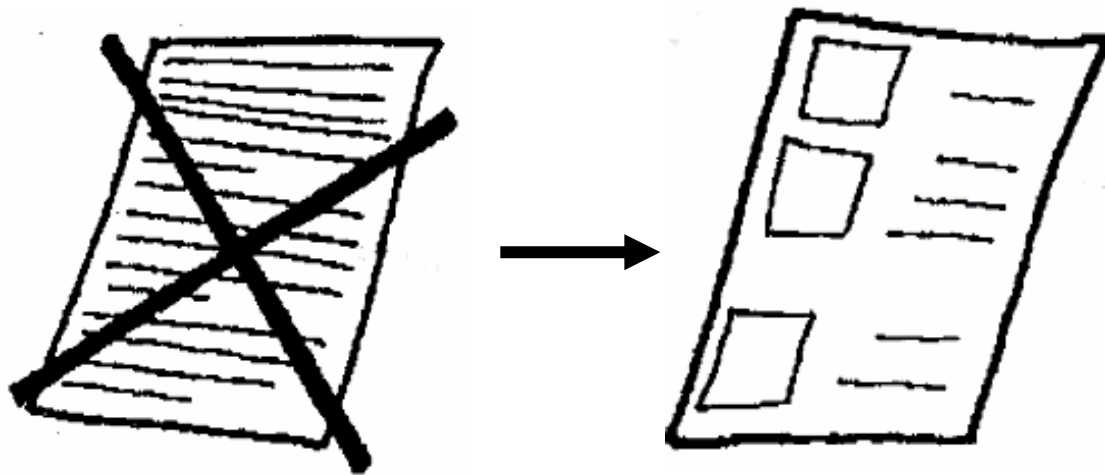# Easy Write Guidelines

How to make written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities.

For copies of these guidelines or for more information about Easy Write training, go to **ldicn.org.uk** or **www.betterlives.org.uk** look under the communication section

If you want to make a referral for an Easy Write mentor to help you call 0116 2255214.

Contents	Page Number

Guidelines for making written information easier to understand

These guidelines are for anybody who needs to give written information to an unknown audience. This could be:-
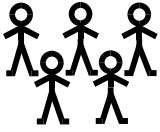
- agendas
- minutes

- reports
- leaflets

- appointment cards
- letters

A communication passport, which tells you how an individual communicates, may be more useful when you know who the information is for (known audience).

To write these guidelines we included advice from:

- organisations like Mencap, People First, Plain English Campaign
- people with disabilities

- the Speech and Language Therapy Team from Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

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Look at the Easy Write help pages on ldicn.org.uk or www.betterlives.org.uk for resources, examples and help. If you want to make a referral to Easy Write you can call Ashleigh Burrows on 0116 2255214 or Miranda Graham on 0116 3057983

If you have any questions about the guidelines you can contact the Speech and Language Therapy Team on 0116 2255214.

Planning your information

Choose the best way to get the information across

Here are some ways that you could use:

- Audiotape
- Video
- Talks / Presentations
- Meetings
- Drama
- Internet
- Written, for example; leaflets, minutes, reports, letters
- Posters

You could use 1 or more of these ways together.

The following guidelines will help when you have decided to use written information to get your message across.
Some people will be able to understand the information without any help. Some people may need extra support. Ask the person what you have talked about to check that they have understood.

Use this sentence on your information to remind people of this:
"Some people will need someone to support them to go through this information so that they understand it."

Only include important and relevant information.

Think carefully about:

- What your audience already knows
- Exactly what you want your audience to know
- What you want your audience to do with the information.

Put points in an order that makes the most sense

- List the points you need to make
- Decide what information goes under each point

  Try to write points in order of importance and/or in the order in which things happen.

Using easy words

Using easy words and sentences is very important. You will need to give yourself time to do this well. You need to make the words easy to understand before you think about pictures.

Use familiar words.

Use everyday words wherever possible;

Examples

Use "home" rather than "residence"

Use "change" rather than "amend"

The Easy Word dictionary at ldicn.org.uk or www.betterlives.org.uk can help you with this.

Use a specific word or words rather than a general one.

Example

Use "wine, beer and whiskey" rather than "alcohol".

Use "going bowling," or "going to the swimming pool", rather than "hobbies."

Avoid jargon.

Examples

Use "making things up to date" rather than "modernisation"
    "going home from hospital" rather than "discharge"

Sometimes it may be better to use a jargon word because it is used by most people. It is therefore important that people understand it.
In these cases, include the jargon word and explain what it means in the text.

Examples

"Agenda"   Please read the agenda before you come. The agenda is the list of things we will talk about.

"Care Co-ordinator"   Jane is your Care Co-ordinator. A Care Co-ordinator
- talks with you about what you want.
- talks with you about who can help you.

Use the same word each time.

There may be lots of words you could use to describe the same thing.

However, it is better to choose the most everyday word and keep to it.

Example

Use "doctor" rather than GP, specialist, consultant, psychiatrist and doctor.

Avoid abbreviations.

Some examples of abbreviations are

CPA – Care Programme Approach
SALT – Speech and Language Therapist
PCP – Person Centred Plan

Using the full name for something will make your information much easier to understand.

Use the name instead of the pronoun e.g. "the nurse" rather than "he".

A pronoun (e.g. he, she, they, it, him, her, them) is harder to understand than the name. Wherever possible use the name instead of the pronoun.

Rather than

"The physiotherapist will give you some exercises to do. **She** will check if you are doing **them** right."

Say

"The physiotherapist will give you some exercises to do. The physiotherapist will check if you are doing the exercises right".

For numbers write the number not the word.

Rather than writing

"sixty six"

write

"66"

Using easy sentences

Use short sentences.

- Use 20 words or less in a sentence. Aim to use less than 15.
- Put just 1 main idea in each sentence.
- Split longer sentences down into shorter, more manageable ones.

Rather than

"Exercise can make you feel tired but there is no need to worry about this because this is okay".

Say

"Exercise can make you tired. Feeling tired is okay.

If possible, use sentences that say what will happen rather than what won't happen.

Rather than

You will not have to fill in this form on your own".

Say

"Someone will help you fill in this form".

rather than

"It is not unusual to have to wait to see the doctor".

Say

"You may have to wait to see the doctor".

Be direct and 'talk' to your reader.

Say exactly who will do what.

Rather than

"A letter will be sent".

Say

"The College will send you a letter".

Rather than

"You will be called when it is your turn".

Say

"The nurse will call you when it is your turn".

These sentences are much easier to understand.

Choosing pictures

Pictures can help people to understand what you are trying to say.

When choosing pictures you need to think about the main message.

For example

Sarah broke her arm in the park

This picture tells you about the park

Sarah broke her arm in the park

This picture gives you more information about Sarah.
This picture is the best one to use in this example.

Choosing Pictures

When choosing pictures you also need to think about the kind of picture to use.

The table on the next page shows the different kinds of pictures you can use to make your information easier to understand.

Type of picture	Example	Description
Symbols		Symbols are • easy to draw • show 1 or 2 ideas at a time • have thicker lines than drawings
Logos	Leicester City Council	Logos are symbols or simple drawings that stand for charities, companies and other organisations
Line drawings		Line drawings can be more complicated than symbols. They have thinner lines and often 'tell a story'. They can show more than 1 idea.
Photographs		Photographs are usually coloured. They can sometimes show a lot of detail and be difficult to see clearly when they are small.
Signage		These are pictures and words that are used as signposts in:- • public buildings • roads
Graphics		Graphics are hand drawn pictures that represent ideas. These help to interest people in what you are talking about. They do not always make information easier to understand.
Clip art		A collection of pictures that are on your computer and on the internet. These are usually detailed and in colour. Clip art offers a number of pictures for 1 word, this makes it difficult to be consistent.

Use the following advice to help you decide which picture is best for you to use. If you are making information easier to understand for a known audience, check their communication passports.

For people and places, use photographs.

For example

The meeting is at The Council Offices, Jarrow Close
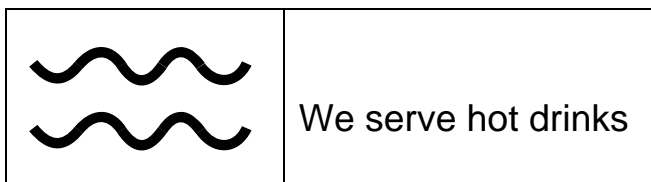

Miranda will be at the meeting

Use pictures with a clear meaning

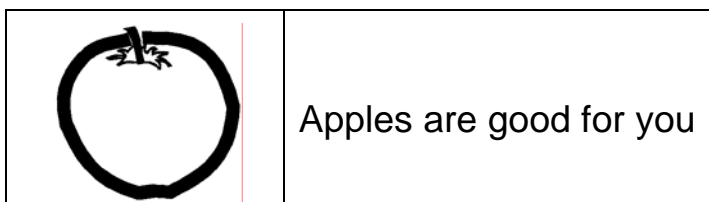Use a picture that shows the key meaning, rather than general pictures.

Example 1

	We serve hot drinks

This picture shows the key message, a hot drink.

	We serve hot drinks

This symbol represents 'hot'. It is abstract and does not show the key message.

Example 2

	Apples are good for you

This picture shows one of the key ideas in the sentence.
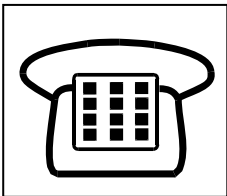
	Apples are good for you
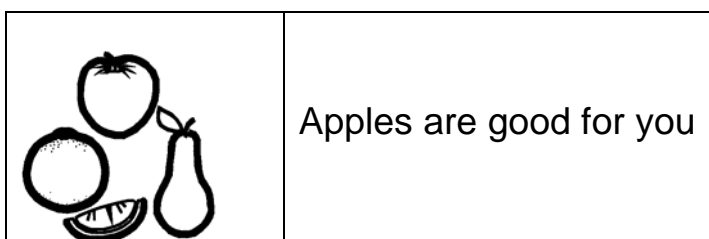
This picture means 'fruit'. It is not specific enough to show the key message.

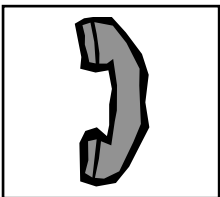**Use pictures that look like the thing you are talking about**

Examples

If you are talking about a telephone, use a picture that looks like a telephone

Rather than a picture that could look like a door handle, or a telephone.

• Where this is not possible use the same picture all the time, such as a logo

County Partnership Board

City Partnership Board

Use pictures that are easy to see.

To make the pictures easy to see, think about these things:

- **Size of the pictures**
  If pictures are too small they may be difficult for people to see. It may make it difficult to tell what the picture is.
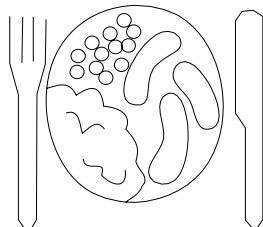
- **The amount of lines in the picture**
  A lot of lines or detail can make pictures difficult to Understand.

- **Thickness of the lines**
  Pictures with thicker lines are easier to see and understand than pictures with thin or 'sketchy' lines.

Colour

If a picture is in colour, make sure you print or photocopy it in colour. If you print or photocopy the picture in black and white it will be less clear.
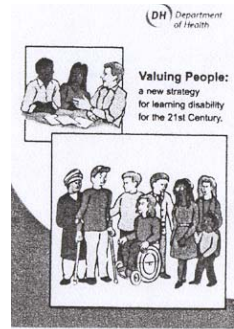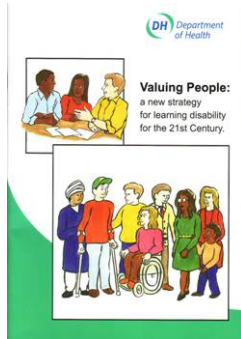
- **Contrast**
  The lines of the picture need to stand out from the background. Aim for a high contrast between your picture and the back ground. The biggest contrast is black and white.

The coloured background makes this picture difficult to see.

This black and white picture is clearer.

Always say where you have got your pictures from and use the logo if there is one.

For example,

The pictures in this document are from

Change Picture Banks www.changepeople.co.uk

Leicester Symbols Project

and Somerset Total Communication Symbols.

Presenting your information clearly

Organise your pages

- Make sure your pages are numbered clearly.

Break up the writing

To help you to do this use:

- headings
- sections
- short paragraphs
- bullet points
- clear spacing
- boxes

Lay out information clearly

Make the layout easy to follow and easy to see.

- For most documents such as leaflets, reports, letters, meeting minutes put pictures on the left and writing on the right.

- Have plenty of white space around pictures to make them easy to see.

- Don't have too many pictures on a page. Too many pictures can be confusing.

- Make sure your pictures match up clearly with the right sentence. You can use a box around the picture and the words to show that they go together.

Use good quality print.

- Think carefully about how you will make copies of your information.
- If you photocopy the information, check the pictures are still clear and that there are not smudges or black lines across the page.

Finish

A shiny paper can reflect light and make pictures difficult to see. Matt paper is better.

If you are laminating the information, use matt laminating pouches.

Font

- Use clear fonts like Arial, Comic Sans, Tahoma. If you are not sure about a font, check whether the letters look like how you would write them for example,

  The letter g in Batang font is not easy to recognise.

  The letters in Vivaldi font are very small and difficult to recognise.

- Use size 14 or bigger.
- Putting writing in bold can make it clearer.

Coloured Text

There should be a big contrast between the colour of the words and the background. The biggest contrast you can use is black and white.

If you can, check with the people who will be reading the information what is best for them. For example, some people find black on yellow easier to see.

Making information stand out.

Use **bold** or make the size of the text bigger to make information stand out. This is helpful for important information or headings.

Avoid using italics, underlining and words in capitals as these all make it more difficult to read the words.

For example,

Rather than

"YOU MUST TAKE 1 TABLET EVERY MORNING"

Use

**"You must take 1 tablet every morning."**

Leaflets

Use a layout for your leaflet that is easy to understand.

Make it clear where to start and which bit to read next.

If you can, put information on just 1 side of the page. People can forget to turn over the page to read print on the back.

If you need to print on both sides, make sure the paper is thick so you can't see through it. Make sure your pages are numbered.

Easiest

A4

Portrait

A4

Landscape
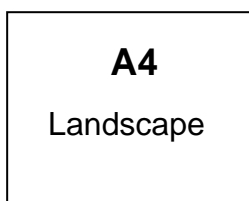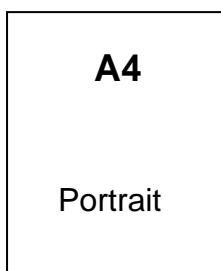
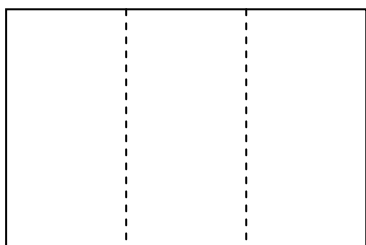- 1 or more pages with information on 1 side of the page.
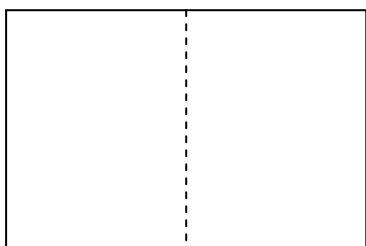
- A4 paper folded in half.
  This gives 4 pages of information.

- A4 paper folded into 3.
  Folding this way usually gives 6 pages of information. This can be confusing because the order of the pages is not clear. It does not give much room for words and pictures

Most difficult

On the next page is an example of an Easy Write poster.

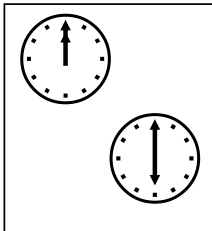Some people will need someone to support them to go through this information so that they understand it.

Information event for disabled people, their carers and families.
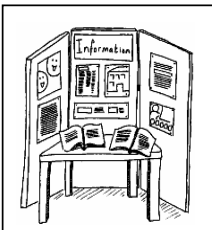
At the Community Centre, Meridian Close, Leicester.

On Saturday 26th January 2008

From 12.00pm till 6.00pm

There will be information from over 35 different organisations

For more information call Cheryl on 0116 228228

What the words in the guidelines mean.

Accessibility   making written information easier to understand. This word can also be used to mean physical access to buildings. In these guidelines we are using the first meaning.

Communication Passport   A communication passport tells you the best ways to communicate with someone. You can find out more about communication passports at ldicn.org.uk or www.betterlives.org.uk

Known audience   an individual or small group of people with learning disabilities who you know how to communicate with.

Unknown audience   any group of people where you do not know the communication needs of each individual.

Guidelines Checklist

On the next few pages you will find a checklist. You can use this checklist to:

- help you develop a piece of written information, for example;
  - letters
  - agenda
  - leaflets
  - minutes
  - reports

- evaluate existing written information, making it easier to understand.

- audit written information to find out how easy it is to understand.

Easy Write Checklist

Section of the Easy Write guidelines	Tick if done	Page number
Plan your information		
Look at the Easy Write help pages at ldicn.org.uk or www.betterlives.org.uk		**2**
Have I included this sentence? "Some people will need someone to support them to go through this information so that they understand it."		**3**
Have I included the important and relevant information?		**3**
Have I put points in an order that makes the most sense?		**4**
Easy Words		
Have I used familiar words? Have I checked the Easy Word Dictionary?		**5**
Have I used specific words instead of general ones?		**5**
Have I avoided jargon?		**6**
Have I used the same word each time?		**6**
Have I avoided abbreviations?		**7**
Have I used the name instead of the pronoun?		**7**
Have I used the number, not the word?		**7**

Use easy sentences.		
Are the sentences less than 20 words?		**8**
Where possible do the sentences say what will happen?		**8**
Do the sentences 'talk' to the reader?		**9**
Use pictures		
Have you identified the main message in the sentence? You need to do this before you can choose a picture.		**10**
Have I used photographs for people and places?		**12**
Do the pictures I've used have a clear meaning?		**13**
Do the pictures look like the thing I am talking about? If not, have I used the same picture all the time?		**14**
Are the pictures easy to see? - Are they big enough? - Not too many lines? - Not too detailed? - Use thick lines?		**15**
If I have used colour pictures will they be reproduced in colour?		**16**
Do the lines of the pictures I have used stand out from the background?		**16**
Does it say somewhere on the document where the pictures are from?		**17**

Present your information clearly		
Have I numbered my pages?		**18**

Have I broken up the writing?		**18**
Is the layout easy to follow? • Are the pictures on the left and the writing on the right? • Is there white space around the pictures? • Is there the right amount of pictures on the page? There should not be too many pictures on the page. • Do the pictures match up clearly with the right words?		**18**
Is the print quality good?		**19**
Have I used matt laminating pouches?		**19**
Have I used a clear font at least size 14?		**19**
Have I used a big contrast between the writing and the paper?		**19**
Have I used bold or a bigger text size to make information stand out? Have I avoided using italics and underlining? Have I avoided putting whole words in capitals or using capitals where they should not be used?		**20**
Have I used the easiest layout for my leaflet?		**21**

We have included information from :-

1. 'Access First: A guide on how to give written information for
                          people with learning difficulties' by People First.

2. A Guide to Using Symbols. The Symbols Working Group.

3. 'The Informability Manual' by Wendy Gregory, HMSO.

4. 'Literacy Through Symbols: Improving Access for Children and
    Adults' by Tina and Mike Detheridge, David Fulton Publishers.

5. 'Making ourselves clear: Mencap's minimum standards for
    accessible writing' (leaflet), Mencap.

6. 'Plain English Guide' by Martin Cutts, Oxford £3.99.

7. 'Plain Facts: information about research for people with learning
    difficulties' by Ruth Townsley and Karen Gyde, Norah Fry Research
    Centre, Bristol University.

8. 'The Poppi Guide: Practicalities of Providing Patient Information',
    Mark Dumen and Christine Farrell, publisher Kings Fund 2000.

9. Step by Step procedure for Developing a new Patient Information
    Leaflet, Leicestershire & Rutland Healthcare Trust.

10. Am I making myself clear, Mencaps Guidelines for Accessible
    Writing.

11. Making Reading Easier, Basic Skills Agency.

12. 'Information is Power', The Impact of Accessible Information on
    People with learning difficulties, Ruth Townsley.

13. 'The right to read and write: A straightforward guide to literacy and
    people with Mental Health in Canada', Roetier Institute (1991).