

# Designing for safety: a guide to my presentation

David Sless  
Director, Communication Research Institute (CRI)  
[d.sless@communication.org.au](mailto:d.sless@communication.org.au)

## **contents**

abstract	1
how to use this guide	1
origins of contemporary information design	2
the information design process	3
designing health information	4
Applying the lessons to design for safety	4

## **abstract**

Forms, patient information, instructions, and other types of safety critical information can be designed to a consistently high standard. The processes, methods, and skills for designing such information, with safety in mind, are well understood. But the know-how is not widely available in health settings.

Most of what we know comes from a much wider area of research and practice in the more general field of information design. I will introduce you to some examples of this work in the more general field of information design, and show you some recent examples of work in the health field.

## **how to use this guide**

This is *NOT* my conference presentation.

What follows is a guide to the substance of my presentation. It summarizes the main points I cover and gives you the URL for each of the publications I cite.

I have prepared this so that you can sit back and enjoy the presentation without taking notes, unless you feel compelled to do so.

## ***origins of contemporary information design***

40,000 years ago, people were designing information.

Today we learn how to design information by drawing on that 40,000 years of accumulated craft tradition and adapting it to contemporary needs.

Through research at CRI and elsewhere, contemporary information designers have created a systematic process that enables us to design information to a high standard.

Most of the contemporary experience in information design practice has occurred in areas outside of health. The main proving grounds for contemporary practice have been in business and government. I will show some case histories.

### DESIGNING FORMS

Government departments and insurance companies have provided one of the best environments for developing and testing forms design methods.

The case history reported here dates from the mid 1980s when most of this work was done. It shows the application of a systematic process that enabled us to design forms to a high standard. In this case accuracy in forms completion resulted in a massive productivity gain of 97.2%.

Fisher P and Sless D 1990

Information design methods and productivity in the insurance industry. *Information Design Journal* 6(2) 103-129

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_85\\_149746393.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_85_149746393.html)

### DESIGNING BILLING SYSTEMS

Utility bills, insurance notices and other automatically generated documents provide special challenges and opportunities. Customising documents for individuals is now a routine part of how business relates to its customers. Many of the opportunities provided by this type of automation are yet to be explored in the health area.

Case History #1: the Telecom bill—redesigning a computer generated report

Originally published as:

Sless D 1992

The Telecom bill: redesigning a computer generated report

In Sless D & Penman R (eds) *Designing Information For People*

Canberra: Communication Research Press 77-98

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_83\\_758772970.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_83_758772970.html)

Case History #2: an insurance renewal document

Original published as:

Penman R Sless D & Wiseman R 1996

Best practice in accessible documents in the private sector

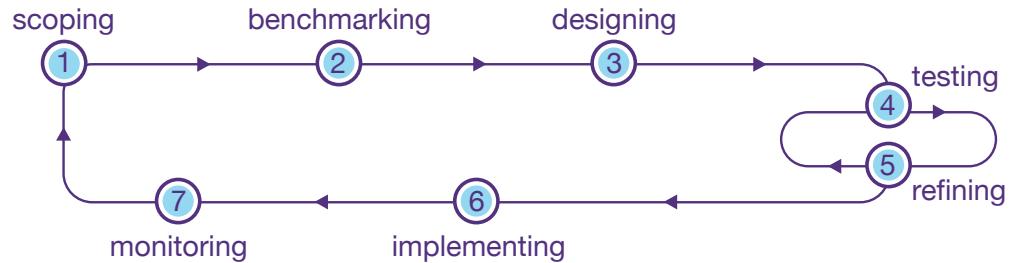
In *Putting it Plainly: Current Developments and needs in Plain English and Accessible Reading Materials*

Canberra: Australian Language and Literacy Council

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_82\\_489166888.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_82_489166888.html)

## ***the information design process***

The above case histories follow a systematic process which is illustrated in the diagram below.



### 1 SCOPING

Identifying the full range of social, economic, political, legal, regulatory, and technical constraints to be taken into account when designing information, and setting performance requirements for the information.

### 2 BENCHMARKING

Using diagnostic testing and error analysis to find out how existing information is performing against the agreed performance requirements set in the scoping stage.

### 3 DESIGNING

Using appropriate graphics, typography, layout, colour, language and structure so that the label performs at or above the required benchmarking level.

### 4. TESTING

Using diagnostic testing to find out how the new information is performing against the agreed performance requirements set in the scoping stage.

### 5. REFINING

Using appropriate graphics, typography, layout, colour, language and structure to remove diagnosed faults in the information so that it performs at or above the required benchmarking level.

### 6. IMPLEMENTING

Ensuring that the final designs are faithfully implemented in production with the approval of all stakeholders.

### 7. MONITORING

Measuring to ensure that the performance of the information is maintained throughout its use.

## ***designing health information***

Over the last 15 years CRI has been applying systematic information design processes to designing health information.

Sless D & Shrensky R 2005

Designing medicine information for people: an introduction to the course

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_96\\_1593902868.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_96_1593902868.html)

### SOME CASE HISTORIES

case history #7 □ Consumer Medicines Information: developing the guidelines

Originally published as part of: □

Penman R Sless D & Wiseman R 1996 Best practice in accessible documents in the private sector □ In *Putting it Plainly: Current Developments and needs in Plain English and Accessible Reading Materials* □ Canberra: Australian Language and Literacy Council □ © cria 1996

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_93\\_1567681995.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_93_1567681995.html)

Sless D & Tyers A 2002

case history #5 □ Panadol 24 Pack: new instructions for consumers

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_89\\_1290110197.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_89_1290110197.html)

## ***Applying the lessons to design for safety***

Sless D 2000

*Experiences in co-designing*

Keynote Address given at the Co-designing conference, Coventry University, 13 September 2000

[http://www.communication.org.au/cria\\_publications/publication\\_id\\_33\\_1312654719.html](http://www.communication.org.au/cria_publications/publication_id_33_1312654719.html)

1. Use sophisticated graphic and writing craft skills
2. Use systematic processes
3. Make allowances for institutional politics
4. Institutionalise good practice.