

Producing an Easy-to-read document

When producing an Easy-to-read (ETR) document in English, you can either:

- write a text directly in Easy-to-read
- adapt a text from standard English into Easy-to-read
- translate a text written in another Easy-to-read language into English Easy-to-read

For all of the options above, it is crucial to follow a structured process. These guidelines provide both rules and recommendations for ETR writing, adaption and translation.

Target Groups

First, it is essential to identify a text's intended target audience. This fundamental step helps determine the language level of the reader (A1, A2, or B1; see next page) and the accessibility criteria most suited to a group's specific needs. Target groups for

ETR documents are varied and may include individuals with a diverse range of disabilities, language learners, elderly persons, and other groups with varying accessibility needs, including individuals with dementia or those with degenerative illnesses that affect cognitive functions.

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ETR texts should generally be drafted using simplified grammar. Nouns and verbs, insofar as possible, should be familiar to the general population and should not align with specialist language. A sentence should contain only one concept. When dealing with the principal subject matter, it is recommended to employ the same nouns consistently in your document and to avoid the (over)use of pronouns or synonyms, unless helpful to or required by the context.

Sentences may include one or two subordinate clauses as long as they respect the basic main-subordinate syntactic order. Adverbs and adjectives should always be used to render a sentence clearer and more precise; avoid adverbs and adjectives that detract from the sentence's essential content. The goal of the writing process is to distil the essential message of the text and not necessarily to retain its specific linguistic or syntactic features. Linguistic complexity comes in many forms and these can often be barriers to comprehension for those with ETR needs.

Writing, adapting or translating an Easy-to-read document

If you are writing a text directly in Easy-to-read, create an outline of the text you wish to produce. In this outline, identify the essential points (introduction, body, conclusion) of the text you intend to write as well as any necessary details you wish to include. Verify the concepts and content expressed in each text with the recommendations for its target

language level.

When adapting a text into Easy-to-read, begin by identifying the concepts expressed in the text to be adapted, then prioritise them hierarchically and select only the most important. If you are translating a text into Easy-to-read, avoid literal translations in order to maintain the idiomatic nature of the text. In each of the three aforementioned cases, follow the language level guidelines outlined below.

Proofreading an Easy-to-read document

Incorporating feedback from individuals with ETR needs is crucial for creating inclusive, easily understandable documents. These experts represent potential target groups and can offer insights into

a text's clarity and accessibility by highlighting difficult words, offering comments or requesting additional information. This collaborative proofreading process ensures the text is accessible and user-friendly, and distinguishes ETR documents from other types of accessible texts.

The Easy-to-read troubleshooter

The criteria for Easy-to-read include three linguistic levels: A1 (very easy to understand), A2 (easy to understand), B1 (simplified language). The following paragraphs outline some specificities for each of these three levels and present strategies for producing a document in Easy-to-read for each reference group.

Level A1

This level is appropriate for individuals with cognitive disabilities, who

have severely limited reading and comprehension skills, as well as beginners in English learning. A1 level texts require language that is very easy to understand, and the information provided needs to be kept to a minimum. The terminology used should be limited to the most common words and the grammatical structure should be as linear as possible: a main clause containing a subject, a verb and a complement. The preferred tense should always be the present tense, and the sentences should be written in active voice. Avoid the use of adjectives and adverbs as well as subordinate clauses to maintain clarity and simplicity.

Level A2

This level is appropriate for individuals with cognitive disabilities, who have moderate learning difficulties, and for students of English with a basic knowledge of the English language. A2 level texts require language that is easy to understand. Adjectives and adverbs can be added to the linear subject-verb-complement order. A broader range of terminology may be used, and the sentence complexity can extend to include a direct and two indirect objects. Additionally, a subordinate clause may be incorporated for added detail.

Level B1

This level is suitable for individuals with cognitive disabilities, who have mild reading difficulties, for students of English with intermediate knowledge of the English language, and for people who are not familiar with concepts that pertain to a specific sector or terminology (as in medicine, bureaucracy, etc.). B1 level texts need to be written in simplified English, using words that are not limited to basic English. At this level, up to two simple subordinate clauses as well as more complex nominal and verbal phrases can be included while maintaining a basic syntactic structure.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

What should I do with synonyms when I translate a text into Easy-to-read?

English is a language with many different words often meaning the same or similar things. These synonyms should be avoided at best in English for accessible communication and be replaced by the same word whenever the same idea is mentioned to avoid ambiguities. This helps with consistency and understanding that the text is still talking about the same idea. This holds also true for names. If you, for example, talk about a person, it is best if you always repeat the name and not use any pronouns like he, she, they etc.

What should I do when a text uses terms from different varieties of English such as Irish English, American English etc.?

English is spoken in many different parts of the world and its varieties should thus be considered when translating a text into Easy-to-read. When deciding which word or variety to use, think about your target audience and whether they would understand the variety with which they are most likely familiar. In most cases, it is best to use the standardised UK or US version of the word or phrase.

What should I do when a text mentions a lot of numbers?

In Easy-to-read texts, it is best to keep very large numbers, which might be difficult to grasp, rather vague. You could, for example, replace large numbers by saying many or, if the text is talking about uncountable nouns, much. This makes it easier to put numbers into perspective, e.g. is 30,000 a lot or a little in this context, and helps readers understand that the text is talking about a large quantity, for example.

What should I do if the text contains a lot of metaphors, wordplays or puns?

Metaphors, wordplays, puns or figurative language in general can be very difficult to understand for readers of Easy-to-read texts, which is why it is best to leave them out and only

translate the meaning or content of said metaphors, wordplays or puns. So, for example, instead of saying “I am drowning in work”, you could say “I have a lot of work”. Your texts can still be entertaining, but this should be achieved through the content rather than the choice of words.

And one last tip for all translators about their choice of words: Although it might seem that way, but the shortest version of a word or phrase is not always the best. For example, to say “improve” is much more complicated than to say “make it better”. This is why you might need to spend more words on explaining certain terms rather than choosing the shortest possible way of phrasing an idea to convey the meaning effectively.

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