

TIPS

for producing



'Children

documents

Before you start writing...

Decide on whether you want to produce a **literal translation** in a children friendly format - or, whether you want to produce children friendly **summaries**.

- Children friendly versions are sometimes preferred when organisations feel children should have access to the **same** information as anyone else.
- However, they tend to become very long documents. Children friendly summaries of documents may be more appropriate depending on the context.
- You may want to consider a combination depending on the sort of documents you are producing, particularly if they will then be translated into another language.
- On the final document, state whether it is a summary or a literal translation.

Be clear about the **age group** you are targeting and state this on the document. You may want to produce different versions for different age categories i.e. 12-15 year olds and 15-18 year olds.

Know your **target group**, it is important to find out about the children and young people who will eventually read the document you are trying to produce, it may be useful to find out:



- age-range: if possible find out whether children fit into categories of 3-5 years (i.e. aged 10-13, 14-18 etc.)
- educational background
- language (will it be the same language as the document you are producing or will the document need to be translated)
- gender
- urban/rural background
- disability, particularly visual impairment

Read a few **children's books** for the age group you are writing for. This should help you get into the thinking of the age group.

When you start writing...

Start by asking 'what do children **need to know** about the subject?'

- It is useful to look at the issue (or the document you are working from) with the eyes of a child
- Ask yourself what is relevant to children reading this and what would they want to know and expect to read about in the children friendly document.
- For example, children may not need to know about complicated procedural issues if they are not involved in the procedures.

Produce a **summary**, if you are working from an original document it is worth producing a summary of the information that needs to be conveyed to children.

- It is easy to lose sight of some of the information in the process of producing a children friendly version.
- Once a children friendly version is available, the summary can be used to check that all information is covered.

Explain the document at the start (briefly), why it has been produced and how children might be able to use it.

Use **simple language** and try to keep the document as short as possible.

Use the **present tense** if possible and keep sentences short.

Write as though you are **speaking to the child** (don't be afraid to use 'you')

Don't use **metaphors**, some of them are not so obvious such as 'voicing your views' or 'sign post'.

Spell out any abbreviations and don't use e.g. or etc.

Explain any **jargon**, any difficult words or concepts

- Try using a highlighter to mark all words that might prove difficult for children to understand in the original document.
- Include jargon words that have little meaning for children even though they sound "easy", for example "key actors".
- To find alternatives for jargon words, use a mixture of sources, including websites aimed at children or children's dictionaries.

To explain difficult words or concepts in the document:

- You could add **boxes** close to where the difficult word or concept is mentioned.

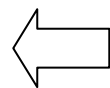
Boxes: in the box give an explanation of the word or concept so that children can skip to it easily whilst they are reading the main text. Make sure the box is on the same page as the word/concept. They also have the advantage of breaking up the text.

- You could create a list of definitions or difficult words or concepts at the end of the document. Writing too many explanations in the document itself can be distracting and lead to a longer, less readable document. It may also have the advantage that a document can be read by children who are at different levels of understanding about certain concepts.

There may be things that shouldn't be 'translated', e.g. one or two key definitions. These can be quoted directly and then explained.



Use **visual images** to support the words. Images should help to explain difficult concepts so should be relevant to the issue outlined (or you might end up confusing children with different messages in the visual images to those in the words). You may want to specifically commission photographs, drawings, paintings, cartoons or use graphics.



This is an example of a confusing image. It does not support the point that the paragraph close by is trying to make (how to use visual images). A better image to support the paragraph would be, for example, a picture of a child drawing (rather than skateboarding).

Use photographs carefully. Be sure that any people pictured in photographs have given their consent for the photo to be used. Photos should:

- show children adequately clothed and not in sexually suggestive poses
- respect children's dignity, not highlighting them as victims
- be culturally appropriate, show children from the region

If the children depicted are victims of violence (and not actors) even more care needs to be used to hide the real identity of the children:

- use false names for any children shown (state that these are false names)
- do not identify their precise location - general geography only
- use images of children that are in profile, or darkened, from the back, or obscure part of the face if it is a full-faced shot (for example, a thick dark line or dappling across the eyes)

Text should look 'interesting', some simple **graphic tricks** have been used in this document.

- Use a font size which is at least 12 points, 'sans serif' fonts are generally seen as more children friendly because they are clearer to read.
- Break up long sentences or paragraphs with bullet points or numbering
- Break up large blocks of text, use headings and sub headings, boxes and illustrations.
- Highlight key words – use **bold**, a **different colour**, *italics* or a *different font*.
- Try not to use too many graphic tricks, for instance, a maximum of 3 different fonts or text colours (except in colour illustrations).

- You may want to get the document professionally designed – if so give the designer a clear brief of what you want, including information on the target group of children who will be reading the document.

Work in a team to resolve some of the problems in “translating” the original paper or concepts. Discussions are often useful to find simpler ways of putting things or to clarify definitions.

Provide links and list resources where children might be able to get additional information on the subject.

Once you have produced a first draft...

Pilot the document **with children**

As this can be quite a daunting prospect the following (from *add source*) gives guidelines on developing pilots and cost effective testing.

Written and visual messages should be tested (piloted) before you use them with your audiences, so that any mistakes can be corrected and you can be sure that people will understand the message.

- Test your written and visual messages and materials first on your colleagues, or members of your family of the correct age and gender;
- Make adjustments;
- Recruit a number of individuals in the audience you are trying to reach with this message. You will have already made some contact with this group through researching your audience, go back to some of the more friendly and easy to reach contacts. Use as many as you can and try to develop a regular ‘piloting group’;
- Test your written and visual messages on these individuals;
- Make adjustments;
- If necessary test again to make sure;
- Remember that this is your ‘piloting group’. You can use them to test messages again in the future, but they should not be included in the audience that you monitor with your indicators.
- Let members of the piloting group understand that this is important to your work, and make sure that they feel valued. This should include payment of any expenses for taking part in the piloting, refreshments and maybe a small fee.

How to test

Depending on the audience and your access to them, you can work with the piloting group as individuals or in a group.

How you present the message will depend on the channel you will use (written or oral) and the audience (level of literacy).

- **Visual materials (photographs, drawings, posters)**

Test visual materials first, to test what the audience 'sees'.

- Use several different drawings or photographs of the picture you wish to use.
- Number the pictures beforehand.
- Show the pictures without comment and ask 'What do you see in this drawing (or photograph)?'
- You can also ask questions such as 'Do you like this picture?' 'How does it make you feel?'
- Note the response to each picture (it helps to have a colleague do the recording).

Select a picture to use after considering all the responses. If the first set of pictures all received negative responses, put them aside (you might be able to use them with a different audience, so don't throw them away) and start again.

- **Written materials or other use of words.**

Written messages may accompany a visual image, in a poster for example. You can pilot both separately and together.

Start by asking a main question: Do you understand this?

Then ask a number of 'probe' questions to check:

If they do not understand, find out why. Are the words too complicated? What words would they use to talk about this topic?

Do you agree/disagree?

Why do you agree/disagree?

How does this make you feel?

Does it make you want to do anything? If so what?

As with the visual materials you might want to test several different ways of saying the same thing. You could write each message on a 'flash card' and show each one in turn, asking for reactions. Or get people to rank the whole set in the order they prefer.

Draft Document, produced by Helen Veitch, Consultant on Children's Participation, UN Study on Violence Against Children, November 2004

Sources: Judith Ennew , Clare Feinstein, Alana Kapell, Liz Kwast, Sophie Laws, Dominique Pierre Plateau, Casper Trimmer