

Embedding Health Literacy into Speech Pathology Practice

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Workshop at the Speech Pathology Australia National Conference
Gold Coast Queensland, 26 June 2026

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Learning Outcomes

- Define **health literacy** and its relevance to speech pathology practice
- Identify **health literacy** barriers for people with communication disability.
- Reflect on the role of speech pathologists in reducing **health literacy** barriers.
- Plan for embedding inclusive communication and **accessible information** strategies in policy and practice.

What is Health Literacy?

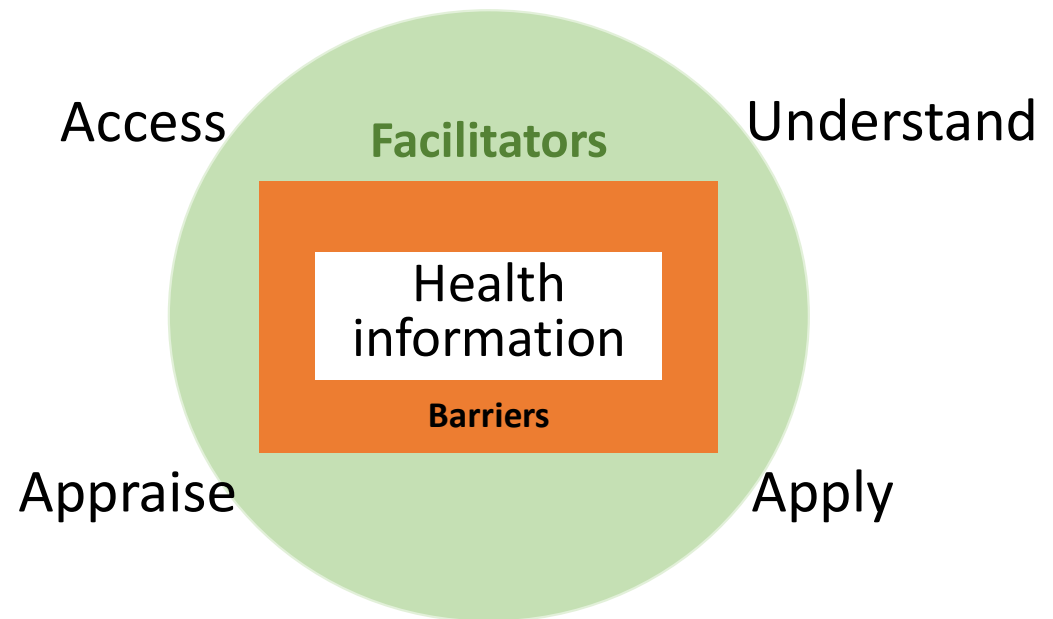
- Ability to:

- Access
- Understand
- Appraise
- Apply

health information

- In the context of:

- Barriers
- Facilitators



What is Health Literacy?

A multidimensional concept incorporating:



Individual skills and abilities



Individual and service contexts



Intended or necessary actions



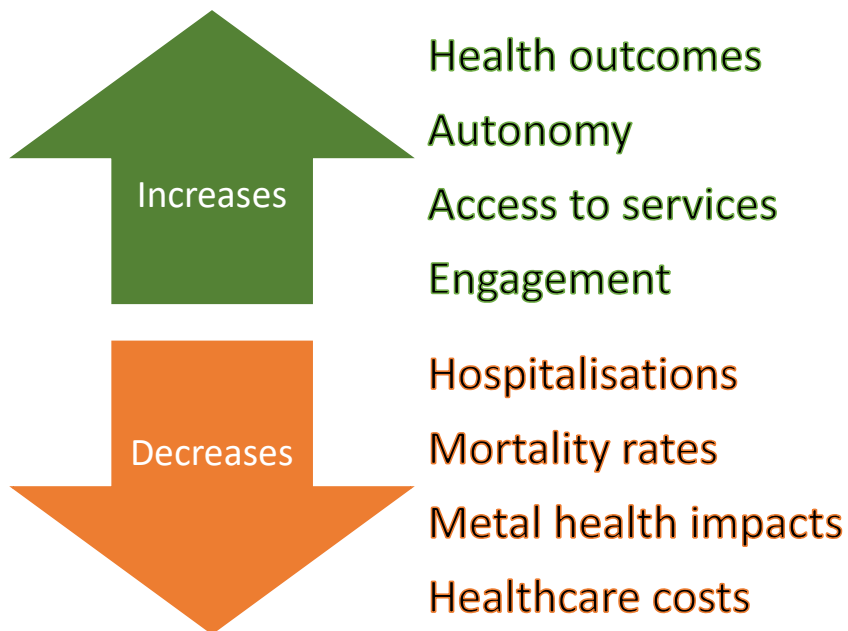
Timeframes (e.g., lifespan)



Health objectives or goals

Why is Health Literacy Important?

Supporting health literacy...



More health literacy barriers are experienced by:

- Minority populations
- Lower SES
- Elderly
- English as additional language

(Berkman et al., 2011; Christy et al., 2017; Lie et al., 2012; Paasche-Orlow & Wolf, 2007) 6

Why is Health Literacy Important?

“Health literacy should not be interpreted as a **deficit** of knowledge or understanding at the **individual-level**, but as a tool for policymakers and health providers to use to **improve services** for individuals, families and communities.”

It is not **only** about individual people.

It is a way to improve the **accessibility** of information and services for all.

Why is Health Literacy Important?

“Health literacy is a social practice, with roles and responsibilities shared among people and systems.

Healthcare and disability sectors can facilitate health literacy by creating environments that support shared access and use of health information, as well as facilitate choice and decision-making.”

(Barrington et al., 2026)



Activity: Health Literacy in Your Context

Reflecting on your practice setting and clients/carers/families...

1. Do they understand their health information?
2. How do you support them to understand and appraise health information?
3. Are they able to use information to achieve goals?

Think

Pair

Share

What are the Barriers and Facilitators?

Access -> understand -> appraise -> apply

- ‘Moderators’ of health literacy
- Individual factors
- Environmental factors

Barriers

Things that negatively impact accessing, understanding, appraising, or applying health information

Facilitators

Things that support accessing, understanding, appraising, or applying health information

What are the Barriers and Facilitators?

Access -> understand -> appraise -> apply

Barriers

- Individual:
 - Cognitive disability
 - Communication/social skills
 - Memory or attention problems
- Environmental:
 - Poor interactions
 - Attitudes of staff or family
 - Poor quality information
 - Previous poor experiences

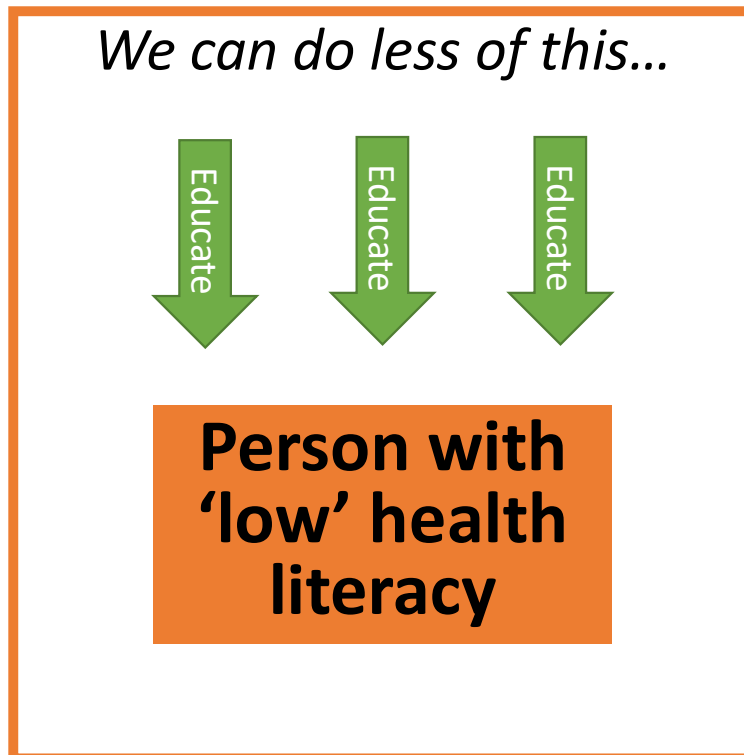
Facilitators

- Individual:
 - Motivation
 - Self-advocacy, self-determination
 - Resilience
- Environmental:
 - Time
 - Support
 - Accessible information
 - Opportunity to apply information

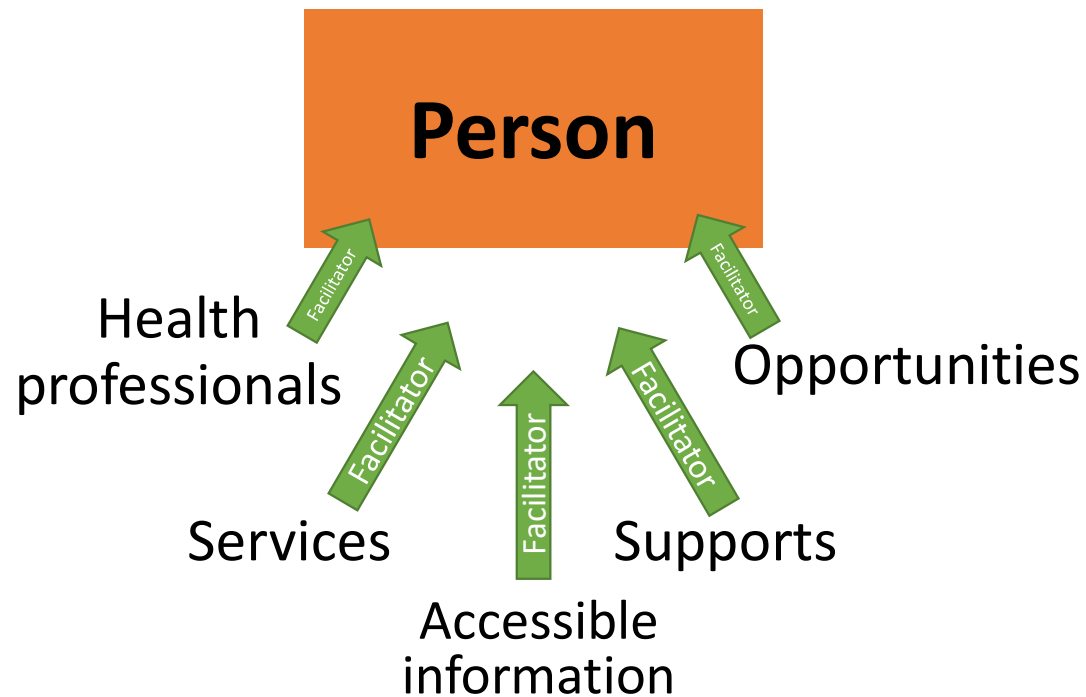
(Bergstrom et al., 2014; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2013; Dixon-Ibarra et al., 2018; Fish et al., 2017; Geukes et al., 2018; Squiers et al., 2012; Mastebroek et al., 2016; Willis, 2016)

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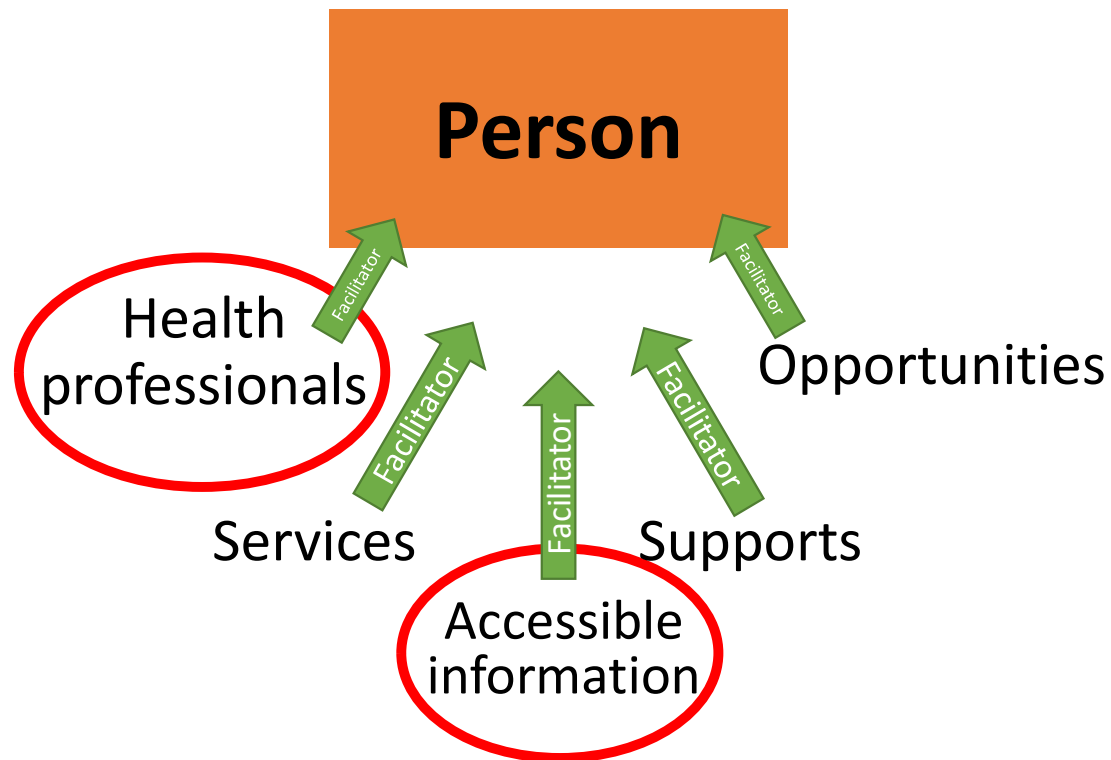
How do we Support Health Literacy?



How do we Support Health Literacy?



How do we Support Health Literacy?



Accessible Information

Written and audio content that is designed to be easily understood by as many people as possible...

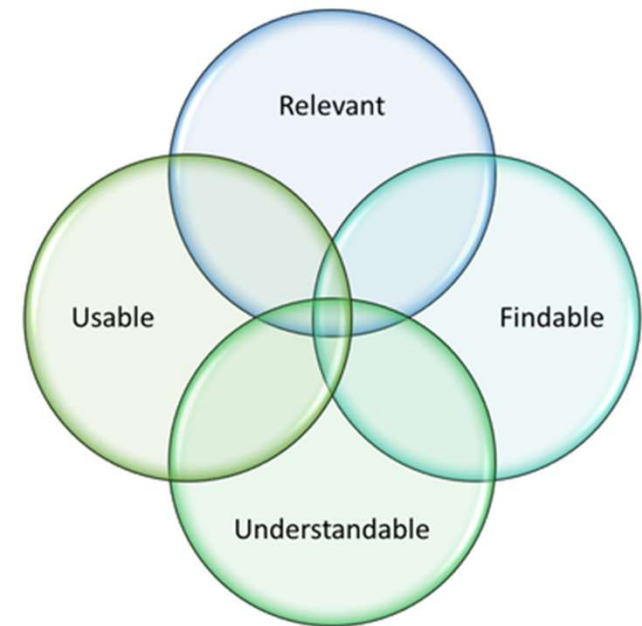
How do we know what someone will easily understand?



Accessible Information

International Standard for Plain Language

- **Relevant:** documents have information that readers need.
- **Findable:** information is easy for readers to find.
- **Understandable:** information is easy for readers to understand.
- **Usable:** documents can be used by readers to achieve their purpose



<https://www.harmonyturnbull.org/2023/08/26/an-international-standard-for-plain-language-yes-please/>

Accessible Information

- Information provided in a way that the reader understands
- Just like a ramp gives access to a building, these strategies give access to information.
- Example formats:
 - Plain language
 - Easy read
 - Easy English
 - Aphasia friendly
 - Symbol supported text





Recommended Emergency Supplies Checklist Cont'd

<input type="checkbox"/>	 <p>First Aid Kit</p>	<p>First aid kit, e.g. scissors, bandages, gauze, medical tape, disposable gloves, tweezers, etc.</p>
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How to set up NetBank

- Go to the website.
commbank.com.au/NetBank
- Click **Register for NetBank**.
- Type your card number and PIN.
- Type the security code.


Birds


can live


in bird cages


in your


house.

Accessible Information

- There is no *perfect* accessible resource
- Focus is often on ‘easier’ to understand than more important (‘harder’) ideas
- Might give surface level understanding
- Better understanding could come from interaction and discussion



Accessible Information: Consider Readers

- How we read depends on:
 - How well we already understand the subject
 - Familiarity with the vocabulary
- We skim headings and page structure
- Unfamiliar words slow us down
- Complex sentences are harder
- Variety, rhythm, and mixed sentence length is good
- Paragraphs and line breaks tell readers there's a new idea



(Australian Government, 2022)

<https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/how-people-read>

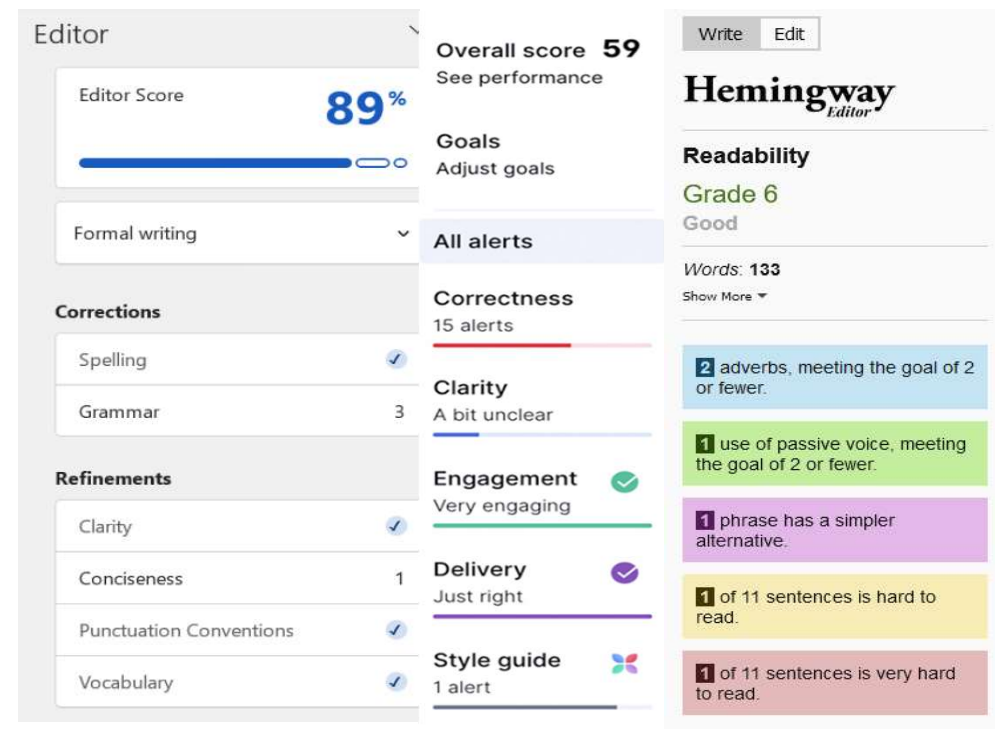
Accessible Information: How do we do it?

- Language considerations
- Information that is findable, necessary, and functional
- Good formatting
- Discuss with readers
- Individualised, accurate, and evidence-based
- Visual appeal and use of visuals
- Reasoning

Turnbull, H. (2026). *The Health Literacy Demands, Accessibility, and Use of Documents Written by Health Professionals for People with Communication Disability and their Supporters: Relationships, Responsibilities, Rights, and Roles* [PhD thesis under examination]. University of Technology Sydney.

Accessible Information: How do we do it?

- **Ask readers: what do they want?**
- **Structure**
 - Chunking information
 - Order of information
 - Options to find more detail
- **Language** (words and sentences)
 - Readability measures
 - Grammarly
 - <https://hemingwayapp.com/>
- **Images**
 - Matched to concepts
 - At a level the person understands
- **Ask readers for feedback**



The screenshot displays the Hemingway Editor interface. On the left, the 'Editor' panel shows an 'Editor Score' of 89% with a progress bar. Below this, there are sections for 'Formal writing', 'Corrections' (Spelling: 1, Grammar: 3), and 'Refinements' (Clarity: 1, Conciseness: 1, Punctuation Conventions: 1, Vocabulary: 1). On the right, the 'Overall score' is 59. Below that, there are sections for 'Goals', 'All alerts', 'Correctness' (15 alerts), 'Clarity' (A bit unclear), 'Engagement' (Very engaging), 'Delivery' (Just right), and 'Style guide' (1 alert). On the far right, the 'Hemingway Editor' logo is visible, along with 'Write' and 'Edit' buttons. Below the logo, the 'Readability' section shows a 'Grade 6' rating and 'Good' status. It also indicates 'Words: 133'. At the bottom right, there are four colored alert boxes: a blue box for '2 adverbs, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer.', a green box for '1 use of passive voice, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer.', a purple box for '1 phrase has a simpler alternative.', and a yellow box for '1 of 11 sentences is hard to read.' At the very bottom right, a red box indicates '1 of 11 sentences is very hard to read.'

Accessible Information: Teach-back

- A communication tool to improve communication and understanding
- For clinicians and services
 - Explain clearly
 - Ask the person what they understood
 - Give more information or explain differently
- For individuals
 - Listening and processing information
 - Tell the clinician what you heard
 - Fill in gaps

<http://teachback.org/>

<http://teachback.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Teach-back-Checklist.pdf>

www.harmonyturnbull.org



What is teach-back?

Teach-back is a simple yet effective communication tool used to check understanding.

The key concepts are...

- Let me know that the responsibility to explain things clearly is on you the provider
- Chunk and Check the information you provide
- Use plain language (Keep it Simple for Safety-KISS)
- Find out how I like to learn
- Explain any misunderstandings until understanding is achieved.
- Check your client's current understanding
- Ask your client to explain back in their own words

The infographic features a row of seven diverse people's faces at the bottom, with speech bubbles containing the key concepts above them.

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Resources

Harmony's Research Blog:

<https://www.harmonyturnbull.org/2022/07/23/understanding-and-supporting-the-health-literacy/>

Accessible content style manual:

<https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/how-people-read>

Health Literacy Resources: <http://teachback.org/health-literacy-resources/>

Teach-back: <http://teachback.org/>