

# Tips and tricks for writing

Clear writing is the backbone of good content. The words you choose and how you structure your information determine how well your audience understands your message. There are a few key tips that can help you get words onto the page and make them effective.

## Sit back and relax

To get your ideas on paper in plain English, imagine you are explaining your thoughts to friends or family, perhaps at a dinner party. They have asked you, 'So what is this (idea, event, issue, project) all about?' How would you explain this to them casually, in a way they would understand?

Although this is just a starting point – the words will need to be modified to fit your audience – it may help you identify your main message and find a simple and direct way to express it.

For example:

The project provides landholders with printed guidelines and locally-sourced seedlings to support increased planting of paddock trees for biodiversity and habitat provision.

can be 'dinner partied' to

We taught farmers the best way to plant trees in their paddocks to provide habitat for insects, birds and reptiles. We also gave them seedlings that would grow in their area.

Similarly, for scientific content:

There is widespread agreement that polyuria, polydipsia and polyphagia are among the most commonly seen clinical symptoms of diabetes mellitus, type I.

becomes, for a non-expert audience

People with type I diabetes may feel thirstier and hungrier than usual, and also need to pee more often.

## Revise, revise, revise

No matter how experienced you are, your writing will always benefit from revision. If possible, put the writing away for a while; this will help you to come back to it with fresh eyes. Often, mistakes or sections that could be clearer will leap out at you after a break.

Try some or all of these tips:

- Read your work aloud or listen to a text-to-speech tool read it out. This is useful for picking up long sentences, convoluted phrases and inconsistent constructions. It also helps you check that the tone is appropriate for the audience.
- Sum up each paragraph in a few words. This technique is useful for checking that each paragraph contains only one major idea; it also helps to show whether the content flows logically. If you do the summing up in a separate document, you can move the ideas around more easily, which can be useful in finding the most logical order.
- Take care to re-read anything you have changed, because changes in one place often require changes in another.
- If possible, check a printed copy of your content before signing off on it. Errors that you do not notice on screen often leap off the physical page, and you will wonder how you missed them. You can even try putting a ruler underneath each line as you read it to focus your full attention on that line of text.

## Get another set of eyes

Ask other people to read at least part of the document. Asking several people is a good idea – for example:

- an expert in the field you are writing about (to check accuracy)
- someone who has a similar background to your target audience (to check clarity)
- someone who has a good eye for grammar and style (to pick up errors).