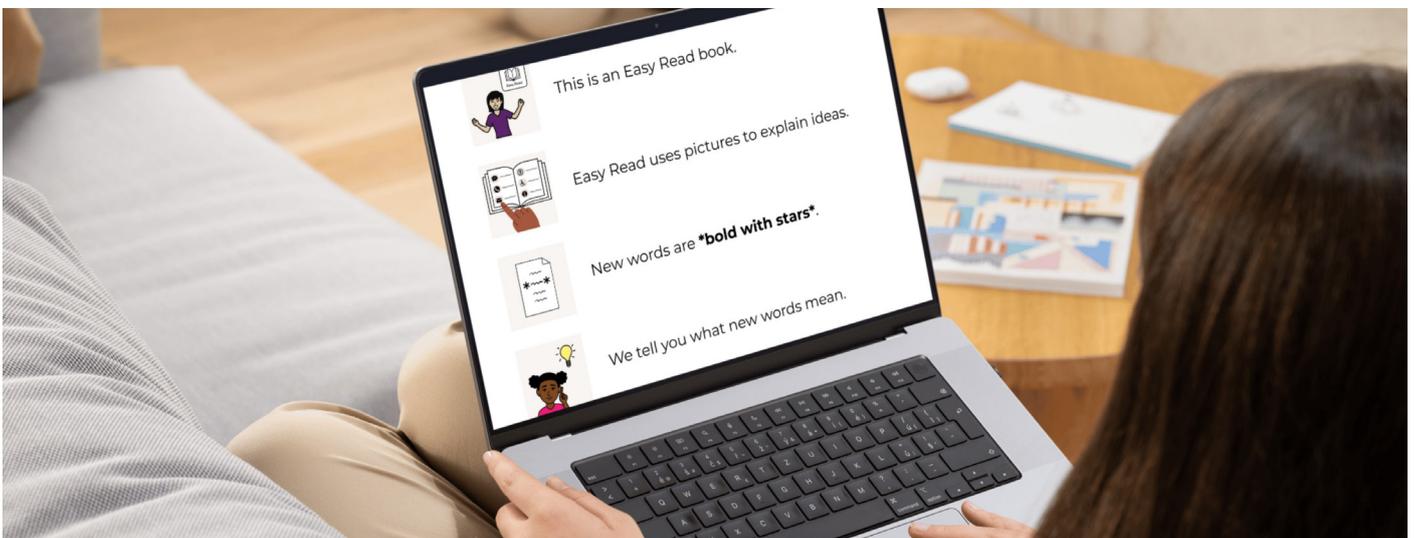


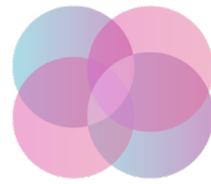
# Easy Read vs. Easy English: What's the difference?

You might struggle to see the difference between Easy Read and Easy English styles of writing. In Australia, the 2 accessible formats can appear near-identical, using similar conventions like pictures, simple language and white space. Both aim to help the same target audience: people with 'low English literacy', so is there *really* a difference between Easy Read and Easy English? We've prepared this factsheet to explore the question, and help you procure high-quality, accessible written information with confidence.



## A brief history of Easy Read

Records reveal Easy Read first emerging in Sweden as early as the 1960s. Sweden's government supported the production of 'lättläst' or 'easy to read' literature, with a National Centre for 'easy-to-read' established by the 1980s (Sundin, 2008). Easy Read then spread across Europe, with a landmark paper released by the UK government in 2001 titled 'Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century'. This started the global information access movement we see today.



## International variation

Swedish researcher, Maria Sundin (2008) studied Easy Read across 5 European countries and found that Easy Read formats are different, both within and between countries.

In the UK, Easy Read is bolstered by **legislation** and **standards**, including the following:

- The Equality Act (2010) which requires organisations to make reasonable adjustments so disabled people can access information.
- The Accessible Information Standard (2016) which requires NHS and adult social care providers to meet the communication needs of people with disabilities, including providing information in Easy Read.

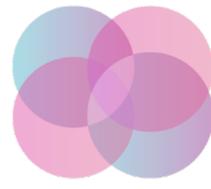
Importantly, Easy Read in the UK is different to Easy Read in Australia. In the UK, Easy Read sentences are longer, and fewer supporting images are used. It is not uncommon to see long documents with a table of contents to support document navigation. This demands stronger literacy abilities overall.

## The Australian context

In the mid 2000s, 'Easy English' emerged in Australia. Easy English borrowed conventions from Easy Read, but used simpler language, more visuals, and fewer words. It aimed to help users with greater literacy support needs, and was designed to be read with a support person (Anderson et al., 2017).

In recent years, the terms 'Easy Read' and 'Easy English' have been used interchangeably. For example, Australia's pioneering Easy English service recently renamed their service to an 'Easy Read' service, reinforcing changing sector terminology (Scope Australia, 2025).

The industry is growing rapidly to meet a rising demand for accessible written information (Meltzer, Barnes, & Wehbe, 2025). In most cases, 'Easy English' and 'Easy Read' use the same conventions, making the 2 'styles' indistinguishable across suppliers. With no national standards, organisations procuring Easy Read and Easy English must focus on choosing suppliers that follow evidence-based practice.



# Easy Read at Embrace Access

## Easy Read or Easy English?

At Embrace Access, we use the term 'Easy Read' to describe our accessible written information. Our Easy Read is written at a Grade 4 reading level, using the same conventions as most 'Easy English' styles. For example, meaningful images, accessible fonts, simple language and white space. We're committed to continually improving our Easy Read product through codesign projects and end-user feedback.

## Research we follow

**Images** are a powerful tool for supporting attention, comprehension, and memory. At Embrace Access, our Easy Read style uses images to support every sentence. Images are chosen by people with low literacy, giving us greater confidence that visual elements are helpful. Research supports the use of images for aiding comprehension (Ally, Gold, & Budson, 2009, Houts et al., 2006; Levie & Lentz, 1982; Mayer, 2014, Wadihah & Fauzi, 2021).

**Short sentences** reduce a reader's cognitive load, making it easier to focus on key messages. At Embrace Access, we like to write sentences that are no longer than 2 lines. This helps us use shorter words and concise phrasing. Research supports the use of short words and sentences for easier reading (Anderson et al., 2017, McNamara & Magliano, 2009, Zipoli, 2016).

**Simple language** improves understanding for people with cognitive-communication difficulties. At Embrace Access, our Easy Read does not exceed a **Grade 4** reading level. Research supports the use of simple language to help a range of users read and understand (Hersh et al., 2013, Plain Language Action and Information Network, 2011).



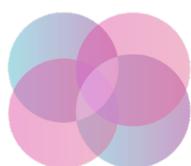
## Understanding ‘low literacy’

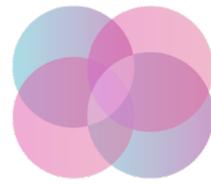
‘Low literacy’ is an umbrella term used to describe people with different reading support needs. In Australia, 44% of people have low literacy, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), but within this group, users still have vastly different preferences.

People who might benefit from conventions used across both Easy Read and Easy English styles, like images and simple language, including those with:

- intellectual or developmental disabilities, such as Down Syndrome
- neurodivergent profiles, such as dyslexia, Autism and ADHD
- acquired disabilities, such as stroke and acquired brain injury or dementia
- cultural and linguistic diversity or CALD backgrounds where English is not a first language.

‘Literacy’ has many facets. For example, attention, memory, phonemic awareness, language, cognitive processing, symbol interpretation, and document navigation. People can experience differences in one, or several areas. This begs the question: is it productive to search for a ‘one size fits all’ Easy Read standard?





# There's no 'perfect' accessible format

## A call for national standards?

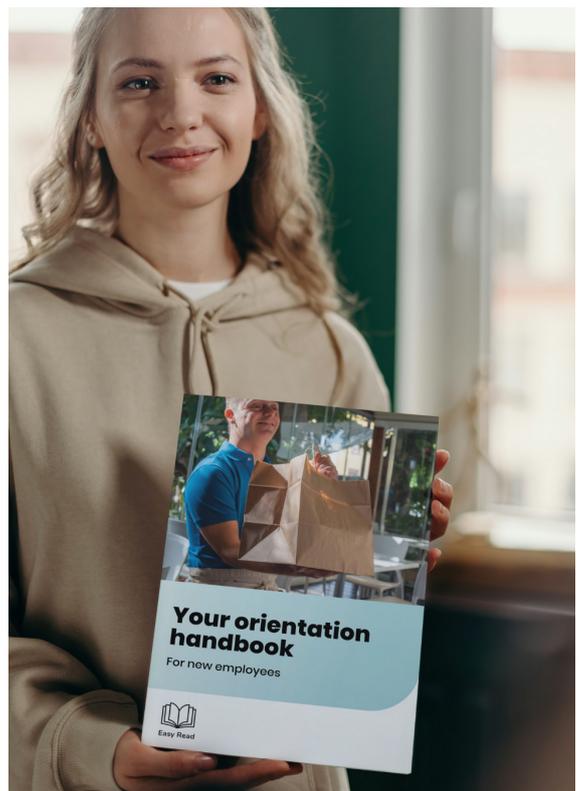
Unlike the UK, Australia does not have specific laws or standards for the production of Easy Read and Easy English. At their core, both accessible formats are designed to provide essential information in a way that is more readable. Due to a lack of standards, each supplier of Easy Read and Easy English decides how to present accessible elements, including words, white space, fonts, and visuals.

While standards serve as a useful source of truth, research suggests that written information is **most accessible** when it is tailored to the user's individual access needs, rather than following a single set of general rules (Anderson et al., 2017, Chinn & Homeyard, 2017).

## Is 'flexible' most accessible?

At Embrace Access, we're often asked, 'What's better? Easy Read or Easy English?' We see Australian suppliers producing great Easy Read and Easy English documents with styles that overlap, and designs that differ.

But differences in style might not be a bad thing. After all, all users have different access needs. Dr Ariella Meltzer's recent study of Easy Read and Easy English (2024) concluded, 'No single easy format will suit everyone. Providers need to be specific about the audience and adapt accordingly.'



# Procuring Easy Read: Helpful questions

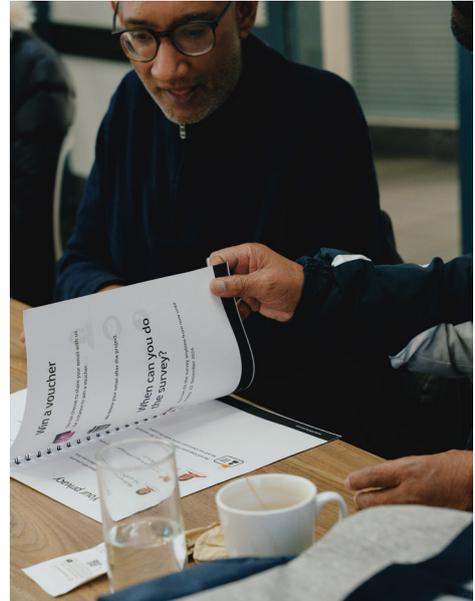
Here are 5 questions you can ask your Easy Read or Easy English supplier to make sure you're getting an accessible, high-quality product.

## 1. What's the reading level?

Easy Read written at a Grade 4 reading level and below will be accessible to more people, compared to the complex original document.

## 2. How many pages?

Easy Read with fewer pages can lighten the reader's overall cognitive load. We try to keep Easy Read documents under 20 pages to help the target audience focus on your key messages.



## 3. Do you follow rules for sentence length?

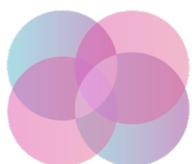
Look for documents with short sentences separated by plenty of white space. We follow a '2-line maximum' rule for sentence length at Embrace Access. This means Easy Read sentences contain shorter words and concise phrasing.

## 4. Do you use codesign?

Codesign means people with low literacy are involved in writing and designing Easy Read documents. At Embrace Access, our Lived Experience Advisors help choose the words and images for each project. This gives us confidence that the final documents are truly accessible for people with lived experience.

## 5. What are your qualifications?

At Embrace Access, our Easy Read documents are approved by senior practising speech pathologists, qualified to support people with reading disabilities.

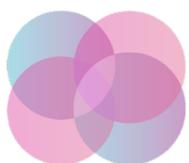


# Understanding Easy Read



## The bottom line

- ✓ International 'Easy Read' styles are different to Easy Read and Easy English in Australia.
- ✓ In Australia, the terms 'Easy Read' and 'Easy English' are increasingly used interchangeably.
- ✓ Without national standards, suppliers of Easy Read and Easy English are responsible for upholding best-practices to support information access for people with low literacy.
- ✓ People can have 'low literacy' for many different reasons, beyond intellectual disability.
- ✓ Accessibility is never 'one size fits all'. Both Easy Read and Easy English use conventions that can help people access written information.



Embrace **Access**

M: 0433 759 535

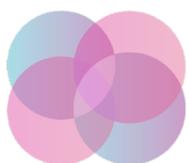
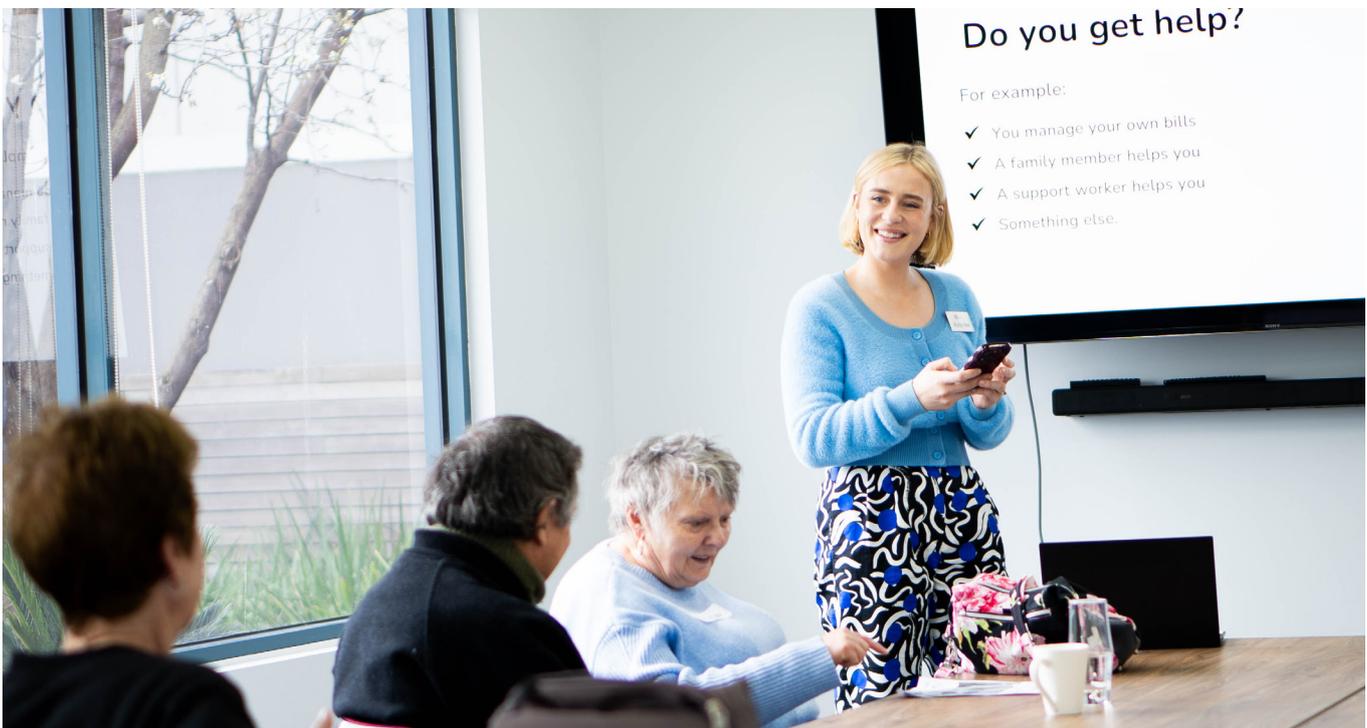
E: [info@embraceaccess.com.au](mailto:info@embraceaccess.com.au)

W: [www.embraceaccess.com.au](http://www.embraceaccess.com.au)

# Understanding Easy Read

## Who wrote this factsheet?

This factsheet was written by Ruby Yee, Director of Embrace Access, in July 2025. Ruby is a certified practising senior speech Pathologist and Easy Read subject matter expert. For nearly a decade, she has worked alongside people with communication disabilities to advance disability access and inclusion. Ruby is passionate about delivering Easy Read training to corporate and government agencies across Australia. She also leads a team of Lived Experience Advisors with low literacy, preparing Easy Read documents for organisations Australia-wide. Learn more in our Easy Read training: [www.embraceaccess.com.au/easy-read-training](http://www.embraceaccess.com.au/easy-read-training)



Embrace **Access**

M: 0433 759 535

E: [info@embraceaccess.com.au](mailto:info@embraceaccess.com.au)

W: [www.embraceaccess.com.au](http://www.embraceaccess.com.au)

# Research

Ally, B. A., Gold, C. A., & Budson, A. E. (2009). The picture superiority effect in patients with Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment. *Neuropsychologia*, 47(2), 595–598. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18992266>

Anderson, Julie; McVilly, Keith; Koritsas, Stella; Johnson, Hilary; Wiese, Michele; Stancliffe, Roger; et al. (2017). Accessible written information resources for adults with intellectual disability: Rapid review. Research to Action Guide. Swinburne. Report. <https://doi.org/10.25916/sut.27923244.v1>

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-2012 (Catalogue No. 4228.0). ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/programme-international-assessment-adult-competencies-australia/latest-release>

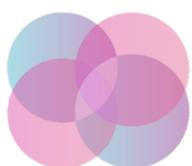
Chinn, D., & Homeyard, C. (2017). Easy read and accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities: Is it worth it? A meta-narrative literature review. *Health expectations : an international journal of public participation in health care and health policy*, 20(6), 1189–1200. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12520>

Crossley, S. A., Skalicky, S., Dascalu, M., McNamara, D. S., & Kyle, K. (2020). Predicting text comprehension, processing, and familiarity in adult readers: New approaches to readability formulas. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53(5), 363–376. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163853X.2017.1296264>

Department of Health. (2001). Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century (Cm. 5086). The Stationery Office. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/valuing-people-a-new-strategy-for-learning-disability-for-the-21st-century>

Equality Act 2010, c. 15, § 20 (UK). Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/20>

Hersh, M. A., Na, A., Williams, P., & Rizzo, A. (2013). Challenges in eAccessibility and participatory elnclusion: The e-Access framework and policy. In A. Marcus (Ed.), *Design, user experience, and usability. Health, learning, playing, cultural, and cross-cultural user experience* (pp. 138–147). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40498-6\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40498-6_15)



Houts, P. S., Doak, C. C., Doak, L. G., & Loscalzo, M. J. (2006). The role of pictures in improving health communication: A review of research on attention, comprehension, recall, and adherence. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 61(2), 173–190. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16122896>

Levie, W. H., & Lentz, R. (1982). Effects of text illustrations: A review of research. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 30(4), 195–232. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1983-28980-001>

Mayer, R. E. (2014). Cognitive theory of multimedia learning. In R. E. Mayer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning* (2nd ed., pp. 43–71). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139547369.005>

McNamara, D. S., & Magliano, J. P. (2019). Toward a comprehensive model of comprehension. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 164–186. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0079-7421\(09\)51009-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0079-7421(09)51009-2)

Meltzer, A., Barnes, E., & Wehbe, A. (2025). Easy Read... Easy English... Plain Language? Decision-Making in the Production of ‘Easy’ Information in Australia. *Journal of applied research in intellectual disabilities : JARID*, 38(1), e70021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.70021>

Plain Language Action and Information Network. (2011). Federal plain language guidelines. <https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines>

Scope Australia. (n.d.). Easy Read service – business solutions [Web page]. Scope Australia. Retrieved July 14, 2025, from <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/business-solutions/easy-read>

Sundin, Maria (2008). “Present situation of easy-to-read organisations in some smaller countries : examples from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Latvia”. *BiD: textos universitaris de biblioteconomia i documentació*, núm. 20 (juny). <https://bid.ub.edu/20sundi2.htm>

Wadihah, H., & Fauzi, A. (2021). Using Image Media on Reading Text to Improve Reading Comprehension of Student with Intellectual Disabilities. *Jurnal Asesmen Dan Intervensi Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus*, 21(1), 51-56.

Zipoli, R. P. (2016). Unraveling Difficult Sentences: Strategies to Support Reading Comprehension. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 52(4), 218-227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451216659465>

