Producing written information for people with a learning disability

Design

- Simple clear design – not cluttered
- Well-spaced between lines and paragraphs
- Justify text to the left not across the page as this can stretch some words
- Avoid splitting words at the end of lines
- Try not to use 2 columns on a page, or if you do, use a border and make plenty of space between each column
- Use matt rather than glossy or reflective paper
- Use good quality paper so the ink from the other side does not show through
- Make a good contrast with colours; black type on white or yellow paper is the best contrast
- Avoid putting text over images such as photos
- For longer documents use a colour-coded content list, e.g. make the edges of the page a coloured border

Use of images

- Use pictures, photos and clip art to add meaning to the text, but ensure images add clarity to the text and are not just for decoration. Ask yourself – do they make the subject of the material clear to a non-reader? If you are not sure, show it to people without the text and ask them what they think it means
- Make sure the images used are appropriate to the age and ethnicity of the people getting the information
- Make sure consent has been obtained for any photos used

Font

- Use minimum size 14 but ideally size 16
- Avoid using text in italics or underlined
- Use sentence case – DON'T WRITE IN CAPITALS
- Use a clear sans serif type font like Arial rather than Times New Roman
- Don't use fancy letters and fonts
- Check how the letters 'a' and 'g' (Calibri) appear on the font you use
- Some people think comic sans looks childish

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Content

- Use short sentences of 15 to 20 words
- Keep to one main idea in each sentence
- Break long sentences where there is an 'and' or 'but', into two sentences
- Put information into a logical sequence. To avoid confusion limit the use of pronouns e.g. if, they - instead repeat the noun more often
- Use the personal pronouns e.g. 'I' 'we' 'you' to help the reader identify with the content e.g. when you get to the building go to the reception. I will come and meet you there
- Avoid jargon and acronyms (abbreviations), but if it is essential, include an explanation
- Use bullet points rather than long text
- Try and keep all the text about one thing on the same page, rather than letting it run onto the next page
- Use story boxes and fact boxes to make the main points clear
  Contact details should include a phone number and not just an email address
- Avoid long complicated words – use easy short ones e.g. 'use' rather than 'utilise'
- Put important words such as the date in bold so they stand out
- When you have written the letter or information, read it again and cut out all the irrelevant information and surplus words
- Make the verbs in the sentence active not passive i.e. 'the students hand their work in on time' and not 'the work is handed in on time by the students' remember 'the cat sat on the mat'!
- Keep punctuation to a minimum, and avoid semicolons (;) colons (:) and hyphens (-)
- Be consistent even if it makes the text seem boring e.g. use 'the trustee meeting' and don't change it later to 'the committee' or 'the board'.
- Use the number and not the word, e.g. use '3' not 'three'
- Avoid use of negatives
- Write numbers as numbers not words

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Letters

- Use a photo of the venue
- Use a photo of yourself by your signature
- Print your name in full as well as signing it
- If your letter is about an appointment, put the date as Monday 17th September 2012, not 17.9.12
- If you need to put the time, add a clock showing the correct time
- A useful site is:
  http://www.havefunteaching.com/flash-cards/math/time-flash-cards.pdf
  There is a clock for each quarter hour and they can be re-sized
- Give information about travel, e.g. bus numbers, ring-and-ride or a taxi firm telephone number
- Give a map and directions with local landmarks, e.g. next to the Pink Elephant pub.
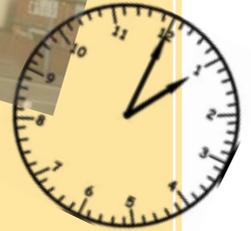
Involve your audience

- Include people with a learning disability in the design process
- If possible, test out the information by asking other people with a learning disability who have not seen the information before, to get their feedback

- Using images in Microsoft Word
  Unlike Microsoft PowerPoint you can't click and drag images in a Word document.
  An easy way to get round this is to insert a table. Then you can write the text and paste images where you want them. You can add rows and columns and alter the column widths. When you have finished the document, delete the gridlines by choosing 'no border' in the drop-down borders options.

14 pt

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