

Paper Based Materials

Here are some points to think about when designing handouts/worksheets etc..

White Space

- Not too much text – this is threatening to some pupils.
- Clearly separate into chunks.
- Use decent sized margins – it gives somewhere to write notes, hold the page, as well as having less text on the page. Make sure the inside margin is big enough if you are binding the work.
- Put plenty of space between paragraphs.
- Don't have the spaces between lines too close – it is threatening.
- Don't have the spaces between lines too far apart – you can lose connectivity.

Type choice and size

- Use a reasonably clear font, not one that emphasises the similarity of letter forms such as the script fonts etc..
- Use bold rather than capitals to convey emphasis. Words which are all in capitals lose the shape as the letters are all the same height and depth. This makes it much harder to read – using bold avoids this problem.
- Individual letters however are easier to read as capitals – better to use capitals for headings (“Section A” rather than Section a”).
- Larger font sizes are good for less able readers (fluent readers aren't bothered much by font size). If the font size is large then lines should correspond with “sense groups” (a part of the text which makes sense on its own).
- If the lines are long then the space between them should be greater (important if you use landscape orientation).
- Italic text is very difficult to read, especially if there is a lot of it.
- Underlining may distract less able readers.

Sentence length

- Attempt to keep sentences short without being patronizing.
- Make only one point in each sentence.
- Use full stops rather than semicolons.

Page layout

- Don't allow paragraphs and sections to run over pages.

Illustrations

- These are ‘a good thing’ to use as long as they are relevant. They may act as a motivating factor for reluctant or poor readers. They can act as an aid to understanding, but badly chosen they can confuse. Don't use any old clipart graphic as it may distract from the meaning and mislead the pupils.
- Put them at the end of paragraphs not in the middle. Pictures which are in the centre of paragraphs make it hard for pupils to know which way to read – across the picture or down one side and up the other.
- At the same time put them near to the text to which they are related, pupils are reluctant to turn to a different page to find an illustration.
- Remember that text that precedes illustrations may be ignored as pupils skip straight to the picture.
- Do not use them as background (even as a watermark). It confuses and makes it difficult to photocopy.

Use of paper

- Use paper which is thick enough to prevent shadowing from the other side.
- Use a high contrast between the type and the paper (some pupils find black on white a problem so pale paper colours can be good).
- Make an original on white paper before photocopying onto coloured.
- Glossy paper reflects light and makes reading difficult.

Choice of words

- Don't worry about repeating words, it is an aid to reinforcement.
- Use the active rather than the passive case – "Put it away" not "It should be put away". At last – a use for that annoying rule in Word's grammar checker.
- Use key words (of, it, and, to).
- Watch out for bias (gender, race, class etc.) in the text, especially if using text from other sources (photocopies of pages from a book) as it may affect the readability for certain groups of students.