SCIE ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES
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How to produce information in an accessible way

social care
institute for excellence

Introduction

This document looks at how to make sure information in accessible, that is, written and presented in a way so as to be easily understandable, in general and for various groups of people. SCIE has a policy of producing all resources and publications in different formats upon request or where there is a known need.

The guidelines start with some general points about making information accessible and then includes information specific to different groups. Use of text, images, photographs, symbols, video, DVD and audio are covered.

SCIE also has guidelines for organising accessible events such as conferences and meetings. These are available from the SCIE website at www.scie.org.uk/publications/participation

General guidelines on making information accessible

Presenting information

- Use simple language and short sentences. This makes information easier to understand for everyone.

- Keep the layout of regular publications consistent for example, a monthly newsletter. But make sure that you are flexible and can give people the information in different ways.

- Use SCIE's corporate font 'Arial'12 point for normal text. Unless requested otherwise, use 20 point for people with visual impairments. And a minimum of 14 for people with learning difficulties.

- Use simple, clear text with short sentences, simple punctuation and no jargon, acronyms or abbreviations.

- Avoid block capitals, italics or underlining. They all make text harder to read.

- Use a ragged right edge rather than fully justified text.

- Plan what you want to write. Cut out any unnecessary detail and present important ideas in a logical order.

- Use active and personal language. Using 'you' and 'we' makes your writing clearer and more direct.

- Provide information in different formats where necessary. Alternative formats include 'easy read' (there is more about this is presenting information for people with learning disabilities), Braille, audiotape, video, British Sign Language (BSL), and in different languages.

- Where you are using information that another organisation has produced (for example information about a venue) ask them for that information in different formats so that you can pass it on to anyone who needs it. If they are service providers, they will have duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to provide information in this way.

Using images

- Images, when used properly, make writing easier to understand and more attractive.
- Use images, like photographs, drawings or symbols to support your text. Aim to make your material clear at a glance, even to a person who does not have good reading skills.
- It is best to stick to one type of image and avoid mixing photographs, line drawings and images.
- Images should show people from different cultures, people with disabilities, etc. They can also show specific buildings or people.
- We recommend that you place pictures to the right of the text.
- People prefer coloured pictures, rather than just black and white.
- Drawings must not be childish or patronising.
- The best drawings are often the simplest – they should not be too ‘busy’.
- Be careful about using humour to portray an idea. Humour can distract from or confuse the message and may also offend some people.
- Many people put a photograph of the writer at the end of a letter or article.
- Pictures can be inserted into a word document by going to the ‘Insert’ menu, to ‘Picture’ and then selecting ‘From file’. Then find the picture in the folder in which it is stored, and click on it. It will then be inserted and you can adjust the size and position using the picture toolbar (If you cannot see this go to ‘Tools’ and ‘Customise’, then ‘Select picture’.). SCIE has rights to the CHANGE picture bank – it can be found through the participation portal through SCIE’s intranet system SCIEnet.

Using photographs

- Generally, photographs are the most popular kind of image with readers.
- A photograph can hold a lot of information and can easily be ‘read’.
- Photographs can help when talking about a certain person or building.

- You must always ask permission if you are taking or using photographs of people you are working with.

- Photographs have to be carefully taken to make sure they show one idea clearly. For example, a photographs of a person illustrating the idea that they are happy, should not have a busy background and distract from the main idea of the picture.

- You should be aware that photographs do not always photocopy well.

- It is useful to put a photograph of the writer at the end of a letter or article.

Using video and audio materials

- Consider making information available on videotape and audiotape, especially if you know your users are blind or sight impaired.

- Put information on CD. It is easier and cheaper to reproduce and for people to skip from track to track. CD players can be bought very cheaply.

- Look into using DVDs rather than videos. DVD players are getting cheaper.

- If using audiotapes, keep them short.

- When one side of the audiotape is at an end, say this so the user knows to turn the tape over.

- Be consistent when you say numbers. Say zero instead of ‘oh’.

- When people see a video on CD/DVD it will often be in a small box on the screen. Big close up shots are therefore better than long shots or wide shots.

- It is especially important to make sure verbal communication, for example, on audiotape and videotape, is as simple and as clear as people will probably be listening to it on small computer speakers.

- For computer-based information, you might want to offer an audio version of your text and a text version of your audio that can run at the same time.

Making information accessible for black and ethnic minority people

Presenting information

- People who are black or who identify themselves as ethnic minorities have very varied needs. Try to avoid making assumptions.
- Work with people from black and minority ethnic communities to ask them how they want their information presented.
- Find out as much as you can about the black or minority ethnic community group/s your information is for, so you can make sure it meets their needs.
- Do not just translate information into another language as direct translation from English into another language doesn't always make sense. Translations need to take account of culture.
- Use translators and interpreters who have proper training and who understand cultural differences. The translator may use words and pictures to help people feel the information is right for them.
- Produce leaflets in different languages if required.

Using video and audio materials

- Think about the voices and music you use – make sure they're appropriate.
- Videos can be a good way of getting information about health to women from black and minority ethnic communities.

Using images

- Make sure people from black and minority ethnic groups are portrayed in the pictures you use. Use positive images of different people and different cultures.
- The way people use and understand pictures varies from one culture to another. Think about who is shown in the picture, the expression on their face, what they are wearing, their body language and the scene around them.

- Pictures can be used to show which community a person belongs to. Decoration, jewellery, dress and colours can all mean something to people. Small details can help people feel the information is right for their community.

Making information accessible for people with learning disabilities

Presenting information

- Many people with learning disabilities read information in what is called ‘easy read’. ‘Easy read’ means writing things down clearly using short sentences and avoiding difficult words and acronyms. Easy read publications always uses pictures to show what the text means. (See the images section.)

- Easy information helps people with learning disabilities to make choices and know their rights.

- Lots of people with learning disabilities may also be deaf or hard of hearing or be blind or visually impaired.

- You should use a minimum font size of 14 point for people with learning disabilities and 20 point for people with visual impairments.

- Most people with learning disabilities and visual impairments do not use Braille as it is a difficult language to use.

- It is important to talk to people with learning disabilities. They can make sure you use the right words and pictures.

- Put important points in bold.

- Make sure there is good contrast between the text and paper. Black text on white or yellow paper is best.

- Do not use yellow text on white paper or white text in dark boxes.

- Use bullet points to break your information up and present it clearly.

- Use story boxes and fact boxes for the main points.

- Do not put text over images.

- Always start and finish a sentence on the same page.

- Break the text into short chunks and use plenty of white space, that is, the blank space around the text.

- Write addresses as they would appear on an envelope.
- Ensure you insert a clear contents page and section headings.
- Consider using an A3 format – you can use larger print and images. Check that a larger document is OK for someone to manipulate.
- Explain difficult words the first time you use them and put a word list at the back. Make it clear where this can be found.
- Keep sentences short with one idea in each sentence. Sentences should not be more than 15 to 20 words long.
- Avoid semicolons (;), colons (:) and too many commas.
- Do not break up words with hyphens at the end of a line.
- Be consistent – even if it sounds repetitive. Use the same words for important ideas each time they come up.
- Use the number and not the word e.g. 3 instead of three. Try not to use percentages or large numbers.
- Make it clear if the reader has to do anything, for example, reply to an invitation, or fill in a questionnaire.
- Make it easy to reply by providing space for written answers.

Using video and audio materials

- Where possible, provide an audio CD to accompany information.
- The words must be read slowly and clearly but not so slow that it sounds patronising.
- The video or audio material should tell the user when to turn the page on the hard copy of any accompanying information.
- Use music on the video or audio material to give the user time to turn the page on their hard copy of the information.

Using images

- You should always use pictures when you are presenting information for people with learning difficulties.

- There are various ways you can find pictures and you can use photographs or illustrations. You can find a list of picture banks and collections at www.easyinfo.org.uk.

- Images should show one idea.

- Most people like one picture per paragraph to show the main idea. Choose an image that best explains the text.

Sometimes you might not be able to find the image you need, and may need to draw pictures or take photographs yourself. You could also ask the designers of an established clipart or symbol collection such as the Valuing People Clipart Collection www.inspiredservices.org.uk

Using photographs

- Photographs are a very popular kind of image. A photograph can hold a lot of information and can easily be ‘read’.

- Photographs can help when talking about a certain person or building.

Using symbols

- Do not rely on abstract symbols unless you know the readers are familiar with what symbols mean. Not many adults with a learning disability are confident symbol users but this will change as more people learn symbols at school.

- Unless a person is familiar with reading symbols above each word, it is best just to use symbols for main ideas.

- Put symbols next to the text, rather than above the words.

- Do not just use the first symbol you find – choose one that is relevant.

- Generally, photographs and pictures are better as not everyone uses symbols.

Making information accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people

Presenting information

- Many deaf and hard of hearing people use British Sign Language (BSL). For people who use BSL, that is their first language not English, so it is important to keep the information simple and clearly written.

- At meetings, conferences and events you should provide a BSL interpreter whenever needed. (See SCIE's guidelines for organising accessible events such as conferences and meetings. These are available from the SCIE website at www.scie.org.uk/publications/participation).

Using video materials

- For people whose first language is BSL, video clips are useful. Leaflets can be translated into BSL on video.

Making information accessible for people with visual impairments

Presenting information

- People who are visually impaired may need information provided in Braille, large print or on audiotape. Braille is used by over 20,000 people in the UK.
- Many people prefer information in an audio format, on tape or increasingly on CD.
- For people with some sight, use at least Arial 20 point. It is best if printed on pale yellow or white paper in bold black or dark blue print.
- You should use contrasting colours for background and text.
- Use good quality matt paper (use a minimum of 100gsm – 130gsm is ideal) so that the text on the other side does not show through and so glare does not make the words hard to read.

Using images

- Pictures should be big, bold, bright and colourful.

Making information accessible for older people

- Avoid using blue as it is often harder for older people to read.
- Use matt paper to avoid brightness and glare which make it hard for older people to read.
- Use a minimum font size of 14 point and 20 point for people with visual impairments.
- Consider using an A3 format (as an A4 booklet) as you can use larger print and images which are easier for people to see.

Making information accessible for children and young people

- Consider using coloured fonts, but make sure you use colours that are clearly visible.
- Do not use the font Comic Sans as this is difficult to read.
- Consider using cartoons and photographs. This may be more appropriate for younger children.
- Use simple language.