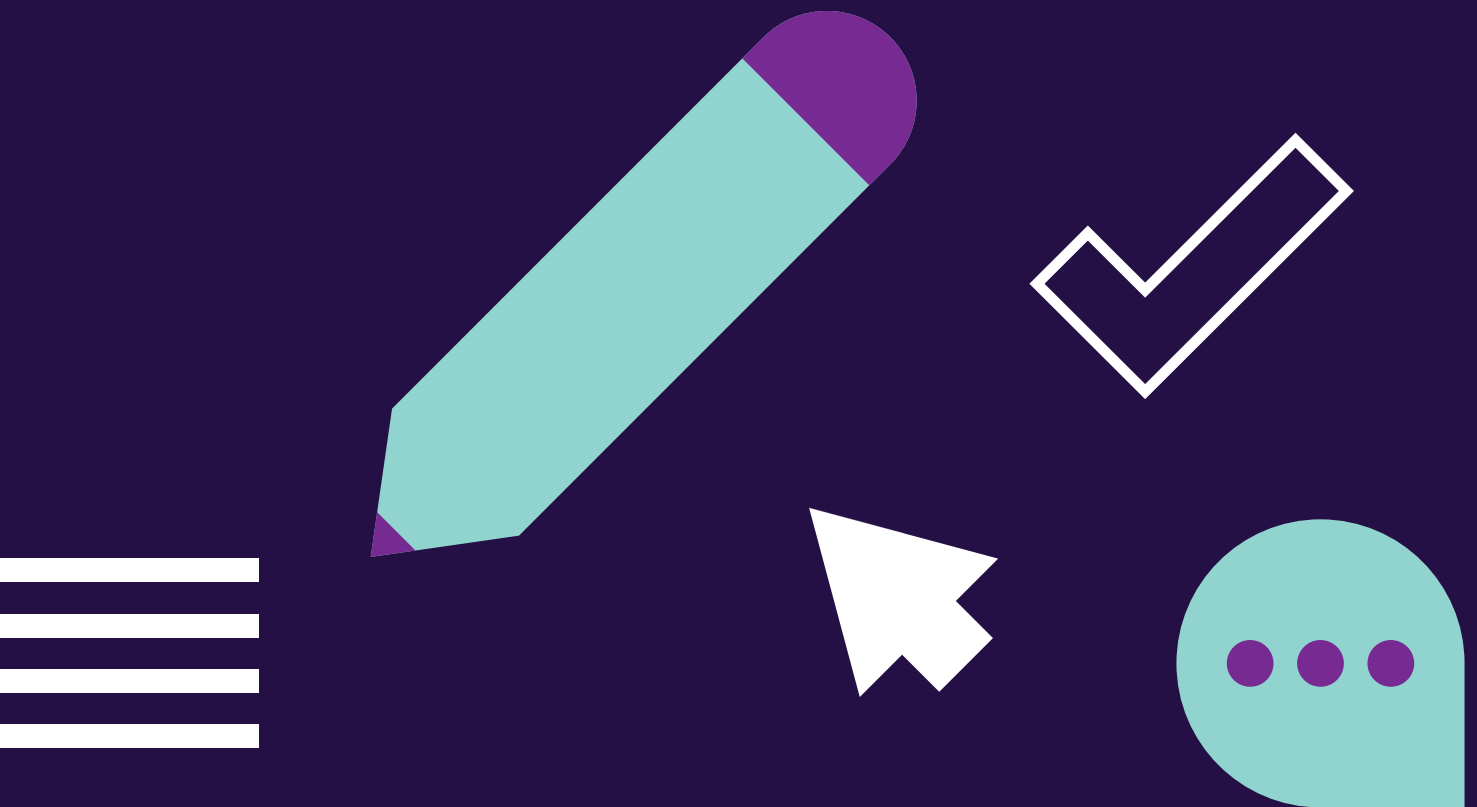


# Writing and design tips

How to write and design your documents and materials so they are easier to read, understand and use.



Adult  
Literacy  
for Life



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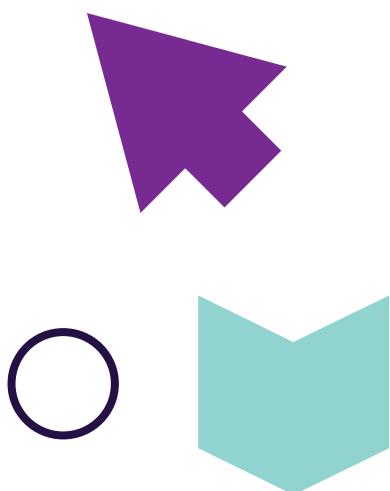
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You can find out more about the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and our plain English services and resources on our website.



Visit [nala.ie/plain-english](http://nala.ie/plain-english) or scan the QR (Quick Response) code on your phone.

Scan on your phone

# Introduction

## Who are we?

We are the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), a registered charity and membership based organisation. We believe literacy is a human right. We are committed to making sure that people with literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs can fully take part in society. We are also committed to making sure that they have access to quality learning opportunities that meet their needs.

## Literacy in Ireland

Literacy involves listening, speaking, reading, writing, using numbers and everyday technology and applying those skills in different settings to:

- communicate;
- build relationships;
- understand information; and
- make informed choices.



1 in 5 adults in Ireland struggle with reading and understanding information<sup>1</sup>. Even more struggle with everyday maths. They may have difficulty with tasks such as filling in forms, reading a bus timetable, understanding bills or following instructions.

They can also find it difficult to work out numbers and complete tasks such as reading and understanding dosage instructions on a medicine label.

Not all adults with literacy needs are the same. For example, some may be better at numbers than spelling and some may be better at reading than writing.

## Literacy is like a muscle

We all need to use and update our skills regularly or they weaken. The literacy skills demanded by society are changing all the time. Some people with literacy needs may have left school confident about their reading and numeracy skills. Changes in workplaces and everyday life require new skills.

<sup>1</sup> Adults aged 16-65. Source: Central Statistics Office (2024). [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\) 2023](#).

Most adults with significant literacy needs can read short pieces of writing. However, they may find it hard to understand longer or detailed documents.

If you or your organisation writes information for the public, you need to take this into account to make sure your efforts are as effective and accessible as possible.

## Why did we produce this booklet?

This booklet of tips will help make your documents and materials easier to read and understand, especially for adults with literacy needs.

Many adults may find it hard to understand your documents. This means they do not have as fair an opportunity to find, understand and act on what they read.

## Changing demands on organisations

Organisations are being required to make their services and documentation more accessible and inclusive.

Some significant changes that public sector organisations and other organisations need to be aware of include:

- Official Languages Act, 2003, 2021
- Disability Act, 2005
- Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, 2014
- Adult Literacy for Life: A 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy, 2021
- Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public: A Universal Design Approach, 2023
- European Union Accessibility Act, 2025

The first ISO (International Organization for Standardization) Plain Language Standard was launched in 2023. It provides an international standard for communication in plain language. It is an important tool for us all.

You can find links to the above laws and resources in the references section on pages 44-45.

We also share some useful resources on pages 42-43.

# What is plain English?

A communication is in plain language...



"...if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information."<sup>2</sup>

NALA continues to advocate for the importance of using plain English and provides a range of plain English editing and training services.

To write in plain English, you need to identify who your readers are and put yourself in their shoes. Ideally, try to test material with readers too.

## What are the advantages of using plain English?

### It makes good business sense

Using plain English saves you time and money. It increases the chance that everyone will understand your message, which saves time and avoids misunderstandings.

### It's effective

When you use plain English, your reader can better understand your information. Organisations want to communicate well, and people accessing your service want information that is quick and easy to understand.

### It's fair

When you use plain English more people can understand your information and make informed judgements. Most people do not want to be forced to read material more than once to understand the message and decide what to do next. This is important for people who may struggle with reading and understanding information.

<sup>2</sup> Source: International Plain Language Federation. [Plain language definitions](#).

## What are the impacts of using plain English?

There are many positive impacts from using plain English. We list two examples from Ireland below.

### 1. Innovation in housing services

A new Tenant Handbook for people living in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCC) accommodation was developed by their Housing Department. The Handbook aimed to provide clear information to tenants and future tenants about their rights and duties and to outline the services that DLRCC provides as a landlord. It was divided into smaller standalone documents written according to the principles of plain English.



#### 15% reduction in maintenance requests

This department achieved a **15%** reduction in maintenance requests within just six months of their new plain English Tenant Handbook being launched. This works out at about **1,000 requests** over 12 months and a saving of at least **23 working days a year**.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. The Better Letter Initiative

Redesigned material based on plain English guidelines and behavioural research insights was tested in the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise and Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore, both members of the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. The redesigned material included an appointment letter and new patient preparation note.



#### 15% increase in patients confirming attendance

Across the two hospitals the redesigned letter saw a total increase of almost **15%** of patients making contact to confirm their appointment.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Source: Institute of Public Administration (2022). [Innovation in Housing Services: Case Studies](#).

<sup>4</sup> Source: Government of Ireland, Department of Health (2020). [The Better Letter Initiative: An Impact Evaluation of a Redesigned Inpatient and Day Case Appointment Letter](#), Department of Health Research Paper.

# Tips for writing

## Tips not rules

The tips in this booklet are not rules but guidelines to help improve your written information. All tips will not apply to every reader or every document, but they will go a long way towards making your information understandable to everyone.

## Write for your audience

Keep your readers in mind and ask the following questions when writing your document:

- How familiar are they with the language your organisation uses?
- What subjects can you assume they understand?
- How will they read the document? Will they read it straight through or skip through it to the sections that interest them?
- Have you used accessibility guidelines to create and present your document?
- Have you explained any details they may not be familiar with?
- Have you given the background to the information?

## Use everyday words

There's nothing wrong with long words, but why use one when a short word will do? If you must use specialised language or jargon, explain what it means. Using everyday numbers can help too. For example, write 90% and not ninety per cent.

## Be personal and direct

Use 'I', 'we' and 'you' in your documents. This will help you to imagine your reader and help make the tone of your documents less formal. It is easier for your reader to engage with the information when you address them directly.

## Keep sentences short

Long sentences can be hard to read. While there are no strict rules about sentence length, we advise you to keep sentences to an average of 15 to 20 words. Break up sentences with full stops rather than semi-colons, as people are more familiar with full stops.



## Spell out acronyms

When using acronyms (abbreviations you can pronounce as a word) such as NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency), spell them out the first time you use them. If your organisation uses lots of acronyms, make sure you have a list that spells them out.

## Be consistent

Be consistent with any terms you use in your documents. For example, if you call something a 'review', use this term throughout your document. It can confuse your readers if you use the words 'evaluation', 'audit' or 'study' for the same thing.

## Avoid Latin and French expressions

There can be confusion around abbreviations such as e.g., i.e. and etc. Try to use the full English equivalents such as 'for example', 'that is' and 'and so on'.

## Use active verbs

If you use active verbs your writing will:

- be clearer;
- seem more personal and direct;
- engage the reader; and
- usually need fewer words to say the same thing.

The table on page 10 gives examples of active verbs and shows why they are easier to follow than verbs in the passive voice.

## Don't ban the passive voice!

The passive voice puts a bit of distance between the person giving the information and the person receiving it. It is sometimes appropriate to use it. In some situations the active voice can seem too harsh.

For example: "If you do not pay us today, we will close your account." This is active, but it may be the wrong tone for your organisation to use. In this case, you might prefer to use the passive voice: "If this account is not paid today, it will be closed."

Because the passive voice can slow down someone when they are reading, you should only use it occasionally.

## See how active verbs are easier to understand than passive

Passive verbs	Active verbs
<p>Sentences with passive verbs can be difficult to understand. These sentences are said to be written in the 'passive voice', in this order:</p> <p><b>object – verb – actor</b></p> <p>(You will sometimes see the 'actor' referred to as the 'subject'.)</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>The <b>cheque will be sent</b> on Tuesday by <b>John Smith</b>.</p>	<p>Sentences with active verbs are easy to understand. These sentences are said to be written in the 'active voice', in this order:</p> <p><b>actor – verb – object</b></p> <p>Example:</p> <p><b>John Smith will send</b> the <b>cheque</b> on Tuesday.</p>
<p>Passive sentences like the two below sometimes have no actor (subject) at all. This can be confusing because it is not clear who or what is doing the action.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>The <b>match</b> was <b>won</b>.</p> <p>The <b>cheque will be sent</b>.</p>	<p>Where appropriate, add an actor.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p><b>Ireland won</b> the <b>match</b>.</p> <p><b>John Smith will send</b> the <b>cheque</b>.</p>

## Use a house style

Most organisations have terms, phrases and internal jargon that they use repeatedly. It is very useful to have a 'house style guide' that everyone in your organisation uses. This can include the tips in this booklet and any writing or layout standards especially for your organisation.

To ensure the style guide remains useful, someone needs to keep it up to date and take on board suggestions from your staff or customers as new issues arise. Your house style can deal with specific points like those below.

### Your organisation's name

- How do you spell it?
- Do you use things like 'Limited', 'Ireland Ltd', or 'Group'?

### Job titles

- Do they take capital letters?
- Are they up to date?

### Acronyms (abbreviations you can pronounce as a word)

- When do you use the acronym (for example NALA for National Adult Literacy Agency) for your organisation?
- What other acronyms do you use - in and outside your organisation?

### Jargon (specialised language)

- What jargon will everyone in your organisation understand?
- What are the standard explanations of internal jargon for people outside your organisation?
- What standard explanations for jargon might not be understood by everyone?

# Tips for structure

## Organise information to meet readers' needs and interests

### Table of contents

In a long document, a table of contents helps people to find the information they are particularly interested in.

### Introductory paragraph

If a section of a document is very long, it is a good idea to include an introductory paragraph that summarises the contents.

### Headings

Headings and sub-headings help people to work their way around a page. They also make the text less intimidating.

### Questions and answers

Questions and answers are a great way to get information across or emphasise certain facts. They also mean people can go straight to the area that particularly interests them.

### Bullet point lists

Use bullet points to break down complex text into lists. This booklet includes examples of bullet points.

## Use clear paragraphs

We recommend that you limit each paragraph to one idea. Leave some white space between each paragraph and avoid continuing a paragraph over a page.

# Tips for design

Whether you work regularly with a designer or design your own material in-house, you can use some of these guidelines. They will help you produce a publication or web text that looks more appealing and is easier to read.

## Use good quality paper

Many types of paper are used for printing and each one reacts differently to ink. The best quality paper is 'uncoated'. Because of its surface, it takes ink well, which improves legibility.

The other benefit of uncoated paper is that it does not reflect light. Documents printed on uncoated paper are more accessible because there is no glare from the page. NALA publications use uncoated paper.

## Watch out for shadowing

Try to use paper heavy enough to avoid too much 'shadowing'. This is what happens when images or text on one side of a page can be seen through the paper. This can make reading difficult, so try to use a heavier or thicker paper to avoid this problem as much as possible.

We printed this booklet on paper weighing 120 gsm (grams per square metre).

Ask your printer or paper supplier for advice, as some paper is more transparent than others.

## Ensure a good contrast

White or light cream paper usually makes your text most readable. But you can use light-coloured paper or a solid background colour to make your publication more colourful.

For best results, make sure there is a strong contrast between the text and the background.

When you use light coloured text on a dark background, use a bold font. This helps prevent the problem of ink filling in parts of the letter. This happens most often with a serif (no tails) typeface.



## Use at least 12-point type

We use 12-point (pt) text in all NALA publications because it is easier to read.

## Make important points stand out clearly

When you want to emphasise a heading or a paragraph of text use a bigger size or **bold**.

Italics or underlining can distort the shape of words.

Do not use all capital letters (also called upper case) to make points stand out.

AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THIS EXAMPLE, THEY CAN BE DIFFICULT TO READ AND MAKE IT SEEM THAT YOU ARE SHOUTING AT YOUR READER!

## Choose a readable font

Fonts are generally grouped as 'serif' or 'sans serif' (see example below). If you use a computer, you will have access to a wide range of fonts. But it is best to stick to clear, easy-to-read sans serif fonts like Arial, Helvetica or Avenir Next. This booklet uses Avenir Next.

The **serif** typeface is identified by a short stroke (or tail) that projects from the end of the letter.



The other major group of typefaces is the **sans serif**, from the French word sans, meaning without.



## Watch your line spacing

Line spacing refers to the amount of space from the bottom of one line of text to the bottom of the next line. Too little space and the reader could miss lines. Too much and the reader will be unsure if the lines of text refer to each other. If you are using 12-point text, the recommended line spacing is 18-point (or 1.5 spacing).

A similar term is 'leading' (pronounced 'ledding'), which refers to the amount of space between lines of text. The term is taken from the days when printers placed lead between lines of text to space them out.

The text opposite is 30-pt (point) and there is 10-pt of space between the lines. This means the leading is 10-pt.

Add the 30-pt type size to the 10-pt leading and you get the line space, which is 40-pt.

If you were to ask a designer to layout your text like this, you would ask for '30-pt on 40-pt' which is written 30/40-pt.

30-pt ↑  
10-pt ↓

Leading is  
the space  
between the  
lines of text

## Avoid background images

Avoid using background images behind text. Many organisations use illustrations as a background image. This makes text harder to read, especially if the background image is very colourful. Background images, even if faint, make text difficult to read.

40%	15%
Background images can make text difficult to read. Give photos and complex images their own space on the page.	Background images can make text difficult to read. Give photos and complex images their own space on the page.

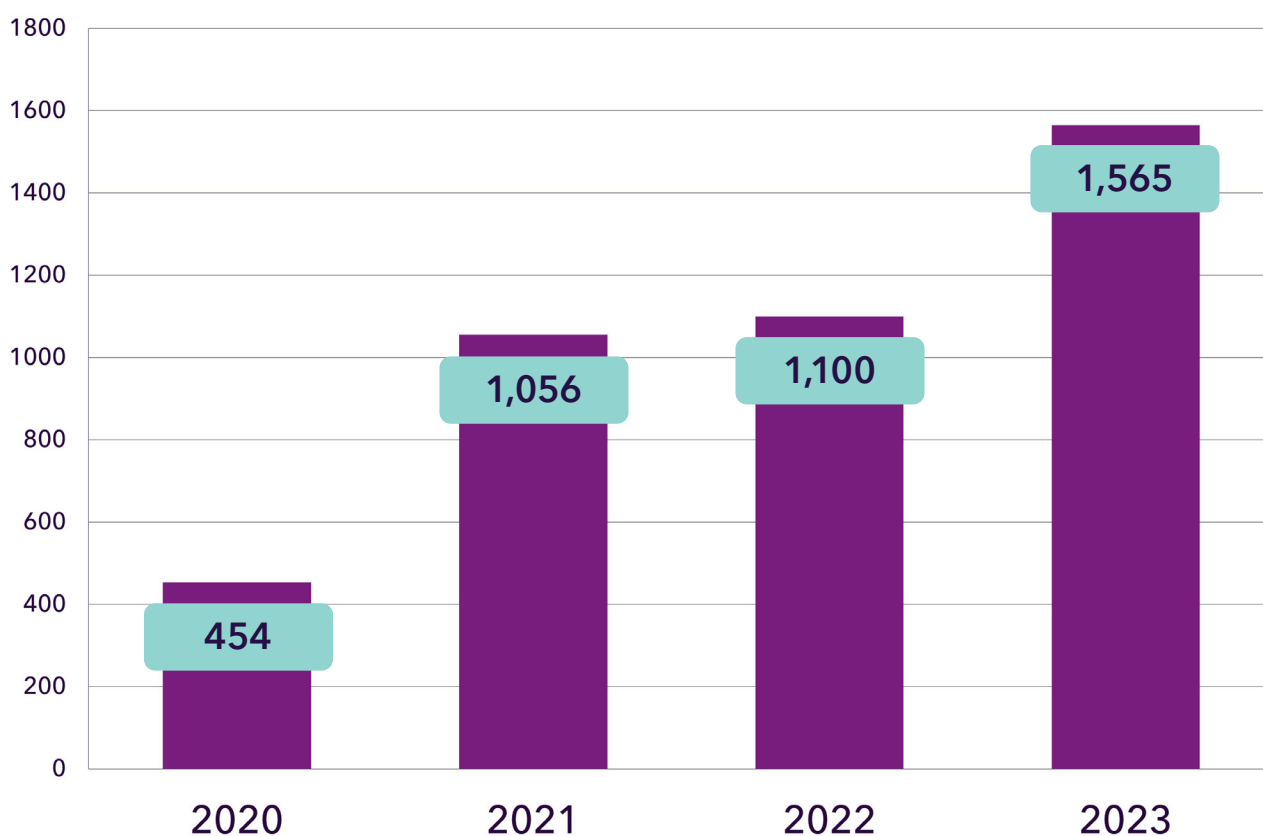
## Visuals can help

Visuals like tables, graphs and images can complement and offer a break from large amounts of text. When you use them thoughtfully, they can be a great way of emphasising important facts and figures. This means placing them near the relevant text and making sure they genuinely clarify or add something to your message. But remember your audience. Some people are not familiar with charts and pie charts and may not understand how they work. It can help to write an explanatory line or two.

### Example: NALA plain English training 2020-2023

In the table below, you can see the increase in the number of people NALA trained in plain English between 2020-2023.

In 2020, NALA trained 454 people in plain English. In 2023, this had increased to 1,565 people.<sup>5</sup> This shows the growing interest in plain English.



■ Number of people who received NALA plain English training.

<sup>5</sup> Source: National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). [Annual Reports 2020-2023](#).



## Avoid justified text

Avoid using justified text because this can lead to large white space between words. This makes sentences difficult to read. It is best to use left aligned (also called ragged right) text, as shown below.

Justified text	Called either 'left aligned' or 'ragged right'
Try not to justify text, as this can lead to gaps in words. It is best to use left aligned and ragged right text. Be generous with your margins.	Try not to justify text, as this can lead to gaps in words. It is best to use left aligned and ragged right text. Be generous with your margins.

## Single column and double column layout

Try and use a single column layout for text in a document. A double column or two-column layout can make text harder to read as lines are shorter.

# Checking your content is in plain English

## Use the plain English checklist for documents

The items on the checklist on page 46 will help you check if your document meets the key plain English guidelines. Many of these guidelines also apply to other content, including online content.

## Use readability checkers where appropriate

You might like to use a readability checker. These use a formula to help check the length of your sentences or paragraphs and they often give a score for clarity.

There is a readability checker in Microsoft Word.

Readability checkers do not consider the content of your document, your reader's needs or whether your document helps your reader find information quickly. Remember people are the best judge of any document.

## Test your document or text with readers

You should test your document to see that people will understand it quickly and easily. Even if it is an internal email for a small number of staff or the target reader group, it is still worth asking people for their opinion.

People who know nothing about your area are sometimes the best at spotting unclear text. It is also worth testing your document with some of the people who are likely to use it.

Testing may save you money, time and energy in answering questions or in printing corrections later.

## Proofread your document

It is vital that you proofread your document. It is best to do this at least an hour later or preferably 24 hours after you have finished writing it. This way, you will see it with fresh eyes and are more likely to notice errors. If possible, ask someone else to proofread it too.

Pay special attention to:

- spelling;
- numbers;
- names;
- dates;
- addresses;
- phone numbers; and
- email addresses.

## Check accessibility

It is very important to check accessibility. This means that your document or website material is designed and developed so that anyone can use them. Particularly for online accessibility, it includes being aware of things like colour contrast, reading order, font size and layout so that your content is usable with support tools like screen readers or text to speech tools.

Word processing applications often include accessibility checkers. For example, to check accessibility in Word:

- select 'File';
- then select 'Info'; and
- then 'Check for issues' and finally 'Check accessibility'.

The results will show any issues that arise, why and how to fix them, for example missing ALT (alternative) text on images. If you can, use PDF (Portable Document Format) editing software that can check for accessibility issues in your PDF file.

## Accessibility resources

Ahead resources:

- [Accessible Powerpoint presentations](#)
- [Accessible Word Documents](#)

Available at [ahead.ie/wam-remoteworking-resources-accessibility](https://ahead.ie/wam-remoteworking-resources-accessibility)

Adobe resources:

- [Create accessible PDFs](#)

Available at [helpx.adobe.com/ie/sign/authoring/create-accessible-pdfs.html](https://helpx.adobe.com/ie/sign/authoring/create-accessible-pdfs.html)

National Disability Authority (NDA) Centre for Excellence in Universal Design guides:

- [Create accessible PDFs](#)
- [Testing your content](#)

Available at [universaldesign.ie/communications-digital/web-and-mobile-accessibility](https://universaldesign.ie/communications-digital/web-and-mobile-accessibility)

Webaim resources:

- [Webaim Contrast Checker](#)
- [Word and Powerpoint Evaluation Checklist](#)

Available at [webaim.org/resources](https://webaim.org/resources)

# Before and after editing examples

To see the difference made by plain English, have a look at the 'before' and 'after' examples on pages 21-27.

## Example of hospital information

### Before plain English editing

The hospital patient has the right to information relevant to their situation that must allow the patient the fullest insight into all aspects of his situation, medical and otherwise, and, on an informed basis, enable them to make their own decisions or to participate in decisions which have implications for their well-being.

### After plain English editing

You have a right to information about your condition that helps you fully understand it and make informed choices about your treatment.

## Key things we changed

- We used 'you' to start the rewrite. This is more engaging as it is more personal and direct.
- We shortened the sentence by cutting unnecessary words and descriptions but keeping the main meaning. The shorter version makes information faster and easier to read.

## Example of a complaint form

Before plain English editing

<b>Learner Complaint Form</b>			
First Name:		Last Name:	
Contact Number:		Email:	
Name of the Centre that you were attending that you wish to make the complaint about:			
Address of the Centre:			
Details of the Complaint (Please be specific and include dates, locations and witnesses if appropriate)			
You may attach copies of any documentation/correspondence that are relevant to the complaint.			
Signed:			
Date:			

## After plain English editing

### Learner complaint form

You may attach copies of any documents that are relevant to the complaint.

#### Learner contact details

First name:

Last name:

Contact number:

Email:

#### Learner centre details

Name of the centre that you wish to make a complaint about:

Address of the centre:

#### Details of the complaint

Please be specific and include dates, locations, and witnesses if appropriate.

#### Signature

Signed:

Date:

### Key things we changed

- We used headings and brought the instruction about documents to the top.
- We changed the colour of the form title for better contrast.

## Example of a letter

### Before plain English editing

YOUR REFERENCE NUMBER IS: xxxxxx

#### SOCIAL HOUSING ASSESSMENT 2024

Dear Applicant(s),

All Local Authorities are required by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage to complete a Social Housing Assessment for everyone who has applied for inclusion on the Social Housing Support List. As you have an open housing application with this local County Council you are now required to complete this form. The required form can be completed online at: <https://localcouncil.ie/housing/social-housing-assessment-2024/>

You need to complete the online form by 25th September.

All Income details must be submitted for ALL adults included on the Social Housing Application.

If you have any queries in relation to this please do not hesitate to contact Housing Allocations on phone 053 2080000 or email [localcouncil@localcouncil.ie](mailto:localcouncil@localcouncil.ie)

Yours sincerely,

---

**Housing Department.**



Your reference number is: xxxx

### Are you still looking for social housing?

If you are, you must return your completed form by 25th September

Dear Mr Park,

Are you still interested in getting social housing through us? If you are, you **must** complete and return a Social Housing Assessment form by **25th September** to stay on our Social Housing Support List. All councils are asking applicants for social housing to do this.

### What you have to do

#### 1. Gather your household income details

Gather the income details for **all** the adults who are included in your Social Housing Application. You will need this information when filling in the form.

#### 2. Submit the form online

Fill in the online form. The link to the form is:

**[localcouncil.ie/housing/social-housing-assessment-2024/](http://localcouncil.ie/housing/social-housing-assessment-2024/)**

If you have any more questions, please contact our Housing Allocations section. You can email **[localcouncil@localcouncil.ie](mailto:localcouncil@localcouncil.ie)** or phone **053 208 000**.

We look forward to getting your completed form.

Yours sincerely,

---

Housing Department

## Key things we changed

- We moved the actions needed and the deadline to the top of the letter.
- We used headings to highlight the two main action points.

## Example of a poster

Before plain English editing

# BRUSH UP ON your *IT skills*

*4 Mondays in September*  
Starting on the FIRST  
**MONDAY** in SEPT  
10 am in the GAAC

Reach out to us to book your place in the 4 week course starting on 4 SEPTEMBER.  
Email [mary@centre.ie](mailto:mary@centre.ie) Phone 01 123 4567

# Brush up on your digital skills



**Every Monday in September – 4 week course!**

**Starts:** Monday 2 September at 10 am

**Where:** Green Acres Community Centre

**You can book your place by**

- Ringing us at **01 123 4567**
- Emailing **mary@centre.ie**
- Visiting our website **greenacresonline.ie**



## Key things we changed

- For the heading we changed the decorative font for an easier to read font.
- We used bold instead of italics or capitals.
- We spelt out the abbreviation.
- We also improved the visual and colours used to make the poster more attractive.

# Words and terms

In this part of the booklet, we include some plain English alternatives to some complicated words or phrases.

On page 29 we suggest some concise words as alternatives to common complicated words and long-winded phrases.

On pages 30-31 we share some everyday words. We recommend you use everyday words as much as possible. If you must use jargon, explain it using plain English words.

We include samples of financial, legal and medical jargon on pages 32-37 and suggest alternative words or phrases. These are more likely to be understood by non-specialist readers.

On pages 38-39 we share a list of explanations for common environmental terms.

Some suggestions are intended to be broad alternatives rather than strict definitions or equal terms.

## Remember

When producing your documents or materials you may want to add a list of commonly used words or phrases to your document along with a plain English explanation of each entry.

If you cannot avoid certain terms:

- define the terms in plain English immediately afterwards; and
- use the same terms consistently.

If you must use abbreviations:

- include the full name with the abbreviations the first time you use them; and
- repeat the full name now and again, depending on the length of your document.

## Concise words

Instead of	Consider
adequate number of	enough
adjacent to	beside
as a result of	because
at the present time	now, currently
by means of	by, with
come to the conclusion	conclude
draw to your attention	point out, show
during such time	while
excessive number of	too many
for the duration of	during, until the end
for the purpose of	to
give an indication	indicate, signal
give consideration to	consider, think about
hold discussions, meetings	discuss, meet
in conjunction with	with
in possession of	have, own
in proximity to	near, close to
in receipt of	receiving, getting

## Everyday words

Instead of	Consider
accompany	join
alternatively	or
ascertain	find out
audit	review
avail of	take up, take
benchmark	standard
beneficial	helpful, useful
bi-annually	twice a year
calculate	work out
cease	end, finish
commence	start, begin
confiscate	take from
consequently	so
constitute	make up, form
demonstrate	show
determine	check
disseminate	share, spread
endeavour	try, aim
eventuality	situation
facilitate	make easier, help, enable

## Everyday words

Instead of	Consider
fundamental	basic
herewith	with
in lieu of	instead of
incremental	gradual, little by little
inter alia	among other things
interim	temporary, meantime
irrespective	regardless
locality	place
modification	change, alteration
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest, most
participate	take part
particulars	details
persons	people
quarterly	every three months
resident, residing	living
terminate	end, finish
utilise	use

## Financial terms

Instead of	Consider
accrue	build up
arrears	money owed after it is due
asset	property
balance	amount
benefit in kind	perk
capital	amount of money being invested
credit	loan
credit limit	maximum loan
creditor	person or company owed money
debit	payment from an account
debt consolidation	combining debts
debtor	person or company owing money
deeds	proof of ownership
default	miss a payment
depreciation	drop in value
exclusion	not covered
exempt	free from
expenditure	spending
gross	total
instalment	payment



## Financial terms

Instead of	Consider
liabilities	debts
lump-sum	once-off payment
mature	come to an end
means	income or property besides a family home
net income	income after tax
outgoings	expenses, spending
overdue	not yet paid
overheads	costs
per annum	a year
policy holder	customer
premium	contribution, payment
principal	loan amount
remittance	payment
remuneration	pay, earnings
signatory	person who signs
surcharge transaction	extra charge payment into or out of an account
withdraw	take out

## Legal terms

Instead of	Consider
aforementioned	already mentioned
annul	cancel
assign	transfer, give
benefactor	person giving money (or other support)
beneficiary	person who benefits
breach	break, disobey
consent	agree
convey	transfer, give
counterfeit	forged
duress	pressure
emolument	salary, fee
execute	carry out
force majeure	uncontrollable event
forfeit	lose
heretofore	before now
indemnity	promise not to sue, compensation
jurisdiction	power
legal representative	solicitor, barrister

## Legal terms

Instead of	Consider
litigation	suing
merchantable	suitable for sale
misrepresentation	lying
negligence	carelessness
non-negotiable	cannot be changed, cannot be sold
non-transferable	cannot be given away
onus	duty
plaintiff	person bringing a case to court
proviso	condition
rescind	cancel
statutory rights	legal rights
subject to	depending on
summons	order to attend court
testify	give evidence
title	ownership, right to own
undertaking	promise
void	not valid
waive	give up a right or benefit

## Medical terms

Instead of	Consider
acute	sudden and severe
administer	give
antenatal	before birth
anterior	front
audiology	hearing
benign	not serious
biopsy	studying tissue to check for disease
cardiology	studying and treating the heart
catheter	tube
central nervous system	brain and spinal cord
chemotherapy	treating cancer with drugs
chronic	long-lasting, slow to change
coagulate, coagulation	clot, clotting
congenital	from birth
contraindication	reason not to take
contusion	bruise
diagnosis	identifying a health condition

## Medical terms

Instead of	Consider
dosage	how to take
elective	optional
epidermis	skin
excise	cut out
gastroenteritis	stomach illness
haemophilia	severe bleeding
hypertension	high blood pressure
immunise	protect
incision	cut
inhalation	breathing in
intravenous	through a vein
malignant	harmful, cancerous
mammogram	breast x-ray
monitor	keep track of
myopia	short-sight
negative (test results)	you do not have, you are not
ophthalmic	eye
positive (test results)	you have, you are
prognosis	likely outcome, chance of recovery
renal	kidney
rheumatology	muscles and joints

## Environmental terms explained

Term	Explanation
adaptation	Change - in this context a change in response to the current or future impacts of climate change.
afforestation	Planting new forests on lands that didn't have any in recent decades.
BER (Building Energy Rating)	A certificate that shows (rates) the energy performance of your home.
biodegradable	Something that can be broken down. In this context it means break down by bacteria and micro-organisms into materials that are not harmful to the environment. Examples: food or plant waste.
biodiversity	The variety of plant and animal life in an area and how they interact within habitats and ecosystems (like lakes and native forests).
biofuels	Fuels in liquid form made from plants or agricultural or biological waste. Example: the bioethanol in car petrol engines comes from maize and sugarcane.
biomass	Plant or animal material like wood and food waste. Examples: wood pellets you can use to heat your home.
built environment	Structures we build and their surrounding environments. Examples: bridges, roads and paths.
carbon footprint	Measures the carbon emissions linked to a particular activity or product. It includes emissions involved in all stages of making and using a product or carrying out an activity. Examples: walking and cycling create a much smaller carbon footprint than driving.
carbon tax	A charge on fossil fuels. It aims to reduce their use, and, in turn, reduce our emissions. Examples: we pay carbon tax on oil, petrol and diesel.

## Environmental terms explained

Term	Explanation
climate	The average weather conditions in a region over a long time - usually 30 years or more.
climate change	A change in long-term weather patterns due to natural forces, or human activity, or both.
decarbonisation	A process that happens when we stop using fossil fuels throughout the country. Example: using renewable energy to heat your water at home instead of oil.
emissions	Gases or particles released into the air that can contribute to global warming or poor air quality.
greenhouse gases	Gases like carbon dioxide that trap heat from the Earth's surface causing warming in the lower atmosphere and slowing down loss of energy from Earth.
heat pumps	Mainly electrical devices which convert available heat for use in homes, offices, and other suitable buildings. These devices use renewable heat sources from the air, water or ground.
methane	A powerful greenhouse gas that comes from sources like agriculture, fossil fuels and waste.
renewable energy	Energy that comes from resources like wind, solar energy, or biomass.
smoky coal	Type of coal used to heat homes. It is characterised by excessive smoke and the release of particles, which can negatively affect breathing and health, and reduce air quality.
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Goals developed by the United Nations to address the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world.

# Further information

## National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) services

NALA works with organisations to:

- raise awareness of literacy; and
- consider literacy as they develop and provide their services.

Visit [nala.ie](https://nala.ie) to find out more about our work.

## Plain English services

We provide a range of plain English editing and training services and resources, including regular webinars.

Visit [nala.ie/plain-english](https://nala.ie/plain-english) for more information.

You can also join the NALA Plain English LinkedIn Network to:

- become part of Ireland's plain language movement;
- keep up to date with plain language developments; and
- connect with colleagues and learn about resources to improve your writing skills.

To joining the group search '**NALA Plain English Network**' on LinkedIn or visit [linkedin.com/groups/12529538](https://linkedin.com/groups/12529538)

## Literacy awareness services

Do you work in an organisation where you may come into contact with adults who struggle with reading, writing, maths or technology? We provide online courses, webinars, resources and advice on literacy awareness and literacy friendly policies and practices.

Visit [nala.ie/literacy-awareness](https://nala.ie/literacy-awareness) for more information.

## Become a member of NALA

Want to be kept up to date on our work and receive discounts on our plain English editing and training service?

Visit [nala.ie/become-a-member](https://nala.ie/become-a-member) to become a member of NALA today.



## Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) strategy

Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) is the Government's 10-year strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in Ireland.

The strategy aims to:

- ensure that every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential; and
- support organisations and services to be literacy friendly and fully accessible to adults with unmet needs.

The strategy uses a cross-government, cross-economy and cross-society approach. The strategy is important because it will help people gain the necessary skills to achieve their personal, social and employment goals so that they can take part fully in society.

The strategy will also help organisations and services to be literacy friendly and fully accessible to adults with unmet needs. This will support a more inclusive, equal society.

Visit [adultliteracyforlife.ie](https://adultliteracyforlife.ie) to find out more.

## Implementing the Adult Literacy for Life strategy

SOLAS (Ireland's Further Education and Training authority) set up a National Programme Office to coordinate the strategy across all government departments and stakeholders.

At regional level, Regional Literacy Coordinators have been appointed in the 16 Education and Training Boards. They drive partnerships between organisations that will support the aims of the Adult Literacy for Life strategy.

They have set up Regional Literacy Coalitions, who are a broad mix of representatives and organisations in each region. The Coalitions are sharing expertise and developing appropriate responses at local level.

Visit [adultliteracyforlife.ie/about-us](https://adultliteracyforlife.ie/about-us) to find your local Regional Literacy Coordinator.

## Let's talk about literacy, health literacy and plain language

Adult Literacy for Life have developed short online courses for staff dealing with the public. Visit [adultliteracyforlife.ie/aware](https://adultliteracyforlife.ie/aware) to find out more.

# Useful resources

You can find direct links for each of these resources on the NALA website. Visit [nala.ie/plain-english-resources](https://nala.ie/plain-english-resources) or scan the QR code on your phone.



Department of the Taoiseach, Comhairle na nÓg, the Environmental Protection Agency and NALA resource:

- **Climate Jargon Buster**  
Available at [climatejargonbuster.ie](https://climatejargonbuster.ie)

European Commission resources:

- **Scríobh go soiléir sothuigthe (Irish language resource)**  
Available at [data.europa.eu/doi/10.2782/930226](https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2782/930226)
- **How to write clearly (English language resource)**  
Available at [data.europa.eu/doi/10.2782/022405](https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2782/022405)

Gov.uk content guide:

- **Content design: planning, writing and managing content**  
Available at [gov.uk/guidance/content-design](https://gov.uk/guidance/content-design)

Health Service Executive (HSE) resource:

- **HSE Guideline for Communicating Clearly**  
Available at [hse.ie/communicatingclearly](https://hse.ie/communicatingclearly)

International Plain Language Federation resources:

- **What is plain language?**
  - **International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard**
- Available at [iplfederation.org](https://iplfederation.org)

National Disability Authority (NDA) toolkit:

- **Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public - A Universal Design Approach**  
Available at [nda.ie/publications-and-resources/toolkits](https://nda.ie/publications-and-resources/toolkits)

National Health Service (NHS) guide:

- **Content guide: Numbers, measurements, dates and time**

Available at [service-manual.nhs.uk/content/numbers-measurements-dates-time](https://service-manual.nhs.uk/content/numbers-measurements-dates-time)

Nielson Norman Group resource:

- **Better Link Labels: 4Ss for Encouraging Clicks**

Available at [nngroup.com/articles/better-link-labels](https://nngroup.com/articles/better-link-labels)

Plain English campaign guides:

- **The A-Z of alternative words**

Available at [plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides](https://plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides)

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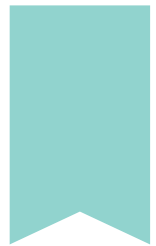
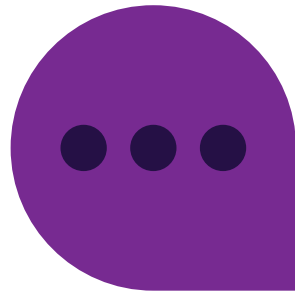
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# Writing and design checklist

This checklist offers a quick way for you to review a letter, leaflet, booklet, short report or text on a website page to see if it uses plain English and is easy to follow. Not all questions will apply to every document but try to answer 'yes' as much as possible to the questions that do apply.

	Yes	No
<b>Language, punctuation and grammar</b>		
1. Does the document use 'you' and 'we', where possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does it use the active voice most of the time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does it keep technical terms and abbreviations to a minimum?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does it define any necessary terms and abbreviations clearly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does it keep 'corporate jargon' to a minimum?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Does it avoid Latin and French phrases and Latin abbreviations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Does it use the same term for the same concept throughout?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Does it have an average of 15 to 20 words in each sentence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Does it use the simplest verb tense possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Does it avoid abstract nouns where possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Does it use correct punctuation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Do nouns and verbs agree (singular noun with singular verb, for example)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Structure</b>		
13. Does it organise information according to the reader's needs and interests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Does it use informative headings or questions to break up text?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Does it include a natural flow from one point to the next?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Are paragraphs relatively short?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Does it use bullet point lists for detailed or complicated information?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Page design</b>		
18. Does it avoid underlining, groups of italics and unnecessary capital letters?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Is text in a readable typeface (font), aligned to the left and 1.5 spaced?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Are images, charts or blocks of colour, if any, clear and relevant to the text?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Acknowledgments

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The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership based organisation. We work to support adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs to take part fully in society and to have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA does this by raising awareness of the importance of literacy, doing research and sharing good practice. We also provide online learning courses, a tutoring service and lobby for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

### National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

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Sandford Close  
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### Websites:

[nala.ie](http://nala.ie)  
[learnwithnala.ie](http://learnwithnala.ie)

**Phone:** 01 412 7900

**Email:** [info@nala.ie](mailto:info@nala.ie)

**Freephone:** 1 800 20 20 65

**Registered Charity Number:** 20020965

**Charity Number:** 8506

**Company Number:** 342807



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for Life**

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