Clear Written Communications

The Easy English Style Guide

Contents

1 About Easy English

1.1 What is Easy English?

Easy English is a style of writing that has been developed to provide understandable, concise information for people with low English literacy. People with low English literacy can be described as people with a limited ability to read and write words.

A person with low English literacy may have difficulty with spoken or written language skills for:

- working out meaning and

- conveying meaning.

Literacy also requires the ability and flexibility to take knowledge and apply it.

The definition of literacy has evolved. It has now been expanded to include literacy in information and communication technologies.

Easy English may also be called Easy Read, Easy to Read, Plain Language and Aphasia Friendly.

For more information see the 'What is Easy English?' fact sheet.

1.2 Who is Easy English for?

Many people find it hard to read and understand everyday written information and documents. The reasons for such difficulties are as diverse as the people themselves.

A person may have low English literacy due to:

- an intellectual or cognitive disability

- a learning disability

- an acquired disability, such as stroke, brain injury or degenerative condition

- poor educational outcomes

- reduced exposure to literacy in adult life

- ageing.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may also experience low English literacy.

For more information see the 'Who is Easy English for?' fact sheet.

1 About Easy English

1.3 Key principles of Easy English

Easy English focuses on presenting key information rather than all the detail. Words are combined with images to enhance the message for the reader.

Ideally, reading an Easy English document is a shared activity between the reader and another person, such as a friend, a family member or support person. Through discussion, the meaning of the document can be clarified, understood and further details can be provided. Once the document has been explained it can be a useful reminder for the person later.

1.4 Key features of Easy English

The key features of Easy English include

- simplified language and grammar

- minimal punctuation

- simplified font, layout and design and

- images that illustrate headings and key messages.

1.5 Where to find examples of Easy English

Scope's Accessible Information Service keeps records of a large number of examples from Australia and overseas.

For more information, please contact us (page 21).

2 Easy English Recommendations

In Easy English documents, information should be presented in sequence and written so that the reader understands the content and knows what actions to complete.

2.1 Document Design

> **Inclusive communications**
>
> Who is your audience? Remember that readers will have different life situations, experiences and cultures. Some readers may have a vision impairment. Some readers may have limited fine motor skills, making turning pages difficult.

Paper

Choose paper that is not see-through (at least 100gsm). Use matt paper. Shiny paper can make a document more difficult to read.

Tabs

Consider using tabs to make turning pages easier.

Always include:

- **A title**
  Always use a short, simple title. The title should make the content clear.

- **Headings**
  Use headings and sub-headings to break up the information.

- **Contact Information**
  When providing contact information, provide: name of your organisation, date of publication, phone, fax and National Relay Service numbers, email, website and social media addresses.
  For websites, type the website address followed by step-by-step instructions for how to get to the exact webpage (see example on page 13).

- **Page numbers**
  Always use page numbers. They should be the same font size as your main text.

PLEASE NOTE:
The examples in this guide, as shown in boxes and in diagrams, are not to scale. As a result, the font size may appear smaller and lines may not be double-spaced.

Consider including:

- **Contents**
  Booklets and books should have a contents section. Use the heading 'In this book'.

- **Introduction/Getting help with using this book**
  This might include where to find other available versions of the text or guidance for working through the resource. List information for the support person at the back of the book. When this information appears at the front of the book, it confuses the reader.

- **Glossary**
  Include a glossary for difficult words or frequently used pictures. You can use the heading 'Words in this book' or 'Hard words'.

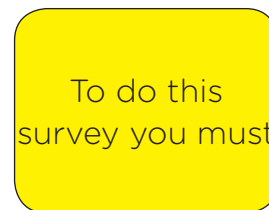## Use of Colour

Do

- use high contrast colours, so your text stands out.

- use some colours as a background, but not as a typeface, e.g. yellow.

- make white writing big and bold. Use a solid dark background.

Do not

- overuse bright colours.

- use a lot of different colours in the one document.

For more information about appropriate colour contrast contact Vision Australia. Phone 1300 84 74 66 or www.visionaustralia.org

Table 1. Document design - printed documents

Document type	Format and size	Design tips
1. Card	A6 or A7. Single or double sided.	• Single message • Contact information for further details
2. Poster	Large format for display (A3, A2 or A1).	• No more than 4 points • Call to action • Contact information for further details
3. Information sheet or flyer	A5 or A4. Printed one side only.	• Limited number of points • Sections with headings • Contact information for further details
4. Brochure	A4 paper. Vertical bi-folded into A5 size, i.e. 4 pages. Avoid trifold.	• Image on cover • Brief information on cover • Sections with headings • Contact information for further details on back page
5. Booklet	A4 or A5 stapled.	• Image on cover • Brief information on cover • In this book (Contents) • Sections with headings • Words in this book (Glossary) • Contact information for further details • Information for support person inside back cover
6. Book or series of books	Larger than booklet. Bound, stapled or in ring bound folder. Number the booklets.	• Title and image on cover • In this Book (Contents) • Sections with headings • Words in this book (Glossary) • Contact information for further details • Information for support person inside back cover
7. Forms	A4. Stapled side or top to make booklet.	• Include an example of how to complete the form • Allow plenty of space for large handwriting • Include an image for each new line (e.g. name, address)
8. Surveys	A4 portrait or landscape. Stapled side or top to make booklet.	• Include an example of how to complete the survey • Allow plenty of space for large handwriting • Landscape allows more space for responses

2 Easy English Recommendations

Table 2. Document design - Electronic resources

Document type	Design tips
1. Websites	• Use the same principles from this style guide - Use headings and subheadings - Present key points only • Use simple navigation - Use images for navigation - Hide hyperlinks under the words "click here" • Alert reader if they are leaving the website • Refer to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0
2. Documents for websites	• Make sure the document is set up correctly for a screen reader program • Check headings and include alternative text for images • Supply a text only version for people who do not have access to a screen reader program
3. PowerPoint presentations	• Use the same principles from this style guide • Use at least font size 20 • Use at least 1.5 line spacing between lines • Use about 20 words per slide

Paper sizes

A6 — 148 mm × 105 mm

A7 — 105 mm × 74 mm

A5 — 210 mm × 148 mm

A4 — 297 mm × 210 mm

A3 — 420 mm × 297 mm

A2 — 594 mm × 420 mm

A1 — 841 mm × 594 mm
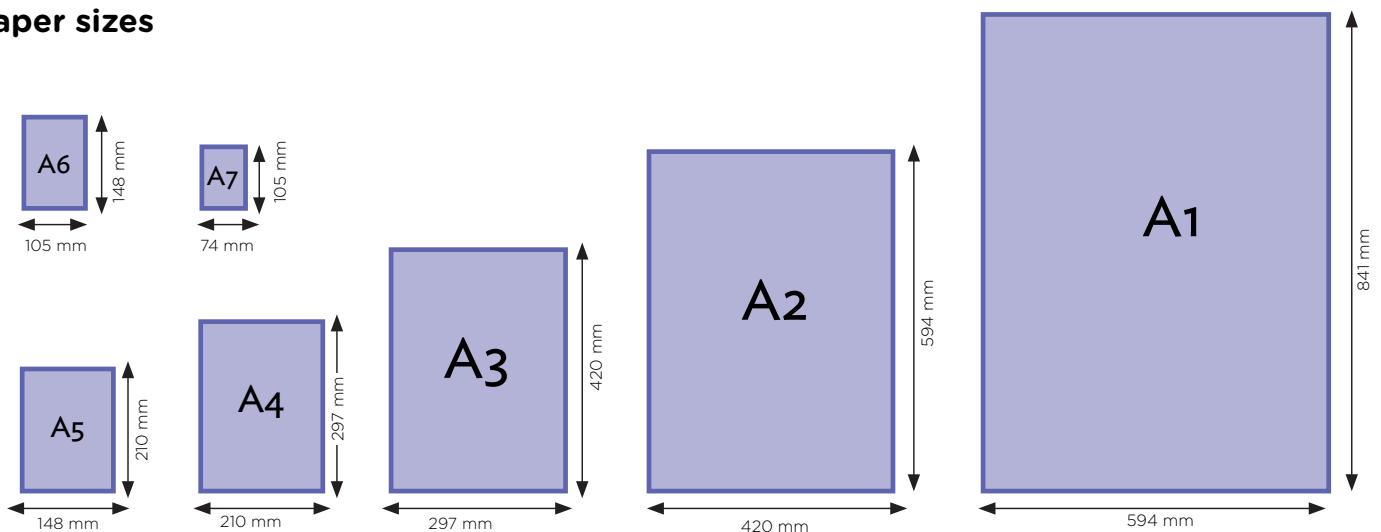
2 Easy English Recommendations

2.2 Language – Choosing your words

Inclusive communications

- Remember that your readers will have different life situations, experiences and cultures
- Choose language that is widely understood
- Give examples that will be familiar to the reader
- Name the person first, e.g. 'a person with a disability', not 'a disabled person'

Be clear

- Focus on facts
- Give clear instructions
- Write only the key points
- Present information in a sequence of clear steps
- Use one idea per sentence
- Use clear examples that highlight the point you are making

This form is about how we can use your
- photo
- video
- information.
Write your name.
Sign your name.
Write the date.

Be direct

- Address readers as 'you'
- Use 'we' for the writer of the material

✕ Our organisation can help people with a disability.

✓ We can help you.

Be specific

Be specific with

- dates
- time
- size
- amount

✕ You must tell us soon.

✓ You must tell us before 26 August 2013.

Be consistent

Use the same word to talk about the same thing.

✕ This money is for your house. You must tell us who lives in your home.

✓ This money is for your house. You must tell us who lives in your house.

2 Easy English Recommendations

Use nouns instead of pronouns where possible

> ✖ We will give it to them.
>
> ✔ We will give the report to the government.

Use lists

Use bullet points or numbers

> The best tram stop is on Smith Street.
> - Take route number 6
> - Get off at stop number 22

Keep language simple

- Choose shorter words

- If you need to use a difficult word, write the meaning in the glossary ('Words in this book')

> ✖ support   ✖ specialist
>
> ✔ help   ✔ doctor

Use a word instead of a phrase

> ✖ make a choice
>
> ✔ choose

Use short, simple sentences

> ✖ After attending the function, everyone will reconvene at the hotel.
>
> ✔ You will meet the group.
> You will have dinner.
> You will go back to the hotel.

Use active sentences, not passive

> ✖ You will be told (passive).
>
> ✔ We will tell you (active).

2 Easy English Recommendations

Use numerals for numbers, not words
Use two spaces on either side of the number

> ✖ There were thirteen people at the meeting.
>
> ✔ There were 13 people at the meeting.

Keep language familiar

Choose words based on 'everyday' spoken language

> ✖ You should not eat poultry.
>
> ✔ You should not eat chicken or turkey.

Use standard Australian spelling

> ✖ color
>
> ✔ colour

Limit punctuation
Do not use

- brackets (brackets)
- hyphens ---
- ampersand &
- slashes \ / (except in web links)
- excessive detail
- slang or jargon
- catchy marketing phrases
- contractions of words (e.g. Write 'it is'; not 'it's')
- abbreviations (e.g. Write 'For example' not 'e.g.')
- acronyms unless the acronym is more common than the full version (e.g. ATM versus 'automatic teller machine' or NSW versus New South Wales). Do not punctuate acronyms (e.g. Write NSW, not N.S.W.). Explain any acronym you use at the start of the document and/or in the glossary ('Words in this book').

2 Easy English Recommendations

2.3 Document Layout

Margins

- Use wide margins, at least 2.5 cm wide.
- If using images use a 6.5 - 7.5 cm left margin.
  This leaves white space on the left to insert images.

Spacing

- Use double line spacing between paragraph lines. White space is thinking space.
- Insert extra spaces between lines of text with images.
- Increase space between numbers and any symbols used, e.g. 6 and 8.

Style of writing

- Choose a sans serif font (i.e. without serifs, the small projecting lines). Suitable fonts include
  Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Trebuchet or Verdana.
- Use upper and lower case. Do not use upper case, e.g. What not WHAT.

Size of writing

- Use font size 14 for body text
- Use font size 16 or larger for headings
- Use larger text for flyers
- Use even larger text for posters

Alignment

- Left align all text, including headings
- Do not centre text
- Do not justify text
- Do not use multiple columns of text

2 Easy English Recommendations

Text density

- If using images, use no more than 25 - 30 characters per line
- If not using images, use no more than 50 - 60 characters per line

Completeness

- Complete a word on the line it starts
- Complete a sentence on the page it starts

Emphasis

- Use bold for important words or phrases
- Use a text box to highlight information

. . . .

✖ **Do not**

You can choose to
answer the questions.
or
You can choose not to
answer the questions.

Do not centre text

You can choose to
answer the questions.

You can choose not to
answer the questions.

Do not justify text

YOUR INFORMATION
WILL BE PRIVATE

Do not use upper case text - except for selected acronyms (see pg 9)

To do this survey, you *must* be 18 years old.
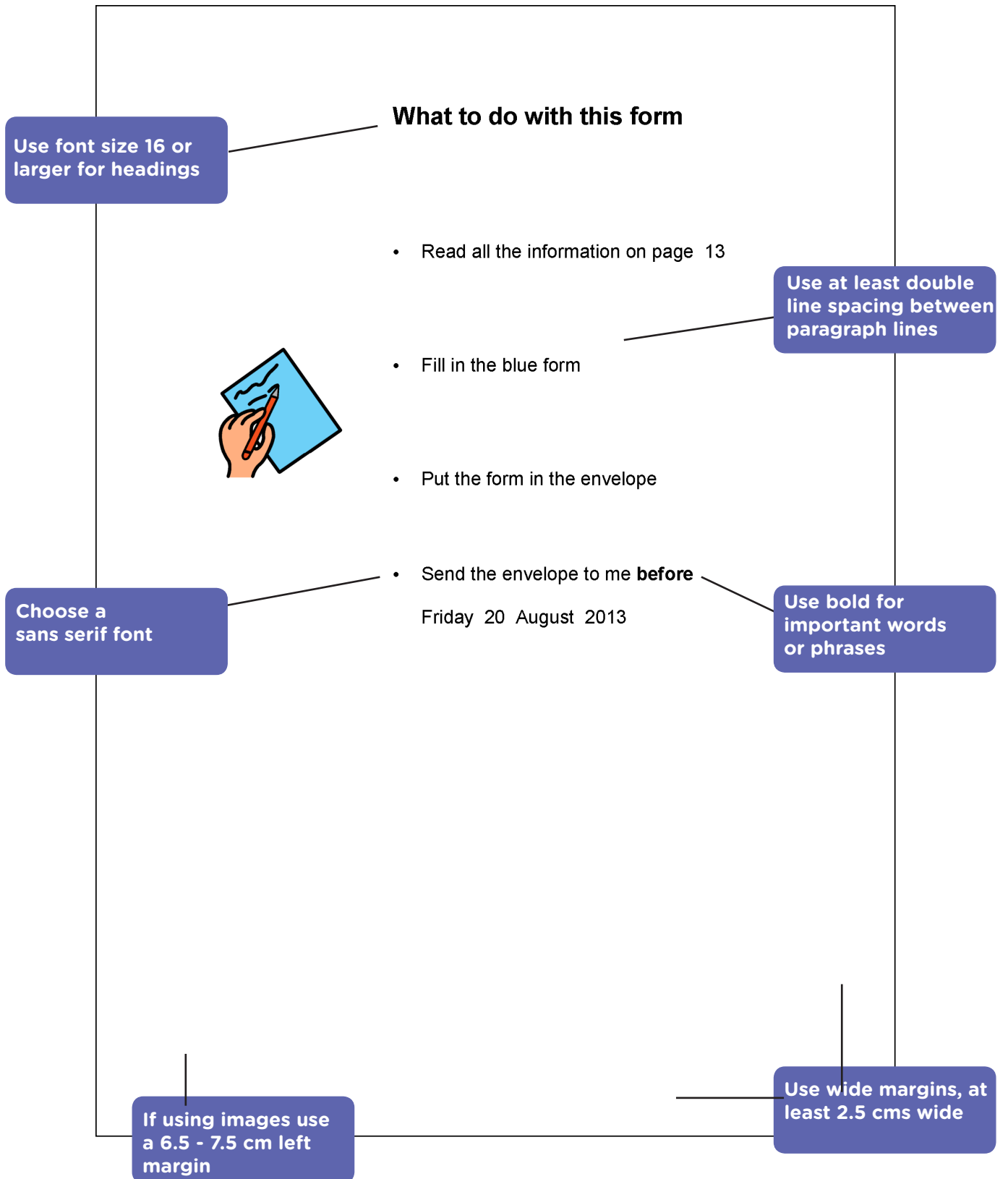
Do not use italics

To do this survey, you must be 18 years old.

Do not underline text

To do this survey, you ~~must~~ be 18 years old.

Do not use font effects such as strike through, super, or subscript

Use font size 16 or larger for headings

What to do with this form

- Read all the information on page 13

Use at least double line spacing between paragraph lines

- Fill in the blue form

- Put the form in the envelope

- Send the envelope to me **before**

  Friday 20 August 2013

Choose a sans serif font

Use bold for important words or phrases

If using images use a 6.5 - 7.5 cm left margin

Use wide margins, at least 2.5 cms wide
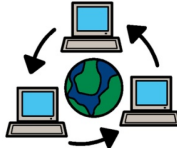
How to include website information

If you can, include detailed instructions for the people who print the document.

You can get this book

Email   crc@scopevic.org.au

No underline

Website   Click here

Hyperlink hidden under "click here"

or

http://www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/site/whatweoffer/communicationresourcecentre/resources

Underlined web address

or

Go to   www.scopevic.org.au

Click on   What we offer

Look at the list on the left

Clear instructions

Click on   Communication Resource Centre

Look at the list on the left

Click on   + Resources

A text box may help to highlight important information

2 Easy English Recommendations

2.4 Images

> **Inclusive communications**
>
> - Consider readers who have different life situations, experiences and cultures
> - Choose images that are familiar to your audience's everyday life
> - Be aware that many images are not always universally understood

Use of images

Images should:

- be meaningful to the reader

- make your key messages easier to understand

- emphasise the key points in the document

- help the reader to remember information.

Images are only useful for people who recognise and understand images.

There are a number of factors to consider when using images

- How similar the images look to the real object or activity.

- Whether the image can be confused with something else.

- How clear the image is. The background of the image should not distract from the image.

- How the thickness of the image lines affects the clarity.

- How acceptable the image is to the target audience. For example,
    - culturally appropriate
    - within the life experience, and
    - age appropriate.

Some images can be recognised and understood immediately. Other images need to be learnt. If the image is representing a complex concept, it can be difficult to understand. This could be because the person looking at the image has no experience of the object or concept that is being shown.

If you cannot find a suitable image it may be because the language is too complex. Go back and review the language used to make sure it is as simple as possible.

2 Easy English Recommendations

Types of images to use in Easy English documents

- Photographs

- Logos

- Illustrations and line drawings

- Pictographs

A note about copyright

Many images have restrictions due to copyright. Check the copyright on the particular image you use.

You should:

- use an image on the title page to show what the document is about.

- use coloured images if possible. If you are photocopying to black and white, choose black and white images.

- present images on the left, then the writing. This may support the person to 'read' the image and then read the text or have the text read to them.

- have space around the image.

- use a plain, solid background. DO NOT use watermark text or graphics behind the image.

- keep the writing and images separate. Do not overlap the writing with the images.

How to use images

Clarity

- Use clear, high quality images

- Use images to illustrate key points or the main idea in a paragraph

- Use an image that accurately shows the idea in the text, e.g. send the form back to me

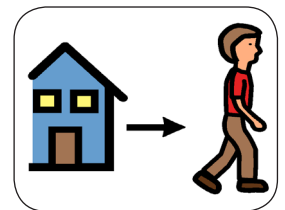- Use an image on the title page that represents what the document is about
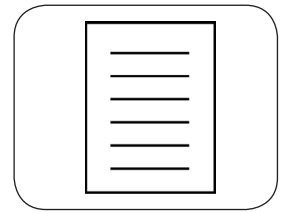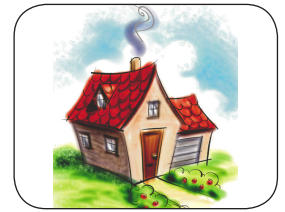
Relevance

Use an image that is appropriate for your target audience, e.g. Vietnamese family.
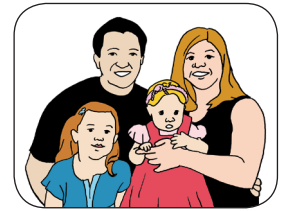
Symbols

Use symbols such as arrows and ticks to show concepts such as good, yes, go and leave.

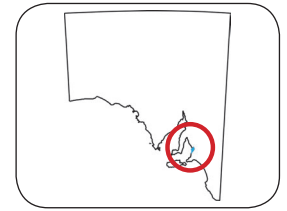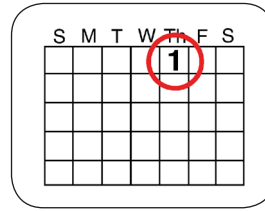**Highlighting**

Use a cross or place a diagonal line over an image to indicate a negative concept

2 Easy English Recommendations

- Use circles rather than arrows to highlight a part of an image

- Arrows can be difficult to track visually

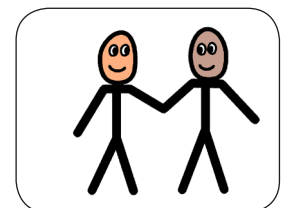- When you create a line or circle, use a 4 point line stroke/weight

Time

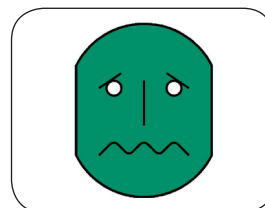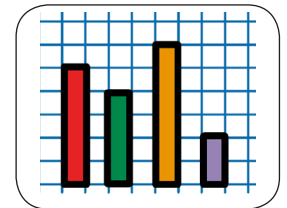Represent time using both a 12 hour clock and a digital clock.

Images to avoid

- Avoid or minimise the use of speech and thought bubbles

- Avoid the use of tables, maps or diagrams. These can be hard to understand

- Be aware that some illustrations or cartoons can be viewed as childish

Pictographs

A pictograph is a pictorial representation of a physical object or concept, e.g. disability service, Scope service.

Logos

- A logo is an emblem or graphic mark of a company or organisation

- Use appropriate logos, as required

- Check with the owner for permission to use their logo

- Check the owner's style guide for the rules for using their logo

Photographs

- Use clear photographs

- Remove background and foreground clutter

- Make sure the concept or message is the main feature of the photograph

- Use a clear background screen when you take photographs of objects

- Avoid or reduce glare from reflective surfaces

Repetition

- Use the same image for the same concept throughout the document

- Consider including the image with a definition in your glossary ('Words in this book')

Avoid overuse

- Use images sparingly

- Do not insert images purely for decoration

- Do not use an image for every word in the document

3 Consumer Testing

3.1 Who are the consumers?

Community members with low English literacy are appropriate consumers for Easy English testing. People with low English literacy are experts in deciding if a document is Easy English or not.

Choosing appropriate consumers

Documents should be matched with consumers based on the consumers' interests, life experiences, and/or their affinity with the intended audience.

Consumer testing with a reference group or advisory group

Many organisations already have a 'reference group' or 'advisory group' that they consult with. If you plan to test your Easy English documents with your existing group/s, it is important to make sure the group is appropriate for the consumer testing job. For example, if a council wants to test an Easy English document with their 'disability reference group' – do the group members actually have reading difficulties? Will the council get the right kind of feedback on the document?

Consumer testing – individual or group?

Both methods can be useful. The approach you choose will depend on the consumers and the type of documents being tested. If people are reluctant to read aloud or speak up in groups, individual testing may be more successful.

3.2 What does consumer testing involve?

Consumer testing involves obtaining direct feedback from an individual or a group of people to determine the readability and usability of written material.

In order to participate in individual or group consumer testing, most people will need assistance. Some participants will read all or parts of the document themselves. Others will need the document read to them. Most will need guidance to be able to read and understand the information, as well as discuss and provide feedback.

Consumers are supported to provide feedback on:

- **the general layout and presentation of the information:** Is the document easy to follow? Is the format accessible?

- **the language used:** Is the content clear and easy to understand?

- **images used:** Do the images make sense and support the language?

- **overall ease of use and readability.**

References

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  http://www.clearforall.co.uk/

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- **Norah Fry Research Centre.** www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/NorahFry

- Owens, J (2006) **Accessible Information for People with Complex Communication Needs.**
  AAC Sept 2006 Vol.22 (3) pp 196-208

- **Victorian Government: External Communications Access Policy (July 2006).**
  Retrieved 14/11/13 http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/resources/communication-old/advertising-and-communications-guidelines/victorian-government-communication-guidelines/policies-and-guidelines/accessible-communication-policy-introductions

- **Vision Australia.** Phone 1300 84 74 66 or www.visionaustralia.org

- **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.** Retrieved 25/9/13.
  http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/

4 References & Contact Information

Contact Information

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