

Say It: The Power of Plain English

Cut the clutter. Clarify the meaning. Connect with your reader.

Plain English is not “dumbing down”. It is *opening up*.

It makes your writing clearer, quicker to read, and easier to act on. In community communication, this is not a luxury; it is a duty. People want simple, direct information—especially when decisions, routines, or safety may be affected.

Plain English removes the friction. It strips away jargon, avoids long-winded language, and delivers meaning with confidence and respect. It helps you sound human rather than corporate and calm rather than complicated.

Think of plain English as spring cleaning: you strip out the dust, clutter, and old phrases so the real message shines.

1. Avoid Jargon, Long Words, and Formal Clichés

Jargon slows the reader and erodes trust. Long words distract. Formal clichés create distance.

Common problems:

- *“Prior to commencement...”*
- *“We would like to advise residents that...”*
- *“Your cooperation in this matter is appreciated.”*

Plain English versions:

- *“Before the work starts...”*
- *“We want to let you know...”*
- *“Thank you for your help.”*

Ask: *Would a twelve-year-old understand this? Would a busy resident skim-reading on a phone understand it?*

If not, simplify.

2. Use Short, Active Sentences and Familiar Vocabulary

Short sentences create pace. Active sentences create clarity.

Passive (unclear):

“It has been decided that parking restrictions will be implemented.”

Active (clear):

“We will introduce parking restrictions.”

Guideposts:

- One idea per sentence.
- Keep most sentences under fifteen words.
- Use everyday phrases over formal constructions.

3. Prioritise Meaning Over Style

Your role is to communicate, not impress.

If a sentence sounds elegant but hides the main message, cut it. If a word is “nice to have” rather than necessary, remove it.

Checklist for meaning-first writing:

- What is the essential point?
- What does the reader need to know right now?
- What action, if any, do they need to take?
- Is anything here “fluff”?

Plain English is a discipline. Every word must earn its place.

4. Apply Readability Tests and Editing Checklists

Plain English does not happen by accident. You must edit with intention.

Readability checks:

- Keep the average sentence length short.
- Use headings, spacing, and bullet points.
- Avoid long paragraphs—break them up.
- Replace abstract nouns with concrete verbs.

Editing checklist (The Three S’s):

- **Simple:** Are the words familiar and easy to read?
- **Short:** Can any sentence be cut or simplified?
- **Straightforward:** Does the reader know what to do?