


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

4. Checking





*“Check if
people understand what
you are saying.”*

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4. Checking

Introduction

This chapter gives you tips on ways you can check information before you give it out. The tips apply whether the information was produced by you or by others.

The *Check It!* toolkit is a set of tools for checking the quality of Easy Read.

A copy of *Check It!* is included on the DVD that comes with these guidelines. Alternatively, ask Learning Disability Wales to email it to you. It takes between 15 minutes and an hour to check a document using *Check It!*.

A lot of written information is clearly going to fail *Check It!*. You may want to run a quick, basic test if you suspect a document will fail *Check It!*. This is called a readability test.

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Readability tests

Readability is not the same as accessibility. A document can pass the readability test, and still fail *Check It!*. However, it is safe to say that any document that fails the readability test will also fail *Check It!*.

There are many readability tests. These guidelines include three different kinds of test. You do not need to use them all.

The five finger test

This test can only be done by someone from your target group. It is a very simple, subjective test of whether something is suitable for your target group.

Ask someone from your audience to read the information out loud. Every time they stumble to read a word or say they don't know what the word means, put up a finger. A document fails the screening if you get to five fingers within the first 200 words.

The Flesch-Kincaid test

This is the easiest test to use for Everyday, provided you have or can convert a copy of the document into Word. You can also use it to test Easy Read.

The Flesch-Kincaid test is based on the average number of syllables per word, and the average number of words per sentence. It can be presented as a Reading Ease (Easy Read should score 90-100; Everyday should score 60-90) or as Grade Level (Easy Read should be under 3; Everyday should be under 8).

It is virtually impossible to calculate either score by hand. However, if you use any version of Microsoft Word, you can get your computer to run the test for you. In Word 2003, for example, you choose 'tools' > 'spelling and grammar' > 'options' and then check the 'readability statistics' box. Then you run through your document choosing 'ignore' each time you are given the option of changing something. When you get to the end, you are given a Readability Score giving both the Reading Ease and Grade Level scores.

Even if the document scores slightly outside the recommended range for Easy Read, you may want to use the *Check It!* toolkit if the document looks accessible to you.

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The SMOG test

SMOG stands for the **Simple Measure of Gobbledegook**. It was developed in 1969 by G. Harry McLaughlin. It has been extensively tested and shown to give very reliable results. The Readability Level for Easy Read should be 10 or under; the Readability level for Everyday should be 14 or under. If the score is only just above the recommended level, you may want to use the *Check It!* toolkit if the document looks accessible to you.

This test can be done by computer, or by hand.

By computer:

Go to www.niace.org.uk/misc/SMOG-calculator/smogcalc.php#. Type in, or copy and paste, the text from the document you are checking. If it is a long document, use at least 100 words from at least three places in the document.

By hand / calculator:

1. Select a text
2. Count **10** sentences
3. Count the number of words that have three or more syllables
4. Multiply this by 3
5. Circle the number closest to your answer

1 4 9 16 25 36 49 64 81 100 121 144 169

6. Find the square root of the number you circled
7. Add **8** to give you the Readability Level.

What if a document fails the test?

If it is a document you have produced, look back to **Doing** and see if you can improve the document.

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About the *Check It!* toolkit

Check It! has been developed and tested by people with learning disabilities with support. It is a tool for checking the quality of Easy Read.

As we saw in **Doing**, the accessibility of Easy Read depends on more than just easy words. It depends on:

- the ease of finding the information
- the information itself
- the words and sentences
- the general layout
- the design and graphics.

Check It! has a section for each of these topics. Within each section, *Check It!* asks a number of questions. The questions are based on the guidelines for Easy Read listed in **Finding out more**. The final score is a thumbs up or thumbs down for each section. Very few, if any, documents will score a thumbs up on every question. However, as long as a document gets a thumbs up for most of the questions in a section, the document will get a thumbs up for that section.

Getting a thumbs up for every section does not guarantee that the information is easy for everyone in your audience to understand, or that people will act on your information. However, it provides a measure of how likely the written information is to be useful to those of your audience who do not have very individualised communication styles and needs.

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Using the *Check It!* toolkit

Many of the questions are objective, and simple for anyone to answer. However, some of the questions are more subjective, so the answer will depend to some extent on the person who answers the question. This means that the tool is most accurate when used by a person or group of people from your target audience.

Ideally, the people using the *Check It!* toolkit should not be the same people who helped to produce the information. For example, if you use a panel to help produce information, you may want to ask other members of the target audience to use *Check It!*. This is because people who have already worked on a document will find it hard to score the document as if they had never seen it. It also guards against ‘creeping professionalisation’ when members of a panel begin to think more like the professionals within the organisation and less like the rest of the audience. It is good practice to pay the individuals or groups you ask to check your information.

Organisations may prefer to buy in a checking service or set up an exchange with another organisation so that they check each other’s information.

Full instructions on using *Check It!* can be found in the toolkit itself.

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It's readable, it's accessible...but is it making a difference?

The final stage of checking information is to see if the information is making a difference. It is possible to have written information that passes the *Check It!* test with flying colours, but is still not fit for purpose because it is not making a difference to people.

The ultimate check is whether people's behaviour changes as a result of the information. For example, if you produce a leaflet on healthy lifestyles, you need to know:

1. Did people understand the leaflet?
2. Did it reach some groups of people better than others? Were some left out?
3. Are people living healthier lives?

Or, if you produce a consultation document, you need to know:

1. Did people find out about, read and understand the document?
2. Did it reach some groups of people better than others? Were some left out?
3. Did people respond to the consultation?

This kind of checking is part of evaluation. Evaluation is simply a kind of research to see whether there was any point in doing what you have done.

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