This Tip Sheet is to assist UQ staff who work on drafting or amending policies and procedures at UQ. The information contained provides guidance on Plain English and Readability. Further information about policies and procedures at UQ is available in the UQ Policy Handbook and on the Enterprise Governance website.

Plain English

UQ policies and procedures need to communicate in a way that a broad and diverse audience will understand. When drafting policies and procedures, try to make your writing as easy to read as possible so it's accessible to all users. The best way to do this is by using common words, or plain English.

Writing in plain English means using simpler and more direct language. It does not mean 'dumbing down' information.

Documents that are written in plain English helps people understand what they need to do and make decisions.

Tips for writing in plain English

➢ Avoid jargon so the user can understand the content the first time they read it.

➢ Use active voice — not passive.

➢ Use the shorter, plain English word, term, sentence and paragraph over the longer (examples below).

➢ Minimise punctuation. Use several short sentences instead of a long sentence broken up with punctuation.

Don't write this	Write this
as a consequence of	because
in the event of, in the event that	if, when
make an application	apply
with reference to, with regard to, with respect to	about, regarding

Make sure all users can understand your content

If you're writing for a specialist audience, you still need to make sure everyone can understand what the content is about.

Write in plain English so everyone can understand, regardless of their ability.

Think about the needs of users who speak a language other than English.

Readability

Readability is about how easy or hard it is for a user to understand text.

Content with a good readability level helps users know what to do. This includes users with lower comprehension skills.

Aim to make content as readable as possible. This makes it more accessible for everyone, not only users with low literacy. Plain English helps specialist and technical audiences too.

Reading level and accessibility

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) criteria 3.1.5 (Level AAA) recommends you write to lower secondary education level. This is Year 7 to Year 8 in Australia, or between 12 to 14 years old.

Even if you aren't able to achieve this reading level, the more readable you can make content the better it is for your audience.

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