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What is Easy-to-Read?

Easy-to-read is a method to adapt content, language, presentation and pictures for a target group who has difficulties in reading and understanding information.

To produce information in easy-to-read, you must have knowledge about your reader's disabilities or difficulties.

Components of an easy-to-read information:

- Short text
- Focus on the most important
- Logical flow/structure
- Simple and concrete words
- Simple sentence structure
- Inviting layout
- Readable type face
- Pictures that support the text

Accessible information – a Human Right

It is a human right to have access to information. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states equality and non-discrimination regardless if you have a disability or not. Everyone has the right to participate in society and in order to be able participate you need information.

Find – Read – Understand

Accessible information is information that is easy to find, to read and to understand. The first obstacle for a person with reading difficulties is to find the information. Often the reader doesn't know the information exists and is not searching for it. Let the reader know what information there is to find. And, guide the reader how to find the information.

When the information has been found, it must be easy to read. It means that the presentation, layout and structure must be clear and easy to grasp. The reader must easily understand where the text starts and ends. The type face, font must be easy to de-code.

And finally, the content must be easy to understand, written in an easy-to-read language.

Difficulties for reader – challenges for writer

Persons with intellectual disabilities often face big difficulties with written information. Many of them are not readers at all and can only understand spoken information. Or, can only read printed information with pictures or symbols.

Many of the readers have these difficulties:

- read very slowly, get tired quickly
- can only concentrate for a short time
- can't get the over-all picture of a text
- can't see what is important in a text
- may not be interested in reading
- unsure about reading conventions – where to start
- limited knowledge about vocabulary and society
- difficulties to understand

You have to bear this in mind when you produce information in easy-to-read. You have to consider all these difficulties when you work with content, language, layout and pictures in order to develop information that is easy-to-read.

- Content
- Language
- Layout/form
- Pictures/illustrations

→ Person with intellectual disability

Content

Who is your reader?

What do you want to inform your reader about? Why do you want to say this to your reader?

What does your reader already know about this subject? Is your reader interested in knowing this?

When will your reader get this information? How will your reader get this information?

These questions are important to answer before you start producing your easy-to-read information. The answers will guide you what you should include or not include in your text.

Focus on your reader

The text often needs to offer background information the reader might lack, as well as explanations of the context and specific words.

A useful approach to the text is:

The reader should get all the information that he or she needs to understand the text from the text itself.

Sometimes it is enough to just add an explaining word.

Example

“In the African country Burkina Faso...”

When and how?

Timing and the channel for the information also has an impact on the content. If it is information about a castle and you are standing next to the castle when reading about it, the content can be different compared to if you read about the castle at home.

Your frames of references will be different.

If the information is new to your reader you have to help the reader to see the context. If the information summarizes or gives more detailed information about something you already have had a meeting about, the content will be different.

Prioritize the information

If you have low reading skills, it might take a long time to read even a short paragraph, and it is an intellectual as well as a physical effort. Therefore the easy-to-read text should be as short as possible, without losing the content.

Help your reader to understand what is important by choosing the content carefully, structure the information well and start with the most important information.

Example

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

FAMILY LIFE AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY

The states should promote full participation of the functionally disabled in family life. Countries should encourage their right to personal integrity and make sure that laws do not discriminate against people having functional disabilities with regard to sexual relations, marriage and parenthood.

What is the key information in this article for your reader?

Persons with disabilities have the right to live a family life.

or

Persons with disabilities have the right to a private life.

or

Laws shall not treat persons with disabilities different from others in matters of sex, marriage or parenthood.

or

The State should give persons with disabilities support so they can live a family life.

or

Do you want to do an easy-to-read version of the entire content of the article?

These are the kind of decisions the writer must make.

Language

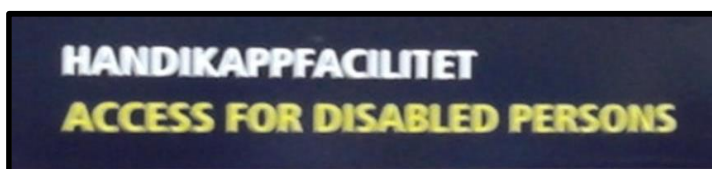
An easy-to-read text should have a concrete content as well as a concrete language.

Characteristics for easy-to-read language:

- Common words
- Use same word, do not add synonyms
- Avoid words with double meanings
- Avoid expressions
- Be careful with abbreviations
- Make it concrete
- Active voice
- Clear sender – receiver (we – you)
- Informative headlines
- Numbers

Common words – words you see everyday

An easy-to-read word does not have to be a short word, nor a word that is easily spelled. The words we are unused to, do not see often in text, are difficult words. In easy-to-read texts you should always use the common words.



The sign above is being used for an accessible toilet at an airport in Sweden. They should have used the more common sign to the right instead.



Sometimes you have to use a difficult and uncommon word. If you explain the word when you introduce it, you can then use it in the text. Sometimes you need to add a sentence or two with an explanation.

Example

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities say that everyone shall have the same rights. A convention is an agreement that the member countries of the United Nations have written together.

Sometimes you can explain the unusual word using the technique already presented to you in the previous chapter.

- Sheep can get the disease bluetongue.
- In the country Burkina Faso...
- In the African country Burkina Faso...

Difficult	Easier
Frequently	→ Often
Fabricate	→ Invent, make up
Forsake	→ Give up
Impeccable	→ Perfect
Meal	→ Breakfast, lunch or dinner
Novice	→ Beginner
Obvious	→ Clear

Synonyms

In school you have probably learned that you should not repeat the same word several times in a text. You should use synonyms instead. In easy-to-read texts it is the opposite. You should repeat the same word in order to help the reader to interpret the text.

Example

John has a dog. The furry friend follows him wherever he goes. Waffles loves to be scratched on the belly and to eat sweets. The four-legged rascal is 10 years old now but still acts like a puppy.

The reader might interpret that there are four different animals or friends in the text. The version below is easier to understand.

John has a dog. The dog's name is Waffles. Waffles follows John wherever he goes. Waffles loves to be scratched on the belly and to eat sweets. Waffles is 10 years old now but still acts like a puppy.

Writer's checklist

- Have I used common words in my text?
- Are there words that I need to explain?
- Have I used synonyms instead of repeating the same word?

Word with double meaning

There are several words in the English language that have a double meaning. In easy-to-read texts you should try to avoid words with several meanings.

Bat = animal or wooden stick
Can = able to or container
Kind = nice or type
Light = lamp or not heavy
Play = have fun or a drama

Avoid expressions

Expressions, metaphors should be avoided in easy-to-read texts. Many readers might interpret a metaphor literally. The expression “I’m just pulling your leg” doesn’t have anything to do with your legs. It means that I am teasing you.

With metaphors there is also the risk that the reader and the writer might not share the same frame of reference. The frames of references depend on the reader’s age, gender, cultural background etc. The risk of misunderstanding is high.

Example

- **Make a long story short!**
= **Come to the point - leave out details**
- **Piece of cake!**
= **A job or other activity that is easy or simple.**
- **Can't judge a book by its cover!**
= **Cannot judge something on how it looks.**

Abbreviations

“PM meets MP to discuss EU”

In order to understand the sentence above you need lots of knowledge. You need to understand that PM, MP and EU are abbreviations of other words and you need to know which words.

In easy-to-read texts you should only use an abbreviation if it is more common than the full length word. EU might be more common and known to the reader than European Union.

Example

PM meets MP to discuss EU =

- **Prime Minister meets with members of parliament to discuss EU.**
- **Prime Minister David Cameron discuss with members of the British Parliament if Britain should stay or leave EU.**

Make it concrete – be specific

We often use abstract and general concepts that include many different specific meanings. Words like culture, environment, communication and health are all fairly common but abstract words. The word “communication” for example can be interpreted as the way we talk to each other, as well as the transportation system, as well as the e-mail.

In easy-to-read texts we avoid these kind of general words. If you want to use the word communication, make sure to help the reader understand what kind of communication you are talking about.

Example

The communication in Athens is bad. The city buses are often running late.

Writer’s checklist

- Have I used words with double meaning in my text?
- Have I used any expressions or metaphors?
- Have I spelled out abbreviations?
- Have I used abstract words that needs to be exemplified?

Active voice

Writing a text using an active voice means that it is clear who is doing something or did something. In passive voice you write what is being done or has been done. The passive voice does not include who. A sentence written in passive voice does not include an agent, a person.

To write with an active voice helps the reader to understand the text.

Example

Passive: The ticket is being stamped on the bus.

Active: The bus driver will stamp your ticket.

or

You should stamp your ticket in the machine on the bus.

As you can see, you must know the details of the information to be able to write with an active voice!

Clear sender – receiver (we - you)

If you besides using the active voice also include a direct approach, your text will be much easier to understand.

Example

We invite you to a party on Saturday.

Or

We want you to come to our party on Saturday.

Instead of:

Invitation to party Saturday!

Numbers

There are several difficulties with numbers in texts. A large number with many digits are difficult to read. The meaning of the numbers are often difficult to interpret.

Therefore, you must ask yourself:

- What do I want to say with the numbers?
- Is the exact number important, or is the important information the increase/decrease of something? Has something become better or worse?

This is how you can write numbers in easy-to-read texts:

1-12 **with words (one...) or digits,
depending what the reader is most used to**

13-99 **with digits**

100, 200 **one hundred, two hundred**

1000, 2000 **one thousand, two thousand**

20 000 **20 thousand**

20 000 000 **20 millions**

Our budget has increased this year.
We have more money to spend this year.

The dinosaur T Rex was 20 meters long.
The dinosaur T Rex was big as a bus.

The bus ticket costs 4 euro
The bus ticket costs the same as two ice-creams.

Sentences – simple and correct

Make the structure of your sentences simple. Avoid long sentences. It is better to make two shorter sentences instead of one long.

One thought or one information per sentence.

Make sure you have spelled all the words correct. A person with low reading skills might not understand the misspelled word.

Informative headlines help the reader

Headlines help the reader to understand the structure of the text. An informative headline helps the reader to understand what the text in the paragraph is about. It helps the reader to interpret the text correctly.

Therefore it is very important to use informative headlines in easy-to-read texts. In newspapers the headlines often use metaphors and play with words. That kind of headline is not at all helpful for a person with low reading skills.

Example

Tsisipas meets the king of dirt Nadal

Tennis player Tsisipas will play against Nadal.

Nadal is the best player in the tournament.

The Eagle has landed

The rocket has landed on the moon

Tiger puts balls in wrong place again

Golf player Tiger Woods cheats on his wife again

Writer's checklist

- Have I used an active voice in my text?
- Is it clear who is the sender and receiver?
- Have I included numbers in my text? Are they important?
- Have I kept the sentences clear and short?
- Is there one information per sentence?

Layout

This is Easy-to-Read layout:

- Clear and simple
- Space between the lines
- Manual line breaks
- Visual boxes and vertical lines between columns
- Typography

Clear and simple

It is important that form and layout are well thought through. It is easier for the reader to appreciate information if text and pictures are presented as clearly and with as much space as possible. Don't be afraid of empty areas on the page. The mind enjoys concentrating on one thing at a time.

Space between the lines

Make sure your text have good space between the lines. We recommend line spacing of 1,5. A single line mode, which we are using in this text, is too narrow in easy-to-read texts.

Manual line breaks

Many readers have difficulty in noticing full-stops and reading long lines. Therefore an easy-to-read text is often written with line-feeds at the end of each phrase. A new line starts at a natural point in the sentence and always after a full stop. The reader can then make a pause at the proper place. To test if the line-feed is correct, read the text out loud. If it is natural to pause when changing the line, then it is correct.

This is how the paragraph on the previous side looks like when presented with easy-to-read line feeds:

Many readers have difficulty in noticing
full-stops and reading long lines.

Therefore an easy-to-read text is often written
with line-feeds at the end of each phrase.

A new line starts
at a natural point in the sentence
and always after a full stop.

The reader can then make a pause
at the proper place.

The line-feeds give the text a light and spaceious impression. To the reader the text does not look difficult nor massive. The text signals that it is easy and possible to be read.

We recommend you give your easy-to-read texts a maximum length of 50-55 characters per line. Characters include each letter and the space between the words. To read very long lines are just as difficult as reading long sentences.

Visual boxes and vertical lines between columns

An easy-to-read text should preferable be presented in just one text field on the page. But, sometimes you have to present your text in columns. If so, make sure there is lots of space between the two columns. A line between the columns will also help the reader to see the structure of the text.

If there are different texts being presented at the same page, you can also use visual boxes.

Typography

Studies show that there is no ultimate easy-to-read font. The fonts we are most used to are the ones we find easiest to read. So don't try to be original and creative when choosing the typography or you will end up with a difficult text.

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The size of the font also matters. This text is Times New Roman in size 13. Depending on the font, do not use smaller size than 12-14.

Running text written with CAPITAL LETTERS or in *italics* is difficult to read.

The presentation has a great impact on if we find a text easy to read or not. If the text looks difficult, you might not even try to read it.

Pictures

Pictures and illustrations in easy-to-read information should:

- Help reader to understand
- Support the text
- Easy to interpret

It helps the reader to understand the content of your text if you combine it with informative illustrations. Avoid illustrations that are metaphors, just as you should avoid them in your text.

A text about housing should not be illustrated by a birdhouse. It should be illustrated by a house.



Don't put text on the picture. Text should always be presented on a clear background.

About easy-to-read on the Internet

The questions you always should ask when writing easy-to-read is even more important for information presented on the internet:

- Is the information possible to find?
- Is the information possible to read
- Is the information possible to understand?

These three questions are often forgotten when websites are being developed. The user in focus is the skilled reader with no special needs, or the skilled reader with special technical needs.

Some readers need to be able to listen to the information, others need pictures, video presentations or a version in sign language. And, many readers with low reading skills need information in easy-to-read language.

Internet and reading skills

The internet as a media requires higher reading skills than information on paper. The average reader reads a text presented on screen 25 per cent slower than text printed on paper.

The whole idea of the internet is that there is no limit in cyberspace to how much information you can present. The information is there for the reader to find, read and share.

The information presented on the website is not linear. There is not a defined direction of how to read the webpage – where to start and where to go.

The skilled reader masters the search for information, including using the website's search-function. And, once finding the right information, the skilled reader will be able to read and understand the text. But very often this is not the case for a person with intellectual disabilities.

A text is not accessible just because you can reach it via internet.

To find information on Internet

An easy-to-read text on the internet needs to be easy to find. Therefore it is important that the website is organized in a logical way. Very often readers must be informed about what easy-to-read material that can be found on the web. The readers can't find it themselves.

Structure and navigation equally important

It is important that you can find the easy-to-read information. But, it is also important to minimize the risk of getting lost while navigating on the website.

Therefore the websites must be easy to navigate and have a structure that is easy to grasp. The structure must clearly communicate to the reader where to go, where to read.

A good structure is to begin web information with a short summary and then offer different alternatives for more information.

Example

What is Easy-to-read?

Easy-to-read is information that is easy to find, easy to read and easy to understand for persons who has reading difficulties.

An easy-to-read information has a clear and logical structure. The text is written with common words. The sentences are short and simple to read and understand. The text is presented with an airy layout and with pictures that help the reader to understand the content.

Do you want to know more about easy-to-read?

Click here to read more [//link to new page//](#)

Click here to see a film about easy-to-read [//link to video//](#)

Do you have questions about easy-to-read?

Call us, phone number 01-23 456 789

or send an e-mail to us [//link to e-mail//](#)

Text on web

The same recommendations apply for easy-to-read text on web as for a printed text. It must be written in a simple and understandable way.

The reader should get all the information that he or she needs in order to understand the text from the text itself. But, since it is more difficult to read on a screen than on paper, the text needs to be even easier and shorter than a printed version. Ideally you should not have to scroll. Ideally, the entire text should fit on the screen.

Layout and illustrations on web

For a person with low reading skills it is difficult to find the line/sentence where the information continues after having to scroll down the text. It might take a long time to find the right place. Often it takes too long and the reader gives up. Or by mistake, he or she skips one or several sentences and consequently misunderstands the information.

Layout is also pictures. The recommendations for pictures in printed material are also recommendations for the internet. Use informative illustrations together with the easy-to-read text to help the reader to understand the content of the text.

Be careful about how to place the pictures or illustrations on the internet. You can start with the picture or put the picture after the text. Or, you can put the picture beside the text. But never let the picture interrupt the text by being placed in the middle of the text. Never let the text run around a picture. That is difficult for all readers!

Example

Be careful about how to place the pictures or illustrations on the internet. You can start with the picture or put the picture after the text. Or, you can put the picture beside the text. But never let the picture interrupt the text by being placed in the middle of the text. Never let the text run around a picture. That is difficult for all readers!



Summary

This learning material is produced within the Erasmus project *Puzzle – developing easy to read formats for people with intellectual disabilities*. It is part of the project's intellectual output *Learning material* and focus on how to implement the easy to read method to write texts that people with intellectual disabilities can read and understand.

Easy-to-read information is easy to find, easy to read and easy to understand for persons who has reading difficulties.

It is information that has a clear and logical structure. The text is written with common words. The sentences are short and simple to read and understand. The text is presented with an airy layout, short lines and with pictures that help the reader to understand the content.

To make information easy-to-read you must know your reader, his/her knowledge and interest about the topic. You also must know your subject. In easy-to-read texts you can never hide behind general concepts and a passive voice. Easy-to-read texts are concrete telling who is doing something and not what is being done.

As the writer you are responsible for guiding your reader through the text. You are responsible for leaving out less important information and focus on what is key to know.

It is a human right to have access to information. And, if I have reading difficulties, I have the right to get information in an easy-to-read version!