



# Making Our Written Publications Socially Inclusive

A guide produced by Sligo PPN to advise key organisations as to best practise in the production of written content.

This guide is informed by research and community  
consultation<sup>1</sup>

From the Irish Times <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/low-literacy-levels-puts-lives-at-risk-1.2931524>

Using jargon puts lives at risk. Civil servants in the UK have been banned from using words like “deliver”, “tackling” and “going forward”, frequently used by HSE managers. These meaningless terms should also be banned in Ireland.

<sup>1</sup>This guide is adapted from the work of Leitrim Older Persons Council ‘Making Written Publications Age Friendly’

# **Designing Text for Community**

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You need to make sure that the way your information is presented accommodates all members of the community. Designing material so that it is reader-friendly is as important as clear content.

**“serif” typeface for print materials** - Fonts in serif typefaces—like Times New Roman, and Georgia—have tails on the ends of their letters that create an illusionary line, which can help guide the eye across the print (This document is typed in Georgia, size 12). “Sans serif” typefaces, such as Arial, do not have the tails and are harder to read on the written page. Novelty typefaces, like *Comic Sans*, and display typefaces, like Bodoni, are also difficult to read.

**Make type size at least 12 point, 13 point, or 14 point** - Type that is too small can be hard on the eyes and can even cause a headache. Some fonts are naturally bigger than others. Use 14 point type size when working with smaller fonts, like Times New Roman. Try and make headings even larger so they will stand out.

**Allow for white space** - Empty space on a page can provide natural places for the eyes to relax from reading and may help individuals such as older adults or people with literacy problems to focus their attention.

**Use upper and lowercase letters** - Generally, readers are most familiar with print that has upper and lowercase letters. That’s why ALL CAPITAL LETTERS CAN BE DIFFICULT TO READ. Save using all uppercase letters for headlines or when you want to emphasize something.

**Use 1.5 or Double space body text, where possible** - It can be frustrating to read the same lines over and over again because they are blurring together. Double spacing text can help your reader avoid this problem.

**Try to limit the use of italics, underlining, and bold for emphasis** - These styles are good for highlighting information but if overused can make the text less readable.

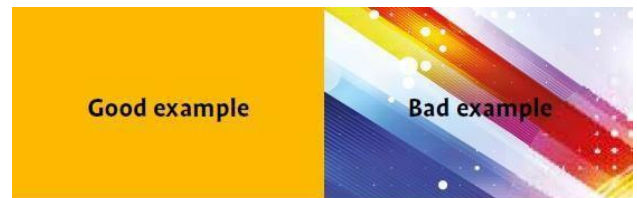
**Align text to the left margin** - Text is called “left justified” when the start of each new line is aligned with the left margin. This style is easiest to read.

**Sentences and graphics** - If you plan to insert a picture into the text, try to ensure it can fit without disturbing the text as sentences divided by images can be hard to read.

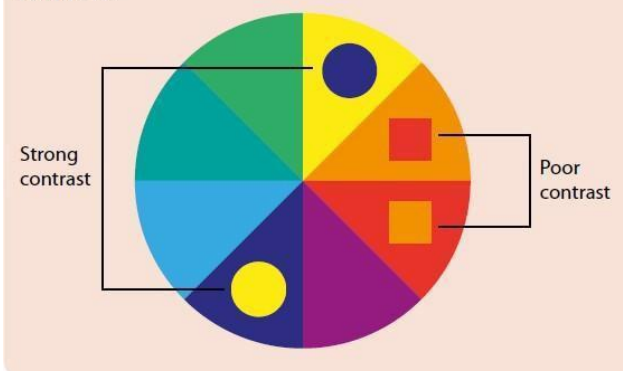
**Keep normal spacing between letters** - Try not to condense or expand spacing between letters so that the words can fit on one line. For example:

- o This is what regularly spaced text looks like.
- o Thisiswhattextlookslikewhenitiscondensed.
- o T h i s i s w h a t t e x t l o o k s l i k e w h e n e x p a n d e d .

**Avoid yellow and blue and green in close proximity** – People with fading vision can find it increasingly difficult to tell these colours apart. Using blue or green text on a yellow backdrop or vice versa may make the words appear to blend in with the background.



**Tip:** Avoid using colours that are in close proximity on the colour wheel. Design colour materials with strong contrast.



**Limit line length** - Keeping lines from 50 to 65 characters long can help the eyes scan across the text more easily. This reduces the chance of readers inadvertently skipping to another line in the middle of reading.

**Avoid awkward breaks at the end of lines** - Breaking a word at the end of a line with a hyphen can make it difficult to read. Also, try to keep numbers and their qualifiers, like 25 percent or 32 people, on the same line.

**Carefully select paper** - Glossy paper creates a shine that can make text difficult to read. If a paper is too thin, the reader may be able to see through it to the type on the other side of the page, which will also make it hard to read.

# **Clear Content**

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There are a number of ways to make written information easier for your readers to use and retain:

**Try to be direct and specific** - Present information in a clear and familiar way to reduce the number of inferences that must be made. Omit unnecessary words. For example, instead of saying, “Some people find that talking to staff within the local authority can be helpful in making decisions about the right type of funding available to a community group ,” you might say, “Talk with Sligo County Council about community supports available.”

**Limit the number of key points** - Try to stick with three to five points per section. Make your message brief to help compensate for possible short-term memory limitations.

**Offer a manageable number of actions** - There may be several things you want your readers to do about a certain issue. Try to suggest only one or two things at a time - you increase the likelihood your reader will take positive actions. You might also think about presenting suggestions as carefully numbered, sequenced steps. People with some cognitive disorders, such as early Alzheimer’s disease, typically can retain only one or two steps at a time.

**Use positive statements** - Try to always frame your statement positively.

**Support information with real examples and relatable stories** - Using stories can help readers build on information that is already familiar to them. Examples and stories may connect readers to applicable past experiences. In relation to forms, try to always include a sample filled in template that people can follow

**Pictures help illustrate information** - Sometimes an easy-to- understand picture can help the reader identify with the information. This is especially true when engaging groups such as older people, people living with dementia, travellers or groups facing language barriers. When using pictures of individuals, ensure that you reflect the LECPs ethos of social inclusion, use images that **all** community groups can relate to and don’t use patronizing images.

**Put your key points up front** - Try to say your main message right at the start. If you bury the important message in the middle or towards the end of the publication (or even within a paragraph), it may not get read.

**Break lengthy documents into short sections or paragraphs** - This may help the reader to remain focused and not get distracted in the middle of a long paragraph or section. For key statutory documents such as CDPs or LECs consider producing a complementary summary document for the community. It is rare that the bulky publications have much relevance outside of established structures.

**Repeat main points multiple times**- This will help with the recall of information and focus on what is most important. Consider starting with an introductory summary paragraph or bulleted list and end with a summary.

- Introduce what you are going to say.
- Say it.
- Repeat what you said.

**Reinforcing key points with questions** - Research suggests that inserting questions related to the main messages into the text may help readers recall the key points.

**Think about how you use diagrams** - Charts and graphs that require interpretation or the ability to compare information in different rows or columns can be confusing for readers.

**Where possible, avoid jargon** - Terms used by professionals but not commonly in use by the general public can be thought of as jargon. This is especially the case with the use of acronyms. These make sense to few people except those who use them regularly as part of their working day. If you do need to use them, include an Explanation of Terms.

Plain English is a style of presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it. To learn more about it, go to NALA's plain English website.

