Plain English for research

Chris Carty, Adult Literacy Ambassador, Sligo ETB – Going back to education as an adult

Aoife Crawford, Policy and Research Officer, NALA – Literacy and research

Sean Driver, Plain English Editor and Trainer, NALA – Plain English Tips

8 May 2025

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Chris Carthy from Sligo says going back to education has opened up the world to her.

Literacy and Research

OECD Survey of Adult Skills

Factors behind low literacy and numeracy

Recruiting research subjects

Writing up your research

Communicating with the public

NALA Policy and Research Officer

Presenter Name

NALA

OECD Survey of Adult Skills 2023

Literacy

21%

1 in 5

700,000 adults

Numeracy

25%

1 in 4

835,000 adults

Adaptive problem-solving

28%

Over 1 in 4

935,000 adults

Adults aged 16-65
At or below Level 1 on a 5-point scale
Find out more from the Central Statistics Office (CSO)

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Factors linked with lower literacy and numeracy scores

- Older age
- Worse health status
- Not speaking English as a native language (literacy only)
- Lower educational attainment
- Lower educational attainment of parents
- Being unemployed or outside the labour market
- Lower income

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Recruiting research subjects

✓Reach more people

✓Reduce risk of sample bias

- Study design (remove unnecessary literacy hurdles)
- Promotion (use a variety of media)
- Participant information (write in plain language)
- Surveys (write in plain language)

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Writing up your research

✓Make the reader's job easier

✓Help other disciplines understand your findings

- Abstracts
- Visualisations
- Layout
- Language

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Communicating with the public

✓Reach many more people

✓Have real-world impact

- Online content
- Magazine articles
- Press releases
- Media appearances / interviews
- Briefings for policymakers

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Top 6 tips for writing in PE

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- Use the active voice

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- Use everyday words – the words of your readers and cut jargon and explain technical words

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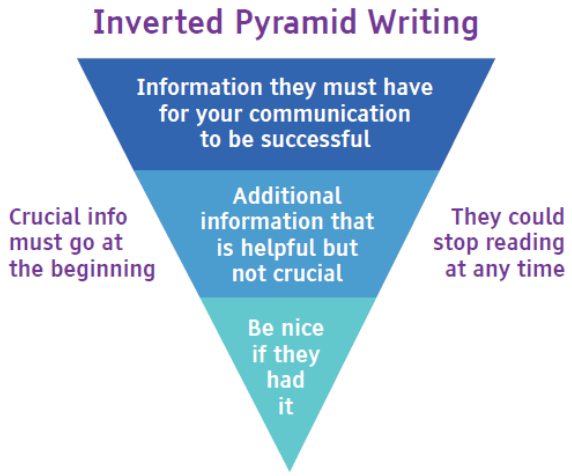
- Keep sentences short, use 15-20 words
- Use the inverted pyramid of writing



Top 6 tips for writing in PE

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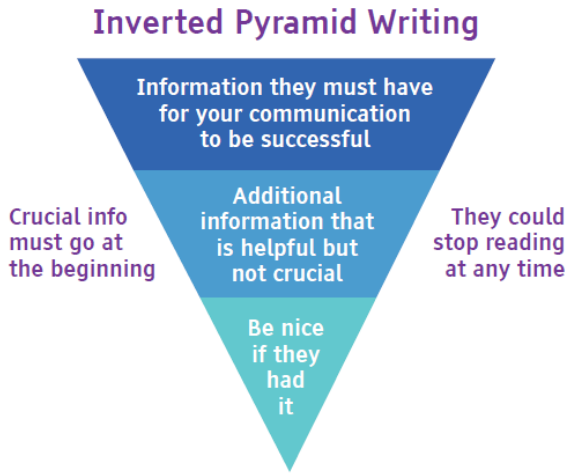
- Use everyday words – the words of your readers and cut jargon and explain technical words
- Keep sentences short, use 15-20 words
- Use the inverted pyramid of writing
- Use white space, headings and bullets to break up text



Examples

DSP

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

MyWelfare

As Gaeilge | Services | Login with MyGovID

How can we help you today?

Pathways to Work

Here you will find services that will help you find work, upskill, retrain or return to education

Parents, Children, Family

Apply for family payments such as Maternity Benefit, Child Benefit and more

Out of Work Payments

Apply for Jobseeker's Payments, make your declaration for your casual (part-time) Jobseeker's claim or calculate how income affects your payment

Health, Disability, Illness

Apply for payments such as Illness Benefit, check your eligibility for Treatment Benefits and more

Accessing Public Services

Apply for a Personal Public Service (PPS) Number or renew your Public Services Card

Apply for a Public Services Card Online

Find out more

Household Benefits

Find out more

The latest Customer Notices from the Department of Social Protection

Read our latest Customer Notices.

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

- Social Welfare Schemes and Services
- Customer Feedback
- Access Officers under the Disability Act 2005
- Social Welfare Statistics
- Social Welfare Phone Numbers

My State Pension

Information on State Pensions in Ireland, how to calculate and apply for the State Pension

Publication

Access Officers under the Disability Act 2005

From Department of Social Protection
Published on 13 May 2020
Last updated on 11 December 2024

The Department of Social Protection has appointed a team of Access Officers in accordance with Section 26(2) of the Disability Act 2005.

Our Access Officers are based around the country, and are responsible for providing or arranging for, and coordinating assistance and guidance, to people with disabilities who want to access our information, services, or buildings.

Accommodations might include for example, organising in-person or online meetings, the booking of a remote sign language interpreter, providing information in Braille or audio format, or organising for an accessible location for a meeting with an individual.

Access Officers cannot provide advocacy services to customers, but we can direct you to organisations who offer this service if it is required.

Please contact our Access Officer team by emailing: AccessOfficer@welfare.ie

Include your name and contact details, we will process your request quickly and will provide you with any assistance we can.

To make a complaint under section 38 of the Disability Act please contact our Inquiry Officer.

Part of

Policies

Social Protection

How our Access Officers can support you

If you are a person with a disability, our Access Officers can support you to access information, services, and buildings.

This might include:

- organising in-person or online meetings
- booking a remote sign language interpreter
- providing information in Braille or audio format
- organising for an accessible location for a meeting

Our Access Officers cannot provide advocacy services.

However, we can direct you to organisations who offer this service.

How to request support

Email AccessOfficer@welfare.ie with your request.

Please include your name and contact details.

We will process your request quickly and will provide you with any assistance we can.

How to make a complaint

To make a complaint, contact our Inquiry Officer.

(Your complaint is made under section 38 of the Disability Act 2005)

Relevant legislation

Our team of Access Officers was created in line with Section 26(2) of the Disability Act 2005.

Plain English for research

8 May 2025

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Top 6 tips for writing in PE

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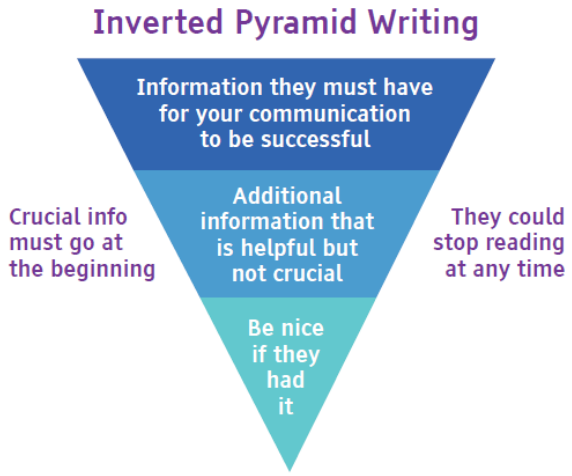

Example 1 - Summary

8 May 2025

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Accessible summary

- Professionals are reluctant to discuss sensitive information with people with intellectual disabilities.
- People with intellectual disabilities and families wish to engage in end-of-life discussions.
- People with intellectual disabilities expressed how they could handle bad news, and they felt that this information could be used to help make choices.
- People with intellectual disabilities and families want to develop a plan based on their choices and wishes and there is a need to respect this at the end of life.
- People with intellectual disabilities need help with everyday tasks, close supervision, and a caring presence as they become more dependent at the end of life.
- They value having familiar people around them, meaningful companionship, and clear communication. Being with loved ones and feeling understood are essential for their comfort.
- Many participants emphasised the importance of spiritual support, such as prayers, blessings, and feeling at peace before they die.
- People with intellectual disabilities felt safer and more comfortable when their usual daily routines were maintained, even as they approached the end of life. This included continuing their favourite activities and keeping familiar habits.
- They preferred to receive end-of-life care in a familiar place, such as their usual residence, surrounded by people they knew well, which provided them with a sense of security and comfort.
- Having familiar caregivers was essential because these carers understood their needs and preferences better than others, ensuring more personalised and compassionate care.

Discussions about end-of-life care difficult but desired

While professionals may be reluctant to discuss sensitive information with people with intellectual disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities and families wish to engage in end-of-life discussions. People with intellectual disabilities and families want to develop a plan based on their choices and wishes and there is a need to respect this at the end of life.

The ‘bad news’ helps people make choices

- People with intellectual disabilities expressed how they could handle bad news
- They said they could use this information help make choices.

Practical support from familiar people

- They said they need help with everyday tasks, close supervision, and a caring presence as they become more dependent at the end of life.
- They value having familiar people around them, meaningful companionship, and clear communication. Being with loved ones and feeling understood are essential for their comfort.
- Having familiar caregivers was essential because these carers understood their needs and preferences better than others. This ensures more personalised and compassionate care.

Spiritual support

- They emphasised how important spiritual support was, such as prayers, blessings, and feeling at peace before they die.

Keeping the routine and stay in a familiar location

- People with intellectual disabilities felt safer and more comfortable when they could keep their usual daily routines even as they approached the end of life. This included continuing their favourite activities and keeping familiar habits.

Spiritual support

- They emphasised how important spiritual support was, such as prayers, blessings, and feeling at peace before they die.

Keeping the routine and stay in a familiar location

- People with intellectual disabilities felt safer and more comfortable when they could keep their usual daily routines even as they approached the end of life. This included continuing their favourite activities and keeping familiar habits.
- They preferred to receive end-of-life care in a familiar place, such as their usual home, surrounded by people they knew well. This provided them with a sense of security and comfort.

Example 2 – Email to recruit participant

8 May 2025

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Title of email: Invitation to take part in the interview about peer support in the workplace
Email sent to: Healthcare Assistants providing hospice care at home
Attachement : Appendix 2. Participant Information Sheet (PIS) WP2-WP3 [V1, 24.02.25]

Dear Colleague,

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is XXX, and I am a Doctoral Research Fellow at Ulster University. I am conducting a research study to explore the needs and preferences of Healthcare Assistants in relation to workplace support and learning from peers and to understand the context, procedures and capacities of hospice services to facilitate peer support.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online interview via MS Teams. You have been chosen as a potential participant as you have been employed as a Healthcare Assistants providing hospice care at home, you are over the age of 18, have access to a device on which you can participate in the online interview via MS Teams, can understand and speak English and you are willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent.

During the interview, I hope to learn more about your experiences, needs, and preferences regarding workplace peer support and your views about context, procedures and capacities of hospice services to facilitate peer support.
The interview will take approximately 30–60 minutes. With your permission, it will be digitally recorded (audio and/or video). Before the interview, I will also ask you to complete a short demographic and work questionnaire. As a token of appreciation, participants will be offered a £30 electronic gift voucher. Volunteering to take part does not guarantee participation. Researchers will include participants with different experience levels, working across various settings to ensure diversity. The interviews will be taking place between May and December 2025.
If you are interested in participating, please use the link below to access the participant information sheet and consent form <<Insert links here>>
The study is being funded by HSC R&D Division, Public Health Agency, and sponsored by the Ulster University. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at
Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to this important research.

Yours faithfully,

Dear Colleague,

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is XXX and I am a Doctoral Research Fellow at Ulster University.

I am researching the needs and preferences of Healthcare Assistants about workplace support and learning from peers and I'd like to ask you to take part in an interview.

I want to hear from staff about how hospice services facilitate peer support so we can make recommendations to improve it.

How to take part

Would you be able to help me by taking part in an online interview via MS Teams between September and December 2025?

I'd like to ask you about your views on the context, procedures, and capacities of hospice services to facilitate support. The interview will take 30–60 minutes. With your permission, we will record the audio and video.

We will include participants with different experience levels, working across various settings to ensure diversity.

If you are interested in participating, please use the link below to access the participant information sheet and consent form:

Sing up for an interview

Before the interview

If you agree to take part, I'd ask you to complete a short demographic and work questionnaire. As a token of appreciation, we can offer you a £30 electronic gift voucher. Unfortunately, volunteering to take part does not guarantee participation.

Why you been asked to take part

You have been chosen as a potential participant because:

- you are over 18,
- you support Healthcare Assistants providing hospice care at home,
- you can provide insights about the experiences, needs, and preferences of HCAs regarding workplace peer support,
- you have access to a device suitable for an online interview via MS Teams,
- you can understand and speak English, and
- you may be willing to participate in the study and can provide informed consent

Who is funding the study?

The study is being funded by HSC R&D Division, Public Health Agency, and sponsored by the Ulster University.

Contact me

If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to this important research.

Yours faithfully,

Example 3 – PIS

8 May 2025

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What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation; however, it is acknowledged that discussing topics related to palliative care may cause distress, therefore a distress protocol will be used. You can stop the interview and withdraw your participation at any time without providing any reason.

8 May 2025

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation; however, it is acknowledged that discussing topics related to palliative care may cause distress, therefore a distress protocol will be used. You can stop the interview and withdraw your participation at any time without providing any reason.

Write Edit Feedback

Readability

Grade 13

OK. Aim for 9.

Words: 53

Show more stats

1 of 3 sentences is very hard to read.

1 of 3 sentences is hard to read.

Find grammar and spelling issues with Editor Plus.
Upgrade

2 weakeners.
View details

2 words with simpler alternatives.

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There are no anticipated risks associated with participation; however, it is acknowledged that discussing topics related to palliative care may cause distress, therefore a distress protocol will be used. You can stop the interview and withdraw your participation at any time without providing any reason.

Write | Edit | Feedbac

Readability

Post-graduate

Poor. Aim for 9.

Words: 45

Show more stats

1 of 2 sentences is very hard to read.

1 of 2 sentences is hard to read.

Find grammar and spelling issues with Editor Plus.

Upgrade

NALA

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation; however, it is acknowledged that discussing topics related to palliative care may cause distress, therefore a distress protocol will be used. You can stop the interview and withdraw your participation at any time without providing any reason.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation. However, discussing topics related to palliative care may cause distress. We will use ‘a distress protocol’. This means you can stop the interview and leave the interview at any time without giving a reason.

Sean Driver Owner
Group created: Apr 2021

Pending posts 0
Requests to join 0

Manage group

Edit group

Recent
- NALA Plain English Network
- Co-designing meaningful pays...
- Community of practice on plai...
- Plain Language Association Int...
- Community of Practice for Plai...

Groups
- NALA Plain English Network
- Community of practice on plai...
- Plain Language Association Int...

Show more

Events +
- Co-designing meaningful pays...

See all

Discover more

NALA Plain English Network

Private Listed

Earn an Active Group badge

Start a post in this group

Video | Photo | Poll

All | Recommended

Pinned by admin — Unpin

Sean Driver posted in NALA Plain English Network

Sean Driver · You
Plain English Editor and Trainer at National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Admin · Admin · 38m

Great chance to make some connections across Europe and learn about plain language initiatives in other organisations with the Dutch UserCentriCities (UCC). And share your good work too ...more

UCC Café May: communicating clearly with plain language - User Needs First
international.gebruikercentraal.nl

Like | Comment

6 impressions — View analytics

Highlight this post by pinning it at the top. — Pin this post

Sean Driver · You
Plain English Editor and Trainer at National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Admin · Admin · 1w · Edited

Accessible Numbers webinar on co-designing payslips today 30 April on Teams at

622 members

Including Cathleen Hartnett QA Services and 86 other connections

87

Invite connections

Show all →

Analytics
Last 15 days activity

43 Active members ▲5%
9 New members ▲29%
2 Posts ▲100%
237 Post views ▲51%

Show all →

Admins

Claire O Riordan · 1st Owner
Plain English Coordinator at National Adult Literacy Agency

Sean Driver · You Owner
Plain English Editor and Trainer at National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

Groups you might be interested in

Writers & Authors
578,059 members

NALA

Research article | Open access | Published: 02 June 2022

A practical 'How-To' Guide to plain language summaries (PLS) of peer-reviewed scientific publications: results of a multi-stakeholder initiative utilizing co-creation methodology

Laura Dormer, Thomas Schindler, Lauri Arnstein Williams, Dawn Lobban, Sheila Khawaja, Amanda Hunn, Daniela Luzuriaga Ubilla, Ify Sargeant & Anne-Marie Hamoir

Research Involvement and Engagement **8**, Article number: 23 (2022) | Cite this article

11k Accesses | **30** Altmetric | Metrics

Abstract

Background

Peer-reviewed scientific publications and congress abstracts are typically written by scientists for specialist audiences; however, patients and other non-specialists are understandably interested in the potential implications of research and what they may mean for them. Plain language summaries (PLS)—summaries of scientific articles in easy-to-read language—are emerging as a valuable addition to traditional scientific publications. Co-creation of PLS with the intended audience is key to ensuring a successful outcome, but practical guidance on how to achieve this has been lacking.

Methods

Building on the Patient Engagement (PE) Quality Guidance previously developed by Patient Focused Medicines Development (PFMD), a multi-stakeholder working group (WG) of individuals with patient engagement experience and/or expertise in PLS was established to develop further activity-specific guidance. PLS guidance was developed through a stepwise

Download PDF

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Sections Figures References

Abstract

Plain English summary

Introduction

Methods

Results

Discussion

Availability of data and materials

Abbreviations

References

Acknowledgments

Funding

Author information

Ethics declarations

Additional information

Supplementary Information

NALA

Online Plain English Training Wednesday 11 June 2025

11 June 2025 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Microsoft Teams

What is plain English?

Plain English is a style of writing and layout that the intended reader can understand after a single reading. It will help you clarify what you're trying to say and, as a result, help your reader get your message exactly as you intended. Presenting information in plain English includes using suitable words, adopting a direct style, avoiding unnecessary jargon and designing your written information to make it easier to follow.

Webinar: Top plain English tips for writing leaflets and publications

20 June 2025 10:00 am - 11:00 am

Online through Microsoft Teams

Join the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) for a **free** interactive online workshop where we will help you to use plain English guidelines when writing for leaflets and publications.

Top resources

- NALA Writing and design tips
- National Disability Authority (NDA) Communication Toolkit on Document Design