

Writing for a Lay Audience - Summary Report - 5th June 2018 Oxford AHSN

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The aim of the workshop:

Over the last 20 years, changes in the way in which we communicate have made specialised information readily accessible to the public. The use of the internet and social media platforms are commonplace, giving the public access to vast quantities of general and specialised information. An expert's specialised knowledge, however, is often a hindrance to effective lay communication, as this requires that the expert anticipates the audience's knowledge or perspective on the subject. This training course was designed specifically for staff or involved members of the public who are trying to write for a public audience whether in a research or service provision setting.

This workshop set out to address a number of things:

- What are the challenges?
- What words do we think people might have a problem with?
- What do we need to know/do to improve a reader's understanding?
- Tips and hints on how to improve writing clarity.

What we did on the day:

We begin every workshop with the same exercise – finding out the delegates' expectations. In this workshop we asked the following:

- **What are the challenges?**
- **What words do we think people might have a problem with?** – we showed a film of people talking about commonly used medical words. <https://vimeo.com/240799825>
- **This was followed by a couple of exercises** looking at pieces of writing and working out what was wrong with them and possible ways of improving the writing
- **What do we need to know/do to improve a reader's understanding?**

We compiled a list of hints and tips on writing for lay audiences using the following:

How to write in plain English <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/howto.pdf>

The A-Z of alternative words <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/alternative.pdf>

How to write medical information in plain English <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/medical-information.html>

- All of these hints and tips can be found alongside other free guides from the Plain English campaign: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html>

Feedback:

An evaluation sheet was used to collect feedback.

Consider content, delivery and participation, how would you rate this whole event.					
	1	2	3	4	5
Total			1	7	7

Please tell us what you will take away from the workshop e.g. What will you START to do, STOP doing and CONTINUE to do with regard to writing for lay audiences?

START	STOP	CONTINUE
1. Start: reviewing work using 10 tips as a framework	Stop using unnecessary terms.	Continue to improve
2. Start: research average reading age, no acronyms in meetings	Stop producing things in isolation	Continue visuals alongside writing
3. Start to read text aloud		
4. Start to check out plain English campaign. Use Arial 12 as default.	Stop using capitals	Continue avoiding using passive voice & long sentences.
5. I definitely won't use capitals and italics for emphasis! Instead I will use lower case bold. Consider using shorter sentences and less formal language.		
6.	Stop using 'professional assumptions'	Continue to try and write in plain English.
7. Start: Think about tone, format and simple information.	Stop: adding unnecessary content.	Continue: Keep the feedback loop open.
8. To keep information simple		
9. Get peer reviews. Make sure you know your audience.		
10. Sharing content with other colleagues and reading aloud.	Stop: using jargon	Continue: simple, concise, bullet points, text writing.
11. Start: proof reading aloud	Stop: using acronyms	Continue: writing simple
12. Start: Think of audience not yourself	Stop: Use capitals for emphasis	Continue: Read aloud for re-drafting.
13. Think of the audience	not to use jargon	Use clear and simple sentences
14. Reflect more on my audience, get a brief of the audience first. Understand who I am pitching to.		
15. Start: Thinking more about & focusing on the target audience.	Stop: Using Jargon	Continue: Trying new things