## Writing in plain English

Writing simple English is a skill that we may take for granted but it is a vital skill for workplace representatives to master, and something that can be easily improved by a small amount of effort.

**Why is using simple English important for RCM workplace representatives?**

You will never be able to reach all your members using word of mouth alone. There will always be members on different shifts, and some on leave for example. Therefore you need to communicate with members, and managers, to some extent in writing.

It is an important discipline to keep your written messages simple so that

* members are more likely to read them
* members are more likely to understand them
* members are less likely to be put off the RCM by unnecessarily obscure language or jargon
* ALL members are more likely to communicate with you if they feel your style is inclusive rather than exclusive.

**What does simple English look like?**

Simple English is about writing to be understood. Therefore your ideas should flow in a logical order. So for example, if you are **writing a report** you should

* Give it a title
* Use headings and sub-headings
* Present your points in a logical sequence, either in chronological order, or in order of importance to the report’s theme
* Always draw conclusions and make recommendations
* Write in an impersonal form, for example “given his many problems, Mr. Smith needs further training…” rather than “in my opinion Mr. Smith is a slow learner and so needs further training…”
* Keep a neutral, professional tone. Setting your feelings aside
* Sign and date it.

Examples of simple English in **general writing**

* All writing should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
* Always think about the structure of piece of writing before you start. For example, if you are writing a report to management you may want to use a “background-developments-recommendations” structure.
* Never try to say everything. If you ever have to write minutes of meetings check the accepted format by reading a couple of examples from previous meetings.
* Less is more. Removing unnecessary words or points allows the importance points due prominence.
* Figures of speech can be removed. For example you should replace
  + “at this point in time” with “now”
  + “be in a position to” with “we can”
  + “in connection with” with “about”.

You will see numerous such examples when you start looking.

* Words should be **active** (do, help, talk, start) not academic or legalistic (undertake, facilitate, critique, commence).
* Words should be **concrete** (heat, noise) rather than abstract (working conditions).
* Words should be **honest** (cuts, job losses) not evasive (savings, let people go).
* Long sentences require more effort from the reader and so are less likely to be read. The more elements in a sentence, the harder it is to follow. So try to keep each sentence to one idea, and split sentences that ramble on. Short sentences are usually more effective at getting the point across than long ones.
* A rough guide to sentence length
  + 1 to 25 words- good
  + 25 to 40 words- check it and possibly split it up
  + Over 40 words- re-write it.
* Do not write very short sentences for the sake of it. Use those occasionally, for emphasis.

What other examples would you add to this list?