IMPROVING THE READING EXPERIENCE

D istance can be more than physical. Reading challenges like dyslexia or poor eyesight reduce accessibility to books for some people, effectively distancing them from what others take for granted. While printed books are limited in how they are presented, ebooks have the potential to offer greater options to readers with these challenges. How can new technology help achieve this?

There is a lot of research as to how font settings and backgrounds can dramatically improve reading experience. We often hear from librarians, parents or readers themselves how reading challenges reduce enjoyment and hamper learning. Happily, use of new technology can give users a lot more control of their reading experience.

Our aim is to use technology to facilitate ease of reading and this is achieved through the ability to select different screen background colours (white background is not dyslexia friendly), text font styles and line spacing. There are now options for setting backgrounds and fonts so users can select options that best suit their reading difficulty or personal preference. Readers will often want to 'set and forget' these preferences so that future ebooks will display the same way.

Research offers some guidance on which options may be most suitable for greatest ease of reading. It's suggested 'clean' fonts such as cursive, gothic or verdana are easier for dyslexics, font size is best at 12–14 (or larger) point and dark text on pastel background colours is best. We have found that access to our ePlatform product via a tablet device rather than a smartphone helps too, as this offers a larger screen size and more options.

Ultimately it's all about helping everyone to discover the joy of reading, and that includes those who may have been reluctant readers in the past due to visual stress.

Platforms that follow these guidelines put control back in the hands of the readers and open up the world of books to them.

TRISH DU TEMPLE
Director, ePlatform
Wheelers Books
trish@wheelers.co.nz

ABOVE: Font settings, backgrounds and type size are all important for readability.