

7

RULES FOR USING PLAIN ENGLISH

1

KEEP SENTENCES SHORT

Most long sentences can be broken up. Use 15–20 words for each sentence. Vary the length of each sentence. Have 1 idea per sentence.

2

PREFER ACTIVE SENTENCES

Turning a passive sentence into an active sentence means changing the structure. Active sentences are ordered like this: WHO (subject) DID (verb) WHAT (object). For example: Anne watched television. Passive sentences are structured like this: WHAT WAS DONE BY WHO. For example: The television was watched by Anne.

3

USE 'YOU' AND 'WE'

Using 'you' and 'we' helps you focus on WHO DID WHAT. For example: we started the project; we designed the service; you should use the template to record results.

4

AVOID JARGON

Jargon is a special language used in business, medicine, science, government and development. It is useful for a specialist audience, but not for a wider audience. Strip your text of jargon by saying exactly what you mean and by using everyday language.

5

DON'T BE AFRAID TO GIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions help clarify actions. For example: 'Doctors must write down the test results'; or 'download the documents here'.

6

AVOID TURNING VERBS INTO NOUNS

Turning verbs ('doing' words) into nouns (things, concepts, emotions, a person) is called 'nominalisation'. Too many nominalisations make writing long and dull, especially in passive sentences. See examples of nominalisations [here](#).

7

USE LISTS WHERE POSSIBLE

Lists, numbers and headings are your friends. They help tidy the text and signpost the reader. Remember to use digits for all numbers and percentages.

8

Source: How to write in plain English.
www.plainenglish.co.uk

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