

ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION: THE BASICS

1 in 5 Australians have a disability, many of whom experience regular challenges with accessing information. As a result, the ability to write accurately, clearly and consistently has far-reaching benefits on the disability community. Best of all, it's easy. By keeping a few basics in mind, you can improve your writing, reach more people and create a more inclusive society for people of all

Why does it matter?

Producing accessible content is useful for people with disability, but it can help readers of all abilities too. Whether you're sending an email, producing a presentation or writing a web page, creating clear, consistent and useful content is easier on everybody as it ensures that your message will be interpreted the right way. Plus, focusing on accessibility is a great way to embody what being a frontline worker is all about – supporting people with disability to lead the life that they want.

Format with care

Avoid excessive use of formatting – overdoing it with italic and underline can make your content more difficult to read. Bold is the most accessible type of formatting, so use it sparingly to emphasise parts of your text. At the same time, steer clear of justified text and stick to left alignment instead. Justified paragraphs can create large uneven spaces between sentences, making it difficult for readers to see where new lines appear.

Consider word size

Font size can make a big difference to accessibility, especially when it comes to assisting readers with vision impairments. It's best practice to type Word documents in font size 12-14, and where possible, avoid writing large blocks of text in capital letters. This can make text difficult to read and suggest that you're shouting. Plus, people with dyslexia or low literacy levels rely on the shape of words to read so using capitals can make it harder for them to recognise certain words.



Stick to 'sans serif'

Serif fonts tend to have small 'hooks' at the end of each letter. This can make them look more decorative, but also more difficult to read for people with dyslexia. This is because serif fonts run letters close together, making it more difficult for readers to tell words apart. In contrast, sans serif fonts such as Arial, Calibri, Helvetica or Verdana have wider spaces between each letter and are typically easier to read. Here's an example.

Which font is best?

This is a serif font (Freestyle Script)

This is a sans serif font (Helvetica)

Keep it simple

A common mistake is to overuse jargon, or include professional terms from your workplace that aren't widely understood. When in doubt, ask yourself "can I say this more simply?" For example, rather than saying 'referendum', you could say 'asking the public to vote yes or no on an issue'. Complicated words should also be avoided. Rather than 'employment', consider 'work' or rather than 'annual', try 'every year'.

TOP TIP: Aim your writing at a 12-year old level. This will help you focus on keeping your message simple.

Think visually

While words are important for explaining things in detail, pictures can make your message even clearer. For example, when organising a meeting with your client, send a map or photo of the location to provide a better idea of where to go than a written description only.

Careful with colour

While colour can be an effective way to draw attention to something, it shouldn't be used alone. People with colour blindness may not be able to see the colours you've chosen, while screen readers used by people with vision impairment can often overlook colour changes. For clarity, make sure any charts and illustrations you use include numbers, shapes or symbols in addition to colour. Also make sure the contrast between your text and background enables easy reading – [Vision Australia](#) has a useful tool to help you figure out whether two colours can be easily read by people with vision impairments.

"My aim is to put down on paper what I see and feel in the best and simplest way" - Ernest Hemingway

Accessible formats explained

Accessible documents come in many forms – here are some of the most common:



Large print

Material printed on 16 point font or higher so that it is easier for people with low vision to read.



Braille

A system of writing used by people who are vision impaired. There are specialist organisations which can help translate written documents into Braille text.



Easy English

A simplified form of English that is helpful to people with intellectual disabilities or low English language literacy levels. It typically uses simple language, short sentences and pictures.



Captions

Captions are a way of presenting the audio portion of a video as text on screen. This often includes spoken dialogue and sound effects, designed to help viewers with hearing impairments.



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