

# TOP TIPS FOR WRITING PLAIN ENGLISH

## Before you start writing...

### 1. Define the purpose of your writing

Who is it for and what do you want it to achieve? Write this at the top of the page - not as a title but as a guide when you are writing. Check back when you have finished writing that everything achieves what you said it would.

### 2. List the main points you want to make

These provide the foundation for your text. If it is a short piece of writing, each point may be a paragraph. If it is a long piece of writing, each point will be a section or chapter. Make sure you don't stray from this point when writing for that section.

### 3. Arrange your facts and figures

Next to each main point, list the useful facts and figures that help explain the point. It may be evidence, examples or arguments.

### 4. Review your notes

Once you have got the purpose, main points and facts down on paper, review them. Check if anything is out of place or not relevant and remove it. Ask yourself whether anything is missing and add it in. Now read it through again and see if it makes your case well. Remember it has to be relevant for your audience, giving them the level of detail they need. It also has to achieve its purpose. If not, you may need to go back to the start and define your purpose.

## When you are writing...

### 5. Avoid Clichés

Phrases such as 'at the end of the day,' 'think outside the box,' 'put two and two together' and 'to be honest with you' should be avoided.

## **6. Avoid unnecessary repetition**

Don't use more than one word when one will do - e.g. 'for example' should be used instead of 'such as the following.' Also, avoid using words that mean the same - such as 'eliminate altogether.' Simply use 'eliminate.'

## **7. Avoid jargon and buzzwords**

Technical language such as 'grassroots programmes' and 'local strategic partnerships' should be avoided - or fully explained in plain English.

## **8. Avoid long sentences**

Short sentences make writing easier to understand and more direct. Vary the length of sentences to inject pace into your writing and keep the reader interested.

## **9. Use the active voice**

For example 'we have organised activities' is better than 'activities have been organised by us'. Passive sentences can make writing sound impersonal and uninteresting.

## **10. Don't write negatively**

It is better to write about what 'is' rather than what 'isn't'. For example 'most people were happy with the proposal' is more positive than 'a few people expressed concern at the proposal.'

## **11. Use accurate punctuation**

Make sure capital letters, colons and semi-colons are used correctly.

## **12. Make sure the document is well laid-out**

Consider putting headings in bold or larger type and using bullet points for lists. Make sure the pages are properly justified and each paragraph contains just one idea.

**And finally...check your writing thoroughly, get another opinion and try a readability test!**