26TEN Online Workshop

Writing in Plain English to Parents and Carers

Activity Worksheets

2nd edition, December 2020



Activity 1: Write for your reader

Choose one of the following to work on. (You won’t have to write an actual document. You’ll just be thinking about how you would go about writing it.)

* An email to a parent or carer
* A short article for a newsletter
* A school report
* A work instruction for colleagues

Work through these questions. If you’d like some ideas to get you going, you’ll find an example on page 9.

1. Who are you intending will read your document?
2. How will they read the document?  
   (Will they read it straight through or skip to the sections that interest them?)
3. Action – is there something you want your reader to do, think or feel as a result of reading it?
4. How familiar are your readers with the words and terms you’re likely to use?

Activity 2: The MADE structure

Here’s a reminder of the four elements of the MADE structure.

* Message – your most important point
* Action – what you want the reader to do
* Details – information the reader needs to know
* Extras – information the reader might like to know

Here’s an example of a simple email using the MADE structure.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To: Jaky Becker  From: Andy Sindstrom  Subject: Posting your transcript to you  Date: 30 November 2020 |
| MESSAGE | Dear Jaky  Thank you for your email requesting a copy of your transcript. You have asked for it to be sent by both International Registered Post and courier. |
| ACTION | Which option would you prefer? |
| DETAILS | Please note that postage is added to the cost of each transcript (currently $20.00). International Registered Post costs $25.00, while courier costs $100.00. |
| EXTRAS | International Registered Post can take up to four days to be delivered. The courier service is usually overnight*.* |
|  | <Sign off and signature block> |

Activity 2: The MADE Structure (continued)

Use the MADE structure below to write an email to a parent or carer. You can use your answers to the questions in Activity 1 as a starting point. On pages 10–12 you’ll find examples of different sorts of emails that use the MADE structure.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To:  From:  Subject:  Date: |
| MESSAGE  Most important point |  |
| ACTION  What you want the reader to do |  |
| DETAILS  Information the reader needs to know |  |
| EXTRAS  Information the reader might like to know |  |

Activity 3: Keep sentences short and clear

Rewrite this long sentence into two shorter and clearer ones. See page 13 for a suggested alternative.

1. It is the student’s responsibility along with assistance from their parents or carers to organise and provide the name of a business or company that is prepared to take them on work experience placement. *(35 words)*

Rewrite this paragraph to parents and carers more clearly. See page 13 for a suggested alternative.

1. During this year we will give added emphasis to the goal of communication and utilise a variety of means to accomplish this goal. Your inputs, from the unique position as a parent, will help us to plan and implement an educational plan that meets the needs of your child. An open dialogue, feedback and sharing of information between parents and teachers will enable us to work with your child in the most effective manner. *(75 words in total; 3 sentences of 24, 26 and 25 words respectively; jargon and vague information)*

Activity 4: Use the active voice

Rewrite these sentences into the active voice. See page 14 for suggested alternatives.

1. Staff were advised that the building works would cause some disruption for a week.
2. A review of the Department’s Sick Leave Policy was undertaken and will now occur every three years.
3. Links with our partners were further strengthened during the past year.

Activity 5: Use strong, active verbs

Rewrite these sentences changing the highlighted nouns to verbs. Also see if you can make them sound more human. See page 15 for suggested alternatives.

1. He gives careful **consideration** to all aspects of any problem.
2. We are conducting an **analysis** of Year 10 student results.
3. Work is being done on the **preparation** of a new policy on the safe use of play equipment.

Activity 6: Practise writing more clearly

Try rewriting some of your own work into plain English, or you can practise with these. See page 16 for suggested alternatives.

1. Noah’s spelling levels are grade appropriate, but he is encouraged to keep revisiting his weekly spelling words to improve them further.
2. Evaluative procedures were based on objective departmental criteria for student progress.

# Some suggestions

On these next few pages you’ll find suggested responses and alternatives for each of the activities. You’ll see that sometimes we’ve included more than one suggestion. In plain English writing, there’s usually not a single ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way. It will depend on the intended readers for a document. Your aim is for them to be able to understand it the first time they read it.

## Activity on the video – chapter 2 (at 2 minutes 30 seconds)

PLEASE LEAVE SUFFICIENT SPACE BEHIND THIS VEHICLE TO ALLOW SAFE INGRESS AND EGRESS OF MECHANICALLY PROPELLED, SEATED POSITION, AMBULATORY DEVICE BY MEANS OF AUTHORISED LIFTING EQUIPMENT. THANK YOU.

Here are some alternatives.

Please leave enough room for wheelchairs to be moved in and out of this van.

OR

If you’re parking next to this van, please leave enough room for us to lift a wheelchair in and out of the back door. Thank you.

OR

Please leave a space of at least one metre between this van and your car so we can help our passengers in wheelchairs get in and out safely.

## Activity 1: Write for your reader

Here’s an example for a high school teacher who needs to write an email to parents and carers about work experience.

1. Who are you intending will read your document?

Parents and carers of Year 10 students.

1. How will they read the document?  
   (Will they read it straight through or skip to the sections that interest them?)

It will vary, but mainly skipping to what’s important to them.

1. Action – is there something you want your reader to do, think or feel as a result of reading it?

For parents and carers to talk to their child about work experience and help them get organised.

1. How familiar are your readers with the words and terms you’re likely to use?

They won’t be familiar with specialist education and policy terms.

## Activity 2: The MADE Structure

Here’s an email based on the work experience activity on the previous page.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To: Parents and carers of our students  From: Jo Jones, Class Teacher  Subject: Helping your child get ready for work experience  Date: 1 August 2020 |
| MESSAGE | <Salutation or greeting>  Your child will be doing work experience during the week of 10 October 2020. We expect them to organise their own placement and let us know the name and contact details of the workplace they’ll be with. |
| ACTION | Would you please check with your child to see if they need any help from you to organise it. |
| DETAILS | Here are the steps your child needs to take in setting up the placement:   1. Think about what sort of work experience they’d like 2. Find out which workplaces offer that type of work experience 3. Contact workplaces to see if they can get a placement 4. When they have a placement, let me know the name and contact details of the person and the workplace they’ll be going to. |
| EXTRAS | If you have any questions, please contact me on 0400 500 600 or [jojones@thehighschool.tas.gov.au](mailto:jojones@thehighschool.tas.gov.au) |
|  | <Sign off and signature block> |

## Activity 2: The MADE Structure (continued)

Here’s a simple email using the MADE structure.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To: All team members  From: Demita Narjan  Subject: Farewell party for Sasha – date and catering details  Date: 20 May 2020 |
| MESSAGE | <Salutation or greeting>  Please join us for afternoon tea to farewell Sasha who is moving to another school. |
| ACTION | When: 1 July 2020 at 3 pm  Where: Main meeting room  We will have light refreshments.  **Please email me any specific food requests by 20 June 2020**. |
| DETAILS | Food Lore Café is catering. They offer a wide range of food. See their website for details [www.foodlore.com.au](http://www.foodlore.com.au). |
| EXTRAS | The meeting room is booked for another meeting at 4.30 pm, so we’ll need to finish up by then. |
|  | <Sign off and signature block> |

## Activity 2: The MADE Structure (continued)

Here’s a more detailed email using the MADE structure.[[1]](#footnote-1)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To: All team members  From: Nic Croxton, Team Leader  Subject: Compelling new evidence on why plain English is important  Date: 20 May 2020 |
| MESSAGE | <Salutation or greeting>  More than 80 per cent of the general public find government reports difficult to understand. This statistic might surprise you as much as it surprised me. |
| ACTION | **From 1 July 2020, plain English is to become the standard writing style in our team.** |
| DETAILS | Many of you already write well. What we’re after is a consistently high standard across the whole team. As a first step towards this, you’ll all have the chance to attend a short information session on adult literacy and a half-day workshop on plain English. That will give us all a shared understanding of our new approach. |
| EXTRAS | **What the statistics tell us about adult literacy and plain English**  The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts surveys of literacy and ranks the population on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). The minimum level needed for coping with standard documents and forms is 3*.*   * 46% are at level 1 and 2 * 37% are at level 3 * 17% are at levels 4 and 5   Writing all our documents in plain English will make it easier for people at levels 2 and 3 to understand them. For people at level 1, an approach called Easy English can work well.  I’ll be in touch again soon with dates for the training. I look forward to working with you all on this. |
|  | <Sign off and signature block> |

**Activity 3: Keep sentences short and clear**

1. It is the student’s responsibility along with assistance from their parents or carers to organise and provide the name of a business or company that is prepared to take them on work experience placement. *(35 words)*

We expect students to organise their own placement for work experience then let us know who it’s with. Could you please check if your child needs any help from you.

*(18 + 12 words)*

1. During this year we will give added emphasis to the goal of communication and utilise a variety of means to accomplish this goal. Your inputs, from the unique position as a parent, will help us to plan and implement an educational plan that meets the needs of your child. An open dialogue, feedback and sharing of information between parents and teachers will enable us to work with your child in the most effective manner. *(75 words in total; 3 sentences of 24, 26 and 25 words respectively; jargon; information is vague)*

We’re always keen to hear your ideas about how we can best support your child’s education. You can get in touch with us by phone or email. You're also welcome to come and meet your child’s teacher in person.

Phone: 03 6330 4500

Email: [class.teacher@theprimaryschool.tas.gov.au](mailto:class.teacher@theprimaryschool.tas.gov.au)

*(45 words in total; 3 sentences of 16, 11 and 12 words, plus contact details; no jargon; information is specific)*

## Activity 4: Use the active voice

1. Staff were advised that the building works would cause some disruption for a week.

We have advised staff that the building works will continue for a week.

OR

We’ve let staff know that the building works will last for a week.

1. A review of the Department’s Sick Leave Policy was undertaken and will now occur every three years.

We recently reviewed the sick leave policy and from now on will review it every three years.

1. Links with our partners were further strengthened during the past year.

We’ve strengthened our links with our partners during the past year.

## Activity 5: Use strong, active verbs

1. He gives careful **consideration** to all aspects of any problem.

He **considers** all aspects of any problem carefully.

OR  
  
He **considers** all aspects of any problem with care.

1. We are conducting an **analysis** of Year 10 student results.

We are **analysing** Year 10 student results.

1. Work is being done on the **preparation** of a new policy on the safe use of play equipment.

We are **preparing** a new policy on how we can all use the play equipment safely.

## Activity 6: Write more clearly and simply

1. Noah’s spelling levels are grade appropriate, but he is encouraged to keep revisiting his weekly spelling words to improve them further.

Noah’s spelling is good for his grade and age. To help him improve even more, we encourage him to go back over his weekly spelling words at least two or three times.

(This alternative is longer but clearer, and it sounds more human.)

1. Evaluative procedures were based on objective departmental criteria for student progress.

We will evaluate each student’s progress using criteria set by the department.

OR

To see how well we’ve succeeded in teaching our students, we’ll measure their progress using criteria set by the department.

(This alternative is longer, but adds some useful details and sounds more human.)

1. Adapted from presentation by Peter Davies, strategic communication adviser, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, viewed 3 May 2019. These are Victorian figures. Tasmania’s are similar.<https://editorsvictoria.org/publications/newsletter/185-may-2019> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)