

Making a Document Accessible to Partially Sighted People

All staff need to be aware of how they can make print documents accessible to partially sighted people. To assist you, here are suggestions from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) for basic amendments to print documents.

1. WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

Signposting

Every standard print publication should have a clear, large print statement (16 point) in a prominent place about the availability of alternative formats.

Clear print

Clear print is a design approach which better takes into account blind and partially sighted readers.

Simply, a Clear Print document will find a wider audience. The solutions we propose are straightforward and inexpensive, focusing on some basic design elements, for example: font, type size, contrast and page navigation.

Clear Print differs from large print in the size of the type used (known as point size). Clear Print documents set text in a minimum type size of 12 point (although we recommend 14 point to reach more customers with sight problems). Large print documents are produced in a larger type size, ranging from 16 to 22 point.

Clear Print guidelines are based on RNIB's experience of the issues over many years together with advice from experts in the field. Currently more research is underway into areas such as contrast, type size and page layout. RNIB hosts a scientific advisory panel to ensure that our guidelines are based on sound research and take expert opinions into account.

2. HOW CAN I MAKE MY DOCUMENTS MORE ACCESSIBLE?

Type size

The size of the type (known as point size) is a fundamental factor in legibility. The RNIB recommends a typeface between 12 to 14 point. To make sure you reach more people with sight problems it's better to go for 14 point.

Contrast

The greater the contrast between the background and the text, the more legible the text will be. Note that the contrast will be affected by the size and weight of the type. Black text on white background provides the best contrast.

Typeface

As a general rule, be guided by typefaces such as Arial, Univers and New Century Schoolbook. These are all good examples of clear and legible typefaces. Avoid simulated handwriting and ornate typefaces as these can be difficult to read.

Type styles

Capital letters and italicised text are both generally harder to read. A word or two in capitals is fine but avoid the use of capitals for continuous text. We advise that italic text is not used where an alternative emphasis is available.

Leading

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.

Type weight

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

Numbers

If you print documents with numbers in them, choose a typeface in which the numbers are clear. Readers with sight problems can easily misread 3, 5, 8 and 0.

Line length

Ideally, line length should be between 60-70 letters per line. 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.

Word spacing and alignment

Keep to the same amount of space between each word. Do not condense or stretch lines of type. We recommend 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. We advise that you avoid justified text as the uneven word spacing can make reading more difficult for people with sight problems.

Columns

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

Reversing type

If using white type, make sure the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast.

Setting text

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.

Forms

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

Navigational aids

It is helpful if recurring features, such as headings and page numbers, are always in the same place. A contents list and rules to separate different sections are also useful. Leave a space between paragraphs as dividing the text up gives the eye a break and makes reading easier.

Printing

Avoid glossy paper because glare makes it difficult to read. Choose uncoated paper that weighs over 90 GSM. As a general rule, if the text is showing through from the reverse side, then the paper is too thin.

Format

When folding paper, avoid creases which obscure the text. 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.

Large print

For many blind and partially sighted people, larger print is essential. No single size is suitable for everyone, but most people prefer their large print in the **range of 16 to 22** point. If possible, for example with personal communication, always ask your customer which size suits best. You can produce simple large print documents yourself in-house with your word processor, but more complex jobs may need to be sent to a commercial printer.

3. WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For more detailed advice, and for information relating to alternative formats including Braille and audio tape, please visit http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_seeitright_hcsp#P135_8716