

## 2.8 Assisting people who have difficulty reading and writing

Many people have literacy levels that make it difficult to complete the increasingly complex forms required to access essential services. This can have the potential to place those with low literacy levels at a disadvantage and at risk of missing out.

They also may have low self-esteem or feel emotions such as shame, fear and powerlessness, which can often lead to isolation. It is important you treat those with low literacy with dignity and respect, in the same way you would anyone else.

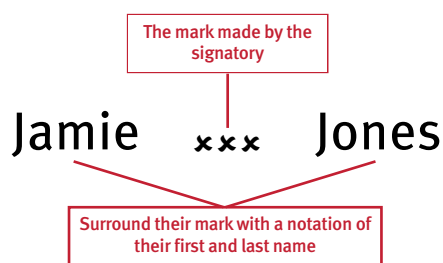
Be mindful of your tone and pace of speaking – speaking louder or slowing your pace is not necessary and can come across as offensive.

When witnessing:

- Explain to the signatory, though the contents of the document will remain confidential, it is necessary to read the document out aloud to be sure that you have the correct one and that they have a thorough understanding of it.
- Read the entire document to them, allowing time for them to ask questions if they need to clarify anything.
- You should never act on the signatory's behalf by filling in a document you intend to witness. If for any reason a person is unable to complete or make alterations to a document themselves, your options are:
  - Assist them to make the requested alterations, with both you and the signatory initialing all alterations. Be aware by helping in this way, you cannot then witness the document you must refer them to another JP or Cdec to have it witnessed.
  - Refer the signatory to someone else for assistance to make the changes prior to you witnessing the document.
- Complete a certification clause on the document, using the following or similar words:

*I have read the contents of this document to the signatory, and they appeared to me to understand the contents, nature and effect of the document, and they have placed their signature or mark upon the document in my presence.*

- If the signatory is unable to sign but is able to make a mark you are required to ensure their mark can be clearly identified. You can do this by writing their name either side of their mark and adding the words 'The mark made by the signatory' as shown below.



- Witness the signature or mark in the usual manner.

Additional information to your standard record keeping could include:

- if the document was read aloud to the signatory
- if any alterations were made to the document
- if there was an annotation made on the document if the signatory made their mark on the document.
- any other actions taken which differ from your standard witnessing process.

## **Where can I get more information?**

**Reading Writing Hotline**

[www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au](http://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au)