**Plain English Guide for Participant Communication**

**(Medical Terminology and General Language)**

**Preface**

The Australian Bureau of Statistic states that literacy skills are becoming increasingly important in contemporary Australian society. In 2006, just over half of Australians aged 15-74 years had adequate or better prose (54%) and document (53%) literacy skills. Although these rates are slightly higher than those in 1996 they still represent a high proportion of people who may be at a disadvantage in finding employment, completing documents and performing other tasks.

Good literacy is an essential skill for coping with the many demands of life in contemporary Australian society. Tasks ranging from reading the directions on a bottle of medicine, completing a tax return, or accessing information on the Internet, all require a reasonably high level of English literacy. People who are unable to complete such tasks independently are at a considerable disadvantage. 1

Please note, the recommended reading level for patient information is grade 6, or 11–12 years old (Ennis L, Wykes T. Sense and readability: participant information sheets for research studies. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2016;208(2):189–194. doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.114.156687). This is particularly important for patient facing material such as the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (PISCF).

A readability assessment can be performed on the PISCF using MS Word.  Please see the [Microsoft Office website](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2) for further information on the Readability Function and further definitions of the scores. The MS Office [Flesch Reading Ease test score target is: 60-70.](javascript:) This test rates text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. This is a guide only.

**Plain Language**

The definition of Plain Language in the Collins dictionary 2 is ‘*language that is clear and easy to understand, with no ambiguity or unnecessarily difficult words’*

It is also known as Plain English or Lay Language.

Plain Language should be written so that it is easy to read, use and understand. Avoid ambiguous, overcomplicated or technical language.

When composing Information Sheets and Consent Forms ensure ease of reading for the participant through short, concise sentences or statements, the use of the Plain Language guides and being aware of your audience.

Be aware of placement of important information, preferably addressing this at the beginning of your communication.

|  |  |
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| **Medical Terminology** | **Plain English Alternative** |
| **abdomen** | stomach, stomach area |
| **alopecia** | hair loss, balding, loss of hair |
| **anaphylaxis** | shock, a sudden and severe allergic reaction, stop breathing, poisoning, life threatening allergic reaction |
| **anemia** | tired, low iron, a low blood count |
| **angina** | chest pain |
| **anesthesia** | numbing drug, drug that puts you to sleep or puts you under |
| **anorexia** | eating disorder, too thin, not hungry |
| **antibiotic** | drug, medicine, drug that fights bacteria, infection-fighting medicine, medicine that fights infection |
| **antigen** | germ, bacteria, virus, poison, something in your body that your body tries to fight off, something that helps your body fight disease |
| **antiviral** | medicine, drug that fights viruses |
| **arrhythmia** | irregular heartbeat, skipped heartbeat, heart problem |
| **arthralgia** | pain, pain in your joints |
| **aspiration** | choke, breathe in a fluid, take out fluid or tissue to test |
| **asymptomatic infection** | when you’re sick, but you don’t feel bad, no symptoms |
| **arteriosclerosis** | hardening of the arteries, clogged blood vessels |
| **autoimmune disease** | disease that makes your body attack itself |
|  |  |
| **benign** | harmless |
| **bilateral** | with both sides considered, two-sided, when both sides get a say, even, balanced; on both sides |
| **biopsy** | take tissue (usually for testing) |
| **BMI** | body mass index, a measure of body fat based on height and weight, a measure of body fat |
| **bone density test** | bone strength test, a test of how solid and how strong your bones are; test for osteoporosis, xray test for brittle bones |
| **bone marrow** | area (or the space) inside your bones where blood cells are made |
| **bradycardia** | slow heartbeat |
| **carcinoma** | cancer starting in the skin or organ lining |
| **cardiovascular** | having to do with the heart and blood vessels |
| **cartilage** | the smooth covering on the end of bones |
| **catheter** | tube |
| **cerebral hemorrhage** | stroke, bleeding in the brain |
| **cerebrovascular disease** | stroke |
| **chemotherapy** | cancer drug, cancer medicine, cancer treatment |
| **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease** | lung disease, such as asthma or emphysema |
| **coagulate** | clot, set, clump together |
| **colonoscopy** | check your colon, check your intestines, look inside your intestine, check for colon  cancer |
| **compromised** | weakened |
| **congenital** | born with, inborn, there at birth |
| **contraindication** | dangerous to give, not good for, when a drug or procedure may be harmful, wrong,  opposite |
| **coronary thrombosis** | heart attack, blood clot in a blood vessel in the heart |
| **cutaneous** | skin related, about the skin, on the surface, skin |
| **cyst** | pus under your skin, boil, cancer cells, lump |
|  |  |
| **dermal** | related to the skin, skin related |
| **diabetes** | diabetes, disease with too much sugar in the blood, problem with making food into energy |
| **discoloration** | change in color, not the color it normally is, odd color |
| **disorder** | condition, illness, medical problem |
|  |  |
| **efficacy** | effectiveness, can treat |
| **EMR (Electronic Medical Record)** | chart, medical records, computer medical record; medical record in a digital format |
| **electrolytes** | blood salts, a type of necessary salt found in blood |
| **embolism** | blood clot |
| **encephalitis** | swollen brain, brain swelling, swelling of the brain |
| **endocrine** | hormone system |
| **epidermis** | skin |
| **febrile** | caused by a fever, feverish |
| **fissure** | deep crack |
| **fistula** | abnormal connection or passageway |
|  |  |
| **gastrointestinal** | digestive system, stomach and bowel |
| **glucose** | sugar, energy, blood sugar |
|  |  |
| **haematocrit** | amount of red blood cells in the blood |
| **haematuria** | blood in the urine |
| **haemorrhage** | bleeding |
| **hepatic** | related to the liver |
| **hyperglycemia** | high blood sugar |
| **hyperlipidemia** | high cholesterol |
| **hypertension** | high blood pressure |
| **hypoglycemia** | low blood sugar |
| **hypotension** | low blood pressure |
|  |  |
| **immunological** | related to the immune system |
| **immunosuppression** | when your body can’t fight disease |
| **infectious** | something that can spread disease |
| **inflammation** | swelling, injury, sore |
| **ingest** | eat/drink |
| **injection** | shot, to give medicine by needle, booster, dose |
| **insulin** | blood sugar |
| **intervention** | care |
| **intravenous (IV)** | into your vein; into your blood stream, putting drugs or fluids directly into your blood |
|  |  |
| **lesion** | cut, injury, wound, sore |
| **lingual** | on the tongue |
|  |  |
| **mammogram** | breast health test, breast check |
| **malignant** | cancer |
| **melanoma** | skin cancer |
| **migraine** | severe headache |
| **morbidity** | diseased, sick, ill |
| **mucosal (mucus) membranes** | soft, moist areas just inside the openings to your body |
| **myocardial** | of the heart muscle |
|  |  |
| **narcotic** | addictive pain medicine, drug |
| **nasal** | in the nose |
| **nephrology** | study of kidney problems |
| **neuritis** | swelling of a nerve |
| **neurological** | related to the brain and nervous system |
|  |  |
| **obesity** | dangerously overweight, too heavy |
| **obstruction** | barrier, block, hurdle |
| **oncologist** | Cancer doctor patient |
| **oral** | mouth and jaw |
| **oral consent** | you say it is OK for the doctor to do a test or procedure |
| **orthotic** | support or brace |
| **outpatient** | visiting patient, not staying overnight |
|  |  |
| **paediatrician** | baby doctor; children’s doctor |
| **palliative** | supportive care |
| **papule** | small red dot on your skin, skin rash |
| **paralysis** | can’t move |
| **pathogen** | germ, virus, disease-causing agent |
| **pericarditis** | heart inflammation, swelling of the tissue covering the heart |
| **peritoneum** | lining of your stomach, belly |
| **placebo** | sugar pill, drug with no active ingredient and will cause no effect |
| **platelet** | blood clotting cell |
| **prescriber** | doctor, nurse, any medical person who is licensed to write prescriptions |
| **prevalent** | common |
| **proximal** | near to, close, area closer to the center of the body |
| **pulmonary** | related to the lungs |
|  |  |
| **radiation** | energy, rays, waves, heat |
| **recur** | come back, get again, happen again |
| **remission** | when a disease is not active |
| **renal** | related to the kidney |
| **respiration** | breathing, taking in oxygen |
| **retrospectively** | back to the past |
| **rupture** | break, burst, break open |
|  |  |
| **sciatica** | Back pain that also goes down the leg |
| **sclerosis** | thickening and stiffening |
| **sedentary** | inactive, sitting a lot |
| **seizure** | fit of uncontrolled movements |
| **serology** | study of blood strength |
| **spirometer** | breathing test, breath strength machine, breath strength indicator |
| **stoma** | small opening |
| **systemic** | throughout your body, in all parts of your body |
|  |  |
| **therapeutic** | healing, improving, getting better |
| **thrombosis** | clot blocking a blood vessel |
| **toxin** | poison, pollution |
| **tremor** | shaking, trembling |
| **tumour** | growth, lump |
|  |  |
| **ulcer** | open sore, canker |
| **Unbiased** | Fair, balanced, true and correct |
| **upper respiratory system** | nose, throat, and windpipe |
|  |  |
| **vaccinate** | to protect against disease, usually by a shot |
| **validate** | prove, test |
| **vascular** | of the veins |
| **Venepuncture** | collect a blood sample |
| **vertigo** | loss of balance, dizziness |
| **virulent** | strong, dangerous |
|  |  |
| **wheeze** | breathing problem, difficulty breathing; gasp; gag; pant |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **GENERAL WORDS** | **PLAIN LANGUAGE ALTERNATIVE** |
| **absence** | no, none |
| **accommodation** | where you live, home |
|  |  |
| **accompanying** | with |
| **additional** | extra, more |
| **administer** | give |
| **advance knowledge** | improve |
| **adverse** | bad, unwanted |
| **advise** | tell |
| **allocated** | put in to |
| **approximately** | about |
| **alleviate** | ease, reduce |
| **allocate** | share, add, give |
| **alternative** | choice, other |
| **ameliorate** | improve, help |
| **amendment** | change |
| **annual** | once a year |
| **anticipate** | expect |
| **appropriate** | right, suitable |
| **ascertain** | find out |
| **associated** | linked to |
| **attempt** | try |
| **attend** | come to, go to, be at |
| **authorise** | allow, let |
|  |  |
| **beneficial** | helpful, useful |
| **biannual** | twice a year |
| **biased** | not true and correct |
| **biennial** | every 2 years |
| **biweekly** | twice a week |
| **breach** | break |
|  |  |
| **cease** | stop |
| **coincidence** | at the same time |
| **commence** | start |
| **complete** | fill in |
| **consequently** | so |
| **convalesce** | get better |
| **corroborate** | confirm, check |
| **communicate** | talk, write, telephone |
| **compile** | make, collect |
| **completion** | end |
| **comprise** | make up, include |
| **compulsory** | you must |
| **conclusion** | end |
| **considerable** | great, important |
| **consult** | talk to, meet, ask |
| **correspond** | write |
| **customary** | usual, normal |
|  |  |
| **decline** | worsening of |
| **defective** | faulty |
| **deficiency** | lack of |
| **deleterious** | harmful |
| **demonstrate** | shown |
| **deteriorates** | gets worse |
| **determine** | decide, work out |
| **detrimental** | harmful, damaging |
| **diminish** | lessen, reduce |
| **disclose** | tell |
| **discontinue** | stop, end |
| **discuss** | talk about |
| **documentation** | papers, documents |
| **duration** | time, life |
|  |  |
| **eligible** | able to |
| **enclosed** | inside, with |
| **enquire** | ask |
| **ensure** | make sure |
| **equivalent** | equal, the same |
| **evaluate** | test, check |
| **excessive** | too much, too many |
| **exclude** | leave out |
| **expire** | run out |
|  |  |
| **facilitate** | help, make possible |
| **factor** | reason |
| **finalise** | end, finish |
| **following** | after |
| **for the duration of** | during, while |
| **for the purpose of** | to, for |
| **frequently** | often |
|  |  |
| **gauge** | assess |
| **generate** | produce, give, make |
| **genetic** | markers in the blood (if applicable saliva/tissue) |
|  |  |
| **hereby** | now, by this |
| **herein** | here |
| **herewith** | with this |
|  |  |
| **immediately** | at once, now |
| **implement** | carry out, do |
| **in case of** | if |
| **in addition** | and, as well as, now |
| **in conjunction with** | and, with |
| **in lieu of** | instead of |
| **in the absence of** | without |
| **inappropriate** | wrong, unsuitable |
| **inception** | start, beginning |
| **incorporating** | which includes |
| **incurred** | have to pay, owe |
| **inform** | tell |
| **initially** | at first |
| **investigate** | look |
| **irrespective of** | despite, even if |
|  |  |
| **jeopardise** | risk, threaten |
|  |  |
| **locate** | find, put |
|  |  |
| **manner** | way |
| **marginal** | small, slight |
|  |  |
| **negligible** | very small |
| **notify** | tell, let you know |
| **numerous** | many |
| **objective** | aim, goal |
| **obtain** | get, receive |
| **onset** | beginning, start |
| **opt** | choose, pick |
| **on behalf of** | for |
| **on request** | if you ask |
| **optimum** | best, ideal |
| **option** | choice |
|  |  |
| **participate** | join in, take oart |
| **particulars** | details, facts |
| **periodically** | regularly |
| **persons** | person |
| **prior to** | before |
| **preserve** | keep, protect |
| **previous** | earlier, before |
| **proceed** | go ahead |
| **projected** | estimated |
| **prolonged** | long |
| **proximity** | closeness, nearness |
|  |  |
| **query** | questions |
| **quantity** | amount |
|  |  |
| **regarding** | about |
| **reimburse** | pay back |
| **relevant** | related |
| **reconsider** | think again about |
| **regulation** | rule |
| **relating to** | about |
| **requirements** | needs, rules |
| **restriction** | limit |
| **revised** | new, changed |
|  |  |
| **scope** | range |
| **subject** | participant |
| **subsequently** | following, after |
| **surname** | last name |
|  |  |
| **thereof** | that |
| **technique** | method, procedure |
| **terminate** | end |
| **thereby** | by that, because of that |
| **therein** | in that, there |
|  |  |
| **undergo** | have |
| **undertake** | agree, promise, do |
| **utilisation** | use |
| **utilise** | use |
|  |  |
| **variation** | change |
|  |  |
| **waive** | give up a right |
| **whilst** | while |
| **whereby** | by which |
| **with effect from** | from |
| **with regard to** | about, for |

**Resources**

1. Plain Language.Gov [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)
2. Plain Language Thesaurus [www.orau.gov](http://www.orau.gov)
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics website [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)
4. Collins Dictionary website [www.collinsdictionary.com](http://www.collinsdictionary.com)
5. National PICF - Participant Information and Consent Form – User Guide November 2016: <https://www.nationalpicf.com.au/files/National%20PICF%20-%20Participant%20Information%20and%20Consent%20Form%20%E2%80%93%20User%20Guide%20-%20November%202016%20.pdf>