



Guidelines for Written Communications¹⁰

The following guidelines are offered as an example of how you can make your documentation more accessible to those with disabilities. The guidelines can be used when producing e-mails, letters, fact sheets, administration forms, invoices, faxes, invitations and booking forms. They can also be used as a template for producing accessible marketing copy.

These guidelines have been formulated because:

- Following the guidelines will make information easier to access, read and follow. Failure to meet these standards may result in misunderstanding or disregard.
 - Employing standards to improve accessibility sets a good example to others.
 - When promoting your organisation's reputation as disability confident it makes sense to do so in a consistently accessible manner.
1. Aligned text to the left, including headings.
 2. Use unjustified text.
 3. Avoid underlining.
 4. Avoid italics.
 5. Avoid using capital letters to emphasise whole words.
 6. Avoid shading or pictures behind text.
 7. Use a minimum font size of 12 and a clear font (for example Arial).
 8. Use diagrams where appropriate.

1. Aligned text to the left, including headings

Why? English is read from the left of the page to the right. When all of the text is aligned to the left, the eyes and brain know exactly where to go to at the start of every line. If text is centralised, or aligned to the right, the eyes and the brain have to search for the start of each line, "jumping" to a different start point from line to line – this can be uncomfortable and confusing for readers with visual impairments, dyslexia, and anyone who finds reading more difficult.

2. Use unjustified text

Why? When using unjustified (left aligned) text, the spaces between the words are all the same size. The eyes and brain know how far to move to get to the next word. When reading justified text, the eyes and brain have to move to a distance that is different from the last time – this can be uncomfortable and confusing for readers with visual impairments, dyslexia, and anyone who finds reading more difficult.

¹⁰ Based on Producing Accessible Information by the Employers' Forum on Disability, UK



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3. Avoid underlining

Why? The added line makes it more difficult to focus on, and read letters and words. The eyes and the brain see “a word with a line under it” rather than “a word”. They therefore have to work harder to separate the word from the line to read it. This can be uncomfortable and confusing for readers with visual impairments, dyslexia, and anyone who finds reading more difficult. **If you would like to highlight words, use bold, or increase the size of the font.**

4. Avoid italics

Why? The slant of each line and letter changes the “weight” of the font, making it lighter and less “solid”. Again, the eyes and brain therefore need to work harder to identify the letters and words. This can again be uncomfortable and confusing for readers with visual impairments, dyslexia and anyone who finds reading more difficult. **If you would like to highlight words, use bold, or increase the size of the font.**

5. Avoid using capital letters to emphasise whole words

Why? In English, and other European languages, it is usual to preserve capital letters for the start of sentences, or words that fit a certain grammatical context such as proper nouns. It takes more effort for the brain and the eyes to identify words made entirely of capital letters. This can again be uncomfortable and confusing for readers with visual impairments, dyslexia and anyone who finds reading more difficult. **If you would like to highlight words, use bold, or increase the size of the font.**

6. Avoid shading or pictures behind text

Why? shading or pictures behind the text can reduce the colour contrast between the text and the background. The eyes and brain need to work harder to identify the letters and words from the background. This can again be uncomfortable for readers with visual impairments, dyslexia, and anyone who finds reading more difficult.

Highlight words by placing them into a text box or using a larger font size instead.





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7. Use a minimum font size of 12 and a clear font (for example Arial)

Why? Arial is one of the most accessible fonts. It has clean lines and is easy to read because Arial, and similar fonts are characterised by being “**sans serif**”. A serif is a little decorative line that is found on letters in some fonts like Times New Roman. “Sans serif” means “without the decorative line on each letter”. Some people find it difficult to read fonts that use serifs, because they distract the eyes and the brain from the overall shape of the letter.

Font size 12 is considered to be the minimum size at which people read comfortably.

Avoid trying to photocopy larger font sizes, when the print size has been increased to improve accessibility, as photocopy quality can be variable, and so the end result can be counter-productive.

8. Use diagrams where appropriate

Why? A clear diagram can often convey a lot of information, and helps people to understand the message more quickly. Diagrams are useful in this way for all people, and also in particular for people with learning disabilities.

In General, accessible information will make it easier to attract the best, communicate with all your employees, and do business with millions of customers.