



## PLAIN ENGLISH: HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

Plain English is a way to write and present information so a reader can understand and act on it after a single reading.

### Plain English means:

- writing accurately and clearly for the intended reader
- avoiding complex terms
- using clear layout and design

Examples of plain English techniques include using personal pronouns like 'you' and 'we' and using active phrases and everyday words. Other techniques are writing short sentences, removing unnecessary words and using sub-headings and lists to break up dense text.

### Plain English and you

At some time we have all had to try and read an important but hard to read letter or set of instructions. You will remember the confusion you felt at this time. This experience is worse for the one in four Irish people who have literacy and numeracy difficulties. By using plain English, you can reach more people. Using plain English helps customers and staff to:

- better use services
- access entitlements
- fulfil their potential

By not using plain English, organisations are losing current and potential customers due to complicated communications and procedures. These lead to misunderstandings, mistakes and complaints. They also create unnecessary disadvantage for people who have literacy difficulties.

Examples of text before and after plain English

### Extract from an information booklet on the National Fuel Scheme

#### **Before**

Where two or more people who would qualify for a Fuel Allowance individually are living in the same household a single Fuel Allowance will only be paid to one qualified person in that household.

#### **After**

Only one person in any household can get Fuel Allowance, no matter how many people in the household qualify for it.

### Extract from the information booklet on Carer's Allowance

**Before**

Death of a person being cared for by his/her spouse/partner Where a person being cared for under the Carer's Allowance Scheme dies, and s/he was getting one of the payments listed below, this will continue to be paid to the Carer at the married rate for 6 weeks.

**After**

If you were married or were the partner of the person you were caring for and they were getting one of the payments listed below, you as their carer will continue to get their payment at the married rate for six weeks after their death.

**Plain English works - the evidence**

International research proves the social and business case for using plain English. For example, local governments and private companies have seen significantly reduced costs and improved staff morale as a result of re-writing their business documents.

When Arizona's Department of Revenue rewrote one letter in plain English, it got about 11,000 fewer enquiries than it had the year before.

In Ireland, there is growing awareness of and interest in using plain English, particularly among the public sector and more recently in the private sector. To date, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has worked with four Government departments, more than a dozen State bodies, a number of local authorities and private organisations to improve their written communications.

**Plain English support**

NALA provide an editing and review service of documents that can make your documents easy to understand. We also have a Plain English Mark which we award to documents that achieve plain English standards. NALA also provides plain English training so that you can create more reader-friendly information. For more information contact [plainenglish@nala.ie](mailto:plainenglish@nala.ie) or call Claire O'Riordan at (01) 412 7922. You can also view [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie)