

## **'Easy to Read' Style Guide**

*Adapted from, the Dyslexia Style Guide by the British Dyslexia Association,  
<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/extra352.html>*

"Information is power" and is therefore key to empowering individuals to form a greater understanding of the world around them.

The style in which this information is produced is key to facilitating comprehension for the reader.

Presenting information in a format which makes it easily accessible is vital, if the information it contains is to be understood by everyone.

It is important to understand why and how to make changes in order to increase readability.

This Guide aims to explain how some simple changes to the way information is presented to them can make all the difference.

### **The skill of reading and comprehension.**

Every individual has a different perception of what they see and reading is no exception. The shape and size of words can appear different to each reader. For some readers there can be barriers to overcome.

People often talk about 'tuning in' to text and 'focussing' on what they are looking at. This describes concentrating on content as well as the simple decoding exercise that occurs when we read. For many people, reading becomes an automatic skill that requires little conscious effort. When decoding occurs unconsciously, the reader is able to concentrate on comprehension.

For some readers decoding the words is not always an automatic or unconscious skill. Anyone with a history of reading difficulties may have to concentrate harder to interpret text and remember what they have read.

Suggestions included in this document are aimed at improving accessibility to information, thus allowing the reader more time to comprehend the information.

Everyone is susceptible to eye strain and tiredness when working. When a person concentrates for a long period on a particular piece of text the words may go blurry, though this is only temporary. Some people frequently experience visual discomfort when reading e.g. people with dyslexia. Some dyslexic people focus on the spaces rather than on the words. This is often described as seeing 'rivers' moving down the page. The words and text can appear to be moving around the page or wobbling.

Anything that disturbs concentration, such as visual discomfort, makes the problem worse. With a few small alterations however it is possible to alleviate the pressures of visual discomfort.

### **It makes sense for you to adapt the presentation of your material.**

A. It promotes a culture of equal opportunities for all.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, employers and service providers are obliged to make reasonable adjustments in order to ensure accessibility for all.

B. It makes good business sense.

Consider that 10% of employees may be dyslexic, and 72% of Health and Social Care staff have maths / numeracy skills below level 2 (GCSE grade A-C) and 56% have English / literacy skills below level 2. Up to 16% will be at entry level 3 or below.

### **Hints and Tips: how to make your information accessible.**

Adopting some simple strategies can help dyslexic people to get the most from their reading.

#### **Font Style.**

Fonts should be rounded, allow for space between letters, reflect ordinary cursive writing and be 'easy on the eye'. Look for a font that spaces letters

rather than running them closely together. Bear in mind that fonts that have unusual shaped letters can create difficulties.

- Select sans serif fonts such as Arial or Comic Sans. Other suggestions include Verdana, Helvetica, Tahoma, and Trebuchet.
- Use a minimum of size 12pt or 14pt.
- Where possible use lower case letters rather than capitals. Using capital letters for emphasis can make text harder to read.
- Don't write sentences entirely in capitals; this infers that the reader is being shouted at.

### **Paper or Screen.**

- Avoid light text on a dark background.
- Use coloured paper/screen instead of white. Cream or off-white provides a good alternative.
- If printing, matt paper is preferable to glossy paper, as this reduces glare.
- Ensure the paper is heavy enough to prevent text glaring through from the back. Good quality 80 or 90 gms is effective.

### **Presentation Style.**

Presentation can make a big difference, both to readability and initial visual impact.

- Limit lines to 60 to 70 characters. Lines that are too long or short can put strain on eyes.
- Use line spacing between paragraphs to break up text.
- Use wide margins and headings.
- Use of boxes for emphasis or to highlight important text can be effective.
- Avoid dense blocks of text by using short paragraphs.
- Use bold to highlight. Italics or underlining can make the words run together.
- Keep lines left justified with a ragged right edge.
- Use bullets or numbers rather than continuous prose.

- Don't hyphenate words that are not usually split in order to fill up line ends, e.g. "opera-tion".
- The space between lines is important. Recommendations suggest a leading (space) of 1.5 to 2 times the space.

### **Writing Style.**

The way in which text is written can have an impact on the reader. Long and complicated sentences can be difficult for the reader to navigate and comprehend.

- Write in short simple sentences.
- Be conscious of where sentences begin on the page. Starting a new sentence at the end of a line makes it harder to follow.
- Try to call the readers 'you'; imagine they are sitting opposite you and you are talking to them directly.
- Give instructions clearly. Avoid long sentences of explanation.
- Some additional hints from The Plain English Campaign Web: [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)
- Stop and think before you start writing. Be clear what it is you want to say.
- Use short words where possible.
- Keep your sentence length down to an average of 15 to 20 words.
- Use active verbs as much as possible. Say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'.
- Be concise.

### **Readability scores.**

When Microsoft Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it can display information about the reading level of the document, including the following readability scores.

Each readability score bases its rating on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence.

To set your spell checker to automatically check readability, go to Tools,

Options, Spelling, and Grammar, then tick the Readability request. Word will then show your readability score every time you spell check.

### **Flesch Reading Ease score.**

Rates text on a 100-point scale; the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of approximately 70 to 80.

(N.B. this document has a Reading Ease score of 57.6)

### **Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score.**

Rates text on a U.S. grade-school level. For example, a score of 5.0 means that a fifth grader, i.e. a Year 6, average 10 year old, can understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of approximately 5.0.

(N.B. this document has a Grade Level score of 8.0)

### **Page layout.**

- Keep the design simple. Background graphics can make text difficult to read.
- Keep examples and illustrations relevant and distinguishable from the rest of the text
- keep essential information grouped together.
- Don't put too much information on each page

### **Increasing accessibility.**

Everyone processes information in a different style. It is important to consider this when presenting ideas and concepts.

For example;

- Flow charts are ideal for explaining procedures.
- Pictograms and graphics help to locate information.
- Lists of 'do's and 'don'ts' are more useful than continuous text to highlight aspects of good practice.

- Don't use abbreviations if you can help it or explain it and/or provide a glossary of abbreviations and jargon.
- Include a contents page at the beginning and an index at end.

### **Text-reading software.**

Some people may be using text-reading software. There are a number of points to bear in mind when preparing information for use with text readers.

- Full stops after headings to make the voice pause and drop in tone.
- Semi-colons, commas, or full stops after bullet points in order to separate each point.
- Number menu items to aid navigation.
- Don't write words in capital letters in mid-line, as they may be read as single letters.
- Include as few signs/symbols as are absolutely necessary, e.g. asterisks or slashes, as these will be spoken.
- Consider whether abbreviations and acronyms need full stops.
- Screen readers may have difficulty with tables. They read down each cell, going across the page from left to right.

### **Website design.**

Website design must consider all the above factors together with the following points.

Research shows that readers access text at a 25% slower rate on a computer. This should be taken into account when putting information on the web.

When a website is completed, check the site and information for accessibility by carrying out these simple checks.

- Navigation should be easy. A site map is essential.
- Use graphics, images, and pictures to break up text, while bearing in mind that graphics and tables may take a long time to download.
- Large graphics make pages harder to read.
- Offer alternate download pages in a text reader friendly style.

- Where possible design web pages which can be downloaded and read off-line.
- Moving text creates problems for people with visual difficulties. It also creates a difficulty for text-reading software.
- Contents links should show which pages have been accessed.
- Most users prefer dark print on a pale background. Colour preferences vary. Some websites offer a choice of background colours.
- Encourage the use of hyperlinks at the end of sentences.
- Avoid green and red/pink as these are difficult for colour-blind individuals.
- Make sure that it is possible for users to set their own choice of font style and size, and background and print colours.

Further information on Web Design:

- WAI Accessibility Guidelines: [www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT](http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT)
- RNIB Campaign for Good Web Design: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## References

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