

Plain English guidelines - SAS standards

Here are five key principles for written communication. All examples are from the GCU website.

1) A good average sentence length (about 15-20 words). Sentences for the web should be shorter

Example

Go to the support point on the second floor of the library with your matriculation card, a member of staff on the Electronic floor who will phone the helpdesk and request that your password be reset to the original (they will also be able to give you a copy of your original password). (Original - 53 words)

Take your matriculation card to the support point, library second floor. (11 words) The member of staff on duty will phone and ask the helpdesk to reset your password to the original. (19 words) They can also give you a copy of your original password. (11 words)

2) Use verbs rather than nouns

Examples:

Access to the library is possible if you fall into any of the categories listed below (Original (O))

You can use the library if you are in any of these categories: (Plain English (PE))

It is our aim to eventually provide seamless access to... (O)

We aim to eventually provide seamless access to... (PE)

3) Use words like 'we' and 'you' instead of 'the university', 'the student'.

Examples

Students not on City Campus may telephone... (O)

If you are not on City Campus you may telephone... (PE)

4) Use everyday words

Examples

If you **require** a printout of your original password... (O) If you **need** a print out... (PE)

In the event of a fire (O) **If there is** a fire (PE)

therefore it is imperative that you check that you can login... (O)

so you must check that you can login... (PE)

The office is **located on** the third floor of... (O). The office is **on** the third floor of... (PE)

See the Plain English Campaign's list of alternative words - www.plainenglish.co.uk/A-Z.html

5) Plenty of 'active' verbs (instead of 'passive' ones)

Examples

When producing slides, 8-10 lines of text **is recommended**. (O)

We recommend 8-10 lines of text for slides. (PE)

Appointments can be arranged by calling into the office and making an appointment with... (O)

You can make an appointment by calling into the office and talking to... (PE)

(Or To make an appointment, call into the office and talk to...)

Further information **can be obtained** from Learning Services. (O)

You can get more information from Learning Services. (PE)

For more information, go to: How to write plain English www.plainenglish.co.uk/plainenglishguide.html.

The Plain English tutor revised this paragraph for the first course at Caledonian

Original:

If you feel you wish to withdraw from your programme of study, you must first inform your department and speak to your Programme Organiser or adviser who will be able to advise you. If you do not wish to speak to your Programme Organiser or adviser regarding problems which are resulting in you wishing to withdraw, please speak to a councillor in the Department of Student Services who may be able to help. The department is located on the 1st floor of the George Moore Building.

Plain English

If you want to leave your course, you must speak to your programme organiser or tutor who will be able to advise you. If you don't want to do this, please speak to a counsellor in the Department of Student Services who may be able to help. The Department is on the first floor of the George Moore Building.

(On a website, SAS would change the last sentence to: Here are the opening hours and location [link to Student Counselling Service's home page])