



Easy-to-read target groups

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1. Language level or age group?
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1. Language level or age group?

For which age group is this book? This question is common, but for Easy-to-read literature there is no simple answer. Some books are targeted to children or teenagers, but in principle all books can be read by all age groups. **Language** and **knowledge levels** and **interests**, more than the reader's age, define which book is suitable.

For example a book on climate change can be read alone or **aloud** to almost all age groups. Today climate issues are constantly in the news and even preschool children have heard about climate change. Unfamiliar words or concepts can be **discussed** and **explained** when needed. Reading becomes much more interesting when it is **experienced together**.

Language levels

Language levels indicate how **easy the language** is of an Easy book. In Easy-to-read literature there are several systems of language levels nowadays. Every publisher uses their own **systems**, marks and classifications, often 3–5 levels. In several languages no levels at all are used.

The topic of an Easy book can be anything – just like in any other book. The aim of the language levels is to **guide** the reader to choose a book corresponding to the individual language needs and skills. Some readers prefer to stay on the level they think or know they can manage. Others choose a level to **challenge** their language skills.

Everyday language and reading experiences

In Easy-to-read books the language is what we use **every day**. Also in books about the environment and pollution, artificial intelligence or other more complicated topics, words and concepts generally known from media and schoolbooks are used.

Learners of a **new language** benefit from Easy books, independently of age or other factors. Words and expressions are easy to read and pronounce. They are commonly used in daily life and by other people, and can be utilised immediately.

Every language has its specific way of creating Easy Language texts. Word length and expressions vary. That is why there is **no global dictionary** or word list for Easy Language and language levels, only recommendations.

Understanding

How a reader perceives and understands a text is influenced by more factors than language alone. **Interest**, **motivation**, earlier **knowledge** and **experiences** also play important roles. During reading many thinking processes and emotional reactions occur in the reader.

If the reader is able to **identify** with characters in the story and **relate** events to their own world and everyday life, a **positive emotional response** can be formed. This response often brings on new **insights**, a higher **motivation** to continue reading and broadening of their **understanding**.

2. Easy language, difficult topic?

An Easy-to-read book can be about a difficult topic. A paradox? The question of easy and difficult is in reality about different aspects of the book: readability and content.

Easy-to-read books are **mechanically** easy to read. This means that eyes and brain can easily perceive and process the text. The **language** is also easy. The **contents** may require more effort, but language level and topic do not necessarily follow the same lines in standard language books either. The general idea that Easy-to-read literature must contain easy content as well does not correspond to modern reality.

Diversity

Easy-to-read literature has **developed** a lot since the first books were published more than fifty years ago. The variety of books and topics continue to grow. Nowadays there are both entertaining and serious books. **Quality** may fluctuate just as with any book. Still, Easy books have one thing in common: their language is easy.

Good literature does not underestimate the reader. Easy books should offer the same kind of reading experiences as any other book. A person with reading challenges is able to grasp meaning, even when the reading process does not happen without difficulty. Reading skills, memory and perception are developed through reading – and Easy books support reading.

Demands on the contents in Easy-to-read books are increasing parallel to growing needs of Easy literature in society. As more and varied groups of readers use Easy literature, a larger diversity of topics and greater complexity are required.

Complexity

Nowadays Easy books are commonly used in education, among others in **language teaching**, for **extra reading** and as the basis for **discussions**. Traditionally, Easy books are read by persons with cognitive challenges or low vision, weak and unfamiliar readers, migrants, children learning to read, elderly and persons with memory difficulties or loss. Today also capable readers enjoy Easy books. All possess individual personalities, tastes and needs of literature.

Processing a standard language book into Easy-to-read means actually “translating” the text into Easy Language. The **reading experience** from the original text must be transmitted. The authors who write **original** Easy books confront a bigger challenge: the story should be appealing and at the same time clear, but it must absolutely **not become banal**. If early Easy-to-read authors tended to avoid difficult themes, modern authors tackle them. Feelings and experiences, thoughts, conflicts and emotional processes, big life events, love and sorrow are all present in the books today.

Focus is on the reader. With such a great variation among readers it is difficult to define a “typical reader of Easy books”. Easy books are today translated into other languages. **Intercultural** aspects become more important, because also society is changing.

The **complexity** and **diversity** in Easy literature will therefore continue to grow and develop. The challenge is to offer readers a rich reading experience in Easy Language.

3. Reading benefits health

Reading benefits our health. Researchers from various parts of the world note that people who read regularly enjoy better health than those who mainly follow social media or aimlessly surf on the internet. Mental health is supported by the long-term perspective, calm and feeling of purpose provided by reading literature.

Book therapy

Bibliotherapy or book therapy focuses on reading as a form of therapy in new, strange or chaotic situations. Through a book we can escape from everyday life. Imagination is activated in a more creative way than for instance when watching a film where the visual images are served on a platter. A book **describes** events, people and events, but we **ourselves create** the pictures of the world in the book; this strengthens the reading experience and fixes the pictures in memory. A book is mostly also fairly well-structured and safe. We can relax and disconnect the world around us while reading.

Everyone has the right to read

Books influence our **development, intellect and emotions**. They help us to **understand and reflect on** ourselves, feelings, experiences, situations and other people. We **learn** new topics and broaden our horizons through books.

Reading creates **balance** in life. To read the same book many times during various periods in our lives is like setting up a mirror: we see how we change and grow.

How do we now look at the book we read many years ago? How does it work on us now? Do we understand it better?

Many people read the **same books** again and again during their lives, because they love, like or find new questions and elements which appeal to them in various life phases. Books are **friends** who can follow you throughout your life.

Reading is a journey of discovery

Many different kinds of readers need Easy-to-read books. Modern Easy books contain all kinds of questions and topics, but for activating imagination and thinking, the books must be both **exciting and descriptive** enough, but not too much.

The story is at the same time in Easy Language. The reader should **discover** new aspects in the book at each new reading. At best the Easy book becomes a friend to whom the reader can return, regardless if the reader needs Easy-to-read literature later in life or not.

4. Easy-to-read for seniors

Elderly with or without failing vision or memory disorders experience the same need for reading experiences as younger persons.

Books have accompanied them throughout life, and they want to continue the **pleasure** of reading, but may no longer have persistence to follow too complicated storylines.

In publishing seniors are however often forgotten.

Font sizes in books are often **too small**. To be able to read on it is necessary to **remember** clearly what happened in the previous chapters.

Audio books could be an alternative, but most seniors prefer “old-fashioned, real **paperbacks**”, according to an enquiry we made among elderly readers.

The participants became acquainted with Easy-to-read books for adults and gave **positive feedback** for text size and readability.

The reading experience was not reduced in comparison with other books, rather the opposite: it increased as the readers could **concentrate on the story**.