

# How you say it matters:

Creating professional and accessible publications

# Creating professional and accessible publications

All organizations want their publications to be effective as communication tools. This guide will help you communicate better with all audiences, including those with disabilities. Our guide will help you develop clear messages, write in audience-friendly language, format your publications appropriately, and create alternate formats.

Our guide is intended to give community members simple ways to improve accessibility in their documents as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## What do we mean when we say “professional”?

Creating documents in a manner can be read and understood by a wide audience. This means publications:

- Are easy to read, easy to understand
- Use simple, clear, and direct design
- Include relevant graphics

## What do we mean when we say “accessible”?

Accessibility means different things to different people, and in this guide, we focus on creating publications that:

- Use non-discriminatory language
- Are likely to be understood by the widest possible audience
- Are easily converted to alternate formats

## How should I use this guide?

We have found that thoughtful planning results in good design. Read this guide before you start any publication project. Keep these guidelines in mind when writing your publications, and use our checklist before printing to make sure you haven't missed anything.

An important thing to remember is that one in five Americans has a disability. Even if you are not trying to reach a specific disability audience, there is no doubt that some of your audience members will have disabilities. Our guidelines will show you how easy it is to make publications that are professional *and* accessible.

# Who is your audience?

## Hint: It's not you.

How often have you read a publication and thought to yourself, “what is that person talking about?” We recommend imagining you are talking to your grandmother about the topic of your publication. Assume she is a smart cookie, but not an expert in your field. Avoid overly technical words and irrelevant information. It is helpful to think of someone specific when writing so you can explain things at their level.

## Reading Level

The average American adult reads at an 8-9 grade level. Aim for shorter sentences, simple words, and always put your most important point first.

### **Example of an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level**

If you are going to write for general audiences, aim for an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading comprehension level.

### **Example of a 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level**

For people who don't read very well, write to a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level.

## People First Language

The idea behind people-first language is that it recognizes someone is a person, a human being, and a citizen first, and that their disability is a part, but not all of them.

### **Instead of...**

The disabled or the handicapped

She's confined to a wheelchair

Mentally Retarded

He's emotionally disturbed/mentally ill

Instead of: “normal”

### **Use...**

People with disabilities

She uses a wheelchair

Person with a cognitive disability

He has a mental health condition

Use: “typical” or “average”

## What is your message?

The best communications begin with a simple and clear message. The first thing people think when they pick up a publication is “What does this have to do with me?” Think carefully about the most important thing you want to get across to your audience, and make sure you explain why they should care about your message. Try to stick to three main points per document.

For a general brochure, you should include:

- Who you are
- What you do
- How to contact you for more information

For a general brochure, it’s not a good idea to include:

- Every program available,
- The entire history of organization
- Every person associated with your organization

If you have a large amount of information to share, consider a larger document like a newsletter or a report instead of a brochure or flyer.

## Plain Language

Plain Language is different from reading level. Every audience, from experts to novices (remember your grandma) appreciates language that is simple, clear and direct.

### **Sample text**

When the process of writing a publication results in ambiguous language or over-reliance on jargon, the writer should analyze their work and calibrate it to the reading level of their audience. One method of achieving this is by testing the documents validity with a member of the designated community.

### **Translated to plain language**

If you are writing a document you should review your work and make sure your audience can read it. A simple way to test this is by having a community member read it and give feedback

## How should I format my document?

Once you have your message developed, it is time to put it on paper. Formatting may seem intimidating, but is actually an important step to bring your publication to life. All printed publications should follow these guidelines.

### Headings should be in a sans-serif font

All headings should be an 18-point font minimum.

#### Example of a sans-serif font:

AaBbCc

Arial, Helvetica, Myriad Pro, Calibri

### Body text should be in a serif font

All body text should be at least a 14-point font.

#### Example of a serif font:

AaBbCc

Times New Roman, Minion Pro, Cambria

### Use only two fonts per publication

Use one font for headings, another font for body text. It is tempting to use multiple fonts to create interest, but it is actually distracting and difficult to read.

### Follow these rules for font style and emphasis

- Don't use underlined text
  - People think underlined text is a website link
- Don't use all-capital letters anywhere in your document
  - PEOPLE THINK YOU ARE SHOUTING AT THEM
- If you use colored text, use only one dark color
  - People can't easily read some colored text
- Using *italicized* or **bold** text are good ways to emphasize an important point.
  - ***You don't need both to stand out***
- Remember to be consistent with how you use font styles.
  - If you use italics for quotations, use bold to emphasize a single word

# Graphics

Graphics include photographs, images, clipart, charts, logos and other non-text elements that help to describe a concept. Graphics can help add interest and additional meaning, especially for people with cognitive disabilities.

Photographs are better than generic clip art. But the best things you can use are photos specific to your cause or message.



*The clipart on the left is good* because it adds visual interest and would be relevant to a document about people with visual impairment.

*The photo in the middle is better* because it shows an actual person with the visual impairment functioning in everyday life.

*The photo on the right is the best* because it shows an actual person served by *our* organization who benefits from our programs.



Never place text on top of graphics. As you can see, this text is very hard to read.

## White space is as important as relevant graphics

Using white space can help guide the eye through a document. Don't fill the space with so much text that it overwhelms the reader. White space provides "breathing room" for the eye, and increases readability.

Add white space to make a page less cramped, confusing, or overwhelming.

### **Creating professional and accessible publications**

The purpose of this guide is to help community members and organizations create brochures, flyers, and newsletters that fulfill the American's with Disabilities Act Standards and Guidelines. These guidelines are effective for both the general population and for the disability community. Good design is both professional *and* accessible. All organizations want their publications to be effective, this guide will help you, no matter who you are communicating with – clear messages and effective something else.

This guide is intended to give community members simple ways to improve accessibility in their documents as required by the ADA. The instruction outlined within this document are recommendations that are effective in all aspects of publishing. How will this guide help you?

Read this guide before you start any publication project. Thoughtful planning results in good design. Think about, read guide, verify with checklist when done What do we mean when we say "professional"?

Creating documents in a manner can be read and understood by a wide audience.

Easy to read, easy to understand, Consist with other documents

Overall readability ( use of whitespace, etc), Polished ( not tacky)

Use of . relevant graphics, What do we mean when we say "accessible"?

Same as above, but also easily modified into alternate formats

Universal design: best design is the most inclusive design, professional and accessible are essentially the same thing. Commonly requested alternate formats are: Screen readers, low vision, low cognitive abilities

*Compare this example to Page 1 of our guide, notice how much more difficult it is to read this page without headings and whitespace.*

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# How do I make alternate formats?

Alternate formats can mean a variety of things:

- reading your document over the phone to someone who is visually impaired;
- taking extra time to explain a publications to someone with a cognitive disability, or;
- providing the document electronically.

Every publication you create should include an alternate format statement like the example below. This shows you are aware of your responsibility to provide an alternate format to anyone who requests one.

This publication is available in alternate formats upon request

The two most common requests for alternate formats you will get are large print, and screen-reader friendly. *Always ask the person requesting an alternate format what works best for them.*

## Making a large print version

- Use 18-point minimum font for all text
  - Headings should be larger than body text font
- Put at least 1.25 spaces between lines
- Left justify your margins
- Make sure graphics are bigger, but the same quality as the original
- Don't use columns

## Making a screen-reader friendly version

Screen-readers are computer programs that read documents aloud to someone with a visual impairment. Ask each person what their specific needs are, but these are general guidelines to follow:

- Remove any text boxes, tables, graphs, and other graphics, and insert content of those items into body of text
- Double-check that file is in a format the requestor can open, and if not, try saving document as a .text file (.txt) rich-text file (.rtf) or PDF (.pdf)

# Publication Checklist

## Audience

- Did you think about who your audience is?
- Did you write to the reading level of your audience?
- Did you use People First Language?

## Message

- Did you think about what your message is
- Did you pick the right format (brochure, flyer, or newsletter)?
- Did you explain to your reader why they should care?

## Finishing touches

- Did you use the recommended fonts and font sizes?
- Did you only use two fonts in your publication?
- Did you use text styles (italics, bold) appropriately?

## Graphics

- Did you use relevant graphics?
- Did you remove any text on top of graphics?
- Did you include plenty of white space?

## Alternate formats

- Did you include an alternate formats statement?

## Congratulations!

By using this guide, you are well on your way to making accessible and professional publications.

Remember that it will get easier with each publication you make. Also, you will feel great that every publication leaving your office is reaching the widest possible audience.

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**This document is available in alternate formats.**

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