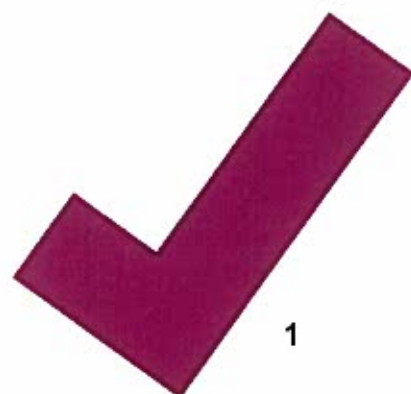


Guide to making information accessible for people with a learning disability



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Document Status

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Guide to making information accessible for people with a learning disability

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There is an [easy read summary](#) of this guide available. This guide can be made available in other alternative formats, such as large print, and may be available in alternative languages, upon request. Please contact the Learning Disability and Autism Engagement Team on engage@nhs.net.

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1 Introduction

NHS England is committed to promoting the inclusion of people with a learning disability as people who use health services, partners and colleagues. The [Accessible Information Standard](#) says that disabled people or people with a sensory loss should get information in a way they can access and understand. This is a disability related reasonable adjustment. One way we can demonstrate our commitment is through the publication and use of accessible information.

This guide will tell you what to consider when developing an accessible version of your document or information for people with a learning disability. This guide will be useful to colleagues in NHS England and also in the wider NHS.

2 Getting started

Think about whether you need to produce an alternative format to the 'standard document' - is there a need that you could have anticipated?

Is the information relevant to people with a learning disability?

Information that is likely to require an accessible format includes information about:

- people's own health care, for example health plans and referral letters
- 'self-care' advice, for example about how to manage diabetes

- services that people use, for example information about cancer screening or walk-in centres
- involvement in decisions about services, for example consultation documents or tenancy agreements
- papers for meetings which involve people with a learning disability, for example as staff members or public participants

It is important to remember that most of the services that people with a learning disability use are the same services as everyone else. For example, people with a learning disability use GP practices, outpatient departments, accident and emergency and dentists, as well as specialist 'learning disability services'. If it is relevant to people who have a learning disability, you need to make the information accessible.

To help you further with this, NHS England's [Accessible Information and Communication Policy](#) has a [decision making tool for alternative formats](#)

Involve your audience in production

It is important to involve people with a learning disability in making accessible information. They can ensure that the information is accessible to your target audience. For example, for easy read documents, they can test the clarity of the writing and make sure the pictures match the writing. Involving people with a learning disability from the start can improve the accessibility of your information.

Who to involve

- Your target audience, for example steering group members, users of a particular service or colleagues.

- A self-advocacy group to help you produce and check your accessible information. A self-advocacy group is an organisation run for and by people with a learning disability.
- Good easy read providers involve people with a learning disability in developing the document and / or have a reading or testing group.
- If your audience is new to the topic, test the easy read on people who are not familiar with the information.

3 What is the most accessible format for the audience?

There are different ways to make information accessible to people with a learning disability. The best way to find out the preferred format is to ask the person or the people who will be the audience.

Easy read document

Easy read is information which is written using simple words supported by images. Easy read aims to be easier to understand than standard documents, mainly for people with a learning disability. It can also be useful for other people too, for example people with low literacy levels and / or English as a second language, people who have had a stroke or people with dementia. The images used to create easy read documents vary, for example photographs, drawings or symbols. Different people are used to different styles of easy read, in different sectors and use of different easy read providers across the country.

Pros:

- Easy read will help some people to read information independently
- Easy read can help people to remember information from conversation
- The images should support people to understand the text

Cons:

- Some people cannot read
- Does not replace conversation and some people will need support to read the document
- Can be produced badly – it's important to test your easy read document with your target audience to make sure it's accessible
- Some people find the pictures distracting
- Lots of different styles to choose from – need to decide on the best approach for your audience

Simple text

This is the basis for easy read. Not everyone with a learning disability wants easy read. For example, some autistic people might find images distracting. It is similar to 'plain English', but uses simpler, shorter words and sentences.

Pros:

- Quicker to produce than easy read
- Helps you think about the key messages

Cons:

- Not everyone can read
- Does not replace conversation and some people will need support to read the document
- Not accessible to everyone – have to ask whether someone needs images
- Need to consider presentation to make sure the document is appealing

Video

Video can be a good alternative to an easy read document. A video is accessible to most people if it has closed captions or subtitles, not just people with a learning disability. It is quick, easy and cost effective to film a short video – it can be done on most smartphones..

Pros:

- Useful for groups to watch together and discuss the information
- People can watch on their own – can be entertaining as well as informative

Cons:

- Many people with a learning disability do not have a computer or have poor access to the internet

Audio

An audio recording of information is another alternative to a document. This could be a podcast or MP3 file that is available online for people to listen to, or a recording onto a CD or cassette tape. Where the information is just for an individual, it can even be a voice recording onto someone's smartphone.

Pros:

- Audio can be good for people who do not read
- People can rewind and repeat information that they missed or did not understand
- Can be very quick and cheap to produce

Cons:

- People might need support to download or play audio formats

- Many people with a learning disability do not have a computer or have poor access to the internet, so they cannot download or listen to files on a website

Talking

Meeting with someone means that people can ask and respond to questions and you can check understanding. This could be one to one if the topic is just relevant to one person, or it could be a workshop or focus group if it is for a few people. You could ask a local self-advocacy group to help you run the workshop. You should be very clear about why you are holding a workshop or focus group - whether you are sharing information or want people's ideas.

Pros:

- You can check people's understanding and repeat or rephrase things as necessary

Cons:

- It is good to have some information to take away and refer to

Social media

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter can be a good way of sharing your message. Some people with a learning disability use Facebook. Lots of supporting organisations and carers use Facebook and Twitter. You can share links, videos, easy read documents, use pictures and infographics.

Pros:

- Good tool to help share your message – especially with groups
- Quick and cheap way of sharing information

Cons:

- Lots of people with a learning disability are not on social media

- Limited space for information
- Information can be taken out of context
- There can be misunderstandings and disagreements on social media

Tailored and individual communication needs

Some people require tailored communication methods, if their communication requirements are more complex. These are called augmented and alternative communication (AAC). The [Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists have resources](#) which can help.

Pros:

- Useful for working one to one with people who would not understand other communication methods

Cons:

- If you're not used to these different communication methods you will need support to use them

4 Timescale

Making accessible information takes time. For published documents, you should aim to publish it at the same time as your 'standard' document. If your easy read is for a meeting, make sure it is given to participants in good time to help them prepare. This should be at least two weeks before the meeting (unless agreed with participants).

It depends what format you choose and the provider you use as to how long production will take. A long document with bespoke images could take up to six weeks for the supplier to produce. Part of this is having enough time to test the information and make changes if needed.

5 How to produce easy read information

There are guides on easy read which have been co-produced with people who have a learning disability, from which these guidelines have been produced with gratitude (Appendix). Many of these principles can also be applied to producing the other types of accessible formats outlined above.

The first steps

The first steps to producing accessible information for people with a learning disability is to clarify and simplify the message-

1. Identify the main messages of interest to people with a learning disability
2. Remove information that doesn't help to explain the most important messages
3. Re-write the main messages in simple English
4. If the standard version is a very long document consider publishing more than one accessible version with different focuses. Too much information can overwhelm people
5. Remove or explain jargon and acronyms
6. Test the simplified text with people with a learning disability. This could be people who work on your project or ask an external group to do this.

The purpose of easy read is clarity of information; there should be enough information to empower someone, not too much so that it is confusing. The accessible version should be significantly shorter than the standard document.

For working documents/internal documents/presentations

For documents that will not be published you can create your own easy read versions. NHS England often uses [Photosymbols](#) to add pictures. Photosymbols is a bank of images which you can insert into the text document to illustrate the simplified text. Check with people with a learning disability that the images support the text.

Do not download photographs from the internet for use in easy read. These will not have been tested by people with a learning disability and there may be licencing issues.

For published documents- guidance on commissioning easy read information

For documents which will be externally published, you will need to work with an external supplier. Alternatively you could establish your own coproduction group to work with you to develop the document. It is essential that people with a learning disability are involved in production.

There are many different easy read providers. Each provider produces easy read differently. Things to consider-

(1) The type of easy read you need

If you have a complicated issue you want to explain you may need bespoke images to explain the text. You also need to consider if you want drawings or photos. Providers specialise in either making easy read using drawings or photos. Your audience will often have a preference.

(2) How people with a learning disability are involved

There are different ways people with a learning disability can be involved in producing easy read. Different providers will involve people at different stages in the process.

- Co-producing the whole document
- Testing the text
- Quality checking the final easy read document

It is better if people are more involved throughout and paid for their work and expertise, rather than used as volunteers.

Publishing the document

The easy read version should be easy to find. It should be available at the same place as the 'standard' version. There is an [easy read summary](#) of this guide available.

You should think about where you will publicise the accessible formats so that people with a learning disability will see it. You could share it with the Learning Disability and Autism Engagement team who can share it with the [NHS England Learning Disability and Autism Forum](#). Contact the team at engage@nhs.net.

If you are publishing online document online you will need to make sure it is web accessible. There should always be contact details on your document, for readers to request an alternative format.

Guidelines for good easy read

Simple English

Here are guidelines to keeping the text for your easy read information in simple English:

- Make sure that the information appears in a logical order.
- Write as though you are speaking.
- Keep your sentences short and to the point. About 15 words is good.
- Avoid using difficult words, jargon, abbreviations or acronyms if you do not explain them.
- If you need to use technical terms throughout the document include a glossary or 'list of useful words' where you explain the meaning of each word, rather than repeatedly explaining the concept. For example, using 'Personal Independence Payment' and including a glossary definition such as 'money that is given to people to pay for things that they need to be able to live independently'.
- Use simple punctuation, for example question marks, exclamation marks, commas and full stops. Avoid using colons, semi colons, dashes and brackets.
- Do not use too many commas. It is often better to split a sentence into two rather than use a comma. If you are using commas because your sentence has a list, it might be better to use bullet points.
- Use active and personal language for example 'I', 'you' and 'we'. If you use 'we' you should be explicit about who 'we' means. For

example “When this document says ‘we’ it means NHS England”.
It makes the document direct and easy to understand.

- Avoid using percentages and fractions. Say ‘few’ instead of ‘7%’.
Say ‘most people’ rather than ‘3,409 out of 4,001 people’.
- Use numerals instead of words. For example ‘3’ instead of ‘three’.

Content

In addition to keeping the language in simple English, here are some guidelines on how to make the language and content easy to read:

- Write in facts. Do not write using abstract language like metaphors.
Metaphors could be misunderstood by some readers.
- Be simple and direct.
- Have one idea or action per sentence.
- Be consistent with use of language. Keep using the same word throughout the document. For example if you use the word ‘doctor’ use that word throughout, do not alternate between ‘doctor’ and ‘GP’.
- Making it clear whether the document is just for information, or whether an action is needed.
- A document is not ‘easy read’ if it is too long. One guideline is that it should be no more than 22 pages although shorter documents are more accessible. One idea is to split larger documents up into smaller chunks.
- For long documents include a contents page.
- Test the language and content with your target audience.

Layout and design

Here are some guidelines on how to make the layout and design of your document accessible:

- Use photos, drawings or symbols to support the text.
- Ensure that the images used match the text.
- It is conventional to have the images on the left.
- Use large print, 14 point minimum. People with a learning disability have a higher incidence of undiagnosed sight problems than the rest of the population.
- Use a clear, uncluttered, 'sans serif' font, such as Arial.
- Do not use *italics*, underlining and CAPITALS as they change the shape of the written word making it harder for some people to read. You could use **bold** to highlight important words but remember that some people may not notice that text is in bold.
- Start and finish a sentence on the same page.
- Do not split a word across two lines with a hyphen. Start a new line for a new word. To some people a new line might signify a new idea, so it is best if one sentence fits on the same line.
- Print the document on good quality paper so that the images and text on the reverse side do not show through.
- Using colour: black text on white or yellow background is generally best unless a person specifically wants a different colour.
- Don't squeeze too many words onto a page- some white space helps readability.

Appendix- Helpful resources

This is a list of resources which can help you develop easy read-

- CHANGE. [How to make information accessible](#)
- Department of Health. [Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities](#)
- [European standards for making information easy to read and understand](#)
- Mencap. [Am I making myself clear?](#)
- NHS England The [Accessible Information Standard](#)
- People First. Easy Read Standards
- [The plain English campaign](#)

We are grateful to these authors as these publications have shaped these guidelines. Thank you also to everyone who contributed to these guidelines through a focus group and peer review.

