

Put a L.I.D. on it!

In other words, pay attention to the:

Language you use

Information you present

Design of your text and graphics.

To help you to develop good plain language writing habits, learn and apply the following tips.

Plain Language Tips

1. Use the active voice.
2. Use common words rather than technical jargon.
3. Use a positive tone wherever possible.
4. Write directly to your reader.
5. Use short words and short sentences.
6. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.
7. List important points separate from the text.
8. Don't change verbs into nouns.
9. List items in a parallel (the same grammatical) form.
10. Test what you write.

Clear Design Tips

1. Choose left flush justification.
2. Choose type that is clear and easy to read.
3. Pay attention to how the text looks on the page.
4. Use illustrations and graphics effectively.

Here are examples of how to apply these tips to your writing:

Plain Language Tips

1. Use the active voice.

Instead of:

This medicine is to be taken before every meal.

Use:

Take this medicine before every meal.

Instead of:

First aid kits should be kept in your house and car.

Use:

Keep first aid kits in your house and car.

2. Use common words rather than technical jargon.

Instead of:

Neuralgia which accompanies fractures of the fibula indicates the advisability of administering an analgesic.

Use:

Giving pain relievers to patients with broken legs helps make them more comfortable.

3. Use a positive tone wherever possible.

Instead of:

Do not fail to notify your family doctor in case of illness.

Use:

Notify your family doctor when you are sick.

Sometimes, however, a negative tone gives a clearer message.

Instead of:

This medicine is suitable for children over 12 years of age.

Use:

Do not give this medicine to children under 12 years of age.

4. Write directly to your reader.

Use the words you, I, we, us, and our to make your document more personal. Refer to your readers in the first person.

Instead of:

Patients are asked to register at the reception desk before each appointment.

Use:

Please register at the reception desk before your appointment.

Instead of:

NHS Lothian requests that patients park their car in Car Park C.

Use:

Please park your car in Car Park C.

5. Use short words and short sentences.

Instead of:

Patients' responsibilities for recovery at home will be explained by the attending doctor before departure from the ward.

Use:

Your doctor will speak to you before you leave the ward. S/he will explain how to take good care of yourself when you get home.

6. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.

Instead of:

Before you leave the clinic, make an appointment for a follow-up visit at the reception desk.

Use:

Make an appointment for a follow-up visit at the reception desk before you leave the clinic.

7. List important points separate from the text.

Instead of:

Feb. 7-8, 2015, Toronto, Better Breathing Conference, 5 Ontario Thoracic Society, 201-573 King St. E, Toronto, ON M5A 4L3; tel. (416) 864-9911, fax (416) 864-9916

Use:

Better Breathing Conference

When: Feb. 7 - 8, 1997

Where: Toronto, Ontario

Tel: (416) 864-9911

Fax: (416) 864-9916

For more information, contact:

Ontario Thoracic Society

201-573 King Street E.

Toronto, Ontario M5A 4L3

8. Don't change verbs into nouns.

Verbs

decide

reimburse

examine

inspect

pay

Nouns

decision

reimbursement

examination

inspection

payment

9. List items in a parallel (the same grammatical) form.

Instead of:

Three healthy habits are:

1. **Getting** eight hours of sleep each night.
2. You **should eat** three balanced meals every day.
3. It is important to **exercise** regularly.

Use:

Three healthy habits are:

1. **Getting** eight hours of sleep each night.
2. **Eating** three balanced meals every day.
3. **Exercising** regularly.

10. Test what you write.

Always have someone else read and comment on what you write. If you prepare documents that will be widely circulated, conduct a field test among people who represent your audience.

Consult with people who know your audience better than you do.

This process will tell you:

- if your audience **wants** to read your work;
- if they **can** read it;
- if they can **make use** of it.

If your draft does not pass the test, the results will give you valuable information on how to revise your work for your audience.

Clear Design Tips

Here are examples of how to apply these tips to your design:

1. Choose left flush justification.

Left flush justification is the format of this paragraph. The spaces between the words are all the same, and the reader can move from one line to the next with little or no problem.

Avoid:

Justified Margins:

This format makes straight margins on both sides of the page. It can be hard to read because the spaces between words are not all the same, creating holes in the text.

Centred Text

This format is fine for titles and headings. You should not centre text, because it is harder for readers to find the beginning of each line.

2. Choose type that is clear and easy to read.

Avoid:

Italics, or a type that changes the normal form of letters. These make reading more difficult.

BLOCK LETTERS SHOULD BE AVOIDED. THIS FORMS A DENSE BLOCK OF TEXT THAT CAN TIRE THE READER AND MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE READER TO RECOGNIZE THE SHAPE OF THE WORDS.

Words printed in lower case have more distinctive shapes than words printed in UPPER CASE.

Use:

Types such as Arial, *Comic Sans* and Helvetica are popular. These types can also be used in bold.

3. Pay attention to how the text looks on the page.

Organise your text so that there is white space. White space refers to the blank space on a document, such as the margins and the space between

sections. A text with too little white space can look crowded, and discourage readers.

Avoid:

Health Promotion Strategies

The principal health promotion strategies which address medication misuse at a community level are community development, health education, advocacy, mass media and self-help.

Use:

Health Promotion Strategies

The principal health promotion strategies which address medication misuse at a community level are:

- Community development
- Health education
- Advocacy
- Mass media
- Self-help

4. Use illustrations and graphics effectively.

Use illustrations and graphics to help your reader understand the text.

Make sure they are clear and the captions are easy to read. Place them on the page in a way that does not interrupt normal reading patterns. Your reader should not have to “jump” over an illustration to read the text.

Adapted from Easy Does It! Plain language and Clear Verbal Communication;
National Literacy and Health Program, Canadian Public Health Association
(1998)