



Presentation Style and Writing Well

Presentation style

Although it may seem unimportant, the look of your application does make a difference. Which would you prefer to read: a page of dense text with no headings and only two paragraphs or a page of text broken up with several paragraphs, headings in bold, bullet points, etc.?

Use:

- Bullet points and headings, highlighted in bold or underlined
- Shorter paragraphs
- Larger size of print (some funders will specify – follow their instructions!)
- If writing a letter of application, use a clear and logical structure

Writing style

- A case study, a quote from a service user or a shocking statistic may be a good way to catch the funder's attention. Funders get hundreds of applications, so you want to grab their attention in the first few lines of your application. If you are completing a form – this can be a good way to introduce your project description (additional evidence of need can then be added to the question on need)
- It is important to get the passion for your work into the application!
- Use plain English (See the Plain English Campaign website: www.plainenglish.co.uk)
- Don't use three words when one is enough (people often think they need to use very complicated English – but this is not necessary. For those where English is not your first language, don't worry if it's not perfect – so long as the information is clear and understandable.
- Don't use jargon
- Don't use acronyms (e.g. NCVO, EAW, WRC) unless you need to repeat them several times. In this case write the words out in full the first time you use them, followed by the acronym in brackets.
- Write for the reader – don't assume that the person assessing your application knows anything about your work but try not to be patronising either
- Be clear and specific
- Use facts more than opinions
- Keep it short and simple – a longer description or explanation does not usually make your application better

- Vary the length of sentences but generally, break up longer sentences into smaller ones
- Try not to put more than 3 ideas or points in one paragraph. It is well-known in sales that 3 is the magic number when trying to make your point; people can't usually take in much more.
- Don't use generalisations or bland statements e.g. 'extremely busy', 'huge increase', 'well-attended' – be specific
- Don't use words or phrases like: 'unique', 'desperate need', 'a major new initiative' – unless you are sure you can provide evidence to back them up
- Over emotional appeals or cries for help in crisis situations don't usually work
- Be positive: 'This project will...' instead of 'This project aims to...'; 'This project plans to...' instead of 'This project hopes to...'
- Use 'active' sentences: 'We helped young women to...' instead of 'Young women were helped by our organisation to...'; 'We work closely with...' instead of 'A partnership was formed between us and...'

Always try to ask someone who knows nothing about your work to read the application to see whether they understand your project and whether your answers to the questions make sense.