Working with people who use Plain and Easy English

What is Plain English?

Plain English uses language that is clear, short and easy to understand. Plain English uses common words and phrases over unusual or overly descriptive ones. Plain English avoids hard to understand words. Plain English is spoken and written with an understanding of listener's and reader's communication needs.

What is Easy English?

Written **Easy English** uses simple everyday language supported by pictures. Easy English uses minimal grammar and greatly reduces information to communicate key pieces of information and ideas.

Who benefits from Plain English and Easy English?

Plain English is often used when communicating with the general public. Plain English is fast to read and can communicate messages to diverse populations. All information can be communicated in plain English.

Easy English can help people with cognitive disability access and understand written language. Easy English is sometimes used when communicating with people who have low levels of literacy and people who speak English as a second language.

Writing in Plain and Easy English can deepen a writer's understanding of their work and help get the perfect message across.

Why Easy English matters

The voice of people with cognitive disability is often not heard. This means that within government, services, community and mainstream organisations decisions are made about people with cognitive disabilities without them having a say.

Using Easy English helps people with cognitive disabilities understand written information. Using Easy English for agendas, minutes and notes means people with cognitive disabilities can follow the progress of a meeting and supports full participation.

Translating a standard sentence to Plain or Easy English

Standard sentence

Use straightforward language, words that everyone understands and minimise the use of jargon and acronyms.

Plain English sentence

Use words that everyone understands and avoid jargon and acronyms.

Easy English sentence

- **Use easy words**

Tips for meeting and working with people who prefer Plain and Easy English

- Whenever possible speak in Plain English.

- Provide all written material in Plain or Easy English.

- Ask people about their communication needs and preferences.

- Respect people's communication needs and preferences.

- Treat people as equals.

- Use age appropriate language.

- Explain acronyms.

- Break information down into key points.

- Ask one question at a time.

- Encourage everyone to speak up and ask for an explanation if they don't understand.

- Avoid jumping from item to item or drifting off the topic as this can be confusing.

- Slow down, make sure meetings and conversations do not go too fast.

- Give clear instructions.

- Check that people have understood and ask them to explain what they now know.

Tips for writing Plain English documents

- Make a plan before you start writing and have a list of the main points you want to make.

- Use short words.

- Use everyday words, avoid jargon and legalistic words.

- Always explain any difficult terms, words or phrases you use.

- Keep your sentences short and have one main point per sentence.

- Be concise.

- Keep your audience in mind and write with an awareness of your reader.

- Use simple formatting.

- Use a sans-serif font and use the same font through your document.

- Use 14 or above size font.

- Keep some white space on the page.

- Always proof your writing and have someone who uses Plain English check too.

Adapted from 'How to write plain English guide'. www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html

Make it clear

Tips for writing **Easy English** documents

- Find out as much as you can about your audience and their communication needs.

- Think about the best format for your information. For example video or audio recordings may be better for some people than written information.

- Use age appropriate language.

- Your audience might not know much about your subject. Make sure you explain the subject clearly.

- Where possible involve people with intellectual disabilities when writing information.

- Use easy to understand words that people will know.

- If you use difficult words explain them clearly.

- Use the same word or image to describe the same thing throughout your document.

- Explain acronyms.

- Use dot points and keep sentences short.

- Put information in an order that is logical and easy to follow.

- It is OK to explain difficult words more than once.

- Use simple formatting.

- Use a sans-serif font and use the same font through your document.

- Use 14 or above size font.

- Use double spacing.

- Use bold for headings and difficult words.

- Use images that add meaning and are relevant.

Adapted from 'Europeans standards for making information easy to read and understand.
http://easy-to-read.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/EN_Information_for_all.pdf

www.saru.net.au