

## How to Simplify Material for Parents with Learning Challenges

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**Overview:** People with learning difficulties prefer to get information without having to ask for help from other people to understand what they read. You can make materials accessible by using principles of universal design so that they work for most anyone. The content you put into each format needs to be easy to read and use family-friendly language. You can add simple pictures to illustrate an idea. No one approach will work for everyone. It takes time and resources to achieve these goals and it is worth the effort.

The words you use (spoken or written) should not be offensive to the listener/reader. Use people-first language and communicate in a style that is age appropriate. Treat adults as adults and children as children.

Why not start by creating fact sheets or brochures that advertise your services in an easy to read style. Next begin to modify some of your tool kits and presentation materials.

### Simplify materials by using these strategies:



#### Use vocabulary and concepts that are clear and easy to understand:

- Get to the point in the first sentence.
- Present one idea at a time.
- Use simple, basic English. Examples:
  - Say *tell* instead of *notify*,
  - Say *find* instead of *access or locate*
  - Say *use* instead of *utilize*.
  - Say *helpful* instead of *empowering*

#### Organize information so that it is easy to find and respond to:

- Present text in blocks. This is called "chunking."
- In web format, provide only a little text at one time. Give people the option of selecting more if they want additional information by clicking on a link that says "tell me more," or "read on" or "next".
- Eliminate extra information that is not really relevant or important

- Use large print (Size 16 font) in an article. Use **size 28 and above** on Power Point.
- Include simple pictures☺, or graphs. Caption those if creating a web document. To do the captioning:

Right click on the picture. Select Format Picture. Then select the Web tab. Type your short caption into the box that appears and select OK. Save before exiting the document.

- Break up long sentences. Use short ones.
- Put extra space between sentences.
- Use a direct (I, you, he, she, we,) not an indirect voice (us, they, them, those, one).

Direct Voice ✓	Indirect Voice
If you are 18 years old . . . .	Those who are 18 years old . . .
You qualify for Medicaid . . .	In the case of someone who qualifies . . .
Call this number after five pm.	If it's necessary to contact staff after hours . . .

- Use a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level or below; (the average reading level of most U.S. adults).

**Translate complex ideas into a simple reading level:** The following rules used in order are most helpful as you attempt to translate text into a simpler reading level.

1. Reduce the overall sentence length by breaking long sentences into two sentences.
2. Remove long adjective clauses you may have placed at the start of sentence.
3. Change any verb tenses to a direct tense.
4. Summarize the meaning of a section into one sentence that has the main point.
5. Replace complex vocabulary with simple terms.
6. Think about what the reader wants to know instead of what you wanted to say.
7. Keep a log of terms that you frequently use and replacement phrases as a handy reference.

**Check the reading level of a document:** You can check the reading level of any text by scanning or typing a paragraph of the information into a Microsoft Word document. After you have typed the paragraph, go to Tools or Review/Check Spelling and then Options and click on the Spelling and Grammar tab. A list of options will appear with boxes you can select. Check the readability statistics option. Then every time you spell check part or the entire document the reading level will be listed in a menu that appears at the end of the checking function.

**Other helpful techniques:**

- Give people choices to check rather than lines to fill out.  
Example: Use:  Male  Female instead of Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
- Provide color cues for people who have trouble with words. Example:  
**Start** date: 01/01/07                      **Stop** date: 6/30/07