

Information for all

European standards for making information easy to read and understand



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



Inclusion Europe

Produced in the framework of the project
Pathways to adult education for people with intellectual disabilities

The partners of the project
“Pathways to adult education
for people with intellectual disabilities”
have written another 3 brochures:



To download them, go to: www.life-long-learning.eu

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About these standards

Standards are a list of rules which help people to do things in the same way and in the right way.

■ What are these standards about?

These standards are to help people make their information easy to read and understand.

We have made these standards as part of a project that took place in Europe.

People from 8 European countries met several times to write these standards.

The project which brought these people together was called “Pathways to adult education for people with intellectual disabilities”.

Adult education is also called lifelong learning. Lifelong learning programmes are courses where adults can learn new things.

At the moment, lifelong learning programmes are often hard for people with intellectual disabilities to take part in.

The aim of this project is to make lifelong learning programmes easier for people with intellectual disabilities to take part in.

■ Who can use the standards?

Anyone who wants to make information easy to read and understand can use the standards. However, some of the standards can be hard to understand.

So people with intellectual disabilities might need the help of a support person when they read them for the first time.

These standards were made to make information easy for **people with intellectual disabilities** to understand.

But these standards can also be useful to make information easy for many other people to understand.

For example,

- ⦿ people who do not have English as a first language
- ⦿ people who find it difficult to read.

■ **Why do we need these standards?**

- ⦿ People with intellectual disabilities are just like everyone else. They can do a lot in life if they get the right support.
- ⦿ People with intellectual disabilities can find it harder to understand things and to learn new things.

So it is important for people with intellectual disabilities to have information that is as clear and as easy to understand as possible.

- ⦿ Like everyone else, people with intellectual disabilities have a right to good information.

This is written in the Convention of the United Nations which is about the rights of disabled people. In its article 9, this Convention says that people with disabilities have to receive accessible information.

Good information helps people find out what they need to know.

It helps them to make their own choices and decisions.

- ⊙ If people with intellectual disabilities do not get good information, they will be left out. They will not be able to join in with things happening around them. And they will have to wait for other people to make choices and decisions for them.
- ⊙ To make good information means making information easy to read and understand. To do this well, you have to follow standards. Standards are a list of advice which help people to do things in the same way and in the right way.

You should always think about the standards in this booklet when you want to make information easy to read and understand.

These standards will tell you how to make information easy to understand, whatever the format of information you are making.

There are 4 different formats of information:

- ⊙ **Written information:**
These are things like leaflets, brochures and reports.
- ⊙ **Electronic information:**
This is written information on computers, for example information on websites or on CD-rom.
- ⊙ **Audio information:**
This is information you can listen to, for example on a CD or on the radio.
- ⊙ **Videos** you can watch on TV or on a computer.

- ⊙ These standards are for people who want to make information easy to read and understand. It is also important to make stories or poetry easy to read and understand. However, the “Pathways” project concentrated only on information documents. We did not have the time to check if the standards to make stories or poetry easy to read and understand would be the same or slightly different.

Note:

If you want to know more about people with intellectual disabilities you can ask questions and get information from one of the organisations listed at the end of this booklet.

General standards for easy to understand information

■ Before you start producing your information

1. Always find out as much as you can about the people who will use your information and about their needs.
2. Choose the best format for your information. For example, information on a CD or DVD may be better for some people than written information.
3. Always use the right language for the people your information is for. For example, do not use language for children when your information is for adults.
4. Remember that the people who will use your information might not know much about your subject. Make sure you explain the subject clearly and also explain any difficult words to do with that subject.
5. Always involve people with intellectual disabilities when making your information. For example, they can take part in making decisions
 - ⊙ about the subject
 - ⊙ about what to say on a subject
 - ⊙ and about where to make the information available.They can also take part in checking the information to see how easy it is to understand.

You can find out more about how to involve people with intellectual disabilities from another booklet we have written.

The booklet is called
“Do not write for us without us!
Involving people with intellectual disabilities
in the writing of easy to read texts”.

■ **Words**

6. Use easy to understand words that people will know well.
7. Do not use difficult words.
If you need to use difficult words,
make sure you always explain them clearly.
8. Use examples to explain things.
Try to use examples
that people will know from their everyday lives.
9. Use the same word to describe the same thing
throughout your document.
10. Do not use difficult ideas such as metaphors.
A metaphor is a sentence
that does not actually mean what it says.
An example of a metaphor is “it is raining cats and dogs”.
11. Do not use words from other languages
unless they are very well known
like the French word “voilà” in the English language.
12. Avoid using initials.
Use the word in full where possible.

Initials are the first letter of every word.

If you have to use initials, explain them.
For example, if you write “EU”,
explain that it stands for “the European Union”.
13. Percentages (63%) and big numbers (1,758,625)
are hard to understand.

Try not to use percentages and big numbers.
Instead, use words like “few” and “many”
to explain what you mean.

■ Sentences

14. Always keep your sentences short.
15. Speak to people directly.
Use words like “you” to do this.
16. Use positive sentences rather than negative ones where possible.
For example, say
“You should stay until the end of the meeting”
rather than
“You should not leave before the end of the meeting”.
17. Use active language rather than passive language where possible.
For example, say “The doctor will send you a letter”
not “you will be sent a letter”.

■ How to order your information

18. Always put your information
in an order that is easy to understand and follow.
19. Group all information about the same topic together.
20. It is OK to repeat important information.
It is OK to explain difficult words more than once.

2

Standards for written information

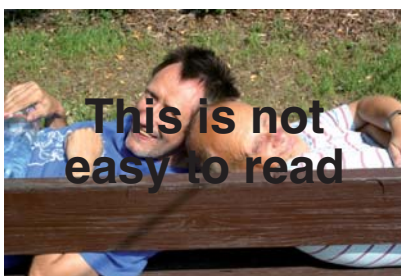
Note:

Written information that is easy for people with intellectual disabilities to understand is often called “easy-to-read” information.

When you are preparing written information, use the 20 standards in section 1 as well as the following standards.

■ Design and format

1. Use a format that is easy to read, follow and photocopy. For example, A4 or A5.
2. Think about the size of your document. A book of 100 pages is too long. People could feel they are not able to read such a long book. In this case, it would be better to write 3 smaller booklets.
3. Never use a design or layout that will make your document hard for people to read and understand. The most important thing is that your document is easy for people with intellectual disabilities to understand.
4. Never use a background that makes it difficult to read the text. For example, never use a picture or a pattern as a background.



Be careful when using a dark background.
When you do that,
make sure the background is dark enough
and the writing clear enough for you to read it.

This is
easy to read

This is not
easy to read

■ Writing

5. Always use a font that is clear and easy to read.
A font is a type of writing.
For example Arial or Tahoma
are clear and easy to read fonts.

This means you should

⊙ **Never use serif fonts.**

These fonts are harder to read
because the shape of the letters is not as clear.

Here is an example

serif font

d

sans-serif font

d

Here are some examples of fonts that are harder to read
Century is not easy to read
Times new roman is not easy to read.

⦿ **Never use writing that is too close together.**

Example: This is Gill 14 condensed.
This is not easy to read because it is too close together.

This is Arial 14 with character spacing at 70%.
This is not easy to read.

This is an example of text
with line spacing set at multiple 0.8pt.
This is not easy to read.

⦿ **Never use writing that is too light and does not print off well.**

Example: This is Eras 14 Light.
This is not easy to read because it is too light.

⦿ **Never use italics.**

Example: *This text is in italics.*
It is not easy to read.

⦿ **Never use a special writing design.**

Example:
This is text with shadows.
It is not easy to read.

This is outlined text.
It is not easy to read.

6. Always use large writing.
You should use writing which is at least the size of Arial 14.
7. Do not write whole words in capitals.
Lower case letters are easier to read.
8. Try to use only 1 type of writing in your text.

9. Underlining can make the text harder for some people with intellectual disabilities to read. Use underlining with caution.
10. Where possible, avoid writing in colour because
 - ⦿ some people cannot tell the difference between colours.
 - ⦿ people might need to photocopy your document in black and white. Then the colours would not come out clearly.
 - ⦿ Some colours do not stand out well against certain backgrounds. For example yellow writing on white paper is not easy to see.

■ Words

11. Do not use difficult words.

If you need to use difficult words, make sure you always explain them clearly.

Where possible, explain the words at the time you are using them. In written documents, you could also have a list of useful words at the end of the document.

12. Be careful when you use pronouns. Pronouns are words like “I”, “him” or “it” that you use instead of the actual person or thing you are talking about.

Make sure it is always clear who or what the pronoun is talking about. If it is not clear then use the proper name instead.

2

13. Never use footnotes.

A footnote is when you explain something at the bottom of the page instead of explaining it in the text.

Example:

Do not write “Peter Smith¹ spoke at the meeting.”

Write

“Peter Smith is the president of a self-advocacy organisation.
Peter Smith spoke at the meeting.”

14. Keep the punctuation simple.

For example, do not write

Yesterday, I bought a green/yellow bike (a new one!)
for my son – whose name is Michael.

Instead, write

My son’s name is Michael.

Yesterday, I bought a new bike for him.

The new bike is green and yellow.

15. Avoid all special characters where possible,
like \, &, <, § or #.

16. Avoid all abbreviations like “e.g.” or “etc.”

■ Sentences

17. Always start a new sentence on a new line.

18. Never split 1 word over 2 lines.

This means never use a hyphen (-)
to split a word over 2 lines.

¹ President of a self-advocacy organisation

19. Keep your sentences short.

You could do this by

- ⦿ writing only 1 idea per sentence
- ⦿ using a full stop before starting a new idea, instead of using a comma or an “and”.

Where possible, 1 sentence should fit on 1 line.

If you have to write 1 sentence on 2 lines, cut the sentence where people would pause when reading out loud.

Example: Write: The way this sentence is cut
is easy to read.

Do not write: The way this sentence is
cut is not as easy to read.

■ Writing text

20. Use headings that are clear and easy to understand.
Headings should tell you what the text underneath is about.
21. Always make sure you give people all the information they need.
Make sure it is clear who the information is for and what it is about.
22. Do not give people more information than they need to understand your point.
Only give them the important information.
23. Make sure the important information is easy to find.
To do this, you could:
- ⦿ put this information at the beginning of the document
 - ⦿ highlight the important information in **bold**
 - ⦿ or put the important information in a box.

2

24. Try not to use too many layers of subtitles or bullet points.
25. Graphs and tables can be very hard to understand. But they can sometimes explain things better than in writing. When you use graphs or tables, make them simple and explain them well.

For example:

Mr Smith works most of the time on his computer.

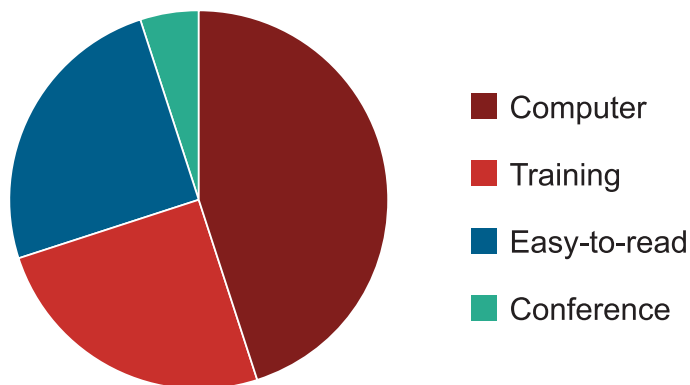
He also gives people training and makes easy-to-read information.

But this takes him less time than his computer work.

Finally, Mr Smith also goes to conferences.

But this is what takes him the smallest amount of time.

Mr Smith's working time is spent on



■ **What your text should look like**

26. Use bullet points to list things.
A list of words separated by commas is not easy to read.
27. Do not write in columns.

28. Align your text to the left of the page.

Never justify your text.

Justified text has big gaps between words and is harder to read.

Example: This text is aligned to the left.
It is easy to read
because the spaces between the words
are all the same.

This text is justified and it is
not as easy to read because
there are big gaps between
the words.

29. Do not put too much text on your page.

30. Leave space between paragraphs.

31. Do not indent your text.

This means that the first line of each paragraph should be aligned with the rest of the text.

32. Try to avoid narrow margins.

Margins are the spaces
between the words and the edges of the page.

Where possible, keep all margins big enough
so that your page does not look too cramped.

33. Where possible, number the pages of your document.

In the case of documents for meetings,
write “page 2 out of 4”.

This will help people know they have all the pages.

2

■ Images

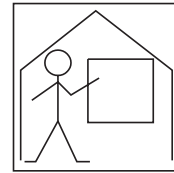
34. Many people find it hard to read text.
To help them understand your text,
you should put images next to it to describe what it is about.

Images are things like

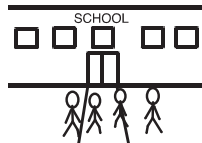
- ⦿ photographs,



- ⦿ drawings,



- ⦿ or symbols.



35. To illustrate your text, you can use

- ⦿ photographs,
- ⦿ drawings,
- ⦿ or symbols.

Where possible, try to use the same style of images throughout your document.

36. Always use images that are good and right for the people you are writing for.
For example, never use images for children when you are writing for adults.

37. Always choose images that are clear, easy to understand and go well with the piece of text they are helping to explain.

For example, make sure photographs are clear and do not have too many things in them to look at.

Example:

This is a clear photograph of a man reading a book.



This picture is not as clear because there are too many things in the photograph to look at.



38. Use the same image to explain the same thing throughout your document.
39. There are many ways to use images.

For example, you can put 1 or 2 illustrations next to a paragraph to help explain what the text is about.

■ How to show people it is an easy-to-read document

40. Put an easy-to-read symbol on the cover page of your easy-to-read document. This will help people see that it is an easy-to-read document.

There is a European easy-to-read logo that you can use. It looks like this



You can download this logo at www.inclusion-europe.org/etr

■ Standards for the English language

41. Be careful with numbers like “7th” meeting. It might be hard for some people to understand. You could write something like “The meeting we have had 6 times before”.
42. Be careful with numbers
 - ⦿ Write numbers as digits, not as words. This means you should write numbers as 1, 2, not one, two.
 - ⦿ Never use Roman numerals like V, X or XVI
43. Where possible, use the present tense rather than the past tense.

44. Avoid words like doesn't, wasn't, couldn't.
Write the words out in full instead.
For example does not, was not, could not.
45. Where possible, write dates out in full.
For example: Tuesday 13 October 2008.

Do not write	13/10/2008
or	13 th October.

3

Standards for electronic information

Electronic information is written information on computers, for example information on website or on CD-rom.

It is important to follow the standards in sections 1 and 2 if you want to make your electronic information easy to read and understand.

Note:

The "Web Accessibility Initiative" is an international association.

They have developed some important accessibility standards for information on computers.

For example for people who are blind or for people who have trouble moving their hands.

They have written guidelines to make websites accessible for disabled people.

You can find these guidelines here:

<http://www.w3.org/WAI>

Unfortunately, they are not easy to read.

You might need the help of your supporter to understand them.

The following standards are specific for people with intellectual disabilities.

They focus on making websites and CD-roms easy for people with intellectual disabilities to read and understand.

It is always better when websites or CD-roms are completely easy to read.

However, when it is not the case, the first page should have a clear link to all the easy-to-read pages.

■ Creating an accessible website

1. Always ask people with intellectual disabilities to test your website.
2. Try to add some things to your website that will make the information easier for people to understand. For example, you could use a screen-reader. A screen-reader reads out the words on the screen. Or you could use short films where people read and explain your texts.
3. To find websites on the internet, people can use search engines like Google or Yahoo. These search engines find information for you on the internet.

To make sure that people can easily find your website, you could add the words “easy-to-read” in the “meta tag” of your homepage.

The meta tag is a title which nobody can see. Only the search engines will find it when looking for easy-to-read information. The person creating your website should be able to help you with this.

4. On websites, new pages can sometimes appear by themselves. People call them “pop up” pages, because they appear even if you have not clicked on anything. These things should be avoided on websites if you want them to be easy to read and understand. “Pop ups” can be hard for some people to follow and can be confusing.

5. Sometimes, people use special programmes for their websites.
Like a programme to have very nice drawings.
You should be careful with special programmes.
They can be heavy.
They can make your website harder to access and less easy to run.
6. Remember that sometimes people have to use old computers.
Or they have a very slow internet connection.
Therefore, do not use any programme or pictures which will make your website very slow to use.
This way, people will access it more easily.
7. Try to have a way for people to find things easily on your website.
This is usually called a “search tool”.

■ Your homepage

A homepage is the first page which appears when you type the address of a website.

It is an important page because it is the first thing that people will see when they visit your website.

8. Make sure that your homepage clearly shows what the website is about.
9. Put on your homepage
 - ⊙ a telephone number
 - ⊙ a postal address
 - ⊙ an e-mail address of someone to contact.

This way, people can contact you easily.

10. You should have big and clear buttons to change the size of the writing for people who prefer bigger writing.

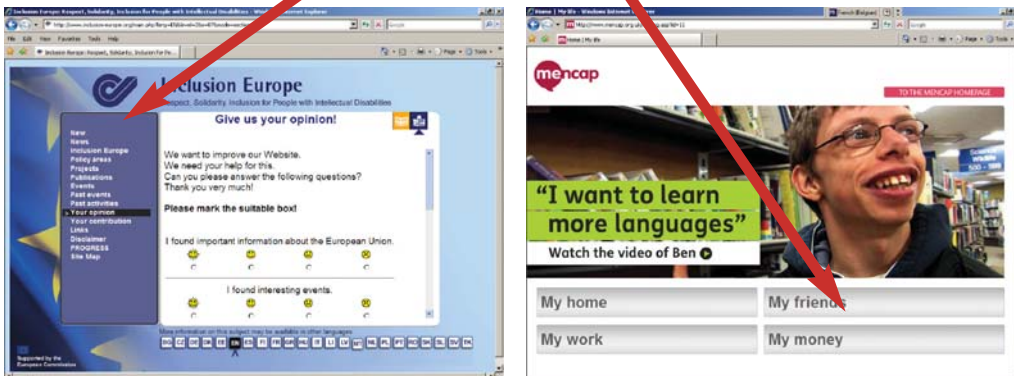
■ Moving between the different pages of a website

Some definitions:

When you move around from one part of the website to another, it is called navigation.

A navigation bar is a bar with the headings of the different parts of the website.

Here are 2 examples of navigation bars

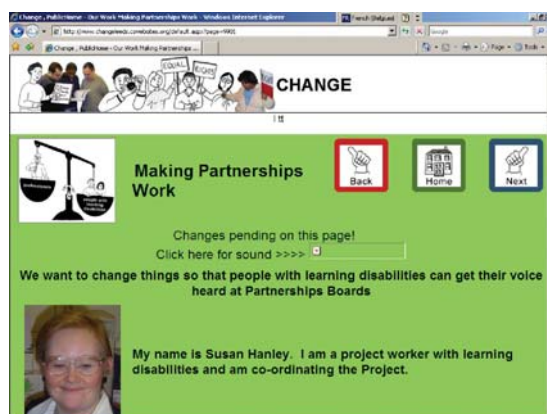


11. Make sure it is always easy for people to see which part of the website they are on. The navigation bar should clearly show this.
12. Make sure people do not have to click more than once to get back to the home page.
13. Always put the same navigation bar in the same place throughout the website. This way people can get used to the different parts they can find on your website.

3

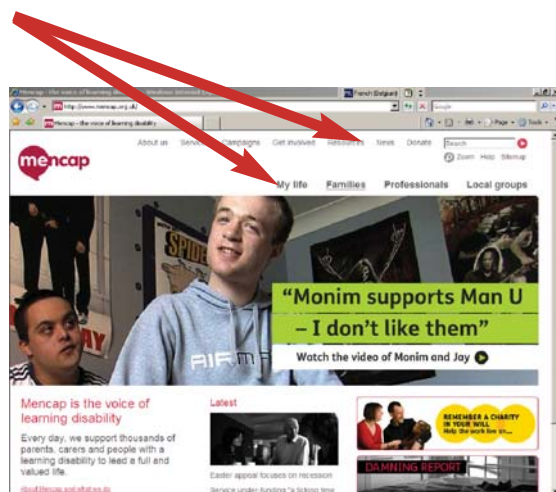
14. It must be easy for people to move from one page to another. For example, you can use big, clear buttons on every page. People can click them and get to:
- ⦿ the next page
 - ⦿ the page before
 - ⦿ the home page.

Example of a website with these buttons:



15. Sometimes websites have a second navigation bar. This second navigation bar has headings like “site map”, “about us” or “contact us”. If you choose to have a second navigation bar, make sure it does not stand out as the main one.

Example of a website with 2 navigation bars



16. Your main navigation bar should not have more than 7 or 8 main headings.
17. Make sure the headings of the navigation bar are clear and easy to understand. If you feel they are too difficult, you can explain with more details on your homepage what people will find under the different headings.

■ What your screen should look like

18. Do not put too much information on the screen. Where possible, try to fit all the text on the screen so that people do not have to scroll down to see all the information.

If people will need to scroll down, put a text menu at the top. A text menu is a list of the main sections of your text. You should also give the possibility to easily go back to the top of the page at the end of each section

19. Make sure people will not have to move the page from left to right to read the text.
20. Leave space between each paragraph on the screen, as you would do between paragraphs on a printed document.
21. Do not have animations on the screen.

■ Links

On websites, you can often click on some words. When you click on these words, you find more information. These words which you can click on are called “links” because they link you to more information.

22. Underlining can make it difficult for people to read. But it is common practice on the internet to underline links so people know they can click on it to visit more pages.

Therefore you should use underlining only for links. Do not underline headings or words which are not links because people will try to click on it to find more information.

23. When you create links to other pages, make sure it is clear what information people will find on these new pages.

24. Avoid links which are difficult to read.

For example http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/grundvig/documents/gru_2007en.pdf

If the link is too long, you should hide it behind an easy word.

25. It is good for people to know if they have already clicked on a link or not. This is usually shown with colours:

- ⦿ Blue if you have not yet clicked on a link
- ⦿ Purple if you have already clicked a link

You should use the same colour-coding on your website.

26. It is better if only words link with new information.

It is not easy if people have to click on pictures or photographs to find new information.

So avoid putting a link to a new page behind an illustration. This is not easy to find.

■ Creating an accessible CD-rom

It is important to follow the standards for electronic information presented above if you want to make an accessible CD-rom.

27. When you create an accessible CD-rom, make sure the CD-rom case is also in easy-to-read format.
28. Try creating a CD-rom which works with all programmes. If your CD-rom needs special programmes, write it on the case.
29. Your CD-rom should start automatically when put in a CD-rom drive. Easy-to-read information should come first explaining “how to use this CD-rom”.

4

Standards for video information

The project group also looked at some standards for making information on video easy to understand.

Because of the little time available we were not able to analyse this topic in depth. This could be a main goal for a further project as this project focused mainly on written and electronic information (sections 2 and 3).

■ Introduction

When you want to give people information, it is very important that this information is accessible. Therefore, you have to choose the best possible way to give people this information.

One way of giving people information is by video. People also call this a film or a DVD.

■ General advice

1. Your video must be simple.
It must focus on making difficult ideas easy to understand.
2. Do not be in a hurry.
Do not speak too fast.
People must have enough time to understand what you are telling them.
3. Avoid confusing things, like slow or fast motion.

■ The DVD case

4. The design of the DVD case should follow the standards for easy to understand information.
Keep it simple.
Do not use too many pictures or graphic elements.
This can be confusing.
5. Make the information on your DVD case clear and simple.
The text should be easy to read.
6. Important information should appear in the video, not just on the DVD case.
For example the address of someone to contact.
7. Make it clear what programme you need to view your CD or DVD.

■ Background voice

A background voice is when you can hear someone speaking but you cannot see this person because they are showing you something else on the video.

8. A background voice should be slow and very clear.
9. A background voice should only be speaking about things that people can see on the screen.
10. If you use a background voice, it can be helpful to present the person first before he or she starts talking in the background.

4

■ The screen

11. The screen should not be too light or too dark.
12. Video and sound must be high quality and clear.
13. For videos to be played on a computer, buttons for sound and full screen should be easy to find.

■ The film itself

14. Stick as much as possible to reality.
For example, if you talk about a truck driver, do not show a man driving a van but rather a man driving a real truck.
15. Videos presenting information should not be too long.
No more than 20 or 30 minutes.
If you have a lot of information, you should consider making 2 different films.
16. When you change the place of filming, explain where the new place is so people do not get confused.
It can also be easier to see people going from 1 place to another rather than seeing someone here and then suddenly elsewhere without knowing why.

■ Subtitles

Sometimes, videos have text on the bottom of the screen. This text is called subtitles.

Subtitles can be confusing for people with intellectual disabilities.

But they can also be useful

- ⦿ for example for people who are deaf or have hearing difficulties
- ⦿ or when the person speaking on the video has a strong accent or difficulty speaking.

If you should decide to put subtitles on your video, make sure you respect the following standards:

17. Subtitles should follow the standards for written information.
They should be easy to read.
For example, use larger writing than usual in a movie - subtitles.
Check that you can also read them on a small screen.
18. Viewers should have enough time to read the subtitles.
Subtitles should be on the screen as long as possible.

This is a challenge
because we speak faster than we read.
So it can be difficult
to leave subtitles long enough on the screen
for people to read them.
This is especially true
for people with intellectual disabilities
who sometimes read slower.

So when you make your video,
make sure that people do not speak too quickly.

19. There must be a strong contrast between subtitles and the background.
This can be difficult
because the background of a video is changing.
One way is to have a dark line at the bottom on which the subtitles appear.

But this line should be transparent so you can still see the film.

20. Subtitles should be in the same position on the screen throughout the whole video. If possible, they should be at the bottom of the screen. If there is not enough contrast between the background and the subtitles, change the font colour, not the position.
21. It should be possible for the viewer to hide the subtitles at any time. There should be clear instructions about how to do this.
22. To make the speech in the video even clearer you could also make a document with all the text. This way, people can print it and read it before or after watching your video.

■ Audio description

Some videos have a voice explaining what is happening in the film. This means that blind people can understand what is happening. In this way, the video is accessible for blind people as well. This is called audio description.

For people who are not blind, this audio description can be confusing. So it should be possible for the viewer to switch off the audio description at any time. There should be clear instructions about how to do this.

Finally, for blind people who also have intellectual disabilities, make sure the audio description uses easy to understand words.

Standards for audio information

The project group also looked at some standards for making audio information easy to understand. Audio information is information you can listen to, for example news on the radio or announcements on trains or at stations.

Because of the little time available we were not able to analyse this topic in depth. This could be a main goal for a further project as this project focused mainly on written and electronic information (sections 2 and 3).

However, we give you here some tips on how to make audio information accessible.

■ Tips for making audio information accessible

1. Have a look again at the standards listed in Section 1.
They are also very important for making audio information accessible.
2. Make sure that the person speaking had good pronunciation and articulates clearly.
3. Make sure that the sound has a good volume, not too loud, not too quiet.
4. Make sure the sound is good, without interference or background noise.
5. Make sure the person speaking speaks slowly.
6. It is very important to leave pauses at sensible points. This way, people can understand the first part before more information is given to them.

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7. Make sure the voice of the person speaking is clear, meaning not too low, not too high.
8. Give enough time for people to understand the information. For example, announcements before trains leave should be done early enough so people have the time to go to the right platform.
9. Do not hesitate to repeat your information several times.
10. The messages given in audio format should always be polite and courteous.
11. Make sure that the person speaking does not have an accent which is too strong.
12. Always speak one at a time.
13. Do not interrupt audio information, for example by advertising.
14. Make sure you use words which are easy to understand. For example, do not use dialects.
15. You might use a special sound announcing that the following information is in an accessible format.
16. Read the text in a way that emotions can be perceived.
17. When it is appropriate, the voice should match the character. For example, when reading a story, when the text refers to a man, use a male voice when it refers to a woman, use a female voice when it refers to a child, use a child's voice.

The leading organisation of the project was Inclusion Europe.
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Inclusion Europe

The European association
of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

Inclusion Europe is a non-profit organisation.
We campaign for the rights and interests of people with
intellectual disabilities and their families.
Our members are national organisations from 36 countries.

People with intellectual disabilities are citizens of their country.
They have an equal right to be included in society,
whatever the level of their disability.
They want rights, not favours.
People with intellectual disabilities have many gifts and abilities.
They also have special needs.
They need a choice of services to support their needs.

Inclusion Europe focuses on three main policy areas:

- Human Rights for people with intellectual disabilities
- Inclusion in society
- Non-discrimination

Inclusion Europe co-ordinates activities in many European countries,
including projects, conferences, working groups and exchange meetings.
It responds to European political proposals
and provides information about the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.
Inclusion Europe advises the European Commission
and members of the European Parliament on disability issues.



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