

Quick Tips for writing in Plain English

Think about the following when you're writing a new document

Language

- Don't use words that are unnecessary
- Use simple words and phrases
- Personalise the information i.e. say "you" and "me" to explain who is supposed to do what.
- Use active verbs (sentence structure is really important to readability)
- Do not use technical jargon or acronyms
- If you do use acronyms, write the term in full the first time it is written. Then write the acronym in brackets straight after the term, e.g. Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)
- If you need to introduce a difficult term, take the time to explain it clearly for the reader to understand.

Tone

- Use a friendly tone that always keeps the reader in mind.
- Try to write the information the same way you would speak to someone face-to-face.

Structure

- Start the document with the main point you want to get across
- Focus on the facts
- Give clear instructions
- Write only the key points
- Write information in a sequence of clear steps
- Use short sentences with very little punctuation.
- Use no more than 20 words per sentence.
- Introduce one idea per sentence, and use clear examples that show the point you are making

Layout

- Group related information together, on individual pages and throughout the document
- Use clear and concise headings
- Use bullet points to break up the text
- Use numbering to show steps in a process
- Use white space in-between text where possible to break up the content and make it easier to read
- Use a larger size font (minimum size 12) and simple style such as Arial

When you are reviewing a document, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the purpose of the information clear?
- Will the information make sense to someone who is not familiar with the topic?
- Would I use the same language in a face-to-face conversation?
- Are there any unnecessary words I could get rid of?
- Are there any long sentences that could be shortened or broken into smaller sentences?
- Are there any long words that could be replaced with shorter words?
- Could the information be laid out in a way that makes it easier to understand?

The following examples were taken from the plain English Campaign Website at <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>

Before:

If there are any points on which you require explanation or further particulars, we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone.

After:

If you have any questions, please phone.

Before:

It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to the Council by way of the envelope provided.

After:

Please read the notes opposite before you fill in the form. Then send it back to us as soon as possible in the envelope provided.