


Guidelines for making information easy to read and understand for people with learning disabilities

2. Planning





John was glad
he told the Local Health
Board about his problems with
their consultation documents.
*“They listened! They’ve asked me
to join a panel to help them.
I’m sure we will get it sorted
together”.*

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2. Planning

Introduction

Accessible information takes careful planning. This can save money later, and make sure your information is fit for purpose. Have a look at this checklist before you even pick up a pen or log into your computer.

Before you start checklist

Basics

- Who do you want to give information to? ☐
- What do you want to say? ☐
- What is the key information? ☐
- What do you want them to do with the information? ☐
- Do they really need to know it? ☐

Practicalities

- How does your target group usually get information? ☐
- Resources:
 - can you use the method your target group usually uses?* ☐
 - what resources do you have?* ☐
 - can you do the job with the resources available?* ☐
- Are you going to use written information:
 - by itself?* ☐
 - as a memory aid after a face-to-face meeting?* ☐
 - as a booklet that goes with a DVD?* ☐
- Will it go on the internet, be printed or both? ☐
- Who needs to be involved:
 - from within the organisation?* ☐
 - from outside the organisation?* ☐
- How will you check the information before you produce it? ☐
- How will you make the information easy to get hold of? ☐

Monitoring and improving

- How will you check if your information is being read? ☐
- How will you check if your information is being understood? ☐
- How will you know if your information is making a difference? ☐

2. Planning

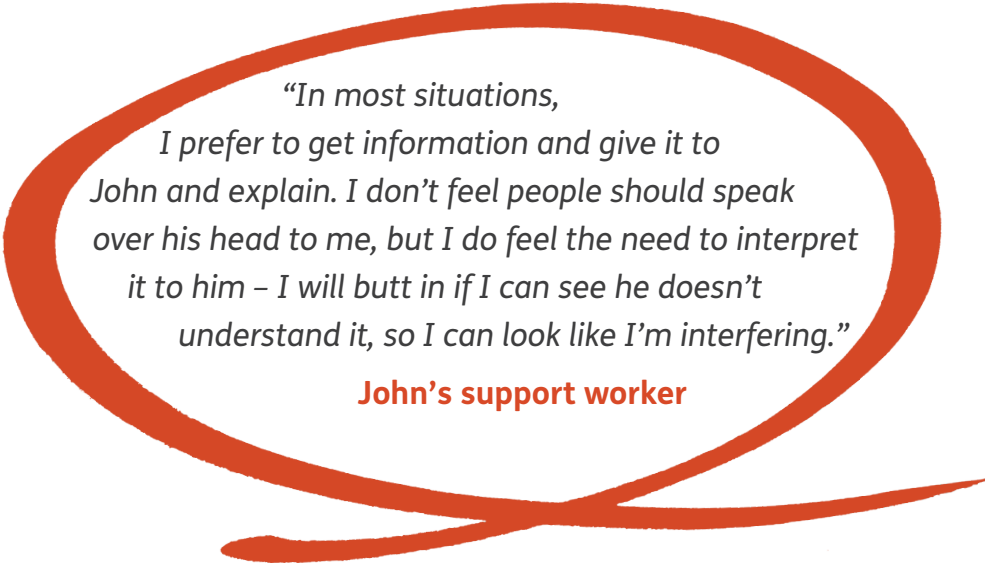
Process

It is up to you to plan a process that will work for your organisation. The rest of this chapter suggests steps you should include, particularly for larger pieces of work or if you want to set an in-house style for written information.

Identify your target group

When you are writing for the general public, you need to remember that this includes people with learning disabilities and their parents/carers and support workers. Your audience may include people with sensory or physical impairments, and it may include people who are not fluent in either Welsh or English. If you can only produce one version of written information, you need to make sure it will meet the needs of as many of your audience as possible.

You may also be writing specifically for parents/carers or for people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities need the opportunity to access information for themselves, both as part of living independently and as part of protecting their privacy. However, many people with learning disabilities will want someone to help them access information either part or all of the time. Organisations cannot always manage to provide individualised information to people who have individualised communication needs. If this is the case, the organisation at the very least needs to make sure a carer fully understands the information and is supported to communicate with the person.



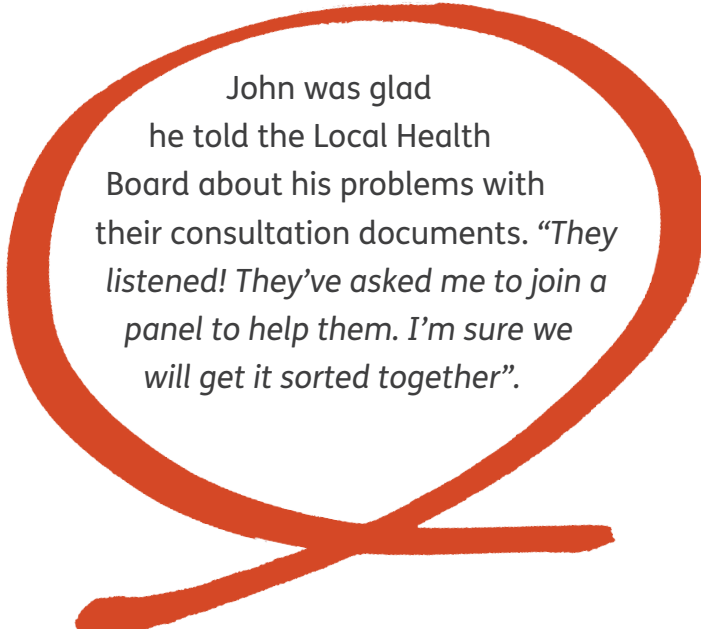
*"In most situations,
I prefer to get information and give it to
John and explain. I don't feel people should speak
over his head to me, but I do feel the need to interpret
it to him – I will butt in if I can see he doesn't
understand it, so I can look like I'm interfering."*

John's support worker

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Set up a panel from your target group

Communication is a two-way process. You need to listen to members of your target group. Setting up a panel does involve some time and expense, so several organisations may want to share a panel. If you work in a very small organisation, you may need to rely on talking informally with a couple of people rather than setting up a more formal panel.



John was glad he told the Local Health Board about his problems with their consultation documents. *“They listened! They’ve asked me to join a panel to help them. I’m sure we will get it sorted together”.*

As members of your panel work with you, they will pick up knowledge, skills and attitudes that are not typical of members of your audience. This means your panel needs to have a regular turnover of members to prevent them becoming professionalised and no longer typical of your audience.

Can written information meet their needs?

Written information is only one way of giving information. Some people rely on word of mouth, others on social media, others on professionals telling them, others on going to meetings. Some listen to local radio or read the local paper, others search the internet. Very few are likely to choose looking for leaflets and reports as their favourite way to get information.

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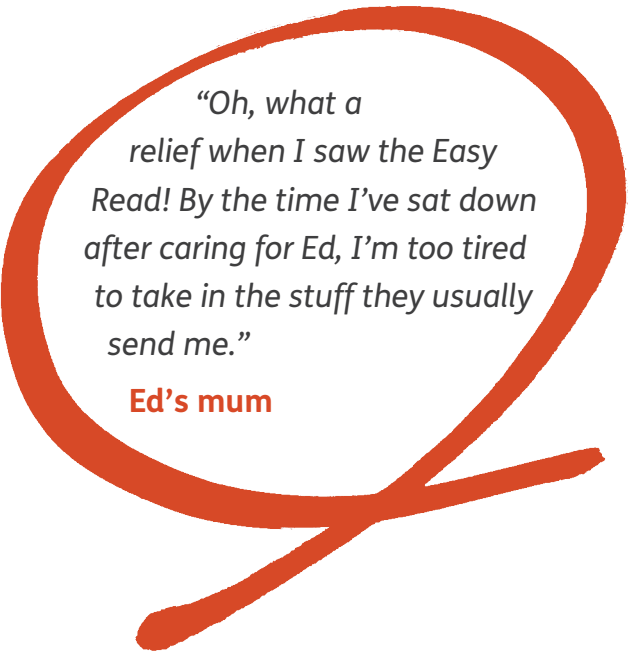
Many people who use computers use a screen reader to read information out loud. An Easy Read or Everyday document will still be inaccessible if it hasn't been set up for a screen reader. The chapter called **Doing** includes information about screen readers.

What do they want to know?

Carers and people with learning disabilities consistently report difficulties getting hold of the information they need, at the time they need it and in a format they can understand. Communication is a two-way process. Ask your panel what they want.

What information do you want to give them?

People want information that is relevant to them and enough information to meet their needs. There is a fine balance between providing enough information and overloading people with information. The simpler and clearer your information, the easier you make life for people who are possibly overstretched or find it difficult to process information.



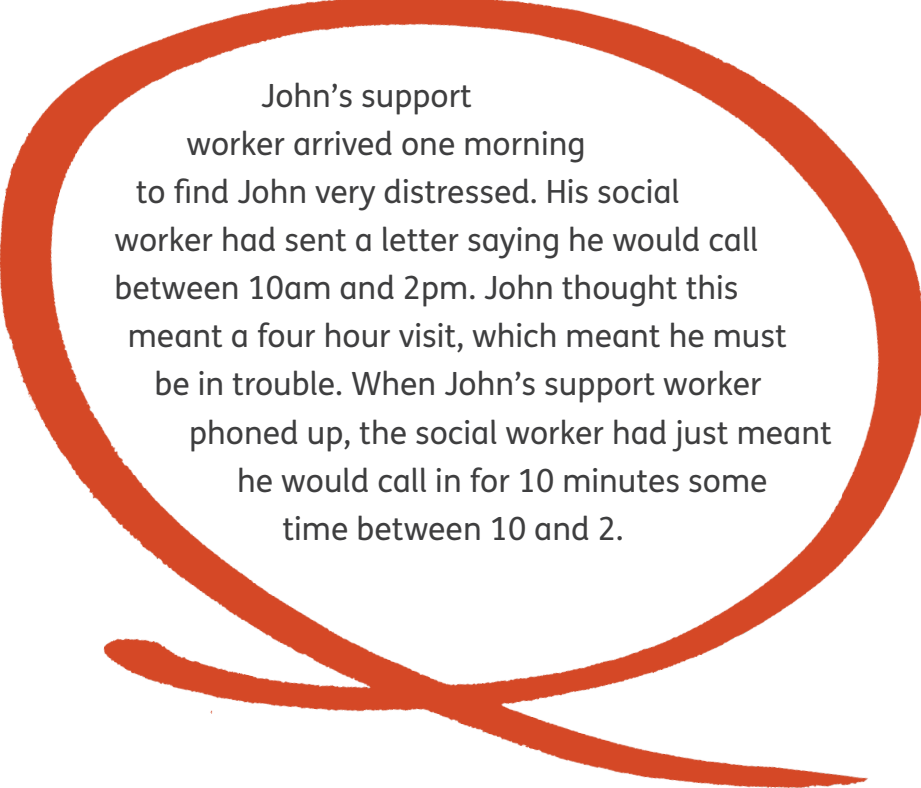
"Oh, what a relief when I saw the Easy Read! By the time I've sat down after caring for Ed, I'm too tired to take in the stuff they usually send me."

Ed's mum

2. Planning

Plan the content and check it with your panel

Producing information takes time, thought and money. It is important to make the best use of your resources by carefully planning what information you will produce. Even with letters you need to check the content to make sure it meets people's needs.

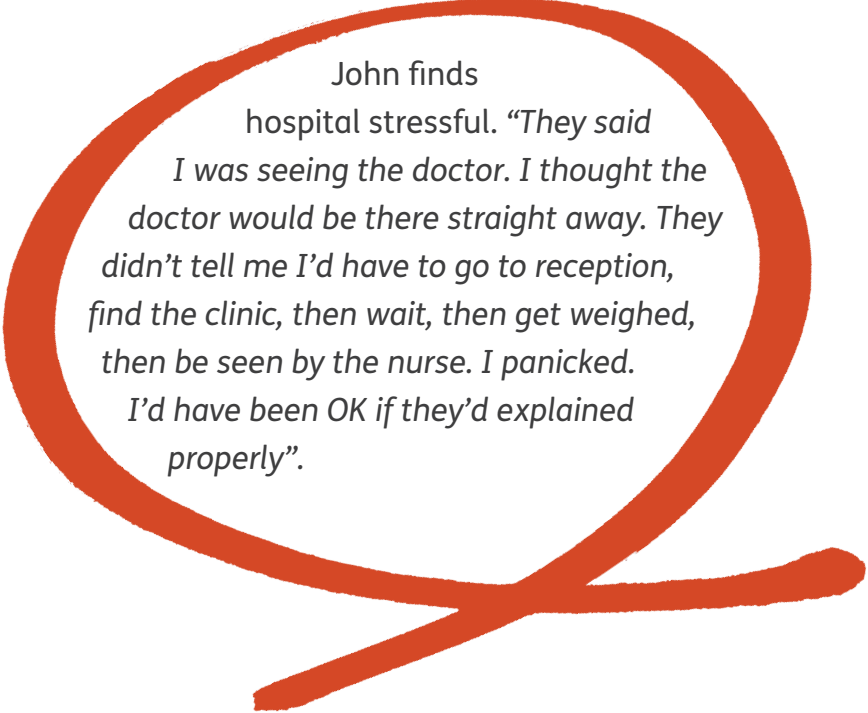


John's support worker arrived one morning to find John very distressed. His social worker had sent a letter saying he would call between 10am and 2pm. John thought this meant a four hour visit, which meant he must be in trouble. When John's support worker phoned up, the social worker had just meant he would call in for 10 minutes some time between 10 and 2.

If the person producing the information and the person reading the information come from very different perspectives, it is easy for this kind of misunderstanding to occur. Checking with your panel will reduce these misunderstandings.

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Another type of misunderstanding is caused when information misses out steps that may seem obvious to the person writing the letter or booklet, but may not be obvious to the person receiving it.



John finds
hospital stressful. *"They said
I was seeing the doctor. I thought the
doctor would be there straight away. They
didn't tell me I'd have to go to reception,
find the clinic, then wait, then get weighed,
then be seen by the nurse. I panicked.
I'd have been OK if they'd explained
properly".*

Choose your writing style


If you are writing for people with learning disabilities, use Easy Read. If you are writing for the general public or parents/carers, use Everyday. If you want to give information to people with learning disabilities and you know that many of them have individualised communication needs, produce an Everyday version for the parent/carer and the resources (eg photographs or pictures) that the parent/carer may need to help explain the information to the person they care for.

Draft, check and re-draft

To check if the panel understand what you have written, ask people to read the information (or have it read to them) and then feed back the key points. Hopefully, everyone will be able to do this, and their key points will match your key points.

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However, you may find that people cannot identify the key points, or different people give different key points, or the key points don't match your key points. In this case, you need to verbally explain, or demonstrate, what you meant and take their advice on how to rephrase your information.



"We thought we'd done a really good job. We used a traffic light code to make it easier – or so we thought. But when the handbook went to our panel, John didn't understand it. He didn't know that red, yellow and green have special meanings. He knows about pedestrian lights, but not traffic lights."

John's Local Health Board communication officer

Re-draft and work on design

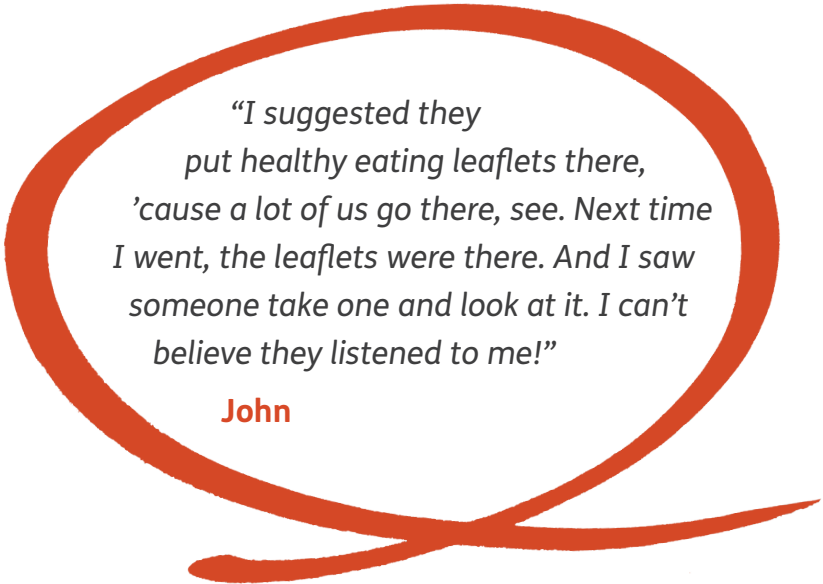
Doing has plenty of advice on design. Design is as important as the writing and pictures in making your information accessible. If you have the resources, you may want to outsource some of the design work.

If you have followed the design guidelines in **Doing**, your overall design should be fit for purpose. You still need to check what people think each graphic means. This is particularly important for Easy Read, where graphics are used to support the text. The best way to check is to give people the graphics without the text, and ask them what each graphic means. If their interpretation is different from the meaning of the text, you need to work with the panel to find a more appropriate graphic. This means taking a supply of graphics with you, either printed out or on a laptop.

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Getting the information out

If you have chosen your panel well, they will be fairly typical of your target group. Find out what places and services they use. For example, if there is a particular supermarket that many shop at, perhaps you could put some leaflets in a display stand there. Or if they are frequent users of their GP, you could ask receptionists to have a supply of leaflets. Perhaps your panel feel that everyone who uses a certain service needs to see this information, so you may need to talk about ways to give the information personally to people. Maybe they use the internet.



*"I suggested they
put healthy eating leaflets there,
'cause a lot of us go there, see. Next time
I went, the leaflets were there. And I saw
someone take one and look at it. I can't
believe they listened to me!"*

John

The easiest way for someone to find your information is if they are given it or it is posted to them. However, this is not always possible. Here are some tips from carers, people with learning disabilities and marketing experts:

- Tell other organisations about your information
- Think where your audience go, and put a supply of leaflets there
- Think what else your audience reads or listens to, and advertise there
- Think who your audience may ask, and make sure those people know about your information
- Make it easy to find if someone does an internet search.

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Finalise, proofread and print

Your information needs to be high quality. Proofreading is best done by someone who has not been involved in producing the information. Small things, like confusing 'it's' and 'its', can make people think your information is poor quality. When checking, make sure you have included information about when the information was produced and by whom. This happens automatically on letters, but is sometimes forgotten on leaflets. The date helps people work out whether the information is current or may be out of date.

Monitoring and improving

It is helpful to know how you will monitor and evaluate your information service before you send out your information. You may need to comply with organisational audit needs. Or you may simply want to evaluate your information so you can continually improve people's access to information.

Make a note of how your information is being sent out. This means you can check later on whether the information has reached the intended audience. Plan when to send information out, so it goes out at an appropriate time. For example, do not send letters that might worry people on a Thursday or Friday, in case the letter arrives on a Saturday when they cannot phone anyone for help.

Evaluation needs to be built into your information planning; it is not a separate stand-alone step. It forms the foundation for the start of the next set of steps, by reviewing what you have learned.

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