

Plain-language production evaluation guide



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What this guide is for

This guide helps project teams test and improve learning resources so they are:

- clear and easy to understand
- accessible (including for people with disabilities)
- usable (people can find what they need and complete tasks)
- fit for adult learners (including people with different literacy levels and language backgrounds)

Use it to evaluate any output, such as learning units, handouts, PDFs, web pages, slides, or worksheets.

Who it is for

- Evaluation lead: makes sure everyone follows the same steps and confirms the final version is ready.
- Content owner: shares the document and updates it after feedback.
- Facilitator / note-taker: tests the document with users and writes down what happens and what people say.
- Reviewer / analyst: gives scores and groups the feedback into main issues and priorities.

Evaluation dimensions (what “good” looks like?)

Assess each resource using these five dimensions:

A. Readability

- readable font, spacing, contrast
- clear headings
- meaningful links

B. Simplicity (plain language)

- common words, short sentences
- active voice when helpful
- jargon explained; acronyms written out once

C. Structure

- clear purpose at the start
- logical order, step-by-step when needed
- helpful headings and lists

D. Visual presentation

- consistent layout and styles
- visuals support meaning
- uncluttered pages; simple tables

E. Fit for adult learners

- respectful tone
- relevant examples
- accessibility needs considered
- realistic effort and length

How to test

When you test a document, it helps to get feedback from different people. Not everyone reads in the same way, and different groups notice different problems.

Three useful types of feedback

1) Expert check (with a scoring grid)

Ask someone who knows plain language, accessibility, or learning design to review the document using the same criteria each time.

You get: scores + clear change suggestions.

2) Peer review

Ask a colleague who did not write the document to review it with the same criteria.

You get: consistency fixes (terms, structure, tone) + practical improvements.

3) User testing

Test with people from the target audience (for example adult learners, trainers, professionals). Use a short survey and, if possible, one simple task.

You get: proof of what people really understand, and where they get stuck.

Compare what people say

After testing, compare results across groups:

- Which problems come up again and again?
- Which problems block understanding?
- What is easy to fix quickly?

Use more than one target group when possible

If you can, test with more than one group, for example:

- adult learners with different language confidence,
- trainers who will use the material,
- professionals from the sector.

This helps make the document work for more people.

The testing process (step by step)

Step 1 – Prepare the test pack

For each resource, prepare:

- title + version + date
- who it is for and what it is for
- the survey (link or paper)
- one short task (optional but useful)

Example task: “Find the rule about long sentences. Explain it in your own words.”

Step 2 – Recruit participants

Aim for variety (sector, language comfort, profiles). Keep it simple:

- explain the goal: improve clarity and accessibility
- participation is voluntary
- collect only necessary data (GDPR-friendly)

Step 3 – Run the testing

Choose one or more:

- survey (fast, comparable)
- focus group (3–8 people)
- interview (deep feedback)
- usability test (observe someone doing a task)

During testing:

- do not “teach” the content
- let confusion happen (it shows what to fix)
- note the exact place: page/section/sentence

Step 4 — Analyse results

Combine:

- numbers (scores, yes/no)
- comments (quotes, notes)

Look for:

- repeated issues
- issues that block understanding

Step 5 — Improve and verify

- revise the resource
- check again with the five dimensions
- re-test after major changes if possible (even with 1–2 people)

Toolkit

Scoring scale (1–5)

- 1 = not clear / not accessible
- 2 = major changes needed
- 3 = ok but needs improvement
- 4 = good
- 5 = ready to publish

Short survey template

About you (optional)

- Sector: ____
- Language comfort: high / medium / low
- Accessibility needs to consider (optional): ____

Rate 1–5

- easy to read
- easy to understand
- well organised
- layout helps me follow
- suitable for adult learners

Quick checks

- main message understood: yes / partly / no
- task completed (if used): yes / partly / no

Comments

- clearest part: ____
- most confusing part: ____
- what should change first: ____

Focus group / interview prompts

- What is this about (in your words)?
- What was unclear?
- Which words felt too technical?

Minimum quality and accessibility checks

- key terms explained the first time
- no unexplained acronyms
- short paragraphs; lists for steps
- clear headings (not too many levels)
- good contrast; not colour-only meaning
- links are descriptive
- images have alt text (web) or clear captions (print), when needed
- file is usable (clean PDF, readable slides, consistent layout)
- tone is respectful; examples are relevant

Reporting template

A. What was tested

Titles, formats, versions/dates.

B. Who tested it

Number of people + short profile summary (no sensitive details).

C. How it was tested

Survey / focus group / interview / usability + basic context (online/in-person).

D. Key findings

Top 3 strengths + top 5 issues (with examples).

E. What changed

List main edits + note verification completed.

Success indicators

- enough variety in participants
- feedback is specific and usable (not just “good/bad”)
- changes make the resource clearer and easier to use
- fewer repeated issues over time (better quality control)
- positive feedback from real users

Final checklist

- meets the five evaluation dimensions
- main clarity issues fixed
- accessibility basics checked
- version/date updated
- evidence stored safely (GDPR-friendly)
- short summary ready to share

