

# Information for Health Staff

## Producing Plain English Resources for Consumers



**Before you start, check what other information exists on your topic. You may be able to use this instead of starting again.**

Principle	Tips	Examples and notes
Understand your target audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write your document to suit your audience</li> <li>Be aware of and sensitive to Aboriginal, other cultural and religious sensitivities</li> <li>Translate into community languages</li> </ul>	<p><i>Are you writing for adults, adolescents or children?</i></p> <p><i>Review your data to check the age, gender, culture, religion, disability status of your consumers</i></p>
Know your key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put key messages first, then follow with more detail</li> <li>Write clearly and concisely</li> <li>Put your information in a logical order</li> </ul>	<p><i>Have a few key messages only</i></p> <p><i>Add a summary at beginning of section or chapter in longer documents</i></p>
Keep sentences short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentences should contain no more than 15 to 20 words</li> <li>Make sure the meaning is clear</li> </ul>	
Use everyday words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use words your reader will understand</li> <li>Aim for grade 6-8 reading level</li> <li>Use words of up to 3 syllables</li> <li>Avoid acronyms or jargon</li> <li>If you need to use acronyms or complex terms, explain them the first time you use them.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Use this app to test readability: <a href="http://www.hemingwayapp.com/">http://www.hemingwayapp.com/</a></i></p> <p><i>Explain and educate like this: CEC (Clinical Excellence Commission); Thromboembolism (blood clot)</i></p>
Give direct instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Break information into steps</li> <li>Be action oriented</li> <li>Explain why it is important</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Tell your doctor about all the medicines you are taking. This will help him/her to work out how best to help you safely.”</i></p>

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Principle	Tips	Examples and notes
Be personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use “you” and “we” to keep sentences short, clear and personal</li> </ul>	<i>For example: “you can call us” and “we will let you know...”</i>
Be consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be consistent with terms or words throughout your document</li> </ul>	<i>If you use the word ‘test’ in your document, it can be confusing if you use the word ‘check’ or ‘evaluate’ later on</i>
Be positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use positive rather than negative words:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘do’ instead of ‘don’t’</li> <li>‘include’ instead of ‘don’t forget to’</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<i>Say, “Give yourself plenty of time to get to the bathroom safely” instead of “don’t rush or you might fall”</i>
Use the active voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give instructions in active rather than passive voice</li> <li>The active voice makes it clear who’s doing what</li> </ul>	<i>“Drink one litre of water each day”, rather than “ensure that one litre of water is drunk each day”</i>
Avoid nominalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nominalisation is the practice of turning verbs (action words) into nouns (things, people or places)</li> <li>It is very complex language and conveys an impersonal tone. It is often used in academic writing</li> </ul>	<i>Make these changes: ‘complete’ instead of ‘the completion of’; ‘develop’ instead of ‘the development of’</i>
Use lists/questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lists are a good way to break up long sentences, and can be used to explain what people need to do or bring</li> <li>Keep lists, and each item on the list, brief</li> <li>Put in a logical order with related points together</li> </ul>	

**When the draft of your new resource is ready:**

- **Test your new resource with at least five consumers similar to those who will use the final product**
- **Alter if needed**
- **Test again**
- **Publish**