

Plain English style guide

Affect/effect: Affect is a verb while effect is a noun. For e.g. The drug *affected* the patients hugely – its *effects* were disastrous. Effect can be used as a verb but is a synonym for achieve e.g. he effected a remarkable transformation in the fortunes of Manchester United

Approximately: prefer ‘around’

Basis: On a weekly, daily **basis** etc is just waffle. Prefer daily, weekly or even better every day or every week

Commence: Prefer ‘start’

Comprised of: Prefer ‘made up of.’

Disinterested/uninterested: *Disinterested* means not having anything to gain or lose from a situation whereas *uninterested* means not taking an interest in what’s happening. Referees are – or at least should be – disinterested in the outcome of football matches but should certainly not be uninterested in what’s going on during them.

Endeavour: Can usually be replaced with ‘try.’

Enormity/enormousness: An enormity is another word for an atrocity not an adjective meaning very big. For example: The UN realised that an enormity had been committed in Serbia when they saw the enormousness of the mass graves there

Facilitate: Diplomats might facilitate talks between Russia and the UN but nurses and doctors should *help* patients put their trousers on, go to the toilet etc

Fewer/less: If you can count something you should use **fewer** if you have to measure it or weigh it use **less** e.g. *Fewer people driving means less petrol has been sold*

Going forward: Prefer ‘In the future.’

Humanist/Humanitarian: Humanists are atheists with a sense of optimism. Bill Gates is a humanitarian. But neither humanist nor humanitarian should be used instead of ‘kind’ or ‘well-meaning.’

Impact: Best reserved for car or plane crashes. If tempted to use ‘impact’ as a verb then ‘affect’ is probably better. If you are thinking of using it as a noun then ‘effect(s)’ would probably do just as well

Intervention(s): prefer treatment(s)

Less see Fewer/less

Male/female: Male and female are ADJECTIVES not NOUNS. E.g. *Ten men/women were in the pub discussing male/female psychology*. Male and female should only be used as nouns when talking about animals for which no alternative (e.g. bull and cow) exist

Multidisciplinary: It's great that different professions work together to provide care for patients but *they don't really need to know*. Pat yourselves on the back but don't inflict this long and ugly word on the general public

Outcomes: prefer 'results.'

Patient-centred: avoid. Begs the question what care was centred on before. Hat stands? Lampshades? Astrology?

Per annum: Prefer 'a year.'

Practice/practise: Practise is a verb while practice is a noun e.g. 'To practise medicine effectively doctors need to do hours of practice.'

Prior to: prefer 'before.'

Simplistic Does NOT mean the same as simple. Building a wall is simple. Trying to solve the US's problems by building a wall between it and Mexico is simplistic, but far from simple!

Situated/located: Castle and machine-gun emplacements can be well-situated but in most cases this word can be dropped altogether. *The toilets are situated just outside outpatients* makes just as much sense when changed to *The toilets are just outside outpatients*

Tasked with: is an abomination. Prefer 'asked'

Token/tokenistic: 'token' can be used as an adjective. There is no good reason to use 'tokenistic'

Uninterested: see Disinterested

Unique: Being unique is a bit like being pregnant. Something either is or isn't, so 'fairly unique,' 'very unique,' etc doesn't make any sense. Prefer 'unusual.'

Utilise: It's hard to think of any context when this word couldn't be improved on by utilising 'use.'

Utility: (see above) Prefer 'usefulness.'

Whilst/While: Whilst = even though, whereas while covers meanings to do with time e.g. *Whilst* it can be annoying to have background music in the waiting room it does stop patients getting bored *while* they are waiting