

How to write in plain English

- ✓ Put the important messages at the start.
- ✓ Write short sentences. Average sentence length should be 15-25 words.
- ✓ Stick to one sentence one idea.
- ✓ Try to vary the rhythm. Consider some very short two-or three-word sentences. It's easy. And it may keep your reader awake.
- ✓ Break the text into small chunks. One paragraph should be used for just one idea or concept.
- ✓ Avoid making nouns from verbs. This nominalisation makes writing chunky and boring to read (e.g. protection was intensified, rather than there was an intensification of protection).
- ✓ Avoid jargon. If you must use a technical or specialised term, explain its meaning the first time you use it.
- ✓ Avoid long words. Ask yourself: is it possible to convey the same meaning with words of fewer syllables that are in common useage?
- ✓ Do not be afraid of repetition. Don't use a different word, just to avoid repeating one used in the previous sentence.
- ✓ Avoid acronyms.
- ✓ Cut out redundant words.
- ✓ Use the active rather than the passive voice as much as possible. The species depends upon rather than is dependent upon... This brings the language alive, makes it more immediate.
- ✓ Always proof-read a printed version, preferably after a break. Use a pencil to point to the text as you read. This will stop your brain from seeing what it wants to see, rather than what is actually there.

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