

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"> Write your document to suit your audience Be aware of and sensitive to Aboriginal, other cultural and religious sensitivities Translate into community languages 	<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"> Put key messages first, then follow with more detail Write clearly and concisely Put your information in a logical order 	<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"> Sentences should contain no more than 15 to 20 words Make sure the meaning is clear 	
Use everyday words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use words your reader will understand Aim for grade 6-8 reading level Use words of up to 3 syllables Avoid acronyms or jargon If you need to use acronyms or complex terms, explain them the first time you use them. 	<p><i>Use this app to test readability: http://www.hemingwayapp.com/</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"> Break information into steps Be action oriented Explain why it is important 	<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"> Use “you” and “we” to keep sentences short, clear and personal 	<i>For example: “you can call us” and “we will let you know...”</i>
Be consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be consistent with terms or words throughout your document 	<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"> Use positive rather than negative words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘do’ instead of ‘don’t’ ‘include’ instead of ‘don’t forget to’ 	<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"> Give instructions in active rather than passive voice The active voice makes it clear who’s doing what 	<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"> Nominalisation is the practice of turning verbs (action words) into nouns (things, people or places) It is very complex language and conveys an impersonal tone. It is often used in academic writing 	<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"> Lists are a good way to break up long sentences, and can be used to explain what people need to do or bring Keep lists, and each item on the list, brief Put in a logical order with related points together 	

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**