

# Why Easy English?

## An Easy English vs Easy Read fact sheet.

### Characteristics of Easy English

Easy English takes a Universal Design approach to access to written information. This means we write to be understood by the largest audience possible. This includes the 44% of Australians who do **not** have the literacy to manage day to day reading tasks (ABS#4228), and those people who rarely read and do **not** think they can read. For this reason, we ensure Easy English documents are written to a reading level of Australian Year 2 or below.

The aim of Easy English is to tell the reader what to do. When writing Easy English, we distinguish between marketing-based messages and need-to-know information. Otherwise, it is too difficult for readers to find the “what to do” instruction amidst the non-essential material.

Easy English text follows these guidelines:

- Short sentences of 5-8 words each;
- All sentences in active tense;
- Use of bullet points, rather than paragraphs or lengthy prose;
- One idea per sentence;
- Everyday words of the audience;
- Use of examples from the life experience of the audience;
- Lots of white space;
- A minimum of size 14 font.

Each sentence or idea is supported by a simple, meaningful image. Images are placed directly to the left of the relevant line of text. This helps readers to connect the image with what they are reading. We limit images to 4 per page. This also means that ideas are limited to about 4 per page.

These guidelines have been developed and continuously improved based on ongoing research and feedback from consumers, informed by Cathy's over 30 years of experience as a Speech Pathologist working with people with multiple and complex needs.

## **Characteristics of Easy Read**

Easy English is different from Easy Read. Easy Read was originally developed in the UK to meet the needs of people with intellectual disability who **do** have relatively well-developed literacy skills. Easy Read documents are therefore useful for a much smaller cohort of people than Easy English. Easy Read documents are sometimes mislabelled as Plain Language or even Easy English. However, you can tell it is Easy Read based on its characteristics.

### **Variability and reading level**

Easy Read tends to differ across documents and between organisations, as no measurable and repeatable list of check points has been agreed upon.

Research has found that Australian Easy Read is written at an average Year 5 reading level, but can vary from Year 3 to Year 10. This still leaves a substantial percent of people without access to meaningful information.

This variation also means the documents are **not** predictable for the people who need them; a person with low literacy can **not** be sure every time they pick up an Easy Read document that they will be able to read it.

## **Content**

Easy Read documents tend to include much more information, which can make it difficult to find the “what to do” instruction. The document may be very long – longer than a low literacy reader can grapple with – and cover multiple topics. In Easy English, we split up documents when necessary to give each distinct topic its own fact sheet.

“Hard words” are defined, then used throughout. This is in contrast to Easy English, where we stick to the audience’s everyday language. The sentences may be more than 8 words in length and have a complex structure, such as an “if, then” construction.

## **Images**

Images in Easy Read may be photos or stylized graphics that are **not** directly relevant to the text’s meaning and/or are **not** placed close enough to the text to support understanding. The images may reflect the corporate view of the content, rather than the reader’s experience. Images may have words in them, or symbols that can **not** be understood without specific general knowledge (e.g. the scales of justice to represent the law). The front cover and page headings may **not** have an image at all.

## **Structure**

Easy Read documents generally start with a repeated introduction that refers to the complex corporate name of the organisation or original report, and explains that this is an easy-to-read document, hard words will be in bold, you can ask someone for help to read it, and so on.

This may be followed by a table of contents made up of lengthy headings and page numbers, with **no** images. In Easy English, a contents page would have the same format as any other page (i.e. with lots of white space and images to support understanding). More often, an Easy English document will **not** need a table of contents, as we would create separate documents for each topic.

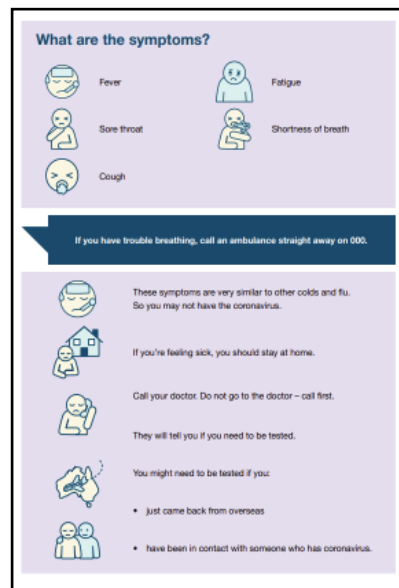
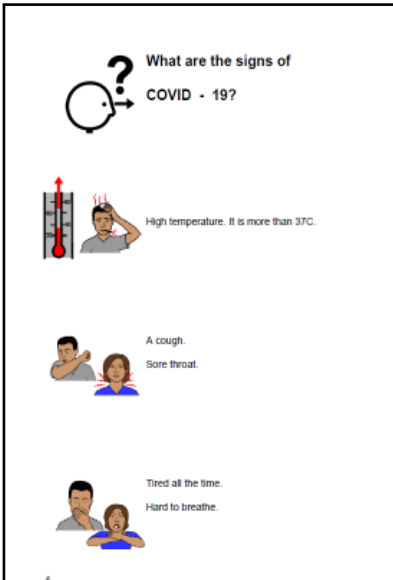
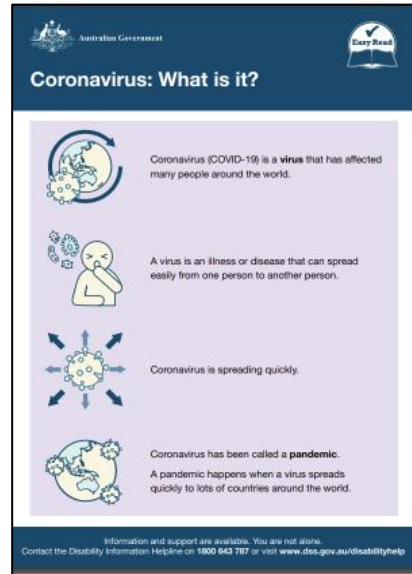
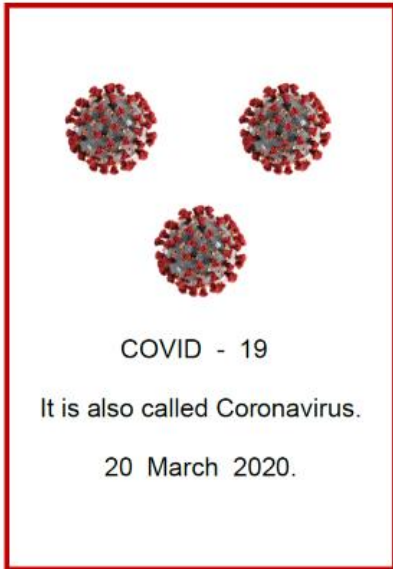
Our experience has shown that

- When a reader sees repeated introduction content, they do **not** recognise it is a new document. They think they are reading the same thing again, and will put it down.
- When a reader is told “this is an easy-to-read document,” this sets up the reader to feel a failure if they can **not** read it.
- When a reader is told “hard words are in bold,” and turns the page to see many bold words, they are intimidated and may **not** persevere with the text.

# Side-by-side comparison

**Left:** Easy English fact sheet. COVID - 19. Access Easy English. 2020.

**Right:** Easy Read fact sheet. Coronavirus: What is it? Australian Government. 2020.



Easy English (left)	Easy Read (right)
A cover page with a clear title and image to introduce the topic	No distinct cover page.
Plenty of white space.	Denser text on a coloured background.
Most important information first (i.e. signs of COVID-19.)	Most important information (i.e. symptoms and instructions) comes <b>after</b> less important background information (i.e. what is a virus, what is a pandemic)
Everyday words of the audience e.g. signs, tired.	Technical terms e.g. symptoms, fatigue. Trying to teach new words e.g. virus.
Images in meaningful, real-world colours.	All images in the same corporate palette.
All images placed to support specific lines of text.	Some images disconnected from specific lines of text (i.e. alignment on page 2)
4 images per page	Up to 10 images per page

## You want to know more

### Access Easy English blog posts.

- Easy English Easy Read. What's it all about?  
<https://medium.com/@accesseasyenglish/easy-english-easy-read-whats-it-all-about-278fdc302914>
- Posters. Easy English, Easy Read comparison  
<https://medium.com/@accesseasyenglish/posters-easy-english-easy-read-comparison-bd9c214410cb>

### Research published by Cathy Basterfield.

- Basterfield, C. What's in a Name. 2018 at the International Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability, (IASSIDD.) Scotland
- Basterfield, C. More evidence of difference: Easy English- Easy Read. 2021 at the International Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability – European Conference, Amsterdam  
and
- Basterfield, C. Evidence of difference: Easy English – Easy Read. 2022 at the Speech Pathology Australia Conference, Melbourne.
- Basterfield, C. UNCRPD. Why does it need to be so hard. 2021 at the International Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability – European Conference, Amsterdam.

### Other research.

- Buell, S. (2019) An open randomized controlled trial of the effects of linguistic simplification and mediation on the comprehension of “easy read” text by people with intellectual disabilities. J Appl Res Intellect Disability. 2019;00:1–13

- Chinn (2019) Talking to producers of Easy Read health information for people with intellectual disability: Production practices, textual features and imagined audiences. *J IDD* Vol 44. No. 4 pp 410-420.