Writing Easy Read Content

ASAN

AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK

Why make accessible resources?

- Access is a civil right!
- Everyone deserves access to information
- Access helps everyone
  - Easy Read resources are more accessible for many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, but are also helpful to people with other kinds of disabilities, English language learners, and more!
- When you make information accessible, you are including people—when you don't, you are excluding

What is Easy Read?

- A style of writing that uses clear and easy-to-understand language
  - Designed to make information accessible to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)
- Each sentence in an Easy Read document is shown next to a picture icon to illustrate the information in that sentence
- Easy Read is the best way we have found so far to make complicated information accessible to people with IDD
- Easy Read has been used in New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom for longer than it has been used in the United States.
  - But by now, many organizations in the U.S. and internationally have done Easy Read work

What is Easy Read? Example

Original sentence

Some people with disabilities receive long-term services and supports (LTSS), such as job coaches, transportation, or personal assistance, in community settings as opposed to residential settings.

Easy Read

Some people with disabilities need **long-term services and supports (LTSS)**.

LTSS are services that help people with disabilities live our everyday lives.

Some kinds of LTSS are:

- Job coaches
- Transportation
- An in-home helper

Some people with disabilities get LTSS in their communities, not in an institution.

What is Plain Language?

- Another style of writing that uses less complex language
    - People who can't use Easy Read for accessibility reasons can benefit from resources with less complex language, like Plain Language resources
- It is important to make documents in both Plain Language and Easy Read
    - The spacing, sentence structure, and images in Easy Read documents may be inaccessible
    - For example, some people have a hard time processing images, or focusing on writing that is very "spaced out," like in Easy Read.
- You can easily translate plain language from Easy Read
    - Find places to combine sentences and paragraphs
    - Shorter sentences can be put together with conjunctions in Plain Language
    - Sections can be spaced together into paragraphs, and you can change grammar or syntax to make the Plain Language version flow better
    - Avoid adding any more terms that would need to be defined.

What is Plain Language? Example

Original sentence

Our fellowship program will involve working with a mentor to develop skills through a year-long project.

Plain Language

Fellows work with a mentor. They work on a project together for one year. This helps our fellows learn new skills.

Plain Language	Easy Read
5th-6th grade reading level.	3rd-4th grade reading level
Use common words whenever possible. Define any words or terms that might be unfamiliar	
Clear, direct and short sentences	
Sentences can have more than one idea, although idea density should still be relatively low	As much as possible, keep to one idea per sentence
Can use paragraphs	Each sentence is its own paragraph
Does not need to use pictures	Each sentence has a picture next to it
Formatting should be clear and easy to understand	Formatting should include large font and lots of "white space," with 5 or fewer sentences per page

Plain Language vs. Easy Read

Plain Language

Jack was a farmer who lived with his wife and children. One day, someone stole their cow, which made the children upset.

Easy Read

Jack was a farmer.

He lived with his wife and children.

One day, someone stole Jack's family's cow.

The children got upset that their cow got stolen.

How do I write in Easy Read?

Create an outline

- Figure out your main idea and where you need to expand your content
- Include background information so everyone starts with the same knowledge
- Split your content into sections
  - Reinforce the main ideas
  - Make the amount of content less overwhelming
- Frame each section as a question that you hope to answer within your writing
- If you're writing a document on housing policy and you have a section on affordable housing, part of an outline might look like this:
  - What is affordable housing?
    - What does "affordable" mean?
    - Who makes affordable housing?
    - Who can get affordable housing?

Passive vs. Active Voice

- Avoid using passive voice in your Easy Read writing
- Passive voice means that instead of there being a subject doing an action in the sentence, the subject is just receiving the action being done by someone or something else.
- Active voice is better for accessibility, because it is clearer and more direct.
- For example:
  - **Active voice:** The ball hit me.
  - **Passive voice:** I was hit by the ball

Passive vs. Active Voice: Zombie Test

- If you can take a sentence and add the phrase "by zombies" after the main verb, it's written in passive voice

Passive sentence

The policy was **approved** by the entire committee.

The policy was **approved** BY ZOMBIES.

You know the sentence is passive because adding "by zombies" still makes sense.

Active sentence

The entire committee **approved** the policy.

The entire committee **approved** BY ZOMBIES.

You know the sentence is active because adding "by zombies" doesn't make sense.

You try! Is this sentence passive or active?

The house was **built** in 2010.

Straightforward language

- Use straightforward language
- Watch out for using words like "this," "they," or "it" when it might not be clear what or who you're talking about
  - It is better to repeat the subject: "Elections are complicated. Elections are important."
- Avoid metaphor, sarcasm, or other figures of speech
  - If you do use them, just clarify what the figure of speech means
- For example:
  - **Original text**: The brain of someone with ADHD is like a wild horse.
  - **Reworded text**: People with ADHD sometimes feel like their brain is "hard to steer." They feel like using their brain is like riding a wild horse.

Straightforward language: Exercise

Original sentence

Cognitive accessibility involves making an environment or information easier to process mentally. This may include decision-making aids, translations of complex documents into cleaner, simpler language, presenting information multiple times and in multiple formats, and the reduction of the number of steps someone must perform to complete a task.

How would you reword this sentence to be clearer?

Repetition

- Repeating the main ideas can be helpful for writing in Easy Read
- Reminders can help readers better connect to different chapters/sections of your document
- Reminders also give a clear message that readers are more likely to remember once they finish reading the document
- Remember, "going backwards" by reinforcing these ideas can help you move forward in the Easy Read process!

Repetition: Example

For example, we use repetition to talk about how policies affect communities:

People live in different communities because of policy decisions.

Policy decides how much money a community has.

Policy decides how healthy the environment in a community is.

Policy decides what housing is like in a community.

Policy decides who can live in a community.

Define terms

- Define terms specific to the topic of your document using accessible language
  - For example, in a document about Medicaid, you would need to define the word Medicaid
- Defined words should appear in bold the first time they are defined
- Put all definitions in a glossary
  - We call this section "Words to Know", and put this list at the front of our Easy Read documents so people can read them before the main paper
- For the most important terms, use repetition within the document to remind readers of these definitions

Define terms: Exercise

Which words in the sentences below do you think need to be defined?

Discrimination is wrong. You shouldn't discriminate against other people. Other people shouldn't discriminate against you.

Bulleted lists

- You can use bulleted lists to organize ideas
- Bulleted lists separate ideas, add space, and use more pictures
- Some people avoid bulleted lists because they make the document longer
  - ASAN usually avoids numbered lists for this reason, unless we are talking about specific sequence of events

Original sentence

Some examples of public places are a hair salon, a restaurant, or a movie theater.

Reworded sentence

Some examples of public places are:

- A hair salon
- A restaurant
- A movie theater

Bulleted lists: Example

For example, here is a bulleted list about sharing your political story:

Your story is when you talk about your life.

Some things you might share in your story could be:

- What has happened in your life.
- What you think and feel about your life.
- What things could have made your life better.
- What you want to see happen next in your life.
- What you want to happen for other people who have lives like yours.

Using examples

- Using many examples is common in Easy Read
- Examples help readers understand the content by making ideas more concrete instead of abstract
- Do not make examples too long. Readers might forget parts of the example story before it is finished. You can create 2 example people to compare scenarios. Or, you can add short sections between examples to separate ideas.

Using examples: Example

- In the example below, homelessness should be defined earlier for this example, but adding that Jim doesn't know where he can sleep also helps remind readers of what homelessness means
- Using a third-person example instead of a first or second makes things clearer

Original sentence

If you were homeless, you might try and call the local shelter, but they might not have a bed for you.

Reworded Sentence

Jim is homeless.

He does not know where he can sleep tonight.

He tried to call the local shelter.

But the shelter did not have a bed for him.

Checking reading level

- ASAN aims to write our Easy Read documents between 3rd–4th grade reading level
- Avoid using longer words where simpler ones will do
- Be mindful of sentence length
- Check the reading level of a document with websites like Hemingway, Readable, and Automatic Readability Checker
- Temporarily replace predefined words that would "throw off" the score
  - For example, if you defined the term "housing insecurity" the first time you used it, you should it with a shorter placeholder word, so that the phrase will not get flagged every time.
  - You should also take out words your audience already knows, like "disability"
- Check small sections at a time, rather than the whole document

Checking reading level: Example

- Using less complex words does not mean you cannot talk about complex ideas
- For example:
  - These words tell a story using only the ten hundred words people use most often. Even though the words aren't hard, you can talk about hard ideas. You can talk about things like how people get the help they need, problems that people deal with, things that people need to be able to go to school and work, and more! Easy words can help you talk about hard ideas and let more people understand. You can try to do the same thing with the [Up-Goer Five](#).

Checking reading level: Exercise

- When putting your work through a reading level checker, you should take out certain pre-defined words that would "throw off" the score.
  - We aren't "cheating" by removing words; we already defined those words. Replacing these words lets us focus on everything we **can** still change to lower the reading level.
  - The easiest way to change wording for a reading level is to use the "find and replace" function in a Word document to find a word—we replace them with fruit names!
- What words in the sentences below do you think should be replaced (and defined) to get the right score?

People with disabilities don't want to live in separate places built for us. We want to live with everyone else! Community living means living in the same places as people without disabilities. A community can be a neighborhood, town, or city.

Translating Documents into Easy Read

Starting from the original document

- Your Easy Read document must have the same information as your original document
  - You can change the order of ideas, the words you use, and other things about your writing. Easy Read was created to make sure people have equitable access to information.
- Break down the document into smaller parts and start with an outline
  - This can help you figure out if you need to change the order or the framing
  - It can also help you figure out what ideas you need to flesh out or separate into more sentences
- Think about which terms in your original document should be defined vs. replaced

Defining words

- Define words that show up often in the field you're writing about
- Replace less common jargon

Defining words: Example

Defining a word

For words that show up often in the field that you're writing about, it is usually best to define them. For example, you might decide that "affordable housing" is a commonly-used phrase in housing policy, so you could define it.

Replacing a word

If you're talking about natural disasters, you could replace "emergency management" with "dealing with an emergency." Then, you could define what an emergency is in the context of a natural disaster.

Keep in mind that in some cases, like this, shorter sentences are not always better. Even though "dealing with an emergency" is more words than "emergency management", the wording is more accessible.

Make sure Easy Read has the same information

- All publicly available versions of a document, complex and Easy Read, must have the same information
  - ASAN releases all versions of our documents at once to make sure they're uniform
- Compare both versions to make sure they have the same information
- When making an Easy Read version of an existing document, do not remove information
- When making both versions together, you can remove information to make it more accessible as long as you remove it from both versions

Make sure Easy Read has the same information: Example

For example, let's say you are translating a resource about how dogs evolved, which you haven't published yet.

If there is a long section comparing dogs to cats, you might decide that people don't need that information to understand dog evolution, and cut it from both versions of the resource. But you should leave in the section about how dogs developed from wolves by living with people for thousands of years. People need to know about that to understand dog evolution.

Summarizing

- Organizations without the resources to translate their documents into Easy Read could write an Easy Read summary
- Summarizing means cutting down the content of your document to a paragraph or two, similar to an abstract in other papers, but put into Easy Read format
- An Easy Read summary is not equal access
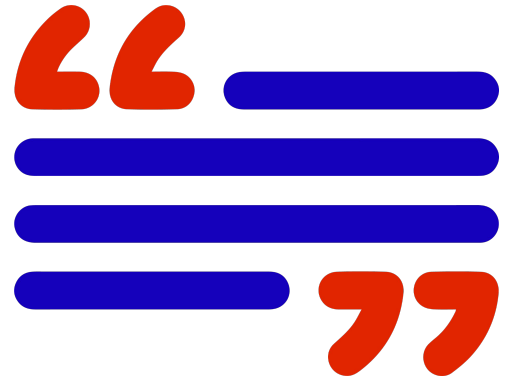
What does writing Easy Read content look like?

Original sentence

Many autistic students have expressed difficulty accessing information regarding receiving disability accommodations.

Drafts

1. Many autistic students say it is hard to get information.

2. It has been said by many autistic students that getting information about accommodations is hard.

3. Many autistic people say it is hard to get information about how to get accommodations for their disabilities.

Final Easy Read sentences

Many autistic students say it is hard to get information about accommodations.

Accommodations are changes that make doing things easier for people with disabilities.

Exercise 1

Some people communicate in ways that are not speech, such as through pointing at pictures or typing on an iPad.

Exercise 2

One difference between part-time and full-time jobs is that full-time jobs have to offer employees health insurance, while part-time jobs do not.

Exercise 3

When I met with a representative from the California Department of Education, they told me about their plan to stop requiring certain standardized tests.

Exercise 4

In order to fulfill the promise of community living for people with disabilities, it is crucial that community living options for people with disabilities remain truly integrated in the community instead of merely replicating institutional environments in smaller buildings.

Exercise 5

Non-speaking autistic students identified additional barriers they face in higher education.

Thanks for listening! Any questions?

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network
http://autisticadvocacy.org/
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