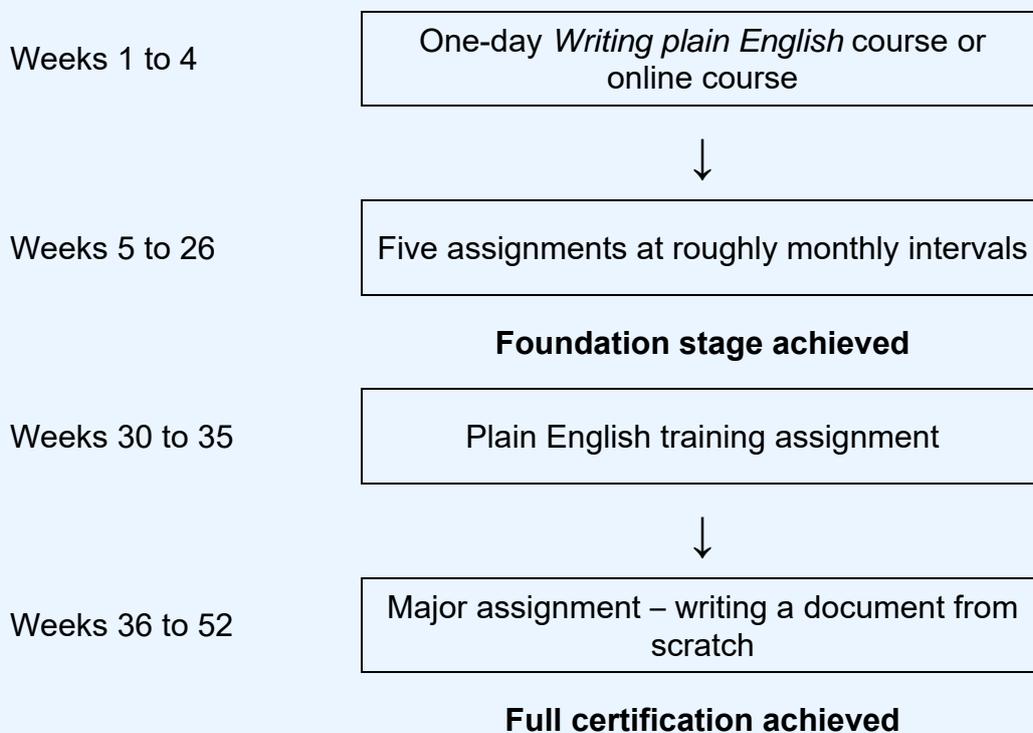## The *plain English certificate*

The *plain English certificate* is aimed at writers who want to achieve a high degree of competence in writing and editing documents. Although anyone can apply for the course, it is mainly for people who spend most of their time writing or editing documents or web pages at work.

The course has two stages: the foundation stage and full certification. You can opt just to achieve the foundation stage if you want. You can also take a longer break than we suggest below after the foundation stage if you do opt to go on to achieve full certification.

The course is made up of a number of blocks, the first one of which you may be able to skip.

Outline

Weeks 1 to 4	One-day *Writing plain English* course or online course

↓

Weeks 5 to 26	Five assignments at roughly monthly intervals

Foundation stage achieved

Weeks 30 to 35	Plain English training assignment

↓

Weeks 36 to 52	Major assignment – writing a document from scratch

Full certification achieved

Writing plain English course

You may skip this part of the *plain English certificate* if:

- you have been on a *Writing plain English* course, or an equivalent course, in the last three years

or

- you have been on a *Writing plain English* course, or an equivalent course, in the last five years and have worked mostly at writing or editing documents since then

or

- you opt to work through our online *Writing plain English* course instead.

Please see the separate course outline.

The five assignments

As part of the foundation stage of the certificate you have to send us five samples of your writing or editing for us to appraise (roughly one a month). You can either send in original work or pieces of writing you have edited, or a mixture of both. The pieces should be around six sides in length. You can send in longer documents, but we will select six representative sides to appraise.

What you can send in:

* any piece of writing you have just finished, before it's been reviewed or edited by anyone else, certified by your line manager as being your own original work
* any piece of writing you have edited into plain English, without help or input from any other reviewer and certified as such by your line manager.

Ideally the work should be in Word, and edited pieces should have changes tracked so that we can see the original version as well as your edit. Otherwise, please send in the original document and your edit as separate files.

You will see that the process allows you to send in work without needing to produce anything over and above what you would do as part of your normal job. Producing the examples can be a part of your day-to-day work. But don't think you have to send in the piece of writing exactly as you produced it or edited it. In fact, we suggest you look through the piece again after a few days and make what improvements you can. After all, you probably had to produce it against a tight deadline. The key thing is that it's still all your own work.

We will give each assignment a mark:

A   an excellent piece of work that needs little or no improvement. The wording is clear and concise, and the tone is appropriate to the intended reader. We would consider this document to be meeting, or to be very close to, the standard for our *plain English approved* logo.

B   a very good piece of work that needs mostly minor amendments, but these are few in number. The wording is clear and concise most of the time, and the tone is appropriate most of the time. Any problems are such that the delegate would avoid them in future once they were highlighted.

C   a good piece of work that broadly follows plain English guidelines and has very few significant problems. The wording needs some improvement, but we would not expect it to cause significant problems for its intended readers.

D   the piece of work is not up to the minimum standard expected. There are significant problems with the wording and tone, and the document would cause significant problems for its readers.

Marks A, B and C are 'pass' marks, and D is a 'fail'. If you receive a 'D' for an assignment we offer you the chance to send in another example. This allows you to learn from the feedback we give on the first attempt and to use this to improve your mark. We will allow you extra time if you want to 'retake' an assignment.

You have to achieve a 'C' or better on all five assignments.

Plain English training assignment

The aim of this assignment is to demonstrate that you understand the plain English principles well enough to pass them on to other people. Therefore we ask you to produce a piece of work aimed at introducing plain English to an inexperienced audience.

This can be:

- a PowerPoint presentation, with an outline script
- a booklet or leaflet explaining the plain English principles
- a 'teach yourself' workbook
- a web-based tutorial

or learning material in some other format.

We encourage you to produce something that will benefit your colleagues and your organisation, but this isn't compulsory.

Your training assignment should be ready by week 30, and you are free to start it whenever you like. We ask you to send us a brief description of your 'training product' before you start so that we can approve it.

If you decided to take a break after achieving the foundation stage of the certificate, you have to send in your training assignment within 12 weeks of telling us you want to move on to full certification.

We will mark your assignment using the same marking system as above. If you achieve less than a 'C' at your first attempt we will give you suggestions for improving the quality and you can resubmit it up to two more times.

Major assignment – writing a document from scratch

This should be a work-related document, but please let us know if this would be a problem. As long as you are able to produce an informative document that meets our criteria we will accept this.

Your major assignment must be ready within one year of your starting the *plain English certificate*. You can start it whenever you want, but we suggest that you leave most of the work until after you have submitted your training assignment.

If you decided to take a break after achieving the foundation stage of the certificate, you have to send in your major assignment within 18 weeks of getting the mark for your training assignment.

The document should be 'substantial'. That is, it should represent at least 20 sides of A4, single spaced. You can submit more than one document if this is more in keeping with the nature of your work. For example, you could send us several short leaflets, web pages and so on, as long as the total amounts to at least 20 sides.

The document must be in plain English. It should be clear and concise, and appropriate for its intended audience in language and tone.

You can submit your major assignment in Word or as a pdf. We will mark your assignment using the same marking system as above. As with your training assignment, if you achieve less than a 'C' at your first attempt we will give you suggestions for improving the quality and you can resubmit it up to two more times.

Support

Our aim is to help you succeed and achieve the best marks you can. We also want the experience to be as stress free as possible. Your tutor will be happy to help and advise you while you are working on the various blocks that make up the course.

If you have problems in sending back your assignments on time, please let us know. The assignments need to have deadlines, but if you are ill or have some kind of personal problem we will be happy to extend your deadline or simply agree a break in the programme.

The cost

The costs below are based on one person working towards the certificate. If you want your team or a number of colleagues to achieve the certificate we will give you a discount on each place.

For the foundation stage: £850

For full certification (further charge after achieving the foundation stage): £1650.

More information

For more information or to enrol please contact Dave Fox.

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