# Designing Skill Cards for New Professions: Easy-to-read Facilitators and Validators

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*Abstract:* Easy-to-read (E2R) can be defined broadly as a text simplification method aimed at making information more accessible to people with reading and learning difficulties, promoted intensely in recent years as a top-priority European strategy for social inclusion. Although validation of E2R content is an important step in the process, neither validation nor those involved in it, i.e. validators and facilitators, get official recognition. The present article focuses on the creation of skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators within the Train2Validate European project, in an attempt to promote the professionalization of validation work.

*Keywords:* skill card; easy-to-read (E2R); easy-to-read validation; Train2Validate (T2V); professionalization; social inclusion

## 1. Introduction

From a linguistic perspective, easy-to-read (henceforth referred to as E2R) is defined as a functional, regulated variety of a national language that addresses people with reading, learning or comprehension difficulties (Bredel and Maaß 2016, in Bernabé Caro and Orero 2019: 61). However, most definitions focus on E2R as a method grounded in text simplification which is used to improve the readability and

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comprehensibility of written texts with the aim of making messages accessible to all people, including those with intellectual disabilities, and which can hence be listed as an accessibility service (Bernabé Caro and Orero 2019). It is in this latter meaning that the term will be used in this paper.

As emphasized by Inclusion Europe, the European association that campaigns for the rights and interests of people with intellectual disabilities, E2R aims primarily to foster the social inclusion and empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities (https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/), as well as of those with other conditions affecting the way in which they process information (IFLA 2010, García Muñoz 2012, Bernabé Caro and Orero 2019, Perego 2020, Fărcaşiu et al. 2022), enabling them to access information and function autonomously in everyday life.

Although the concept of E2R emerged 60 years ago and E2R practice has been around for many years, there is still a lack of harmonized training in the field, as well as of official recognition of the three main professional profiles involved, namely writers (i.e. creators of E2R content), validators (i.e. assessors of E2R content) and facilitators (i.e. supporters of validators), as evidence reveals (Dejica et al. 2022). Things are moving on the right track, however, with two Erasmus+ projects funded by the European Commission attempting to fill this gap: the EASIT project, finished in 2021 and the Train2Validate (T2V) project, in progress until August 2023, which focus(ed) on the creation of skill cards, curricula and training materials for E2R writers in audiodescription, subtitling and media journalism, and respectively, for E2R validators and facilitators.

The present article focuses on the creation of skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators within the Train2Validate European project, as an essential step towards the official recognition of these new profiles and the professionalization of validation work. Currently, validation is neither defined nor recognized as a profession according to the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification or the Regulated professions database of the European Commission (Bernabé Caro and Cavallo 2022). In addition, empirical data collected in the project has revealed that most people working in the field of E2R validation are non-paid volunteers (Dejica et al. 2022b: 150).

The present paper is structured as follows. The next two sections of the paper will outline the concepts of easy-to-read and validation according to specialized literature, whereas section 4 provides insights into the creation of skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators within the T2V project. The project started in September 2020 and is carried out by a strategic partnership, initially made up of three universities (in Germany: Internationale Hochschule SDI München, in Italy: Scuola Superiore per Mediatori Linguistici Pisa, in Romania: Politehnica University Timișoara), three end-user associations (Plena Inclusión Madrid from Spain, Zavod Risa from Slovenia and Fundația Professional from Romania), and one European certification body (European Certification and Qualification Association – ECQA). The NGO Fundația Professional withdrew from the project in August 2022.

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## 2. What is easy-to-read (E2R)?

According to the International Federation of Libraries Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2010) and to Inclusion Europe (2009), E2R is a text simplification method that uses specific guidelines and recommendations to make information accessible to people with reading, learning or intellectual difficulties / disabilities. In an attempt to improve both readability and understandability, text simplification goes beyond mere linguistic reduction in complexity. Simplification strategies are not restricted to lexical and syntactic modifications, but also include lexical repetition, the addition of information to clarify or explain concepts, the use of non-verbal elements (e.g. illustrations), paralinguistic and design features (IFLA 2010, Inclusion Europe 2009, García Muñoz 2012). Although E2R is mostly associated with written communication, more recent research has shown that E2R can also be applied to audiovisual content (Bernabé Caro and Orero 2019).

As pointed out by Bernabé Caro and Orero (2019: 66) and by Perego (2020: 38-47), the range of E2R guidelines is extensive on international, European and national levels, many European countries (e.g. Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain) having various documents serving as official or unofficial guidelines written in national languages. Although they may vary in focus, the recommendations included in these guidelines overlap to a great extent in many respects (e.g. the concept of E2R, target audience categories and needs, linguistic and non-linguistic text simplification methods, layout, design, simplification of audiovisual and digital content, etc.). Two of them, in particular, are the most used ones, serving as important reference materials (Bernabé Caro and Orero 2019: 66; Perego 2020: 38): *Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials*, created by IFLA in 1997 and revised in 2010, which are now available in 5 languages (including English), and *Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand*, published in English by Inclusion Europe in 2009 and translated into 16 European languages.

As García Muñoz (2022: 15) points out, Spain is the only country in the world that has an official national standard on E2R (UNE 153101 EX); it was published in 2018 and is also available in English. The German standardization body (DIN) is also drafting a standard on E2R (DIN SPEC 33429). On an international level, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is preparing a similar standard (ISO/IEC DIS 23859-1), which will contribute significantly to the official recognition of E2R as essential to an inclusive society (ibid.).

Although E2R primarily addresses people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, there are other categories of people who have a permanent or temporary need for over-simplified content and may hence greatly benefit from it (García Muñoz 2012, Perego 2020). E2R can thus make it possible for people with reading, learning and/or understanding difficulties, which may be due to various reasons ranging from intellectual disability and old age to low literacy and immigration, to learn things, to get informed, to make decisions and to participate more actively in society.

Ideally, E2R "should cover all possible fields of application to ensure that everyday information that all citizen use in their daily life is usable" (Perego 2020: 34). As an example, a quick search on the Internet using the keywords "easy to read" and "Covid" will return millions of results, showing how E2R has been used to deliver information about the recently discovered coronavirus and the disease it may cause (COVID-19), including prevention and legal issues. An impressive number of both public and private bodies in English-speaking countries have developed and published E2R COVID-19-related materials on their websites, in an effort to make essential information more accessible to people who have reading/understanding difficulties, for whatever reason.

Despite the growing interest in E2R in the last decade, relatively little attention has been given to validation - an essential stage in the production of E2R content, which will be explained in the next section.

## 3. E2R validation

As emphasized in most E2R guidelines and standards mentioned in the previous section as well as in other academic or non-academic publications (e.g. Dejica et al. 2022, Maas 2020, Perego 2020, Plena Inclusión Madrid 2018), E2R is a user-centric simplification method, requiring the active participation of end-users. The production of E2R materials involves on a two-step process: (1) the creation of E2R content and (2) the validation of E2R content by end-users, called "participatory validation" (Bernabé Caro and Cavallo 2022). The former is primarily carried out by E2R writers and can be achieved either by creating the content from scratch in E2R or by adapting already existing content to E2R (which, from a translation perspective, is called intralingual translation), according to E2R principles and recommendations. The Spanish E2R standard also lists designers and layout editors, besides E2R writers, as professionals involved in the creation process (García Muñoz and Bernabé Caro 2022: 56).

Validation, on the other hand, aims at assessing whether E2R content is easy to read and understand by end-users, and relies on teamwork, the two professional profiles involved being the validator and the facilitator. Plena Inclusión Madrid (2018) provides the most detailed account of E2R validation, explaining the concept, the process and the specific professional roles, among others. Accordingly, validators are people with reading comprehension difficulties whose task is to assess the comprehensibility of E2R content, whereas facilitators are people without such difficulties, whose task is to assist the former in the process, by setting up validation teams, organizing validation sessions, briefing validators on the subject, assisting validators in their work, sending feedback to E2R writers, etc. As for the skills that validators and facilitators should have, Plena Inclusión (2018: 15-17) suggests both professional and soft skills, such as ability to read and listen, reading comprehension skills, E2R knowledge, communication and teamwork skills, responsibility, dedication and tolerance to frustration for validators, and respectively, organizational and time management skills, knowledge of E2R guidelines, language and computer

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skills, ability to work with people with intellectual disabilities, facilitation skills, management skills and empathy for facilitators.

The validation team should consist of one facilitator and four to six validators with varied reading skills and comprehension abilities to avoid biases, whereas the validation session should last up to three hours with thirty-minute breaks or up to two hours with shorter breaks, depending on the situation (Plena Inclusión Madrid 2018: 21). Validation should comprise five work phases and should cover a minimum of four activities (ibid. 23-25). The five-stage process recommended by Plena Inclusión concerns primarily validation of E2R texts, and was later on adapted by Bernabé Caro et al. (2020) to accommodate audiovideo content as well.

Another extremely valuable contribution to E2R validation, which brings empirical evidence to the guidelines published by Plena Inclusión Madrid (2018), is the book *The Status of Training Programs for E2R Validators and Facilitators* (Dejica et al. 2022). This is actually the first publication to provide detailed, evidence-based information about E2R validation in Europe, such as the validation process, the demographic and professional profiles of validators and facilitators, and their education and training in the field. The findings presented in the book are based on the 337 answers to an online multilingual survey created by the T2V project partners, which was filled in by people working in E2R from 12 countries, mostly from Spain, Italy, Germany, Slovenia and Romania (Dejica et al. 2022a: 24-29). Concerning the skills validators and facilitators should have, it is noteworthy that the skills mentioned by the participants in the survey (Dejica et al. 2022a: 147-149) generally mirror those suggested by Plena Inclusión (2018), but are, however, much more specific and varied.

## 4. Skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators: Methodology and workflow

The methodology, workflow and findings related to the creation of skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators presented in this section draw chiefly on the report elaborated by García Muñoz, Hortal Rubio and Gonzales Sabin (2021) on the main activities performed and results obtained in the second research stage of the T2V project (Intellectual Output 2), led by Plena Inclusión Madrid. The main goal of this second research stage was to create skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators, in an effort to promote the professionalization of E2R validation and the official certification of two job roles involved.

Skill cards are documents that map the main competence areas specific to a professional profile and pinpoint the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform a job role effectively, which are collectively called learning outcomes in the European Qualifications Framework (CEDEFOP 2014: 165). Skill cards serve as essential qualification and certification tools, as they state precisely what an individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

In what follows, we shall describe the main activities in the T2V project that have resulted in two skill cards: one for validators and one for facilitators.

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## 4.1. Skill extraction

Work on the skill cards started with a research phase, meant to collect a set of skills and competences that have already been identified as specific to the two job roles. The first step was to extract specific skills from a repository of specialized literature in the field of E2R in general, and E2R validation in particular, which had been created previously in the project (Dejica et al. 2022a: 24). The resources included in the repository cover five languages (Italian, German, Slovene, Spanish and Romanian) and a variety of genres (e.g. books, guidelines, standards, scientific papers, reports, presentations). It is noteworthy that only 3 out of the 57 resources in the repository refer specifically to skills (Plena Inclusión Madrid 2018, Schiffler 2018, Bernabé et. al 2020).

The second step was to compile the skills selected as relevant by the participants in the multilingual survey on the status of E2R validators and facilitators created earlier in the project (Dejica et al. 2022a: 24-29). There were 11 skills for validators and 13 for facilitators, which overlap to those mentioned in specialized literature to a great extent. Subsequent data analysis allowed for the identification of a core set of skills for each profile.

## 4.2. Skill "hunting"

Next, the project partners went "hunting" for skills, so to speak, in two rounds. In the first round, all project partners had to find skill cards for related professional profiles, which were then analysed to identify skills and competences that may also be relevant to E2R validators and/or facilitators, as well the competence area each of these skills and competences may apply in the skill cards for validators and facilitators. The related professional profiles examined include the following: easy-to-understand subtitler / audiodescriptor / journalist, accessibility manager, sign language instructor / assistant, quality assurance assistant, service worker, social worker for people with learning disabilities, interpreter / specialist for deaf-blind persons, and real time intralingual subtitler. 15 out of the proposed 22 skill cards were finally considered for analysis, from which 99 skills and competences were selected as relevant for facilitators and 42 for validators, each with own corresponding competence area. The data obtained allowed Plena Inclusión Madrid to draft the main areas of competence for validators and for facilitators (García Muñoz et al. 2021: 20).

In the second round, the project partners "went hunting" for skills on site; that is, each partner had to attend validation sessions as an observer and to organize interviews with E2R validators and facilitators, in order to identify specific hard and soft skills. Project partners were provided with guidelines for optimal observation and were "armed" with custom observation and interview sheets created by Plena Inclusión, in which to record their findings (García Muñoz et al. 2021: 14-15).

Four observation sessions were conducted in 3 project countries (Spain, Slovenia and Romania), in which were involved 19 validators and 6 facilitators. As for the interviews, the project partners interviewed 19 validators from Italy and Spain, and respectively, 8 facilitators from Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia and Spain.

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The questions focused mainly on perceptions of their own role (i.e. either validator or facilitator) as well as of the other role, in terms of required skills, task preferences, degree of difficulty, personal qualities and behaviour. These activities have provided valuable evidence-based information about the tasks validators and facilitators perform, as well as about specific needs and skills.

### 4.3. Creation of the skill cards

As mentioned in 4.2., based on partners' input, Plena Inclusión Madrid initially drafted six main competence areas for validators and six for facilitators, which were the starting point in the creation of the skill cards. Then, project partners held two meetings to discuss and agree on various aspects related to the name, the structure, the load and the difficulty level of the two skill cards. For instance, partners decided that the skill cards would have a modular structure, following the specifications provided by the European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA), and would be divided into units (i.e. main competence areas), elements (i.e. the learning topics in each unit) and learning outcomes (i.e. performance criteria the trainee should demonstrate). In what concerns the learning outcomes, partners agreed to apply Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001).

In light of the above, Plena Inclusión Madrid drafted the first version of the skill cards, which was sent to the project partners for feedback, together with a comprehensive feedback form where partners could assess the content, make corrections, suggest and provide reasons for any changes regarding content or organization, and come up with alternatives. Partners' feedback led to a second version, which was similarly sent for evaluation.

As the second round of feedback did not involve any restructuring but some minor language changes, the consortium reached a unanimous agreement to transfer the information into the standard skill card template provided by the ECQA, which would facilitate dissemination, application and transferability. The skill cards in the ECQA Excel template were sent for feedback again, primarily to assess compliance with ECQA criteria (e.g. codification, organization of information, character limit, linguistic criteria). Following partners' corrections and amendments, Plena Inclusión Madrid delivered the final version of the skill cards, which were then translated from English into all project languages (German, Italian, Romanian, Slovene and Spanish).

The skill cards are well-balanced and share the same basic structure: 4 main units, divided into specific elements, which, in turn, comprise 2-4 learning outcomes. The skill cards have much in common given that validators and facilitators work closely together in the validation process. However, validators have fewer elements per unit (i.e. 2-3, compared to 2-5 for facilitators), fewer and less demanding learning outcomes (e.g. to identify, to describe, to explain vs. to apply, to differentiate), as well as an optional unit for an advanced level.

Appendix 1 provides a contrastive schematic representation of the units and learning elements, in which all the differences in content between the two skill cards are marked in italic red letters. As for the learning outcomes (LOs), only their number

for each element has been given. The complete skill cards in all 5 languages are available on the T2V website. Additionally, the skill cards in English are also available in different formats, to comply with accessibility requirements: besides the ECQA Excel files, there are Word files for screen readers, as well as Word files in E2R language for people with reading / reading comprehension difficulties.

## 4.4. Assessment of the skill cards
The last step in the process was to send the final versions of both skill cards for external assessment. The skill cards first underwent a quality review by the ECQA, which confirmed that both skill cards fully complied with their requirements. A second, more content-oriented assessment based on 5 questions was performed by a German accessibility expert and member of the Train2Validate Advisory Board. Finally, 9 facilitators and 4 validators working in E2R validation also provided detailed feedback on each skill card, by means of a comprehensive online questionnaire that had been sent by email to validation networks in Spain and Slovenia. Despite some suggestions, both skill cards received very positive feedback, which emphasized their comprehensiveness and relevance in the field, their logical and coherent structure, as well as their appropriate size.

## 5. Concluding remarks
The goal of the present paper has been to describe the process of designing skill cards for easy-to-read validators and facilitators to fill a gap in validation practice, and hence, to join national and international E2R standardization efforts. We strongly believe that the creation of harmonized skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators in line with European qualification standards, as presented above, is the first major step towards the official recognition of two professions that already exist. The clear delimitation and definition of the skills needed for any profession is a pre-requisite for the development of curricula that can be implemented in both academic and vocational institutions. As such, the two skill cards have provided a solid basis for the design of corresponding competence-based modular curricula, which are available on the Train2Validate website, as well as of specific training materials, which are currently being developed in the project.

The skill cards, together with the curricula, will hopefully pave the way for official certification in E2R validation, either as a validator or as a facilitator, which will not only boost the social and professional recognition of these job roles, but will also increase the quality of E2R content and will foster the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities on the labour market.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that the skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators created within the Train2Validate project mark a turning point in the field of easy-to-read, and may serve as a source of inspiration and an example of best practice for the development of similar accessibility-related professional profiles that build on validation by end-users.

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**Webography**

ECQA - European Certification and Qualification Association, https://www.jobcertification.eu/

EASIT project, Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training, https://pagines.uab.cat/easit/en

IFLA - International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, https://www.ifla.org/

Inclusion Europe, https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/

Train2Validate project, Professional training for easy-to-read facilitators and validators, https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/

**Appendix 1.** A schematic representation of the skill cards for E2R validators and facilitators

| VALIDATORS | | | FACILITATORS | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **UNITS** | **ELEMENTS** | **LOs** | **UNITS** | **ELEMENTS** | **LOs** |
| **1.** Accessibility and end-users | 1. Accessibility and Universal Design | 3 | **1.** Accessibility and end-users | 1. Accessibility and Universal Design | 3 |
| | 2. End-users and needs | 3 | | 2. End-users and needs | 3 |
| **2.** Easy-to-read methodology | 1. Basic linguistic knowledge | 4 | **2.** Easy-to-read methodology | 1. Basic linguistic knowledge | 4 |
| | 2. *The process of creating easy-to-read texts* | 3 | | 2. *Analysis of original texts* | 3 |
| | 3. *Text production using easy-to-read guidelines* | 4 | | 3. *The process of creating easy-to-read texts* | 3 |
| | | | | 4. *Text production using easy-to-read guidelines* | 4 |
| **3.** Easy-to-read *validation* | 1. The *validators'* professional profile | 3 | **3.** Easy-to-read *facilitation* | 1. The *facilitators'* professional profile | 3 |
| | 2. Teamwork skills | 4 | | 2. Teamwork skills | 4 |
| | 3. *The easy-to-read validation process* | 4 | | 3. *The easy-to-read facilitation strategies* | 4 |
| | | | | 4. Quality and reporting | 3 |
| **4.** Management skills | 1. Skills to apply in working environments | 3 | **4.** Management skills | 1. *Planning and time management skills* | 4 |
| | 2. Computer skills | 3 | | 2. Skills to apply in working environments | 3 |
| | 3. Cross-functional skills | 2 | | 3. Computer skills | 4 |
| | | | | 4. *Entrepreneurial skills* | 4 |
| | | | | 5. Cross-functional skills | 2 |
| **5.** *Optional Unit* | 1. *Analysis of original texts* | 3 | | | |
| | 2. *Advanced computer skills* | 4 | | | |
| | 3. *Entrepreneurial skills* | 4 | | | |

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