



# Guidance for Making Written Information Easier to Understand



## **Background**

The 'Making Things Clearer' Group came together as a working group of the Learning Disabilities Managed Care Network early in 2006.

The aim of the group was to help those working in Learning Disability to make written communications more accessible across all aspects of the service.

A basic need for clear and concise guidelines was quickly a priority and the group have developed this 'Guidance for Making Written Information Easier to Understand'.

This is designed to be of assistance for all people to use when preparing written communication, whether professional generic health service providers, or people who work within a Learning Disability environment.

These guidelines are not prescriptive, but will be a useful tool in the preparation of documentation at the start of any process.

We hope you find them of value.

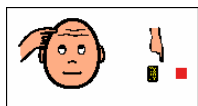
## Introduction

If you are giving information **to one person** you will need to think carefully about what helps this person understand. Each individual will have different skills. Your Speech and Language Therapist can help you with this.

This guidance tells you about what to do if you are making **information for groups of people** such as information leaflets, posters, contracts. People with learning disabilities do not all have the same skill level or areas of difficulty.



Easy information is important to people with Learning Disabilities. It helps them to:



make choices



understand their rights



have a say

Easy Information is important for the providers of services to people with a Learning Disability. It helps them to:



provide a quality service



meet legal requirements



be inclusive



## Things to Think About



There are things to think about if you want to make information easier for people with Learning Disabilities to understand.

There is a lot of advice about how to do this. This guidance brings the good practice together and has sections on:

- **Before you start**
- **How it will look**
- **The words**
- **Using photos, pictures and symbols**
- **Where to get more help**

### Remember in learning disability

80% of people have some communication problems  
 30% of people have sight impairment

### Before you start

Some important questions you should ask at the start are:



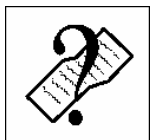
Who is this for?



Who can help make the information easier to understand?

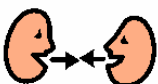


Why do we need to give this information?



What is the important information?

### Is this the best way to get the information across?



There may be other formats such as video, PowerPoint or talking directly to people that would be better.



## Layout

<b>Do Use</b>	<b>Do Not Use</b>
Larger print at least 14 point font	Small print such as this which is 10 point font
Clear type face for example Arial, Univers, Tahoma	Fancy text or type faces with curly letters or <i>Italics</i>
<b>Bold print - this helps important things stand out</b>	Narrow print
<u>Clear headings</u>	<u>Underlining</u> , apart from headings
Good contrast between the type and paper	<b>Bad Contrast, between the type and the paper</b>
Sentences and paragraphs that start and end on the same page	Sentences and paragraphs that start and end on different pages
Paper with a matt finish	Shiny paper
Leave spaces above and below bits of writing	Too much writing on one page
Lower case letters	<b>LETTERS IN A BLOCK</b>
One colour of print	<b>Too many colours on the page</b>
Alignment of text to the left	Justification of text because it creates uneven word spacing

## Language

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
Do use short clear sentences eg, Some days have been cold.	Do not use long sentences eg, The weather has been really changeable and we have had some really cold days.
Do split sentences up into 2 ideas. eg, John wants to go to the bank. He also wants to go swimming.	Do not use sentences containing more than one idea. eg, Today John wants to go to the bank and practise his swimming.
Do present information so that each idea is in a separate paragraph. eg, information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what to bring with you to an appointment</li> <li>• how to get there</li> <li>• what will happen</li> </ul>	Do not present information so that the different ideas are within the same paragraph. eg, When you come to the clinic, you will be seen by a physiotherapist. You should bring shorts to wear. Parking is difficult so you may prefer to use public transport.
Do describe events in the order in which they happen. eg, We'll go to the Bank of Scotland. We'll get you money. We'll check that you get enough money.	Do not describe events in the wrong order. eg, We'll go and get your money. We'll check that you get enough money. We'll go to the Bank of Scotland.
Do use easy words – if you have to use hard words such as medical terms, explain them. Easy words are the ones we use most commonly eg, red, polite, reply, going to have a baby.	Do not use difficult words, these are words that we use less commonly eg, crimson, courteous, respond, pregnant.
Use full names eg, Speech and Language Therapist, Doctor	Do not use abbreviations eg, SALT, G.P.

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
<p>Do use consistent words to describe things. This may mean that you repeat that word several times. eg, We'll help you with your money. We'll help you at the bank. We'll help you fill in the forms.</p>	<p>Do not use different words that mean the same thing. eg, We'll give you support with your money. We'll assist you at the bank and make it easy for you to complete the paperwork.</p>
<p>Do use examples that people will know about to help explain things that are harder to understand'. eg, The Government have told us how to do this.</p>	<p>Do not use examples that people may not know about eg, The Scottish Executive have written guidelines on this.</p>
<p>Do use positive sentences. eg, Remember to take your medicine.</p>	<p>Do not use negative sentences. eg, Don't forget to take your medicine.</p>
<p>Do use active sentences. eg, The doctor gave me the medicine.</p>	<p>Do not use passive sentences. eg, The medicine was given to me by the doctor.</p>
<p>Use simple punctuation such as commas and full stops.</p>	<p>Do not use complicated punctuation, avoid semi-colons; colons: and – hyphens.</p>

## Photographs, Symbols and Drawings

Using photographs, symbols and drawings is a really useful way to make writing easier to understand and remember.

Photograph



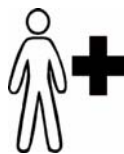
Symbol



Drawing



Think carefully about the images that will get your message across. There are lots of possibilities because people use different sets of pictures and symbols. There is no evidence that one symbol system is better than another. eg, these are all symbols for 'nurse'.



Some people may prefer a particular symbol to represent an idea; which symbol would you choose for 'listen' ?



or



Do not try to symbolise every word. It can be confusing to have too many images on the one page.



Do not



Use



Many



Pictures

1

One



Page



Use a picture or symbol that links to each of your important ideas and gets the message across the best.

Making images big enough to see and make sure they are not too detailed.

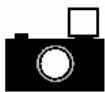


The right image should be near to the words that it is describing.

You can use different types of images for different ideas, for example use photographs of particular people or places.



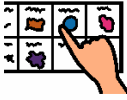
The following charts may help you decide which are the best images for you to use.



## Photographs

<b>Things that are good about photographs</b>	<b>Things that are not so good about photographs</b>
A photo can carry a lot of information and be very easy to 'read'.	When printed or copied the photo is not as sharp or clear.
Photos of people are clear and easy to recognize.	Photos can be too specific which can be confusing. For instance using a photograph of a local college to convey the notion of any other college might lead to misunderstandings.
A photograph of a place will add meaning to an address or name of a place.	Photographs of activities in particular can look 'busy', with no overall activity being recognisable.
Photographs can be useful when illustrating complex documents. One simple photograph can convey lots of ideas.	

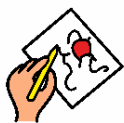
Those appearing in photographs should have given their permission.



## Symbol Systems

There are now several symbols packages available. It is best to speak to your local Speech and Language Therapy department to find out which ones are commonly used in your area.

<b>Things that are good about symbols</b>	<b>Things that are not so good about symbols</b>
Range of very specific single images – good resource for describing key words and key ideas	Not always easy to communicate more abstract ideas
Easily adapted to support people with visual difficulties	Over stylised images that do not look that natural
Can often be from an established system which is used locally so are familiar	



## Drawings

<b>Things that are good about drawings</b>	<b>Things that are not so good about drawings</b>
A good drawing may convey very specific information	Drawings can be busy, which can make them more complicated to understand
A good drawing may be able to convey abstract information	It can be hard to produce drawings which are attractive and simple, but not too childish and patronising

## Where to get more help



### By reading

All of the following documents and websites were used to help us write this guidance. They have more detailed information in making things easier to understand

Clear for All

[www.clearforall.co.uk](http://www.clearforall.co.uk)

Mencap (2002) Am I making myself clear? Mencap's guidelines for accessible writing.

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

Scottish Accessible Information Forum (2007) Standards for Disability Information and Advice Provision in Scotland. [www.saifscotland.org.uk](http://www.saifscotland.org.uk)

RNIB (2007) Clear Print Guidelines.

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)



### By involving people with Learning Disabilities.

This can be in design and or getting feedback and views



### By asking your local Speech and Language Therapist

The symbols used in this document are:

Picture Communication System (PCS), Mayer-Johnson:  
Boardmaker for Windows (2001)

[www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)