Towards Inclusive Practice

Including Everyone.

Commissioning Easy Read Resources

A project by: **Inclusion Australia**

Contents

About this guide

This guide was developed as part of the *Towards Inclusive Practice* project. The aim of the project is to provide advice to government and other organisations about how they can be more inclusive of people with an intellectual disability.

The *Towards Inclusive Practice* Inclusion Advisors played a vital role in the project, and in the development of this guide. Inclusion Advisors are people with an intellectual disability from around Australia who shared their experiences about what makes them feel included and how they like to receive information.

Easy Read is a way of writing to present information so that it is easier for people with low literacy to read.

This guide has information about:

- what Easy Read is, and why it is important
- Key principles of Easy Read
- What you need to do before commissioning Easy Read

There is also a checklist to help you check Easy Read before publishing.

Please note that the information in this guide is advice only - it is not an instruction manual.

Introduction

"Every website should have an Easy Read option - it should be standard on everyone's website." - Inclusion Advisor, SA

Access to information is a fundamental human right, enshrined by law.

Providing information in alternative accessible formats such as Easy Read and Plain English is important to reach more people, and for more people to understand your information.

Literacy is a person's ability to read and write. Literacy is measured by the level of education a person typically (?) needs to read text. This is called the 'Reading level'.

In Australia, approximately:

- 14% of Australian adults read below a Year 6 reading level[1].
- 30% read at a level equal to a Year 7 to 10 reading level
- 38% read at level 3 that reflects a Year 11 to 12 reading level
- And only 16% are at the highest level, a certificate IV and above[2].

Providing information in alternative formats such as Easy Read and Plain English also makes information accessible for people with an intellectual disability or learning difficulties, and people with English as their second language.

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[1] reference for link between levels and school years: https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/literacy-and-access
[2] reference for percentages https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/programme-international-assessment-adult-competencies-australia/latest-release and https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Country%20note%20-%20Australia_final.pdf)

Easy Read vs. Plain English

> *"I understand what I'm reading, the words, but I might not understand what they're explaining to me if that makes sense. So that's where the Plain English comes in."*
> *- Advocate, VIC*

Easy Read and Plain English are both ways of presenting written information that are easier to understand for people with low literacy. Easy Read and Plain English are not the same thing.

Plain English uses everyday words and clear active sentences but is not accompanied by pictures or images.

Standard Language	Plain English
Let's touch base in half-an hour to nut this out.	Let's meet in 30 minutes to talk about an answer.
We received your application for funding, and upon reviewing the criteria, your application has been approved.	Your request for funding has been approved.

In contrast, **Easy Read** uses simple everyday words and short, clear sentences with a relevant picture for each new concept.

Easy Read is a particular style and format that takes time and preparation. You can create your own Easy Read documents following specific guidelines, or commission them to be externally developed.

Several organisations provide Easy Read training and translation services. However, just because a document claims to be in Easy Read does not mean it is easy to read.

This guide will help you understand what good Easy Read looks like, and help you prepare to engage with a provider to commission Easy Read translations.

Why does Easy Read matter?

"I don't read unless it's in Easy Read." - Inclusion Advisor, TAS

Access to information is a universal human right. However, much of the public information provided by government departments is inaccessible for people with an intellectual disability.

People with an intellectual disability have told us stories of:

- Not being able to read emails or information received in the mail
- Not receiving vital health information about Covid-19 in a format they could understand until weeks after standard information was released
- Being expected to fill out forms that they do not understand
- Being fearful of being scammed because they cannot read and understand the information provided
- Having to rely on their parents or other supporters to interact with government agencies on their behalf
- Having to make phone calls to request information in an accessible format.

Easy Read is important because it:

- Is accessible to more people
- Ensures your messages are understood
- Is clear and understandable
- Enables people to make informed decisions.

How is Easy Read used?

- Easy Read versions often accompany longer, more complicated documents.
- Easy Read is often used together with a support person.
- Easy Read is often used to start conversations, and as a refresher or reminder about information.

> *"Sometimes I need support to read it, just in case. There could be something I don't understand. I like to have support to make sure I interpreted it right."*
> *- Inclusion Advisor, TAS*

Easy Read information should be:

- readily available at the same time as the standard information
- easy to find on websites (e.g. alongside the standard information)
- tested by people with an intellectual disability before being released.

> *"I cannot remember ever seeing a standard version of a report and an Easy Read version released at the same time. Easy Read is often an afterthought"* *- Advocate, NSW*

What does a finished Easy Read document look like?

Inclusion Australia produced a policy submission on Disability Employment Services (DES) reform in early 2022. The submission documents include the full submission, a Plain English summary, and an Easy Read summary.

We encourage you to explore the three different document types in this submission. The different document types allow more people to read, process and understand the same information. You can find all three versions of the submission on the Inclusion Australia website.

Some Principles of Easy Read

There is no Australian standard for Easy Read[3] but there are some universal principles to how an Easy Read document should be presented.

> *"There should be key points of the information so there isn't so many pages- we don't want print outs of 40+ pages."* *- Inclusion Advisor, SA*
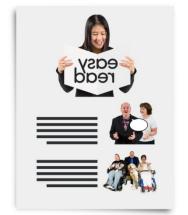
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[3] https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/content-types/easy-read

Keep it short. Aim to keep Easy Read documents no more than 5 pages long. Documents longer than 5 pages will require a contents page. Documents longer than 20 pages must be split up into separate documents.

Ensure information equity. Easy Read translations must include the key points of an original document.

Keep a clear structure. Easy Read uses one idea per sentence. Sentences do not carry over a page. New topics start on a new page.

One-thirds, two-thirds rule. Images should take up 1/3 of the page and go on the left side of the document. Text should take up 2/3 of the page and go on the right side.

Use easy words. Wherever possible, easy to understand words should be used. Jargon, slang, and complex or technical words should be avoided. For example, instead of "The government wants to make changes to the **legislation**" write "the government wants to change the law."

If a difficult word needs to be used, it must be written in **bold** and explained clearly. For example: "The government wants to make changes to the legislation. **Legislation** is a type of law about how things must be done."

Acronyms If you need to use an acronym, write it out in full the first time and explain clearly. For example,

We will be asking you about the **NDIS**. The NDIS is the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which supports people with disability.

Use white space. White space creates visual breaks for readers. Easy Read uses wide margins and line spacing of at least 1.5 to help create white space.

Include images. Images are used to help explain each new concept. They should be relevant, easy to understand and be age and culturally appropriate.

Use large text. Easy Read uses a sans serif font such as Calibri, Arial, Tahoma. All text is a minimum of 14 point and is high contrast, e.g. black text on a white background. Text goes on the right side of the document.

Simple formatting. Heavy formatting can be visually distracting. It is better to keep it simple, for example:

- Easy Read uses punctuation only as needed.
- Text is not underlined, in *italics*, nor in CAPITALS.
- Lists are given as dot points, not commas.
- Numbers are written as numerals, not as words.
- Headings and subheadings are used throughout.

Organise user testing. People with an intellectual disability know what they need. All Easy Read documents should be user-tested with a person with an intellectual disability.

Things to consider before commissioning an Easy Read translation

"If I am with a group of friends and we are all reading something and everyone understands but me, it is embarrassing" - Inclusion Advisor, Tasmania

Before commissioning an Easy Read translation, there are steps you can take to make the process easier:

Your Audience. Be very clear on who your audience is. You may need different versions of your document for different audiences.

Original document. Your original document being translated must be either completed or in the final draft stages.

Your key messages. Only include need-to-know information, not 'nice to know'. Go through the document and note the key messages. Keep messages and content short, simple and to the point.

The words you use. Easy Read documents are just that, easy to read. If your original document includes industry jargon, or complex words, take the time to find alternatives. If alternatives cannot be found, explain what they mean. Explain any acronyms and spell out abbreviations.

Images. Decide if you want to use real photos or cartoon images. Consider your audience and what is age appropriate for them. Do not use both as this can be confusing for the reader.

Time. Allow plenty of time for an Easy Read translation to be completed. We recommend about six weeks from start to finish.

Commissioning Easy Read translations

"When it's done well, it works. Sometimes people give you Easy Read documents, but it isn't actually easy." - Inclusion Advisor, TAS

There are several organisations that provide Easy Read translations. However, just because a document says it is in Easy Read, does not mean it is easy to read.

Some important considerations when engaging an Easy Read translation service:

1. Services that work directly with people with an intellectual disability to review Easy Read, will ensure that your Easy Read documents are accessible.
2. Ask for examples of the previous work in Easy Read.
3. Make sure their examples follow the principles of Easy Read above.
4. Ask the provider what they need from you.
5. Be prepared to pay for the expertise to translate a document into Easy Read.
6. When deciding what format, you would like the final product to be consider other accessibility requirements. For example, the document should be able to be read by a screen reader. Ask the Easy Read translation provider about the formats they recommend.

Preparing to commission Easy Read

Use these tips to make sure you are ready to commission an Easy Read translation.

Getting started

- I know who my audience is
- The original document is in final draft stage
- I have been through the final document and decided the most important messages to include
- I know what I want the final product to be (poster, booklet, etc.)
- I have allowed at least 6 weeks for the translation to be completed and tested

Supporting your translation

- I have provided any images required, like logos
- I have explained jargon words that are connected to my industry
- I have explained complex topics
- I have explained any acronyms used in the document

Checking your Easy Read

If you are commissioning Easy Read, you want to be confident the documents will be useful and appropriate for your audience.

Here are some tips for checking your commissioned Easy Read documents.

- There is plenty of white space in the document

- Images are on the left, and text on the right

- Images match the content of the text

- Images are age and culturally appropriate for the audience

- Text is in a sans serif font such as Arial, Tahoma, or Calibri

- Font size is 14 or larger

- Text is black on a white background (or another high contrast option)

- There is no underlined, italics or CAPITALS (upper case)

- There is only one idea per sentence

- Sentences are short (16 words or less) and do not carry over a page

- Headings and subheadings have been used

- New topics start on a new page

- Sentences use every day, easily understood words

- Difficult words are in **bold** and have been explained

- Any acronyms have been written in full the first time and clearly explained

- Line spacing is 1.5 or more

- Margins are set to 'Normal' or wider

- Punctuation is used only where required

- Dot points are used for lists

- Documents are a maximum of 20 pages

- Documents longer than 5 pages have a contents page

- Numbers are written as numerals, not words

- The finished document is screen reader compatible.