Center" link prominently placed on each page. She clicks on the link to see what benefits the Center offers its members. She sees that members will receive an e-newsletter once a month that can be customized to meet individual needs, as well as quarterly updates about the Center's accomplishments. Members are offered substantial networking opportunities. They are listed in the member directory and receive invitations to networking events and training sessions, and are offered a discounted admission to the yearly conference forum. Jennifer reviews the member form; it looks easy enough to complete. She takes out her credit card from her wallet and fills in the information. The secure site icon at the bottom of the screen gives her assurance that the transaction will be secure as she hits the submit button. When she is directed to a confirmation page that thanks her for becoming a member and gives her a password for her membership log-in, she knows she made a good decision.

## Scenario 2 – Discovering a Positive Return on Investment

Since joining the Center for Plain Language via the online membership form, Jennifer has made a habit of visiting the Center’s Web site four or five times a year to check up on the organization and confirm that her contributions are being well utilized. During each visit, she spends 20-30 minutes perusing the Web site for news, stories, and other information certifying the organization’s continued success and commitment to service.

Jennifer accesses the Center’s site through its direct URL, [www.centerforplainlanguage.org](http://www.centerforplainlanguage.org), since it’s so easy to remember. She does not have a specific path in mind for browsing the site. She begins her session at the home page where she reads news that the Center for Plain Language is organizing its annual Plain Language awards ceremony and training workshop. She clicks the “learn more” link on the home page to find out more about the event. She is pleased to discover that this year’s workshop will feature technical and legal writing. She checks her PDA to make sure she has no prior engagements and marks the event date on her calendar. She then clicks the RSVP link on the Web page to inform the Center that she will attend the event.

Jennifer wonders if she will see familiar faces at the event. She visits the network directory page to see who’s currently a member of the organization. She notices that Bob Blakeman, a former co-worker, is now a member of the Center. She reads his biography to see what he has been up to and decides to use the email link to see if he is planning on attending the event as well.

When Jennifer returns to the Center’s Web site, she takes a look at the current donor listing to learn of other organizations and individual members providing support to the Center. She notices that three new substantial donors have been added to the list.

Jennifer ends her exploratory browsing session happy to discover news of the conference and additional recruitment of donors. She exits the Web site with a positive feeling about the return on her investment in the organization.

### Scenario 3 – Advocacy

Jennifer arrives back at work after lunch on Thursday and finds an email from the Center for Plain Language in her In-Box. She has come to expect these emails each Thursday afternoon and this week, the subject line piques her interest, “Legislation Alert! Contractions in Congress.” Jennifer opens the email immediately. As she reads, she discovers that the Center for Plain Language is supporting a bill that will impact the use of contractions in government documents. She learns that the Center had previously conducted extensive research on this topic and through the research found that there is a measurable difference in low-literacy document comprehension depending on whether contractions are or are not used.

As she reads the email, Jennifer can click through to various pages on the Center for Plain Language web site. Contextual links offer her the opportunity to read more about the research, she can forward the email to a friend, she can support the work of the Center by making a donation or she can find out how to support the current legislation.

Jennifer chooses to “Take Action” and clicks through to the advocacy section of the site. Here she finds more of the details about the legislation the Center is supporting. Jennifer feels the Center has done their homework and that the case they are making is strong. She is ready to tell her legislators that they should support the bill. Jennifer fills out her address and zip-code in the form provided on the site and the contact info for her representative appears on the page. The Center has provided a draft of a letter that she can customize as she chooses. Jennifer adds a few lines to the letter, reviews the information and then clicks a link that submits the letter to her representative via email.

In the short time she’s been thinking about the issue of contractions, Jennifer has already thought of four or five colleagues who she knows would be interested in finding out more about the Center’s efforts. When she completes the email to her representative, Jennifer then clicks on the “Tell a Friend” link and inputs the emails of a number of people she thinks will want to know more about the bill. She customizes a message to tell them she how she found out about the Center and then adds her own email address so the email won’t get hung up on Spam filters.

Jennifer closes the window, pleased to be involved with such a proactive organization.

## Persona – Megan (Researcher)



Megan is a 20 year old Junior at Syracuse University. She is a very serious student and has maintained a 4.0 in the Honors Writing Program since she was accepted in 2003. Between researching for classes, downloading music and emailing friends and family she is online frequently. She has WiFi access to the Internet virtually everywhere on campus and her favorite coffee shop has it, too.

Megan's writing concentration is in Public Health Communication. She has won multiple national awards for her paper on "Health Topics for Travelers." After graduation, Megan plans on applying to Syracuse University's Master's program in Public Health Management. She believes her undergraduate education and national recognition in Public Health Communication will assure her a spot in the program.

## Scenario 4 – Submitting Research

Jennifer has just picked up her niece Megan at BWI. Megan is a junior in the honors writing program at Syracuse. She is looking forward to spending spring break with her Aunt Jennifer and, hopefully, landing an internship in Washington for the summer. As they drive home from the airport, Megan tells Jennifer about some of the research she has been doing for her advanced style class. As they continue to discuss her studies, Jennifer is impressed with the level of effort Megan puts into her research and she asks if she can read the paper.

Later, Megan asks Jennifer if she'd like to read a draft of the paper. Jennifer agrees and as she reads, realizes that the paper is a very solid research thesis. She asks Megan if she's ever heard of the Center for Plain Language? Megan hasn't so Jennifer fills her in on some of the highlights of her experiences with the Center. She suggests that Megan take a look at the site – Jennifer seems to recall that there is an award program for research and she wonders if Megan's paper would fit the criteria.

That night, Megan pulls out her laptop and surfs to the Center for Plain Language site. She reads the about the Center and, of course, her aunt Jennifer was on-target with the mission of the organization. Megan was eager to download the latest podcast to see if Thom and Annetta were really as funny as Jennifer had said. As she listens, Megan notes that she is entertained by the good-natured sparring and educated by the obviously well-regarded experts. Laughing quietly, Megan clicks over to the “Research” section and as she checks off the criteria in her head, realizes she'd be eligible to submit her work for consideration – the work is current and she is not being funded from outside sources. Megan bookmarks the page so that she can submit the paper when it's finalized.

While she already has two interview appointments, Megan clicks over to the “Jobs/Volunteer” page to check out internship possibilities at the Center. Indeed, they are looking for an intern for the summer. Megan polishes up a cover letter and submits it, with a resume, to the email address on the page.

As she surfs back through the site, Megan heads to the “Writing with Plain Language” page that Annetta mentioned in the podcast. As she reads through the page, she sees an abundance of resources and training opportunities. It is clear that this information is on another site – plainlanguage.gov, but she appreciates that the Center has provided some of the general information and explicit links to the other site. When Megan follows a link to find out about a training program coming up in June, a pop-up alerts her that she will be leaving the Center for Plain Language site. That's okay. Megan is certain she will be returning to the Center's Web site soon.