

# How to support literacy difficulties



## WHAT ARE 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 judgements, 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 present in a number of forms, 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 number of reasons, including a learning disability, poor school attendance or cultural differences. These individuals may not have learned to read or write at all or may have very 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 autistic people and clients who have learning disabilities.

## ASSISTING CLIENTS WITH 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.
- **Highlight key points in documents.** Encourage your client to draw on and annotate written information. Then you can review words or information they did not understand.
- **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.
- **Create easy read versions of key documents.** Read our [guide to producing easy read information](#) here.
- **Recommend a text-to-speech app.** You may need to support your client to set up and use this software. There are many options available for different devices, including [Natural Readers](#), [Read Aloud](#) and [TTSReader](#).
- **Reduce the amount of written information** which will be put to your client during their evidence. Request that the court adopts this recommendation.

Communicourt is the largest Managed and Approved Service Provider of intermediaries for defendants and respondents, in criminal and family courts. We passionately believe that everyone has a right to a fair trial.

**Communicourt**  
communication matters in the courts

## How we can help you



### LITERACY TIPS (CONTINUED)

- **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 with dyslexia

- **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'.
- **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.

### REQUESTING AN INTERMEDIARY ASSESSMENT

If you think your client may have a communication difficulty, intermediary support is fully funded. Communicourt assessments are simple to arrange using the process outlined below.

An intermediary assessment can provide professionals and the court with more insight into your client's communication strengths and difficulties (including their literacy), and how these may impact them during proceedings.

We produce comprehensive communication reports which identify issues and make detailed recommendations to help you and your client, even in cases where an intermediary is not recommended.

If an intermediary is recommended, one of our highly trained intermediaries can attend conferences (subject to funding) and hearings to facilitate those recommendations, meaning you can focus on your job.

Our experience means we can recommend solutions that make a tangible difference and support the justice system in getting a fair result.

### HOW TO GET SUPPORT



#### BOOK ONLINE

Refer your client for an assessment through our online booking system [communicourt.co.uk](https://www.communicourt.co.uk)

5 minutes

#### FUNDING

We will send you a quote that you need to send to HMCTS and Legal Aid for them to approve funding

24 Hours

#### BOOK THE ASSESSMENT

Once you have funding in place, please let us know. We will then arrange an assessment

4-6 weeks

#### ASSESSMENT

The 3 hour assessment can be carried out in person or remotely. You will then receive a report

7 days

#### BOOK COURT DATES

We will send booking forms which must be signed by the court. Once received we will then book your intermediary

Throughout the trial