

PLAIN ENGLISH



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

According to the last international survey, one in four - that is, about half a million - Irish adults have problems reading and writing. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent charity committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.

NALA believe that everyone should have access to clear and concise information. One step in the right direction is to use plain English.

Plain English is a style of presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it. It's about putting yourself in your reader's or listener's shoes to identify what information they need to know, how best to present that information and how to rephrase any specialised terms in plain language. Equally, when requesting information, using plain English means asking precise questions in everyday language and in a logical order that avoids repetition.

When you use plain English, you:

- use clear, concise and accurate language,
- order your points logically, including only necessary detail, and
- use clean design to make your writing more attractive and easier to follow.

Plain English is not a one-size-fits-all approach to presenting information or, indeed, an alternative format for only some people. It is about communicating directly to the intended reader or listener in language they understand, whether they are specialists, colleagues or members of the public. Most of us don't like reading through long passages of difficult text to find the main points, so why ask others to do so?

Five reasons why it's worth using plain English

- It will help you get your message across to the one in four adults who may have literacy difficulties.
- It can help you produce clearer health and safety notices and similar policy documents for your organisation, so increasing the likelihood of complying with the law.
- It makes good business sense. Studies have shown that when you use plain English, your reader can better understand your information.
 - You will be able to provide more efficient customer service. Clearer information is shown to improve performance, reduce mistakes and lead to fewer complaints and repeated questions.
 - It's only fair - giving people the information they need in language they understand enables them to make informed choices, access their entitlements and meet their legal duties.



Plain English - before and after

Before

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

After

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