

IS YOUR CARROT “JULIENNE” OR CUT INTO STRIPS? AN EASY ENGLISH / EASY READ COMPARISON

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Everyone needs equal access to information to make informed decisions and be an active member of their community. Getting it should be easy, not an obstacle course.

There are two main formats available for the 44% of Australian adults who live with low literacy: Easy English, and Easy Read. The two formats are very different. Which one is what your readers need?

Easy Read

Easy Read is described as being for people with intellectual disability, but may also be of use to some other people.

When I first encountered Easy Read almost 20 years ago, the literature showed it was a valuable concept but still too hard for many readers and needed further refinement. This supported my own analysis, that Easy Read required some reasonable literacy skills to read, understand, and use the information. Unfortunately, rather than becoming more user-friendly over time, Easy Read is now more complex than previously.

Research from Susan Buell (Buell et al., 2019) identified Easy Read **may be** of some use to **some people** with intellectual disability when they:

- have a mild intellectual disability
 - have some adequate literacy skills
 - already know about the topic
 - want to engage with the information
 - and critically
 - have excellent communication support from a person who knows them well, to engage with the information and consider what it means for them.
- This is not necessarily a support worker.

The vast majority of people with intellectual disability do not fit these criteria, nor do the majority of people with low literacy.

Easy English

Easy English is for any person with low literacy. It is built from a wide research base including speech pathology, literacy and reading development, plain language, graphic design, health literacy, digital literacy and consumer engagement. It uses the Plain Language ISO 24495-1 -2023 (International Organization for Standardization, 2023) and Universal

Design Principles (Centre for Universal Design Australia, 2015).

From its initial development in 2005-2007, Easy English continues to evolve. Its guidelines include specific measurable and repeatable elements. You can view a range of Easy English examples on the Access Easy English (Basterfield, 201, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023) website.

See Table 1 for a comparison of some elements of Easy English compared with Easy Read.

EASY ENGLISH AND EASY READ COMPARISONS - EXAMPLES

	Easy English	Easy Read
Content Development	Stand alone resource, not a summary. Plan for less than 20 pages.	Summary of the original. Many documents are 25-50 pages long, or more.
Readability & range (Flesh, 1948)	Average grade 1.5 (US) Range grade 0 to grade 3.	Average grade 6.5 (US) Range grade 4 to grade 12.
Sentence length	Average 5 to 8 words.	Average 12 to 14 words.
Complex words	Does not include complex words. Uses simple words the reader already knows.	Highlights hard words in bold. Provides a definition, then continues to use the hard word.
Use of "if...then" statements	Never.	Frequently.
Images - Headings	Every heading has image support.	No headings have image support.
Images - body of content	Maximum of 4 highly guessable and specific images per page.	From 4 to up to 8 images per page. Many images require you to learn their meaning.

Confusion Between Formats

Easy English and Easy Read have significant differences in design and accessibility. People with low literacy can and do tell the difference. Yet, Easy Read has become the 'go to' format for government departments and organisations to provide accessible written information. Easy Read developers believe the terms "Easy Read" and "Easy English" are interchangeable.

Government Guidelines

The Australian Government Style Manual (2002) recommends Easy Read as a way to "broaden access to information." The Manual says of Easy Read:

- While it follows **some** Plain Language principles, Easy Read and Plain Language are different
- documents are **summaries** of the source material
- documents should be a Year 4 to Year 6 Flesch-Kincaid reading level
- It is OK to use difficult words if they are in bold, and the resource includes a definition and glossary.

Access Easy English has many concerns about these guidelines:

- Why are only **some** Plain Language principles included?
- Why is it only a summary?
- Why is the target grade 4 to grade 6? While this target is quite conservative, Access Easy English's ongoing analysis of available Easy Read resources find very few federal government Easy Read documents achieve even this.
- Using difficult new words rather than easy words the reader already knows makes the resource less accessible, and less useable by the reader.

Easy Read is specifically recommended in many Australian state government style guides (Government of South Australia, 2024; NSW Government, 2024; Queensland Government, 2024). Only Victoria (Victorian Government, 2024) references Easy English, but even so the vast majority of work published by the Victorian government and procured from external providers is Easy Read.

Access Easy English has concerns about the national and state guidelines recommending Easy Read as an accessible resource for Australians with low literacy.

- The guidelines are not informed by evidence-based practice
- The guidelines do not align with the needs of people with low literacy
- Plain Language, even before the Standards were adopted, was not part of Easy Read development
- The Plain Language Standard is not included or being applied, even with guidelines recently published
- Considerable funding is being invested in content that few Australians with low literacy can find, read,

understand and use.

And the word "julienne"? It is the example in the newly released NSW Government Easy Read guidelines (2024) of a 'hard word' that requires explanation. Let's just 'cut the carrot.'

Recommendations

- Read some of the Easy Read resources available from Australian governments and agencies. Are they genuinely easy to read?
- Compare them to similar resources from the Access Easy English website – can you see the difference? Which one would be more usable, by more people with low literacy?
- Ensure your procurement is in line with research-supported best practice, to create the most accessible resources that will benefit the most people with low literacy
- Let me know if you have links into these government departments. Only awareness and knowledge can bring about change for all.

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