A fact sheet about

Asking for things in writing

UnderstandingZoe

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Asking for things in writing

Why writing can be an access need, and one line that asks for it.



Key points

- Getting information in writing can be an access need (definition below): something you need in order to take part, which others can meet.
- Asking for it is not asking for a favour, and it does not mean you are not trying.
- In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act can back this up with services, renting, work and study, but not with family and friends.
- One line saved on your phone, to send or to show, can ask for you, with no speaking needed.

What an access need is

Your GP explains a new plan, two tests and a referral, and you nod along. At home you can recall the referral but not the rest. Then the agent rings about the rental, and a relative calls about a party. Each time the details are said once, with nothing to look back at.

Asking for writing can feel like asking for special treatment, but for most people, writing it down takes a minute.

An access need is something you need in order to take part on equal terms: to understand, join in or use a service. For some people it is a ramp, and for others it is a written copy of what was said.

Some people take in speech more slowly, or lose it once the next thing is said. Some find phone calls very hard, or do not speak. Writing gives you the words at your own pace, and something to come back to. You can read more about why spoken instructions slip away here.

So an access need is not a weakness, and meeting it is not a favour. It is a small change in how words are shared.

Why it is a fair thing to ask for

In a survey, autistic adults much preferred email to phone calls with people or groups they did not know. With family and friends, many liked both writing and talking face to face.

In a US study, neurodivergent adults wrote a short list of their needs for their doctor, and almost all the doctors read it. Australia's guideline on ADHD tells health workers to give a written copy of anything they say out loud.

Australia has a law about this, the Disability Discrimination Act. Under it, not making a reasonable change for a person with a disability can be unfair treatment. A change only stops being reasonable if it would cause the other person unjustifiable hardship. The Act covers services, such as health care, trades and government services. It also covers renting a home, work and study.

The word disability in the Act is wide. It can cover how a person learns, thinks or feels. This does not promise a yes, and this page is not legal advice. The law does not cover family and friends, so you can read more about asking family for what you need here.

More broadly, research on autism, ADHD and neurodivergence has often left out BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian) people, LGBTQIA+ people and other groups. Your lived experience is what is most valid.

The one thing to try: save one line that asks for writing

Save one line that asks for writing on your phone, to send or show to the people you deal with most. Here are some to start from:

A GP: "Could you write that down, or send it to me after?"

A landlord or agent: "Please send anything about the lease or repairs by email or text, not by phone."

A tradesperson: "Could you text me the quote and the dates?"

A government service: "Please contact me in writing where you can."

A relative on the phone: "Can you text me the details? I'll lose them on the call."

To ask with no speaking at all, you can reply to a call by text. You can also show a line on your phone or a card: "Please write it down or type it for me."

A support person can ask with you or for you, and keep a copy of what is written. Autistic adults have said health visits go better when a supporter joins in the way they want, and staff still speak to them.

You can save your lines as notes in the Understanding Zoe app. Keep the written answers there too, with your documents and appointments.

Asking for writing elsewhere comes from what neurodivergent adults say has helped them. It has not been tested in research yet, so it is anchored in lived experience and in what the community shares

about it. And lived experience is valid too.

Some people will still ring, so you may need to ask again. If saying no to calls brings up guilt, you can read more about saying no without guilt here.

At work, in study, and when asking may not be safe

Written instructions are a common change at work and in study. You can read more about asking for adjustments in study here, and read more about agreeing changes at work here.

You do not have to give a reason, or name a neurotype, to ask for writing. But to rely on the Act, the other person needs to know there is a disability. Being able to share that is a privilege. For some people, often BBIA or LGBTQIA+ people, it may never be safe. At work, autistic adults in one survey worried most about how others would see them once they knew.

If sharing is not safe, a simple reason may be enough, such as wanting a record. Someone you trust, or an advocate, can also ask with you.

Getting support

This page describes what many adults say about themselves. It is not an assessment, and it cannot tell you what is going on for you.

You can ask for support at any point. A GP is a good place to start. A GP can talk with you about a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which can lower the cost of sessions. Different health professionals can help you find changes that suit you, and your GP can help you work out who is right for you.

You can also book a telehealth session through Understanding Zoe.

If a service says no, a disability advocate can help you work out what to do. You can also make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Sources

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), sections 4(1) (definitions of accommodation, disability, reasonable adjustment and services), 5(2) (failing to make reasonable adjustments), 11 (unjustifiable hardship), 15 (employment), 22 (education), 24 (goods, services and facilities), 25 (accommodation) and 29 (Commonwealth laws and programs). Compilation No. 41, 8 October 2026, legislation.gov.au

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Understanding Zoe is the first neuroaffirming AI-powered app that turns every report, observation and moment into an actionable next step, supporting neurodivergent people and those who care about them to thrive.

for more information, you can contact

hello@understandingzoe.com

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