



## Askability Schools Pack



### Welcome

Welcome to the Askability Schools Pack. This pack contains guidance and materials to help you make the most of the Askability.

From simply reading the content, discussing and exploring the topics with help from the activities, through to getting involved and sharing ideas with Speak Up and Chat.

### Contents

What is Askability? _____	Page 3
What's on Askability? _____	Page 5
Reading Askability online _____	Page 7
Offline activities _____	Page 11
Participating in Askability _____	Page 15
Chat on Askability _____	Page 19
Widgit Symbols _____	Page 23

Go to [Askability.org.uk](http://Askability.org.uk)

### Accessing the pack

You can also find all the PDF materials and guidance notes in the 'Schools pack PDFs' folder on the Schools pack CD. You can open the CD from 'My Computer', then right click on the CD and select 'Open'. You can also run a web browser version of this guide by double clicking in 'Askability Schools Pack.htm' in the CD.



**The Children's Society**  
[www.childrenssociety.org.uk](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk)



**Widgit Software**  
[www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com)



*'I'm profoundly deaf and use an electric wheelchair because I have cerebral palsy. My first language is British Sign Language, not English. Askability is amazing - it has opened up a new world for me and my friends, who have communication difficulties too.*

*Symbols make information easy to understand - it's like reading a newspaper. I now know a lot more and feel more confident about joining in conversations. Best of all, I can make choices about where I want to go.*

*'I think it's really important that councils involve people like me when they decide what we need. This will make sure money is well spent on things we really need and not wasted.*

*'The Children's Society has always involved us in Askability - I'm an editor for the site at my weekly work placement.'*

Reice, 18



## What is Askability?



**Askability** is a website aimed at children with limited reading ability, which is presented entirely in fully symbol-supported text.

The website was inspired by staff at The Children's Society Solihull, after seeing how easy it was for children they worked with to misunderstand the news about the war in Iraq. They identified a way for children with learning disabilities and limited reading ability to find out about current affairs, and realised that a website presented entirely in symbols could revolutionise communication for these children.

The result is Askability— a website featuring local and national events and news stories, as well as fun and interactive content, all in simply-written, fully-symbolised text.

This guide explains each section of the website, and gives guidance on how you can help children to get the most out of Askability.





## Interaction and communication

A key element of Askability is the encouragement it gives its users to get involved by contributing to its content. As well as being given a wide variety of features, stories and reviews to read, children using the website are encouraged to take time to reflect on what they have read, think about how it affects them, and even write their own contribution to the website.

Askability empowers and involves users, giving them an accessible way to share their thoughts and ideas within their local and national community.

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## The symbols on Askability

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The content on the Askability website is fully-symbolised using Widgit Symbols

The website's content is written in simple language with full symbol support to help users understand the content.

If you are familiar with symbols, particularly with **Widgit Symbols**; and how they work, you should find Askability easy to navigate and read.

If you are unfamiliar with symbols, it may be helpful to look at the relevant section on **Widgit Symbols** at the end of this guide (Page 23). This will give you an understanding of Widgit Symbols, and will help you explain them to the students.



## What's on Askability?



### Materials in this section

#### Folder: 01 Sitemaps

##### Sitemap-Poster.pdf

Askability site map for teachers

##### Sitemap-Easy-Read.pdf

Askability site map for children (with symbol support)

## The website's content

Askability aims to help children become familiar with browsing a website, reading information and thinking about how it affects them.

The website provides a variety of fully-symbolised material for children to read, in five main sections:

### News



News

This section features a variety of news stories, all presented in fully symbol-supported text, which are regularly updated to ensure Askability users keep up-to-date with the latest news. There are global and national news stories, as well as local news stories for particular regions. There is also news about sport, entertainment and the weather, all written in simple language.

### What's on



What's On

The 'What's on' section features various suggestions for things to do in different areas, such as sports activities, cinema listings, museums, libraries and zoos. It also features TV and radio listings.

### Speak up



Speak Up

This section encourages children using the website to get involved – either by sharing their comments and pictures with other users, sending a question to the Askability Team, or by giving feedback on the website.



Fun

## Fun

The 'Fun' section features reviews of books, films, DVDs, toys, games and music, and a 'jokes and stories' section.



Chat

## Chat

This is an area where students can 'chat' in a safe environment. Young people registered on the site can talk with friends using guided messages and comments.

There are two **site maps** available (see above), one for adults working with children, and another with symbol support for children to use. You may find it helpful to print these out as posters, for reference when finding your way around the site.

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## Local and national content

Askability includes national content, and allows local content to be added (where a local authority enables this). For example, the News section features simply written, symbol-supported global and national news stories, and also local news stories by local authority area.

In the 'What's On' section, children can select 'Local' and then choose their own area to find suggestions for things to do locally..

The 'What's On' section also allows access to content for 'Other Regions'.

Similarly in the 'News' section, children will have the option of choosing local news, provided their local authority has opted to include content on the site. When a local area has been set, this choice is remembered on that computer.

This local content gives children the opportunity to keep up-to-date with what's going on in their area, with the aim of building communities and communication between users within local regions.



## Reading Askability online



### Materials in this section

#### Folder: 02 Reading Activities

##### **Using Internet Activity.pdf**

A survey on using the Internet for students to complete

##### **Summary Letter.doc**

Explaining the Askability content activities, to include with homework

##### **Reading Feedback Sheet.pdf**

An activity to help students feedback on the stories

##### **Using Askability Activity.pdf**

A survey on the Askability website for students to complete

#### Folder: 03 Vocabulary Cards

##### **Small Vocabulary Cards.pdf**

##### **Large Vocabulary Cards.pdf**

Cards featuring Widgit Symbols illustrating a range of words – smaller cards to use when completing surveys and larger cards to use in the classroom to help discussion

#### Folder: 04 URL Cards

The **URL Cards** show the web addresses of specific pages on the website to encourage browsing, with space to add an article within the section

##### **Individual URL Cards**

50 Individual sheets with 10 cards for each URL

##### **URL Card Collection.pdf**

A collection with one card for each URL



## Introducing Askability

It is a good idea to spend time becoming familiar with Askability before introducing it to students. Askability can be used by individuals or by groups, in the classroom or at home. Once you have become familiar with the sections and navigation of the website, and are ready to introduce students to Askability, you may wish to lead a session on exploring the website as a group activity, or encourage students to browse Askability as a one-to-one activity with a member of staff.

### The Internet

A good place to start is to find out what the students already know about the Internet and whether or how they already use it. You can download a quick, fully-symbolised survey on **'Using the Internet'** (see above), which you may want students to complete before you introduce Askability to them. This survey can also be used as the basis of a discussion in the classroom.

### Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards

This Askability Schools Pack contains Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards, in two sizes (downloadable above). They provide a large selection of vocabulary and responses you might use when discussing the topics on Askability.

The **'small vocabulary cards'** can be cut up so that the student could use them, with help if needed, to answer the questions on activities.

The **'large vocabulary cards'** can be used as prompts and responses in discussions, to encourage the students to talk about the Internet and the topics on the site.

### Showing Askability for the first time

Rather than trying to explore the entire site in the first instance, you may want to identify some specific sections or articles to show.

Most of the website's content is of general interest, but you may wish to start with a section that would be of particular interest to your students. If there is local content for your area on the website (such as local news, local 'What's on' articles etc), showing this would be a great place to start.

When demonstrating the site, it's a good idea to help students identify the navigation buttons, as well as drawing attention to the content of each page. This will then become confident in navigating their way around the site.



## Exploring Askability

After demonstrating the basic structure of the website, try to get members of the group to choose links to follow – ideally allowing them to use the controls themselves, but otherwise suggesting content that they might like to explore.

Viewing Askability as a group in class could be either student-led or teacher-led, depending on the students' ability and confidence. The website content can provide a variety of prompts for discussion within the classroom, which could fit in with lesson plans.

'URL Cards' are provided in this pack with the URLs (web addresses) of specific sections on the website – e.g.

[www.askability.org.uk/activity-books](http://www.askability.org.uk/activity-books). These could be cut up and given to students to give them guidance on what to look at on the site, either as a group or individually. There is a sheet of cards for each section of the website and also a document with a single URL card for each section.



The features within each section are regularly updated, and there is a space on each card for the teacher to write a particular feature / item for the children to find – e.g. 'Travel Activity Book'. Some areas of the site require you to specify your local area in the URL. In this instance a gap has been left to write this in.

You may wish to cut the cards up and use them in an activity such as placing them in a hat for the students to pull out.

The '**Reading feedback sheet**' can be completed by students, helping them to think about the topic they have read about, and also creating a record of the activity. The sheet asks what they have read and where (linking back to the earlier Internet activity), then asks them to describe the article, (showing comprehension and recall skills), and finally, how the article made them feel.

The URL cards and feedback sheet can be used to create homework, group or individual activities. If these are used for out of school activities, there is also a supporting '**Askability summary letter**' that can be used to explain what the site is about. This letter is a MS word document so can be edited.

Once a student is familiar with Askability, allowing them to explore the site by themselves or with a helper, will greatly build their confidence in navigating their way around the site and finding articles that interest them.



## Feedback on Askability

The pack includes a '**Using Askability**' activity, which can be completed by students after they have browsed the website – either individually or as a group activity. It encourages them to reflect on the parts of the website they like the most and find the most interesting, which can provide useful feedback on their areas of interest, for future lessons.

As with all the student surveys in this pack, the questions in the 'Using Askability' survey can also be completed using the Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards – either by sticking the smaller cards on the sheet, or by using the larger cards in discussion.



## Offline activities



### Materials in this section

#### Folder: 05 Offline Activities



#### Individual Activities

24 activities based on the different sections of Askability

#### Folder: 03 Vocabulary Cards



#### Small Vocabulary Cards.pdf



#### Large Vocabulary Cards.pdf

Cards featuring Widgit Symbols illustrating a range of words – smaller cards to use when completing surveys and larger cards to use in the classroom to help discussion



#### Vocabulary Cards Templates.cip

Templates for the vocabulary cards for the PC software Communicate: InPrint. These can be used to support additional vocabulary.

#### Folder: 04 URL Cards

The **URL Cards** show the web addresses of specific pages on the website to encourage browsing, with space to add an article within the section



#### Individual URL Cards

50 Individual sheets with 10 cards for each URL



#### URL Card Collection.pdf

A collection with one card for each URL



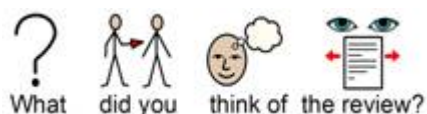
Much of the content on Askability can act as a support for, or stimulus to, class work, which can be worked through offline.

## Activities

A set of '[Offline Activities](#)' is available to download. The activities aim to encourage the students to:

1. think about what they've read in the various sections of the site
2. to consider the factual information
3. think about how they felt about it, adding their own opinions and ideas.

Students may wish to think beyond the article and create their own contribution to the subject. For example, the activity sheet for the music reviews section ([www.askability.org.uk/music](http://www.askability.org.uk/music)) encourages the student to remember the details of the review, to consider their thoughts on it, and to assess their feelings about music generally. You may not wish to give all three levels of information to every student. The materials are designed in such a way that you can separate the different levels.



These activities will also provide a good record of the student's web use, and which pages of the website they have been visiting.



## Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards

The Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards available to download (see above) can be used to answer the questions within the activities.

The vocabulary cards feature a wide range of Widgit Symbols, with a selection relating to vocabulary for each of the areas covered by the activities:

- News
- Sport
- Stars
- Weather
- Cinema
- Farm
- Zoo
- Museum
- Library
- Shows
- Parks
- Events
- Jokes
- Books
- Computer games
- DVDs
- Music

There is also a selection of vocabulary cards relating to feelings – for example, 'happy', 'agree', 'don't know', 'discuss' and 'look at'.

The vocabulary cards come in two sizes, '**Small Vocabulary Cards**' and '**Large Vocabulary Cards**'.

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## Using the Activities and Vocabulary cards

### Vocabulary cards

The smaller vocabulary cards are designed to be cut up and stuck on the activity sheets to answer the questions. These can be a successful way to support students that are not able to complete this activity alone. They can also be used if an activity is being completed by a group. Where students can pick out various cards and discuss them before sticking to the sheet.

The larger cards are easier to use in discussion work, then can be used as prompts to encourage conversation. They can also be included in displays and other activities around these topics.

### Activities

The activity sheets can be filled in by individuals or as group/class activities. You may also wish to print out the activity sheets and cut out each question. Using these along with the cut-up larger vocabulary cards in a group can encourage discussion. Using a conversation board can be a very effective way of facilitating this.



## Making your own Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards

You may wish to make a selection of your own Widgit Symbol vocabulary cards to provide you with a more targeted vocabulary for specific discussions. The two PC software applications that you can use to create more symbol cards are Communicate: In Print and Communicate: SymWriter.

### **Communicate: In Print**

We have provided some '**Communicate: In Print templates**' for making your own vocabulary cards. Using these templates, you can make cards of different sizes featuring Widgit Symbols of your choice, with or without borders.

**Communicate: SymWriter** does not have grid-printing facilities, but you can use Tabs to lay out symbols across a page so that they can easily be cut up into cards. For large cards, set the tabs (found under the text/paragraph menu). Three tabs across the page works well with a graphic size of 16 and a text size of 24 (although this will vary a little depending on the font you use). Small cards for using in the activity sheets can be made from 5 tabs with a graphic size of 12 and a font size of 14.

### **More about the software:**

[www.widgit.com/inprint](http://www.widgit.com/inprint)

[www.widgit.com/symwriter](http://www.widgit.com/symwriter)

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## Exploring Askability outside school or college

Once the student is familiar with Askability and is becoming confident at accessing content, the site is ideal for use in other places – for example, at home, with friends, in the library, or in the social club.

### **Setting homework**

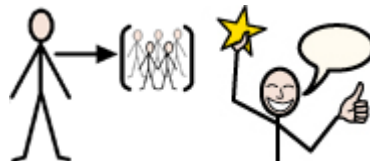
If a student has access to the Internet at home (which you can determine by helping them complete the 'Using the Internet' activity), you may wish to use the Askability URL cards to set homework tasks looking at specified sections of the website. (This may only be appropriate if the student has help from an adult at home).

### **Information on Askability for parents and carers**

A letter for parent and carers can be downloaded (see above, which you can send home with the student. This, along with the Askability URL cards, should give a parent, carer, librarian or member of an organisation sufficient guidance to be able to help the student in other places where they might access the Internet.



## Participating in Askability



### Materials in this section

**Folder:** 06 Safety and Chat

#### **Internet-Safety-Rules.pdf**

Symbol rules on staying safe on the internet.

## Speak Up

The '**Speak Up**' section of Askability gives students different ways of contacting the site, providing an opportunity for children and young people to contribute to both national and local content.

This will give them a voice, and empower them communicate with their local authority and with The Children's Society so they can express their feelings and opinions about things that affect them.

This guide is divided into six areas:

- Web Safety
- Help Us
- Ask Us
- Show Us
- Tell Us
- Blog of the Week



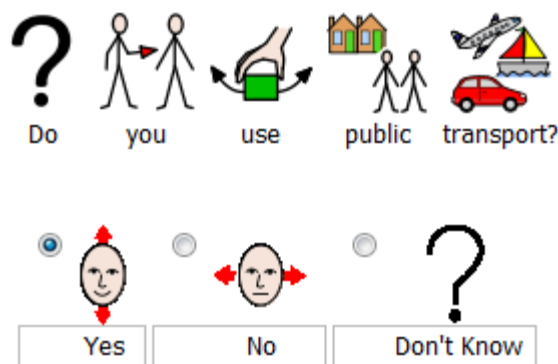
## Web Safety

The 'Speak Up' section is fully moderated and safe. All contributions sent in to the site by children are encrypted at the source and then decrypted by an qualified worker at The Children's Society who has an enhanced CRB clearance, has undergone Safeguarding Training and follows The Children's Society's policies, procedures and protocols.

We've created a fully-symbolised set of **'Internet Safety Rules'** for children and young people to help them learn about safety when accessing the Internet. This guide can be downloaded above.

## Help Us

The 'Help Us' section enables children and young people to complete short surveys about their local area or another region, and express their feelings about what their local authority has to offer them. They can also choose to complete a survey about Askability, in order to help us improve and develop the site.



Each survey features fully-symbolised questions, with multiple choice symbolised options for the student to select.

The 'Help Us' section is a great way for students to participate and get involved with the site, and to find out what their local area is doing for them. It also gives local authorities the opportunity to find out how children and young people feel about their local services and what is available to them in their area.

## Ask Us

The 'Ask Us' section gives users the chance to ask The Children's Society anything at all, from "Where are the pyramids?" to "Where can I find out about getting a job?!" Users will be directed to an individual or service that can help them.

All questions are submitted securely and privately. Any personal information and will not be shared. The Children's Society will answer any questions sent in by either posting the answer on the graffiti wall in the questions section, or by replying directly to the child or young person.



## Show Us

This section is where students can send in a picture to be posted on the site. The picture can be of anything they want to share, including drawings, or photos such as a snowman they built or a pet etc. However in order to protect children and young people, we are unable to display photographs of children, their family or friends.

The 'View Pictures' section displays a limited number of the latest pictures sent into the site. If students have sent in a picture, please do keep checking the site to see if it's there. When a student sends in a picture, he or she will need to provide:

- first name
- age
- town where they live
- email address.



Only their first name will be displayed alongside the picture on the site. All pictures are moderated by The Children's Society and are checked before being posted.

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## Tell Us

This section also gives students the opportunity to get in touch to share something that's important to them. We will try to upload all comments sent to us to the website - either onto the graffiti wall or, if the child or young person is sharing a story or poem, in the Fun section.

Before the student can write and send a comment that they would like to share, they must first read 'We may need to share your comments and keep you safe'. This is to ensure that they are aware that if we feel their safety is compromised, we will need to take action. Again, students will need to provide their:

- first name
- age
- town where they live
- email address.

Only their first name will be displayed on the site. Stories (and pictures) sent into the site may be changed slightly in order to allow for symbols to support the text when it is displayed on the website.





## Blog of the Week

Your students may want to get involved in writing a Blog for Askability. This is a great opportunity for children and young people to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings about any subject, and to feel empowered by having their contribution included on the site.

The Blog section gives children and young people the opportunity to participate in sharing their experiences in an online environment similar to social networking, but in a secure, moderated way.

A Blog is set up by The Children's Society on request from a school. The Blog could then be written by an individual child or young person, by a class, or even by the whole school.

The Blog can be for a fixed length of time, for example to support a particular project in school, or could be written indefinitely. For example, if a class or individual were organising an event such as a school disco, they could use the Blog to update their schoolmates on how the planning is going and to communicate information about the event.

If you would like the children or young people you work with to be involved in writing a Blog, contact Maureen Murray Vine at the Children's Society directly for more details:

[mym@childsoc.org.uk](mailto:mym@childsoc.org.uk)



## Chat on Askability



### Materials in this section

Folder: 06 Safety and Chat

 **Password Reminder.pdf**

Sheets for filling in as a reminder for log-in details

 **Password Choices.pdf**

Set of password choices for use with the reminder sheet

 **Avatar Choices.pdf**

Set of avatar images for use with the reminder sheet and for students

 **Chat-Vocabulary-Cards.pdf**

Vocabulary cards to cover the main options in the guided chat

## The Chat Zone

This is an area where students can 'chat' in a safe environment.

Social networking is becoming increasingly popular. The level of involvement and participation offered by the Chat Zone on Askability is the closest that many children and young people with language and communication difficulties will get to being involved in an online environment or community.

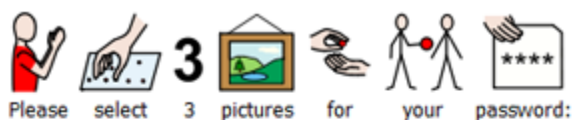


## Registering

Any web user can access this section to view messages being posted. However, in order to 'chat', the user will need to register first, with which the young person may require some assistance.

In order to register to use the Chat Zone, the child or young person will need to enter their name, their date of birth and their email address. Their email address and date of birth will be kept private.

They then select an **avatar** from a selection of 50 images and create a 'password' from a range of pictures. This password needs to be any three of these images, in any order. The student could choose the same image three times – it just needs to be a sequence that they will remember.



A sheet of the '**Password Choices**' is available to download (above). These can be cut up and kept as a reminder to a child's password combination. A sheet of '**Avatar Choices**' is also available. These can be used as a reminder. Students may like to use their avatar in other activities.

The '**Password Reminder**' card is an easy to use template, to stick a child's password and avatar to. These can be kept given to the child to take away so that they can remember their log-ins for use at other computers and at home.



## Chatting

Once the user has registered, they will be able to login and 'chat' with friends using their username (this will be automatically generated and will consist of their first name and number – dependent on amount of same names registered) and their chosen avatar.

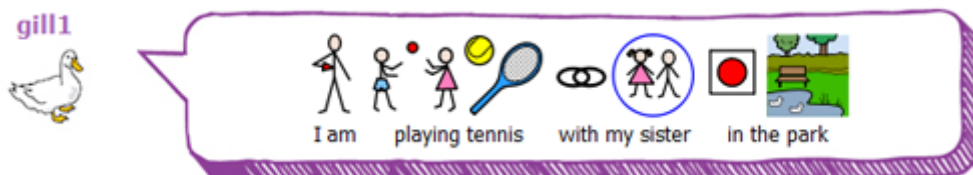
Students will see symbol options which they can select to communicate with other Askability Chat Zone users.

They begin by selecting either **I am...** or **We are....**

The next step to choose from different subjects e.g. **playing, feeling, hobbies.**

Selecting a subject takes them to specific activities. e.g. **reading a book, making cards, making cakes.**

After this you can choose to also add **where** you were or **who** you were with.



The user will be able to see their sentence developing in a box beneath the symbol options. When they have finished their sentence, they just need to click on 'Finish' and then 'send' their sentence to the Askability site.

As the symbols are all pre-loaded, there will be no need for moderation in this section. However, we will still monitor all posts submitted, and will contact users using their email address if we feel concerned about any of their posts.

There is a set of '**Chat Vocabulary Cards**' that can be cut up and used to support chatting. The cards cover most of the main vocabulary available in the Chat Zone. The cards can be using in general discussion. Or a student can select and sequence the cards to help them prepare what they want to chat about.

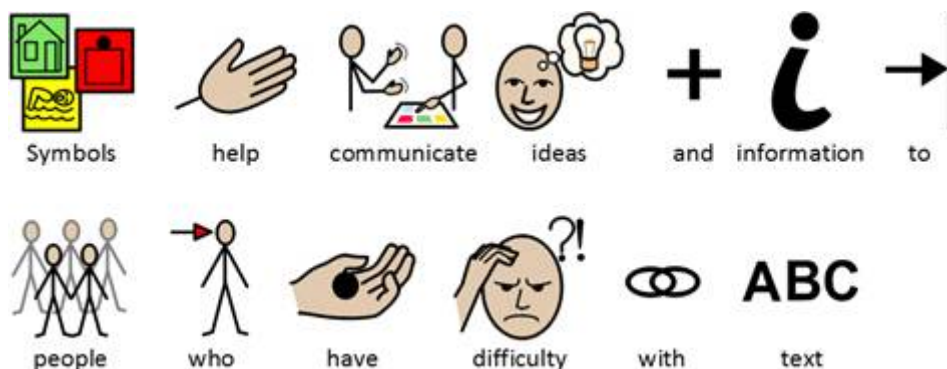




## Widgit Symbols



The text on the website is fully-symbolised using the **Widgit Symbols Set** – a ‘symbol language’ consisting of a set of carefully and simply drawn symbols, each of which illustrates a single concept.



The ever-expanding Widgit Symbol Set contains more than 10,000 symbols, which cover an English vocabulary of over 40,000 words.

Widgit’s simply drawn, colourful symbols each illustrate a single concept, in a clear and concise way, and cover a range of topics (including many curricular areas) wide enough to make them suitable for symbol users of all ages and abilities.

Widgit Symbols are used all over the world, supporting 17 languages, increasing the accessibility of written text, and giving readers of all literacy levels greater access to information. As the Widgit Symbol Set is designed specifically for written information, Widgit Symbol users can develop a real independence in their reading and writing.



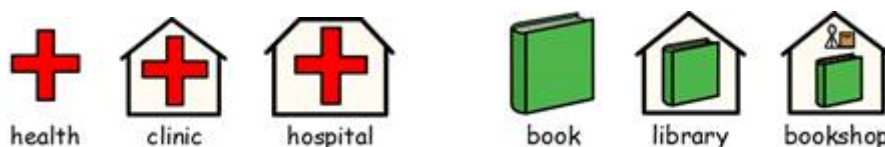
## Schematic structure

The Wigit Symbols follow a schematic structure, meaning that there are 'rules' for the way in which they are formed. These 'rules' for symbol composition quickly become recognisable to new users, giving a level of independence to users even while they are learning.

A good example of this structure is the set of conventions followed by the symbols for buildings. A symbol that represents a building will feature a standard outline of a building, which contains another symbol that gives information about the type of building it is. The scale of the building is indicated by the shape of the roof: a flat roof represents a large building, such as a hospital, and a pointed roof represents a smaller building, such as a clinic.

The inclusion of other elements within a 'building' symbol can change the nature of the symbol again. For example, adding a cash register to the 'book in a building' symbol would indicate a bookshop rather than a library.

Once these rules have been learned, it is easy to recognise the concept being depicted by the symbol, even when the symbol features three or more elements.

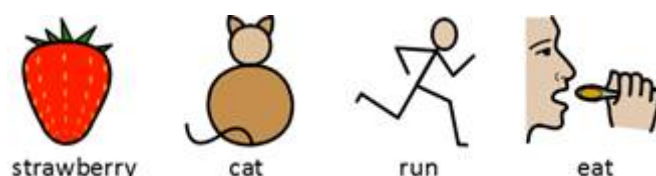


## Levels of symbols

There are three levels of complexity within the Wigit Symbol Set: **Transparent**, **Learned** and **Abstract**.

- **Transparent**

'Transparent' symbols are very obvious depictions of the concepts that they illustrate. The reader does not need to rely upon the symbol's context (i.e. to understand any of the words in the sentence, or pay attention to the other symbols) to be able to understand what the symbol means. As long as the reader is familiar with the concept that is being illustrated, they should be able to interpret the symbol.

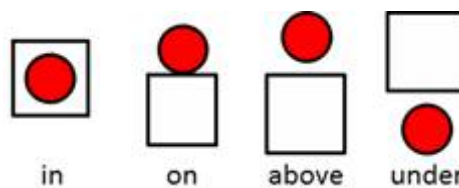




- **Learned**

The second level of symbol, 'learned', is more conceptual and therefore needs to be learned. The consistent nature of 'learned' symbols means that the concepts they represent become obvious when they are shown together.

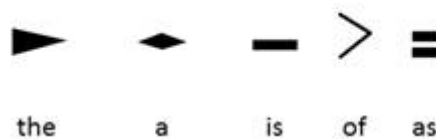
In this example, the concepts of the words are illustrated by the varying relationship between the red ball and the box. If the 'in' symbol was seen without the word or the other symbols to provide context, it could be difficult to understand. However, having seen the symbols for related concepts, the reader is able to make an educated guess at the meaning, even without being able to understand the words.



- **Abstract**

At the third and highest level are the 'abstract' symbols. Abstracts are symbols that have no obvious meaning when viewed on their own, and typically represent determiners (e.g. 'a', 'an', 'the') or adpositions (e.g. 'of', 'to', 'with', 'ago').

While their meaning can often be inferred by the context in which they are used, abstracts may actually be a distraction to some readers. In fact, not using abstract symbols to symbolise, for example, a determiner in a sentence, can actually help the meaning of the sentence to become more obvious.



Usually, only the main information-carrying words in a sentence are symbolised, as the purpose of symbolising is to communicate the idea, rather than to teach literacy.





## More Information

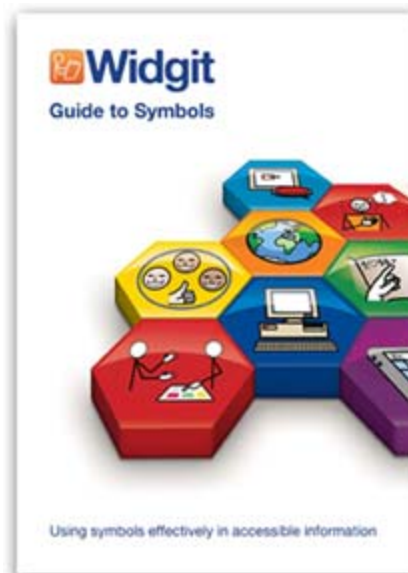
More information on symbols and how to use them can be found in Widgit's **Guide to Symbols.pdf**

There is more information on symbols, and their use, on the Widgit website [www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com)

### Evidence of use in mainstream schools:

You may also like to read about the Symbols Inclusion Project – the collaboration between Widgit and Warwickshire Integrated Disability Service on the use of symbols to support inclusion and curriculum access. This aims to create genuinely inclusive learning environments for all children and young people:

[www.symbolsinclusionproject.org](http://www.symbolsinclusionproject.org)



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