

# Plain English

Good Practice Guide

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Government  
of South Australia

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**Acknowledgements** Fortunately, there is a wealth of material about plain English and we have included links to some very good resources in Appendix A. We have referred to some of these resources as well as other material to create this guide and so we acknowledge the following sources: > Dianne Lee, Wordswork - Writing for Clear Communication training material > NSW Public Service Board - A Guide to Plain English, Training Pamphlet 1/64 > Arts SA Style Guide > Plain English Campaign - How to write in plain English > AskOxford.com - Better Writing - Plain English

This is one of a series of Guides developed by the Government Reform Commission to promote and support good practice in the South Australian public sector.

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## Foreword



### **The Hon Jay Weatherill MP**

Minister Assisting the Premier in Cabinet  
Business and Public Sector Management

Sometimes in government people write in convoluted ways using language which hides or confuses the real message they want to convey.

Writing in plain English sends clear messages about what the government is doing or what it requires or what service is being offered. When people read government information they want to understand it the first time. Plain English gives confidence in the message being communicated. Every time we communicate clearly and simply we help to create a more positive and helpful image.

Plain English saves time and effort – for citizens, the private and community sectors and other parts of

government. Plain English will be more meaningful precisely because it says what it means and it speaks with the audience always in mind.

This guide gives lots of suggestions about writing short, straightforward sentences, avoiding jargon, using punctuation correctly and writing well-structured documents.

I strongly encourage all public sector employees to use the guide, apply the principles and review written documents against the checklist provided.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay Weatherill".

Jay Weatherill

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## Applying this Guide

### Why do we write?

It seems easy enough to explain in a few words why we write. We write to communicate - to pass a message from the writer to the reader. So there is no point in creating documents that people do not understand. A message is not effective just because the writer understands what is meant; the writer must be sure that the reader will understand it too, and it must be acceptable to the reader. The information we prepare for public use should not confuse or frustrate. Our written documents need to be simple enough for everyone to understand.

Plain English (sometimes known as plain language) is an increasingly popular movement away from complicated communication (sometimes called gobbledygook). This movement has been gaining momentum for a long time. A lot of this guide is based on a training pamphlet published in 1964, but it is still as relevant as ever.

The basic rule for effective writing is: **Put yourself in the place of the reader.**

By writing clearly, your audience will be able to focus on the message rather than trying to pick through the style. Public servants are often accused of writing in bureaucratese and lawyers of writing legalese, but we all need to avoid **jargon**, unnecessary technical terms

and long and confusing sentences.

It's logical that if your communication is clear, more people will be able to understand it, and your readers will find your writing refreshing and powerful. Plain English saves everyone time and is essential to serving our customers well.

The principles also apply to naming and signage - say what you mean as concisely and simply as possible.

This guide is designed to help you write clearly.

We recommend that you keep this guide handy and refer to it whenever you are suffering writer's block or finding yourself using meaningless phrases. It should help you to replace bad writing habits with good habits. Use it as a checklist when reviewing documents and always before releasing information to the public.

In writing about the English language, we have had to use words that apply to **grammar** and **punctuation**. These terms are printed in **blue** through the document and defined in a glossary in Appendix C.

You should also refer to your agency's style guide for advice about using capitals, italics, **punctuation**, abbreviations, fonts and styles for numbers and dates.

# Principles of Plain English

## 1. Choose the straightforward option

Consider the following examples.

You are advised that  
Your attention is drawn to the fact that  
I wish to inform you that



the brochures requested in your letter of 10 July 2007 are now available.

The expressions in the left-hand column are not 'polite' introductions to **sentences**, as many people seem to think. They are simply useless preliminaries. The information the writer wants to convey is simply

The brochures requested in your letter of 10 July 2007 are now available.

In the following examples, **the words in bold italics** add nothing to the sense of the **sentences** in which they occur.

The department will **be taking steps to** improve its level of service **over and above what it is now**.

**The position is that** Mr Smith's services were satisfactory.

**You are advised for your information that** you should call into this office **personally** to complete the form.

The brochure requested is not available at present but **it should be pointed out that** we expect to have supplies by the end of July. **In the circumstances** your name has been placed on a waiting list **in this connection**.

### Consider these alternatives:

at a later date	later
collaboration together	collaborate
despite the fact that	although
follow after	follow
for a period of	for
in conjunction with	with
in connection with	about
in lieu of	instead of
in regard to	about
in the near future	soon
on two separate occasions	twice
originally created	created
with regard to	about

### Avoid or minimise the following

in total of  
as a matter of fact  
do not hesitate to contact us  
please find attached  
I would like to take this opportunity  
I would like to say  
on a weekly basis  
to be perfectly honest  
last but not least  
in view of the fact that  
at the end of the day  
at this moment in time  
as far as I am concerned  
each and every one  
going forward

## 2. Keep your sentences short

An average **sentence** should contain no more than 15 to 20 words. The longer the **sentence** the harder it is to follow.

This doesn't mean counting each word, but it does mean making every word count. **Be punchy**. Mix shorter **sentences** with longer ones.

A basic rule of thumb: one idea or thought in every **sentence**. *And* is the word you have to watch.

Compare these two statements:

I understand that some nurses making house calls have been attacked in recent months on the expectation that they were carrying drugs **and** their caution when visiting certain areas in the south of the city has been very exacting **and** has even included telephoning the address to be visited, from their car, when they arrive outside the house.

I understand that some nurses making house calls have been attacked in recent months on the expectation that they were carrying drugs. Their caution when visiting certain areas in the south of the city has been very exacting. It has even included telephoning the address to be visited, from their car, when they arrive outside the house.

## 3. Use active voice - unless there's a good reason to use the passive.

For some reason public sector writers seem particularly prone to using the passive voice. Perhaps this is because they often write for someone else's signature and feel they might over-commit the signing officer by being too definite or too direct.

Here are some examples, with the passive version followed by the active.

Emerging artists are supported by Arts SA.  
Arts SA supports emerging artists.

Your application will be considered shortly.  
We will consider your application shortly.

The crime was solved by the police.  
The police solved the crime.

Take special care to avoid overused phrases such as 'It is noted' and 'It is recommended'.

Sometimes the passive voice may be an appropriate option.

To make a written response less hostile - "this bill has not been paid" (passive) is softer than "you have not paid this bill" (active).

To avoid laying the blame - "a mistake was made" (passive) rather than "the administrator made a mistake" (active).

When you don't know who or what performed the action - "the committee was appointed".

But use passive voice sparingly and aim to make 80 to 90 per cent of your **sentences** active.

#### 4. Use 'you' and 'we'

Use 'you' and 'we' to keep **sentences** short, clear and personal. Use 'you' when addressing the reader. Imagine you are speaking to them in person.

You wouldn't use 'the applicant' if the person was sitting across a desk from you, would you?

Here are some examples of this.

Applicants must send us ...

**You must send us ...**

The department always tells customers before ...

**We will always tell you before...**

Advice is available from...

**You can get advice from...**

The myth that 'I' and 'we' should be avoided in official documents has crippled many writers, causing them to adopt clumsy and confusing constructions.

If you are writing about your department it is often easier and less bureaucratic to write 'we'. And there is nothing wrong with using 'we' and 'I' in the same letter.

#### 5. Choose words appropriate for the reader

Say what you mean and choose words that your reader will understand. This does not necessarily mean using simple words - just words that the reader will understand. One scientist talking to another will speak differently to one speaking to their child.

**Jargon** is language that is only understood by a particular group of people such as a profession, an industry or a club. You can use **jargon** when writing to people who will understand the terms or phrases, but avoid it with other audiences.

#### 6. Give instructions directly

Avoid long-winded instructions and directions that confuse the reader and muddle the message.

Please be advised that late applications will not be accepted under any circumstances.

**We will not accept late applications.**

There always seems to be a fear of commands. The most common fault is saying 'customers should do this' instead of just 'do this'. For example:

Passengers are advised not to leave their baggage unattended.

**Please do not leave your bags unattended.**

#### 7. Be positive

Always try to emphasise the positive side of things. Even consequences can be presented in a pleasant manner when you arrange **sentences** in a positive way.

For example:

If you don't send your payment, we won't be able to renew your licence. (negative)

Please send your payment so we can renew your licence. (positive)



## 8. Avoid nominalisations

**Nominalisation** refers to the use of a **verb** or an **adjective** as a **noun**. The enemies here are words with such endings as -ion, -tion, -ing, -ment, -ent, -ance, -ence, -ancy, -ency.

For example:

advance	the advancement of
arrange	the arrangement of
complete	the completion of
complex	the complexity of
decide	making a decision
facilitate	the facilitation of
implement	the implementation of
introduce	making an introduction
investigate	conducting an investigation
occur	the occurrence of
provide	the provision of
(re)develop	the (re)development of

These words can be used, of course, but sparingly. They can clog up your writing if you use them too often. As in the following examples:

The Minister has *given consideration to* (considered) *the representations of Mr X* (Mr X's letter) *in the matter of* (about) the right-of-way through his property and *has come to the decision* (decided)...

Suitable land *in sufficient quantities* is acquired *in appropriate areas and subjected to site development in advancement of the commencement of actual house construction*. (Enough suitable land is acquired wherever it is needed, and is developed before houses are built on it.)

The Principal Engineer made his recommendation *on the basis of his assumption* (because he assumed) that *a solution would be effected of the other problems* (the other problems would be solved) *prior to commencement of the work* (before the work was begun).

If the Board *holds a meeting* (meets) on Friday, it will probably *come to the conclusion* (conclude) that the time has come to *take action* (act).

## 9. Use lists

Lists can be a good way of breaking up long **sentences**.

Use a **colon** after the lead-in **sentence** to a list of dot points:

- > Dot points that are full **sentences** start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.
- > Dot points that are not full **sentences**:
  - > start in lower case
  - > have no full stop
  - > except for the last dot point.

When using dot points, ensure that the flow of the text is retained and that the approach to structure, capitalisation and **punctuation** is consistent throughout the document.

Dot points are generally preferable to numbered lists, but you can use numbers when you want to show priority.



## 10. Be precise

There are certain words which are so often used loosely that they deserve mention here.

<b>Advise, Inform</b>	You can <i>advise</i> a person to apply for a position, but you <i>inform</i> or tell them <i>that</i> they are eligible to apply.
<b>Affect, Effect</b>	<i>Affect</i> means 'make a difference to' (verb), whereas <i>effect</i> means 'a result' (noun or verb) or 'bring about (a result)'. The <i>attitude</i> of the staff was <i>affected</i> by the continual changes. The <i>effect</i> was low morale.
<b>Anticipate, Expect</b>	<i>Anticipate</i> means to be aware of a future event and to prepare for it; <i>expect</i> means to regard something as likely to happen. The team members are <i>anticipating</i> their next match with confidence because they <i>expect</i> to win.
<b>Apparent, Evident, Obvious</b>	Something is <i>apparent</i> if it appears to be true; <i>evident</i> if it is clearly seen to be true; <i>obvious</i> if it thrusts itself upon the observer.
<b>Councillor, Counsellor</b>	A <i>councillor</i> is a member of a council, whereas a <i>counsellor</i> is someone who gives guidance on personal or psychological problems.
<b>Continual, Continuous</b>	<i>Continual</i> means repeated many times; <i>continuous</i> means going on without a break. I am <i>continually</i> being interrupted by phone calls. People waiting for the bus formed a <i>continuous</i> line for 50 metres.
<b>Fewer, Less</b>	<i>Fewer</i> refers to number, <i>less</i> to amount. There have been <i>fewer</i> crashes on the roads this year. Children are buying <i>less</i> fatty foods from school canteens.
<b>Imply, Infer</b>	The following <b>sentences</b> illustrate the correct usage of these words: The Minister <i>implied</i> that the policy would be changed, although he did not say so outright. The audience <i>inferred</i> that the policy would be changed.
<b>Presently, Currently</b>	<i>Presently</i> means soon; <i>currently</i> means now. He will arrive <i>presently</i> . He is <i>currently</i> on his way.
<b>Verbal, Oral</b>	<i>Verbal</i> means in words; <i>oral</i> means spoken. So the commonly used expression, 'He informed me verbally' is nonsense (unless the writer wants to make it clear that the informant did not use sign language).

More examples can be found on the Commonly Confused Words page of the Better Writing section of the *Ask Oxford* website, which is listed in Appendix A.

# Grammar and Punctuation

## 1. Sentence structure

Keep related parts of **sentences** together. We have all seen examples of **sentences** which are amusingly ambiguous, such as the often quoted

If the baby does not thrive on raw milk, boil it.

Although you should not be guilty of such simple blunders, you might say

I instructed the tenant to leave last week.

when you mean

Last week, I instructed the tenant to leave.

Longer **sentences** can cause more trouble.

A report was made on each woman's application for maintenance of her child by the case officer.

*By* appears to relate to *maintenance* when it should relate to *made*. The **sentence** should therefore read

A report was made by the case officer on each woman's application for maintenance of her child.

OR better still, use the active voice

The case officer made a report...

Allowing the main **verb** to get too far away from its **subject** keeps the reader in suspense too long.

The Minister may, after considering all documents submitted by both parties and, perhaps, making a personal inspection of the site, nominate an arbitrator.

The average reader will have to read this **sentence** twice. It should be recast.

## 2. Singular/plural

The **verb** must agree in number with its **subject**.

For example:

The office is vacant.

The offices are vacant.

Similarly for the **pronoun**:

The apartment gives its occupants a view of the park.

The apartments give their occupants a view of the park.

**Collective nouns** often present a problem of number.

Such words as 'board', 'committee' and 'team', although each is **singular** in itself, have a **plural** suggestion because they are a collection of units. Where the **collective noun** represents a single unit, rather than a number of individuals, use the **singular**.

As in

The board *is* the guiding body for the organisation.

But where the individual components are referred to, the **plural** is needed.

The board *are* not inclined to comment on the issue.

When the **subjects** are joined by other linking words, the **verb** should agree with the main **subject**.

The director, together with the executive, *is* attending the function.

But

The director *and* the executive *are* attending the function.

### 3. Plurals, possessives and apostrophes

The **possessive** form of a **noun** needs an apostrophe, but the **plural noun** that ends in s does not. For example:

The courier delivered the papers for the Ministers.

compared to

The courier delivered the Ministers' papers.

Use an apostrophe before the **possessive** s of a **singular noun**, for example, *the State Government's role*.

For **singular nouns** ending in s, it's a matter of house style whether you use *James'* or *James's*.

For **plural nouns** ending in s, the apostrophe belongs after the s, as in *departments'*. But for **plural nouns** that do not end in s, the apostrophe is before the s, as in *children's*.

Singular	Plural
boy's	boys'
person's	people's
employee's	employees'
hostess's	hostesses'
woman's	women's

There is no apostrophe in names containing a **plural noun** ending in s that identifies its function:

Libraries Board  
Teachers Federation.

You also use an apostrophe to show omissions in contractions. For example:

it's (it is)	<i>but</i>	its (of it)
there's (there is)	<i>but</i>	theirs (of them)
you're (you are)	<i>but</i>	your (of you)

### 4. Colons and semicolons

A **colon** (:) marks a pause to introduce a word, phrase or clause that amplifies, summarises or contrasts with what comes before. Use it to pause and explain: as demonstrated by this **sentence**.

**Colons** can also be used to introduce a block quotation or a list of points.

**Semicolons** (;) are commonly used to separate items in a list.

They are also used to separate two independent clauses in one **sentence**; for example, as indicated by this **sentence**. Only use a **semicolon** in this way if both clauses can stand on their own. In other words, if you can replace the **semicolon** with a full stop and both **sentences** make sense, go ahead.

### 5. Fanboys rule

You can also use a comma and a **coordinating conjunction** to join two independent clauses.

There are seven **coordinating conjunctions**. Some people remember the seven by learning the word **fanboys**. Each of the seven letters of fanboys stands for one of the **coordinating conjunctions**.

**F = for**  
**A = and**  
**N = nor**  
**B = but**  
**O = or**  
**Y = yet**  
**S = so**

These seven **coordinating conjunctions**, teamed up with a comma, can correctly join two main clauses, as in the following example:

My eighty-one-year old grandmother still rides her Harley motorbike her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

My eighty-one-year old grandmother still rides her Harley motorbike, **and** her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

## 6. Hyphens

**Hyphens** are often used to prevent misreading by attaching a word or a prefix to another word; for example, *well-meaning* friend, *middle-aged* person and *de-emphasise*, *pre-eminent* and *re-enter*. Prefixes such as *ex* and *co* also require **hyphens**, except for *cooperate* and *coordinate*.

Other examples include: *re-treat* (treat again), *re-sort* (sort again), *re-mark* (mark again).

## 7. Dashes

A dash is used to mark a **parenthesis** - like this - or an interruption. There's nothing wrong with a few dashes here and there, but too many of them will make your writing less formal. Using dashes where other **punctuation** marks are proper is okay in informal correspondence, but out of place in most other kinds of writing.

Use dashes to emphasise a word or phrase inserted as an explanation and use brackets to de-emphasise an insertion.

## 8. Gender-specific pronouns

Avoid using gender-specific **pronouns** and *his/her* or *s/he*.

The supplier should bring ~~his/her~~ own ladder.

The supplier should bring their own ladder.

Asking a candidate what ~~s/he~~ knows is a fairly reliable technique, providing it is knowledge that they can demonstrate.

Asking candidates what they know is a fairly reliable technique, providing it is knowledge that they can demonstrate.

## 9. Acronyms

**Acronyms** are usually capitalised and do not require a full stop. For example:

OECD

DTEI

When using **acronyms**, the first reference is written in full followed by the **acronym** in brackets, such as Government Reform Commission (GRC). Never use **acronyms** in headings and use them sparingly throughout your documents.

Some **acronyms** are more familiar than the full version and are not capitalised or defined.

Anzac

Qantas

Santos

Others, such as IBM and EDS, have become completely separated from their origins and are never defined.

## 10. Agency style

Your agency may have a style guide that sets out more rules for the use of **punctuation**; if not, then refer to the *Arts SA Style Guide* and the *DTEI Style Guide*, both of which are referenced in Appendix A.

## 11. Latin abbreviations

Take care with the following and use sparingly:

Abbreviation	Meaning	Latin	Use
e.g.	for example	exempli gratia	before giving one or more examples of what comes before
etc.	and so forth	et cetera	at the end of a statement where more of the same could be included but isn't because it wouldn't add to the explanation
i.e.	that is	id est	before an explanation of what's just been said
viz.	namely	videlicet	before a statement that is more specific than something previously indicated only in general terms

## Structure and Flow

A well-structured document usually requires planning. Before getting down to business, think about:

- > who is going to read the document
- > what will they be expecting to get from it
- > in what circumstances will they be reading it
- > what you are trying to achieve.

Organise your material in a way that helps readers grasp the important information early in the document and to navigate the rest easily. Consider the logical progression of your information. This will vary depending on whether your aim is to inform or persuade. Devote special attention to producing a well set-out document with clear information and lucid, well-organised instructions.

Discussing your ideas or testing draft versions on people who do not know about your subject matter can help you to work out whether the information is easy to read.

Your audience will probably have many things to do besides reading your document. They'll want to quickly grasp why they need to know about the information you're presenting and what it means for them.

Plain writing and short **sentences** will help to make the information easy to understand, but organising the information in a reader-friendly way can give your document the edge.

Several models are useful:

### Top-heavy triangle

Put your most important point first, follow it with the next most important, and so on, until your last paragraph includes relatively minor points.

### Problem - Cause - Solution

- > state the problem
- > state the cause
- > then say what should happen in the future.

### 5ws and 1h

If you are preparing a response to a letter then consider:

- > Who is writing?
- > Why are they writing?
- > What are they writing about?
- > When did they write or want a response?
- > Where are they writing from or about?
- > How do they want the problem solved?

You can find a more comprehensive thinking template in Appendix B, which may help you to get your thoughts in order before you begin writing.

# Plain English Checklist

Here's a timesaving checklist for reviewing your draft documents.

- Am I including unnecessary detail?
- Is the information in a logical order?
- Have I used clichés, buzz words, trendy phrases, **acronyms** or **jargon**?
- Are my words appropriate to the audience?
- Are my **sentences** easy to read?
- Have I used active **verbs**?
- Are my **punctuation** and **grammar** correct?
- Have I used 'I' and 'we' and 'you' where possible?
- Have I given instructions directly?
- Have I used positive language?
- Should I use headings or lists to make any part of the document or its structure clearer?
- Is the layout easy to read?
- Is the layout economical to print and copy?
- Am I avoiding answering the question?
- Is my wording unambiguous? Does it say what I mean?

## Myth Busters

There are some rules that are made to be broken: not to be rebellious but simply because they can stilt expression.

Myth	Reality
You must not start a <b>sentence</b> with 'and', 'but', 'so', 'because' and 'however'.	However, this may be appropriate occasionally.
You should not use the same word twice in a <b>sentence</b> .	But you can do so, if it is the best way to convey the message clearly and without ambiguity.
You must not put a comma before 'and'.	A comma before 'and' may help the reader to see how the <b>sentence</b> is constructed, and put a pause exactly where you want it.
You must not end a <b>sentence</b> with a <b>preposition</b> .	In fact, it is something we should stand up for.
You must not split your <b>infinitives</b> .	If you think a <b>sentence</b> will be more emphatic, clear or rhythmical, split your <b>infinitive</b> - there is no reason in logic or <b>grammar</b> for avoiding it. So you can say "to boldly go".
You must not write a one- <b>sentence paragraph</b> .	If you can say what you want to say in a single <b>sentence</b> that lacks a direct connection with any other <b>sentence</b> , just stop there and go on to a new <b>paragraph</b> ; there's no rule against it.  Just don't make the <b>sentence</b> too long.
You should write as you speak.	This will depend on the document, the audience and how you speak.

Of course, this does not mean you should break these rules all the time, just when they make a **sentence** flow better.



# Gobbledygook

We thought you might enjoy reading some actual examples of gobbledygook to compare with our suggestions for plain English.

Example	Plain English Good Practice
<p>High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process.</p>	<p>Children need good schools if they are to learn properly.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>If you have any questions, please phone.</p>
<p>Your enquiry about the use of the entrance area at the library for the purpose of displaying posters and leaflets about Welfare and Supplementary Benefit rights, gives rise to the question of the provenance and authoritativeness of the material to be displayed. Posters and leaflets issued by the Central Office of Information, the Department of Health and Social Security and other authoritative bodies are usually displayed in libraries, but items of a disputatious or polemic kind, whilst not necessarily excluded, are considered individually.</p>	<p>Thank you for your letter asking for permission to put up posters in the library. Before we can give you an answer we will need to see a copy of the posters to make sure they won't offend anyone.</p>
<p>With only a year remaining to July 2008 there is a risk that the State Government may not deliver on its committed target. The measures proposed in this Submission are designed to ensure that agencies explore every avenue for reforming processes and regulations to deliver significant savings to business, improve efficiency and maintain a focus on achieving the target.</p>	<p>With only a year remaining to July 2008, we may run out of time to achieve the target. This proposal will help minimise this risk.</p>
<p>While reasonable progress has been made, based on agency presentations, the Council considers that many of the savings identified represent the 'low-hanging fruit' and some agencies need to undertake more fundamental reform.</p>	<p>While agencies have made progress, many of their activities have targeted easy reforms. The Council believes that some agencies should undertake more fundamental reform.</p>

## Conclusion

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Writing is a form of communication. We hope that you found this good practice guide helpful in clarifying your written communications.

Plain English is not meant to be patronising or overly simple. It does not mean artificially short documents or changed meanings. And, while it is not easy, it is important. Official writing can still be efficient and friendly. You can present complex matters plainly and anyone, with care, can write well.

We encourage all agencies to review all their written communication to check for, and eliminate, gobbledygook, meaningless phrases and ponderous text.

*Good writing is like a window pane.*

- George Orwell

## Appendix A - Where to Go for Further Help

There are a number of sources that include further detail about plain English:

The Plain English Campaign officially began in 1979, after founder Chrissie Maher OBE publicly shredded hundreds of official documents in Parliament Square, London.

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/about.htm>

What is plain English? The writing and setting out of essential information in a way that gives a co-operative, motivated person a good chance of understanding the document at first reading, and in the same sense that the writer meant it to be understood.

<http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/plainenglish/?view=uk>

The writer's job is to make the reader(s) understand the meaning quickly and precisely - UniSA.

<http://www.roma.unisa.edu.au/07118/language/writing.htm>

A step-by-step guide to becoming a plain English organisation.

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training\\_skills/publications\\_resources/plain\\_english\\_at\\_work/plain\\_english\\_step\\_by\\_step\\_guide.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/plain_english_at_work/plain_english_step_by_step_guide.htm)

The Plain English Foundation works to improve public communication by helping organisations to use plain English in their writing.

<http://www.plainenglishfoundation.com/>

Plain language - improving communication from the Federal Government to the public.

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>

The power of plain English.

<http://www.wordcentre.co.uk/>

Getting an "A" on an English Paper by Jack Lynch, Rutgers University - Newark.

<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/index.html>

Politics and the English Language: The great enemy of clear language is insincerity.

<http://garbl.home.comcast.net/>

Useful resources from the EPA intranet.

<http://hub2.deh.sa.gov.au/epa/communication/tips.asp>

Style Guide Examples accessible through the Government Reform Commission website.

<http://www.grc.sa.gov.au>

ArtsSA - Style Guide

DTEI Style Guide

### Recommended References

*Australian Government Style Guide*

*Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*

6th Edition, published by John Wiley & Sons, Aust Ltd

*The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr with revisions, an introduction and a chapter on writing by E. B. White 4th edition published by Allyn and Bacon, c2000

*Eats, shoots and leaves, the zero tolerance approach to punctuation* by Lynne Truss published by Profile Books 2003

*Death sentence: the decay of public language* by Don Watson published by Random House Australia 2003

*Watson's dictionary of weasel words, contemporary clichés, cant and management jargon* by Don Watson published by Knopf 2004

# Appendix B - Thinking and Planning for Writing

Source: Writing for clear communication. Module 1: Thinking, planning and the process of writing by Diane Lee

	Conscious Level	Subconscious level
Who	<p>Who is your message aimed at?</p> <p>Who is your message about?</p> <p>Who else is involved in the event/issue?</p> <p>Who is writing?</p>	<p>Who else will be reading your message?</p> <p>Who can help you pull it together?</p> <p>Who else will need to be involved, or should be involved?</p>
What	<p>What is the issue?</p> <p>What does the reader need to know or want to know?</p> <p>What is the event/issue about?</p> <p>What is a solution?</p>	<p>What do you need to know to be able to write your message?</p> <p>What is the point of writing?</p> <p>What information should be put in, and what should be omitted?</p> <p>What do you need, want or have to say?</p>
Where	<p>Is there a location that you need to talk about?</p> <p>Where will the event/issue take place?</p>	<p>Where can you get this information?</p> <p>Where will this message end up?</p>
When	<p>When is the deadline?</p> <p>When did the event/issue happen?</p> <p>When will it happen?</p>	<p>When do you need to have this document written?</p>
Why	<p>Why does the reader need to know?</p> <p>Why is it important?</p> <p>Why is it happening?</p>	<p>Why are you including and excluding certain information?</p> <p>Why have you expressed things in a certain way?</p> <p>Why have you written what you have?</p>
How	<p>How did it happen?</p> <p>How can a solution be found?</p>	<p>How will you convey your message?</p> <p>How does your agency's house style impact on what you are planning to write or have written?</p> <p>How does your personal style/decision maker's style impact on what you are planning to write or have written?</p>

## Appendix C - Plain English Glossary

This guide has assumed that you have a basic knowledge of English grammar and an understanding of the terms used to describe punctuation. If English is not your first language, or if you have forgotten the meaning of these terms since school, you may find this glossary helpful. The definitions have been taken from the Compact Oxford English Dictionary.

Acronym	a word formed from the initial letters of other words
Adjective	a word used to describe or modify a noun, such as <i>sweet</i> , <i>red</i> or <i>technical</i>
Adverb	a word or phrase that modifies the meaning of an adjective, verb, or other adverb, or of a sentence (e.g. <i>gently</i> , <i>very</i> , <i>fortunately</i> )
Colon	a punctuation mark (:) used to precede a list of items, a quotation, or an expansion or explanation
Collective noun	a noun that denotes a group of individuals (e.g. <i>assembly</i> , <i>family</i> )
Coordinating conjunction	a word which joins together two clauses which are both equally important, e.g. <i>for</i> , <i>and</i> , <i>nor</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>or</i> , <i>yet</i> , <i>so</i>
Grammar	the whole system and structure of a language
Hyphen	the sign (-) used to join words to indicate that they have a combined meaning or that they are grammatically linked, or to indicate word division at the end of a line
Infinitive	the basic form of a verb, without an inflection binding it to a particular subject or tense (normally occurring in English with the word <i>to</i> , as in <i>to see</i> , <i>to ask</i> )
Jargon	words or expressions used by a particular group that are difficult for others to understand
Nominalisation	forming a noun from a verb or adjective
Noun	a word (other than a pronoun) used to identify any of a class of people, places or things (common noun), or to name a particular one of these (proper noun)
Paragraph	a distinct section of a piece of writing, beginning on a new line and often indented
Parentheses	a word or phrase inserted as an explanation or afterthought; in writing usually marked off by brackets, dashes or commas
Plural	denoting more than one
Possessive pronoun	a pronoun indicating possession, for example, <i>mine</i> , <i>his</i> , <i>their</i>
Preposition	a word governing a noun or pronoun and expressing a relation to another word or element, as in 'she arrived <i>after</i> dinner' and 'what did you do it <i>for</i> ?'

Predicate	the part of a sentence or clause containing a verb and stating something about the subject (e.g. <i>went home</i> in <i>John went home</i> ).
Pronoun	a word used instead of a noun to indicate someone or something already mentioned or known, e.g. <i>I, she, this</i>
Punctuation	the marks, such as full stop, comma and brackets, used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and to clarify meaning
Semicolon	a punctuation mark (;) indicating a more pronounced pause than that indicated by a comma
Sentence	set of words that is complete in itself, conveying a statement, question, exclamation or command and typically containing a subject and predicate
Singular	of a word or form denoting or referring to just one person or thing
Split infinitive	a construction consisting of an infinitive with an adverb or other word inserted between to and the verb, e.g. <i>she seems to really like it</i>
Subject	the word or words in a sentence that name who or what performs the action of the verb
Verb	a word used to describe an action, state, or occurrence





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