

## SELSI GUIDELINES FOR SPOKEN EASY LANGUAGE

2024

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### 1 Authors of these guidelines

These guidelines have been created as a part of the ERASMUS+ project SELSI (*Spoken Easy Language for Social Inclusion*). The SELSI Team includes:

1) three universities:

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- Università degli studi di Trieste (Italy)
- Università degli studi di Pavia (Italy)

2) four non-governmental organisations:

- VŠĮ Informacijos kaupimo ir sklaidos centras (Lithuania)
- Vieglās valodas aģentūra (Latvia)
- Dyslexiförbundet (Sweden)
- Zavod Risa (Slovenia)

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Leealaura Leskelä and Ulla Bohman, members of the project's advisory board, have also contributed their expertise and detailed comments to these guidelines.

It would not have been possible to prepare these guidelines as they are without the people who participated in the testing sessions. The authors of these guidelines are grateful to all the participants for their involvement and the feedback.

### **The participants who tested the guidelines were:**

- In Latvia: The day care centres *Ceribu tilts*, *Saulesvece*, and *Duntes ozoli*.
- In Slovenia: self-advocates and validators from Zavod *RISA*.
- In Sweden: Swedish SELSI Cooperation Group and the participants of the *Begripsam* test groups.

### **How to cite these guidelines:**

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## 2 Introduction

We have created these guidelines as a part of the SELSI (Spoken Easy Language for Social Inclusion) project. Up until now, Easy Language has been mostly researched as a writing technique. The existing guidelines also mainly cover written Easy Language. In SELSI, we are focusing on communication in Spoken Easy Language.

Creating these guidelines has been a long, challenging, but also enjoyable process.

We have started with research. First, we made a questionnaire for professionals using Spoken Easy Language at work and for language users who need Spoken Easy Language for communication. We have asked the professionals how they speak and behave when using Spoken Easy Language. We have also asked the Spoken Easy Language users which ways of adapting the language they like and what seems to work best for them. Four hundred forty-six people from various European countries (mainly Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Sweden) answered our questionnaire. If you are interested in detailed results, you can find them [here](#). The results of this questionnaire were the starting point for putting these guidelines together.

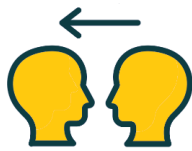
We have also studied published research articles, doctoral theses, and books on communicating with people who need Easy Language. We have looked for practical advice that could be useful for Spoken Easy Language. At the end of these guidelines, we have added the list of academic papers and other resources on which we are basing our guidelines. You can skip that part altogether if you are only interested in practical advice. But if you are searching for more detailed readings on accessible communication, you can get some ideas from there.

These guidelines were designed with educators who teach adults in mind. Teachers who work with adult learners certainly do not limit themselves to one-way, teacher-centred communication in their classes. Adult education involves various types of communicative situations: one-way presentations, discussions, one-on-one tutorials, and student-led discussions, to name just a few; because of how different these situations are, many of the guidelines we suggest will not be limited to adult education settings only. They can also work well in other contexts, from any workshops or presentations to friendly conversations or preparing audiobooks for people who need Spoken Easy Language.

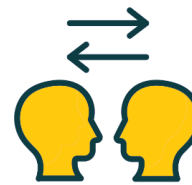
We have already mentioned people who need Spoken Easy Language a few times by now, so we should spell out who these people are. The people who need and use Spoken Easy Language are very diverse. Mainly, it is people with various intellectual disabilities. However, Easy Language is also for people with language disorders, such as aphasia or Developmental Language Disorder. Spoken Easy language can be helpful for people living with dementia. Also, people learning a new language (both for pleasure and because they are migrants or refugees) could benefit from Spoken Easy Language before they achieve a high level of proficiency. Finally, anyone could benefit from Spoken Easy language in certain situations, for example, if they need to communicate under stress. These groups are very different, but we can make the language more accessible to all of them using the same principles.

Spoken interactions can be very different. Researchers tend to distinguish between **one-way communication**, where the speaker speaks, and the other(s) just listen, and two-way communication when both conversation partners are actively

involved. An example of one-way communication could be a presentation, a lecture, or a podcast. **Two-way communication** happens in various contexts; a friendly conversation and a doctor's consultation are examples of two-way communication. Each guideline has a symbol indicating whether it works in one-way or two-way communication. Some of the guidelines work well in both types of situations.



One-way communication



Two-way communication

We also use two words to describe the people you will talk to: “**conversation partner**” and “**listener**.” We use “conversation partner” when discussing two-way communication situations where both (all) people involved are actively participating in the conversation. We use the word “listener” when referring to one-way communication.

When we created these guidelines, we wanted to ensure our suggestions worked. Even though they were all based on our data or published research findings, some of the guidelines seemed to need further investigation. We have identified these guidelines and created a procedure to test them. You can learn about our testing sessions and their results in much more detail [here](#).

We have indicated the guidelines we tested during this project as “SELSI Tested”. You can see the following symbol next to them:



We hope you will find these guidelines helpful and easy to follow. If you are new to Spoken Easy Language, seeing a document this long may initially feel overwhelming. It is a lengthy document, but mostly because we tried to explain each guideline in detail and give examples. Also, while following these guidelines is helpful, they are not hard rules but suggestions for what to consider. If you are coming to a conversation with a positive attitude and an open mind, that is already a very important first step.

The SELSI Team

### 3 Structure of these guidelines

These guidelines are divided into five parts:

- How to engage your conversation partner or listener?
- How to structure your talk?
- How to adapt your language?
- How to use non-verbal communication?
- How to use supporting materials?

Each section presents specific guidelines and provides examples. Little symbols next to the guidelines indicate whether the guideline works in one-way or two-way communication. The guidelines that have been tested with the users of Easy language during the SELSI project are indicated with the following symbol:



## 4 How to engage your conversation partner or listener

Interaction is crucial in oral communication. Communication usually fails if you do not approach your conversation partner or listener with respect, attentiveness, and encouragement. In this section, you will find some guidelines for engaging your communication partner or listener who needs Spoken Easy Language.

### 4.1 How to address your conversation partner

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First, you should consider how you will address your conversation partner. This will affect the atmosphere of the conversation and how well you will manage your conversation partner's or listener's attention. You should aim to take the following steps.

#### 4.1.1 Talk directly to your conversation partner.



If your conversation partner needs support, someone (e.g., a relative or a support person) might be accompanying them. However, it does not matter if your conversation partner is on their own or with someone else; they should remain the person you are talking to. This means:

- a) maintain eye contact with your conversation partner,

- b) physically face the person you are talking to,
- c) talk directly to them instead of saying something about them to the accompanying person.

For example, if you are a doctor visiting a patient who needs Easy Language, talk directly to your patient instead of talking about them to the caregiver.

### 4.1.2 Periodically call your conversation partner by name.



A person feels noticed and important when someone remembers and mentions their name. So repeat your conversation partner's name at least a few times. This will also help you get and keep their attention.

However, make sure using someone's first name in your context is common and natural. For example, being overly familiar with your conversation partner might be problematic in Nordic countries.

### 4.1.3 Address your conversation partner like you would address people without additional communication needs.



While using a person's name can be an effective way to capture their attention, it is essential to consider whether you would address anyone else in a similar context in the same manner. Always take into account the formality level of your conversation. If formal addressing, such as “Sir/Madam,” “Mr. Peterson,” or “Mrs. Smith,” is typical and expected in the given situation, use it. Always consider what is usual and acceptable in your language and culture.

For example, in Finnish or Lithuanian, addressing someone with their surnames and titles is not expected unless the situation is very formal.

#### 4.1.4 Use personal pronouns and possessive pronouns (“you”/“your”).



To show that you are speaking directly to your conversation partner, say “you” or “your”.

For example, instead of saying, “It is possible to sit here,” say, “You can sit here.”

It is worth remembering, though, that in some languages, there is a distinction between a singular “you” and a more polite or more formal “you” (like “tu” and “jūs” in Lithuanian, “tu” and “Lei” in Italian, or “du” and “Sie” in German). If this is the case in your language, make sure you choose the same form you would choose speaking in the same situation with someone who does not need Spoken Easy Language.

#### 4.1.5 Use imperative when giving instructions.



When you want to give an instruction, use imperative.

For example, instead of saying, “More sleep helps people to feel better,” say, “Sleep more. It will make you feel better”.

This way, you can reach your listener or conversation partner more directly.

However, even when using the imperative, remain polite and friendly.

## 4.2 How to get and keep your conversation partner’s/listener’s attention

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If you want to be understood, it is important to maintain your conversation partner’s/listener’s attention. This can be a challenge for a presentation or talk, but it is essential to a successful conversation. Some strategies might be helpful, like personalising your talk, using humour, or asking questions. Consider the following suggestions.

### 4.2.1 Personalise your talk.



If you already know or can get to know your conversation partner, personalise what you say and how you say it.

- a) First, whenever possible, ensure you know your conversation partner's preferred way to start a conversation. Do they prefer to shake hands or maybe wave? What is their cultural background? Do you have to introduce yourself? Pay attention to nonverbal communication. This will help you build a connection with them.
- b) Once you know what strategies work best with your conversation partner, keep the interactions going that way. That is, remember what has led you to successful communication in the past and repeat the successful patterns.
- c) If possible, use topics that are familiar to your conversation partner. For example, if your partner is interested in traveling, try to include some details about travel in your conversations. Speaking about an exciting topic brings speakers closer to each other. However, make sure you do not mention new topics or details out of the blue, as the coherence of a conversation is very important for easy understanding.
- d) In teaching contexts, try to connect new information with topics your listeners are already familiar with. This might be tricky when communicating with groups of people, but if you get a chance to get to know your listeners, this might help.

- e) You can use stories or personal anecdotes. Conveying information in little stories helps your conversation partner or listener keep their attention on what you are saying. Also, remember that examples from everyday life can complement your talk and help one understand more abstract ideas. But do not diverge from the main topic or overuse personal stories.

#### 4.2.2 Use humour when you feel it would be helpful.



Surprisingly, humour is quite a tricky topic in Spoken Easy Language. You can certainly be funny and amusing if you wish to, as the humorous tone of the conversation can make it lighter and more pleasant. Humour can help your conversation partner relax and it can build a stronger rapport between the speaker and the audience. Humour seems to work well for improving focus and helping the listener better understand and remember the information.

However, remember that metaphors, non-literal meanings, and jokes can be challenging to understand, so be careful when using them. Make sure your conversation partner understands the type of humour you are using. If you notice that they have problems understanding it, avoid using the same style of humour in the future.

Humour can work well if you know the group you are talking to and can see their reactions. However, avoiding humour in one-way communication (at least with an unfamiliar audience) might be a good idea.

Also, keep in mind that humour is culturally dependent and sensitive. People have personal preferences for using humour and which types of humour they like, so you should always read the room carefully. While humor can work in certain situations, such as personal conversations, it could also be inappropriate in certain situations, such as social services, health care, etc.

Despite all these things to consider, in our project, Easy Language users who tested this guideline appreciated the use of humour. Integrating a short, topic-relevant joke during our testing session proved to be an effective method for enhancing understanding and engagement among the participants. This approach not only lightened the atmosphere but also facilitated better comprehension and memory retention of the discussed guidelines.

#### 4.2.3 Repeat what you have said in different words.



State and then paraphrase important points of your talk.

For example, if you say, “People should go to work to earn money”, later you can rephrase this statement by saying, “People go to work. If they go to work, they get money. People have to work”.

Ensure you do not repeat everything you say, only the most important points of your talk.

#### 4.2.4 Use questions or question tags to focus your conversation partner’s or listener’s attention.



Questions help to get the attention of your conversation partner or your audience. Before you begin speaking about a topic, you can ask questions such as, “Would you like to hear about ... now?” or “Would you like to know the easiest ways to ...?” Make sure you wait for the answer from your conversation partner before continuing.

Remember that question tags are another way to get and keep your conversation partner’s attention. After you say something, you can include a question tag, such as “You like cats, don’t you?”

Keep in mind that question tags might not be typical in your language. Then, make sure you formulate questions that are typical and natural for your context.

### 4.3 How to encourage your conversation partner

---

Encouraging your conversation partner to participate actively is one of the critical tasks of a person talking to someone who needs Easy Language. If you are in a two-way interaction, you should aim for it to happen two ways. Consider the following recommendations for encouraging your conversation partner to interact with you.

#### 4.3.1 Make sure you are understood.



To ensure that your communication partner understands you, you can ask them to tell you what they now know or to rephrase what you have said.

For example, “Can you tell me in your own words what ...?”.

However, make sure that the conversation does not feel like a test and that your conversation partner does not feel pressured. They should know that they can freely express their difficulty in understanding. If your conversation partner says they do not understand something, ask them to explain what is unclear.

If a group participates in the conversation, you can agree on a discreet sign to show if one person does not understand something. For example, your conversation partners can raise their hands or use a particular card to show they did not understand something you said.

### 4.3.2 Show that you are listening.



Listening is very important. Give your conversation partner feedback about your listening. Use words like “yes,” “oh,” and “okay.” Also, use non-verbal means to show that you listen, such as nodding or keeping eye contact.

### 4.3.3 Show that you understood what your conversation partner has said.



If you understand what your conversation partner says and means, acknowledge it to them.

For example, you can say, “I understood you”, or rephrase what they said.

### 4.3.4 Tell your conversation partner if you find it hard to understand what they have said.



Avoid pretending to understand when you do not. Use direct references to your difficulties in understanding (e.g., “I did not quite understand what you meant”).

However, do not talk about your difficulties in understanding in an aggressive or challenging way.

4.3.5 If you are making an interpretation, present it as an interpretation.



When you make an interpretation of what your conversation partner has said to you, present it as an interpretation or as a guess but not as a conclusion.

Say, for example: “I think you say ..., is that right?”

4.3.6 If you speak in a group, encourage everyone to participate.



Be aware that speaking in a group is often difficult for people who need Spoken Easy Language. You can prepare for this by considering how you will respond to different speakers in the group and encourage them to participate. Also, invite them to interact and share ideas respectfully by listening to each other.

Yet you should try to be considerate, not put people on the spot or challenge them.

Putting individuals with additional communication needs on the spot can lead to

anxiety and stress. They may feel pressure to perform or fear judgment from their peers, which can inhibit their ability to communicate effectively.

## 4.4 How to get feedback from your conversation partner

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### 4.4.1 Ask questions.



You should not expect your conversation partner to actively participate without your effort, especially if your conversation partner needs additional communication support. To involve them in a conversation, you should regularly ask them questions. However, there are some aspects to consider when phrasing your questions. Make sure you:

- a) Ask simple questions. Your questions should be easy to understand and answer. When we tested this guideline, the participants reacted very differently to simple and complex questions. Complex questions kept participants silent and made them avoid eye contact, while simple questions encouraged participation.
- b) Ask one question at a time. In any conversation, it is easier to answer questions when you ask one thing at a time.
- c) Leave enough time to answer your question. Avoid rephrasing the question straight away. Repeating the same question more slowly while the person is

processing information might be more efficient than rephrasing it. Wait before trying to help your conversation partner to answer. Being patient and giving enough time to answer your questions is important. Do not be afraid of silence during the conversation.

- d) Try different ways to ask a question and aim to find what works best for your conversation partner. Suppose a person understands information well but has difficulty answering questions. In that case, it may be easier for them to answer yes/no questions or questions in the either/or format (e.g., “Do you prefer comedies or dramas?”). However, remember that your conversation partner has only two options in such cases. A person might simply repeat the last option given. They might want to agree with you or provide the response they think you are expecting rather than giving their opinion. So, try to ask open-ended questions when possible. For example, instead of asking, “Do you like to watch movies?” say or add, “What kind of movies do you like?”

#### 4.4.2 Ask your conversation partner if they have any questions.



Allow your conversation partner to ask questions. You should not be the only person asking questions. You can encourage them by asking, for example, “And what would you like to ask me?”

### 4.4.3 Ask for feedback.



Ask for direct feedback to involve your conversation partner. For example, ask open questions about what they enjoyed in the talk or what was interesting for them.

### 4.4.4 Encourage your conversation partner to express their opinion.



Show your conversation partners that you are interested in their opinions and do not mind if they disagree. If necessary, offer your conversation partner the opportunity to express their ideas through other means to complement their spoken language. For example, if your conversation partner has difficulty expressing themselves in language, you can encourage them to draw and use pictures, signs, or gestures to help express themselves.

### 4.4.5 Seek to understand the other person's point of view.



It is important not only to ask for the other person's feedback or opinion but also to try to understand their point of view. This is the way to move the conversation forward effectively. Listening is as important as speaking.

## 4.5 How to create a pleasant atmosphere and show respect

---

A safe and pleasant atmosphere is crucial for effective communication, and showing respect is one of the most important parts of this. When preparing for a conversation with someone who needs Spoken Easy Language, consider where you will meet and what you can do to make the meeting environment more comfortable and non-disruptive. Here are some considerations to have in mind.

### 4.5.1 Aim to create a safe atmosphere.



A psychologically safe atmosphere means an environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and free to express themselves without fear of judgment, retribution, or harm. Feeling safe is the basis for any honest communication. So, you should approach the conversation with respect and empathy towards your conversation partner. The Easy Language users we have tested this guideline with saw a safe atmosphere as very important.

### 4.5.2 Try to create a cheerful atmosphere.



A pleasant atmosphere is crucial in a conversation. If possible, make sure your conversation is upbeat. Then, your conversation partner can relax and find your language easier to understand. Note, however, that the topic affects the atmosphere as well. Topics that evoke difficult, sad, angry, or disappointed feelings cannot and should not be discussed in a cheerful atmosphere.

### 4.5.3 Avoid background or visual distractions.



Before meeting with your conversation partner, make sure you can speak in peace. For example, turn off the radio or TV and close the window.

When delivering a class or a workshop, if possible, make sure you have a dedicated silent room where other people will not be coming and going. You can also post a sign that a meeting/class is in progress.

### 4.5.4 Minimise the number of people attending the meeting/class.



The more people participating, the more distractions are possible. It is easier to follow the information and join the conversation with fewer participants, so avoid large groups when possible.

#### 4.5.5 Handle conflict immediately.



If you sense tension or your conversation partner disagrees with you, do not pretend that nothing has happened. Try to clear the tension and solve the problem.

#### 4.5.6 Relax and be natural.



Come to a conversation with a positive attitude. You have the right to all your feelings, including the negative ones, but the interaction goes best when the atmosphere is positive, friendly, and considerate. Try to relax and sound natural. Being helpful and empathetic is more important than remembering and following all the rules of Easy Language.

### 4.6 How to show respect to your conversation partner

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#### 4.6.1 Be respectful and attentive when talking.



Make sure you focus on the conversation and are not distracted. For example, do not look at your phone, think about the errands you still need to run, or engage in other additional tasks during the conversation. Treat your conversation partner who needs Spoken Easy Language with respect as you would treat any conversation partner.

#### 4.6.2 Use age-appropriate language.



Treat an adult conversation partner as an adult. Refrain from infantilising your vocabulary or the way you speak and being patronising.

#### 4.6.3 Include your conversation partner as an equal.



Thank your conversation partner for their input and for any new information they provide. Tell them that it is new for you and that you appreciate it.

4.6.4 Respect your conversation partner's opinion.



Avoid judging the topic your conversation partner wants to talk about or brings up.

4.6.5 Be patient and give your conversation partner enough time to present their opinion.



Give your conversation partner time to think and answer. Let them finish, and do not talk over them.

For example, if you see a person thinking about something and formulating ideas in their head, pause and avoid interrupting the silence.

4.6.6 Before talking on behalf of someone, make sure to have their consent.



With people who need Easy Language, you may find yourself in situations where you need to speak on someone's behalf. If you need to speak on someone's behalf, ask them if they are fine with it and communicate their point of view, not yours.

## 5 How to structure your talk

Structuring your talk is especially important in one-way communication, such as teaching classes, audiobooks, podcasts, etc. Structured talk simply means that you know the steps of your talk in advance and can tell your listener what will happen. Structured talk also means that you can break it into parts and present the information in small portions, summarising the already given information before each new step.

There are situations where two-way communication also benefits from a clear structure, like if you are running a seminar or a meeting.

Keep in mind that friendly conversations usually do not need strong structuring. For example, if you are chatting with someone, try to give the floor for your conversation partner to take the conversation forward in whichever direction they want.

### 5.1 How to start your talk

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#### 5.1.1 Introduce yourself to the listener.



If your listeners do not know you, consider presenting yourself.

5.1.2 Tell the listener what topic you will be talking about.



It is a good idea to introduce the topic early on. Then, your listener can anticipate what to expect.

5.1.3 Inform your listener in advance about what is going to happen.



Set expectations for your listener by explaining what you will do now and what the next one or two steps will be. People like to know what will happen ahead of time.

For example, if you are giving a presentation, present your listener with a plan for your talk. If you are in a meeting, tell the others what the structure of the meeting will be like and how long the meeting is estimated to take.

5.1.4 Introduce the listener to the main concepts of your talk.



Think about an outline, concepts, and vocabulary of your talk. Explain difficult words and discuss the main ideas which you will be using.

For example, if you are talking about the government, explain what “government”, “prime minister”, “minister”, and other essential concepts mean.

#### 5.1.5 Start by talking about what the listener already knows.



At the beginning of your talk, speak about the content familiar to your listener(s). If necessary, check what background knowledge they already have. If you are preparing content for listeners with no possibility of immediate feedback (like for news broadcasts), learn as much as possible about your listeners in advance.

## 5.2 How to structure information

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When preparing your talk, you should always consider how to present your ideas clearly. Here is some advice that can help you organise your talk.

#### 5.2.1 Organize information according to its importance.



Give the main information first. Then, you can follow up with the details.

For example, if preparing the news broadcast, you can give the primary information in the title and chronologically organise the whole news item.

### 5.2.2 Structure your narrative in a predictable way.



When telling a story or for any narrative, use structures that are prototypical, familiar, and easy to predict. Make sure your thoughts follow a very clear structure.

### 5.2.3 Follow a natural chronological order of events.



You should avoid jumping from one event or fact to another or using flashbacks during the talk. Tell about one event or fact and then move to another; start talking from the oldest ones and proceed to the newest. In other words, produce a linear text. This is especially important for telling stories.

### 5.2.4 If talking about the future/possible future, specify when exactly a particular event will occur.



When discussing the future, be specific about when the event will occur.

For example, if we tell people we should prepare for the flight, it does not mean the plane will take off immediately. When talking about a doctor's appointment, say if it's happening tomorrow or in a few weeks, on a specific date. When discussing a job interview, specify the date when it is planned to avoid confusion: inform if it's scheduled for next week or next month.

Keep in mind that many languages use rather complex linguistic structures when discussing the possible future, which tends to be difficult to avoid. In those cases, also try to give a clear timeline and explain what might happen and when.

## 5.3 How to guide your conversation partner through a discussion or a talk

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### 5.3.1 Use signposts.



Signpost language is the words you can use to tell the people what you have been or will be discussing. Use organising words to help your listener predict what information will follow.

For example, you can say: “First of all, I will talk about...”, “Then I will talk about...”, “Finally, I will talk about...”

### 5.3.2 Present information in smaller portions and explicitly signal transitions between topics.



It is easier for your listener to process the information if you break it down into smaller pieces. You can indicate that one topic is finished and you are moving to another by saying: “I have finished talking about... Now I will talk about ...” or “Now let’s talk about...”

However, this guideline might work better for some groups than for others. In our testing sessions, signalling the transition between the topics was important for people with intellectual disabilities but not for people with dementia.

### 5.3.3 Briefly summarise the content at each step.



When you break the information into smaller parts, it is a good idea to briefly summarise each one before starting a new one.

5.3.4 When you give instructions, break them down into simple steps and allow the person to finish one small step before giving directions for another step.



It may be difficult to remember more than one step and follow it. Breaking the directions into small and easy steps and giving them one by one with enough time to finish the previous one before going on may be beneficial. Also, make sure you give directions for every step your listener needs to take, not leaving anything to be inferred.

For example, if you're instructing someone to make a sandwich, start with "Take two slices of bread," and wait until they've completed that step before saying, "Now take the peanut butter and a knife," before going to "Spread peanut butter on one slice."

5.3.5 When you give a person options, limit them to 2 or 3.



When giving choices, limit the choices to 2 or (at maximum) 3; otherwise, the choice might become confusing. You can also use pictures or colours to help the person remember their options.

## 5.4 How to emphasise the important information

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### 5.4.1 Use intonation to make the important information stand out.



You can emphasise the main points of the statement with your voice. However, avoid unnaturally strong emphasis. For example, you can emphasise the key events by slightly raising your voice pitch or increasing your volume.

### 5.4.2 Announce important topics.



If you find parts of your talk particularly important, you can emphasise that by explicitly saying that specific information is important.

For example, you are introducing an online portal with a personal account. When giving instructions on logging into an online account, you can say, “And now I am going to tell you how to log into your account.”

### 5.4.3 Indicate keywords as you speak.



Repeat the main terms, emphasise that the listener should remember them, and ask questions regarding these keywords. You can also use pictures, objects, sounds, and writings that illustrate the keywords and help your listener to keep them in mind.

### 5.4.4 Repeat and summarise important information.



Frequently repeat and summarise the most important information during the conversation. Also, make sure you repeat the most important things after the conversation.

### 5.4.5 Give the listener important information in written form that they can read afterwards.



You can always summarise the main points of your talk in writing and/or in pictures and give it to your listener afterwards.

When you do not directly see your listener, like in a radio broadcast or an audiobook, you can direct listeners to a website or provide a follow-up link where they can find a written summary of the main points presented in the audio content. In any situation, ensure that the written information is in Easy Language.

## 6 How to adapt your language

Engaging your conversation partner or listener and ensuring that your message is well-structured is important. However, adapting your language is also crucial. This chapter will give you guidelines on choosing the words you use and constructing your sentences to give yourself the best chance of being understood. These guidelines will be equally applicable in one-way and two-way communication.

These guidelines for Spoken Easy Language are based on the same principles as those for written Easy Language. However, spoken language differs from written language, so not everything will be the same.

Keep in mind that you should aim to sound natural when speaking in Spoken Easy Language, so don't try to change your usual way of speaking too much.

### 6.1 How to choose easier words

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The choice of words you use when speaking significantly affects if you are easy to understand. In this section, you will find advice on choosing words to make your language easily comprehensible. Of course, it might be easier to follow all the advice when you are preparing a speech or a presentation. In a spontaneous conversation, you might find it difficult to keep all the requirements in your head; however, you will have a chance of getting immediate feedback from your conversation partner, and you should be able to adapt to them quite naturally. With some practice, you should find it easier to adjust your language, even in spontaneous conversations.

Here are the recommendations on how to adapt your vocabulary.

### 6.1.1 Use common and everyday words.



You should use simple and frequent words. As we hear and read them very often, frequent words are the easiest and quickest ones for all language users to recognise and understand. Frequent words are usually also short.

For example, say “give” instead of “provide”.

### 6.1.2 Replace long and complex words that do not have a shorter synonym with a combination of several shorter words that express the same meaning.



Do not aim to use the fewest words possible. Sometimes, it is easier for a listener to understand two or three short words than one long and complex word.

For example, instead of “We are learning to collaborate”, say “We are learning to work together”.

### 6.1.3 Explain more complex words through examples and provide crucial details.



Some words are rare and complex, but you cannot replace them with simpler words since there are no synonyms. In such cases, you do not necessarily have to avoid using those words, but you can explain them. However, avoid explaining with complex terminology or providing encyclopedic definitions. Giving everyday examples usually works best.

For example: “Some young people attend **vocational schools**. In these vocational schools, young people can get professions. For example, they can learn to be chefs, hairdressers, or construction workers.”

### 6.1.4 Replace abstract concepts with concrete words.



Concrete words are easier to visualise and comprehend than abstract ones.

Concrete nouns refer to tangible objects, such as a book, a table, or a clock. On the contrary, abstract words are related to broad and subjective concepts, such as freedom or identity.

Avoiding abstract words will not always be possible if you are discussing more complex topics. However, when it is possible to avoid abstract words, try to make the sentences as concrete as possible.

We often use abstract terms to refer to specific groups of objects or things. After using an abstract term, you can give examples that identify concrete representatives of that group.

For example, “wear masks on **public transport**. This means you must wear masks **on a bus or a train**.”

6.1.5 Replace rare international words with their corresponding words in your language or explain the international words in an easier language.



There are many international words (such as *bar*, *bank*, *museum*) in any language that are so common people have no difficulties understanding them. You can use them when speaking in Spoken Easy Language, and you should not worry about them. However, less frequent loan words (such as "simpoziumas" in Lithuanian, which means “a symposium”) can complicate text comprehension. In this case, try to choose words from your language or explain rare loan words.

Testing this guideline has shown that some people listening to Easy Language do not mind international words and claim to know them, while others prefer avoiding them. So, always think about what your listeners will be familiar with.

### 6.1.6 Use words or phrases that have literal meanings.



Figurative language (such as metaphors, irony, sarcasm, and idioms) is more difficult to understand than phrases that have literal meanings. People who struggle with language comprehension might also find it challenging to understand figurative meanings. We tend to think that figurative language is primarily characteristic of fiction texts, such as poems or novels. However, if we examine our everyday language closely, we will find quite a few expressions with figurative meanings. It is better to rephrase them and choose easier literal phrases.

Note that sometimes, you cannot avoid the metaphor if you want to convey a specific meaning properly. For example, it was very common to use war-related metaphors when talking about the coronavirus (e.g. *Fighting the coronavirus*). In these cases, you should not aim to avoid the metaphor at any cost. If you use figurative language or sayings, choose the most common ones in everyday language.

## 6.2 How to express your ideas clearly

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6.2.1 Avoid using synonyms (two words with the same meaning) for the same concept in one conversation/speech.



When using Spoken Easy Language, aim for simple vocabulary. Avoid referring to the most important concepts of your talk with synonyms, especially for more complex or abstract core words. The fewer different words you use, the easier it is for your listener or conversation partner.

For example, if the text discusses the president, do not use the word “president” interchangeably with its synonyms, such as “the head of the state.”

When choosing which synonym to use, aim for the more common one. For example, say “home address” rather than “residence address”.

### 6.2.2 Avoid using long lists.



Avoid long lists if they contain too much detailed information and pressure the listener to understand and remember every point. You can, however, specify a difficult word or a concept with a short list of easy, concrete words.

For example: “A political initiative means an initiative taken by a member of parliament, a member of the government, a high-ranking official of a ministry or administration, a non-governmental organisation or an individual active citizen.”

In learning environments, when conveying information that benefits from clarity and organisation, consider using verbal cues or pauses to break down and enumerate lists, making it easier for learners to process. This way, the information is presented more clearly without overwhelming the listener.

### 6.2.3 Avoid names or titles that are not essential.



Unknown proper nouns (names or titles) may hinder comprehension. Of course, you should not avoid names or titles in all cases. However, you should always consider whether the proper names are necessary or if they are presented solely as context or additional details that can easily be omitted.

For example, instead of saying, “Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine established a partnership through the so-called Lublin Triangle alliance”, say, “Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine strengthened their relations”.

### 6.2.4 Explain acronyms (abbreviations).



Use only the abbreviated names that your listener is familiar with. However, even when you think that the abbreviated names are known to your listener or are widely

used in society, it is worth explaining those acronyms the first time you use them or checking the listener's understanding. Even such frequent acronyms as NATO, USA, or EU may not be obvious to each listener and may require explanation at least at the beginning of the talk.

#### 6.2.5 Replace large numbers and percentages with simpler words and approximations.



Avoid specific numbers when they are not essential. Percentages and large numbers, especially with fractions, seem especially difficult. Try replacing them with more common words, such as: “a few”, “many”, “half”, etc. Also, make sure you do not use too much numerical information in one sentence.

For example, instead of “Last year, 10,000 foreign visitors visited this museum”, say “Last year, many people from other countries visited this museum”.

There might be cases where you cannot avoid numbers as they are the key to the information you communicate. For example, if you are broadcasting the news, you can give the numbers, but make sure you are using only the key numeric information. You can also explain the numbers by comparing them to something well-known for your listener.

### 6.2.6 Use clear analogies.



Analogies are essentially comparisons between two things used for explaining. So you can compare something more difficult to understand to something more obvious and well-known. You should think about metaphors that would be easy to follow for your conversation partner or listener. Make sure you are not making your ideas more complicated instead of clarifying them.

For example: “If you take expired medicine, it is a little like eating spoiled food. It doesn’t give you the benefit you need and can even hurt you.”

### 6.2.7 If giving advice or instructions, phrase them positively.



People usually understand instructions better when they get advice on what to do rather than what not to do.

For example, instead of “Please do not be late”, say “Please come on time.”

However, while the general rule is to formulate instructions positively, there might be situations where doing so makes the sentence more complex and difficult to

follow. In these situations, do not stick to the rule blindly. Remember that the key is for your listener to understand and follow the instructions easily.

Also, accuracy is the most important factor in instructions for taking medications or other matters potentially influencing one's health or safety. In these cases, if you have to phrase instructions negatively, do not hesitate to do so.

### 6.3 How to simplify your sentences

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When you speak in Easy Language, it is not enough to choose common words; you should also think about how you phrase your sentences. Spoken language differs from written language: spoken sentences are usually naturally shorter and easier to follow than written ones, but focus on keeping them short and simple. Choosing easy sentences when speaking may be difficult because the choices are made quickly and instinctively. Here are some suggestions to consider.

#### 6.3.1 Speak in short sentences.



Short sentences are easier to understand. So, always think about how long your sentence is. Try to:

- a) Express one idea in one sentence. You should aim for grammatically correct and complete sentences. You should formulate your ideas very clearly and concisely.
- b) Divide long sentences into parts so that each has one subject and predicate.
- c) Avoid phrases embedded in the middle of the sentence. The message becomes difficult to understand when new ideas are embedded in a sentence. Aim for more but simpler sentences.

For example, instead of “The workshop that we will go to tomorrow will be about online communication.” say, “We will go to the workshop tomorrow. This workshop will be about online communication”.

A few longer or slightly more complex sentences here and there might not pose issues, but most sentences should be short and simple.

Note that this guideline mostly applies to presentations, radio podcasts or audiobooks where the text is prepared in advance and potentially more complex. In everyday situations and spontaneous conversations, incomplete sentences are common and do not necessarily cause any problems in comprehension. Also, our sentences tend to be short and easy to follow anyway. You should not aim for all the complete phrases in spontaneous conversations, as you will simply sound unnatural.

### 6.3.2 Avoid reduced clauses or leaving out words.



Any parts of the sentence that are left out or implied require additional work from your listener. Make sure you use complete sentences.

For example, instead of “Remember to make lunch, pack and clean”, say, “Remember to make lunch, pack it for school and then clean the table”.

### 6.3.3 Choose active voice over passive voice.



Active voice constructions (e.g., “Jonas wrote a book”) tend to be easier to understand than passive voice sentences (e.g., “The book was written by Jonas”). While you will find various guidelines suggesting avoiding using the passive voice, some researchers are now questioning whether this recommendation is grounded. It seems that the passive voice in itself might not be particularly tricky, but it is more common in writing than in spoken language. Also, writers tend to overuse it or use it to obfuscate the meaning of the message. Then, it becomes problematic. So there is no problem with a few passive constructions in your presentation or speech, but make sure you are not overusing them and that they have an actual function. Otherwise, choose active constructions.

For example, instead of “You will be given information about the trip”, say, “We will give you the information about the trip”.

Our testing also indicated that the guideline of avoiding passive voice is somewhat controversial. Our participants with intellectual disabilities saw using the active voice as helpful. In contrast, people with dementia did not see any difference between using or avoiding the passive voice in radio news. However, if you aim to be easy to follow for various audiences, the active voice might be a safer choice for spoken communication.

#### 6.3.4 Stick to the usual word order.



Sentences following the usual word order are easier to understand. For example, the typical word order in many languages is subject-verb-object or who did what to whom.

Although some languages can be claimed to have a free word order, there is still a common and dominant word order in sentences. This is the word order your listener will expect. If the speaker follows this order, it tends to make it easier for listeners to understand the sentences.

#### 6.3.5 Be considerate when using pronouns.



Pronouns are words that refer to people or things (e.g., “I”, “you”, “she”, “this”).

Your listener has to figure out what or who the pronoun stands for, so be careful not to use too many pronouns. Pronouns such as “I” or “you” are easy to understand, but some other pronouns may cause problems. So you should:

- a) Make sure you do not use too many third-person pronouns (e.g., “he”, “she”, “they”, “it”). It is easier to follow if you repeat the same noun instead.
- b) For example, instead of “Everything starts with education. It is the basis of a successful country,” say, “Everything starts with education. Education is the basis of a successful country.”
- c) Better repeat the person's name instead of the pronoun, especially when your conversation partner or listener is already familiar with that name.

Understanding the pronoun is not difficult if you talk about one person at a time. But when you talk about more than one person, consider if they are easy to identify for your conversation partner or listener. For example, instead of “Martin is happy to be here. The girls are also happy to be here. They are thrilled!” say “Martin is happy to be here. The girls are also happy to be here. Martin and the girls are thrilled!”

- d) Context is very important for understanding the pronouns. If a pronoun is far from the noun it refers to, repeat the noun instead of using the pronoun.



## 7 How to use non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication contributes a lot to spoken communication. Facial expressions, gestures, body position, tone of voice, eye contact, etc., make communication easier. Non-verbal communication is often unintentional. Still, it can offer much information about people talking and situations in which the interaction occurs. This section will advise how and when to use non-verbal communication.

### 7.1 How to speak

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It is important not only what we say but also how we say things. When talking to your conversation partner, try to be calm and natural. Here are a few examples of how you should use your voice. Keep in mind that these recommendations would work well not only for two-way communication, such as conversations but also for one-way interactions, such as giving presentations. Also, they can be applied when preparing audiobooks or other recordings in Spoken Easy Language.

#### 7.1.1 Talk slowly and clearly but naturally.



You should talk slower, and your voice should be audible, especially if you are speaking with someone who is not a native speaker of your language. However,

avoid speaking too loudly, as your conversation partner or listener might find it annoying or patronising.

Clear articulation is also crucial to our conversation partners and listeners. It is difficult for people to understand what we say if we speak quietly, articulate poorly, mumble, or bite off the end of words or phrases. However, do not overdo it. Overarticulation can make listening and understanding even more difficult.

In our testing sessions, all participants appreciated slow and clear speech. As we have tested this guideline for audiobooks, we also saw a lot of variation in the preferred speed. Recordings that some people preferred seemed too slow or monotonous for others. If the speaker speaks very slowly, it helps some listeners follow the story, while others lose track if the pace is too slow.

Also, remember that you can achieve a slower pace by pronouncing the words slowly or pausing more. Our testing participants preferred the latter.

#### 7.1.2 Use a suitable intonation.



Pitch and tone of voice allow us to convey different meanings. For example, saying “no” in a soft or harsh, low voice has different meanings. Changing the tone of speech in a conversation helps keep the listener’s or conversation partner’s attention. However, do not exaggerate the intonation, as when the intonation varies

too much, it becomes a challenge to understand the information. It can also be perceived as childish or inauthentic, or even more, it could make your listener or conversation partner agitated.

### 7.1.3 Avoid an interrogative tone when asking something.



When you are trying to encourage your conversation partner to participate, you may ask them questions. If you do so, avoid an interrogative tone. Keep your voice light and conversational. Ask questions in a prosodically versatile and varied voice, and do not pressure your conversation partner to answer immediately.

### 7.1.4 Avoid speaking in a monotone voice.



Monotone speech is boring and unnatural. Speaking in a monotone voice is hardly possible in spontaneous conversations. However, if you prepare voice recordings, such as audiobooks, make sure your voice is not monotone. If the person reading a text changes their tone, it helps the listeners keep up with the text.

Our testing showed that participants perceived the speaker negatively and found them unengaging when they spoke in a monotone voice.

#### 7.1.5 Speak calmly and avoid speaking too emotionally.



Speak calmly and be patient. This will make your conversation partner or listener feel comfortable, equal, and involved. You can communicate your emotions by the way you speak as you would in any other conversation. However, do not exaggerate. If you read a text for an audio recording, be calm and use a moderate tone. While excessive dramatisation might be disturbing and hinder comprehension, some emotions in the recording might not be a bad idea. However, reading emotionally may work better in some contexts than in others.

Our testing participants who listened to the radio news found neutral presentations more appealing. In such contexts, where conveying information is critical, the reader's possible sympathies or antipathies regarding the content must not affect the reading. However, our participants who listened to audiobooks had different opinions. Some preferred the emotional reading (not exaggerated) as it kept them more engaged. Others wanted to hear the neutral voice and create mental images for themselves. Potentially, these differences were due to people's different listening habits.

### 7.1.6 Speak slower to emphasise important information.



Speaking slower, you can prosodically separate important information from the rest of the speech. Complement it with clear emphasis and intonation variation, but do not use unnaturally strong prosody.

However, this guideline will be more useful in some contexts than others. Our testing showed that emphasising information by slowing down when narrating a story might not be helpful and that it is easy to overdo it. However, our participants agreed that in presentations, when talking about facts or new information, slowing down for emphasis might be beneficial.

## 7.2 How to use pauses

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Pauses are essential in interaction since they enable us to separate meaningful units in a natural speech flow or let us make turns in a conversation. Consider your pauses carefully if you read a text out loud for an audiobook or any other recording.

### 7.2.1 Make pauses between texts or parts of the text.



If you read texts, make very clear pauses when a text or its part finishes. They will help your listener structure the text. Pauses become essential in texts without headings, where misunderstandings can easily occur. The pause should last about 3 seconds or be so long that the reader understands that a new piece of text (e.g., a new poem, short new story, or new chapter) follows.

### 7.2.2 Make pauses between speech units.



When speaking, make pauses between different speech units (phrases or ideas). This will help give your listener a clear clue about the end of each unit. However, do not exaggerate. Be aware that pauses which are too marked steal attention and make the text difficult to understand.

Our testing participants appreciated pauses between clauses or sentences. However, testing showed that a speaker should be cautious not to pause for too long, as the meaning gets lost, and the listener has to exert a lot of energy in remembering what was said before.

### 7.2.3 Make pauses to add emphasis to key points.



You can use a pause to emphasise important information. Make long pauses before or after you say something you wish to emphasise.

For example, when discussing a healthy diet, you can say: “Now I will tell you what to eat if you want to follow a healthy diet [PAUSE]. I will show you the different foods and drinks you should consume daily or over a week [PAUSE].”

#### 7.2.4 Make time for breaks.



Sometimes, you may need to give your conversation partner or listener a break during longer conversations or presentations.

For example, if you deliver a workshop or a presentation that takes longer than people can focus, make sure you split it into parts and give people a chance to walk around or simply rest for a bit.

### 7.3 How to use your body language

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Your body language can help your conversation partner or listener understand you better. It can also make your conversation partner or listener feel better. Here are some recommendations that can be helpful.

### 7.3.1 Accompany your talk with gestures.



Spontaneous hand gestures, especially illustrators (such as indicating the size or the shape of the object you are talking to), regulators (like head nods), and body movement can help you be more effective.

You can use various gestures to make your talk easier to follow. For example:

- a) Pointing. When explaining directions, you can point in the direction you are referring to. For instance, if you're describing where a landmark is located, you can point in that direction.
- b) Size or quantity. If you're discussing something big or small, you can use your hands to show the size. For example, you can stretch your arms apart to indicate a large object and bring the arms close together to signify something small.
- c) Counting. When discussing a series of steps or items, you can use your fingers to count them off one by one, making it easier for the listener to follow along.
- d) Emphasis. Gestures can emphasise key points. For instance, you can use a raised finger gesture while saying, "This is important," to emphasise the significance of the information.
- e) Describing shapes. You can use your hands to outline shapes in the air when discussing shapes. For example, you can trace a square or circle to help the listener visualise it.

- f) Agreement or Disagreement. You can nod or shake your head while speaking to express agreement or disagreement with what you're saying or hearing.

In our testing session, when the speaker demonstrated what they were explaining, the listeners were more engaged and mirrored the speaker's behavior. The group was less active when the speaker did not demonstrate but just verbally explained the topic; participants were only looking at the speaker. In the follow-up discussion, the speaker claimed that it was also easier for them to use gestures actively, as this helped them to stay more engaged.

However, while using gestures is helpful, do not move excessively. Too many variations of gestures can be excessive and counterproductive. Your gestures should be natural and not exaggerated. Also, you should consider how much people typically gesture in your culture. For example, hand gestures are much more common in Italian than in Lithuanian conversations.

### 7.3.2 Be aware and consciously use natural gestures understood across cultures.



Natural gestures are partly culture-dependent. For instance, hands are moved less in some cultures and languages than in many others. What is natural is thus relative.

In a learning or similar environment, using natural gestures broadly understood across cultures is essential to ensure effective communication. Some examples of such gestures could be:

- a) Thumbs Up. This gesture generally signifies approval or agreement and is widely recognised as a positive sign across most cultures.
- b) Raised Eyebrows. Raising your eyebrows can convey surprise, curiosity, or emphasis and is generally recognised as such.
- c) Putting Hand to Ear. Placing your hand to your ear can indicate a request for someone to speak louder or clarify what they say.
- d) Hand Waving. Waving your hand can be a friendly and universally understood way to get someone's attention or say goodbye.

These culturally neutral gestures can facilitate understanding and engage conversation partners or listeners from diverse backgrounds. However, it is essential to remain mindful of potential cultural differences and sensitivities.

7.3.3 Observe the body language of your conversation partner or listener and try to adapt to it.



Always try to adapt to your conversation partner or listener (in cases where they are physically present) to ensure they feel comfortable.

For example, if your conversation partner avoids eye contact, you should not try too hard to hold it. The body language of your conversation partner or listener can also help you notice if they do not feel comfortable or do not understand something.

#### 7.3.4 Compensate for the lack of informative facial expressions covered by a mask with body language elements.



If you must wear a mask, think of other communication elements, such as gestures, that you can enhance to compensate for the covered part of your face.

#### 7.3.5 Use body language to create a kind and inclusive atmosphere.



Your body language can also contribute to the atmosphere of the conversation. For example, giving a handshake might make your conversation partner feel important, which can be helpful throughout the interaction. Smiling or nodding to show you are following might also help create a positive experience in a conversation.



## 8 How to use supporting materials: Visual, auditory, and other support

How you express your ideas through language, gestures, and tone of voice is important. However, supporting materials and the environment in which the conversation occurs are important in oral communication. In this section, you will find some guidelines on using supportive materials when speaking to people who need Easy Language or providing them with audiovisual materials.

### 8.1 When to use visual aids

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#### 8.1.1 Use visuals to explain difficult words or phrases.



8.1.2 Use visuals to show what is allowed and what is prohibited.



<https://www.learningdisabilityservice-leeds.nhs.uk/easy-on-the-i/image-bank/>

8.1.3 Use visual aids to give instructions.



Describe each step orally and also show a picture of it. This could help your listener to complete their tasks. Let your listeners take the visual aid with them.

For example, a recipe instruction can be complemented with pictures:



First, wash tomatoes while holding them under running water.

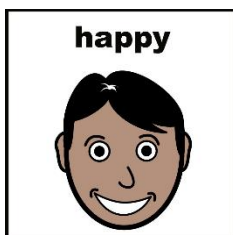


Then, dry the tomatoes with a clean cloth towel.

#### 8.1.4 Use visual aids to show emotions or feelings.



This imagery can help you say what you want and help your conversation partner or listener express their feelings.



<https://www.learningdisabilityservice-leeds.nhs.uk/easy-on-the-i/image-bank/>

### 8.1.5 Use visual aids to present choices.



Incorporate visual aids to help your conversation partner or listener to remember their options.



<https://www.freepik.com/>



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<https://pixabay.com/>

### 8.1.6 If someone cannot speak, find out if they want to communicate by other means.



Check beforehand if and what kind of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools/devices your conversation partner uses. For example, you might use drawing or writing, pictures, maps, communication books, or sign language.

## 8.2 How to use visual aids

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### 8.2.1 Use clear visual materials.



The materials you are using must be easy to understand. Also, make sure all the content in the visual elements has a clear connection to your talk. It is essential that the visual materials, like photos, do not contain more information than you are already giving in your talk. Things like irrelevant details in the background can steal your conversation partner's attention.

### 8.2.2 Adapt the visual support to the environment/experience of your listener.



It is always easier to understand information if you can think concretely about it. So, if you can take photos similar to your listener's context, do so.

For example, when giving instructions, take photos of the place where your listener lives, works, or studies.

### 8.2.3 Adapt the mode of presenting visual support to your listener's needs.



There are several ways to present visual aids. For example, you can use laminated cards or pictures on your tablet/mobile phone. Try different options and choose the one that best suits your listener.

8.2.4 Use the objects around you while you talk.



The objects around you can also help you illustrate what you are saying.

For example, if you talk about time, point to a clock.

8.2.5 Create new connections as you talk: you may use supporting materials for this.



You can present objects and relate them to specific terms or concepts. Later on, you could position the objects according to the ideas that you express.

For example, suppose you present abstract concepts such as the past, present, and future to your conversation partner or listener. In that case, you may use pictures of

a baby, a toddler, a teenager and an adult to explain the connection between them and how time affects them. These objects result in a relatively clear everyday analogy.

#### 8.2.6 Support visual aids with sensory exploration.



Invite your conversation partners to tactilely explore the environment or objects you are talking about.

For example:

- If you are talking about a particular object, have your listener or conversation partner touch it.
- If you introduce uncommon materials, e.g., velvet or suede, you can bring their samples and let your conversation partners touch them.
- When discussing art objects, you can make the student touch different materials with different textures and temperatures (e.g., marble vs wood). Also, touching tools that have never been used can be helpful (e.g., a folding meter stick) and be an exciting experience.
- If you are discussing geographical features like mountains, plains, and bodies of water, you can use tactile maps or models. Create a tactile map with raised areas for mountains and flat areas for plains, and incorporate materials like

sandpaper or felt to represent different textures. Allow the learners to explore the map with their fingers, feeling the differences in elevation and texture.

- You can also involve other senses (like olfactory and gustatory) for the multisensory learning experience.

### 8.2.7 Write down the keywords.



If your listener can read, write down the most important words of your talk as you speak. This can help your listener to remember and absorb the information better.

### 8.2.8 Represent visually the main line of the argument.



You can draw a scheme of the main argument you are making.

For example, use lines and/or boxes. If you are talking about types of chocolate, you can say, “There are three main types of chocolate: dark, white, and milk chocolate” while sketching this idea on a board or a sheet of paper:





If you are creating a sound recording, the sound should be loud and clear enough to be heard on various devices. You should also avoid sound fluctuations or other disturbances. Also, avoid sharp treble sounds in recording and pronunciation. Sounds like “s” and “k” can be disturbing due to wrong recording settings.

### 8.3.2 Avoid extraneous sounds in the recording.



Side rustling, coughing, and background noise make the audio difficult to understand. Make sure your recording includes only the necessary sounds. Sometimes, even sounds like the narrator's breathing can be disturbing. Some listeners are much more sensitive to noise than others, and so, for some people, such sounds can be an absolute dealbreaker, preventing them from continuing to listen.

### 8.3.3 When the recording contains language, make sure it is an Easy Language.



You should ensure that any language (spoken or written) in audio or video recordings is Easy Language.

#### 8.3.4 Use natural voice (or high-quality synthesised speech) in audio recordings.



Using natural voice would probably be your first choice if you are creating audio materials, such as audiobooks. However, with voice synthesizers improving and listeners getting used to synthesised voices, you can also use synthesised voices. In those cases, ensure you follow the same rules as for natural voice recordings.

In our testing session, the participants who were not used to speech synthesis said they preferred natural voices. However, those more used to listening to synthesised speech praised that it is possible to listen to any text with speech synthesis.

Note, however, that if you use synthesised speech, aim for high-quality options. Speech synthesisers, at least for some languages, are now available for special needs (e.g., making a very slow reading sound natural), so make sure you use those when appropriate.

#### 8.3.5 If you use synthesised speech, consider providing a choice of voice.



If you use synthesized speech, ideally, you should give your listeners a choice of which voice they want to listen to. Consider offering female and male voices; you can also use the voices of people of different ages.

Our participants claimed they strongly preferred some readers rather than others when it came to choosing which audiobooks to listen to, and sometimes they even quit reading (listening) if they did not like the voice.

#### 8.3.6 Allow for adjustment of speed.



Some people prefer slow speech, while others find a slow pace hard to listen to because they lose focus. However, for many users of Easy language, the default speed of many audio recordings today is too fast. Apart from individual preferences, even one person can need different speeds of a recording due to different circumstances: when searching for something in a text, you like to skim read (skim listen), while if you need to understand a complex text, you might need it to be read for you at a slower pace.

If you are recording narrations in Easy Language, keep in mind that from the technical perspective, it is relatively easy to increase the speed, and the recording

remains clear. However, slowing down a fast recording automatically changes the sound quality, making it unnatural. So, aiming for a slower recording that can be speeded up if needed seems to be the best option.

### 8.3.7 Offer a text transcript.



Some listeners prefer using both ears and eyes when reading audiobooks, so always consider offering a text transcript alongside the audio recording. For some, it will make the reading easier and enhance the understanding.

### 9 Final remarks

We have written these guidelines by putting together ideas from hundreds of sources, our surveys with people who speak Spoken Easy Language and our own experience with Spoken Easy Language. We hope this attempt to synthesise many suggestions, test them, and group them logically has proven useful. We also hope that after reading these guidelines, you feel more confident and relaxed about using Spoken Easy Language. Now, you can keep learning from each conversation you have and each conversation partner you speak with in Easy Language.

However, a few words of caution are needed here. None of the recommendations on how to speak in Spoken Easy Language is universal: there is always the factor of individuality. Each conversation partner may have different background knowledge, personality, and capabilities. They will all come from various contexts. For example, one person may hear some words very often and understand them easily, but this does not mean that the other person will be as familiar with those words as well. Both you and your conversation partner will make each conversation unique. Therefore, empathising with your conversation partner as much as possible is necessary, even if you do not know them well. Always remember the cultural and linguistic identity of the conversation partner or listener. Always pay attention to their reactions to what you say to them. They may help you adapt how you speak to that specific situation. Remember that your conversation partner and their needs are more important than strictly following any rules for spoken Easy Language.

If you want to learn more about speaking in Easy Language and see some interactive examples, check out our online [tool](#)!

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