

# 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.

# 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)

## 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

# 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.

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

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