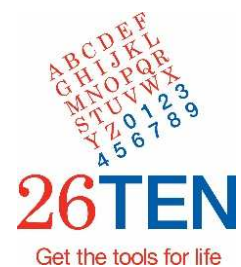


THE WORKPLACE LITERACY PROJECT



An introduction to Plain English writing - workbook

Last revised 30 June 2017



About the program

This training program is an action from the Tasmanian Disability Sector Language, Literacy and Numeracy Skills Action Plan 2016 - 2017.

The aim is to introduce support workers and team leaders to writing in Plain English.

This workshop is based on “Communicate clearly: A guide to Plain English” second edition, produced by 26TEN. The full document is available from <https://26ten.tas.gov.au/communicate-clearly/Pages/About-this-guide.aspx>.

This program is adapted from the full training program to allow an overview of Plain English to be presented during a one-hour, team-based training session.

1

Session objectives

At the end of this session you will be able to:

- Understand what is meant by Plain English
- Recognise the benefits of using Plain English
- Understand the steps to follow when writing Plain English

Plain English definition

Plain English is a way of presenting information that helps someone to understand it the first time they read or hear it. It allows them to get to the information they need, understand it easily and act if they need to.

When you use plain English you:


- Write in clear language
- Give relevant information in the right order
- Help people find information quickly

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What does Plain English writing look like?

Read the following examples, and discuss which is most useful for Jack. Which do you think is written in Plain English?

Email 1



From ▼ pam@supersupportservice.org.au
To... jack@supersupportservice.org.au
Cc...
Subject: Our van is being serviced

Hello Jack,

One of our vans is being serviced this week so can you get a taxi and go and get it when you are on shift?

Thanks
Pamela

Email 2



pam@supersupportservice.org.au

jack@supersupportservice.org.au

Subject: Requirement for vehicle collection from service and repair centre

Dear Jack,

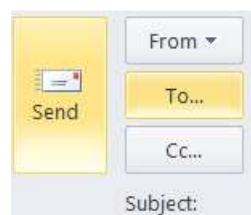
Doubtless you are aware that Super Support Service has procured a Toyota van as a necessity of our contract with DHHS to transport residents between venues of their need. In keeping with our Workplace Health and Safety policy, the vehicle must be serviced every 6 months or after each 15,000 km and as such, it is now time for the vehicle to be serviced by the service and repair centre associated with the distributor, namely Hickman Motors. The servicing arrangements have been arranged by the fleet manager, Stephen Roderick and will involve a full service including oil change.

As you are working in the morning at the supported accommodation facility at 15 Birdsville St, you are being directed to collect the vehicle at the commencement of your shift at this time. You may catch a taxi cab to the service and repair centre using a voucher that is available in the office at the same address, namely 15 Birdsville St. The address of Hickman Motors can be found using a relatively simple search of the internet or through utilisation of the Yellow Pages directory.

Yours Sincerely,
Pamela

3

Email 3



pam@supersupportservice.org.au

jack@supersupportservice.org.au

Subject: Service completed - Toyota van Registration AB55

Hello Jack,

The Toyota van has been serviced this week. It is ready for collection from Hickman Motors.

Please collect the van at the start of your shift on Thursday afternoon.

You will need to catch a taxi. There is a taxi voucher in the office at 15 Birdsville Street.

Hickman Motors' address is 12 Jet Road, Moonah.

Thanks
Pamela

Why use Plain English?

- The reader understands what you've written
- Avoid confusion
- Save time and therefore money
- Use language appropriate for the reader's reading skills
- Minimise mistakes, complaints, or unnecessary queries
- Empower others to understand and follow instructions
- Enable others to make better informed decisions
- Decrease writing time and cut reading time

Any others?

-
-
-
-



From: <http://www.gcvcs.org.uk/welfare-benefits-reforms-a-drive-for-plain-english>

There are 5 steps to writing in Plain English

- Step 1. Think about your reader
- Step 2. Organise your information
- Step 3. Write your content
- Step 4. Check what you have written
- Step 5. Design and produce your document

Step 1 - Think about your reader

Know who you are writing for and why.

- Who are you writing for?
- Why are you writing it?
- What action do you want them to take (to do, to think or feel)?
- Is there more than one reader or group of readers? Do they need separate documents?

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Who do you write emails to?

I write emails to:

•

•

•

Who?

Why do you write emails?

The reasons I write emails are:

•

•

•

Why?

Write for your reader:

- Are they familiar with the words and terms you will use?
- Will you need to explain details they are not familiar with?
- Will they need any background information?
- What information can you assume they understand?
- Will they read the whole document? Will they skip through to the sections that interest them?

Step 2 - Organise your information

Use plenty of signposts

- Headings and sub-headings help people to work their way around a page. They also make the text less intimidating.
- Use bullet-point lists to break down complex text into lists.

Use clear paragraphs

- Limit each paragraph to one idea or topic.
- Keep paragraph length to two to five sentences.
- Leave some white space between each paragraph.


Keep documents as short as possible

- Make sure every sentence you write needs to be there.

Activity

Practice organising your document

Email about Christmas – not written in Plain English

	<input type="text" value="From"/>	pam@supersupportservice.org.au
	<input type="text" value="To..."/>	team@supersupportservice.org.au
	<input type="text" value="Cc..."/>	
	<input type="text" value="Subject:"/>	It's Christmas time

Hello Team

Yay, summer is almost here. I am really looking forward to having a break and going to the Gold Coast this year. Before I get too carried away, we need to organise all our Christmas things. Did someone mention that there is going to be carols in the Hampton Street Park? Do we want to do a Kris Kringle again this year? \$10 or \$15? It would be great if we could all go to the carols. I reckon most residents will want to go. Let me know if you want to take holidays over the Christmas shutdown and what day you can come back in January. I think the Carols are on December the 23rd, and starts at 7.30.

What sort of food do you all want for our team Christmas get together? Coke, cheese and crackers, Cheezels ??? Can anyone not come if it's on Dec 15th?

Cheers
Pam

Step 3 - Write your content

Be personal

- Use 'you', 'we' and 'I' in your documents

Use everyday words

- Do not use long words when short words will do
- Explain technical terms if you need to use them

Keep sentences short

Use the active voice instead of the passive voice. This is clearer and generally shorter.

Active voice

I will call you tomorrow.

The coordinator approved the community access program.

Passive voice

You will be called tomorrow.

The community access program was approved by the coordinator.

Be consistent

- Use the same terms throughout your document

Be specific

- Details can give a better picture of what you are writing about

Spell out acronyms the first time you use them

- For example, Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE)

Ask specific questions if you need answers

Step 4 - Check what you have written

Take your time to edit and proof read your document.

Edit the structure

- Is the information in a logical order the reader can follow easily?
- Is everything the reader needs included?
- Is there any information your reader doesn't need? Can you cut it out?

Edit the message

- Check that sentences are clear and direct
- Check that you have used everyday words that your reader is familiar with
- Check that sentences are short
- Check that you have used consistent spelling and terminology
- Check that the information is accurate

Proof read the document

It can be a really good idea to get someone else to read your document for you. At first it can be difficult getting feedback. You get used to it though.

- Are all words, especially names, spelt correctly?
- Are all the numbers, including phone numbers, correct?
- Are full stops and capital letters used correctly?

Activity

Practice editing and proof reading

Edit the draft email you wrote on the previous page. There's a spare page at the back of this booklet if you'd like to re-write it.

When you're done, swap with someone else and proofread each other's documents.

Step 5 - Design and produce your document

Using these features will make your document easy to read. This increases accessibility.

- Use a clear, readable font, such as, Arial, font size 12
- Use subheadings and dot points
- Make important points stand out, use bold, size or a different colour
- Use 1.15 or 1.5 line spacing

Other documents where you can use Plain English

- Incident reports
- Planning
- Workplace procedures (use numbers for actions/steps)

Any others?

-
-
-
-
-

Everyday words

Instead of	Consider
accompany	join, go with
alternatively	or
ascertain	find out
beneficial	helpful
calculate	work out
determine	check, work out
endeavour	try
facilitate	help, enable
fundamental	basic
participate	take part
utilise	use
terminate	end, finish

Concise words

Instead of	Consider
adequate number of	enough
adjacent to	beside, next to
draw your attention to	point out, show
for the duration of	during, until the end
for the purpose of	to
in respect of	about, for
in the event of	if
make an application	apply
on the condition that	if
with regard to	about

More information

<https://www.nds.org.au/the-workplace-literacy-project/communicating-in-plain-english>

