

## How to support a client with literacy difficulties



Legal proceedings can be particularly challenging for clients who have difficulties with literacy. From threshold documents and interview transcripts, to expert reports and written judgments, the written word is the language of the court and court bundles can run to many volumes.

Literacy problems can prevent your client from accessing essential information about their case. Literacy difficulties can arise for a number of reasons, including:

### Dyslexia

The NHS reports that up to [10% of people](#) have this learning difficulty, which has many impacts, including difficulty with reading and writing.

### Low literacy

A client may have low literacy for a wide range of reasons, including a learning disability, poor access to education in childhood or cultural differences. These individuals may not have learned to read or write at all, or may have limited literacy skills.

### Limited receptive vocabulary

Documents in legal proceedings typically contain low frequency (less commonly used) words, which may not be understood by people with a range of communication needs.

### Attention difficulties

Many people with [ADHD](#) report considerable difficulty maintaining focus while reading documents. They may struggle to attend to the lengthy documents which typically appear in legal proceedings. This issue may also impact people with mental health diagnoses, such as [schizophrenia](#) or [PTSD](#).

### Difficulty drawing inference

'Reading between the lines' to understand the purpose and significance of written information can be a challenging skill for many respondents and defendants, including some [autistic people](#) and clients who have [learning disabilities](#).



## Assisting clients who have literacy difficulties

The strategies required to support an individual who has literacy difficulties will vary from person to person. An [intermediary assessment](#) will provide insight into your client's literacy (alongside other areas of their communication profile) and make bespoke recommendations to support them at all stages of proceedings. The following general tips may be of assistance:



### Ask your client about their literacy.

They may have insight into their reading level, difficulties and strategies which assist. However, be aware that it can be difficult for some people with low literacy to disclose their difficulties.



**Read documents to your client in short chunks.** Simplify the meaning of less common words. Take steps to help your client feel able to indicate when they have not understood.



**Communicate verbally** when sharing information outside of conferences and hearings. Contact your client by telephone or, if they use messaging apps, send a voice note which they can replay and listen to multiple times. This tip is especially helpful for clients with low or no literacy.



**Highlight key points in documents.** If asking your client to review documents on their own, encourage them to draw on and annotate written information. You can review words or information they did not understand at a future meeting.



**Create easy read versions** of key documents. Read our [guide to producing easy read information here](#).



**Recommend a text-to-speech app.** It may be helpful to ask a friend or family member of your client to assist them to set up a text-to-speech app. There are many options available for different devices, including [Natural Readers](#), [Read Aloud](#) and [TTSReader](#).



**Minimise the amount of written information** which will be put to your client during their evidence. Request that the court adopts this recommendation.



**Request provision of 'written references in advance'** from advocates who will question your client. This will allow your client to familiarise themselves with key documents which they will be asked about in advance of their evidence.



**Take regular breaks.** Reading can be especially tiring for those with literacy difficulties. For some people, it can also be emotionally dysregulating (they may feel frustrated or upset, if reading is a skill they find challenging).

**For clients who are dyslexic:**



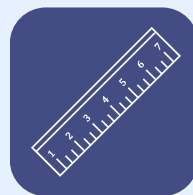
**Print key documents on coloured paper.** Ask your client which colour background helps them to read text. Some people find that light blue, yellow or pink backgrounds help prevent letters from 'jumbling'.



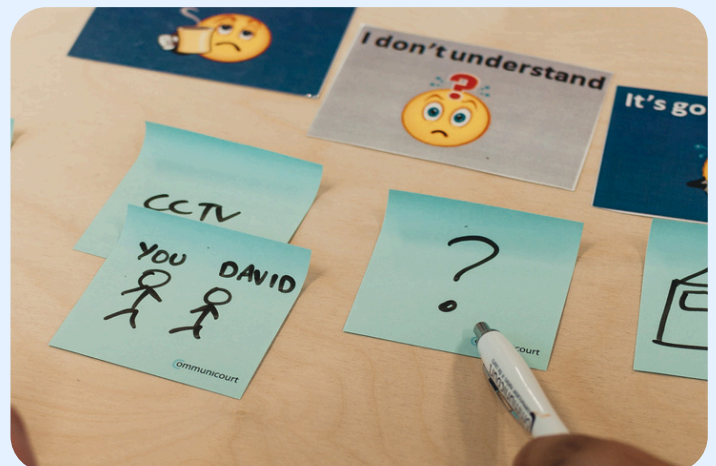
**Present written information** in well-spaced sans serif font, like Arial or Calibri. Use wide line spacing.



**Arrange coloured overlays.** Transparent coloured sheets which can be placed over documents can be a more cost-effective way to provide written information in your client's preferred shade. Alternatively, the background of documents can be changed and displayed on a tablet screen.



**Use a guideline.** A ruler or a simple piece of paper placed underneath each line can help your client follow sentences and avoid losing their place in a document.



## Further reading

### From The Access Brief

- [How to create visual aids](#)
- [How to create easy read documents](#)
- [How can an intermediary assist at trial?](#)

## Intermediary services

If you are concerned about your client's ability to communicate effectively and participate in legal proceedings, Communicourt can help.

We will assess your client to understand their communication needs and how these might affect them in court. Your client does not need to have a diagnosis. Our reports will identify any particular communication issues and make bespoke recommendations to help you and your client throughout proceedings. If intermediary assistance is recommended, one of our highly trained intermediaries can be there throughout proceedings to facilitate those recommendations.

## How to book an intermediary

- 1 Refer online.** Refer your client for an assessment through [our online portal](#) (5 minutes).
- 2 Funding.** We send a quote for you to send to Legal Aid / HMCTS to approve (24 hours).
- 3 Book assessment.** Once funding is approved, please let us know. We will schedule an assessment (2-6 weeks).
- 4 Assessment will take up to 3 hours** and can be conducted in person or remotely. You will then receive a report (7 days).
- 5 Book dates** for hearings or conferences. We will send you booking forms to be signed by the court. Once signed, we will book the intermediary.

