12 tips for clear language in documents

1. Don’t make your documents too long. Don’t provide redundant information.

   **So for example don’t write:**
   The parents, the school and the pupil guidance centre (CLB) bear the responsibility for preventing and fighting the transfer of head lice. Anyone can get lice. There is nothing to be ashamed about. Everywhere where children are together (at home, at school, in the youth movement, in the sports club, etc.) lice can be passed on. Adults can also have head lice. It is vital that the lice are found and treated as soon as possible. Doing this helps your child as well as its environment (family members, classmates, friends). Only if we work together can we ban lice from the school.

   **Better:**
   There are head lice in the class. There is no reason to be ashamed about this. Anyone can get lice. We must work together to get rid of the lice. What can you do?

2. Write short paragraphs and short texts. Use subtitles and questions to summarise the content of the paragraph.

3. Write short, simple sentences (max.10 words).

   **Not:** Kindly confirm this in writing, as well as stating when we can contact you again.

   **Better:** Kindly confirm this in writing. Please tell us on which date we can contact you again.

4. Put the subject at the start of the sentence.

   **Not:** Before 15 April you will have to demonstrate that…; May we kindly ask you to …

   **Better:** You have to demonstrate before 15 April that…; We ask you to…

5. Use active sentences.

   **Not:** The forms will be sent to you

   **Better:** We will send you the forms.

6. Use direct sentences.

   **Not:** We recommend that…; The amount you must pay is…; In case of questions…
Better: You must... Pay... Further information?

7. Use transparent words. Use ordinary language.

Not: accompanying, acknowledge, eligible, currently, reimburse, you are requested, your attention is drawn to, owing to...

Better: with, thank you for, qualify, now, repay, please, please note, because...

8. Avoid professional jargon.

Examples: pedagogical study day, survey, after-school care services, canvas, ...

If you have to use the word then add a pictogram, an illustration, a practical description or summary.

9. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.

Not: i.e., etc., e.g.

Better: meaning, and so on, for example

10. Watch out with metaphors and idioms. People who speak another language often take these literally.

Not: Hitting the nail on the head, the long and the short of it

Instead: You gave the right description, the point is.

11. Avoid nominalising.

Not: Subject to the provision of the information ...

Better: If you don’t provide us the information before this date ...


• Use a recognisable structure (the same structure, logo, who?what?where?).
• Choose Verdana or Arial 10/11p.
• Leave enough white space between the paragraphs.
• Write important words in bold.
• Use clear illustrations of good quality.

Further information? http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/about-us.html