



Social Services
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Information Literacy
Step 6 / Share



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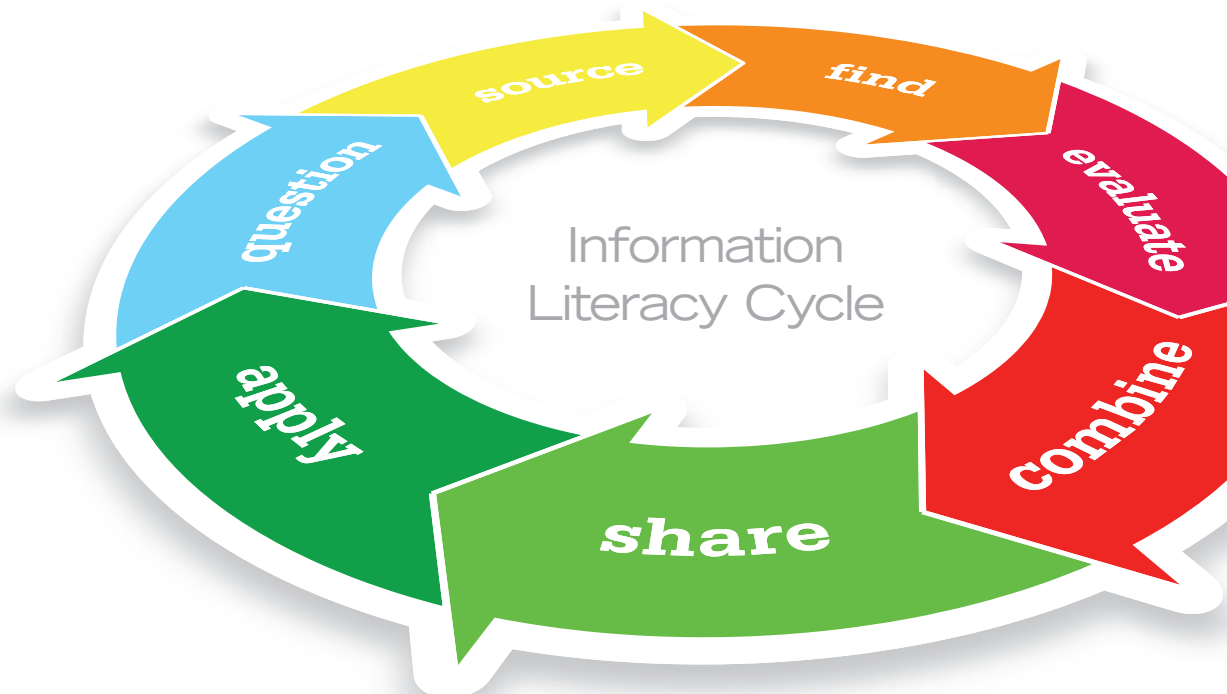
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How can you effectively share the information and knowledge you've found with others?

Learning outcomes

This unit aims to support you to develop skills associated with the Share step of the information literacy cycle. It will enable you to:

- Identify activities and behaviours that support knowledge sharing
- Understand the principles of writing in plain English
- Consider ways to improve your presentations



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KNOWLEDGE SHARING

There are several ways you can share knowledge with others. This unit introduces some key issues to do with knowledge sharing and some ways you can improve the way you communicate in writing and verbally.

About Knowledge Sharing

Some people object to sharing their knowledge as they feel that others will steal their ideas and reap the rewards that are rightly theirs. This is a fallacy. Knowledge sharing isn't about blindly sharing everything; giving away your ideas; being politically naïve; or being open about absolutely everything. You still need to exercise judgment... knowledge sharing is not just about sharing great ideas – it's about improving the way that things get done by sharing the little things. You have lots of knowledge of little use to you – share it with others who can make use of it and in return they will share relevant knowledge with you. (Gurteen, 1999)

Fundamentally, sharing knowledge is about being more open in your way of work and in your relationships with other people. Sharing is about:*

- Soliciting feedback
- Asking questions
- Telling people what you plan to do before doing it
- Asking other people for help
- Asking someone to work with you in some way - however small
- Telling people what you are doing and more importantly why you are doing it.
- Asking people what they think; asking them for advice
- Asking people what would they do differently
- Not just sharing information but know-how and know-why

* Extracted from 'Creating a Knowledge Sharing Culture'. David Gurteen (1999)

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ACTIVITY 1

Think about how you share information and knowledge in your work context. Do you routinely practice some of the behaviours and activities listed above? Discuss in pairs or in the group ways you could improve the way you share knowledge at work.

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SCAM: SOURCE, CHANNEL, AUDIENCE, MESSAGE

Effective sharing of knowledge depends on clear communication. The SCAM model (Winkler et al., 1985; Frost et al., 2006) outlines some issues to consider when you're sharing information.

- **Source:** Who delivers the message? It's important that the message you want to communicate is delivered by the 'right' person. Is there someone else other than you who might be more effective at delivering the message? Also, sending the message out through a selection of sources might work better than if it comes from a single source.
- **Channel:** How is the message delivered? Will it reach who it needs to? Channels include:
 - Newsletters
 - Trade journals
 - Web pages
 - Conferences
 - Seminars and round tables
 - One on one meetings and exchanges
 - Presentations to selected groups of decision makers
 - Written channels such as web pages, newsletters and e-bulletins have the advantage of permanency, allowing the people to access the information when needed, as well as when offered.
- **Audience:** What are the interests and priorities of your target audience? Try to tailor your message to your audience; for example, what are their preferred formats, timings and / or locales for communication?
- **Message:** What do you want to say? What are your key points and are you making them in a logical way? Are you making relevant links between the evidence and the given context? Is your message positive or does it concentrate on barriers and problems? Using plain English (more on this in the next section) and keeping the KISS (Keep it Simple Stupid) principle in mind will help you communicate a clear message. Rogers (1983) suggests a number of message characteris-

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tics that influence the likelihood of their uptake. Though this study focused on a health context, these points could also be useful in the social services context:

- Complexity: The **less complex** the message and the changes to practice implied by it, the more likely its adoption.
- Trialability: The more practitioners can **try out** the recommended change the more likely it is to be implemented.
- Observability: the more a practitioner can **observe the consequences** of a change implied by a message the more likely its adoption.
- Compatibility: the more the message is couched in language or implies change that is compatible with the **culture** of the practitioner's environment the more likely it is to be taken up.



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WRITING IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Plain English 'is a message, written with the reader in mind and with the right tone of voice, that is clear and concise' (Plain English Campaign). Messages can get lost in 'gobbledygook' and jargon so writing in plain English helps to keep your written messages (e.g. reports, summaries, emails and letters) simple, focused and easily understood by your audience. The following summary* outlines some ways you can keep your writing clear:

- Stop and think before you start writing. Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order.
- Prefer short words. Long words will not impress your customers or help your writing style.
- Use everyday English whenever possible. Avoid jargon and legalistic words, and explain any technical terms you have to use.
- Keep your sentence length down to an average of 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence.
- Use active verbs as much as possible. Say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'.
- Be concise.
- Imagine you are talking to your reader. Write sincerely, personally, in a style that is suitable and with the right tone of voice.
- And always check that your writing is clear, helpful, human and polite.

* Extracted from 'How to write in plain English' © Plain English Campaign

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The Plain English Campaign also provides several good examples of long-winded official writing alongside their proposed plain English alternatives:*

Example 1

Before	High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process
After	Children need good schools if they are to learn properly

Example 2

Before	If there are any points on which you require explanation or further particulars we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone
After	If you have any questions, please phone

* © Plain English Campaign

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ACTIVITY 2

Take the following sentence and rewrite it in plain English:

It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to the Council by way of the envelope provided.

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TEN SIMPLE RULES FOR MAKING GOOD ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Sharing and presenting information to get your message across depends on clear communication whether you do this in writing or verbally. Giving presentations can be nerve racking so it's a good idea to keep in mind some key principles when delivering your presentation to ensure you are effectively sharing your message:*

1. **Talk to the Audience:** Know who your audience is and make sure your presentation addresses them, their backgrounds and knowledge level of the material you're presenting. If your presentation is off-topic, your audience will lose interest.
2. **Less is more:** Concentrate on communicating your main message rather than overloading your presentation with too much information. A side effect of too much material is that you talk too quickly which can be hard and confusing to follow for your audience.
3. **Only talk when you have something to say:** Again, focus on the key points you want to make rather than padding your presentation with uninteresting preliminary material.
4. **Make the take-home message persistent:** A good rule of thumb would seem to be that if you ask a member of the audience a week later about your presentation, they should be able to remember three points. If these are the key points you were trying to make then you've done a good job. If they can remember any three points but not the key points, your emphasis may have been wide of the mark.
5. **Be logical:** Think of the presentation as a story with a logical flow – a clear beginning, middle and end.
6. **Treat the floor as a stage:** Presentations should be entertaining but know your limits! If you're not humorous by nature, then don't feel you have to try and be humorous in your presentation, similarly, if you're not comfortable telling anecdotes, don't feel you have to include any.
7. **Practice and time your presentation:** Practice your presentation and stick to what you've practiced rather than deviating into material you know less about. It helps to use slides or other visual cues to keep you on topic.
8. **Use visuals sparingly and effectively:** The visual (e.g. PowerPoint slides) should support and highlight the points you are making rather than acting as a word-for-word record of what you're saying. Overloading the visual can be distracting to the audience so make your points few and clear.

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9. **Review audio and/ or video of your presentations:** This can be very effective to see what works and what you might want to change in your presentation style.
10. **Provide appropriate acknowledgements:** Leave enough time to acknowledge those that have contributed to your presentation.

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Gurteen, D. (1999). Creating a Knowledge Sharing Culture. *Knowledge Management*, 2(5). Available at: <http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/id/ksculture>

Plain English Campaign. *How to write in plain English*. Available at: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/howto.pdf>

Winkler, J., Lohr, K., Brook, R. (1985). Persuasive communication and medical technology assessment. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 145, 314-317.

FURTHER READING

Internet Social Worker: Success

<http://is.gd/idWa>

Plain English Campaign: free guides

<http://is.gd/idWo>

Improving communication with your team

<http://is.gd/idWF>

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TRAINER NOTES

Activity 1

Think about how you share information and knowledge in your work context. Do you routinely practice some of the behaviours and activities listed above? Discuss in pairs or in the group ways you could improve the way you share knowledge at work.

The aim of this activity is to generate discussion in the group about current knowledge sharing practices in their work context and to get them thinking about how they might improve knowledge sharing.

Activity 2

Example of over-complicated sentence:*

“It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to the Council by way of the envelope provided.”

Plain English version of the sentence could be:

“Please read the notes opposite before you fill in the form. Then send it back to us as soon as possible in the envelope provided.”

* Example is taken from The Plain English Campaign Website:

www.plainenglish.co.uk/examples/before_and_after.html

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