

Creating clear print

Reaching the blind and partially sighted

We all produce information in the hope of communicating something about ourselves and assisting others to make decisions and lead independent lives. Can we be sure we have done our best to be fair and to reach everyone?

The DDA* is in part an attempt to ensure fairness and all organisations have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to ensure those with disabilities can access their services.

There are 1.7 million blind and partially sighted people in the UK, many of whom lose out on opportunities simply because they cannot access information. This briefing gives a broad overview on how to create **Clear Print** - documents that use a minimum type size of 12 point ('Large Print' uses 16 to 22 point) and which follow guidelines developed by the RNIB to help make information accessible to the blind and partially sighted.

Clear Print can be created quickly and at virtually no cost.

How do we produce 'Clear Print'?

1. Typeface (font)

Size and contrast are the two most important features to consider.

Type size

The size of the type (known as point size) significantly affects its legibility. A **minimum** of 12 point type should be used for all publications.

Type weight

Typefaces are usually available in light, normal (roman), semi-bold (medium) or bold weights. Avoid light type weights. Use bold or semi-bold weights rather than normal ones.

Serif and sans serif fonts

Serif typefaces have little 'feet' (serifs at the ends of the letters). Sans-serif do not. Both are legible but serif typefaces are easier to read in large quantities of text. Most books are set in semi-bold serif typefaces, whereas signs are usually set in bold, sans serif type.

Style

Do not use simulated handwriting and ornate typefaces. Stick to typefaces that people are familiar with and will recognise easily. Italics, capitals and underlining are generally harder to read. Avoid capital letters in words, titles and the body of text where possible. A word or two in capitals is fine but avoid the use of capitals for continuous text. Avoid italics and underlining completely - use a different type weight instead.

Leading

This is the space between one line of type and the next. If the leading is too narrow it makes it difficult to find the separation between lines. Generally the leading should be 1.5 to 2 times the space between the words on the line. 12 point text is commonly set with 14 point leading; 18 point leading creates an easy to read, inviting document.

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Numbers

Choose a typeface in which the numbers are clear. Readers with sight problems can easily misread 0, 3, 5, 6 and 8. Write out the word if possible.

2. Design and layout

A reader with sight problems takes longer to read. The different elements on the page - pictures, headings, captions, text, etc - should be clearly separated and structured so that information is easy to find.

Line length

Line length should be between 60-70 letters per line except when you use columns. Similarly, sentences and paragraphs should not be too short or too long.

Word spacing and alignment

Keep the same amount of space between each word - do not condense or stretch lines of type or single words to fit your line length.

Word space is usually determined by the alignment of the text ie left, right, justified, centred. RNIB recommends aligning text to the left margin as it is easy to find the start and finish of each line and keeps the spaces even between words.

It is best to avoid justified text as people can mistake large gaps between words for the end of the line. Centred text and text aligned to the right margin are also best avoided though it is acceptable to use centred text for main headings

Contrast

The contrast between the background and the text is also extremely important. As a general rule, contrast dark against light. The better the contrast, the more legible it is. Contrast will also be affected by the size and weight of the type.

A significant number of people who are partially sighted also have difficulty with colour perception. Two colours that would contrast sharply to someone with unaffected colour vision may appear less distinguishable to someone with partial sight.

Reversing type out (white out)

If using white type, make sure the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast.

Navigational aids

It is helpful if recurring features, such as headings and page numbers, are always in the same place. A contents list and a line to separate sections are also useful. In general, a space between paragraphs gives the eye a break and makes reading easier.

Horizontal text

Set text horizontally as text set vertically is extremely difficult for a partially sighted reader to follow.

Columns

Make sure the margin between columns clearly separates them. If space is limited, use a vertical line.

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Images, illustrations, photos

Images can be problematic for those with sight problems - use carefully defined images with high contrast and clean backgrounds. Do not rely on them to provide information or to be the only source of relief on a page. White space, headings and rules can do this too. Avoid fitting text around images if this means that lines of text start in different places. Do not set text over images, e.g. photographs. This affects the contrast and, if a partially sighted person is avoiding images, they will miss the text.

3. Paper and format

Paper type

Glossy paper is difficult to read because of the shine. Choose uncoated paper that weighs over 90gsm. If the text shows through from the reverse side, then the paper is too thin.

Format

When folding paper, avoid creases which obscure the text. Also, try not to use a bulky binding method as people who use screen magnifiers need to place the document flat under the magnifier.

Forms

Partially sighted people tend to have handwriting that is larger than average, so allow extra space on forms.

Is this all we have to do?

It's a huge step in the right direction - well-designed print information will be sufficient for many partially sighted people. However, it is important to remember that there is no single method which suits all blind and partially sighted people all of the time. Others may need information in another format eg large print, braille, computer disk or from the internet. For advice contact the RNIB.

Further information

- Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
www.rnib.org.uk

Producing information in alternative formats

Contact RNIB on 01733 37 53 70 for independent, impartial advice

Their **See it Right pack** gives practical advice on producing accessible information in a range of formats (websites, clear print, handwriting, making information accessible to deaf/blind people, signs, large print, videos, tape, braille, e-text). It will also help you to develop an accessible information strategy. £20/£17 cservices@rnib.org.uk T: 0845 702 3153

- **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)*:**
VAN Briefing 44 (also on www.voluntaryarts.org)
DDA Helpline, 0345 622 633
Disability Rights Commission,
Tel: 0845 762 2633 (free) www.drc-gb.org
The Disability Consultancy, part of RNIB, can assess and assist an organisation's with implementing all the duties of the DDA.
Tel: 01737 37 85 79

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- **Policy guidelines**
Develop accessible information policy guidelines. Ensure some information is available from the outset in different formats, and others when a customer requests it. All should be of equivalent quality and the same price. Plan the production of the alternative formats at the same time as planning your standard print version. And let your customers know they are available.
- **Other communication methods used by people with impaired vision**
word of mouth, personal readers, telephone, print - reading and writing, large print i.e. 14 point or more, Braille, moon, audio tape, commercial cassette recorder/player, easiplay cassette player, handi-cassette player, RNIB talking book player, radio, television, internet, other equipment. There are systems for the 23,000 people in the UK who have a severe loss of both sight and hearing e.g. lip reading or British Sign Language or the Deaf Alphabet, textphones (or minicomms) or Typetalk

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Other Related Information Sheets

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