Plain Language Formats

August 22, 2019

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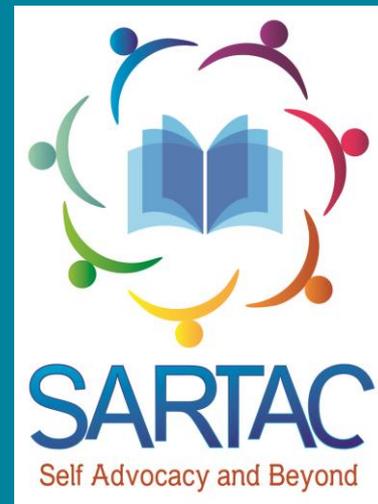
Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center
https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/

Max Barrows & Karen Topper, Green Mountain Self Advocates

Zoe Gross, Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Self Advocacy Resource & Technical Assistance Center

Funded by

ACL
Administration for Community Living

AIDD
Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

A Project of

SELF ADVOCATES BECOMING EMPOWERED

Our Partners

ASAN
AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK

TASH

GMSA
GREEN MOUNTAIN SELF-ADVOCATES

UMKC Institute for Human Development
A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

SWI
SOUTHWEST INSTITUTE

The Purpose of SARTAC

Strengthen the Self Advocacy Movement:

- **Website** resources created by self advocates for self advocacy groups

- **Create tools** self advocates tell us they need

- Be a **national think tank** for creative ideas

- Provide **Technical Assistance** to strengthen local self advocacy groups

Strengthen the Self Advocacy Movement

- Prepare easy to understand **Policy Papers** in plain language.
- Conduct research on the history of the self **advocacy movement** and compare it to other **civil rights and human rights movements**
- Support a **National** Self Advocacy **Conference** in October 1-3, 2020, Denver, Colorado
- Offer **work experience** to SARTAC Leadership and Policy Fellows

What does "cognitively accessible" mean?

About thinking & understanding

Lots of people can use it, including disabled people

Something is **cognitively accessible** if lots of people, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, can use it and understand it
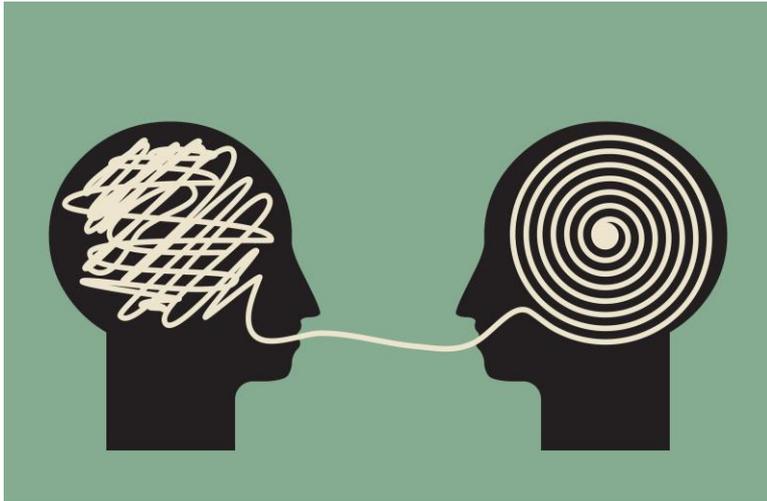
Plain Language is about clear communication.

It is about Nothing about us without us.

If someone asks for plain language as an accommodation – **do not judge them!**

Assume they are capable of understanding what you have to say – you just need to say it in a different way!

Cognitively Accessible Toolkit Types

Plain Language

- Important details come first
- Active voice
- Simple, familiar language
- Few acronyms

Easy Read

- Clear and easy to understand
- A picture for every idea
- Fewer ideas on a page

Plain Language

❑ Active voice ("I ate cake," not "The cake was eaten.")

❑ Important details come first

❑ Simple, familiar language

❑ Few acronyms ("developmental disabilies," not "DD")

❑ Accessible spacing (1.5 is good)

Plain Language

KEEP IT CLEAR

KEEP IT SIMPLE

❑ Has words that are 3 syllables or less

❑ Has less than 15-20 words per sentence

❑ Focuses on need to know, not nice to know

❑ Uses short sentences. One idea per sentence

❑ Speaks to the reader. Use "you" and "we"

❑ Uses words that are culturally appropriate

❑ Repeats important words and phrases

SARTAC

Formatting and Design

- ❑ Text lines up on the left
- ❑ No ALL CAPS
- ❑ Has lots of white space
- ❑ Uses headings
- ❑ Avoids columns
- ❑ Uses page numbers
- ❑ Avoids text over graphics
- ❑ Has wide margins (at least 1 inch)
- ❑ Uses color choices with high contrast

❑ Uses lists. Numbers work better than bullets.

❑ Uses stories instead of graphs and statistics.

❑ Does not write out numbers (say 4 instead of four)

❑ Font type and size is Arial or Verdana (size 14 or larger)

❑ Use of bold is okay (but avoids <u>underline</u> and *italics*)

❑ No contractions. Uses "do not" instead of "don't"

❑ Does not use a hyphen to split a word at the end of a line.

❑ Keeps all the sentences of a paragraph on the same page.

SARTAC

Easy Read

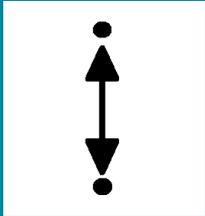- Made for people with intellectual disabilities

- Clear and easy to understand

- A picture for every idea

Easy Read

- No acronyms

- Large space between paragraphs

- Fewer ideas on a page

Easy Read icons are often metaphors

health coverage

Easy Read icons are often metaphors

run for office

Easy Read icons are often metaphors

Money Follows the Person

Reading Level: The Lower, The Better!

- Plain language = 5th-8th grade reading level (depending on who you ask)

- Easy Read = 3rd-4th grade reading level

Reading Level: The Lower, The Better!

We talk about reading level using grades ("third grade reading level"). We do that because it's an easy way to measure readability. But it can give people the wrong idea.

Lower reading levels are better for everyone, not just kids.

We can write about complicated, topics at low reading levels – and we should!

Reading Level of Best-Selling Authors' Books

Years of education required to understand

https://contently.com/strategist/2015/01/28/this-surprising-reading-level-analysis-will-change-the-way-you-write/

Goodnight Moon, Ernest Hemingway, Cormac McCarthy, Susan Collins, Jane Austen, JK Rowling - HP1, Hunter S. Thompson, Stephanie Meyer, Stephen King, J. R. R. Tolkien, Jon Ronson, Ayn Rand, Dan Brown, Thomas Pynchon, Seth Godin blog post, JK Rowling - HP7, Sheryl Sandberg, Tom Clancy, John Grisham, James Patterson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hilary Clinton, Leo Tolstoy, David Foster Wallace, Tim Ferriss, Danielle Steel, Shane Snow, Malcolm Gladwell, Michael Crichton, Chip and Dan Heath, Mitt Romney, Daniel Khaneman, Jim Collins

Why Does Accessible Communication Matter?

Increases the value of the information for ALL people!

"Only 12 percent of adults have Proficient health literacy, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy." In other words, 9 out of 10 people may have difficulty understanding the information they need to know to be healthy.

Source: https://health.gov/communication/literacy/quickguide/Quickguide.pdf, p..7.2

What affects reading level?

- o How many long sentences are there ? (syllables per sentence, words per sentence)

- o How many long words are there? (syllables per word, letters per word)

- o Are there a lot of simple, familiar, common words? Or are there a lot of unusual, complicated words?
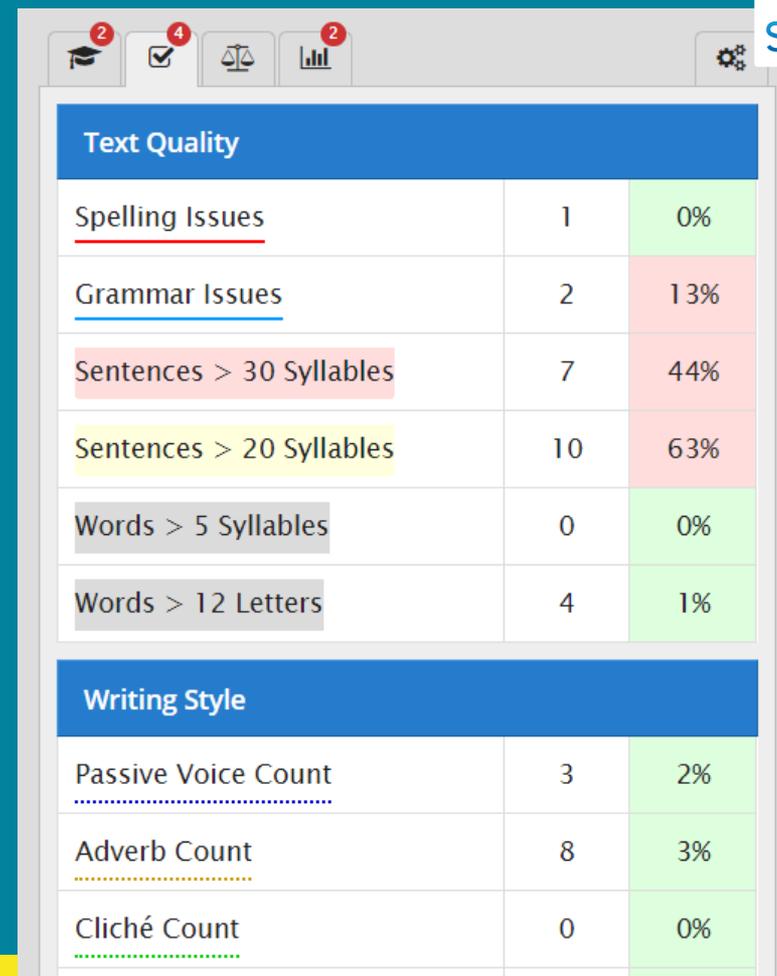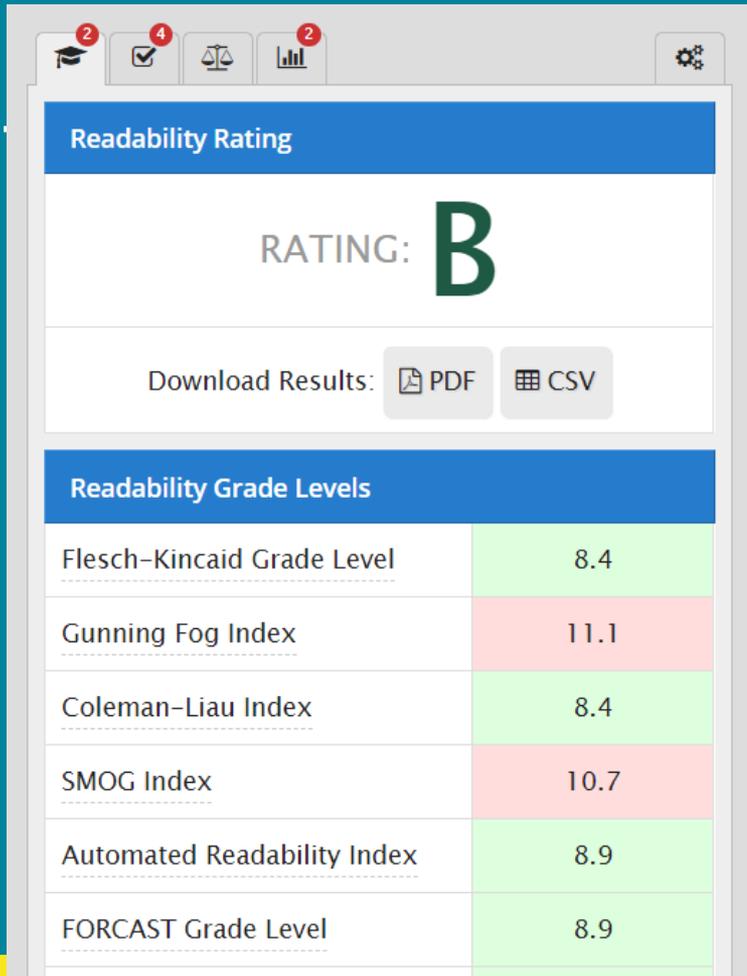
These are not the only things that make text accessible! You still need to pay attention to things like the structure of your sentence, active vs. passive voice, etc. But these are important things, so keep an eye on your reading level too.

Reading Level: The Lower, The Better!

- Check reading level using tools like Readable or Automatic Readability Checker.

- These websites use many different reading level tests on your writing, and show you all of the results.

Readable.io Report

Readability Rating

RATING: **B**

Download Results: 📄 PDF | ▦ CSV

Readability Grade Levels

Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level	8.4
Gunning Fog Index	11.1
Coleman–Liau Index	8.4
SMOG Index	10.7
Automated Readability Index	8.9
FORCAST Grade Level	8.9

Text Quality

Spelling Issues	1	0%
Grammar Issues	2	13%
Sentences > 30 Syllables	7	44%
Sentences > 20 Syllables	10	63%
Words > 5 Syllables	0	0%
Words > 12 Letters	4	1%

Writing Style

Passive Voice Count	3	2%
Adverb Count	8	3%
Cliché Count	0	0%

Conjunctivitis

You have contracted conjunctivitis. This is an inflammation or swelling of the conjunctiva. Often called "pink eye," conjunctivitis is a common eye disease. It may affect one or both eyes. Some forms of conjunctivitis are highly contagious. You have bacterial conjunctivitis which you need to treat with prescription eye drops from the pharmacy. Follow the directions on the bottle. It may improve after three or four days of treatment, but you need to take the entire course of antibiotics to prevent recurrence. Good hygiene is important also.

Pink Eye

You have an **eye infection called pink eye**. To make it go away:

- You need to get eye drops from the drug store.

- Squeeze eye drops into your infected eye 3 times per day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner).

- Use the drops until they are gone.

Pink eye is really **easy to accidentally give to another person**. To keep this from happening, wash your hands after you use the drops and before you touch another person (like shaking hands).

You have **Pink Eye**. To make it go away:

➢ Get eye drops from a drug store.

➢ Squeeze eye drops into your eye.

Use the drops 3 times a day.

❑ Morning ❑ Noon ❑ Night

Use the drops until they are gone.

Pink eye is really easy to give to another person.

Wash your hands a lot!

Let's try Plain Language

Can you rewrite this sentence in plain language?

Information concerning long-term care issues for seniors and people with disabilities has been made available on a new website developed by the County Department of Community and Senior Services.

Hint: it is okay to turn this one sentence into many sentences!

Let's try Easy Read

How can we use pictures to make our meaning clearer?

- Medicaid is a kind of health insurance.
- Having health insurance means you don't pay the full cost of your health care.
- If you have Medicaid, the government helps pay for your health care.

Step 1: find the **most important idea** in a line.
Step 2: brainstorm pictures that could illustrate that idea
(it often helps to talk to others!)
Step 3: pick the best one you can think of.

Questions?

zgross@autisticadvocacy.org
topper@gmsavt.org
max@gmsavt.org