Case Study

CRA Sign-in

UX Copywriting Redesign

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Introduction

In a country where online government services are essential, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) login portal plays a vital role for both residents and newcomers. But despite its importance, I noticed that the user experience—especially during the sign-in process—can feel confusing, overwhelming, or even discouraging.

As someone who's personally used this portal for years, I realized that even experienced users can struggle to find the right sign-in method. For newcomers, especially those with limited English or French proficiency, this process becomes even more frustrating.

This case study explores the CRA sign-in journey through the lens of UX, identifying usability issues, accessibility gaps, and language clarity problems. My goal was to redesign parts of this experience to reduce confusion, improve guidance, and create a more inclusive sign-in process for everyone—no matter their background or digital literacy level.

User Types

To redesign effectively, I first needed to understand *who* uses the CRA login portal and *how* their needs differ. Through observation and secondary research, I identified two primary user types:

1. Canadian Citizens & Permanent Residents

These users are often familiar with government processes, digital tools, and may have already used the CRA portal multiple times. However, despite their experience:

- Many still get confused by the multiple sign-in options.

- The interface lacks clear hierarchy, making simple tasks unnecessarily complex.

- The mobile and tablet layouts often lead to usability issues, especially around button contrast and navigation.

2. Newcomers & Non-Native English/French Speakers

This group includes immigrants, international students, and others who are new to Canada and unfamiliar with government systems. They face unique challenges:

- Language barriers limit their understanding of instructions and labels.

- Legal or financial terminology can feel intimidating or unclear.

- The portal lacks visual aids or simplified pathways for first-time users.

👉 These two groups represent **different digital comfort zones**, but **both experience friction** in navigating the system. Any redesign must strike a balance—*clear enough for newcomers, efficient enough for experienced users*.

UX Issues Identified

After analyzing five core screens of the CRA login process, I uncovered several UX and UX writing issues that affect usability, accessibility, and user trust:

1. Language-Only Landing Page

Problem: The first page only presents two buttons: *English* and *Français*, with no context or guidance.
 Why it matters:

- No headline or welcoming message to ground the user.

- Users may wonder if they're on the right site.

- Legal links like "Terms & Conditions" appear out of place with no clear reason.
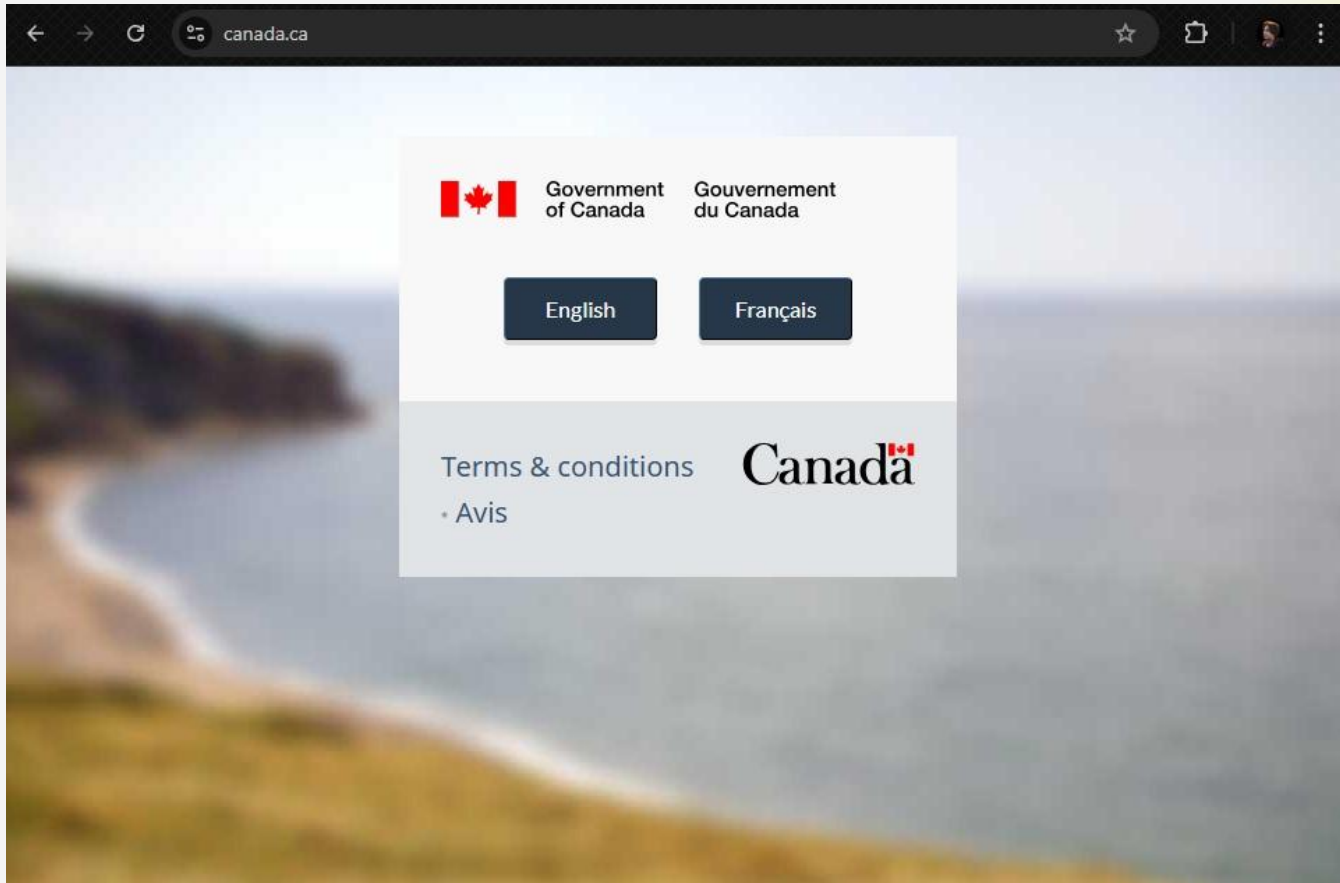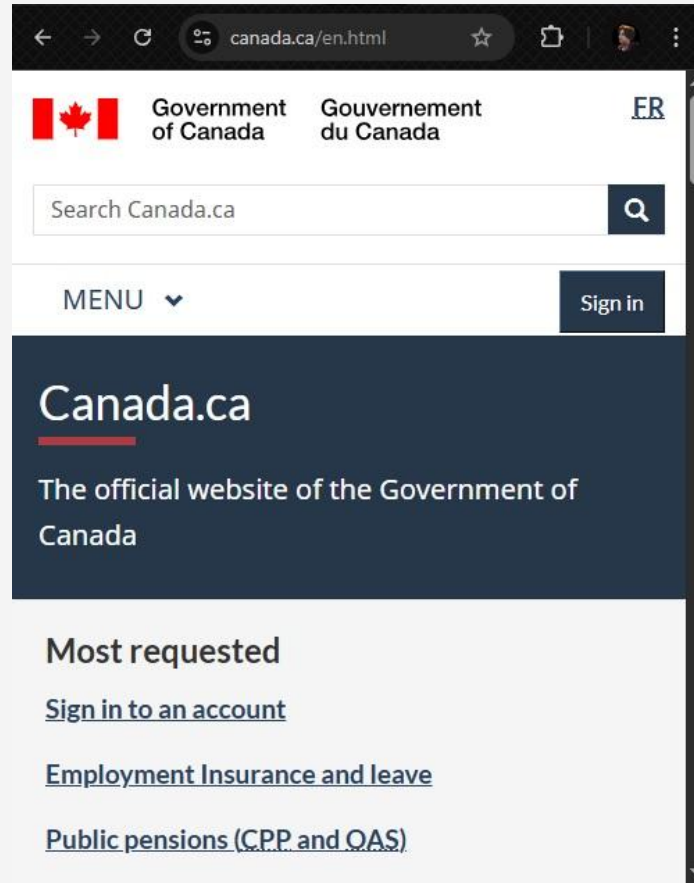
2. Poor Visual Hierarchy on Mobile/Tablet

Problem: The *Sign In* button and the subheading "The official website of the Government of Canada" share the same color.
 Why it matters:

- Important CTA (call-to-action) blends into the background.

- First-time users may overlook the button entirely.

- Fails WCAG contrast and accessibility guidelines.

3. Unclear Sign-In Options

Problem: The sign-in page presents several complex login choices:

- Sign-In Partner

- CRA User ID and Password

- Provincial Partner

Why it matters:

- Users don't know which option applies to them.

- Terminology like "Sign-In Partner" is vague.

- Even experienced users (including myself) hesitate each time.

ℹ ▶ Simplified sign-in process

Sign in to your CRA account

Sign in with your existing credential:

▶ Before you sign in

🏛 **Sign-In Partner**

➔ **CRA user ID and password**

🪪 **Provincial partner (BC, AB)**

or

Register for a CRA account

👤✎ **Register for a CRA account**

4. Weak Error Messaging

Problem

- The error page lacks empathetic language and actionable guidance. After a failed login, users are taken to a separate page where they receive a generic message — "Your username or password is incorrect."
  This copy doesn't acknowledge the user's effort or offer helpful next steps in a clear, human tone.

Why it matters

- Users often forget which part they entered incorrectly. The current message doesn't guide them forward — especially frustrating if they're unsure whether to retry or recover credentials. In high-stakes environments like tax portals, unclear language increases anxiety and leads to repeated failed attempts or abandonment.

5. Dropdown Label & Info Clarity

Problem: The "Before you sign in" label is too vague and doesn't give users a clear sense of what they'll find. The content inside is dense and combines unrelated information in a single block.

Why it matters:

- It downplays the importance of the information, making it seem optional or unimportant

- It overwhelms users—especially those unfamiliar with government logins—by mixing multiple concepts with no hierarchy

- It fails to support user decision-making at a critical moment

Sign in to your CRA account

Sign in with your existing credential:

▼ [Before you sign in](#)

Signing in on behalf of someone else

If you are signing in on behalf of someone else (including friends and family members) you **must** use Represent a Client in your CRA account to access their information.

Do not use autofill on a shared device

Do not use autofill for your online banking information if you are on a shared device. When you are on your Sign-In Partner's website, ensure it is **your** information that is entered and not that of somebody else.

If you register with someone else's banking credentials by mistake and link your SIN to them, the other person will have access to your tax information.

▶ Participating Sign-in Partners

🏛 **Sign-In Partner**

➔ **CRA user ID and password**

Register for a CRA account

or

👤 **Register for a CRA account**

Design Goals

To address the UX and content challenges identified across the CRA sign-in flow, I defined four key design goals:

1. Build Trust from the First Interaction

✅ Add a welcoming message and clear title on the landing page to reassure users they're in the right place.
✅ Reduce confusion by removing or relocating unrelated links like "Terms & Conditions."

2. Enhance Clarity and Accessibility of UI Elements

✅ Improve the visual contrast between buttons and surrounding text.
✅ Apply better hierarchy to prioritize CTAs like *Sign In*.
✅ Follow WCAG color and contrast guidelines for accessibility.

3. Simplify and Humanize Language

✅ Replace technical labels like "Sign-In Partner" with plain, user-friendly terms.
✅ Add short, helpful explanations under each login method to guide users based on their situation.
✅ Make text scannable with bullet points or visual cues.

4. Provide Helpful and Actionable Error Messaging

✅ Rewrite vague error messages to include possible next steps.
✅ Add links to reset forgotten credentials directly from the error message.
✅ Use a friendly, non-blaming tone to reduce user frustration.

💡 These goals are centered around empathy, simplicity, and clarity—especially for newcomers to Canada or those unfamiliar with technical terminology. A great user experience starts with understanding the user's mindset—and helping them move forward without confusion.

UX Recommendations

Inspiration: Government of UK Sign-In Flow (gov.uk) where plain language and section grouping help users find their path.

Here are actionable improvements I'd recommend to enhance the clarity, usability, and trustworthiness of the CRA login experience:

1. 🧭 First Page Clarity & Trust

Problem: The landing page lacks context and starts with a cold UI—just language toggles and legal links.
 Recommendation:

- Add a brief intro like:
   "Welcome to the CRA sign-in portal. Choose your language to get started."

- Move "Terms & Conditions" and "Avis" to footer or post-login, as they distract on the first screen.
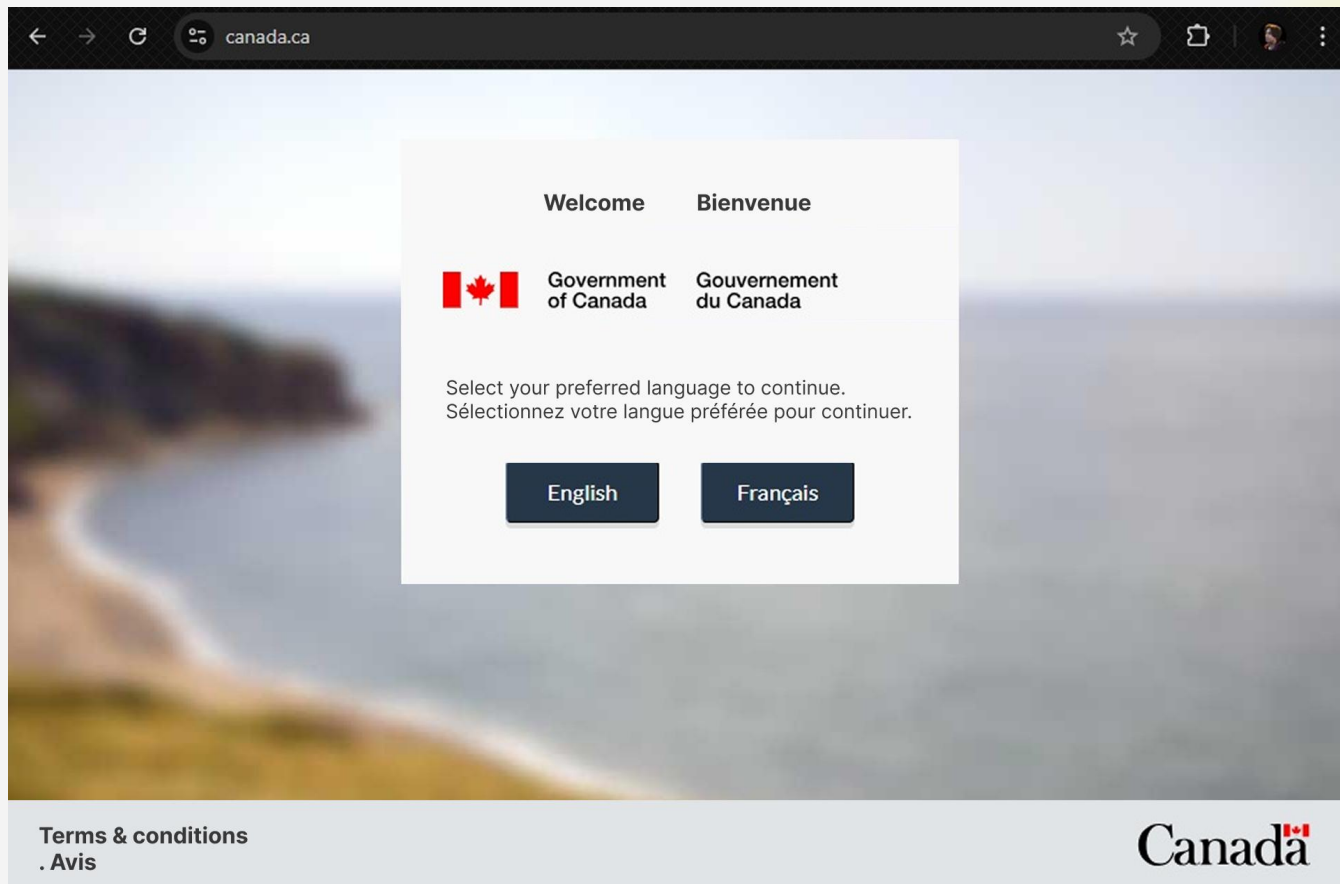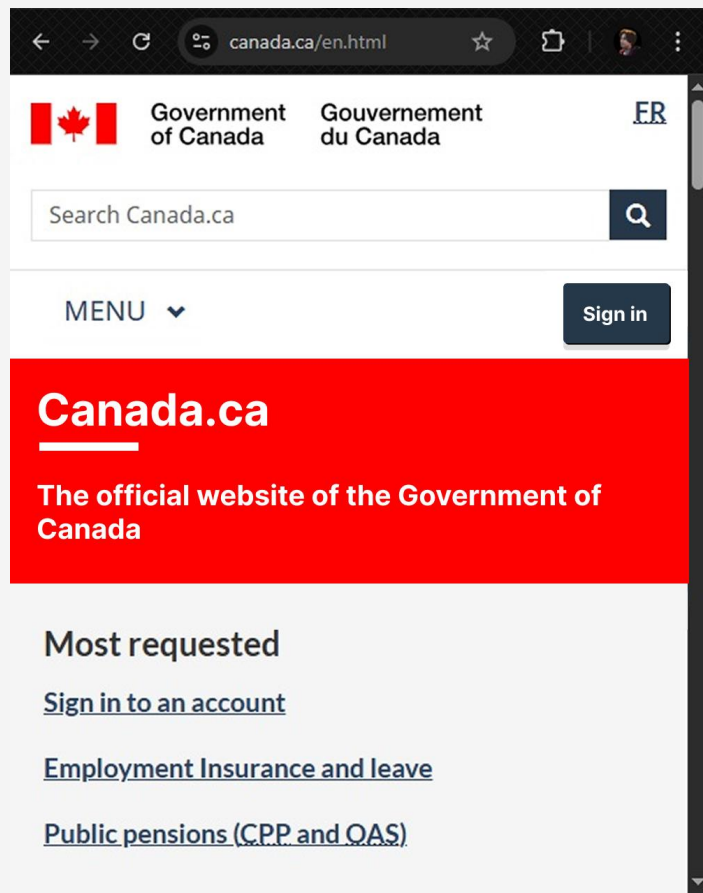
2. 🎨 Visual Clarity for CTAs (Tablet/Mobile)

Problem: On mobile and tablet, the "Sign In" button blends with surrounding text.
 Recommendation:

- Use a contrasting color that meets accessibility guidelines (WCAG AA or higher).

- Add white space and better grouping between the CTA and body text to visually separate actions from content.

3. 🧾 Login Option Clarity

Problem: The multiple login options (Sign-In Partner, CRA User ID, Provincial Partner) are overwhelming and not self-explanatory.
 Recommendation:

- Add short, friendly subtext for each option:

    - *Sign-In Partner (use your online banking credentials)*

    - *CRA User ID and password (if you created a CRA account)*

    - *Provincial Partner (BC/AB residents only)*

- Group login options visually under clear headers (Use Bank Login, Use CRA Login, Use Provincial Login).

I explored two versions—one using brief descriptions under each button, and another using optimized button labels. Although I didn't conduct user testing, I analyzed clarity, scannability, and consistency, and chose version 2 as the final design based on heuristics.

canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/e-services/cra-login-services.html

Sign in to your CRA account

Sign in with your existing credential:

▶ Before you sign in

| 🏛 **Sign- In Partner** | (use your online banking credentials) |

| ➜ **CRA User ID and password** | (if you created a CRA account) |

| 🪪 **Provincial Partner** | (BC/AB residents only) |

(or)

Register for a CRA account

| 👤 **Register for a CRA account** |

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Version 2

canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/e-services/cra-login-services.html

ℹ️ ▶ Simplified sign-in process

Sign in to your CRA account

Sign in with your existing credential:

▶ Before you sign in

🏛️ **Use Bank Login**

➡️ **Use CRA Login**

🪪 **Use Provincial Login**

or

Register for a CRA account

👤✏️ **Register for a CRA account**

4. ❌ Friendly Error Messaging

Problem: The error message after a failed login is vague and lacks action steps.

Current: "The username or password you entered is incorrect."

Recommendation:

- Rewrite to: "We couldn't sign you in. Your CRA user ID or password may be incorrect."

- Use an empathetic tone that avoids blame while maintaining security standards.

👉 Most of these changes can be implemented with minimal UI redesign—just improved language, structure, and a few visual tweaks. This means a low-effort, high-impact fix for the CRA UX.

5. 📁 Dropdown Label & Info Clarity

Problem: The "Before you sign in" label is too vague and doesn't give users a clear sense of what they'll find. The content inside is dense and combines unrelated information in a single block.

Recommendation:

- Rename the label to something more action-oriented and informative, such as:
  - *"Need Help Choosing a Sign-In Option?"*
  - *"Understand Your Sign-In Choices"*
  - *"Login Methods & Safety Tips"*

- Break the content into structured sections with subheadings (e.g., "Who Can Sign In", "Security Best Practices", "Troubleshooting Access")

- Use bullet points, white space, and icons to reduce visual clutter and make it easier to scan

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▼ Need Help Choosing a Sign-In Option?

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Expected Impact

If implemented, the proposed changes could significantly improve the CRA login experience for both Canadian citizens and newcomers.

✅ 1. Faster & Easier Navigation

Clearer copy and restructured layout will reduce user hesitation and decision fatigue.
Expected Result:

- ⏱️ 20–30% faster time to log in

- 📉 Reduced bounce rate from initial screens

✅ 2. Higher Trust & Confidence

Empathetic language and error messaging reduce stress and create a more human-centered experience.
Expected Result:

- 😊 Increased user satisfaction

- 🧠 Better memory retention for repeat users (especially newcomers with language barriers)

✅ 3. Better Accessibility Across Devices

Improved visual contrast and button clarity on mobile/tablet ensures that all users can complete their tasks easily.
 Expected Result:

- 📱 Improved mobile usability score (WCAG compliance)

- 🦯 More inclusive access for visually impaired or low-literacy users

✅ 4. Fewer Support Requests

By making login options easier to understand and actions clearer after an error, users are less likely to contact support.
 Expected Result:

- 📉 15–25% reduction in support inquiries related to login confusion

- 💰 Lower operational costs

What I Learned

Working on this UX copywriting case study helped me deeply understand how critical language and clarity are in high-stakes digital experiences—especially for government services that people rely on.

Here's what stood out most:

💬 Small Words, Big Impact

Even a single unclear label or overloaded sentence can confuse users, especially when they're under pressure or dealing with important tasks like taxes. I learned how carefully chosen copy can remove friction and restore user confidence.

👥 Designing for All

I was reminded that UX writing isn't just about native English speakers. Many users are newcomers or ESL learners, and inclusive language can make the difference between success and frustration.

🧠 Balancing Logic and Emotion

This project taught me how to balance informational clarity with emotional tone—especially when writing error messages. It's not just about telling users what went wrong, but also making them feel supported and guided.

🎯 Outcome-Driven Thinking

Rather than just fixing what's broken, I focused on how better copy can help users complete tasks faster, reduce support tickets, and build trust. Every word should earn its place on the screen.

This case study deepened my belief that UX writing is not just microcopy—it's macro impact. And I'm excited to keep refining my ability to listen, simplify, and serve through language.

Inspiration: Government of UK Sign-In Flow (gov.uk) where plain language and section grouping help users find their path.

Thank you

Questions?   **design.druiux@gmail.com**