

Cheshire West & Chester Council



**Skills and  
Employment  
Service**

# Keeping it simple

Marketing and Communications Standards  
including accessibility and plain English



Cheshire West  
and Chester

# Why do we have marketing and communications standards?

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Skills and Employment Service is one of the biggest adult education providers in the region.

Our sub-contracted partners represent us.

Consistent, high-quality materials tell people we know what we are doing.

People will be more confident in our ability to teach them if we get things right.

# Why do we need to remember accessibility and plain English?

- We support people who
  - have learning difficulties
  - have autism
  - have visual impairments
  - have dyslexia
  - do not have English as their first language
- Our messages are important and we need to make sure they are understood

# Why do we need to keep it simple?

“Cognitive load” is the name given to the amount of mental effort it takes to understand something.

At the end of a working day our brains are tired because of the cognitive load.

Making explanations or designs too complicated increases cognitive load.

Reducing cognitive load makes it more likely that people will read and understand your whole message.



Let's make it easy for everyone to see what we offer...

Green text is good advice

Red text is what not to do



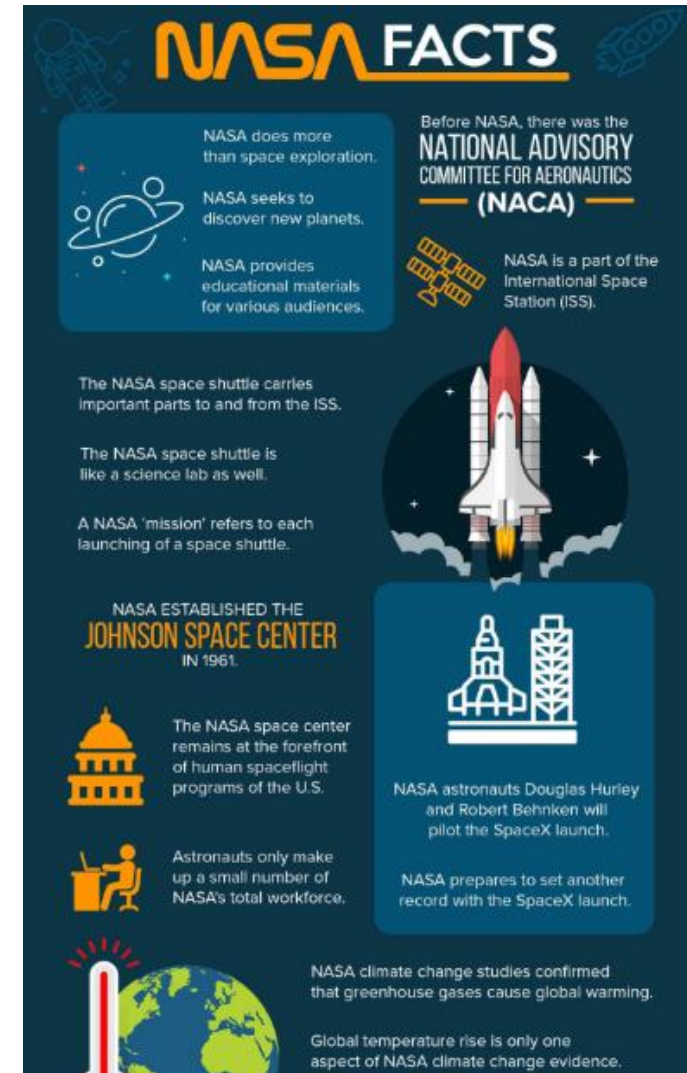
# Accessible design – key elements

- Simple design
- Small chunks of text
- Plain fonts
- Gentle colour contrast
- Left aligned - not centred or justified
- Plain text without bold, italics or all capitals
- Avoid overusing capital letters



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Serif

Serif fonts are harder to read

*Complicated fonts can be impossible!*



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When text is centre aligned each line starts at a different point on the page. People with dyslexia may find it harder to locate the beginning of each line. 'Cognitive load' is increased for all readers making it more tiring to consume the information.

People with dyslexia may also find it harder to read text that has been justified. Although the edges of the paragraph look neater, the gaps between words vary in size. Again, this increases the effort needed to take in the words.

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Different parts of your **message** are **important** but if you **draw attention** to **too many, nothing** will **stand out**

Underlining is now mainly used for hyperlinks so avoid this unless you are using a link

*Italics distorts the shape of letters making them harder to read, especially for people with dyslexia*

TYPING IN CAPITALS IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING AND MAY SEEM RUDE. UNLESS YOUR MESSAGE IS VERY URGENT, AVOID TYPING IN CAPITALS

# Accessible design – key elements

- Simple design
- Small chunks of text
- Plain fonts
- Gentle colour contrast
- Left aligned - not centred or justified
- Plain text without bold, italics or all capitals
- Avoid overusing capital letters, especially at the start of words in the middle of sentences

You can use capital letters at the start of each word in a title.

When writing paragraphs of text capital letters should only be used at the start of a sentence, for people's names and certain other things (see Resources slide for more details).

It is correct to write English with a capital, but not maths.

If you are asking people to talk to you about Safeguarding Concerns the words do not need capital letters.

# Accessible design

Use our templates for posters and social media

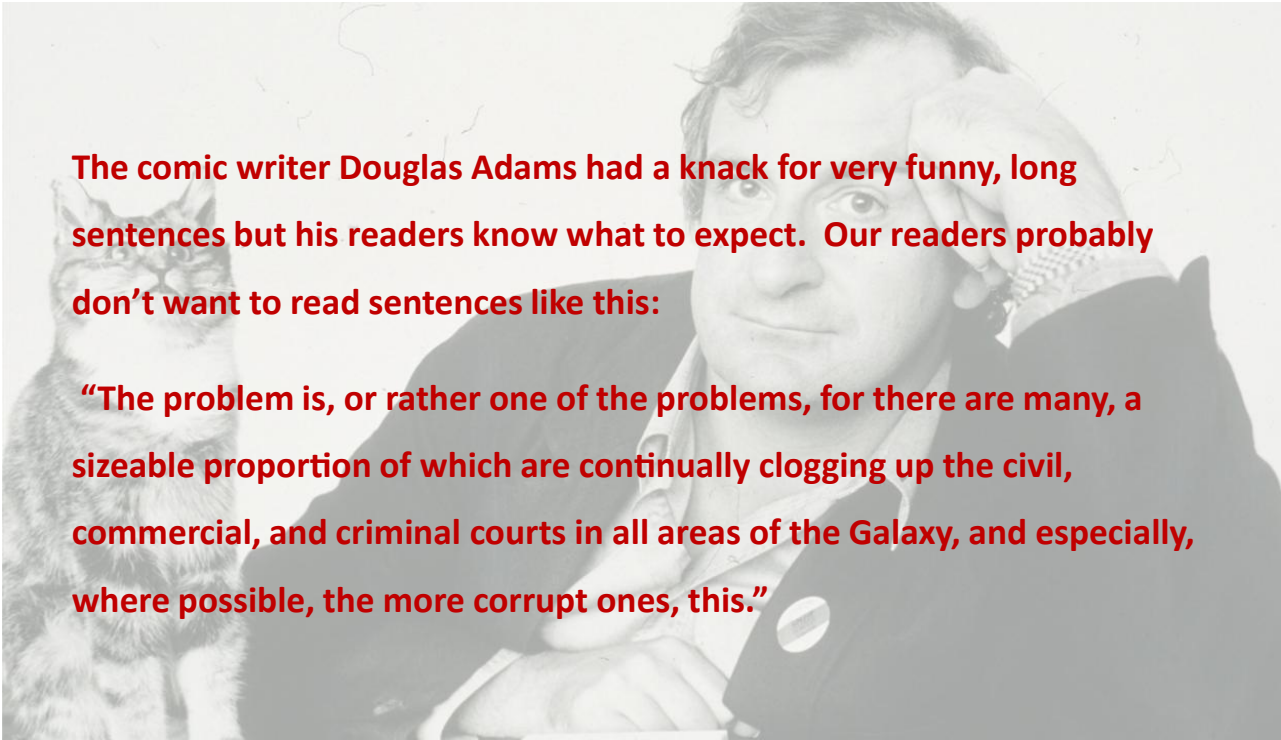
Consult the guides on the Resources slide



# Plain English – key elements

- Keep your sentences short
- Prefer active verbs
- Use 'you' and 'we'
- Use words that are appropriate
- Don't be afraid to give instructions
- Avoid nominalizations
- Use lists where appropriate

Be punchy. Don't waffle.



The comic writer Douglas Adams had a knack for very funny, long sentences but his readers know what to expect. Our readers probably don't want to read sentences like this:

“The problem is, or rather one of the problems, for there are many, a sizeable proportion of which are continually clogging up the civil, commercial, and criminal courts in all areas of the Galaxy, and especially, where possible, the more corrupt ones, this.”



# Plain English – key elements

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Say, "We will monitor and deliver..."

Say, "Maybe you need to touch base with AM"

# Plain English – key elements

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- Prefer active verbs
- Use 'you' and
- **Use words that are appropriate for the reader**
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If your message is for the public,  
don't use jargon or business  
buzzwords

Almost half of job ads overuse buzzwords like "team player", "dynamic" and "self-starter" without qualifying what that means or how it affects the role.



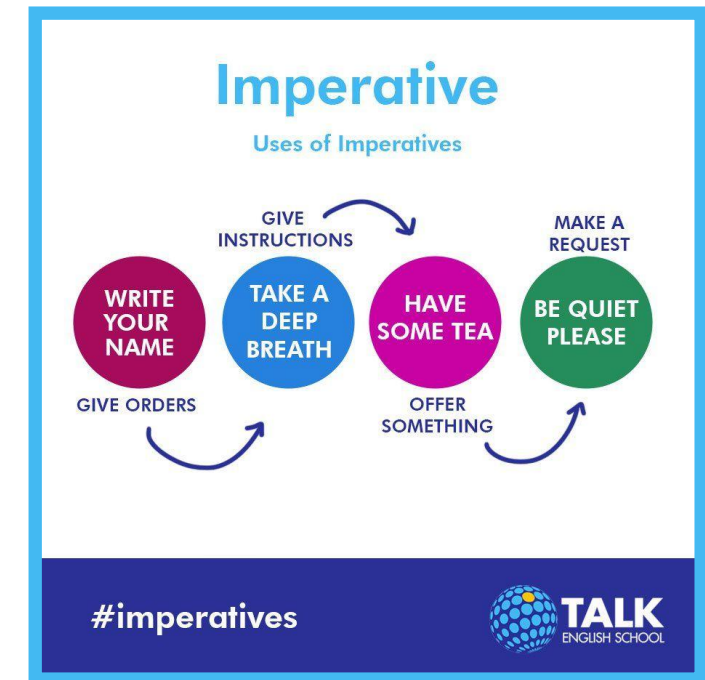


# Plain English – key elements

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- **Don't be afraid to give instructions**
- Avoid nominalizations
- Use lists where appropriate

The bullet points used in this presentation are from the Plain English Campaign. They give instructions.

You can always add “please” to be polite.



# Plain English – key elements

- Keep your sentences short
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- Use 'you' and 'we'
- Use words that are appropriate for the reader
- Don't be afraid to give instructions
- **Avoid nominalizations**
- Use lists where appropriate

Using a nominalization is when you say “An investigation will take place” or “Please make a payment”.

Instead use “We will investigate” or “Please pay”. Both are shorter and sound more active.

## Nominalization

Linguistic process

W Wikipedia

The process of **turning verbs** and adjectives into nouns is known as nominalisation (nominalization if you use American spelling!). It's also sometimes called 'nouncing'.

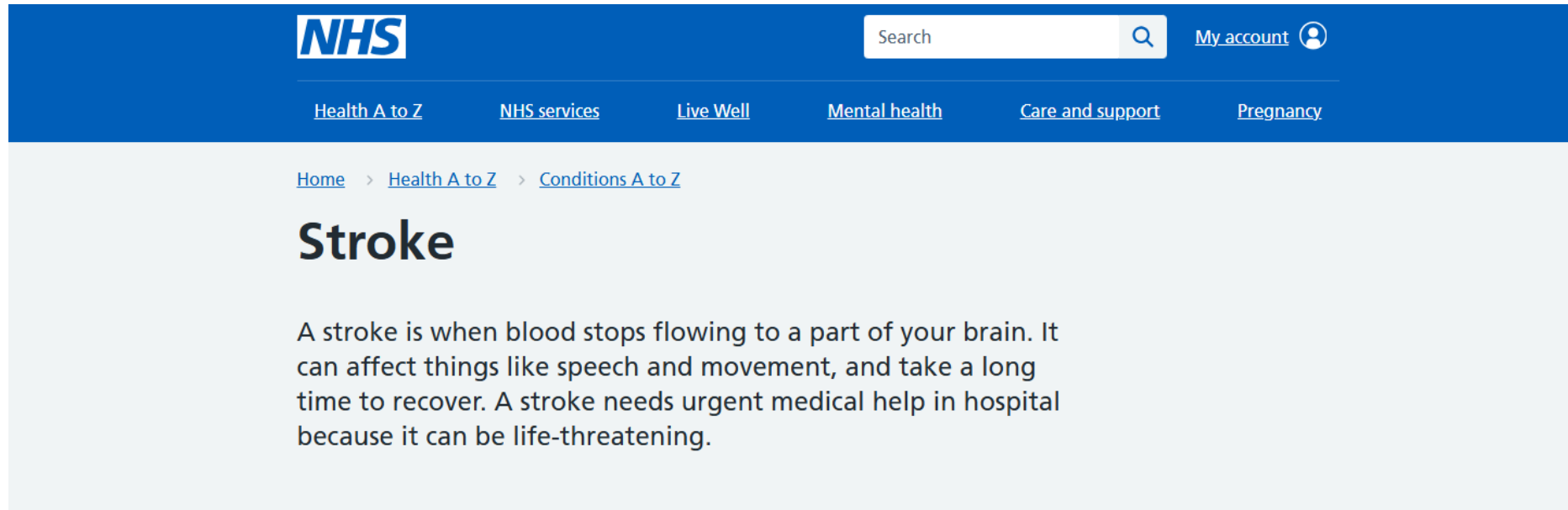
Although nominalization is **welcome in academic writing** to an extent, its overuse can lead to writing which is less vibrant and ends up sounding too mechanical.

# Plain English – key elements

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Just like this one!

# Plain English done well



The NHS have a team of people working on their website to make sure descriptions are easy to understand. They realise that in an emergency people do not have time to read complicated instructions.

# When plain English goes wrong

Be careful how you word things.

Always re-read what you've written to make sure it makes sense.

Don't forget about punctuation.

There's a big difference between “Let's eat, grandma” and “Let's eat grandma”

## ABOUT US

Supported Internships are individualised study programmes which are designed to equip students with special needs or disabilities with the skills they need to secure employment. Interns n

PBS NEWS

## Question:

Are you a mother of young children who recently left the workforce?

you as part of our  
ut our form.

## Essential drowning prevention seminar for a safer summer

As the warmer weather approaches, being smart around water is crucial for a safe and fun summer holiday. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children under the age of 15 and adults aged 15 and over.

## Do You Need Help?

## Human Trafficking

Are you OK? 你還好嗎? ¿Estás bien? Ayos ka ba?

Palmistadom: Sa ninyo, de ninyo pangarap ng...  
Pangal: Sa kanyang magkapatid na may maliit ang buod n...  
Hawak: Sa ninyo ang maliit na kanyang pangkalahatan...  
Mawak: Kanyang pangkalahatan...  
Pangal: Makakakuha ng tulong, kanyang...  
Los Angeles Airport Police ngayon...  
Pangal: Kanyang pangkalahatan...  
Hawak: Kanyang pangkalahatan...  
Mawak: Kanyang pangkalahatan...

potatoes, rainbow carrots, redcurrant mint jus 2

*Younger customers  
Served with choice of chips, fries or mash &  
baked beans or peas*

Southern fried chicken 6.95

## Hospital sued by 7 Foot Doctors

“The Skills and Employment management team will meet more often and will co-ordinate and control emergency responses taking account of local council responses and central government requirements and guidance and develop and implement a Recovery Plan.”

# Style guides

Lots of organisations have style guides. These guides tell you how they like things to look. Style guides contain information like

- branding considerations – logo placement and sizing
- formatting – preferred fonts, sizes and layouts
- dates and times
- what should have a capital letter and what shouldn't

There are some examples of style guides on the Resources slide

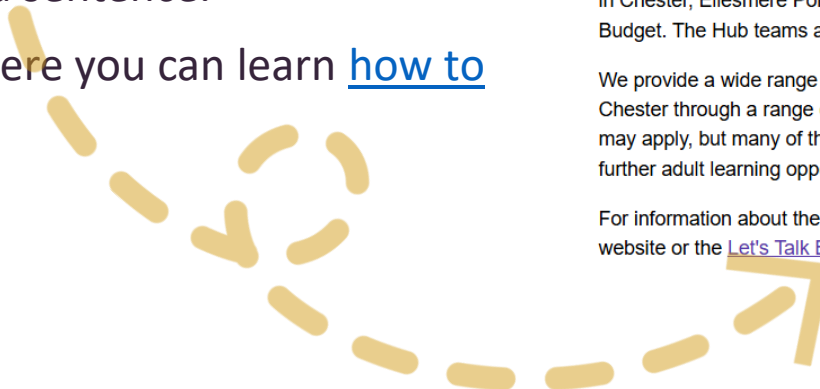
# Good habits

## Hyperlinks

Only use hyperlinks in electronic documents. Ensure they are removed from any printed versions.

For people who use screen readers it is better to use live links which form part of a sentence.

There is a Microsoft page where you can learn [how to create live links](#).



### Overview

#### News - May 2025

The Skills and Employment Service has launched a Prospectus of services. Read more about what we do.

#### Skills and Employment Prospectus

Cheshire West and Chester's Skills and Employment team can provide all the support you need to enable you to move into employment. We provide employment mentoring, help with overcoming barriers to work and a wide range of adult skills development opportunities.

These services are mostly delivered through our four Skills and Employment Hubs (previously called Work Zones) in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford. The main project is supported by the Adult Skills Fund Budget. The Hub teams also deliver projects and activities that are supported by other funding streams.

We provide a wide range of Adult Learning provision and Family Learning opportunities in Cheshire West and Chester through a range of partner providers. This provision is available to all adults aged 19 and over. Tuition fees may apply, but many of the courses, including basic maths and English, are free. We can also signpost you to further adult learning opportunities in your local area.

For information about the full range of services available for employers, please visit the [Business](#) section of our website or the [Let's Talk Business](#) website.

## More good habits...

- Don't stretch pictures, photos and logos
- Don't use shorthand phrases like 1-2-1. Say "one to one"
- Check for repetition of words – use an online thesaurus
- Use consistent date and time formats
- Have someone else look at what you've written or created


...and some bad ones!



Cakes for all occasions


- Wedding's
- Birthday's
- Anniversary's
- Christening's

Alot is not a word.  
You do not write alittle, abunch,  
acantaloupe, or aporkchop.  
Stop writing alot.



**Irony  
is when  
someone writes  
"Your an idiot."**

**Learn grammar.  
Insult properly.**

  
**WRITING.COM**  
WHERE THE WRITERS GO



# Resources

## Accessibility

[HM Government blog - designing for accessibility](#)

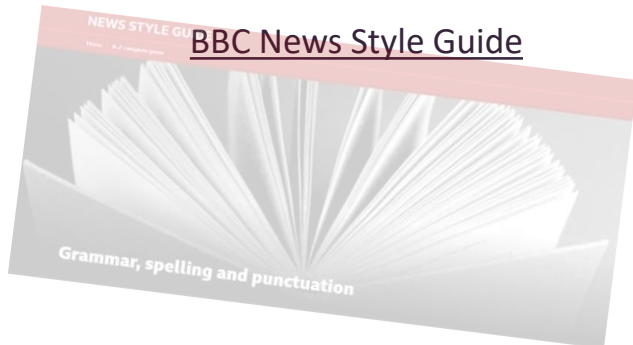
[Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies - GOV.UK](#)

[RGD Access Ability: A practical handbook on accessible graphic design](#)

## Style guides

[Style guide - A to Z - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

[BBC News Style Guide](#)



## Plain English

[Campaign for Plain English guides](#)

[Cheshire West and Chester Council - Plain English and Style Guide](#)

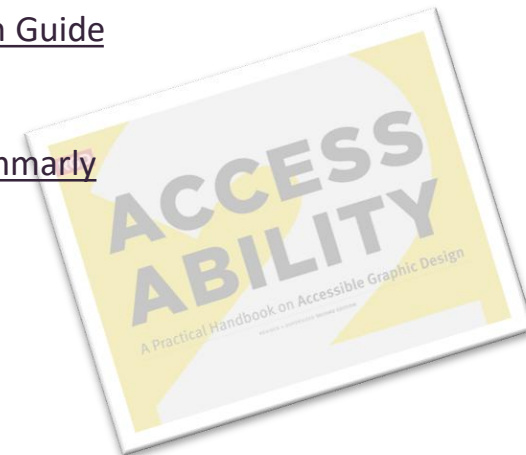
[LGA List of words and phrases not to use in Council communications](#)

## Grammar and punctuation

[BBC News Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation Guide](#)

[BBC Learning English - Easy grammar guide](#)

[Your Go-To Guide for English Grammar | Grammarly](#)





Skills and Employment documents are written in Calibri font.

We write dates in the format **1 September 1995** (with no 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>). This is easier for non-English speakers to understand.

We write times using am and pm with a single full stop between the hours and minutes. There is no need to write 10.00am. **10am** is fine.

We say “the course runs from 9.30am-2pm on Wednesday 3 March 2027”

Please use the templates provided for posters and social media posts.

We are happy to help with the design and wording of any documents and promotional materials.

Are there any elements of this presentation that could be improved? Please let us know. Thank you.

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