KISS
Keep it Short and Simple (?)

Andrea Petz
studying integrated
University of Linz
Structure

Starting Point
Problems, Opinions
Possible Solutions
Why Make it Easy?
How Make it Easy?
Further Information
Starting Point

Project ECDL® PD

– Target Groups 2 and 3 (Deaf / Hard of Hearing; People with mental disabilities)

– Aims:

• Make Syllabus and MQTB by „add ons“ accessible to our target groups without changing the level

• Produce „easy to read“ teaching and learning materials to support applicants and training providers helping them getting the ECDL®.
Some Problems

1. Is it possible to ease e.g. an exam question without changing the level of difficulty?
2. What about all that scientific wording, all the jargon, all those elegant phrases and involved sentences we are used to?
3. Isn´t it part of the exam to understand the question and to know what to do?

AND:

4. Do we really want to adjust the level – downward?
Opinion

„In general, I'm very reluctant to accept a ‘reduced language’ - but in this connection and with the aspired goals such an approach should be investigated thoroughly.“

„Unknown Reviewer“
Possible Solutions

Perhaps it is not possible for every exam – but it is worth a try.
You should always keep in mind who you are talking / writing for.
There should be a focus on fulfilling the task – not on advanced rhetorical abilities.
It is no downgrading, it is an opening to a new circle of people.
(Example: R. Feynman / St. Hawking).
Why make it easy? I

All citizens of the European Union have a democratic right to participate in the social and economic life of the society in which they live.

Access to information about their society’s culture, literature, laws, local and national policies and ethos is fundamental in order to take part in mainstream life.

Only informed citizens can influence or monitor the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families.
Why make it easy? II

Present structures *deny access* to information to a large number of people with limited skills in reading, writing or understanding.

There is an *extensive growing* number of people having problems with literacy and comprehension:

- people with learning disability and other disabilities (eg. Deaf / hard of hearing)
- people who received a limited formal education
- people with social problems
- immigrants whose mother tongue is not the official language of their adopted country.
Why make it easy? III

The United Nations call on governments to make all

– public information services and
– Documentation

accessible for different groups of people with disabilities and to encourage the media to make their services easily available to everyone

(Rule 5)

In most European countries little has been done. Organisations and people such as editors, writers, teachers and translators seldom have guidelines on how to produce texts and summaries which are easy to read and understand.
What is „easy“?

Definition:
An easy-to-read document can therefore be defined as one that contains only the *most important* information written and presented in the *most direct* way so that the *largest possible* audience (part of an intended audience) can understand it.
How to make it easy?

Use simple, straightforward language
- Use the simplest words in the simplest possible way

Avoid abstract concepts and structures
- If you have to mention abstract concepts, use concrete examples or comparisons which help people to understand the issue.

Use short words of everyday language
- Avoid long words which are difficult to read and to speak. Use only words which are common in the everyday language used by the people of your target group. However, be careful to use adult language when writing for adult people.
How to make it easy? II

**Use many personal words**
- Address your readers in a direct and personal form.
  “*You* have the right to...” is always better than
  “*Users of the service* have the right to...”

**Use practical examples**
- Practical examples can help people to understand abstract concepts and to relate information to situations in their own lives

**Address the readers in a respectful form**
- Use adult language when writing for adults.

Andrea Petz - i3s3 - KISS - ICCHP 2002
How to make it easy? III

Use short sentences
Cover only one main idea per sentence
Use positive language,
  – Avoid negative language and negations as they are likely to confuse
Use active rather than passive verbs,
  – Make your document as active and interesting as possible
  – Generally active verbs make your document more lively and less complicate
Do not assume previous knowledge.
How to make it easy?

IV

Use words consistently
Use the same word for one thing – even if repeating words affects the style of writing

Keep the punctuation simple
Avoid semicolons, hyphens and commas

Do not use the subjunctive tense
The „uncertain future“ (Might be, should do ...) is imprecise and confusing - Avoid it as far as possible

Be careful with figures of speech and metaphors
if they are not very common

People with learning disability may not know them but if they are widely used in everyday language they can make a document more colourful.
How to make it easy? V

Be careful with numbers
- Use *many* and *some* for large / small amounts
- For a date like 1867 use „a long time ago“
- For small numbers, always use the *number*, not the word

Do not use words from other languages
- This also applies to words which are in common use but have a foreign origin. If you cannot avoid such a word, explain it

Avoid cross references.
How to make it easy? VI

Mention a contact address for further information, if possible,
- All addresses should be written as on an envelope
- Do not write an address on one line

Avoid jargon, abbreviations and initials,
- Professional jargon should never be used - it is meaningless and irrelevant to most people outside special circles
- Avoid abbreviations and use them only if they are known to your target group (Explanation)

Read and reread your document often,
- Best: With the help of other, affected, persons.
Thank You for Your Attention

Further Information:

http://www.inclusion-europe.org
http://ecdl-pd.aib.uni-linz.ac.at

andrea.petz@jku.at.