Writing for a dyslexic audience
- How to make written material dyslexia-inclusive through use of language

A note about the footnotes in this resource
The footnotes in this resource give sources and further information. You don’t have to read the footnotes to make sense of the leaflet.

A. Plain English

1) Sentence length
   ✔ Use short sentences (14 words maximum)
   ✗ Avoid sentences over 14 words long

2) Word length
   ✔ Use short words e.g. ‘confused’
   ✗ Avoid long, multisyllabic words e.g. ‘discombobulated’

3) Vocabulary
   ✔ Use simple vocabulary. E.g. say ‘there was no rain’ instead of ‘there was an absence of rain’.
   ✔ Use words that are appropriate for your audience

4) ✔ Explain jargon
   E.g. say ‘The Government gave me a loan through a scheme called the Green Deal’ instead of ‘I qualified for the Green Deal’

5) ✔ Explain abbreviations
   E.g. say ‘Community Interest Company’ instead of ‘CIC’.

6) ✔ Use active verbs
   Aim to make about 80 to 90% of your verbs active rather than passive
   e.g. say ‘someone stole my bike’ instead of ‘my bike was stolen’

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2 In the example above, ‘no’ is a plain English alternative to ‘an absence of’.
You can search for plain English alternatives at http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/how-to-write-in-plain-english.html
7) ✔ Use lists
   a) Use lists instead of continuous text e.g. say ‘The colours of the rainbow are violet, indigo, blue’ etc. instead of ‘The colours of the rainbow are firstly, violet, followed by indigo, then blue’ etc.
   b) Use a list of ‘do’s and don’ts’ to highlight aspects of good practice
   c) Use bullet points in your lists whenever appropriate

8) ✗ Avoid nominalizations
   E.g. instead of ‘We had a discussion about desks’, say ‘We discussed desks’.

B. Other aspects of language and style

1) ✔ Use examples to illustrate points
   E.g. ‘I like fruit, for example apples and oranges’.

2) Communication
   a) ✔ Use crisp, clear and concise communication
      E.g. say ‘Please...’ instead of ‘I should be grateful if you would...’
   b) ✔ Use concrete communication instead of abstract communication
      E.g. use clearly structured and well told stories instead of textbook explanations
   c) ✔ Be explicit
      State meanings directly instead of implicitly implying them. E.g. say ‘He really didn’t want it’ instead of ‘It was the last thing he wanted’

3) ✗ Avoid double negatives
   E.g. ‘It’s not unlikely that...’

4) ✔ Use visual imagery, analogies and parallels

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3 For further information, see [http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides/60-how-to-write-in-plain-english.html](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides/60-how-to-write-in-plain-english.html)
4 A nominalization is the name of something that isn’t a physical object, such as a process, technique or emotion
7 The British Dyslexia Association Style Guide [http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/additional-resources-for-educators](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/additional-resources-for-educators)
E.g. ‘His head is in the clouds’, ‘I’m throwing in the towel’, ‘She’s hard as nails’, ‘Keeping our discussion focussed is like herding cats’

5) Avoid Subordinate clauses

E.g. say ‘My former neighbour Sue loved jazz’ (no sub-clause) instead of ‘Sue, who was my neighbour, loved jazz’ (sub-clause in italics).

6) Metaphors

✔ Explain metaphors e.g. ‘He’s a bit Marmite - you either love him or can’t stand him’.

✖ Avoid unexplained metaphors e.g. ‘He’s a bit Marmite’; ‘He’s a pussycat’.

7) Words that are subtly different

✖ Avoid asking dyslexic people to distinguish between words that are subtly different e.g. can’t / won’t; try / do; need / want; should / want; might / will; make / feel; maybe / perhaps

8) Use headings and subheadings

These help provide a structure and give the gist of the content. E.g. the heading and subheadings in this document show what the content is about.

Unreferenced points are from the following sources


2) ‘How to write in plain English’
http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/how-to-write-in-plain-english.html

3) British Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Friendly Style Guide
http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/additional-resources-for-educators

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8 See the Research Reference List at
http://www.dyslexia.com/research/articles/visual-imagery-for-reading-comprehension

9 A subordinate clause is part of a sentence that acts like a noun, adjective or adverb and is not able to function as an independent sentence. I include this point unreferenced, on the basis of personal experience.