



North

Yorkshire County Council

A guide to producing written information in easy read



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An introduction to easy read

Easy read is a way of making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities. Lots of other people find easy read useful too, particularly anyone who finds it hard to read standard written English.

This guide will help you to produce easy read documents for your customers. It provides a style guide for North Yorkshire County Council staff to use so that there is a consistent 'look and feel' to easy read documents. This is important, because it is hard for people with learning disabilities to switch from one style to another. Partner organisations are very welcome to use this guide.

Adapting information that is sometimes complex to understand into easy read can take time, but the rewards are immense. You will be empowering people with a learning disability to make informed choices and to develop their understanding of issues.

Disabled people's rights to accessible information

Disabled people have a legal right to accessible information under the Equality Act 2010 (section 20) and the Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information). The Equality and Human Rights Commission explains it like this:

Article 21 [of the Human Rights Act 1998] says:

Governments should take steps to ensure that disabled people can express their views freely and access information on an equal basis to everyone else by doing things like:

- providing disabled people with information in accessible formats and technologies at no extra cost and in a timely way
- ensuring people can use sign language, Braille and many other types of communication when they are dealing with public services or the State
- urging private service providers to provide accessible information including accessible websites
- encouraging the mass media, including internet providers, to make their services accessible
- recognising and promoting the use of sign language.

What does this mean?

This means that governments and public bodies should take extra steps to make sure that disabled people can access information and express their views.

This includes complaints procedures. If a deaf person wants to make a complaint in British Sign Language, then that should be possible. It also includes websites which should be made accessible and easy to use.

Disability discrimination legislation covers many of these steps, for example section 20 of the 2010 Equality Act (reasonable adjustment duty) includes a duty to make information available in accessible formats.

However, this right makes it clear that the purpose should be full inclusion – for example, disabled people should not have to wait longer than other people for accessible information, or have to wait to access services because there is no interpreter. Public services should also have to think about different ways for people to get in touch with them – for example, not to exclusively rely on the telephone but also to use email, face-to-face meetings etc.

Extract from EHRC website 23.4.13

www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/human-rights-practical-guidance/guidance-from-the-commission/a-guide-to-the-un-disability-convention/part-2-know-your-rights/article-21-freedom-of-expression-and-opinion-and-access-to-information/

Easy read – what is it, and when should it be used?

Everybody needs to have good access to all sorts of information, not just disability-specific information such as benefits but also about health, voting, work and gaining skills.

Easy read is a way of making written information easier to understand, by using simple language and illustrating the information with pictures. Its aim is to help people, particularly those with learning disabilities, to understand information more easily.

It's important to remember, though, that producing written information in easy read is not enough by itself to make information accessible. Easy read should be used to support communication with an individual as part of an interactive process. By producing information in easy read, we make it easier for the person themselves, their friends, family, support worker or advocate to work together to understand the information.

There are other ways of making written information accessible and individuals may have a preference for a particular system or approach. When working with individuals, find out what works for them. See the 'other formats and ways of communicating' section of this guide for more guidance.

The DH guidance *‘Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities’* says:

“Easy read is one way of making information more accessible to people with learning disabilities. Easy read is also known as:

- Making information easier
- Easier to understand information
- Simple words and pictures
- Easy write
- Easy info
- Easy access

The main purpose of an Easy Read [sic] document is to tell people with learning disabilities what they need to know. Easy Read is not a simple translation of existing documents into easier to understand language. Easy Read versions should concentrate on the main points of a document so that people with learning disabilities can understand the main issues and make decisions if necessary.

When commissioning or producing Easy Read it is important to remember that people with learning disabilities are a broad group and that often, Easy Reads are public documents, which need to cater for a broad level of ability.

Some people with learning disabilities may also need assistance to go through an Easy Read document, particularly where it includes complex or sensitive information. Easy Read documents can act as a tool for supporters to help someone with a learning disability understand the key issues about a subject.” Page 12

****Department of Health; Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities - Guidance for people who commission or produce Easy Read information, Revised Edition 2010***

Easy read and plain English

Easy read is different from plain English, because it is designed specifically for people with learning disabilities.

Plain English should be used to communicate with general audiences. Easy read is an important alternative for people with learning disabilities.

Here are two examples, one in plain English and one showing how it might be written in easy read:

Plain English

Thank you for your letter asking for permission to put up posters in the library. Before we can give you an answer we will need to see a copy of the posters to make sure they won't offend anyone.

Easy read

Thank you for your letter about your poster. We need to see the poster before we put it up. This is because it must not offend anyone.

Offend means to upset people.

Here is an example of easy read,
using words and pictures

About this booklet



This booklet is about the **United Nations Convention** on the **rights** of people with disabilities.



The **Convention** is an agreement between different countries.



Rights are things that should happen for everyone.



Countries who sign the agreement must make sure disabled people get their rights.

Involving people with a learning disability

Many people with a learning disability have spoken to us about a need for information that is easy to read and easy to understand. They have told us what we get wrong when we produce information, letters or questionnaires and suggested ways to improve this.

Self advocacy consultation groups, supported by KeyRing, are a group of adults with a learning disability who report to the North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board, self advocacy forum and Local Area Groups. They have given us lots of really good tips which we want to pass onto others. This guide to produce information in easy read is the result of their suggestions and below is a list of their top tips.

Our top tips for easy read information

Aa

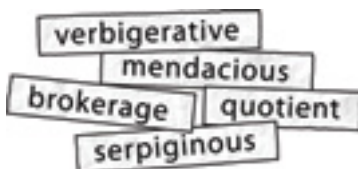
Write or type in black ink that is big enough for people to read.



Black ink is easier for people with a visual impairment to read.



Yellow paper makes it clearer for people with a visual impairment to read.



Don't use difficult words, but if you do, explain them straight away.

If you put the meaning to difficult words at the end of the document most people will lose interest.



It is good to use pictures in the document but only if they really show what the sentence is about.

Don't use too many pictures because this makes it difficult to read.



When you make an audio recording please introduce yourself when you start to record.

Read the document slowly and clearly and explain any long words.



Do your recording in a quiet room where there is no noise from outside.

Some people may want a paper copy as well as a CD so they can follow the words.

Getting started

You may be turning an existing document into easy read, or starting from scratch. Either way is fine, although it is often easier to start from scratch. If you are using an existing document, don't 'translate' it line for line – think about what the document is communicating and how best to make this clear in easy read.

Technical tips

You will need to have a reasonable level of skill with Word to be able to manage the layout of pictures and text. If you need to improve your skills, go to Learning Zone and search for 'Word' using the search tool.


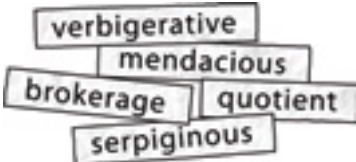
You could use PowerPoint instead of Word. It can be easier to manage the formatting in PowerPoint, as it uses text boxes to place the words and pictures.

You will also need to have access to a bank of pictures. There are various specialist providers of pictures. We recommend using Photosymbols because in our experience, people can relate more easily to photographs than drawings, which may be more abstract. However, there are other suppliers. Go to the section on photo and graphic banks for more information.

Easy read documents can be very big files because of the pictures. This can cause problems if you are e-mailing the documents, or if people are trying to download them from a website. When you have produced your document, it is a good idea to get it turned into a PDF file (Adobe Acrobat) as this will make it a smaller size. Do keep a Word version as well, though, as PDFs can't be edited, and they may not work well for people who use assistive technology.

If you produce similar documents regularly, for example a standard letter, turn it into a template to save time.

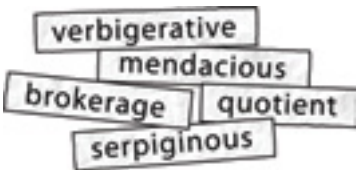
For creating some documents, you might find it helpful to use tables in Word, like this:

	<p>We need easy read because sometimes people use words that are hard to understand.</p>
	<p>These are some long words that are hard to understand. Short words are easier to understand.</p>

Then hide the gridlines, so it looks like this:



We need easy read because sometimes people use words that are hard to understand.



These are some long words that are hard to understand.

Short words are easier to understand.

How to create an easy read document

The following advice is taken from a range of sources including (main source) the DH guidance '[Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities](#)' 2010; Photosymbols; RNIB clear print guidelines; National Equality Partnership and CHANGE: 'How to make information accessible: a guide to producing easy read documents'.

1. Explaining concepts

A lot of people make the mistake of just translating a complicated document without thinking about how to structure the information. This can lead to many of the complexities of the original document ending up in the easy read version.

Each main idea needs both words and pictures. You do not have to put a picture against every single sentence.

Pictures go next to the accompanying text – this helps more people understand the information.

Try to keep all the information about each topic on one page. If the information goes onto another page, try using a sub-heading to remind people what you are talking about. You could also try breaking the information down into smaller chunks.

Important dates should be highlighted at the beginning of the document, for instance the closing date of a consultation or the date that a response is needed to a letter.

Break up text and highlight important points.

You could break up or highlight the text with:

- bullet points
- boxed text
- emboldened text

But beware of using too many sets of bullet points close together.

With longer documents, you could note at the beginning of the document that the reader doesn't have to read the whole publication and that they can ask for support reading it.

Top tip

Plan the flow of information.

Group similar topics together.

Pictures go next to the accompanying text.

Try to keep all the information about each topic on one page.

2. Pictures

Make sure the pictures that you use are easy to understand and illustrate the main points being made. Pictures are there to support and help explain the text but too many pictures against the text can be confusing.

Pictures should be positioned to the left of the text.

Pictures can be drawings, photographs or other images. If you are creating a document for a wide audience, it's better to use one style throughout the document because lots of different styles can look messy and might be confusing. North Yorkshire County Council Health and Adult Services uses Photosymbols. However, if you are creating a document for a specific individual, you can use whatever images the person prefers.

Make sure pictures are as big and as clear as possible within the layout of your page.

You should use high resolution images or photographs for documents that are going to become printed material, for example a leaflet. Pictures in colour are preferable.

Minimise the use of pictures which contain words.

You can also use ticks and crosses, arrows, speech bubbles, thumbs up or thumbs down to make your text and pictures even clearer. But don't use too many on the same page or it will look messy and confusing.

Top tips

Don't use pictures for the sake of it. If you can't find a picture that helps to explain the text, don't use one.

If you are talking about actual places or people, it's good to use a (good quality) photograph of the place or person. But you must get signed permission from the person first. There are consent forms here for NYCC staff to use (links on right hand side of page): <http://nyccintranet/content/book-photographer>

3. Words and sentence structure

Make sure words and sentences are easy to understand. Don't use jargon or complicated words where simple ones would do. Aim for no more than 15 words in each sentence.

Some of your readers may need to become familiar with some difficult words, if they are words that will be used often. This might include concepts such as personalisation, direct payment or assessment. If you have to use difficult words, then you should explain what the words mean. You should

do this the first time they appear and highlight them. The explanation should immediately follow the sentence containing the word. For instance, when explaining what a delivery plan is you could say:

A **delivery plan** shows what we are going to do to make something happen.

Alongside this guide, a word-bank is being developed. This includes words such as personalisation, with definitions and suggested pictures. This will help us to use consistent definitions in all our documents.

It is best not to use acronyms or abbreviations unless they are well known to your target audience. You should use the full title the first time the word or title appears.

Repetition is better than variety. Use the same word or form of words when referring to the same thing. You can also introduce sentences on the same topic with the same form of words.

Top tip

Use active, not passive verbs as in the example below.

Information is much easier to understand if it's written with active verbs. For example, 'Pete answered the phone'.

Passive writing is the other way round - as in 'The phone was answered by Pete'.

(Thanks to Photosymbols for this tip)

You can find more tips for writing clearly in the NYCC guide to plain English 'Write Stuff' <http://nyccintranet/policies/write-stuff-basic-guide-writing-plain-english>

4. Font style and point size

Use font in point size 16, and point 18 for headings.

Use Arial font.

Don't use **Comic Sans** as it is harder to read and can be interpreted as being patronising.

Only use one font style in a document – don't mix them up as it looks **messy** and **confusing**.

Don't use CAPITAL LETTERS for headings or to emphasise words.

If you want to emphasise a word, use **bold**, but don't use it **often** as **lots of words in bold** can be **distracting and intimidating**.

5. Grammar and punctuation

Traditional rules of grammar need not necessarily apply. Use language that sounds natural when spoken. For example, it's fine to end a sentence with a preposition or start one with 'and' or 'but'.

Full stops are fine but avoid using too many or difficult punctuation, such as colons.

Use commas to separate items in a list instead of semi colons.

Do not use contractions and avoid apostrophes, except where they indicate possession. For example, use 'do not', 'would not' and 'can not' rather than 'don't', 'wouldn't' and 'can't'.

Never use hyphens to break words at the end of lines – always start a new line. But do use hyphens for words such as well-being.

6. Numbers and dates

Say half, a quarter, 1 in 5 in preference to percentages.

When referring to percentages, say 67 out of 100 where possible or per cent (rather than the symbol %) where it is not. Use whole numbers, so 7 per cent is better than 6.8 per cent, unless the sense demands greater accuracy.

Express all numbers in figures, including 1 to 10. However, for millions say 3 million, 20 million etc.

Dates should follow the format: Saturday 31 July 2014. Do not abbreviate the year to 14.

There is no firm rule on times of the day apart from avoiding the 24 hour clock. You may decide to use am and pm, for example 8am to 6pm. Pictures using analogue or digital clocks help explain the time.

Top tip

If you use pictures to explain numbers or time, make sure the pictures say the same as the text. In other words, if your text says 11 o'clock, make sure the picture of the clock does as well.



The meeting will start at 11am.

7. Overall layout

Avoid over use of questions as a way of laying out your information. It can be difficult to tell the difference between a question that requires an answer and a rhetorical question. This can be confusing for your audience.

Start new chapters or topics on a new page.

Top tip

Don't cram the text and pictures on the page.

It's easier to read if there is plenty of white space.

Add extra space between the lines of your text as this will make it easier to read.

8. Length of document

Keep your documents as short as possible. If it's more than 20 pages, it's probably too long.

Include a contents list in longer documents.

9. Colour schemes

Words need to show up against the background clearly. It is best to print black text against a white or light cream background or white text against a very dark background.

Sometimes, individuals will require different colour schemes. For example, someone with a visual impairment or who is colour blind may need an alternative background. You should produce alternative colour schemes when requested.

You could use colours as borders to show different topics on the document or agenda. But avoid using traffic light colours: green, orange and red normally denotes good, ok and bad.

Top tips

Use black text against a white background.

Produce alternative colour schemes to meet individual needs.

Don't use complicated page borders or watermarks.

Don't put text on top of pictures, as this makes the text hard to read.

10. Printing your document

The advice on printing will depend on the type of document and the number of copies that you want to print.

If you only want to print one copy or a small number of simple documents, like a letter, it's okay to do it yourself as long as you follow some basic rules (look at the top tips for basic printing).

If you want to print a large number of a more complicated document, like a leaflet or a plan, you will need to have your easy read document properly designed and printed. This is because it will make the document easier to use, and because people with learning disabilities have as much right to information that looks professional as anyone else. NYCC staff should contact the Communications Unit for advice.

Top tips for basic printing

When printing your document, use good quality matt paper.

Don't use glossy paper as the shiny finish can cause glare and this makes it hard to read.

Make sure you use paper that is thick enough so that the printing doesn't show through from the other side of the page.

11. Checking with the audience

Once you have completed the documents in draft, read what you have written aloud. This will help you test whether it sounds natural.

It is good practice to ask people with learning disabilities (experts by experience) what they think and if they understand the document before it is published. This will help you to make sure that you've got it right.

Ideally, work with a group of people with learning disabilities to produce your document. If people are involved from the beginning, your end product is much more likely to work for them.

Experts by experience:

Experts by experience can be individuals, or wider user groups such as the Learning Disability Partnership Board Local Area Groups, self-advocate groups, or a reading group convened for the purpose of working on a document with you.

You can get feedback from experts by experience in a number of ways:

- One to one meetings
- Group discussions
- Electronic feedback

It is important to get your easy read documents checked, especially if you are new to producing easy read. The more complex the information is, the more important it is to involve experts by experience.

If a person or a group has helped you with your document, remember to credit them in the document.

Top tips

It's particularly important to check with your audience if your document is long or has complex information. Here are some ways to check it:

- Have a look at some other examples of easy read and compare yours.
- Do you have a colleague who has experience at producing easy read documents? Ask them to read your draft and give you some feedback.
- Ask experts by experience to check it and give you feedback.

And finally... a round-up of key facts to remember:

- Sentences should be short, easy to read and understand.
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations or complicated words, but give easy to understand explanations if you need to include them.
- When adapting information from a complex document into easy read, you need only include the main points that people need to know.
- Group similar topics together and keep this information on the same page.
- Make sure photos or pictures reflect the main points being made, but don't use a picture for every sentence as this will crowd the page.
- Photos or pictures should be to the left of the text.
- Provide an easy read audio version on a CD/MP3/DVD to give people the opportunity to listen to information at their own pace.
- Use a size 16 Arial font for the main text; headings should be in bold and size 18 font.
- Don't use coloured or fancy fonts as these may be difficult for people with a visual impairment to read.
- Don't write the whole of a heading in capital letters.
- Check your draft easy read document with a group of people with learning disabilities (to make sure it is as easy to read and understand as you think it is).

From Barnet Learning Disability Partnership Board guide to easy read



An example of a bad letter



Letter to a person with learning disabilities about their new support worker

Dear Miss Smith,
I am writing to inform you that your new support working, Julie will be starting next week, on the 23rd April.

The hours she will be supporting you with personal care is 8:30-9:30am.

Please call me if you have any problems.

Yours sincerely

Miss J Blogs



An example of good easy read letter



Dear Lianne,

This is a photo of your new support worker. Her name is Julie.



Julie will come and see you on Monday 23 April.



Julie will help you have a shower and get ready in the morning.



Julie will come at 8.30am every morning.



If you would like to talk to me about this please phone me on **020 8492 5400**.



From your social worker
Sally Nice



Other formats and ways of communicating

Audio

CDs and other audio versions are popular with people with learning disabilities as they allow them to access information on their own, without the need for a support worker. Audio formats are commonly produced alongside printed information.

The majority of people use CDs, however occasional requests for cassettes are still made. Once you have an audio version, it should also be straightforward to add a downloadable sound file to your website.

DVD

DVDs can be useful formats for easy information as many people are familiar with watching TV and DVDs.

It also removes the barrier of the written word by being a visual and aural medium. DVD can make positive use of role models and is a good way to bring information to life.

Interactive CD-ROMs or web pages

These formats give visual and audio cues that help comprehension and memory, allowing independent access to information. Moving images, in particular, can engage and involve people with learning disabilities in accessing information.

Photo stories

You can also consider photo stories to explain a topic. This is when a series of photographs are used with speech bubbles or captions to explain a topic frame by frame – like a cartoon strip.

Drama

Drama is another good way of communicating with people with learning disabilities. A theatre group can explain an issue and help people work through it in an interactive and fun way.

Signed English (Makaton or Signalong)

Makaton and Signalong are both signing systems based in British Sign Language. However they differ from BSL in that they are designed to support spoken language both for expression and comprehension. Signs are used, with speech, in spoken English word order. Symbols may also be used to augment meaning. This 'multimodality' approach to interaction is often called Total Communication.

This helps to provide extra clues about what someone is saying. Using signs can also help people who have no speech or whose speech is unclear.

In addition to the development of concepts and language other positive results can occur. For example: increased eye contact, attention, sociability, vocalisation and expressive speech.

Symbols

Symbols such as Widgit and Boardmaker are a permanent visual representation of a concept and can be used to make written language more easily understood. Symbols can also be used independently as an alternative communication method for people with expressive language difficulties.

When working with an individual, check if they are already using a particular system, as it's important to use symbols consistently. If an individual is moving from one system to another (eg from Widgit to easy read), pair the two systems for a period to aid the transition.

NYCC Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) has produced a guide called 'Total Communication Guidance: using visual supports to facilitate learning and communication'. The guide is available from Carol-ann.howe@northyorks.gov.uk

CYPS recommends Widgit Literacy Symbols (accessible through the software Communicate in Print 2) for children's services. Widgit Literacy Symbols are a structured symbol set designed to support language development and literacy skills. Important features of the symbol set are:

- A clear schematic structure enabling language development
- Clear consistent line drawings with minimum clutter
- The inclusion of grammatical markers for more advanced users
- Extended vocabulary covering up to date topics and National Curriculum vocabulary



Photo and image banks

Photosymbols

Photosymbols is the preferred image bank for North Yorkshire County Council Health and Adult Services. However, it may not always be suitable, particularly if the document is aimed at a wider audience than people with learning disabilities.

www.photosymbols.com/

North Yorkshire County Council staff: contact sue.lear@northyorks.gov.uk for a login and password to access the Photosymbols site.

There's a short guide to using Photosymbols on the North Yorkshire Partnership website, in the Learning Disability Partnership Board's section: www.nypartnerships.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=16810

For non-NYCC staff, your organisation would need to purchase its own licence to use Photosymbols.

CHANGE

Hand-drawn black and white illustrations produced by CHANGE, a leading equal rights organisation led by disabled people. CHANGE was established in 1993 so many people with learning disabilities are familiar with this image set. As well as providing image banks, CHANGE can be commissioned to produce bespoke easy read materials.

<http://www.changepeople.org/>

North Yorkshire County Council's photo library

North Yorkshire County Council has its own photo library that council staff can access. It includes images of people that have given consent for the use of the image, and some images that have been purchased and therefore there would be no charge.

When talking about a specific place, person or building, for example, it's better if an actual picture of that place, person or building can be used. Try the council's photo library first.

If a new photo is needed, remember that it needs to be good quality and carefully composed, as it will be reduced to a small size on the page. Contact the Communications Unit for advice.

Word banks

The North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board is developing a Word Bank to help people understand some important words and titles, such as Clinical Commissioning Group. The Word Bank will be on the North Yorkshire Partnerships website: www.nypartnerships.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=16810

Helpful alternative words

Avoid	Use	Avoid	Use
• along the lines of	- like	• advise	- tell
• as to	- about	• assistance	- help
• at an early date	- soon	• at this moment in time	- now
• is in a position to	- can	• commence	- start
• during such time that	- while	• consequently	- so
• first of all	- first	• forward	- send
• in relation to	- about, for or with	• in respect of	- for
• in the amount of	- for	• obtain	- get
• until such time as	- until	• residence	- house
• additional	- extra or more	• utilise	- use

More advice about producing easy read documents

You can find more advice and tools at:

- Guide to producing and commissioning easy read: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_121940
- Advice on making information accessible for disabled people: www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication

References

The main sources for the information in this guide are the documents/websites cited above; Photosymbols; the NYCC guide to plain English 'the write stuff'; National Equality Partnership; CHANGE: 'How to make information accessible: a guide to producing easy read documents' and the work of the North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board. Information from other sources is referenced in the text.



Contact us

North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 8AD

Our Customer Service Centre is open Monday to Friday 8.00am - 5.30pm (closed weekends and bank holidays). Tel: **0845 8727374** email: **customer.services@northyorks.gov.uk**

Or visit our website at: **www.northyorks.gov.uk**

If you would like this information in another language or format such as Braille, large print or audio, please ask us.

Tel: 01609 780780 Email: communications@northyorks.gov.uk

