

Best Practices – Plain English

Introduction

I recommend using plain English for written e-learning content. Follow these three principles to instantly improve your written course content.

Plain English principles

1. Keep sentences short.
Aim for an average sentence length of 15-20 words. 30 words is the absolute outer limit.
2. Use everyday words and avoid jargon.
If you use acronyms, write them in full the first time, followed by the acronym in brackets. For example, 'Use this formula to calculate Return on Investment (ROI)'.
Refer to the learner as 'you'. For example, 'In this module you will learn...'
Refer to your organisation as 'we' and 'us'. For example, 'We value our customers...'
3. Use first and second personal pronouns to refer to your learner and your organisation.
Refer to the learner as 'you'. For example, 'In this module you will learn...'
Refer to your organisation as 'we' and 'us'. For example, 'We value our customers...'

Applying these principles will make your written content friendlier in tone, and easier to understand.

Tips for writing in plain English

It takes a while to learn how to write in plain English. I find the following tips really help:

- Write as if you are talking to a panel of typical learners.
- Read your copy out loud. Any pompous or over-formal word will stand out.
- Proof and edit everything you write.

For more guidance on writing plain English, visit the Plain English Campaign's web site <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk>