



# Plain Language

*A guide for using plain language  
in Minnesota State Government*



# What is Plain Language?

**Plain language is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it.**

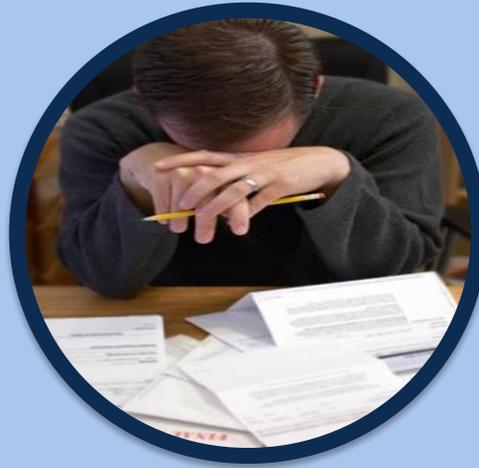


Ginny Redish's definition, adopted into the official guidelines for plain language at [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov).



# What do you write, edit, or review?

-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----



What happens when Minnesotans don't understand what they receive or look up?

# Can plain language help?

**Yes!!**

Story 1: Plain language saves money.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) reduced phone calls.

	Old	New
Average calls per month per counselor	9.4	1.6
Calls per year 10 counselors	1128	192
Rate of calling 750 old letters 710 new letters	1.5	.27

*Work by Reva Daniel  
with VBA counselors  
in Jackson, Mississippi*

# Can plain language help?

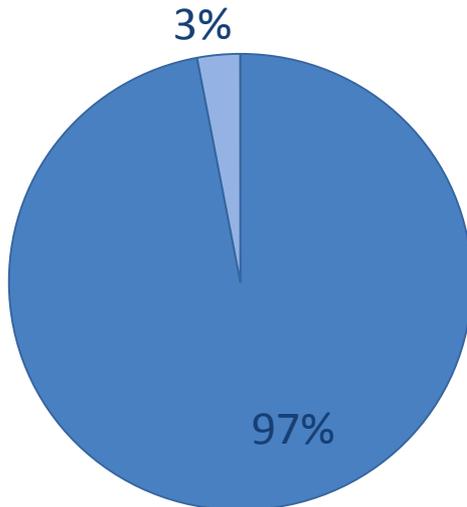
**Yes!!**

Story 2: Plain language saves money.

The Washington Department of Revenue collected **\$800,000 more** than their goal.

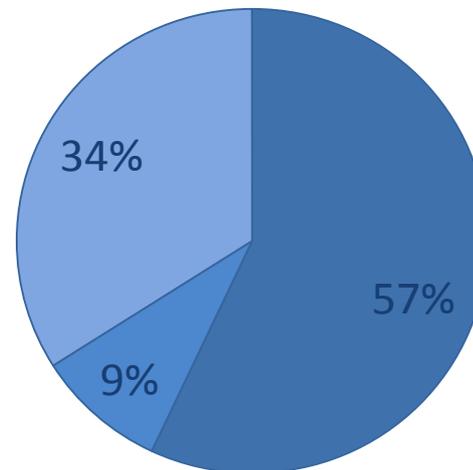
**Original**

■ No response   ■ Responded



**Revised**

■ No Response  
■ Paid Tax  
■ Declared did not owe tax





# Typical manufacturer's warning:

This is a multipurpose passenger vehicle which will handle and maneuver differently from an ordinary passenger car, in driving conditions which may occur on streets and highways and off road. As with other vehicles of this type, if you make sharp turns or abrupt maneuvers, the vehicle may roll over or may go out of control and crash. You should read driving guidelines and instructions in the Owner's Manual, and wear your seatbelts at all times.

**⚠ WARNING: HIGHER ROLLOVER RISK**



**Avoid Abrupt Maneuvers  
and Excessive Speed.**

**Always Buckle Up.**

**See Owner's Manual  
For Further Information.**



**⚠ AVERTISSEMENT : RISQUE ACCRU DE CAPOTAGE**

**Éviter les manoeuvres brusques et les vitesses excessives.**

**Toujours boucler sa ceinture de sécurité.**

**Consulter le Guide du propriétaire  
pour de plus amples informations.**

# Why should we do this?



Reduce confusion

---



Save time and resources

---



Significantly improve customer service

---



Enhance the value of services provided by state government

---

# Respecting your readers

The people you want to reach are very busy.

They want to grab information quickly.

People inside an organization overestimate the vocabulary knowledge of people outside the organization by about 30 percent.



“dumbing down”



Respecting your busy readers' time!

# How do we communicate in plain language?

- Plan
- Organize
- Write
- Edit
- Review/ Test

The following slides include some useful guidelines for each of these steps

---

The actual process isn't as linear as this list suggests. You will probably cycle through write/ edit/ review/ revise/ review at least a few times.

---

# Plan



Office of Governor Mark Dayton, based on workshops from Redish & Associates, Inc. (with Permission), 2014.

# Plan

## Before you write, ask:

- **Why?**  
Explain your purpose
- **Who?**  
Know your readers
- **How?**  
Understand the readers situation
- **What?**  
Think “conversation”





# Plan: Explain your purpose

- Align with goals of your agency
- Be measurable
- Be specific
- Clearly state what you want/ need your reader to do

# Plan: Know your readers

- To whom are you writing?
- 

- What should you keep in mind about this person?
- 

- Abilities
- Aptitudes
- Attitudes



*The Smith Family*

# Plan: Know your readers

## Create a persona (Identity)

- A character assumed by an author in written work
- What is life like for them?
- Include: abilities, aptitudes, and attitudes

For example, your persona might

- Be very busy
- Feel overwhelmed by information and paperwork
- Not know the agency's internal language

# Plan: Think “conversation”

**With your persona in mind, answer these questions:**

- What will your reader need from you? (for example, information, a plan)?
- What questions or concerns will the reader likely have?
- What part of your message is likely to confuse the reader?  
How can you improve understanding?
- What will you write to compel the reader to read and act on your message?



# Plan: Understand the readers' situation

- How is this person receiving your information?
  - Mail
  - Email
  - On your website



- Who opens the mail?

- When, how, why do they deal with the document?

# Plan: Think “conversation”

**Everything you write is part of a conversation.**

- **“See”** your reader: keep their persona in mind as you write
- **“Talk”** to your reader
- **“Hear”** your reader’s questions



# Organize



# What helps us organize?

- **Selecting** the right (*and right amount of*) **content**

- **Arranging** information logically

- **Formatting** for easy use



# Organize: Selecting content

## Think through the conversation with your persona

- Determine your key message

- Identify essential information/ content

- Need to know – Keep it!
- Nice to know – Loose it!

- Answer your persona's questions





# Organize: Arranging information logically

- Main point at the top
- Group related items/information
- Determine sequence of information
- Use headings, lists, tables
- Include only information your reader needs



# Organize: Formatting your message

- Keep headings close to the text they cover
- Keep a straight left margin
- Leave the right margin where it falls  
(don't right-justify the text)
- Use mixed case, not all capitals

# Write



# Write

## What helps us write in plain language?

- Put in the necessary information
- Include a clear subject line that summarizes the main point
- Put the key message first
- Watch the tone
- Use personal pronouns
- Prefer the active voice
- Use your reader's words





# Write: Put in the necessary information

## **Beginning:**

- Subject line
- Key Message – even if it's bad news
- Context – only if needed
- Overview – especially if the letter is long



# Write: Put in the necessary information

## **Middle:**

- Tell the reader what to do, in logical order
    - What does the reader need to do?
    - Answer anticipated questions
    - Inform of rights
- 

## **End:**

- Where to go for more information
  - Contact information (always have contact information on the document)
-



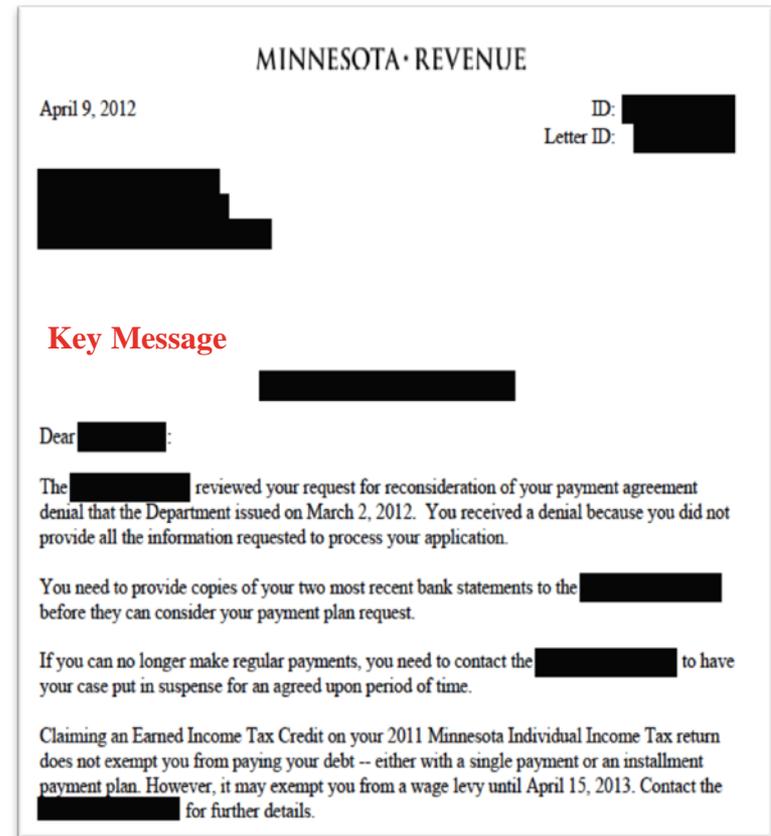
# Write: Include a clear subject line

## Your subject line should:

- Grab the reader's attention.
- Include a mini-preview of the key message.
- Contain keywords useful for search and retention.

# Write: Include a clear subject line that summarizes the main point

- What is the key message?
- What do you want/need this person to do?
- How would you compose the key message like a "subject" line in an email?





# Write: Use short, simple sentences

**Tell the reader what to do, in logical order.**

- Use short sentences
- Keep each sentence to **one thought**  
– or two tightly connected thoughts.
- Strive for **10 – 20 words** per sentence
  - Think short and to the point
  - A fragment may be all you need
- Paragraphs can be one sentence

## **Redish's Rule:**

*When your reader has to read the sentence more than once to understand it, rewrite it!*



# Write: Watch the tone

## Write gender-neutral, use “you”



An applicant may apply at any time, even if she is working.



You may apply at any time, even if you are working.

## Use the plural



A contractor must renew his insurance each year.



Contractors must renew their insurance each year.



# Write: Use personal pronouns

- **Help readers see themselves in the text**
  - Use words like “I, me, we, our, ours, you, yours”

---

- **Use personal pronouns or name the person doing the action**
  - You must respond by...
  - John Smith will contact you...



# Write: Prefer the Active voice

- Focuses attention on the **doer** of an action rather than the **receiver** of the action
- Writes in the natural sequence of occurrence

Active

Ania mailed the letter.

Passive

The letter was mailed by Ania.



# Write: Use your readers' words

Many words in typical legal documents were common hundreds of years ago. **They are not today.**

Instead of	Use or do this
aforesaid	the
hereby	(not needed; take it out)
pursuant to	The law says you must... (or cite the law at the end)
shall	must
shall be construed to mean	means
such	the
to wit	(not needed; take it out)

# Edit



# Edit

## What helps us edit in plain language?

- Go over your draft
- List items when you can
- Keep list items parallel
- Use tables where appropriate
- Use highlighting sparingly





# Edit: Go over your draft

## First draft ≠ final draft

**As you read over what you have written,  
ask yourself**

- Does my reader need to know that?
- Would my reader have a question I have not answered?
- Is every word necessary? What can I cut?
- Would a list help my reader?
- Would a table help my reader?



# Edit: Use lists when you can

## **Lists help the reader by**

- Highlighting levels of importance

---

- Helping the reader understand the order in which things need to happen

---

- Making it easy for the reader to identify all necessary steps in a process

---

- Adding blank space for easy reading

---

# Edit: Keep list items parallel

You save readers time and mental energy when you put all list items in the same structure.

In this example, you can read the beginning and each bulleted item as a grammatical sentence

To apply for a permit, you must

- Be 21 or older
- Have a valid drivers license
- Have no convictions for drunk driving.



**Renew your license, registration or certificate online**  
**Visit [www.dli.mn.gov](http://www.dli.mn.gov) and select “License ReNew”**

---

In order to ensure that license renewals are processed promptly and efficiently, visit the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry’s website to renew a license online: [www.dli.mn.gov](http://www.dli.mn.gov). At the home page, select the “DLI ReNew” icon (image of a crescent wrench) to begin your renewal.

**Personal licenses**

Online renewals for personal licenses are quick and automatic. Once you’ve completed your continuing education (if required), simply go to the DLI website, verify or update the information we have in our records, pay the renewal fee with a credit card or check card, and your license is renewed.

All licensees who renew their license without taking all required continuing education hours will be subject to license suspension and a civil penalty of no less than \$2,000 and a \$100 reinstatement fee.

If your license required an exam, you will need to retake the exam if your license remains inactive for more than two years. Late renewals require payment of a late fee of 1/2 the regular renewal fee.

---

**Questions about license status or renewals?**

Contact DLI Licensing staff via email at [DLI.license@state.mn.us](mailto:DLI.license@state.mn.us) or call us at (651) 284-5034.

*Work by Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry*

# YOUR STATE TRADE LICENSE OR REGISTRATION EXPIRES SOON

## What do I need to do?

- Complete all required continuing education hours.
- Go to [www.dli.mn.gov](http://www.dli.mn.gov).
- Click on the picture that says “DLI ReNew.”
- Follow the instructions and make any changes to your information.
- Pay your renewal fee with a credit card.
- Relax, your license is renewed!



## What if my license expires?

- You will have to pay your regular renewal fee, plus a late fee of 50 percent.
- If your license is inactive for two years, you will have to retake any required exam.

Questions? Email us at [dli.license@state.mn.us](mailto:dli.license@state.mn.us) or call (651) 284-5034.

*Work by Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry*



# Edit: Use tables where appropriate

**Tables are another great way to save readers' time and mental energy.**

Tables are a way of showing a set of “if, then” sentences.

- If you need a receipt, you must enclose a self addressed, stamped envelope.

When you have more than one “if, then” sentence, make a table – with the “if” part first.

If you need x	Then y
If you need z	Then a
If you need c	Then d



# Edit: Use highlighting sparingly

- **Bold** or **color** makes **headings** stand out.
- **Excess bold makes text hard to read, and whole messages in bold can tire readers.**
- A **few words** in bold can make that text **easy to see**.
- Use italics sparingly *for emphasis*. (One or two words.)
- Using multiple **text formatting** methods *within the same document* can leave the reader **completely confused**.

# Review / Test





# Review

- Reviewing is a part of the plain language process.  
Let it work for you
- Wait – Put it down for a while
- Read or whisper aloud
- Ask a colleague in an unrelated area to read it for you
- Work with Communications

# Test

## Three Techniques:

- Have representative readers try it out  
(usability, or user acceptance, testing)
- Ask a few people to read it  
(less formal)
- "Channel" your reader  
(persona-based, conversation-based, review)

**Goal: *Find, Understand, Use!***



# Examples

## Before:

## Original VA Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Please furnish medical evidence in support of your pension claim. The best evidence to submit would be a report of a recent examination by your personal physician, or a report from a hospital or clinic that has treated you recently. The report should include complete findings and diagnoses of the condition which renders you permanently and totally disabled. It is not necessary for you to receive an examination at this time. We only need a report from a doctor, hospital, or clinic that has treated you recently.

This evidence should be submitted as soon as possible, preferably within 60 days. If you do not receive this information within 60 days from the date of this letter, your claim will be denied. Evidence must be received in the Department of Veterans Affairs within one year from the date of this letter; otherwise, benefits, if entitlement is established, may not be paid prior to the date of its receipt. **SHOW VETERAN'S FULL NAME AND VA FILE NUMBER ON ALL EVIDENCE SUBMITTED.**

Privacy Act Information: The information requested by this letter is authorized by existing law (38 U.S.C. 210 (c)(1)) and is considered necessary and relevant to determine entitlement to maximum benefits applied for under this law. The information submitted may be disclosed outside the Department of Veterans Affairs only as permitted by law.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adjudication Officer



# Examples

## After:

## Revised VA Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We have your claim for a pension. Our laws require us to ask you for more information. The information you give us will help us decide whether we can pay you a pension.

### **What We Need**

Send us a medical report from a doctor or clinic that you visited in the past six months. The report should show why you can't work. Please take this letter and the enclosed Guide to your doctor.

### **When We Need It**

We need the doctor's report by [date]. We'll have to turn down your claim if we don't get the report by that date.

### **Your Right to Privacy**

The information you give us is private. We might have to give out this information in a few special cases. But we will not give it out to the general public without your permission. We've attached a form which explains your privacy rights.

If you have any questions about this letter, you may call us at 1-800-827-1000. The call is free.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Enclosures: Doctor's Guide, Your Privacy Rights

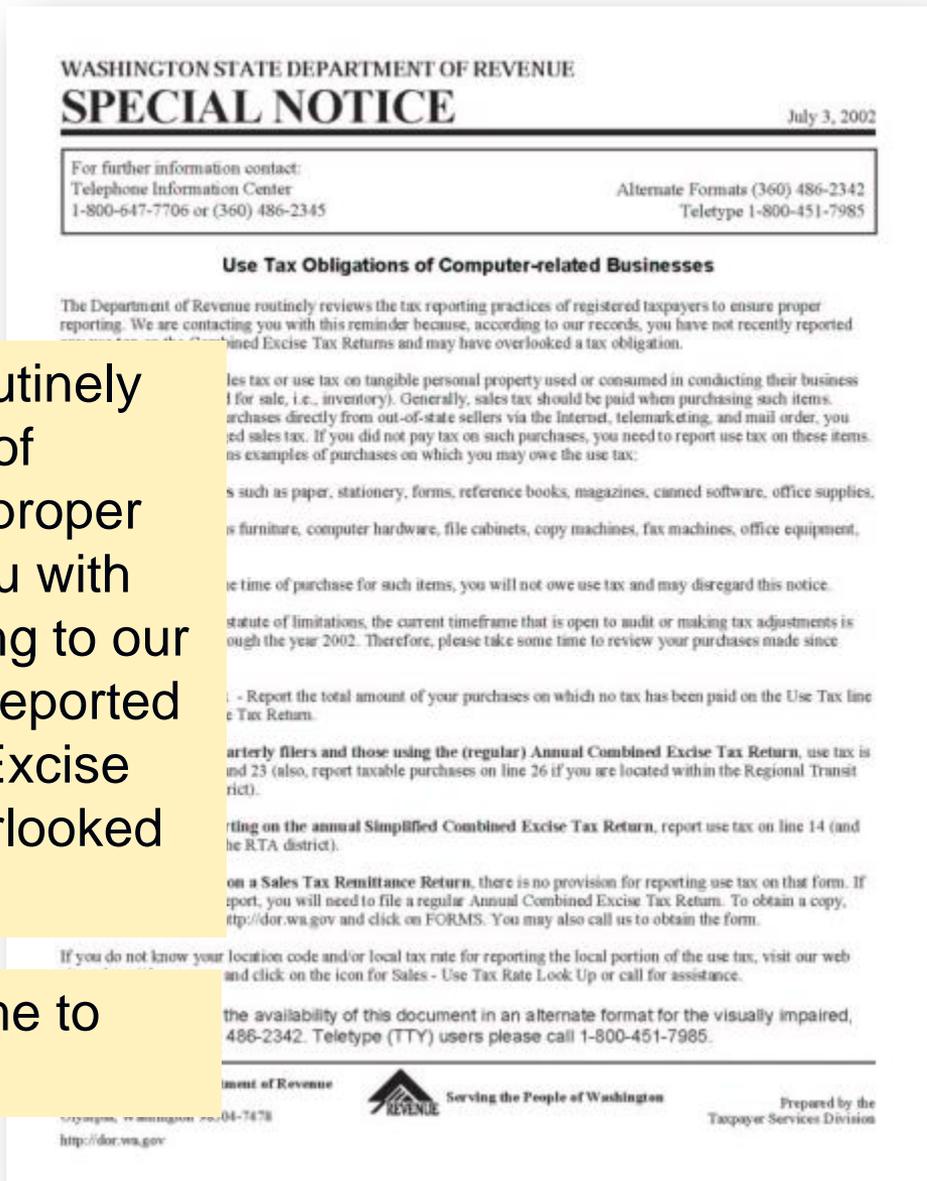


# Examples

## Before:

The Department of Revenue routinely reviews the reporting practices of registered taxpayers to ensure proper reporting. We are contacting you with this reminder because, according to our records, you have not recently reported any **use tax** on the Combined Excise Tax Returns and may have overlooked a tax obligation.

Therefore, please take some time to review your purchases.



# Examples

## After:

According to our records, you have not recently reported use tax on your *Combined Excise Tax Returns*. Because businesses engaged in similar activity typically owe use tax, we are asking you to review your purchases for possible unpaid tax.



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

January 10, 2003

Tax Registration Number: 600 600 600

\*\*\*\*\*AUTO\*\*5-DIGIT 98502  
JONES ROBERT R  
ABC COMPANY INC  
1234 TAXPAYER DRIVE SE  
OLYMPIA WA 98234-5678

Dear Taxpayer:

According to our records, you have not recently reported use tax on your *Combined Excise Tax Returns*. Because businesses engaged in similar activity typically owe use tax, we are asking you to review your purchases for possible unpaid tax.

#### What to look for

Look for Internet, mail order, catalog or other purchases of tangible personal property on which sales tax was not paid. These purchases are subject to use tax, with the exception of goods held exclusively for sale, such as inventory or merchandise. Certain retail services, such as remodeling or repair, are also subject to the sales or use tax. Use tax is only due when sales tax has not been paid.

Examples of purchases on which you may owe use tax:

- ♦ stationery & forms
- ♦ office equipment
- ♦ books & magazines
- ♦ prepackaged software
- ♦ office supplies
- ♦ furniture

#### If you owe use tax

Report the total cost of purchases on the following lines of your *Combined Excise Tax Return*:

- ♦ use tax line (line 17)
- ♦ local use tax line (line 23)
- ♦ Region Transit Authority line, if you are located within the RTA district (line 26)

#### If you do not owe use tax

Call 1-800-426-1776 and use our automated service to report that you have reviewed your records and determined that you do not owe use tax. You will need to enter your Tax Registration Number listed above when using the automated service.

#### Review period

If your business is audited, the Department can review your records dating back to January 1, 1999. Please review purchases made since that time.

For tax assistance, visit <http://dor.wa.gov> or call 1-800-647-7706. To inquire about the availability of this document in an alternate format for the visually impaired, please call (360) 486-2342. Teletype (TTY) users please call 1-800-451-7985.

# Examples

## Before:

### Taxpayer Rights – “CFR”

At the Minnesota Department of Revenue, we're dedicated to upholding your rights as a taxpayer. While you're responsible for giving us complete and accurate information and paying your taxes on time, it's our job to make sure you can do that by getting you the clearest forms and instructions we can provide. You're entitled to tax notices and bills that explain how much you owe in taxes, penalties, and interest, and why. You're also entitled to prompt, courteous and correct answers to your questions.

In most cases, we can't share your personal and financial information with anyone else without your permission. You have the right to know why we're asking for information and what will happen if you don't provide it. If we are authorized by law to share your information, you have the right to know the identity of other persons or entities authorized to receive that information.

If one of us recklessly or intentionally ignores the law while collecting your overdue taxes, you can sue us for damages. However, the court will fine a person if it finds the lawsuit was frivolous or intended as a delaying action.

#### Commissioner Filed Return (CFR)

When you don't file a return by its due date we can file one for you based on available information. This is called a Commissioner Filed Return (CFR). The taxes and penalties imposed on a CFR are considered valid and collectable until we get a return from you.

Even if we file a CFR, you must still file your own return. If you don't, you may be subject to criminal penalties.

You can replace a CFR with your own return at any time, even if you've already paid the amount due from the CFR. We must accept your return to replace the CFR. However, money collected and applied to the CFR may not be refundable. There is a time limit on the refund claim even if the amount you paid is more than the amount you calculate as due on the return you file.

#### Penalties

We charge you a penalty when you're late filing your return or paying your taxes. If you have reasonable cause to justify your delay in filing or paying, let us know within 60 days of the date on the CFR letter from us. We may also charge you other penalties for extended delinquencies, or if we find that you knowingly filed returns using false information. You can appeal most penalties to us or to Minnesota Tax Court.

#### Collection

If you don't pay the amount shown on the CFR notice or appeal within 60 days, we'll send you a bill detailing the tax, penalty, and interest you owe. If you don't pay within the 60 days, we'll continue to charge you interest until the amount you owe is paid in full. After we send a bill, we may file a "lien" for what you owe. The lien will appear on your credit report and could affect your ability to get a loan, rent housing, get a job, or sell, transfer, or refinance your property. Once you pay, we must release the lien.

If you don't pay the bill, we can take "collection action" against you. This means we may take money out of your paycheck, or even seize your property and bank accounts. We generally have to



# Examples

## After:

### I received a Commissioner Filed Return – now what?

*This information sheet explains Commissioner Filed Returns and some of your rights as a taxpayer*

#### Why did I get a Notice of Commissioner Filed Return?

When you don't file a return by its due date, we can file one for you based on the information that we have. This is called a Commissioner Filed Return (CFR).

The taxes, penalties, and interest on a CFR are valid, and we can collect them until we get a return from you for the tax period covered by the CFR.

#### Must I still file a return?

Yes. The CFR does not meet your requirement to file for the tax period. If you do not file your own return, you may be subject to criminal prosecution.

The CFR notice tells you how to file. When you file your return, we must accept it to replace the CFR. We may still audit your return to make sure it's correct.

#### What if I just pay what the notice says?

You can choose to pay the amount on the notice to keep interest and penalties from growing any more. But you must also file your own return.

You should file as soon as possible. If you wait too long, you may lose any money you paid, even if your return shows that you owe less than the amount on the CFR.

#### What if my own return shows I should get a refund?

Whether you will get a refund depends on when you file, as shown in the table below.

If you file your own return	Then you may receive
Within 3½ years of the original due date	The refund on your return <i>and</i> any money paid or applied to the CFR amount
More than 3½ years from the original due date <i>but</i> within 1 year of the date on the CFR notice	Only money paid or applied to the CFR amount – not the refund on your return
More than 3½ years from the original due date <i>and</i> more than 1 year from the date on the CFR notice	Neither the refund on your return <i>nor</i> any money paid or applied to the CFR amount

If you qualify for a refund, we may use it to pay:

- The “extended delinquency” penalty on your return and interest on that penalty
- Any other tax or government agency debt you owe
- Any unpaid child support or criminal fines you owe

If those payments are less than your refund, we'll send you what is left.



# Examples

## Before:



7190 0007 2080 0424 9973

June 21, 2013



**Subject: Notice of intent to offset**

Our records show that you owe a state debt to the Minnesota Department of Revenue. If this is a joint debt each debtor may receive a separate notice.

Debtor name:

Debt type:

Amount due:



**We intend to file a claim with the U.S. Treasury Offset Program for this amount.** This federal program allows the Department of Revenue to claim your federal tax refunds and federal non-tax payments and apply them to your debt. Some non-tax payments, such as social security are ineligible for offset. The U.S. Treasury will only send us your payments that are eligible for offset by federal law. In addition, they will deduct a fee for each transaction before they send the payment to us. The U.S. Treasury sets the amount of this fee and may change it annually. We may have already filed a claim with this program for other state debts you owe.

Having an active payment agreement will not prevent us from filing a claim. If your federal tax refund and/or federal non-tax payment applies to your debt, your payment agreement may end earlier than scheduled. Your payment agreement will automatically end when either you no longer have a balance due with the Department of Revenue or all scheduled payments have been requested. If you currently have a payment agreement in place with the Department of Revenue, continue to follow the terms of the agreement.

**To avoid this claim from being filed, you must pay the amount due in full immediately.**

**Options for making payment:**

- **Electronically debit your bank account** - pay online at [www.revenue.state.mn.us](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us) or call 1-800-570-3329. There is no charge to you for using this service.
- **Major credit card** - log into the Value Payment Systems website at [www.payMNtax.com](http://www.payMNtax.com) or call 1-855-9-IPAY-MN. There is a fee charged by Value Payment Systems for using this service.
- **Money order or check** - use the enclosed payment voucher and include your Letter ID on the payment.

Collection Division  
An equal opportunity employer  
[www.revenue.state.mn.us](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us)

Minnesota Relay 711 (TTY)

# Examples

## After:



7190 0007 2080 0473 5247

September 4, 2013

ID: XXX-XX-0550  
Letter ID: L0148437632

TEST M TEST  
0550 IT - OFFSET  
SHOREVIEW MN 55126-3005

### Subject: The Minnesota Department of Revenue may take your federal payments

Because you still owe us an income tax debt, we intend to file a claim against payments you receive from the federal government. We will use those payments to reduce or pay the debt shown below. This is called an "offset."

**Debtor:** TEST TEST  
**Debt Type:** 2008 Individual Income Tax - Other  
**Amount Due:** \$1,021.59

#### What if I have a payment agreement?

To collect your debt, we will file this claim even if you have a payment agreement. You must continue to make your payments. If your debt is paid in full, your payment agreement will end earlier than scheduled.

#### What happens next?

In 60 days, we will file a claim with the U.S. Department of Treasury. If the federal government owes you money that is "eligible for offset," they will send your payments to us.

**Note:** Each person responsible for repaying this debt may receive a separate notice. If you do not have a payment agreement and want one, contact us.

#### What federal payments can we take?

Only certain federal payments are eligible for offset. Eligible payments are those we can legally take for this debt. For example:

We can take (eligible)	We cannot take (ineligible)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tax Refunds</li><li>• Vendor or Contractor Payments</li><li>• Expense Reimbursements</li><li>• Travel Advances</li><li>• Grants</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Security Income</li><li>• Veterans Benefits</li><li>• Railroad Retirement Benefits</li></ul>

Collection Division  
An equal opportunity employer  
www.revenue.state.mn.us

Minnesota Relay 711 (TTY)

# Examples

## Before:



# Examples

After:

The image shows a news release from the Minnesota Department of Revenue and a snippet from a StarTribune article. The news release is dated March 8, 2013, and is titled "Important Notice for Taxpayers Using Intuit Products (TurboTax, Lacerte, Intuit online, ProSeries)". It advises taxpayers not to use Intuit products to file their taxes. The StarTribune snippet is partially obscured by a large "StarTribune" logo and contains a table with two columns: "do?" and "THEN". The "THEN" column contains text about using different software products and visiting an approved software vendor page.

**MINNESOTA • REVENUE** www.revenue.state.mn.us

**News Release** **CONTACT** Lisa Erickson  
**PHONE** 651-556-6397  
**E-MAIL** lisa.erickson@state.mn.us

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
March 8, 2013

Contact: Lisa Erickson  
Phone: 651-556-6397  
[Lisa.erickson@state.mn.us](mailto:lisa.erickson@state.mn.us)

**Important Notice for Taxpayers Using Intuit Products (TurboTax, Lacerte, Intuit online, ProSeries)**

The Minnesota Department of Revenue advises you **not** to use Intuit (TurboTax, Lacerte, Intuit online, ProSeries) to file your Minnesota taxes electronically or on paper. Intuit has discovered multiple issues with their products. The issues could jeopardize the accuracy of your return or delay your refund.

**StarTribune** do?

	THEN
prepared or filed your	File using a different software product. Visit our <a href="#">approved software vendor page</a> .
return	Intuit communicates the problems are
	1-888-4609.
	it and we find these errors unacceptable.
	ely. If they fail to do so, the department will
	1-4609.

Citing "multiple issues with the products," the Minnesota Department of Revenue issued a **crisp statement** today urging tax filers to avoid using Intuit products to prepare or file their state income taxes.

# Examples

After:

The screenshot shows the Minnesota Revenue website's 'Extensions' page. The header includes the Minnesota Revenue logo and navigation links for Home, Individuals, Businesses, Tax Professionals, Local Governments, Law & Policy, Research & Statistics, Newsroom, and Report Fraud. A search bar is present in the top right. The main content area is titled 'Extensions' and includes sections for 'Filing extension', 'Military filing extensions', and 'Payment extension'. The 'Filing extension' section explains that Minnesota does not have an extension form, but users are allowed six months (or until October 15) before a late-filing penalty is charged. It also notes that a four percent late payment penalty will be assessed on any tax not paid by April 15. The 'Payment extension' section states that users must pay by April 15 or penalty and interest will be assessed. The 'Military filing extensions' section notes that rules for military personnel may differ. The 'Payment extension' section explains that users must pay at least 90 percent of their total tax due by April 15 to avoid penalties and interest. A 'Collection Division' link is provided at the bottom of the main content area. The footer contains contact information for the Minnesota Department of Revenue, including the address: P.O. Box 64264, St. Paul, MN 55164-0264.

The screenshot shows the Minnesota Revenue website's 'Filing Extensions' page. The header is identical to the previous screenshot. The main content area is titled 'Filing Extensions' and includes sections for 'Filing Extensions', 'Extension Payment', and 'Military Filing Extensions'. The 'Filing Extensions' section explains that users can file their return by the regular due date (April 15 for most people) and are allowed six months (or until Oct. 15) before a late-filing penalty is charged. It also notes that a four percent late payment penalty will be assessed on any tax not paid by April 15. The 'Extension Payment' section explains that users can avoid or reduce penalties by estimating how much tax they owe and paying that amount by the regular due date (April 15 for most people). The 'Military Filing Extensions' section notes that rules for military personnel may differ. The 'Contact Us' sidebar on the right includes phone numbers (651-296-3701, 800-852-0694), hours of operation (8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Mon. - Fri.), and a 'Contact Us' link. The 'Top FAQs' sidebar includes questions like 'I filed for an extension with my federal tax return. How do I file for an extension for my state return?' and 'I think I'll owe tax on my Minnesota return this year, but I'm not ready to file by April 15. What should I do?'. The 'Related Information' sidebar includes links for 'Due Dates for Filing Individual Income Tax', 'Penalties and Interest', 'Electronic Payment Options', 'How to Pay Minnesota Income Tax with a Check', and 'Collection Information'. The 'About This Page' sidebar includes links for 'Rate this page' and 'Report errors/problems'.

# Examples

## Before:



Department of Administration

### Policy/Procedure

Policy Number: MMD E-001-0  
(Replaces MMD E-001-98)

EFFECTIVE DATE: November 1, 2001

SUBJECT: Status of Information in Bids and Proposals Submitted to the State of Minnesota

### BACKGROUND AND REFERENCES

The State of Minnesota receives sealed responses to more than 2,000 solicitations for goods and services annually. This policy details the statutory classification of data contained within the responses—public or nonpublic data—at each stage of the solicitation process.

The 2001 Legislature enacted specific language relating to data classifications of information in bids and proposals. The language will be codified at Minn. Stat. § 13.591 and applies to all state agencies, statewide systems, and political subdivisions. State agencies include the state, the University of Minnesota, and any office, officer, department, division, bureau, board, commission, authority, district or agency of the state.

2001 Minnesota Laws, chapter 202, section 7, reads in part as follows:

“Subd.3.[BUSINESS AS VENDOR.] (a) Data submitted by a business to a government entity in response to a request for bids as defined in section 16C.02, subdivision 11, are private or nonpublic until the bids are opened. Once the bids are opened, the name of the bidder and the dollar amount specified in the response are read and become public. All other data in a bidder's response to a bid are private or nonpublic data until completion of the selection process. For purposes of this section, “completion of the selection process” means that the government entity has completed its evaluation and has ranked the responses. After a government entity has completed the selection process, all remaining data submitted by all bidders are public with the exception of trade secret data as defined and classified in section 13.37. A statement by a bidder that submitted data are copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the data contained in the bid.

If all responses to a request for bids are rejected prior to completion of the selection process, all data, other than that made public at the bid opening, remain private or nonpublic until a resolicitation of bids results in completion of the selection process or a determination is made to abandon the purchase. If the rejection occurs after the completion of the selection process, the data remain public. If a resolicitation of bids does not occur within one year of the bid opening date, the remaining data become public.

(b) Data submitted by a business to a government entity in response to a request for proposal, as defined in section 16C.02, subdivision 12, are private or nonpublic until the responses are opened. Once the responses are opened, the name of the responder is read and becomes public. All other data in a responder's response to a request for proposal are private or nonpublic data until completion of the evaluation process. For purposes of this section, “completion of the evaluation process” means that the government entity has completed negotiating the contract with the selected vendor. After a government entity has completed the evaluation process, all remaining data submitted by all responders are public with the exception of trade secret data as defined and classified in section 13.37. A statement by a responder that submitted data are copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the data contained in the response.

If all responses to a request for proposal are rejected prior to completion of the evaluation process, all data, other than that made public at the response opening, remain private or nonpublic until a resolicitation of the requests for proposal results in completion of the evaluation process or a determination is made to abandon the purchase. If the rejection occurs after the completion of the evaluation process, the data remain public. If a resolicitation of proposals does not occur within one year of the proposal opening date, the remaining data become public.”

### DISCUSSION

The classification of data contained within bids and proposals involves a balancing of considerations. One principle tenet is that Minnesota taxpayers have the right to know about and have access to data that relates to the spending of taxpayer dollars. Another principle interest, however, involves ensuring integrity in the solicitation process and creating a system that promotes competitive pricing. Mindful of these competing interests, the legislature has enacted a process that protects specific data for a defined period of time necessary to ensure a competitive process, and then releases the data for public review.

There is a limited instance where certain information contained in a bid or proposal remains nonpublic data. The legislation specifically provides for the protection of trade secret data as defined in Minn. Stat. § 13.37. A determination of whether data meets the definition of a trade secret requires an interpretation of law and the application of the facts to the law. In the event any information in a bid or proposal is indicated by a responder to be trade secret information, the purchasing agent should refer the issue to his or her assigned representative from the Attorney General's Office. Assistance may also be obtained from the Materials Management Division's Acquisitions Manager (telephone 651.296.9075). While pricing formulas submitted in a bid or proposal may need to undergo a trade secret evaluation, the price paid by the state for the goods or services, e.g., accounting data, is never considered by the Department of Administration to be trade secret data.

In accordance with the statutory requirements, the attached policy and procedure shall be followed by all State of Minnesota purchasing officials with respect to information contained within bids and proposals.

### POLICY AND PROCEDURE

<b>PRIOR TO OPENING</b>	Responses to requests for bids and requests for proposals are <b>NON-PUBLIC</b> data.	
<b>AT OPENING</b>	Requests for bids: Only the <b>NAME OF THE RESPONDER</b> and the <b>DOLLAR AMOUNT</b> specified in the bid are <b>PUBLIC</b> . In the event the response entails separate pricing for multiple items, an item number or a description of the item may also be read to give meaning to the dollar amounts disclosed. All other information submitted in conjunction with the bid is <b>NONPUBLIC</b> at the time of opening and may not be shared with any unauthorized individuals.  Requests for proposals: Only the <b>NAME OF THE RESPONDER</b> is <b>PUBLIC</b> . All other information submitted in conjunction with a proposal is <b>NONPUBLIC</b> at the time of opening and may not be shared with any unauthorized individuals.	
<b>RFB SELECTION OR RFP EVALUATION COMPLETED</b>	All data is <b>PUBLIC</b> with the exception of data properly classified as trade secret data as defined in Minn. Stat. § 13.37.  The RFB selection process is complete when the division has finished its evaluation of the bids for responsiveness and the bids have been ranked.  The RFP evaluation process is complete when the division has finished negotiating the contract with the selected vendor.	
<b>ACQUISITION TERMINATED PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF THE SELECTION OR EVALUATION PROCESS</b>	All data not previously made public at the opening is <b>NONPUBLIC</b> . If there is a resolicitation, the data becomes <b>PUBLIC</b> upon completion of the RFB selection process or the RFP evaluation process as set forth above. If a determination is made to abandon the acquisition, the data becomes <b>PUBLIC</b> . If a resolicitation does not occur within one year of the opening date, the data becomes <b>PUBLIC</b> . Data determined to be trade secret data is always <b>NONPUBLIC</b> .	
<b>ACQUISITION TERMINATED AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THE SELECTION OR EVALUATION PROCESS</b>	All data remains <b>PUBLIC</b> with the exception of trade secret data.	
Approved (Division Director) 	Date Approved 10/31/01	Effective Date (if different from date approved)

# Examples



## After:



### Purchasing Policy 10: Status of Information in Bids and Proposals Submitted to the State of Minnesota

[Minn. Stat. § 13.591](#) controls the classification of information in bids and proposals submitted to government entities in Minnesota. This policy outlines the status of information during the various stages of the procurement process. The request for bid (RFB) selection process is complete when the bids have been evaluated for responsiveness and ranked. The request for proposal (RFP) evaluation process is complete upon finishing negotiating with the selected vendor.

#### Prior to Opening

- Responses to an RFB/RFP are non-public.
- Information about the selection or evaluation process for an RFB/RFP is non-public.

#### At Opening

- For an RFB: The names of the responders and the dollar amounts in the bids become public. If the RFB was for multiple items, an item number or description of the items may also be made public to give meaning to the dollar amounts disclosed.
- For an RFP: The names of the responders become public.

#### If the RFB/RFP is Terminated Prior to Completion of Selection/Evaluation

- Data beyond what was made public at the opening remains non-public.
- If the solicitation is reissued, the data becomes public upon completion of the selection/evaluation process.
- If a determination to abandon the purchase is made, the data becomes public.
- If the solicitation is not reissued within one year of the opening, the data becomes public.
- Trade secret data, as defined in [Minn. Stat. § 13.37](#), is always non-public.

#### When Selection/Evaluation is Complete

- All data, unless it is properly classified as trade secret data as defined in [Minn. Stat. § 13.37](#), is public.

#### If the Acquisition is Terminated After Completion of the Selection/Evaluation Process

- All data, unless it is properly classified as trade secret data as defined in [Minn. Stat. § 13.37](#), remains public.

#### Trade Secret Data

If a responder indicates that any information in a bid or proposal is trade secret information, the buyer should refer the issue to the entity's assigned representative at the Attorney General's Office. Assistance may also be obtained from the MMD Acquisitions Manager. While pricing formulas might need to undergo a trade secret evaluation, the Department of Administration never considers the price paid for goods or services to be trade secret data.

# Examples

## Before:



**DATE:** May 29, 2014  
**TO:** Capitol Complex Parking Customers  
**FROM:** Spencer Cronk, Commissioner  
**SUBJECT:** Contract Parking and Metropass Rates

The Capitol Complex is undergoing an historic transformation to accommodate current and future needs. The infrastructure modernization addresses parking needs. With the upcoming loss of more than 700 parking spaces at Lot X (Sears parking lot) and parking immediately around the State Capitol building, new parking structures are being built adjacent to the Transportation building and in Lot B (in conjunction with the new Capitol Office Building).

State owned parking facilities in the Capitol Complex are solely financed by user parking rates. Those user fees cover all costs including debt service, maintenance, and upgrades such as recently installed LED lighting that reduces energy consumption and improves state parking facilities. Since 2007, we have been able to cover costs without an increase in parking rates.

The additional debt service associated with the new parking facilities will require an increase in parking rates. Effective on July 1, the monthly increase in cost will be \$7.44 for a lot contract, \$12.92 for a ramp contract and \$8.53 for a top deck contract. Garage parking will increase by \$26.07 per month. The majority (94%) of parking contract customers are in lots and ramps. There will be no change in Metropass or other alternative transportation rates. Parking Pay stations will increase by \$.25 per hour and \$1 for the daily rate. Given the anticipated debt service costs associated with parking construction, there will likely be another parking increase in FY 2016.

Thank you for your continued use of our services. Email your questions or comments to [pmd.comments@state.mn.us](mailto:pmd.comments@state.mn.us). For more information about commuting services in the Capitol Complex, please visit [www.admin.state.mn.us/pmd](http://www.admin.state.mn.us/pmd).

Office of the Commissioner  
200 Administration Building, 50 Sherburne Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55155  
Phone: 651.201.2555 / Fax: 651.297.7909 / Minnesota Relay Service 1.800.627.3529

*The Department of Administration is an Equal Opportunity Employer*

# Examples

## After:



**DATE:** May 30, 2014  
**TO:** Capitol Complex Parking Customers  
**FROM:** Spencer Cronk, Commissioner  
**SUBJECT:** Contract Parking and Metropass Rates

### What You Need to Know

Effective on July 1, 2014, there will be an increase in Plant Management parking rates. Please see the table below for information on how parking rate increases may impact you:

If you park in a lot...	Your monthly parking rate will increase by \$7.44. Your new monthly rate is \$37.19.
If you park on the top level of a parking ramp...	Your monthly rate will increase by \$8.53. Your new monthly rate is \$42.66.
If you park inside of a ramp...	Your monthly rate will increase by \$12.92. Your new monthly rate is \$64.59.
If you park inside of a garage...	Your monthly rate will increase by \$26.07. Your new monthly rate is \$130.33.
If you use parking pay stations to pay for a visitor parking space...	Your hourly rate will increase by \$0.25 and your daily rate will increase by \$1. The new hourly rate is \$1.75. The new daily rate is \$7.00.
If you use Metropass or other alternative transportation options...	Your rates will not increase. You will continue to pay \$45.00 per month.

**Note:** About 94 percent of customers with a parking contract currently park in lots or ramps.

### Why Parking Rates Are Changing

The Minnesota State Capitol Complex is currently undergoing an historic transformation to accommodate current and future needs. This includes the modernization of infrastructure and the

State of Minnesota Department of Administration  
Website: [mn.gov/admin](http://mn.gov/admin) Phone: 651.201.2555 / Fax: 651.297.7900  
Spencer Cronk, Commissioner  
An Equal Opportunity Employer

construction of new parking facilities to address parking demands. An increase in parking rates is needed to cover the costs of constructing State-owned parking facilities on the Capitol Complex.

User parking rates cover costs for parking facilities, including costs for operation, maintenance, and upgrades, such as recently installed LED lighting that reduces energy consumption and improves State parking facilities. Since 2007, we have covered these costs without an increase in parking rates.

Because construction costs for new parking facilities are financed **entirely** by user parking rates, an increase in rates is required. Given the anticipated debt service costs associated with parking construction, there will likely be future increases in parking rates.

### How Parking Will Change

A new parking structure is currently being built on the State Capitol Complex. Parking Ramp F will be located adjacent to the Transportation Building. Meanwhile, the Capitol Complex is facing the loss of 700 parking spaces, due to construction work occurring immediately around the Capitol Building, and the loss of space currently leased from Sears for Parking Lot X.

Metropass riders will no longer have the option for free parking twice a month in Lot C. This will help address increased demand for available parking stalls, and the sharing of parking costs by all parkers.

### Where to Find Additional Information

- Email your questions or comments to [pmd.comments@state.mn.us](mailto:pmd.comments@state.mn.us).
- Visit [mn.gov/admin/buildings-grounds/](http://mn.gov/admin/buildings-grounds/) and click on "Parking and Transportation" for more information about parking and commuting services on the Capitol Complex.

Thank you for your continued use of our services.

# Resources:



- Plainlanguage.gov
- Centerforplainlanguage.org
- Jen Gates: [jen.gates@state.mn.us](mailto:jen.gates@state.mn.us), 612-710-0168