

# Reader friendly communication

*A guide to using plain language*

*Writer: Jo Medlin*



Reading Writing **Hotline**  
**1300 6 555 06**

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## How do I use this guide?

This is your quick guide to communicating more effectively with your readers (your audience).

We look at using plain language, but we also explore how you can understand your readers, the importance of design and presenting your information in different ways to reach as many people as possible.

This guide will tell you:

- How you will benefit from using a reader-friendly approach
- Why using plain language is important
- How to write effectively.

This guide also has:

- Case studies - how others have changed to a reader-friendly approach
- Links - to more information and help
- Ideas - to talk to others about the benefits of change.

## To use the guide:

- Read Part 1: **Introduction** and Part 2: **Understanding – knowing your readers.**

These will give you some general tips about being reader-friendly. They also give you some important background information that will help you make decisions,

Then

- Look through to find the parts you need. You can read the rest from start to end, or dip in and out as you need to.

What's a text? We are using the word "text" to mean anything we need to read and understand. A street sign is a text, and so is a novel, an email, a phone message, and the menu board in your local café!



## Part 1: Introduction

### Is this guide for me?

If you write anything that other people need to read, this guide is for you!

It's for you if you:

- want people to take notice of what you have to say
- want to get your message across quickly and save yourself time and money
- want your information to be understood
- work for an organisation that wants to communicate more effectively with customers
- want some ideas of how to bring your colleagues along for the ride

*There's lots of information about using plain English that you can find online, but this guide is about more than just choosing the right words.*

### How do I write effectively?

Writing effectively means you are reader-friendly.

Being reader-friendly is about:

- 1 Understanding** - Knowing your readers
- 2 Designing** - Using simple strategies to make your information quicker and easier to read
- 3 Reimagining** - Presenting your information in different ways.



Each year the Reading Writing Hotline gets over 4000 calls from Australian adults seeking literacy support. As well as asking for a literacy program, the callers ring for help to fill in forms, find information online, read medicines, follow instructions, and read signs. Though this is not the role of the Reading Writing Hotline, people ring because they have no other place to go. They are challenged by everyday reading, writing and numeracy tasks that they need for work, to raise their families, and to be involved in their communities.

The Reading Writing Hotline is a service that links adults to classes and tutors where they can get help with their reading and writing. The Hotline also works with businesses and Government agencies to find ways to make information sharing more effective.

*Sometimes adults face barriers to reading and writing because the texts they have to read or fill in are more complex than they need to be.*

## Is it only adults with literacy gaps that benefit from a reader-friendly approach?

No!

Writing effectively involves simplifying the reading and writing needed to get on with everyday tasks. For businesses and employers this could mean thousands of dollars in productivity gains. For government organisations it could mean better services. For small businesses it could save time and money.

Everyone benefits when information is easier to understand and use.

We all like familiar language and familiar ideas, so we are more likely to engage with messages that seem clear and straight forward.

Think of the people reading your communications as your audience. We want our audience to be engaged, to stick with us, and to understand what we want them to know or do. In this guide, we call them your readers.



## Plain English or Plain language or Easy English?

To **write effectively**, you need to understand who you are writing for and adjust your writing to suit them. For example, complex, long, crowded text is difficult for many adults to comprehend.

*Plain language is not dumbing down your writing –  
it's communicating clearly and concisely.*

**Plain English** makes text written in English easy to read. It's about choosing words that help your reader comprehend your message quickly and easily. It is about avoiding jargon and technical terms whenever you can.

**Plain language**, like plain English, is about choosing everyday words. That applies to all your messages, whether they are in English or not. It is about avoiding jargon and technical terms whenever you can. In this document, we use the term Plain English, but the principles are the same, no matter which language we are writing in.

**Easy English** is further simplified and is a style created to make text accessible for people who have trouble reading. This may be people with beginner English, a learning disability, or literacy gaps. It uses images to support the message.

This guide brings all the above ideas together. The aim is to think about texts from the point of view of the person reading them. That's why we say it's a **reader-friendly approach**.



## Research shows:

- Making forms easier to find, understand, fill in and return saves time and money.
- You reach more people to sell a product or service if you make advertising easier to read.
- People read and respond to information that is easy to find and easy to understand.
- Workplaces save on time and wastage when employees can easily follow processes to meet requirements.
- Workplaces are safer when employees can easily read rules and procedures.
- Customers will follow instructions more often when they are reader-friendly.
- If you use a reader-friendly approach people are more likely to want to read information from you again.





## RESEARCH

### Helping clients fill in forms

In 2020, the **Reading Writing Hotline** partnered with the **NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)**. They looked at how often NSW community service organisations needed to help clients fill in forms. They also looked at the impact of giving that support.

The research was done by Social Equity Works.

They found the demand for literacy support for clients is high. It is growing because of events like bushfires, drought, and COVID.

This creates extra work for staff, services, and clients across the community service sector in NSW.

It is being made worse by more government departments putting their forms online.

Some clients just can't connect to government services because the forms and the processes are too complex!

Reading Writing Hotline  
1300 6 555 06

Home Learners Training Providers Employers Tutors First Nations People About Us



## Hotline Research: Helping Clients Fill In Forms.

Jake thinks he could fill out the forms by himself "if they didn't have such complicated language" and "if there were no 'trick' questions" that made him second guess his answers". The wonderful Fine Print Journal recently published an article discussing this important research into a growing problem in Australia. We thank Commissioning Editor Deryn Mansell for permission to republish the article.

See article [Reading Writing Hotline research: helping clients fill in forms](#)



### Want to read more?

The research is available on the Reading Writing Hotline website, or read it here:

[Filling-in-forms-article.pdf \(readingwritinghotline.edu.au\)](#)



## CASE STUDY

### Making forms easier to find, understand, fill in and return saves time and money

The **NSW Government Behavioural Insights Unit** (2022)<sup>1</sup> shared these examples about using a reader-friendly style to save time and money:

- The UK tax authority sent letters to customers directing them to a webpage that sent them to another place to find the form. The form completion rates rose when they included a link to the form in the letter.
- Understanding why forms are needed makes forms easier to understand. One workplace increased completed employee disclosure forms from 55% to 85% when they explained how disclosing personal information would help the employees.
- When tax forms were correctly pre-filled, making them easier to complete, correct self-reporting of customer taxable income was increased.
- Research shows clear, simple, and straight forward wording improves form response and completion rates.

### Want to read more?

The NSW Government Behavioural Insight Unit Blog has current information and ideas to effectively reach customers:

[Making government easier by eliminating 'sludge' | NSW Government](#)

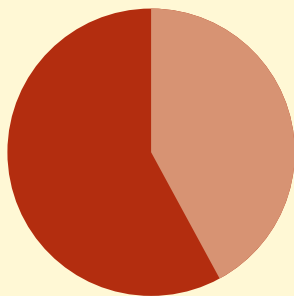
*If we aim to write effectively, we will make the world  
a more readable place for everyone... and we all benefit!*



## Part 2: Understanding – Knowing your readers

This section will give you important information about adult literacy and numeracy in Australia.

**Why is it important to know your readers?** Because to write effectively we need to understand what our readers will engage with, what they will persevere with, and what they might just ignore. If you want to reach your readers, whether they are customers, staff, or colleagues, read this section.



*43% of Australian adults can find everyday reading and writing challenging<sup>2</sup>. Using plain language helps them, and it also helps all other adults. Everyone benefits!*

## What do we know about adult literacy in Australia?

### CASE STUDY

#### Meet some real people who share their stories

Maree and Tom both share their stories of how they decided to deal with the problems they had in reading, writing and maths – and how this decision has changed their lives. These stories were produced by 26TEN, a literacy service for Tasmanians seeking to improve their literacy skills.

#### Maree's story



#### Tom's story



Watch here



In Australia we have free education for children, Commonwealth funded literacy classes for people who are looking for work, and an Adult Migrant Education Program for those who want to increase English language skills. So why do we need to think about the way we write?

Here are some statistics that can answer that question for us...

## RESEARCH

- 43.7% of the adult population can find everyday reading and writing challenging.<sup>2</sup>
- 53% of the adult population can find everyday numeracy challenging.<sup>2</sup>
- Of one million Australian job seekers, approximately 16 per cent (159,000) self-identified with English language needs and/or completed less than year 10 schooling.<sup>3</sup>
- The Reading Writing Hotline gets more than 4000 calls each year from adults seeking help with reading, writing and numeracy.
- By 2022, The Reading Writing Hotline had over 176 600 calls from adults seeking help with reading, writing and numeracy
- Around 60 percent of Australians have health literacy skills that make it difficult to fully manage their health and wellbeing. Barriers to accessing understanding and using health information include language and literacy.<sup>4</sup>
- In a 2022 survey, the Australian Council for Adult Literacy found that over two thirds of people who responded knew someone with unmet literacy needs.<sup>5</sup>
- AI Group research found that most employers believe literacy and numeracy are linked to teamwork and communication and recruitment. They believe they contribute to material wastage and errors, and potential for workplace injuries or unsafe work practices.<sup>6</sup>

## Want to know more?

The **Australian Industry Group's** *Building Employer Commitment to Workplace Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) Programs project* indicate a significant return on investment for employers taking part in workplace LLN programs.

Read more: [Ai Group Summary Investigating in Workforce Literacy.pdf \(aigroup.com.au\)](#)

The AI Group Blog featured workforce retention and the links to LLN programs: [Boost retention with opportunities to upskill | AiGroup](#)



## What do we mean by adult literacy and numeracy?

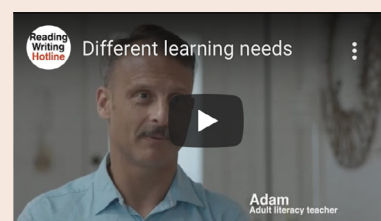
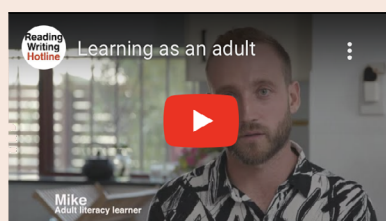
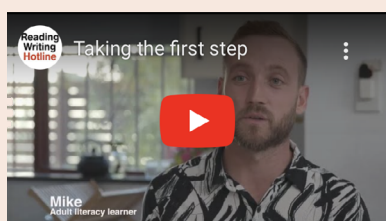
**Literacy** is what people do with language to communicate, access, produce, use, and discuss information and ideas for social purposes, including in the workplace, home and in the community.

**Numeracy** is using a combination of literacy, language and mathematical information and ideas to do real world tasks. (Language + literacy + maths = numeracy)

### CASE STUDY

#### What are the challenges adults can face?

Mike and Adam from SBS TV series Lost for Words talk about literacy learning as an adult.



Watch here

#### Want to know more?

This presentation is by the **Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL)** for **NPS Medicinewise**. It has day to day examples of signs, forms and labels that can be challenging. It also covers Australian statistics. The presentation is about health literacy, but uses everyday examples to help you understand your readers.

Watch here: [Adult literacy and health literacy in Australia](#)



You may not realise how much you're reading words and symbols, and using numbers. Yet for some people these everyday examples might be challenging.

**Event details**  
Sydney Knowledge Hub  
Level 5, Monash Hall Building, UNSW, The University of Sydney, 2006  
23 and 24 June, 8:30AM – 4:30PM  
Book at \$1000 for registration.

**Open**

Monday	8am – 5pm
Tuesday	closed
Wed to Sat	7am- 5:30pm
Sunday	closed

**What did you read this morning?**

## How can I talk about the challenges some adults have with reading and writing?

Please don't say: Illiterate, innumerate, or having a child's reading age (eg reads at a 6 year old level).

Better choices are:

- facing literacy or numeracy challenges
- having literacy or numeracy gaps
- unmet literacy needs
- and if you can't avoid it, low literacy and low numeracy.

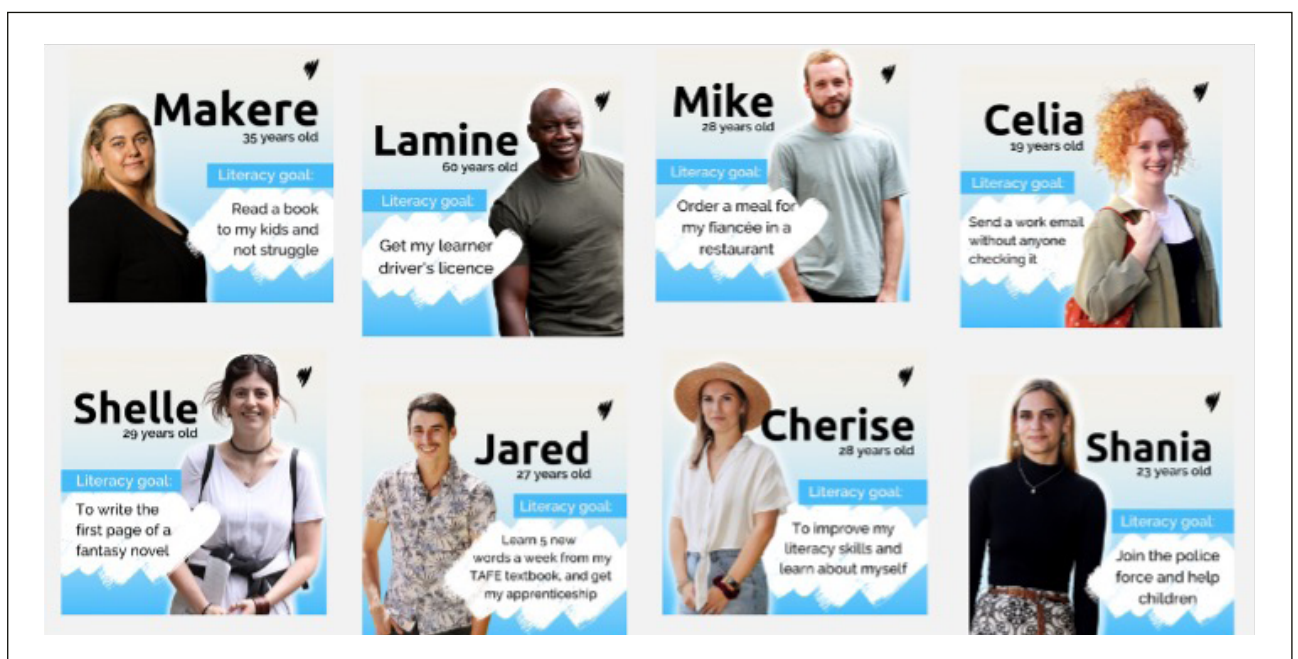


## Why do the words we use to talk about adult literacy matter?

Most adults are embarrassed about their literacy gaps. Some have been living with self-doubt and fear of ridicule for much of their lives. They have a wealth of life experiences to draw from and a range of strategies to tackle everyday literacy challenges, but there is a stigma attached to adult literacy that remains.

Want to know more?

The SBS Television series *Lost for Words*, that aired 2021-22, gives an insight into the lives of successful adults who face some literacy challenges in their workplaces or at home. The student goals illustrate a range of everyday literacy activities that can be challenging. You can watch it on *SBS on Demand*.



## If I know someone with literacy or numeracy gaps what can I do to help them?

*Be respectful, be thoughtful, be kind...  
And encourage them to contact the Reading Writing Hotline!*

The Reading Writing Hotline has been helping adults since 1994 and is Australia's national telephone referral service for adult literacy and numeracy. It is funded by the Australian Government. The Hotline hears from many different callers and has an overview of literacy services and needs throughout Australia. If you know someone who is ready to seek some help, tell them about the Hotline.

### Contact The Hotline:

Go to the Hotline website: [Reading Writing Hotline | Help with reading and writing](#)  
or ring **1300 6 555 06**.

**Reading Writing Hotline**  
**1300 6 555 06**

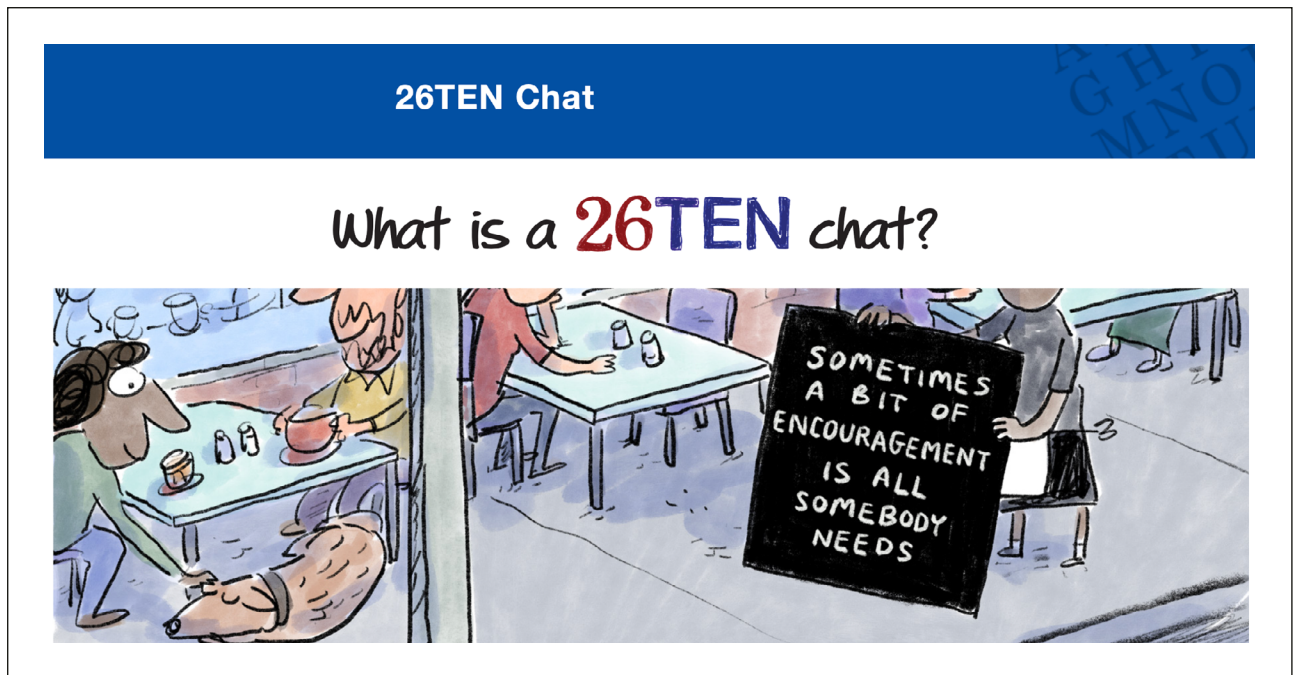




Want to know more?

Tasmanian organisation **26TEN** has information about how to talk to an adult about literacy.

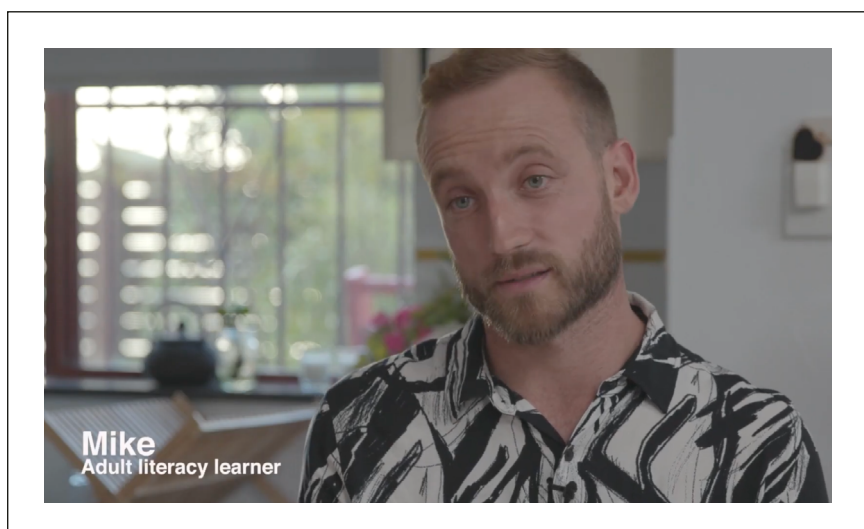
Their chat starters can be adjusted to suit anyone. Find them on the 26TEN website under [26TEN Chat](#)



Adult literacy student Mike talks to adult literacy teacher Adam about taking the first step and calling The Reading Writing Hotline.

Mike's advice is **"Don't be ashamed, ring The Hotline, and back yourself!"**

Watch here



## What can I do as an individual?

The Reading Writing Hotline hears from many people who are surprised by the Australian statistics or moved by the experiences of adults facing literacy barriers. Often they want to get involved and help where they can.

Some ways to take action:

- **Volunteer** as a literacy tutor – ring the Reading Writing Hotline on 1300 6 555 06 to find out what services are nearby. Helping an adult to improve their literacy is different to helping a child, so do get some training. Adult learning is a professional field and there's lots of information available.

[Information and Advice for Adult Literacy Tutors \(readingwritinghotline.edu.au\)](http://readingwritinghotline.edu.au)

- **Change the narrative** - One of the biggest barriers for adults is caused by the shame they feel. Changing the way society views adult literacy could make a big difference. Be considerate with the way you talk about the issue (*see p16: How can I talk about the challenges some adults have with reading and writing?*).

Listen to what people have to say and pay attention to their message: Don't judge people by what their writing looks like (the spelling, the punctuation, the grammar – these are just the surface features).

### Want to know more?

The President of the **Australian Council for Adult Literacy** (ACAL)<sup>7</sup> explains:

*Taking every opportunity to talk about adult literacy and sharing the issues and possible solutions is something I encourage you all to do. If we can change the attitude of just one person by talking about reducing the stigma and shame we cause as a society by judging adults experiencing literacy challenges there could be a ripple effect. Perhaps that one person goes on to support or encourage one other person who has some amazing things to share, but has not yet found their voice. And perhaps their voice is one that matters!*

*No action is too small. Each time we remind someone to use kinder words, to pay attention to the message and not the surface features, and to push back on unnecessarily complex and wordy forms and texts, we have the potential to make the world a readable place for all of us.*



## What can workplaces do for their employees?

Workplace literacy matters. All workers need reading, writing and maths skills to work safely and comply with standards – on-site, in the field and in the office. Better communication skills improve the way workers understand and follow safety requirements and regulations, and their ability to comply with standards.

### Want to know more?

The Reading Writing Hotline website has more information about workplace literacy. The information covers:

- Why workplace literacy matters
- Case studies of workplaces who improved their outcomes by addressing literacy and numeracy demands

Read more on The Reading Writing Hotline website: [\*Benefits for Employers on providing Training - Reading Writing Hotline\*](#)



*There are not many jobs where you don't need to read or write.*

Addressing the literacy demands of the workplace can lead to better morale, better workplace relations, better service, and productivity gains. People in the workplace struggling with their reading may be too embarrassed to ask for help and may silently leave their job, due to shame.

## Want to know more?

Watch **The Ai Group Centre for Education and Training** webinar *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy 101: What employers need to know*.

The webinar covers key concepts and discusses strategies to overcome barriers around language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in the workplace.

## Watch here

[Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy 101: What employers need to know | AiGroup](#)

or on VOCEDplus here:

[Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy 101: What employers need to know \(vimeo.com\)](#)

There are **two ways workplaces can support their own employees**:

- 1** Do an audit of all the reading, writing and numeracy your employees need. Find out if you could change the demands of the workplace to better suit your workforce.
- 2** Support employees to increase their literacy.



## Want to know more?

The Ideas That Work series of videos presents key information about literacy and numeracy in workplaces.

This video explains what language, literacy and numeracy means in the workplace:

<https://www.ideasthatwork.com.au/what-works-for-lln/what-are-the-language-literacy-and-numeracy-skills/>

This video looks at practical ideas for workplaces:

<https://www.ideasthatwork.com.au/what-works-for-lln/what-you-can-do-about-workplace-literacy-and-numeracy/>

These videos were funded under the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015.

## CASE STUDY

### 26TEN Tasmania

In Tasmania the 26TEN program<sup>8</sup> has adopted the idea that workplace literacy is everyone's responsibility. You can read about business success stories on the website:

### Want to read more?

<https://26ten.tas.gov.au/stories/Pages/26TEN-Week-Stories.aspx>

[Build Your Business \(26TEN.tas.gov.au\)](https://26ten.tas.gov.au)



How do we do an audit of all the reading, writing and numeracy our employees need?

- **Look** - Walk through the workplace and **look** at everything your employees need to read. Take photos to capture all the texts.
- **Ask** - Talk to your employees. **Ask** them to show you the things they must read to do their job well. Ask them to show you the things they don't need to read. If you have a good relationship with the employees and they feel supported, they might tell you what things are challenging to read. They might also tell you what's missing.
- Do the same with writing needed in the workplace.
- **Review - Read** the communication that comes from management. Is there...
  - ◆ too much?
  - ◆ too little?
  - ◆ unnecessarily complex language and explanations?

Does management understand how to match their writing to the language and literacy of the employees?

- **Seek help** - from a language, literacy and numeracy teacher who can both help you with the audit and suggest solutions. Decide what absolutely must be kept and what could be changed to make the workplace easier to succeed in.
- **Involve everyone.** Make literacy everyone's business.



## CASE STUDY

### Ideas that work – Unitywater

Unitywater introduced a workplace-wide training program with help from a literacy and numeracy teacher. They looked at the literacy needs of their processes and adjusted them. For example, they used more symbols rather than words, and changed to easy to use instructions.

### Watch here

[Unitywater Case Study – Ideas That Work](#)

This video was funded under the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015.

## How do we support employees to increase their literacy?

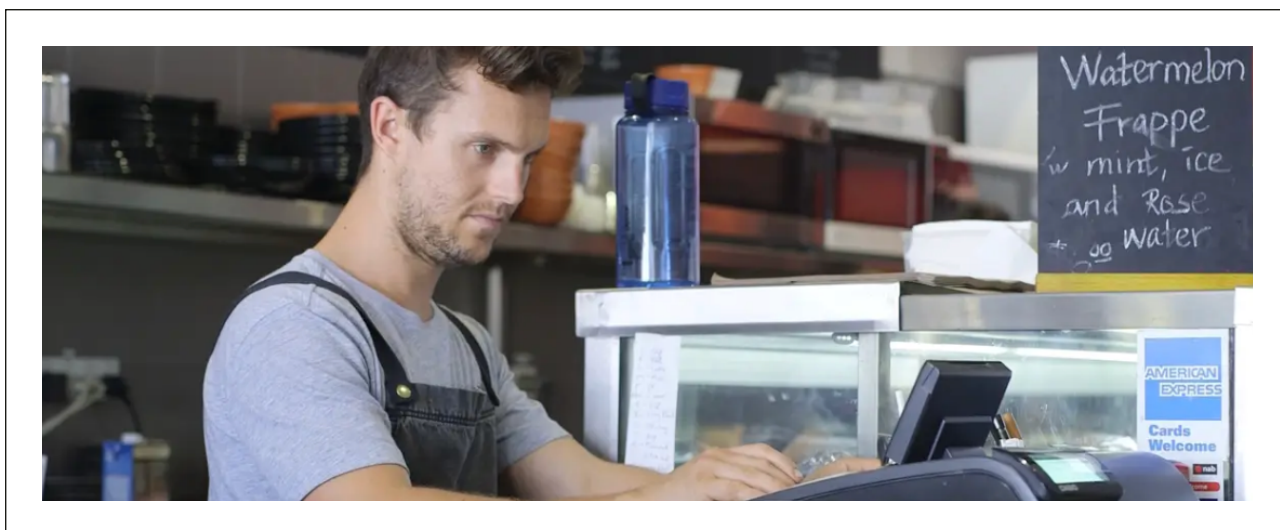
Support your employees to increase their skills by:

- Supporting their attendance at adult literacy classes
- Running a workplace literacy program
- Training your staff to understand adult literacy needs so they can better support each other and your customers.
- Employing a language, literacy and numeracy teacher to provide professional development.



## Want to know more?

Jill is an expert literacy teacher who has taught successful workplace literacy programs. In this video she explains the benefits and how to get started.



## Watch here

Ring the Reading Writing Hotline on 1300 6 555 06 to find out about Government workplace programs and funding. They have current information about programs such as The Foundation Skills for Your Future Program.

The **Foundation Skills for Your Future Program** is a Commonwealth Government training program that helps working Australians improve their skills. It provides:

- Flexible workplace training projects that are employer or industry-specific
- Either accredited or non-accredited training aimed at up to Certificate II level.

The Foundation Skills for Your Future Program delivers training in:

- Reading
- Writing
- English language
- Maths
- Digital skills

Find out more here: Foundation Skills for your Future

<https://www.dese.gov.au/foundation-skills-your-future-program>





*This section is essential reading if you want to reach your customers!*

## What can our business do to write effectively and have a better chance of reaching our customers?

To write effectively, you need to understand who you are writing for and adjust your writing to suit them. **The first two steps are:**

- 1 Review what you know about your customers
- 2 Audit your messaging.

### 1 How do we review what we know about our customers?

- **Talk to front-line staff.** They may have an idea of how your customers respond to your forms, information, signs and other messaging. Provide them with an ongoing feedback system to keep you up-to-date as your processes and/or your customers change.
- **Consider the Australian statistics.** 43% of Australians can experience barriers when they deal with everyday literacy<sup>2</sup> so you can probably assume that 43% of your customers do too.
- **Talk to stakeholders** who know your customers, such as the Reading Writing Hotline, organisations you often deal with, and consumer groups.



## CASE STUDY

### NPS Medicinewise listens to consumers

In 2022, **NPS Medicinewise** asked consumers to tell them what it's like to read health information. Hearing from real users is a powerful way to understand your customers.

Shelle spoke about misreading dosage on medication and how easy it can be to mix up amounts, especially when you're feeling unwell.

[Watch here](#)

## CASE STUDY

### TAC talks to stakeholders who know their customers

**The Western Australian Training Accreditation Council (TAC)** reviewed their messaging with the aim of giving clearer information to training organisations. The information was about meeting literacy and learning needs so TAC spoke to three stakeholders who knew the customers and the issues (The Reading Writing Hotline, The Australian Council for Adult Literacy, and The Western Australia Adult Literacy Council).

As a result, TAC created new, easy to follow information sheets and made a podcast where the president of the Western Australia Adult Literacy Council joined them to discuss the issues.

TAC also invited all stakeholders to give feedback as part of the website update.

[Listen to the podcast](#)



## 2 How do we audit our messaging?

- Use the information about adult literacy in Australia that you've read in this section to look at your business with fresh eyes. Walk through the business and look at everything your customers need to read and write. Physically walk through if you have buildings or office space and do an online walk-through for your web presence.
- Ask your customers how they feel about your signs, forms, documents, advertising and any other texts you use. Take note of what they like but also be prepared to hear what they don't like!
- Carry out a formal audit of everything your customers need to read and write.
- Use readability tools as a starting point to understand the complexity of your texts.
- Use tools developed by other organisations that are available online.



## CASE STUDY

### HelloTAS leads the way with free tools

**The HeLLO Tas! Toolkit** has been developed collaboratively by the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS), Public Health Services (Tasmanian Government) and Primary Health Tasmania.

### About the Toolkit | HeLLO Tas

The toolkit is made by community industry workers for community industry and smaller community health organisations. Many of the ideas could inspire you even if you're in a different sector - so take a look!

There's free downloadable resources such as checklists to help you review what you know about your customers and audit your messaging. You can complete these checklists at your own pace, individually or as a group. They include hints to:

- Get customer feedback
- Involve customers
- Develop a workplace culture that supports literacy practices
- Support the literacy of the workforce
- Cater for diverse communities
- Check how customers find your information
- Check how easy it is to understand your communications
- Demonstrate leadership

In the toolkit you will also find:

- Practical tools and resources
- Fact sheets and information to use when you talk to others in your organisation
- Dozens of ideas for how to improve the health literacy of your organisation.

[See it on the HelloTas website](#)



## Readability tools

There are many tools you can find online that will give you a measure of how readable your writing is. The tools use different methods, and they can be a good starting place if you are wondering if your texts are reader-friendly. A few common readability tools are:

- SMOG or the Simple Measure Of Gobbledygook
- Flesch Reading Ease
- Gunning Fog Index
- The program you use on your computer may also have tools that help you write more effectively. For example, in Microsoft Word there are tools in the Review section that check spelling, grammar, and accessibility.

## Is a readability tool enough?

If you've used a readability tool you might think 'job done'. However, the tools are often said to aim at a Year 8 level (USA). Even if we could define what a year 8 level really looks like, we know that grade levels don't describe adult literacy. We also know that many Australian adults will still be challenged by texts approved by a readability tool. The best idea is to use the tool and then do a sense check. Remember what you know about your customers or readers, and think about how you can improve your message. The readability tool is just a first step.

### CASE STUDY

#### A readability tool developed for the health sector

**The Sydney Health Literacy Lab** has developed a new online health literacy editor called the SHeLL Editor<sup>9</sup>. The Editor gives real-time feedback on how easy texts are to understand. It gives more than just the Grade reading score. It will also point out things like uncommon words, public health jargon (and give alternatives), passive voice, and use of acronyms.

#### Read more

[Health Literacy Editor](#)



*The aim is always to be more effective in how you reach customers.*

These case studies give examples of how organisations have audited their messaging.

## CASE STUDY

### NPS Medicinewise asked customers and staff for feedback and used tools to audit their messaging.

NPS Medicinewise **asked consumers and staff for feedback** on their health information.

They looked at 50 texts on their website. The consumers were given **tools to judge how easy the texts were to understand and act on**. The staff **used tools to assess the readability**.

Then they met at **interactive workshops to discuss** the findings and come up with solutions to make the information more reader-friendly.

In these presentations, Jemma Gonzalez, Consumer Engagement Lead for NPS Medicinewise, talks about the project. (Press the picture of the speaker on each slide for audio).

### Watch here

What-is-health-literacy: <https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/What-is-health-literacy.pptx>

The-method-NPS-Medicinewise: <https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/The-method-NPS-Medicinewise.pptx>

Findings-and-recommendations: <https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Findings-and-recommendations.pptx>



## CASE STUDY



### The NSW Government busts sludge!

The **NSW Behavioural Insights Unit** uses the latest research about how people really think and act to help NSW Government agencies deliver better services to citizens. They send a strong message to NSW Government agencies about being reader-friendly.

**What is sludge?** Sludge is excessive or unjustified frictions that make it difficult for customers to achieve their goals.

There are two important parts to their work:

- 1 The Sludge guides
- 2 The Sludge-a-thon

### The Sludge guides

The team have produced six guides. Each guide gives a starting point, a quick reference guide, and practical steps to take. They include examples of success and of research showing why it's important to bust the sludge. The guides cover common channels that organisations use to communicate to customers:

- Reducing sludge in forms
- Reducing sludge in letters and emails
- Reducing sludge in text messages
- Reducing sludge on phone and face-to-face
- Reducing sludge on websites
- Reducing sludge in apps

The guides were created by the NSW Behavioural Insights Unit, with assistance from the Behavioural Insights Team, the Reading Writing Hotline, and NSW Government partners.

### Read more

[Behavioural Insights Unit guides | NSW Government](#)



## CASE STUDY

### The Sludge-a-thon

The NSW Behavioural Insights Unit runs practical sessions to bust sludge. Government teams from different areas come together for workshops. Each team simplifies one important process from their area. The teams include a range of frontline staff, experts, and managers so there are voices that cover all parts of the customer experience. The teams are supported to understand what isn't working (the sludge) and why (through a sludge audit). They revise both the messaging, and the steps customers need to take and then they create more effective and accessible processes. The workshops include information about adult literacy and numeracy in Australia. This understanding is essential for creating communications that are clear, readable, and easy to engage with. The teams are given ongoing support to implement the changes.

### Read more

[NSW Government Behavioural Insights Unit website: Behavioural Insights Unit | NSW Government](#)

or contact [sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sludge@customerservice.nsw.gov.au)





## Digital literacy

For many of us, the online world has made finding information and contacting people easy – everything is at our fingertips. However, digital literacy has become an everyday challenge for some. As information moves online and businesses decrease their in-person service, those who face digital literacy barriers are more and more disadvantaged.

This became very evident during covid pandemic lockdowns. Local services were no longer open. People who usually got help from a teacher, a librarian, a trusted community member, or a friend were isolated.

Even for some people with high literacy, using digital platforms can be difficult because you need reading skills plus technology skills.

Reading Writing Hotline research<sup>10</sup> found that when faced with online forms, digital literacy barriers included scanning and uploading documents, having no home computer, not being able to afford data, not being able to access public computers, not having an email address, and having little or no experience using computers.

Research<sup>11</sup> shows that around 34% of Australians aged 50 years and over (about 2.7 million people) have either low digital literacy levels or don't use digital devices or the internet.

When you think about your readers, remember to take digital literacy into account. Ask yourself:

- **Can everyone get online?**
- **Can they easily find my information?**
- **Can those who do find it read it/fill it in/understand it/take the action I hope for?**

### CASE STUDY

#### NPS Medicinewise listens to consumers

In 2022, **NPS Medicinewise** asked consumers to tell them what it's like to find information online.

Neville spoke about the long and confusing instructions for doing a covid test at home.

His work-around was to find a video online. However, the next time he wanted to watch, he couldn't find it again!

Digital literacy can present barriers to locating and using information

Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6hVUNMRCx0>



## Numeracy – using maths in adult life

In Australia, around 53% of adults are challenged by everyday numeracy tasks.<sup>2</sup>

Maths in everyday life often includes reading, writing, speaking and listening. We call this numeracy, as it is not just maths. It's the use of language, literacy and mathematical ideas to solve real world problems. You use numeracy skills to pay your bills, manage your money, follow a map, interpret a graph, measure when cooking or buying furniture, to read clothing sizes, and to understand health information such as medicine dosage.

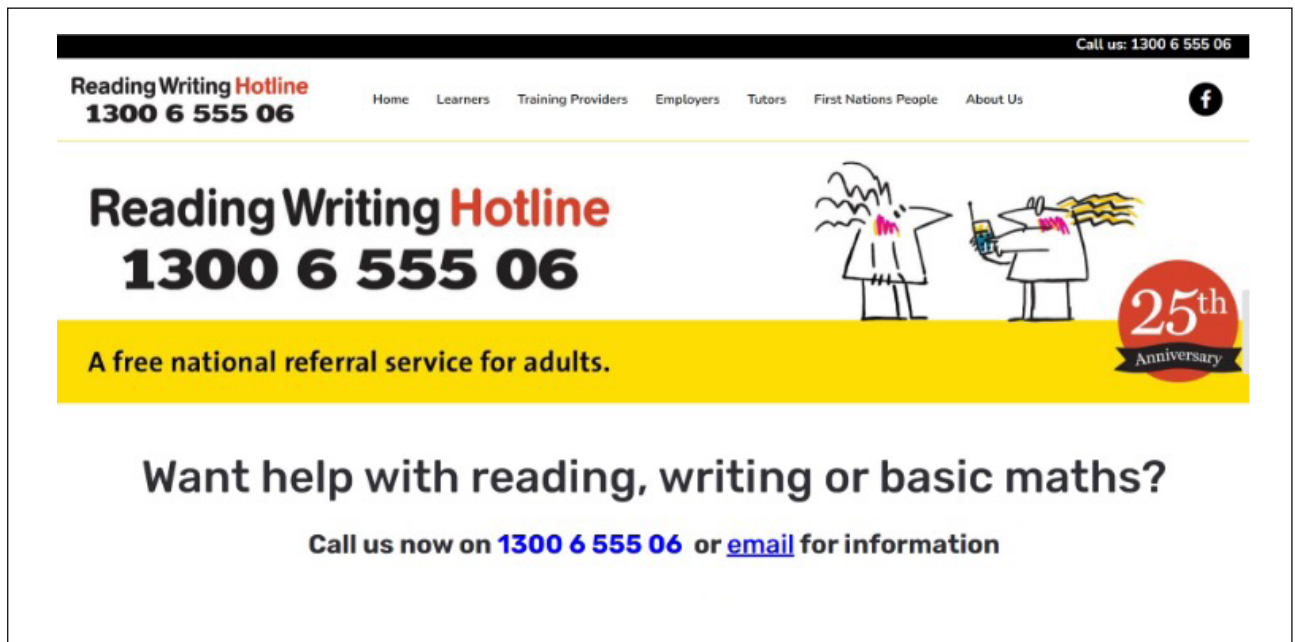
Do you ask for numerical information? If you ask for dates, ages, phone numbers, or monetary amounts, check that it's easy for your readers to respond. You can make it easy to respond by:

- Giving examples, such as the date format needed
- Pre-filling information in online forms
- Giving clear guidance on where and how to get help if needed.

If you give information that includes numbers or maths concepts, check that the way you present the information is consistent. For example, always write dates in the same format and write large numbers in a consistent style.

Don't bury important numbers in too much text because the amount of reading might prevent your readers from finding them easily and quickly. Use layout, size and colour to make your numbers stand out. For example, the Reading Writing Hotline is careful to present their phone number so it's easy to scan and find. On the landing page they repeat the phone number 5 times so it's very easy to find. They also write it with gaps between the numbers that make it easy to read and copy.





The screenshot shows the homepage of the Reading Writing Hotline. At the top right, it says "Call us: 1300 6 555 06". The main header includes the logo "Reading Writing Hotline 1300 6 555 06" and a navigation menu with links for Home, Learners, Training Providers, Employers, Tutors, First Nations People, and About Us. A Facebook icon is also present. Below the header, the logo and phone number are repeated in a larger font. To the right is a cartoon illustration of two figures, one holding a mobile phone. A yellow banner below the logo states "A free national referral service for adults." To the right of the banner is a "25th Anniversary" badge. The main content area asks "Want help with reading, writing or basic maths?" and provides the contact information: "Call us now on 1300 6 555 06 or [email](#) for information".

*A world written by highly educated or highly literate people  
can be difficult for others to navigate.*

This part of the guide has looked at who might be reading your texts. This was about understanding, or knowing your readers.

You might now be asking:

*Am I reaching everyone? Or am I missing 43% of my readers because my messages are too complex?*

In the next part we will look at **designing texts**. You will find out about using simple strategies to make your information quicker and easier to read.



## Part 3: Designing – Using simple strategies to make your information quicker and easier to read

In this part we will look at how you can write effectively. This section will go through some easy steps that you, your colleagues, or your employees can take to help others understand your information.

To write effectively to give information to customers, staff, or the public just check the 3 Ls:

The **3** Ls

- > Language
- > Layout
- > Location

### Language: Use plain language

Everyone can use plain language to make texts reader-friendly. You don't need specialised training. Plain language suits all readers.

*Plain language is not dumbing down your writing – it's communicating clearly and concisely.*

Plain language is quick and easy to use. The basic steps are:

- 1 Check your vocabulary or word choices**
- 2 Write simple sentences**
- 3 Use consistent numeracy information**
- 4 Choose graphics that support the message**



# 1 Check your vocabulary or word choices

Familiar words are easier to read and that means they are easier to understand. When we read, we slow down when the words are unfamiliar. We might need to reread or skip words. This can cause difficulty with comprehension.

- Choose words that are easy to read and understand.
- Use common, short words.
- If you need to use **technical words**, explain them.
- If you need to use uncommon **abbreviations**, explain them.
- Use **personal pronouns** if it suits your tone and if it is inclusive.
- Use an **active voice**.
- Use the same spelling where words can be spelled (or spelt) differently.
- Use the same terms to describe things (or items).
- Stick with the **same tense**.



What do all the technical terms above (in bold) mean?

<p><b>Technical words</b></p>	<p>Technical words are also called <b>jargon or terminology</b>. They are the words used in a profession or specialist area. They are known by people in that area, but they are not commonly used by the public.</p> <p>Sometimes it is important to use the exact technical word, so when you need to use technical words – explain them.</p> <p><b>See the Case study</b> on p 40 <i>Case study – NSW Health explains technical terms</i></p> <p><b>See the Case study</b> on p 40 <i>Case study – Drop the Jargon Day</i></p>
<p><b>Abbreviations</b></p>	<p>Abbreviations are shortened or contracted forms of words or phrases. Common abbreviations like NSW, Vic, TAFE, Aust, Rd and DOB are OK. Other abbreviations that are not well known need to be explained.</p> <p>Write the words in full the first time you use them in your text and put the abbreviation in a bracket. After that, you can just use the abbreviation.</p> <p><b>Read more:</b> <i>The Australian Government Style Manual</i><sup>12</sup> is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. Use it to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of users. The section on abbreviations has useful tips on when and why to limit the use of abbreviations: <a href="#">Abbreviations   Style Manual</a></p>
<p><b>Personal pronouns</b></p>	<p>Personal pronouns take the place of a person's name: <i>I, you, he, she, it, we, they, me, him, her, us</i> and <i>them</i>.</p> <p>Personal pronouns can be used to speak to your reader in an engaging way. For example, refer to the reader as 'you' (<i>You can submit the form...</i>) and to your organisation as 'we' (<i>We will email our response...</i>)</p> <p>When using pronouns, it's important to be inclusive and respectful of your audience.</p> <p><b>Read more:</b> <i>The Australian Government Style Manual</i><sup>12</sup> is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. Use it to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of users. The manual has useful information about <b>using language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia's peoples:</b> <a href="#">Inclusive language   Style Manual</a></p>



## Active voice

An active voice is easier to read because:

- It uses fewer words
- the writing is more concise
- it creates a faster-moving narrative, which is more engaging for readers
- sentence structure is not complex so there are fewer grammatical mistakes.

In active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action.

- ✓ *'Write your answers below'*
- ✗ *'Answers should be written below'.*
- ✓ *'Complete this table with the correct words'*
- ✗ *'This table should be completed with...'*

If you are confused about the difference between active and passive, a useful guideline is to start the sentence with an active verb. In the examples above, write and complete are active verbs.

**Read more:** The plain English information from **26TEN** explains the active voice, gives examples, and helps you get started.

26TEN is a network of people and organisations working together to improve adult literacy and numeracy rates in Tasmania. The 26TEN online guide to plain English is for anyone who needs to communicate information to others and wants to do that as clearly as possible. Step 3 has information about using active voice: Step 3: [Write your content \(26ten.tas.gov.au\)](http://26ten.tas.gov.au)

## Tense

There are three tenses in writing:

- The past - things that have already happened (The section was open)
- The present - things that are happening right now, or things that are continuous (The section is open)
- The future - things that have yet to happen (The section will open)

You can write in any tense but be consistent. Changing tense makes comprehension difficult.



## CASE STUDY

### NSW Health explains technical terms

In health, technical words can be hard to avoid. **NSW Health** have a webpage that explains technical terms used in communications about covid. It has been developed by **Council for Intellectual Disability**.

It is in plain language. There is a downloadable and printable version.

[Read it here](#)

## CASE STUDY

### Drop the Jargon Day

Drop the Jargon is a day for professionals in Australian health, community services and local government to use plain language. It is important because many Australians have trouble understanding and using information provided by organisations. They also have trouble navigating complicated systems like healthcare services. Jargon, technical terms and acronyms make it harder for people with low health literacy to understand and use information.

The project started in 2014, when organisations interested in clear communication were looking to build on the work they had done at the **Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health** as graduates of their Health Literacy Course.

#### Free tools to use:

- Examples of why plain language is important
- Six basic ways to reduce confusing jargon
- Free resources:
  - Use plain language
  - Have plain language descriptions of confusing terms at your fingertips
  - Check understanding
  - Low English proficiency

The *Drop the Jargon Day* website has more information: [Drop the Jargon - Drop The Jargon Day](#)





## 2 Write simple sentences

- Aim for short sentences.
- Short sentences are easy to understand. A short sentence limits the content, which helps comprehension.
- Longer sentences are OK sometimes. Different sentences lengths can help readers stay engaged.
- Be concise. Don't give long explanations if they are not needed. Avoid unnecessary words.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

#### 26TEN resources have information, examples and checklists

- **26TEN:** The plain English guide is for anyone who needs to communicate information to others and wants to do that as clearly as possible. It has been produced by 26TEN, a network of people and organisations working together to improve adult literacy and numeracy rates in Tasmania: [Communicate Clearly: About this guide \(26ten.tas.gov.au\)](http://26ten.tas.gov.au)
- **26TEN** have a checklist to help your organisation or business: [26TEN Organisation Plain English Checklist FINAL.pdf](#)
- **26TEN** have a checklist for writing documents and forms: [26TEN Plain English Checklist July 2019 FINAL.pdf](#)



## CASE STUDY

### The Fair Work Commission

The **Fair Work Commission** is re-drafting awards in plain language. They follow a planned process to do this:

- 1 Consulted with stakeholders and developed plain language guidelines
- 2 Ran a pilot project to create a plain language Pharmacy Award
- 3 Employed a plain language expert to redraft the Pharmacy Award using plain language principles without altering the legal effect
- 4 Tested the new award with employees and employers covered by the Pharmacy Award

The results were used to inform re-drafting of other awards.

Read more here: [Plain language re-drafting | Fair Work Commission \(fwc.gov.au\)](#)

## CASE STUDY

### The Law and Justice Foundation

Legal information is often complex and difficult to read. **The Law and Justice Foundation** show that legal information can be presented in a reader-friendly way.

They explain that plain language helps people understand the law and the legal assistance available to them. It can improve an agency's service delivery. For example, when people clearly understand who they need to contact, or the process they need to follow, or how to complete a form, it can save time and avoid errors.

The Foundation has a series of *How to Guides* and an online newsletter with plain language updates. The Plain Language Law (PLL) is a bimonthly email newsletter for anyone interested in plain language legal information and education resources and initiatives.

Read more here: [Law and Justice Foundation - Writing in plain language \(lawfoundation.net.au\)](#)

Subscribe to the newsletter: [Law and Justice Foundation - Plain Language Law Newsletter \(PLL\) \(lawfoundation.net.au\)](#)



### 3 Use consistent numeracy information

In some texts, there are conventions that need to be followed. If you have a choice, use these tips to be reader-friendly:

- Be consistent. Choose a style and stick to it.
- Numerals are easier to read than number words. eg: 50 not fifty.
- Use commas for 1,000 and above. A comma separates the digits into groups of 3 (from right to left). eg: 6,345 23,694,000 1,000,065.  
Screen readers have difficulty with spaces in numbers so use a comma with no space.
- For large numbers that are rounded, use a numeral and word eg: 5 million 23 million.

#### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

#### The standard for Australian Government writing and editing

*The Australian Government Style Manual*<sup>12</sup> is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. Use it to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of users.

They have guidelines to help you use mathematical language consistently and meet accessibility requirements: [Numbers and measurements | Style Manual](#)



## 4 Choose graphics that support the message

Pictures and other visuals, such as graphs and tables, can act as signposts for readers.

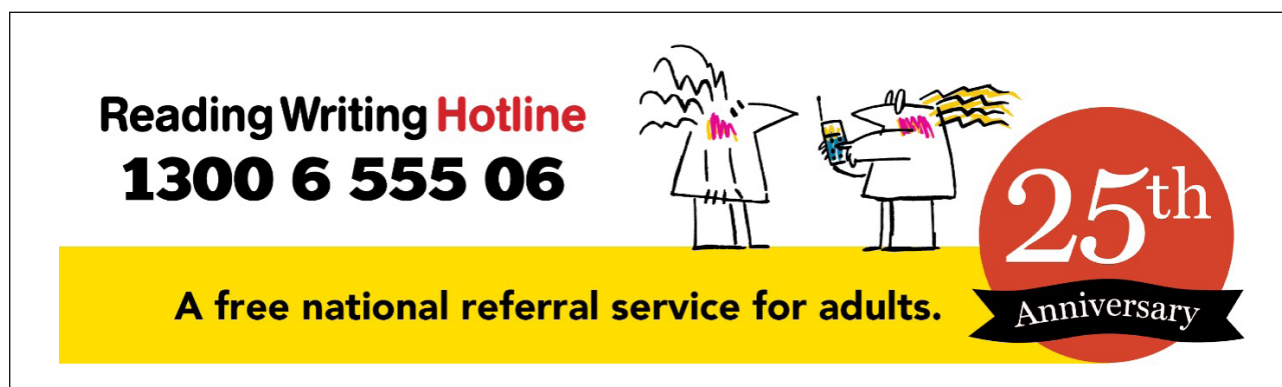
Some tips:

- Choose graphics that can take the place of written text. This can reduce the amount of reading.
- Choose graphics that support your information.
- Don't add graphics just for the sake of it. White space is better for readers than graphics that don't help comprehension or add to the message. If graphics are not clear they can just create confusion.
- Use accessible images. Add text alternatives (called alt text) that describe them for people with disabilities who are using screen readers and other technology. Adding alt text to photos allows screen readers to tell the reader what the image is of, or what it means. Alt text is also useful because it is displayed in place of an image if an image file cannot be loaded.

Add Alt text:

- ◆ Right click on the picture
- ◆ Select Edit Alt Text
- ◆ Write your description

For the picture below we wrote: *Reading Writing Hotline Banner. 25 year anniversary. Call 1300 6 55 06*



## CASE STUDY

### The Reading Writing Hotline uses menu pictures

The Hotline uses images to draw attention to the menu choices.

The images relate to the topic.

The text is minimal.

Who needs to improve their literacy skills?



For Learners



For First Nations people



For Tutors and Teachers



For Employers

[Read it here](#)



## Layout: Use signposts

Adult readers want to go straight to the information they need, so they skim to find what they want. They use **layout features as signposts**. We want clear and easy to navigate signposts, so readers engage with our texts and understand our message.

The important signposts that help readers navigate our texts are:

- **Headings**
- **Sub-headings**
- **Bold font**
- **Colours**
- **Links**
- **Images**
- **Lists (using dot points) and numbered lists (showing order)**
- **Tables**
- **Borders**
- **Page breaks**
- **Font style and size**
- **contrast**

### CASE STUDY

#### COVID-19 vaccination – easy read resources

**The Department of Health and Aged Care** has a set of COVID-19 vaccination – easy read resources.

They are printable fact sheets about COVID-19 in easy read format.

They use layout to make reading easier: bullet points, spacing, bold, headings and subheadings, and pictures.

See them here: [COVID-19 vaccination – Easy Read resources | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)



## Other points to remember when you design the layout:

- Logical order makes easier reading.
- A clear visual structure with an easy-to-read font is quicker to scan and read.
- White space helps readers.
  - ◆ It looks more inviting.
  - ◆ It allows them to skim quickly.
  - ◆ It is not as overwhelming as dense chunks of text.
- For text that has many ideas, use paragraphs. They let readers pause and reflect on their comprehension before they move to the next idea. Paragraphs also help readers skim to find relevant information.
- Chunk information by using line breaks. Line breaks:
  - ◆ help readers understand one idea at a time
  - ◆ make information stand out
  - ◆ aid skim reading
- Readers with colour blindness or limited vision can struggle with grey text or coloured backgrounds.
- Left aligned text is easier to read. Justified text, which aligns to both sides of the page, is harder to read because the spacing between letters interrupts visual processing.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

#### The standard for Australian Government writing and editing

*The Australian Government Style Manual*<sup>12</sup> is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. Use it to create clear and consistent content that meets the needs of users.

The information on **structuring content** will help you control the **rhythm** of your writing. It has information to help you write effectively using **structure, headings, links, lists, paragraphs, tables, text boxes, and call-outs**.

Read here: [Structuring content | Style Manual](#)



## Location: Make it easy to find

If your information is online, make it easy to find.

Digital literacy and access are barriers you can address with clear links and accessible information.

### CASE STUDY

#### The ATO uses a landing page

The ATO uses location to guide readers to the information they need. They locate easy to read guides in the same place. For example:

- What is a tax file number?
- How to link your myGov to your tax and super
- Proving who you are to link your myGov account to the ATO
- If you can't lodge or pay on time (easier to read, without images)

See them here: [Easier to read information landing page](#)

## Does the location change the layout?

**Yes,** Your location should change the way you use layout. We read screens differently to printed texts, and we read large screens differently to smaller screens. The layout needs to suit the location and format of your messages.

- On larger devices, we tend to start in the middle of the screen, then scan outwards. Eg on a laptop.
- On smaller devices, we tend to scan the whole screen, then scan for signposts. Eg on a phone.
- In print, we tend to read from top left to bottom right.

Use signposts to help your readers find information. Help them scan to go quickly to the parts they need.





## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

### The HeLLO Tas! Toolkit

**The HeLLO Tas! Toolkit** has been developed collaboratively by the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS), Public Health Services (Tasmanian Government) and Primary Health Tasmania. Their toolkit includes information about designing online content and how to locate information to be reader-friendly.

Read it here: [Tool 12 - Designing a Health Literate Website.pdf \(hellotas.org.au\)](http://hellotas.org.au)

## CASE STUDY

### Find Legal Answers, State Library NSW

The **Find Legal Answers website** provides legal information to the people of NSW. People can find online books, fact sheets, links to legal organisations and sources of help all in one place.

The landing page uses headings and formatting to make navigation easy. The site helps readers find what they need with clear signposts such as Where do I start? It uses clear navigation at the top of the site, eg Books online and Getting help.

Read more here: [Find Legal Answers | State Library of NSW](http://findlegalanswers.nsw.gov.au)



## Part 4: Reimagining - Presenting your information in different ways

In Part 3, we looked at how to write effectively by using plain language, reader-friendly layout, and making texts accessible and easy to find. Following this advice, you will reach most of your readers.

However, there will still be some people who can't read your information. Almost 15% of Australian adults read and write very little.<sup>2</sup> Others will have difficulty with online information (see Digital Literacy p 33). They might be the people you are trying to reach.

In this section, we want to encourage you to think about why you need to present written text.

### Is there a different or better way to provide your information?

How did you find out about the last three things you bought? Did you read about them, or did you see or hear an engaging text, such as a video, a picture, or a radio ad?

Most effective communication includes visual and auditory messaging.

In this section we ask you to think creatively by:

- Giving a demonstration
- Using an audio option
- Using a visual and audio option
- Talking to people directly
- Providing a phone line
- Providing translations
- Providing interpreters
- Using technology.



## Give a demonstration

If you want people to take action, a demonstration could be as effective, or more effective, than written instructions.

### CASE STUDY

#### The ATO shows how by using videos to give information

The Australian Taxation Office is using a new type of product on [ato.gov.au](http://ato.gov.au)

The 'How to lodge a tax return' video on the [Tax essentials](#) page is interactive. It provides the user with a number of options they can explore. The video covers three themes:

- getting ready to lodge your tax return;
- how to lodge your tax return correctly;
- and, what happens after you've lodged.

## Give an audio option

Can you let people hear your information? Options could include:

- an audio button that reads out the text on your website
- use of universal design so screen readers can access your text
- a podcast or other recording

### CASE STUDY

#### The ATO tells how by using podcasts to give information

The Australian Taxation Office is using a new type of product on their website: [ATO podcast - in your language | Australian Taxation Office](#).

These are an easy way for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities to keep updated with tax and super information. Episodes are released monthly in Arabic, Korean, Vietnamese and Mandarin, and cover topics to make managing tax and super easier from lodging your tax return, starting a small business, staying safe from scams, and more.



## Give a visual and audio option

Can you let people both see and hear your information?

This is a powerful way to introduce your message, give a summary, and link to further information.

### CASE STUDY

## Central Coast Community news presents a summary of the local newspaper

With each issue of the Coast Community News, a Facebook post is created with the headlines in a **visual and audio format**. Short interviews are included. The clips go for about 5 minutes.

The newspaper issues 220,000 print editions with 300,000+ regular monthly website readers.

Their Facebook presentations have over 13,000 **regular followers and reaches many others**.

They also broadcast on community radio to provide another listening option.

**Watch** Home Live Shows Explore Saved Videos Following

Coast Community News posted a video to playlist Central Coast Video News 5 at 5. 15h · 🌐

Following

Overview Comments

Central Coast Newspaper's Weekly News 5@5 for the second week of August 2022.  
In the bulletin this week:

1. Mass fish deaths at Vales Point in lake Macquarie –
2. Diesel prices hurting local budgets –
3. MP is calling out rental prices –
4. Coast Shelter's big sleepout success –
5. The Mariners are getting a good vibe –
6. A very real love story in song at Laycock Street –

All of these stories and many many more, written by local journalists can be found on our news website  
<https://coastcommunitynews.com.au/news/video-news/>  
without a paywall and in this weekend's print of the Coast Community News.



## Talk to people directly

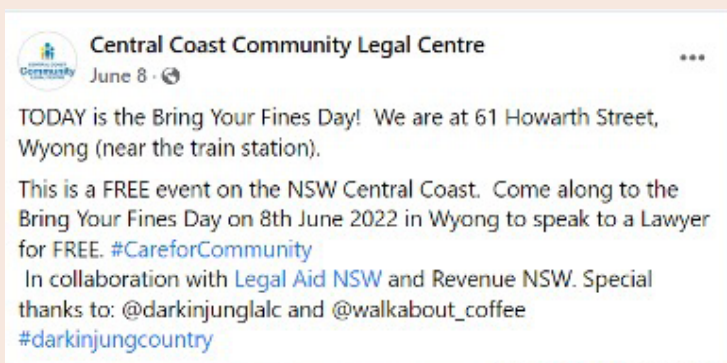
Many people still like to deal with a real person. Even if you don't have permanent front-line staff, you can consider options for people to meet face to face, such as at special events or online.

### CASE STUDY

#### The Central Coast Community Legal Centre runs a drop-in day

**Bring your fines day** is an opportunity for people facing literacy challenges to talk with someone about their paperwork without judgement.

As with most creative approaches to helping people deal with complex literacy demands, **the day is a great for everyone – not just people in the community who need help with reading and form filling!**



## How to make the most of your frontline staff

Your frontline staff are the face of your organisation. They may deal with many people who have literacy issues. You can help your staff provide the best service to those clients or customers by educating them about the diverse levels of adult literacy in the community and giving them some simple tips.



## Educating your frontline staff

Develop a work culture where each staff member accepts that they have a responsibility to help the public understand your information.

- Tell your staff about adult literacy in Australia. You can use the information in Part 2 of this guide (*Part 2: Understanding – knowing your readers*) to begin to provide professional development.
- Use the Reading Writing Hotline website for more information to help the staff who meet your customers.
- Encourage your staff to use the **Teach-back method**. The teach-back method is a way of checking that your message has been understood. It is not a test of the listener's knowledge – it's about checking how well you have explained the information. To use the teach-back method:
  - 1 Chunk and check: If you have a lot of information to give, don't give it all at once. Break it up and check it's clear before you go on.
  - 2 Clarify and check again: You may need to explain things using a different approach, and then check again.
  - 3 Ask the client or customer to explain the information to you in their own words.
- Give your staff options for presenting information in a different way. For example, provide training on how to:
  - ◆ Rephrase (explain using different words)
  - ◆ Explain the key points
  - ◆ Point out the important information in written texts
  - ◆ Use plain language
  - ◆ Use open-ended questions to check understanding and to avoid shaming statements.



## CASE STUDY

### NPS Medicinewise listens to consumers

In 2022, **NPS Medicinewise** asked consumers to tell them what it's like to be given important information verbally.

Makere spoke about being given health information. She explained that remembering a lot of new information is difficult, especially if you are stressed or unwell. This is an example of where the teach-back approach could work.

### Watch the Video

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

### Teach-back – The Online Learning Module ([teachback.org](https://teachback.org/))<sup>13</sup>

**The Community Partnerships Unit, Directorate of Planning, Population Health and Equity, South East Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) and the Health Systems Improvement Unit, Deakin University** have developed a free online module to learn about teach-back and how to use it. It has been used successfully by over 12,000 health professionals across the world.

The aim of the project is to show the value of teach-back and how to use it.

The teach-back website is aimed at Health literacy, but the teach-back idea could be used in other fields, such as legal settings, service organisations, and any situation where front-line staff are giving information.

The developers have also created a consumer module for teach-back, called **check-back** which was developed by Monash University. You can see it here: <https://checkback.org/>



## Provide a phone line

Your frontline staff don't need to be in person. You could use a phone line answered by a real person. A real person can deal with individual needs.

### CASE STUDY

#### The Reading Writing Hotline

The Hotline has a phone number that has been promoted for decades through TV and radio jingles. The Reading Writing Hotline gets more than 4000 calls each year from adults seeking help with reading, writing and numeracy. By 2022, The Reading Writing Hotline had over 176 600 calls from adults seeking assistance.

**Reading Writing Hotline**  
**1300 6 555 06**



## Provide translations

**NAATI** is the national standards and certifying authority for translators and interpreters in Australia. It is the only organisation to issue certification to practitioners who work in the profession in Australia. NAATI is a not-for-profit company that is jointly owned by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The Online Directory has a list of currently certified practitioners. These are the people that can translate your documents or help with interpreting matters.

Website: [NAATI - home - NAATI](https://www.naati.gov.au/)





## Provide Interpreters

Interpreters can be for languages other than English, and for Auslan (Australian sign language).

**TIS National** is an interpreting service provided by the Department of Home Affairs. TIS National provides language services for people who do not speak English and for agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients.

TIS National has:

- Immediate phone interpreting
- ATIS automated immediate phone interpreting
- Pre-booked phone interpreting
- Pre-booked on-site interpreting
- Video interpreting
- A range of informative publications and promotional materials about TIS National services.

Website: [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\)](#)

## Use technology

Mobile phones have given adults with literacy gaps many ways to access text. For example, voice-to-text and text-to-voice apps.

When you write your information, check that it can be used by current technology tools.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The standard for Australian Government writing and editing: *the Australian Government Style Manual*<sup>12</sup> is for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content.

They have information about how people read and how to:

- Make content accessible
- Apply accessibility principles
- Design for accessibility and inclusion
- Cater for literacy and access
- Use inclusive language.

[Accessible and inclusive content | Style Manual](#)



## CASE STUDY

### An adult learner asks for technology

A student in an adult literacy class told us he sat for his boating license. Somebody read and scribed for him. Although this is a great option for many people, he felt uncomfortable in that environment. He explained that he had been practicing the same test online on the website and he was able to use text to voice on his phone:

*“So the technology to help people like myself is already there and working, so it wouldn't be too difficult to implement and save people like me the discomfort and embarrassment”.*

*We can create new opportunities  
by reimagining the way we present information*



## Part 5: Where to now?

### Ready to write effectively?

#### 1 Think about your readers

Is the reading and writing you are expecting reasonable?

If you can't find out about the literacy levels of your readers, you can assume that 43% of them will find everyday reading and writing challenging, and 53% will find numeracy difficult.

#### 2 Review your communications

Do you need to do an audit of what you expect people to read and write?

#### 3 Redesign your communications

For written texts, use plain language and reader-friendly layout. Check that the location is easy to find.

Can you reimagine your messaging style to give your information in a different way?

Use the case studies in this guide for inspiration.

Check the links we've provided for more details.

#### 4 Have a go

Get feedback from your readers, your staff, or your customers to check what works.

#### 5 Contact us at the Reading Writing Hotline

We'd love to hear about your progress and include your example in our next case studies!



## Thank you

Thank you to the following organisations for generously sharing their time and expertise:

- 26TEN Tasmania Strategy
- AI Group Centre for Education and Training
- Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL)
- Australian Public Service Commission (APSC)
- Australian Taxation Office (ATO)
- Behavioural Insights Unit – NSW Government
- Central Coast Community Legal Centre
- Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health
- Coast Community News
- Council for Intellectual Disability
- Fair Work Commission
- Foundation and Transition Programs Branch, Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- NPS MedicineWise
- Reading Writing Hotline participants Maree, Tom and Mike.
- SBS TV
- South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, Deakin University and University of Melbourne
- State Library NSW
- Sydney Health Literacy Lab
- Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc
- The Western Australian Training Accreditation Council (TAC)

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