

Online *Writing plain English* course



Here is a brief guide to what the online course covers.

There are interactive quizzes and exercises throughout the course, and each of the main 'plain English' lessons (*Using everyday words* through to *Writing actively*) has a set of five longer exercises to reinforce what delegates have learnt.

Here is a description of the lessons in the course.

What do we mean by plain English?

This lesson is a short introduction to the practical lessons that follow. It explains what we mean by 'plain English', and why it is so important. It explains the benefits of using plain English and describes what can happen when organisations don't use it.

Using everyday words

Delegates who would normally write 'I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter ...' instead of 'Thank you for your letter ...' will begin to appreciate the power of short, everyday words.

The main point we make is that it is vital to match the language to the reader. This is especially important when writing to a large audience which may contain people having low literacy skills, or for whom English is not their first language.

But even well-educated and literate people appreciate plain English. Usually they don't have the time or patience for anything else!

Keeping sentences short

What do we mean by short? Sentences of the 'cat sat on the mat' variety would quickly make readers feel patronised or bored. Yet long sentences can confuse and exhaust readers. There is a happy medium, and we explore how to write well-constructed sentences that readers can understand.

Using lists

Using lists can be a useful technique because:

- they help split up what otherwise might be a long, complicated sentence
- important information, such as eligibility conditions, is easy to follow and understand
- if you are explaining the benefits of something, the reader can easily home in on what is important to them.

This lesson shows writers how to construct effective, logical lists like the one above.

Making your writing personal

'The bank is pleased to offer the borrower a fixed rate of interest ...'

Unfortunately, unless you make your writing personal, the reader's interest is likely to wander elsewhere. People tend to skip text that they think is not relevant to them. So the key is to make your writing personal and involve the reader from the start.



This means using some short, very powerful words: 'I', 'we' and 'you'.

Writing 'actively'

This lesson covers two grammatical points, but in a practical way that delegates will absorb quickly even if they have never had an English grammar lesson. The first part of the lesson looks at the difference between the 'active voice' and the 'passive voice'. Writing that uses the passive voice has a tendency to appear dry, dull and formal. Writing that uses the active voice is much more lively and informative.

The second part of the lesson looks at how people will often write something like 'As a consequence of your failure to return the form ...' when they could write 'Because you did not return the form ...'

Again, spotting and avoiding this habit can help writers make their writing much more straightforward and informative.

Grammar tips

Even graduates confess that they do not know what a verb is, and have no idea how to construct effective sentences. This lesson introduces all the major 'parts of speech' and explains how to use them.

Is it a grammatical mistake to start a sentence with 'And'? Is it acceptable to boldly split an infinitive? We also look at these and other writing taboos.

Practical punctuation

Many writers are confused about how to punctuate properly. This lesson clears up some common misconceptions, and gives delegates a set of simple guidelines on how to use each of the most common punctuation marks.



Writing business letters

A survey estimated that UK businesses lose £6 billion every year through badly written business letters alone. This lesson looks at organising the information in a letter, and how to make every letter an ambassador for your organisation. Again, looking at the communication from the reader's point of view is all important.

Writing reports

The aim of this lesson is to show delegates how to plan and structure reports in a reader-friendly way. Too many reports are unreadable, and a report is not worth the paper it is written on if people don't read it.

Practical work

The practical exercises included in the course will help you reinforce what you have learnt. To quote one of our recent delegates:

The course sets out the principles of plain English in a series of straightforward modules. At the end of each, you are given opportunities to practise what you have learnt. This is key: the course will teach you the techniques but it's only through [practising] that you will begin to see significant improvements in your writing.

How has my writing improved since doing the course? It has become a lot tighter and easier to read. And it takes me less time to write. I now have the confidence to take on most types of writing.

If you have a team of 20 or more people to train, we can tailor the practical exercises by using examples from your own industry or organisation. This will make the course even more relevant to your delegates.

If you would like more information about the course, please phone Dave Fox on 0114 2571400, or email df@wordcentre.co.uk.