How to:

Writing for success

Writing well is harder than it appears.

For those who are required to repeatedly describe what your organisation does in grant applications and proposals you may find yourself hammering out the same old material time and again.

Here are a few tips to keep your writing fresh, easy-to-read and clear:

USE PLAIN ENGLISH

Plain English has been a requirement of federal legislation since 1983. It highlights a range of methods for achieving clear and accessible communication, some of which are discussed here.

The Plain English Foundation provides training on different types of writing and offer basic online tools to help you.

WRITE FOR THE READER

Put yourself in the shoes the audience. Write for their understanding rather than to impress them.

Avoid jargon and industry-specific terms unless completely necessary. Avoid euphemisms, clichés and trendy terms.

USE ACTIVE SPEECH

Make sure the subject is acting on the object. This means the verb is doing the work in the sentence reducing ambiguity.

Hint: if the action is being done 'by' someone, check you are not using passive voice.

The firemen will investigate the recent arson attack. (Active)

The recent arson attack will be investigated by the firemen. (Passive)

USE SHORT SENTENCES

An average sentence should be 15 to 20 words long. If its more than 30, split it into two sentences. Three to five sentences form a paragraph.

BE CONSISTENT

Use meaningful subheadings to order your information logically. Use the same key terms throughout the document.

REVIEW BASIC GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

Be clear about how to use apostrophes, commas, colons and semicolons, and in the basic punctuation of lists.

Have a copy of an editorial style guide close by. We use and recommend *Style Manual,* Snooks & Co. A Commonwealth of Australia publication its easy-to-use and reliable.

EDIT YOUR DOCUMENT

Editing your document is essential. There are two types of editing: copy-editing picks up typos, grammatical errors and other inconsistencies, and checks related information; and structural editing which addresses the way the writing is presented—its voice, language and form.

If you don't have an independent editor to review your written material, ask a colleague to read and review it for you. A second set of eyes is always better than one.

Editing is easier to do in hard copy than on screen, so print out a version and review it away from your desk.

You might also like ...

Plain English Foundation

https://www.plainenglishfoundation.com/

Plain English Top Tips

https://www.plainenglishfoundation.com/documents/10179/78912/PEF_Top_tips_Key_elements_of_plain_English.pdf

Australian Writers' Centre

http://www.writerscentre.com.au/