

# 2022 Conference on Literature

ITEM K: Review Progress Report  
Regarding the Translation of the Book  
*Alcoholics Anonymous* (Fourth Edition)  
into Plain and Simple Language

# Progress Report Regarding the Translation of the Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Fourth Edition) into Plain and Simple Language

1.) What it is: The translation is meant to put the language of the Big Book into a version which is accessible and relatable to as wide an audience as possible while retaining the spirit and flavor of the original text.

2.) What it is not: This new book is not meant to replace or change the Big Book, but rather to overcome barriers to accessibility so the A.A. message can reach more still-suffering alcoholics.

# Progress Report Regarding the Translation of the Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Fourth Edition) into Plain and Simple Language

- **2021 Conference Advisory Action:** As many of you may recall, it was recommended that:  
“A draft version of the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous (Fourth Edition)*, be translated into plain and simple language and be developed in a way that is accessible and relatable to as wide of an audience as possible and that a progress report or draft be brought back to the 2022 Conference Committee on Literature.”
- **The Tools to Access the Big Book (TABB) Subcommittee** was formed to support and oversee this project in conjunction with the General Service Office (GSO) Publishing Department.

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- **Selection of a vendor for translation:**
  - 18 vendors of translation services experienced in self-help, spirituality, recovery, education, etc. were interviewed and asked to submit samples of plain-language translations of “How it Works” and other excerpts from the Big Book.
  - The goal was described as being that the final product must be at a fifth-grade reading level. “The translation as a whole must capture the welcoming and inclusive spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous and inspire a sense of belonging and hope in the alcoholic seeking help”.

At the January 18, 2022 joint meeting of the General Service Office Publishing Department and Tools to Access the Big Book subcommittee, a vendor was chosen for this work.

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➤ **Examples of draft translations:** The language of the Big Book may be difficult for some to understand. Excerpts of possible draft plain and simple language translations are shown below.

Please note that these are raw, unedited samples from a vendor's first attempt to translate the text, without guidance or input.

Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book)	Excerpt (from unedited raw sample material)
Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. (Big Book, p.xxviii)	Begging these people to stop drinking never helps.
We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think that spirituality is the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. (Big Book, p.68)	And we are not ashamed of relying on God, or of needing God. We know that our faith and trust isn't a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength. Faith is a kind of courage, just as trusting God is a kind of courage.

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- **2020 General Service Conference video:** A video report on access to the Big Book had been prepared for the 70<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference in 2020.

This video presents valuable information such as inaccessibility due to literacy and reading levels as well as relatability because of various life circumstances.

It can be accessed through the Report from the Delegate section on the SENY website ([www.aaseny.org/from-the-delegate](http://www.aaseny.org/from-the-delegate)) as the General Service Board (GSB) Video: Literacy & Comprehension.

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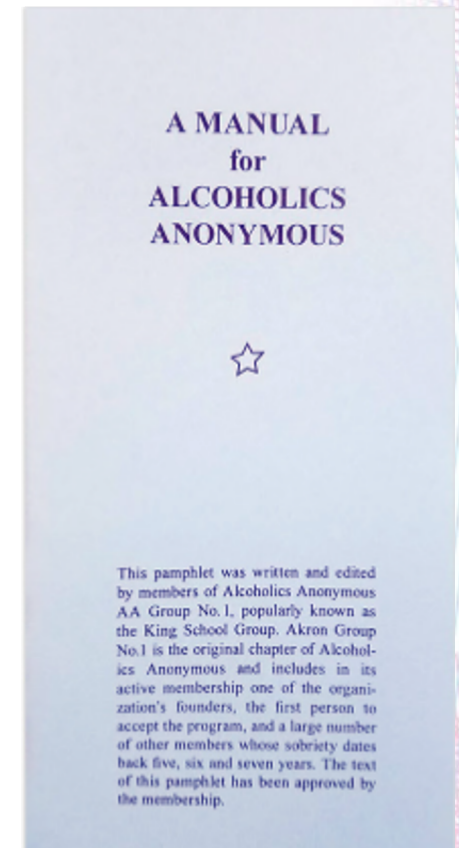
The video mentions that even Dr. Bob believed that the language of the Big Book may be too highbrow for the average alcoholic and requested a practical guide be written.

The pamphlet, which appeared in about 1940, states that even the editors were pretty bewildered by the program at first.

This guide of what to do and what not to do in one's search for sobriety was meant to “make a little straighter and less confusing the highway you are about to travel.”

It can be accessed here:

<https://aainthedesert.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/A-MANUAL-FOR-ALCOHOLICS-ANONYMOUS-1940.pdf>



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## ➤ **The Voice of the Fellowship:** .

- In August 2021, a review of requested feedback from the Fellowship on the video indicated substantial unanimity for translation of the Big Book into modern or simple language.
- For the 2022 72<sup>nd</sup> General Service Conference, 8 of the 11 proposed agenda items relating to the translation of the Big Book into plain and simple language requested that the translation be stopped.

Of concern were political intentions, eradication of God and removal of gendered language. Some also had apprehension for the future of AA and disunity that such a translation may cause.

In each case, the Literature Committee requested that the Tools to Access the Big Book subcommittee address these proposed agenda items in a future progress report.



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➤ **Additional examples of draft translations:** Please note that nothing is written in stone and these are included only to show examples of plain and simple language.

Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book)	Excerpt (from unedited raw sample material)
<p>With few exceptions, our book thus far has spoken of men. But what we have said applies quite as much to women. Our activities in behalf of women who drink are on the increase. There is every evidence that women regain their health as readily as men if they try our suggestions. But for every man who drinks others are involved – the wife who trembles in fear of the next debauch; the mother and father who see their son wasting away. (Big Book, p. 104)</p>	<p>So far, this book has spoken only to alcoholics themselves. But every person who drinks involves other people in their alcoholism. There may be a spouse who dreads the next drinking spree, children who fear their drunk parents, or mothers and fathers who see their grown children getting sicker and sicker.</p>
<p>And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God. Here difficulty arises with agnostics, (Big Book, P. 45)</p>	<p>It also means that we are going to talk about God. If you aren't sure that God exists—in other words, if you are an agnostic— this may worry you.</p>

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*Thank you for your attention*

**I again remind you to take a look at the video referenced in this presentation.**

[www.aaseny.org/from-the-delegate](http://www.aaseny.org/from-the-delegate)

General Service Board (GSB) Video: Literacy & Comprehension