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How to write clearly

Tips on how to write clearly in a community newsletter. Also useful for other types of writing, for example in letters, emails and publicity materials.

It is important to make the content of your newsletter easy to read and enjoyable. If articles are too long and complicated, your reader will give up half way through.

- ♦ **Stop and think** before you start writing. Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order.
- ♦ **Get something down.** Don't think too much! Don't try to get everything perfectly worded in your head before you write anything down. The important thing is to get started. Even if you know it's not quite right, put it down. You can then go back and change it. Even experienced writers will do several drafts before they are satisfied.
- ♦ **Keep your sentences short.** Try to keep them under 20 words. This one is just six words! Stick to one main idea in a sentence. It helps to read the sentence out loud. As a general rule, when you pause in your speech you need a comma. If you come to a stop, put in a full stop. If you have a very long sentence, try splitting it into two separate sentences.
- ♦ **Be natural.** Use everyday English. Avoid jargon, abbreviations and legalistic words. Don't use a long word if a shorter word will do. Imagine you are talking to your reader, and write as you would speak.
- ♦ **Keep it short and simple.** People have short attention spans and won't read pages of text. If you want them to read your article, keep it short and simple. Go back over your article and see if you can make it shorter.
- ♦ **Use active verbs** as much as possible. For example, say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done'.
- ♦ **Check grammar and spelling.** The grammar and spell check on your computer program is worth using, but remember computers don't always get it right. Ask someone to read your article to check for mistakes.
- ♦ **Get a second opinion.** It's always useful to get another opinion on something you've written. Ask for feedback on how clear and readable your article is.

For more help, the Plain English Campaign have some useful guides to clear writing¹.

This page is part of our series on producing community newsletters, which can be read together or separately. The others can be found on our website, or you can pick up a free hard copy from the Centre. They are:

- ♦ *Planning and producing and a community newsletter*
- ♦ *How to make your newsletter look good*
- ♦ *What will you put in your community newsletter?*

¹ www.plainenglish.co.uk