

Field Guides  
To Ensuring Voter Intent

Vol. 02

**Writing  
instructions  
voters  
understand**

Field-researched, critical election  
design techniques to help ensure that  
every vote is cast as voters intend

Field Guides  
To Ensuring Voter Intent

Vol. 02

# **Writing instructions voters understand**

First edition, third printing, 2013

## About the Field Guide series

There have been excellent ballot design guidelines around since about 2007 when the U.S. Election Assistance Commission published AIGA's work in its report, *Effective Designs for the Administration of Elections*. Everyone involved in that project quickly figured out that, as juicy as the design specs were in that report, they needed to be boiled down to essentials that local election officials could easily act on within the constraints they had. *Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent* were inspired by that need.

– Dana Chisnell, *Field Guides Editor*

## About this Field Guide

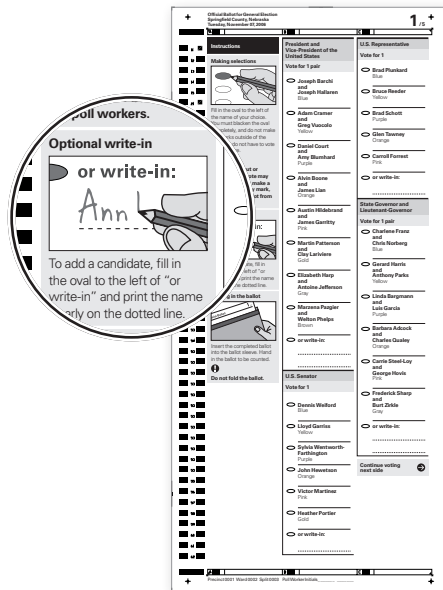
It's amazing the difference simple language can make for voters. In research conducted for the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Ginny Redish and Dana Chisnell found that when instructions on ballots were in plain language, voters made fewer mistakes and were more likely to vote the way they intended.

The 10 guidelines in this Field Guide come mainly from that NIST research. To learn more about the research behind this guide and download examples, go to [civicdesign.org](http://civicdesign.org).

## What is plain language?

According to the Center for Plain Language, something is in plain language if it considers who will use it, why they will use it, and what they will do with it. The language used minimizes jargon and uses sentence structure, strong verbs, word choice, and other similar techniques to make sure that the audience can read, understand, and use the information.

For more information about plain language, see [centerforplainlanguage.org](http://centerforplainlanguage.org).



**On optical scan ballots, instructions like these are most effective when placed just before the first contests.**

## No. 01

**At the beginning of the ballot, explain how to change a vote, and that voters may write in a candidate.**

**Official Ballot for General Election**  
November 8, 2016  
County of [ ] State of [ ]

**Instructions**

**Making selections**

1. Fill in the oval to the left of the name of your choice. You must fill in the oval completely, and do not make any marks outside of the oval. You do not have to write in your name.

2. Do not cross out or erase, or your vote may not count. If you make a mistake or a stray mark, ask for a new ballot from the poll workers.

**Optional write-in or write-in:**

3. To write in a candidate, fill in the oval to the left of "or write-in:" and write the name of the candidate in the space provided.

**Turning in the ballot**

4. Fold the completed ballot into the ballot box. Hand in the ballot to the poll worker.

**Do not fold the ballot.**

**President and Vice President of the United States**

Vote for 1 pair:

<input type="radio"/> Joseph Biden and Joseph R. Biden Jr.	<input type="radio"/> Donald Trump and Mike Pence
<input type="radio"/> Adam Carter and Greg Wasson	<input type="radio"/> Gary Johnson and Bill Weld
<input type="radio"/> David Galt and Amy Blankfield	<input type="radio"/> Jill Stein and James H. Han
<input type="radio"/> Austin Hibbard and James G. Kennedy	<input type="radio"/> Chloë F. F. and Chris H. H.
<input type="radio"/> Martin Patterson and Clay L. L.	<input type="radio"/> Elizabeth H. H. and Andrew J. J.
<input type="radio"/> Massimo P. P. and William P. P.	<input type="radio"/> Mark R. R. and Mark R. R.
<input type="radio"/> or write-in:	<input type="radio"/> or write-in:

**U.S. Senator**

Vote for 1:

<input type="radio"/> Daniel W. W.	<input type="radio"/> Lloyd G. G.
<input type="radio"/> Sylvia M. M.	<input type="radio"/> John M. M.
<input type="radio"/> Victor M. M.	<input type="radio"/> Heather P. P.
<input type="radio"/> or write-in:	<input type="radio"/> or write-in:

**U.S. Representative**

Vote for 1:

<input type="radio"/> Brad P. P.	<input type="radio"/> Bruce R. R.
<input type="radio"/> Brad S. S.	<input type="radio"/> Glen T. T.
<input type="radio"/> Daniel F. F.	<input type="radio"/> or write-in:

**State Governor and Lieutenant Governor**

Vote for 1 pair:

<input type="radio"/> Charles F. F. and Chris H. H.	<input type="radio"/> Gerald H. H. and Anthony P. P.
<input type="radio"/> Linda B. B. and L. L.	<input type="radio"/> Barbara A. A. and Charles G. G.
<input type="radio"/> or write-in:	<input type="radio"/> or write-in:

**Continue voting next side**

## Continue voting next side

instruction is placed at the end of the last column on the page.

## No. 02

# Put instructions where voters need them.

Break instructions into groups.

On paper ballots, place instructions to turn the ballot over at the bottom right hand corner.

On electronic ballots, put instructions for writing in candidates on the write-in screen.

**OFFICIAL BALLOT**  
CITY GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT

**Ranked Choice Voting**

**Instructions:**  
How to make your candidate choice  
1. Place your first choice candidate and complete the ballot.  
2. If you have a second choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your second choice candidate.  
3. If you have a third choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your third choice candidate.  
4. If you have a fourth choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your fourth choice candidate.  
5. If you have a fifth choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your fifth choice candidate.  
6. If you have a sixth choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your sixth choice candidate.  
7. If you have a seventh choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your seventh choice candidate.  
8. If you have an eighth choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your eighth choice candidate.  
9. If you have a ninth choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your ninth choice candidate.  
10. If you have a tenth choice candidate, complete the ballot and rank your tenth choice candidate.

**CANDIDATE NAME**

**1** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank first.

**2** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank second.

**3** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank third.

**4** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank fourth.

**5** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank fifth.

**6** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank sixth.

**7** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank seventh.

**8** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank eighth.

**9** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank ninth.

**10** If you make a mistake, the system will not count your ballot. If you have a mistake, write the name of the candidate you want to rank tenth.

**CITY OFFICE**

**MAYOR** Mark your first, second and third choice candidates in the columns below. One line each.

**1** First choice  
**2** Second choice  
**3** Third choice

**COUNCIL MEMBER** Mark your first, second and third choice candidates in the columns below. One line each.

**1** First choice  
**2** Second choice  
**3** Third choice

**VOTE FRONT AND BACK OF BALLOT**

W4 PS

**Simple illustrations**, along with clear instructions, help voters know what to do.

## No. 03

# Include information that will prevent voters from making errors.

Show and tell voters how to mark the ballot.

Tell voters not to write in candidates whose names already appear on the ballot.

**Before**

If you tear, or deface, or wrongly mark this ballot, return it and obtain another. Do not attempt to correct mistakes on the ballot by making erasures or cross outs. Erasures or cross outs may invalidate all or part of your ballot. Prior to submitting your ballot, if you make a mistake in completing the ballot or wish to change your ballot choices, you may obtain and complete a new ballot. You have a right to a replacement ballot upon return of the original ballot.

**After**

If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for another ballot.

**No. 04**

# Write short sentences.

Use simple words.

Remove unnecessary words.

Separate instructions from results.



**Use**

find

help

make sure

message

put

turn on

use

**Avoid**

locate, identify

assist

verify, validate, prompt

prompt

incorporate

power on

utilize

**No. 05**

# Use short, simple everyday words.

Select the plain rather than the formal word.

Avoid jargon, such as “over vote,” “under vote,” and “partisan.”

**Before**

Moving ahead is accomplished by touching the word Next; moving back by pressing Back.

**After**

To go forward in the ballot, touch Next.

To go back to previous pages in the ballot, touch Back.

**No. 06**

**Write in the active voice, where the person doing the action comes before the verb.**

Think of the voter as "you."

Write instructions where the subject is "you," implied or understood.

You don't have to state "you" directly.

**Before**

If that oval is not marked, your vote cannot be counted for the candidate.

**After**

You must fill in the oval for your vote to count.

**No. 07**

# Write in the positive.

Tell voters what to do rather than what not to do.

**Non-sequential steps**

Vote!

- Mark your votes in private.
- Follow the instructions on the ballot.
- Do not write your name or an ID number anywhere on the ballot.

**Sequential steps**

To make changes:

- 1 Touch the race you want to change.
- 2 At that race, if you have selected something before, touch the choice you do not want.
- 3 Then touch choice you want.
- 4 To return to this screen, touch Return to Review.

**No. 08**

# When giving instructions that are more than one step, make each step an item in a numbered list.

Do not number other instructions. When the instructions are not sequential steps, use separate paragraphs or simple bullets with bold beginnings rather than numbering.

**Good**

If you need any help while voting, please contact your county elections office.

Seal the envelope to keep your votes private.

Do not write on this envelope.

**No. 09**

# Keep paragraphs short.

A one-sentence paragraph is fine.

**Before**

Press the box of the candidate for whom you desire to vote; yellow will appear in the box. The voter must retouch the selected item to deselect it first in order to change a vote.

**After**

To vote for a candidate of your choice, touch that person's name.

If you make a mistake or want to change a vote, first touch the name you no longer want.

**No. 10**

**Separate paragraphs by a space so each paragraph stands out on the page or screen.**

**Tip**

Check that the information is written in plain language.

**Can voters**

- ☐ understand what each instruction, prompt, or message means?
- ☐ follow the instructions and prompts easily?
- ☐ respond appropriately to error messages?
- ☐ complete the ballot without making mistakes?

## Notes

## Notes



## Who made this Guide possible?

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