

# Communicating to non-academic audiences

SSM ECR Workshop  
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# Writing and design tips

- Plain language
- Tips (not rules!)
- Scenarios and examples



# Plain language

*Put yourself in your reader's shoes*

- **What is plain language?**

- A style of presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it
- It is a more efficient way of writing
- You write in clear language and give relevant information in the right order
- When you write your material clearly, people can make informed judgments



# Know your audience



- How familiar are they with the terminology your organisation or discipline uses?
- What subjects can you assume they understand?
- How will they read the document? Will they read straight through it or skip to the sections that interest them?
- Have you explained any details that they may not be familiar with?
- Have you given the background to the information?

# Writing tips (not rules)

- **Use everyday words**
  - If you must use specialised language, explain what it means.
- **Be personal to help the reader engage with the information directly**
  - Use 'I', 'We', and 'You' in the document
- **Keep sentences short**
  - There is no strict rule but aim for 15-20 words
- **Spell out acronyms and be consistent**
- **Use active verbs but don't ban the passive voice**
- **Signposts**
  - Contents table, introductory paragraph, headings, bullet points and lists
- **Use questions and answers**
  - Help readers locate the information they are interested in



# Three scenarios



- **Applications**
  - Ethics
  - Grants
  
- **Conducting your research**
  - Data collection tools
  - Interventions
  - Participant information and recruitment
  
- **Disseminating your research findings**
  - Research report
  - Executive summary
  - Press release

# Plain language in action

## *Patient information*



### ■ Before

- *The hospital patient has the right to information relevant to his situation that must allow the patient the fullest insight into all aspects of his situation, medical or otherwise, and, on an informed basis, enable him to make his own decisions or to participate in decisions which have implications for his or her wellbeing.*

### ■ After

- *You have a right to information about your condition that helps you fully understand it and make informed choices about your treatment.*

# Plain language in action

## *Online health intervention*



### Healthy living with diabetes

#### Surprise!

Physical activity **CAN** help you feel more positive!



Lots of large studies have been carried out in different countries, and they all found that **being more active leads to better well-being.**

Even just a bit of extra activity can help you feel **less stressed and in a better mood.**

[Click here for the next question](#)



# Plain language in action

## *Online health intervention*



### Healthy living with diabetes



#### What can I do to be more active?

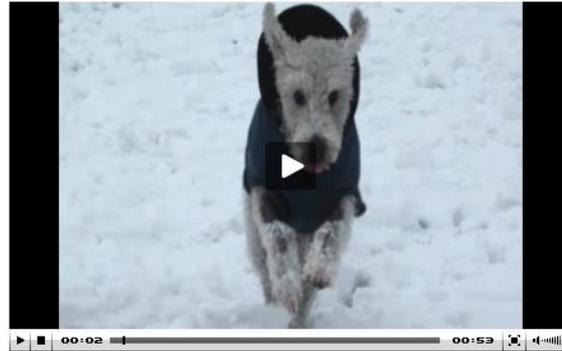
**Any type of activity that makes your heart beat a bit faster can make a difference to your health** – this can be walking, housework, gardening.

Even taking the stairs whenever you get a chance can help build up fitness.

#### Did you know?

New studies have shown that if you sit down for a long time (e.g. on the computer, driving or watching TV) **it is good for your health to fit in activity breaks** when you can. For example, you could walk around while on the phone, or do some gentle physical activity while watching TV.

Click on the black box to watch this **short video** about what activities other people like to do. If you don't have speakers, or prefer to read the story [click here](#).



The last few pages of this website will help you think of activities that suit you and your lifestyle. Click next for ways you can get the most benefit out of the activity you already do.

Next

# Plain language in action

## *Press release*

### ■ Journal Abstract

- *“Addressing concerns of omitted variables, we find a robust result that being in a social network characterised by low levels of support and social engagement is associated with higher levels of mental distress among women. The magnitude of this effect is comparable to that of divorce and appears to be mediated by loneliness in the model.”*

### ■ Press release

- ***“Women over 50 with strong social support networks are less likely to suffer depression than those without, according to a pan-European study ... Factors such as a person’s mental health can determine their level of social engagement ... These issues are addressed in this study to give a clear and uncompromised understanding of the effect that different social network types have on the mental health of an older person.”***

# Online Resources

- **National Adult Literacy Agency (Ireland)**
- **Plain Language Association International**
- **More writing tips**
  - Examples of plain English medical, legal and financial terms
- **Design tips**
  - Formatting
    - Style
    - Graphs
    - Text

