

# Principles for Writing in Plain English and Accessibility

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## What is plain English?

To write in plain English is to write something that can be read once and understood clearly. It is easy to use and navigate.

When writing plain English, it is important to think about:

- **The purpose of your content:** What are you trying to say? What is the most important information to give to your audience?
- **Your user's knowledge on the topic:** Think about your audience. What are they reading/listening to this for?
- **How to make your content inclusive to all:** Inclusivity is the key to avoiding bias and making every reader feel comfortable.
- **How to make your content accessible:** Accessibility is more than just the language we use. Think about what you are writing/saying and the context in which it will be received.

To learn more about accessibility when using plain English check out [ARTICLE]  
<https://bit.ly/WritingInPlainEnglishFurtherReading>



## 1. Use everyday words and phrases

Everyday words are the words that are used to describe something which happens or is used every day. It is otherwise known as the language that is commonplace or ordinary and is spoken daily.



### Top Tips:

- When using everyday words or phrases, avoid using words that are not easy to understand for someone who does not know a lot about the topic at hand.
- Everyday words and phrases need to be easily translated into other languages if the person requires it.
- Everyday language is something that is at an Australian year 7 level of education.

Examples of everyday words and phrases include:

<b>Complex words and phrases</b> 	<b>Plain English examples</b> 
Adequate number of	Enough
Despite the fact that	Although
Inquire	Ask

- Avoid jargon and region-based words and phrases. Your language should always be global and accessible to anyone. For example:

<b>Jargon/region-based words</b> 	<b>Global words/phrases</b> 
Spit the dummy	Have a child-like reaction
Get all your ducks in a row	Get organised



For more information about plain English go to [ARTICLE]  
<https://bit.ly/StyleManualForPlainEnglishAndWordChoices> and find plain English words to replace any that may be misunderstood.

## 2. Use an active voice

An active voice is a style of writing where the subject is the person or thing that completes the action of the sentence (the subject comes before the action). An active voice is clear, direct, and to the point. Avoid passive voice as it is typically used for stylistic purposes and so may come across as confusing.

### Top Tips:

- An active voice helps to engage the reader. It helps to make the reader feel like a part of the narrative.
- It helps with readability. An active voice is easier to read and understand, especially when being read by someone who does not speak fluent English.
- An active voice helps to call the reader to action. It makes the reader feel like there is something for them to do.
- When writing in passive voice, your content can become drawn out. Active voice helps to keep a steady pace and not bore the reader into skimming through the page or article.
- Here are some good examples to help understand the concept of passive versus active voice:

Passive		Active	
The man was bitten by the dog		The dog bit the man	



For more tips on correctly using an active voice make sure to read [ARTICLE]  
<https://bit.ly/PlainEnglishAndUsingAnActiveVoice>.

### 3. Eliminate filler phrases

Filler words and phrases are unnecessary words or phrases that are otherwise known as “entry words.” They “fill up” space for the sake of the sentence sounding a certain way. In speech these words are often “um,” “you know,” “like,” and “ah.” But, in text they appear in other ways like unnecessary words or empty phrases.

#### Top Tips:

- Avoid words like:
  - Basically. This word is mostly used for the purposes of exaggeration.
  - Just. This word typically appears when the person is trying to be more polite.
  - Needless to say. This phrase appears to fill out a sentence.
  - For what it is worth. This phrase appears when the person speaking is not sure if their point of view will be returned.
- Filler words are also words or phrases that do not add anything to the context and fill up space for no reason. Here is an example of a “filler” sentence and how it can be fixed:

Filler/wordy sentence 	Short and to the point 
Please note that the dates below are indicative and may be updated in future. For full details on our grants, please go to the relevant grant page using the links below this timeline	The dates below are not permanent and may be updated in the future. For more details about our grants click the link below the timeline



[ARTICLE] <https://bit.ly/TipsOnAvoidingFillerWords> is a great tool that can help you eliminate those useless words out of your writing.

#### 4. Use easy to understand transition words

A transition word or phrase is one that shows the reader the relationship between paragraphs or sections of text or speech. Transitions are like the “bridges” that help the reader go from section to section.

##### Top Tips:

- Transition words include words such as this, that, these, those
- A good example of transition word use could be:



Old Sentence 	Sentence using transition words 
In June, the Minister announced the launch of a new grants program over two years until mid-2023. The new grants program will be coordinated by Regional Arts WA who will deliver grants to arts organisations, as well as artists.	In June, the Minister announced the launch of a new grants program. This will go on for two years, ending in mid-2023. These grants will be coordinated by Regional Arts WA, who will deliver them to arts organisations and artists.

## 5. Use lists where possible and avoid run-on sentences

Lists are a fantastic way to break up big chunks of text and help your reader skim read to get the most essential information. They also help distribute the writing across the page and create more white space, which helps your reader concentrate better on the content.

### Top Tips:

- A lead-in sentence, otherwise known as a topic sentence, is an introduction to the topic/list. This means that a lead-in sentence needs to explain what the person needs to know before reading the list.
- When using lists, remember to use lead-in sentences to avoid confusion and add clarity to exactly what they are reading. Below is a great example of how a big chunk of text can be easily broken up with a list:

Text 	Text in List Format 
<p>Our service delivery is diverse with a suite of programs including funding for arts projects large and small; capacity building support for key regional arts organisations and artists; the coordination of an emerging Regional Arts Network to connect the State; youth, CALD and First Nations' specific projects; and opportunities to profile and showcase the work of the regional arts sector.</p>	<p>At Regional Arts WA, our services include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• funding for arts projects large and small,</li><li>• capacity building support for key regional arts organisations and artists,</li><li>• the coordination of an emerging Regional Arts Network to connect the State,</li><li>• youth, CALD and First Nations' specific projects, and</li><li>• opportunities to profile and showcase the work of the regional arts sector.</li></ul>





## 6. Avoid acronyms if the term only comes up once or twice

An acronym is a word or name formed from the initial components of a longer name or phrase. Usually using individual letters.

### Top Tips:

- An acronym will only add confusion if the reader already has little context. It is better to use the full term where possible.
- Acronyms are only helpful when it comes to a large body of text. If used more than twice, switch to acronym.
- An example of when not to use an acronym would be:

Word/Phrase 	Reason for not using 
Deductible gift recipient - DGR	This is used once on the 'About Us' page. This acronym is uncommon and not many people will need to know it.

For more helpful guidance around acronyms go to [ARTICLE]

<https://bit.ly/StyleManualForAcronymsAndInitialisms> and read over their rules and tips.

## 7. Use easy to understand headings and subheadings

Well organised writing is only helpful to people when they know how it is organised.

Headings help provide that organisation for the reader and allow them to access the parts they need the most without having to first get through chunks of text.

### Top Tips:

- Accessibility relies heavily on the structure of the content. If the headings and subheadings of the pages are not clear and in a place that is easy to find and read, some readers may get lost.
- Headings are specifically important when it comes to users who may need to use outside aid to read (for example, a screen reader).
- Headings are also important to readers who do not speak English as a first language. The body of the text may be difficult to understand, especially if the reader must translate it into their own language first. Headings and subheadings will help make this process easier by telling the reader what part is important to them, and so what parts they need to understand and translate.
- Headings and subheadings also allow us to think broader about accessibility. If this were being read aloud to me with no context, would I need a heading to understand what I am reading?



If you want to learn [ARTICLE] <https://bit.ly/HowToAddUsefulHeadings> make sure to read and use the information from the article above.

## 8. Keep your language inclusive

Inclusivity is the practice of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded. This includes people who are marginalised, those who have physical or intellectual disabilities, or those who are in other minority groups

### Top Tips:

- Inclusive language shows that people can be viewed as they want to be.
- Inclusive language will help show that the company is inclusive and non-judgmental, it will make the reader feel like they are in a safe space.
- Using inclusive language also helps challenge both a conscious and unconscious bias anyone may have.
- By avoiding gendered pronouns, we avoid the possibility of mis-gendering and excluding anyone from the conversation at hand.
- It is important to never assume anything about a person, not just gender or identity but also abilities, impairments, and any other classifications.
- Some terms to avoid and ones to use instead could be:

Words to avoid 	Words to use 
She, her, he, him (You may use these if you know the gender of the person you are referring to)	They, them
Disabled Person/People The disabled	Person/People with disability
Mother/Father	Parent/Guardian (Always use in combination as the two)

## 9. Never assume the reader knows anything

When reading your content, a person could be completely new to the topic presented or a seasoned professional. Both of those readers should have the same understanding of everything written on the page.

### Top Tips:

- Think about it in the form of a conversation. If you are having a conversation about a new project with your boss, and a co-worker comes halfway through you would not expect them to know what you are talking about. It is the same for any content we create, we cannot expect the reader to have any knowledge or context and so we must start from the beginning.
- Always give the most important information first. Use a sentence that describes everything the reader needs to know about the page/topic. Think of it like an iceberg, the tip is all most people will see, so it needs to hold the most essential information. This way the people who only read the tip of it will still have all the knowledge. It also gives those more curious the opportunity to learn more if they continue reading.
- Use examples when needed. If you are talking about the different regions in WA, name those regions and even go as far as describing where they are and what shires are included or providing a map.
- Use this structure:
  1. Most Important Information
  2. Explanation
  3. Further Details

## 10. Include a glossary

A glossary is a list of word definitions, usually in alphabetical order, used for specific topics or themes. It is a brief dictionary which relates to the context that the glossary is attached to. It is very important when it comes to accessibility around topic specific terminology.

### Top Tips:

- A glossary is helpful for people who may not have a broad understanding of the topic at hand. If there are terms that a person might have to google, a glossary is a great way of making those terms more accessible and less intimidating.
- The best and most accessible way to incorporate a glossary is by including the definitions with the content. In a written format a separate page works best.
- In media format, like a website, a link to a glossary on the website is the most accessible.
- In social media, like Instagram, the easiest way to including meaning is by defining terms on the spot.
- Glossaries can also include reference images or links to more information. For example, a website's glossary can include images of, or links to, maps for referencing if the website includes talk of a certain area or region.

Word/Phrase	Definition
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Not-for-profit organisation	A company that does not make any personal gain, instead makes money for a social or political purpose
Regional Australia	Regional Australia includes all the small cities, towns, and areas that are located beyond the major cities (like Perth). Regional Australia includes all areas outside of the metropolitan area.

To see a great [ARTICLE] <https://bit.ly/GlossaryExample> make sure to head over to The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

## What is Accessibility?

Accessibility is the quality of being easy to use and understand. It is easy to reach and obtain for people who have a disability as well as people without a disability.

Accessibility is more than just the language you use or the word choices you make.

Accessible design should always ensure that anyone can have “direct” access (as in unassisted) and “indirect” access (as in it can work with a person’s assistive technology). For content to be deemed accessible, it needs to have other components that will make it user friendly.

To make text more accessible it is a **must** to have the following in place:

- **The essential information must go first:** The first sentence that someone reads should be able to tell them everything they need to know and be easily understood.
- **No small font sizes and unreadable colours:** Small font sizes make text unreadable by people who may be visually impaired but also for those who struggle with concentration or understanding of texts. Colours, and specifically lighter ones, can be hard to see on a smaller screen. Try to have a good contrast when using many colours. Your contrast must be 4.5:1 to be deemed accessible. Use <https://bit.ly/ContrastCheckerForWebsiteDesign> to make sure your colours are accessible.
- **Try to avoid having more than 110 words per page:** This is a broad number and is not a strict rule. This number will depend on the context and the information that is given. Think of this as a rule: if the information you are providing can fit in less than 110 words, make sure it does.

[ARTICLE] <https://bit.ly/WebStandardsForAccessibility> and [ARTICLE] <https://bit.ly/GuideToWebAccessibility> are great sources if you want to know more about users needs for receiving accessible content.

## Extra Information: Accessibility in social media

### 1. Alternative text on social media.

- Alt text (or alternative text) is a way for a person who is blind/visually impaired to access visual media. It is a tool for accessibility. Alt text appears where the image or media typically would.
- Alt text is great for media like a website, where most screen readers will be able to pick up alt text.
- On social media like Instagram, alt text is available but for a user to access it, they must have certain programs downloaded onto their device.
- Facebook automatically makes captions for images. These captions are vague and typically start with: [May be an image of...]
- These captions can be checked and changed by the person uploading the content

### 2. Descriptions for social media.

- Descriptions are often used by people who are blind/visually impaired. Instagram is a very visual-heavy social media, so it is important to be inclusive and give everyone the ability to enjoy it.
- Descriptions are good for Facebook, where the alt text is automatically generated and usually left like that by the creator. Even though Facebook is not based around the visuals, it is better to use descriptions as they will make everyone feel included.
- Both alt text and descriptions help reduce the stigma and help people recognize that people with no disability are not to be seen as the “normal” in society.
- The best way to use descriptions is to include them as a part at the end of your caption. Start with the hashtag #Accessibility then “Description:” and then go on to describe the image or video above. Use brackets around the description.

### 3. Avoid text in images

- If possible, avoid text in your images altogether. If not, try to make sure there is enough contrast between the background and text.
- Make sure that the text in the image is also included in your caption/post in some way.

#### **4. Use clear and correct subtitles in videos**

- Facebook has automatically made subtitles for videos uploaded on a Business Account. However, if you upload a video onto a personal account you will have to include your own captions/subtitles. To add captions, click the 'edit' button on your video and then the three dots up the top. This will automatically start processing your audio for a transcript which you can edit if you notice it is wrong.
- Instagram also automatically creates subtitles to the videos you upload. They are consistently reliable and easy to read. To generate those, go to 'Advanced Settings' and click the 'Show Captions.'
- On a website you will have to include your own captions and subtitles.
- Auto created captions aren't always reliable though, so it is good to double check them and make changes if needed.

#### **5. Use helpful and easy to find hashtags.**

- Use CamelCase for hashtags. When hash tagging more than one word, avoid using all lowercase. #CamelCase makes it easier to read.
- Include hashtags at the end of the post and try and avoid them in the main part of the caption. When users have screen reader turned on, they hear the word "hashtag" at the front of every hashtag. By putting all the hashtags at the end of the post you are letting the reader decide if they want to read all of them or stop at one. This also stops the main caption from being hard to listen to.
- Make sure to use hashtags that people are likely to search for and know, obscure hashtags are hard to find.

#### **6. Links**

- To make links more accessible label each link with words such as [PIC], [VIDEO] or [AUDIO]. Put this in front of the link so users can know what they are opening.
- Avoid having links shortened to "[click here](#)" as this gives no context to the reader of what they are about to open.
- Include links near the end of the post. Before the hashtags but after the main text.
- Make sure the link is necessary, avoid putting links where they just take up space. Especially on sites where there is a link preview.



- If possible, shorten your links to a description of the link, rather than the whole link itself. For screen readers this will make it easier to determine the content of the link if it is not already described in the post.