

## General guidelines on printed material

We are often asked how to make printed material more accessible. This factsheet briefly explains what you can do to help your readers.

This factsheet is part of AbilityNet's free Advice and Information service.

If you have any questions at all about anything in this Factsheet, or any other aspect of assistive technology, please contact us.

Helpline: 0800 269545

Email: [enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk)



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The following are taken from the Royal National Institute of the Blind's guidelines on printed documentation.

We would recommend a minimum of 12pt (and ideally 14pt) for all information (not just that which is sent out to a special group of customers) to facilitate ease of readability for the substantial group of individuals with a mild visual impairment (including those with age-related vision loss) and those with mild cognitive/literacy difficulties who also benefit from slightly larger text.

The contrast between the background and the type is extremely important. The better the contrast, the more legible it is. Contrast is reliant on the size and weight of the type, and the text and background colours.

The choice of typeface is very important. As a general rule, stick to typefaces that people are familiar with and will recognise easily. Avoid seriffed fonts, italic, simulated handwriting and ornate typefaces as these can be difficult to read.

Avoid capital letters, as they are generally harder to read. A word or two in capitals is fine but avoid the use of capitals for continuous text.

The space between one line of type and the next (known as leading) is important. As a general rule, the space should be 1.5 to 2 times the space between words on a line. Those with dyslexia/dyspraxia are shown to benefit from 1.5 line spacing.

Avoid light type weights. People with sight problems often prefer bold or semi-bold weights to normal ones.

Use a clear typeface if documents contain numbers. Readers with sight problems can easily misread 3, 5, 8 and 0.

The length of a line should be between 60-70 letters. Lines that are too long or too short tire the eyes. The same applies to sentence and paragraph lengths, which should also be neither too long nor too short.

Limit new points to one per paragraph.

Keep to the same amount of space between each word. Do not condense or stretch lines of type. 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 fully justified text as people can mistake large gaps between words for the end of the line. Those with dyslexia/dyspraxia also find fully justified text more difficult.

Leave a space between paragraphs as dividing the text up gives the eye a break and makes reading easier.

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

If using a light-coloured type, make sure the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast.

Avoid fitting text around images if this means that lines of text start in a different place, and are therefore difficult to find. Set text horizontally as text set vertically is extremely difficult for a partially sighted reader to follow. Avoid setting text over images, for example photographs. This will affect the contrast and, if a partially sighted person is avoiding images, they will miss the text.

Allow extra space on forms for signatures. Partially sighted people tend to have handwriting that is larger than average. This will also benefit people with conditions that affect the use of their hands, such as arthritis.

Make sure recurring features, such as headings and page numbers are always in the same place.

Glossy paper should be avoided (as reflected light can obscure the print) and paper should be at least 90gsm. As a rule, if the print is showing through then the paper is too thin.

Avoid creases that obscure the text when folding paper. People who use screen magnifiers need to place the document flat under the magnifier, so try not to use a binding method that may make it difficult to flatten the document.

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