

## Appendix 10

### Guidelines for a Plain Language Ballot

These guidelines are based on the results of an empirical study comparing a ballot with traditional language instructions (Ballot A) to a ballot with plain language instructions (Ballot B).

Voters were more accurate voting the ballot with plain language instructions. Voters preferred the ballot with plain language instructions by a wide margin (82%).

#### What to say and where to say it

1. Be specific. Give people the information they need.
2. At the beginning of the ballot, explain how to vote, how to change a vote, and that voters may write in a candidate.
3. Put instructions where voters need them. For example, save the instructions on how to use the write-in page for the write-in page.
4. Include information that will prevent voters from making errors, such as a caution to not write in someone who is already on the ballot.
5. On a DRE, never have a page with only a page title (such as the Ballot A page that just said Non-partisan offices).
6. Make the page title the title of the office (State Supreme Court Chief Justice rather than Retention Question).
7. Have voters confirm that they are ready to cast their vote with a Cast Vote button, not a Confirm button.
8. At the end, tell people that their vote has been recorded.

#### How to say it

9. Write short sentences.
10. Use short, simple, everyday words. For example, do not use "retention" and "retain." Use "keep" instead. For another example, use "for" and "against" for amendments and measures rather than "accept" and "reject."
11. Do not use voting jargon ("partisan" "non-partisan") unless the law requires you to do so. If the law requires these words, work to change the law. Instead refer to contests as "party-based" and "non-party-based."

12. Address the reader directly with "you" or the imperative ("Do x.").
13. Write in the active voice, where the person doing the action comes before the verb.
14. Write in the positive. Tell people what to do rather than what not to do.
15. Put context before action, "if" before "then." For example, To vote for the candidate of your choice, touch that person's name.
16. When you want people to act, focus on verbs rather than nouns. For example, Write in a candidate's name.
17. When giving people instructions that are more than one step, give each step as an item in a numbered list.
18. Do not number other instructions. When the instructions are not sequential steps, use separate paragraphs with bold beginnings instead of numbering.
19. Put information in the order that voters need it. Don't tempt voters to irrevocable actions before explaining the other options. (See, for example, the order of the information on the Ballot B Confirm page: a question, a note about consequences, an instruction on how to make changes, and then the irrevocable action described last.)

### **What to make it look like**

20. Break information into short sections that each cover only one point.
21. Keep paragraphs short. A one-sentence paragraph is fine.
22. Separate paragraphs by a space so each paragraph stands out on the page.
23. Do not use italics.
24. Use bold for page titles.
25. Use bold to highlight keywords or sections of the instructions, but don't overdo it.
26. Keep all the instructions in the left column. Do not put instructions under the choices for a contest.
27. Do not use all capital letters for emphasis. Use bold. Write all instructions in appropriate upper case and lower case as you would in regular sentences. If the law requires you to use all capital letters, work to change the law.
28. Use a sans serif font in a readable type size.