

ENGLISH UNLOCKED PRESENTS

5 STEPS TO CLEARER WRITING

Rewrite your content so that people who are learning English can understand it more easily.





UNNECESSARILY DIFFICULT?

Is your written content harder to understand than it needs to be? This eBook is for fluent and confident writers of English - ***your fluency and confidence might be getting in the way of your ability to write for readers who are coming to English from another language.*** By the end of this workbook you'll be able to see your written content through fresh eyes and rewrite it with English learners in mind.

Shelley Purchon

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR
ENGLISH UNLOCKED

FIVE STEPS TO CLEARER WRITING

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A crucial first step you might be missing - get your reader to opt in.

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Making every word count - the balance between being concise and being explicit.

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Shorter is better - learn to express complex things more simply.

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Six types of tricky vocabulary which you should avoid.

STEP FIVE

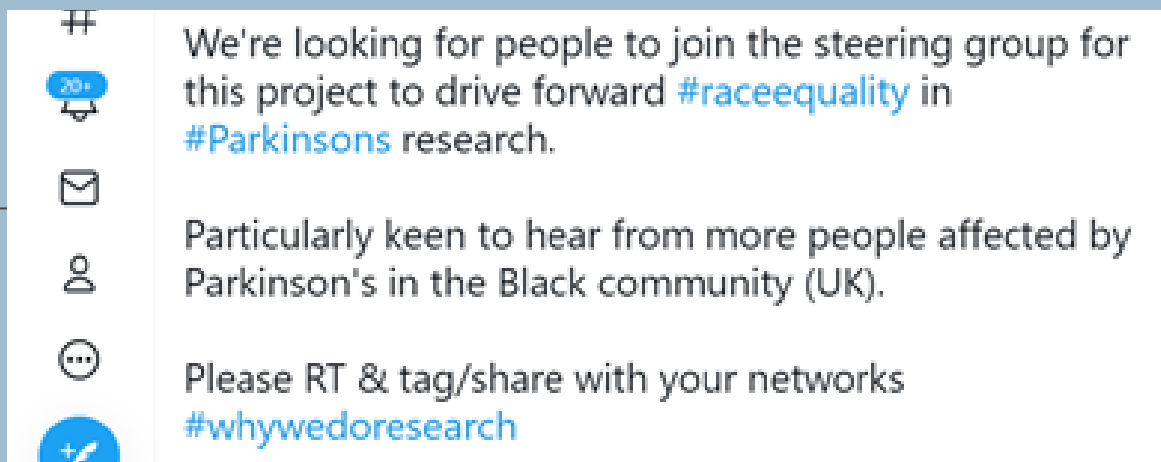
24 - 29

Is your grammar unnecessarily complicated? Two common mistakes.

BEFORE WE START

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

This eBook uses real life examples. Test yourself by trying to improve this tweet before we start.



The wording is fine for confident English speakers but could be improved for readers who are learning English.

Can you guess what we would change?

Read on to learn our first tip

STEP 1

Get your reader to opt in.



A crucial step you might be overlooking.

TWO TWEETS

Here you can see two versions of the tweet your saw earlier- the second is a rewrite suggested by English Unlocked. We use real examples in this eBook - this one comes from the field of science.



This tweet begins with the concerns of the *writer*.

This version gets straight into the concerns of the target *reader*.

Do you have #Parkinson's disease?
Would you like to help scientists to understand Parkinson's better?
We are beginning a research project on this topic and we are looking for people from Black communities to help us.
Please RT & tag/share with your networks.
#raceequality

Start your post with a question to which only the target reader would answer 'yes' - it's a great way to get the reader to opt in. **It makes tweet two seem more engaging**, and not just to people who speak English as a foreign language. Writing this way will improve the accessibility of your content for all kinds of readers.

WHY IS THIS STEP CRUCIAL?

A reader who is learning English is going to have to expend a great deal of effort to read whatever you have written. This means that ***the only job of your first line is to get them to commit to the effort of reading the rest.***



Of course if your writing is unclear it will put them off, but clarity is not your only issue here. Think about who your audience is (and who they are not.) **Why should someone bother reading this?** Is it really meant for them? Prove that it is ***relevant*** in the very first sentence and get them to commit to reading on.

Starting with a question works well for social media. If you're writing a piece with multiple paragraphs, make the first line of each one clear and interesting.



YOUR TURN

Here are two examples. Can you write a better opening sentence? Think about who the target reader is, then write a sentence which gets that reader to opt in. Our suggestions are on the next page.

We are keen to find volunteers from minoritised ethnic backgrounds to investigate how vitamin D levels affect [#menopause](#) symptoms.

We're especially keen to hear from South Asian women. Please RT & tag/ share with your networks

 Everyone can reply

Here the target reader is a South Asian woman who is experiencing the menopause.

Here the target reader is a refugee or asylum seeker.

Understanding what healthcare is available and how to access it can be difficult for newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees. That's why we've produced this handy guide in simple English. Click [here](#) to download our free pdf 'Who's who in the NHS.'

Write two opening sentences here

OUR SUGGESTED ANSWERS

These are our ideas - yours might be different but just as good.

We are keen to find volunteers from minoritised ethnic backgrounds to investigate how vitamin D levels affect [#menopause](#) symptoms.

We're especially keen to hear from South Asian women.

Please RT & tag/ share with your networks

 Everyone can reply



Are you a woman from South Asia? Are you experiencing menopause symptoms?



Understanding what healthcare is available and how to access it can be difficult for newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees. That's why we've produced this handy guide in simple English. Click [here](#) to download our free pdf '*Who's who in the NHS*.'



Are you a refugee or asylum seeker? Would you like to understand health services in the UK?



Are you a refugee or asylum seeker who would like to understand health services in the UK?



Notice that we offer two short questions rather than one long one. In Step 3 you'll use this technique to simplify complex ideas.

ASSUMPTIONS EXCLUDE PEOPLE

Something else to consider when you start is the knowledge level of your audience. Does the tone and content of your opening sentence assume knowledge which your readers might not have?



How much assumed knowledge can you spot in the opening sentence?

Assumption 1

'We're looking for.' Who is we?

Assumption 2

'This project.' What is this project?

Assumption 3

'Steering groups.' What are they? Who is qualified?

If your content contains a lot of assumed knowledge, consider writing two versions of it. One for people who grew up speaking English and a different one for those who didn't. We offer this type of rewrite at English Unlocked - we call it a '**targeted rewrite**.' Click [here](#) to see an example.



STEP 2

Make every word count



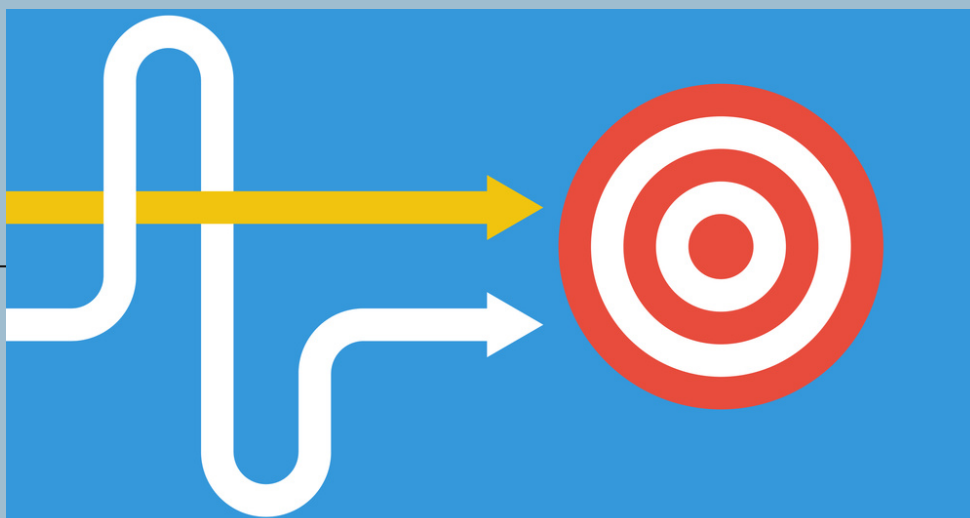
Be concise while also being explicit

BE CONCISE

Remove padding, repetition and waffle. Are you 'going around the houses to get to the trees'?

BE EXPLICIT

Don't skip or imply words and don't use shorthand. Is everything said that needs to be said?



Being concise can make your text shorter while being explicit can make it longer. **Either or both may be necessary.** If there is skipped or implied content you should *add* words for clarity. If you are going around the houses to get to the trees, get straight to the point instead.

TOO LONG?

Politeness might cause you to write longer sentences. "*We kindly ask customers to use the other exit*" seems less abrupt than "*Please use the other exit.*" This is a peculiarity of British English and isn't universal.

TOO SHORT?

It saves time (and your word count) if you skip words. ("*Particularly keen to hear from people in the Black community.*") It can also seem friendlier. ("*Just nipped out, see you in five.*")



YOUR TURN

In your notes write an alternative for each of these examples. Our suggestions are overleaf.

Too long.

If you are interested and would like to find out more about the trial and joining the CO2 Trial Steering Committee, please contact Sarah Flint on 0117 342 2373 or CO2trial@bristol.ac.uk



Call before 9 to report a pupil absence.



Words have been skipped.

Your notes

OUR SUGGESTED ANSWERS

These are our ideas - yours might be different but just as good.

If you would like to find out more, please contact Sarah Flint on 0117 342 2373 or CO2trial@bristol.ac.uk



The general meaning remains the same with fewer words-

Call the school before 9am if your child is ill.



In this version, implied content is now spelled out clearly. We have also changed the wording -

- '*to report a pupil absence*' is a phrase used by schools but not by parents in everyday life.
- '*your child*' is a more immediate and direct way to get your reader's attention.



Specialist vocabulary such as 'report a pupil absence' is to be avoided. In step 4 you will find out about other types of vocabulary you should try to avoid when writing for learners of English.

STEP 3

Shorter is better.



How to express complex things more simply.

TWO SENTENCES ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Sentences can be shortened by culling excess words, but that's not all. Complex sentences can also be trimmed by splitting them up.

The TSC is an independent group who provide overall supervision of the trial



This sentence has two clauses and the word 'who' is used to join them together.

The TSC is an independent group. They provide overall supervision of the trial.



In this version the clauses are separate. The reader can process each one before reading the next.



Complex sentences tend to be long. They might include words like 'such as', 'so', 'so that' and 'in order to.' By splitting the sentence you can make a complex idea easier to digest.

Another example

Here we have split a complex sentence in three-

We are looking for interested individuals to join us in discussing a new study looking into the impact of the government's plans to reduce or stop certain NHS operations.



The government plans to reduce or stop certain NHS operations. Are you interested in this? We are studying the impact of the government's plan and we would love to hear your views.



By placing the most novel or relevant information at the front, version two engages the reader better. Notice too that the original sentence **assumes** the reader knows about the government's plans whereas version two does not.



YOUR TURN

Can you split these complex sentences? You may want to change the words a little too.

We have asked our reception staff to ask questions about the nature of your problem so that they can direct you to the appropriate professional.

This information is for patients who are calling a GP surgery to make an appointment.

Those on blood glucose lowering medication should consult their GP about whether it will be safe for them to fast and what precautions can be taken to prevent blood glucose levels from going either too low or too high.

This comes from an article for people with diabetes on how to fast safely during Ramadan.

Your notes

OUR SUGGESTED ANSWERS

These are our ideas - yours might be different but just as good.

We have asked our reception staff to ask questions about the nature of your problem so that they can direct you to the appropriate professional.



Reception staff may ask you questions about your problem. This helps them to choose the best doctor for you.



Version two sounds less formal than the original., and some professionals fear losing status if they drop the formal tone they are accustomed to. **Which do you value most - accessibility or formality?** At English Unlocked we help you think about that. When we rewrite content, we work with our client to establish a tone of voice that they are happy with.

Those on blood glucose lowering medication should consult their GP about whether it will be safe for them to fast and what precautions can be taken to prevent blood glucose levels from going either too low or too high.



Are you taking medication to lower your blood glucose? You should consult your GP before Ramadan begins. It may not be safe for you to fast. Ask your doctor what precautions you can take to prevent your blood glucose levels from going too high or too low.



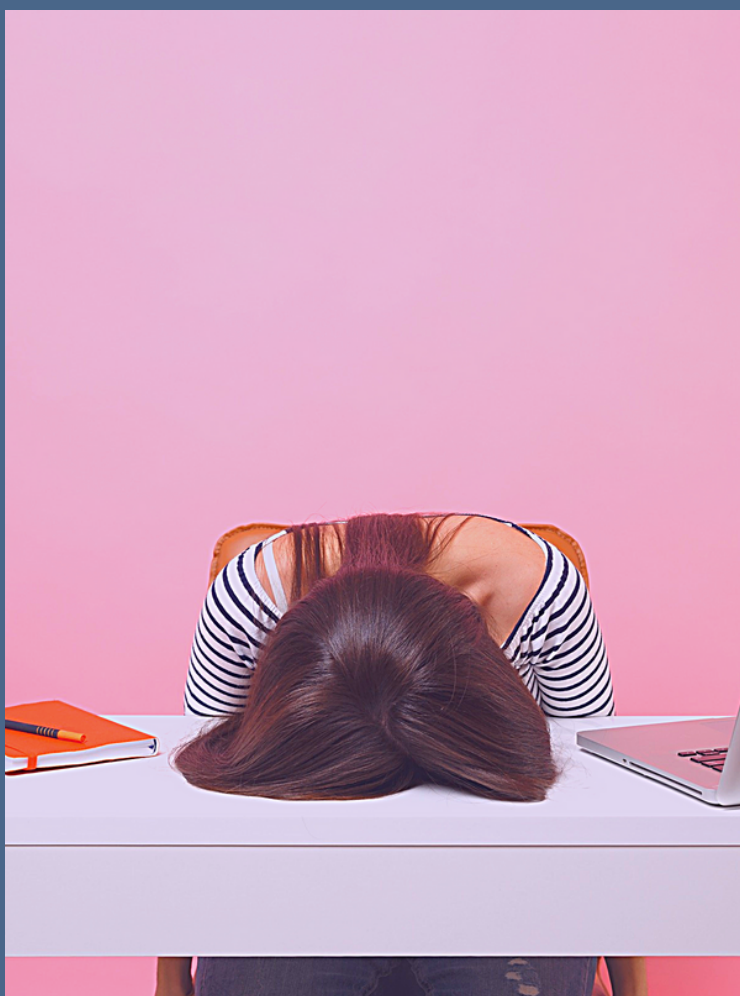
Of course version two is still difficult. Nevertheless, it is easier than the original and therefore accessible to a greater range of people. **Rewriting is no substitute for using a translator** - the people with the lowest English levels can only be reached that way.



'**Blood glucose lowering medication**' is a compound noun. People who are learning English find them especially hard to decipher. In the next section you'll learn to rephrase them.

STEP 4

Six types of tricky vocabulary



How to spot difficult words and phrases.

HOMONYMS



Think about the word '*mind*' - it has two completely different meanings. Such words are called homonyms, and they can confuse learners of English. Take the word '*book*' for example-

Book a hassle-free service or MOT today. Drop your vehicle off yourself or we can pick it up. Give us a ring on 0191 6027689 to find out more.



Unfortunately, homonyms are just one of **six types of tricky vocabulary** which you need to consider when editing your content for English learners. Can you spot **five other** tricky words or phrases in the above passage?

DID YOU SPOT THEM?

Homonym

Compound noun

Initialism/ acronym

Book a hassle-free service or MOT
today. **Drop your vehicle off** yourself or
we can **pick it up**. **Give us a ring** on
0191 6027689 to **find out** more.

Idiom

Phrasal
verbs

Jargon

Never heard of phrasal verbs, compound nouns or idioms?



You're in good company. Native English speakers use them all the time and seldom stop to think how confusing they are for learners.

We don't have room here to explore them all, instead we **will focus on compound nouns**.

If you would like to learn more about the others, click on the links on the diagram above.

COMPOUND NOUNS

What are they and what's so hard about them?

Book a **hassle-free service** or MOT

A compound noun is a noun made up of other nouns. Some are short and easy-



But some other compound nouns are long-

blood glucose lowering medication

The CO2 trial steering committee

a six mile fun run

a care home duty manager



When reading a compound noun, fluent English speakers instinctively know that **this collection of words comes as a unit**. Imagine how confusing it would be if you didn't realise that and tried to understand them word by word?

How many compound nouns can you spot here?



(There are six. Answers on the next page.)

They took their three-year-old in to see the doctor and left the eight-year-old in the car. An off-duty police officer noticed her there, she was watching YouTube in a four-wheel drive in the walk-in centre car park.

Hyphenated compound nouns are easier to spot, but it's a shame the word 'child' is missing from this one.

They took their **three-year-old** in to see the doctor and left the **eight-year-old** in the car. An **off-duty police officer** noticed her there, she was watching **YouTUBE** in a **four-wheel drive** in the **walk-in centre car park**.

Not all compound nouns are baffling, some are well known.

Car park was already a compound noun. Here it's even longer.



How to fix a compound noun. The most informative word (or words) usually come at the end (E.g. *car park*.) If ditching the compound noun isn't an option, make it easier to digest by bringing the last part to the front.

Here are two examples we've rewritten-

Book a hassle-free **service** or MOT today. ✗

Book a **service** or an MOT today, without any hassle. ✓

Instead of *hassle*, why not say '*problems*'?

Those on blood glucose lowering **medication** should consult their GP. ✗

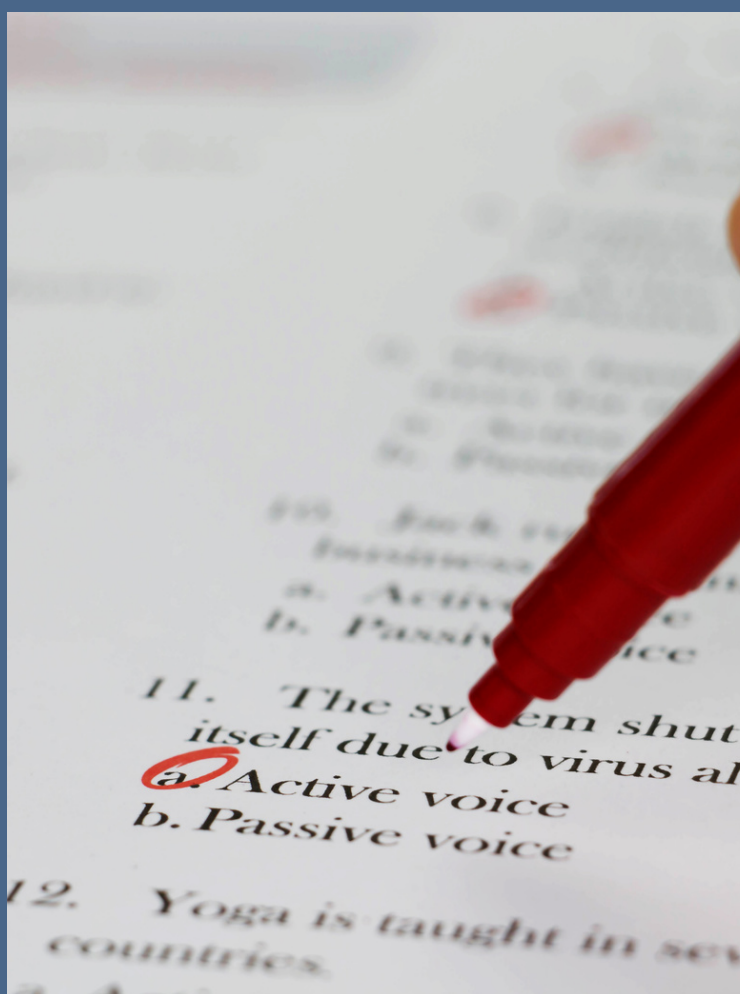
Are you taking **medication** to lower your blood glucose? You should consult your GP. ✓

The word '*blood glucose*' is jargon and a compound noun, but we can't avoid using it.

Compound nouns are a handy way to condense information, but they trip up a reader who is less proficient in English. Change their order or even better, use a synonym.

STEP 5

Keep your grammar simple



Avoid these two complex grammatical structures.

DON'T OVERCOMPLICATE YOUR GRAMMAR



AVOID THIS

You ~~were~~ given...

Avoid passive voice

AND THIS

We will ~~be~~ meeting at...

Avoid complex tenses

You are going to learn to spot these two tricky grammatical structures so that you can reduce their use in your writing.

PASSIVE VOICE

Most things can be expressed in one of two voices - active voice or passive voice. Active voice is usually easier for readers who are learning English.

PASSIVE VOICE



You **were given** two forms.

You **will be taught** by Miss Grant.

ACTIVE VOICE



You **received** two forms.
or
We **gave** you two forms.

Miss Grant **will teach** you.

YOUR TURN

How could this be simplified?



You **will be paid** £32.00 for your time, and transport costs **will be reimbursed** (in addition to your time). Snacks and refreshments **will be provided**.

Turn the page to view our suggestion.

OUR SUGGESTED ANSWER

This is our idea - yours might be different but just as good.

You **will be paid** £32.00 for your time, and transport costs **will be reimbursed** (in addition to your time). Snacks and refreshments **will be provided**.

As well as removing the passive voice, it would be better to remove the word 'reimburse.'

This version uses active voice instead of passive. Active voice requires fewer words and is more direct.

You will receive-

- £32
- Your transport costs
- Snacks and refreshments during the meeting.

The bullet points help too. The reader can see that they will receive three things before they even read what they are.

How else can your grammar get in the way?

Tenses.

On the next page you'll see what we mean.

TENSES

As native speakers of English, we love to throw in a flowery tense where a simple one would do. On this page I ~~will be telling you~~ all about it.
will tell you

OVERLY COMPLEX



We **will be providing** food.

We **have been working** with the Home Office to make a survey

NICE AND SIMPLE



We **will provide** food.

Together with the Home Office we **have made** this survey.

YOUR TURN



How could the sentence in bold be simplified?

I will mostly **be contacting you** by email and WhatsApp but let me know if that's not convenient for you and we'll work out another way.

The choice of tense is not the only issue here. Can you identify two other problems with this phrase? They are both things we have looked at before. Try rewriting it then turn the page.

OUR SUGGESTED ANSWER

This is our idea - yours might be different but just as good.

I will mostly **be contacting you** by email and WhatsApp but let me know if that's not convenient for you and we'll work out another way.

*It's **too long!**
We can split
this sentence
up.*

*Phrasal verbs are one of the **six types**
of vocabulary you should avoid.*

*This version gets
straight to the point
with a question.*

Can we contact you by email and WhatsApp? If not please just tell us what you prefer.

*The verb form in this question could not be any simpler. This is **the present simple tense**. The original used the future continuous tense.*



The original version sounded chatty and friendly (which is what this writer wanted.) **But the new version is friendly too**, and more accessible for people who don't read confidently.

WHAT NEXT?

Well done on completing the book! Here are some tips on how to edit without becoming overwhelmed.



- Take a fresh look at something you have written - you will now be itching to rewrite it.
- Don't try to do this all in one go - you might feel overwhelmed and could easily miss things.
- Give your text five appraisals, rewriting as you go. Focus on just one of these editing objectives at each pass.
- If you can, ask a reader who has learned English as a foreign language to check it. Even if they are now fluent, they will remember how it felt when they weren't.

Further help is available.

Considering using [The English Unlocked rewriting service](#)?

Turn the page to find out how it works.

WE CAN TAKE THIS OFF YOUR HANDS

You can send your content to us *after* you have edited it for clarity, or leave all that to us and save yourself the trouble.



info@englishunlocked.co.uk

www.englishunlocked.co.uk

07786 003429

THE ENGLISH UNLOCKED REWRITING PROCESS

STEP 1

WE RECEIVE YOUR CONTENT

Send a word document to us at info@englishunlocked.co.uk with a note explaining who you are and where the text will appear.

STEP 2

INITIAL CONSULTATION

We will ask you questions about the purpose of the text, its audience and your preferred style. Do you need an all-purpose rewrite or a targeted rewrite? (Learn more about these options [here](#).)

STEP 3

YOU RECEIVE PAGE ONE

We rewrite one page (or less) in the style you have asked for and send it to you. We will also tell you our estimated cost. If you like you can set a maximum budget for the whole rewrite.

STEP 4

WE GET THE TONE RIGHT

You make adjustments to page one, and in this way we establish the style for the rest of the rewrite. The simplicity level, formality and tone of voice are all approved at this point.

STEP 5

THE FINISHED PRODUCT

Payment is made on completion, before delivery. For lengthy rewrites we may ask for partial payment in advance.

ALSO BY ENGLISH UNLOCKED

It's great that you are actively looking for ways to help your clients, service users and colleagues who did not grow up speaking English.

Did you know that we run **workshops** which will help your workforce to engage better with learners of English?



[How to communicate with non English speakers.](#)



[How to work effectively with interpreters](#)



[How to use Google Translate in the workplace](#)

Available for groups and for individuals. Click on the links to find out more or contact [Shelley Purchon](#).

