

How to write in plain English

We and you

- We – not Information Services
- You – not students, staff, the user, the applicant

Use active verbs

- We're doing this – not: This is being done by us...

Keep it short and structured

- Best average sentence length is 15-20 words
- Keep paragraphs short and easy to scan
- Cut out padding (and unnecessary politeness)
- Use lists

Front-load – what matters most to your audience

Put the key message first, everything else later, in:

- email subject lines, headers, sentences – first words
- documents, web pages – first paragraph
- paragraphs – first sentence

Use the simplest words that work

- Need – not: require, requirement
- Tell – not: inform
- About – not: in relation to
- Buy – not: purchase
- Use – not: utilise
- Help – not: assist, assistance
- Extra, more – not: additional
- If you ask – not: on request

Avoid nominalisations (zombie nouns)

- Failure – from: fail
- Availability – from: available
- Engagement – from: engage
- Investigation – from: investigate
- Refusal – from: refuse

Plain English Campaign

More about plain English, including free guides and more words to avoid:

www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html