Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service
— A Universal Design Approach

Written

Verbal

Digital

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí
agus Athchóirithe
Department of Public
Expenditure and Reform

Centre for
Excellence in
Universal Design
NDA

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service

– A Universal Design Approach

Foreword

I very much welcome this Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach. I am of the view that we can all learn from the clear and common sense advice in this toolkit. Not only because the public deserves the best possible service, but because I think these guidelines focus on what is right.

The way we communicate is very important – the language we use, our tone, our body language and how we present information in written or verbal methods. Some groups have, in the past, been intimidated by the way the public service has communicated. This should no longer be the case. Our interaction with the public must be positive and produce the most effective outcomes for all involved.

All members of the public expect to receive the best possible customer experience. I know that public servants aim to deliver the highest quality service they can. We need to ensure that they are equipped to do so. It is essential that they use the simplest and clearest language possible and to ensure that all services are accessible, and meet the diverse needs of all our customers. This toolkit includes guidance on general writing style principles, verbal and non-verbal communications, design of forms and documents, web and social media content and how to display signage.

We are all aware that more and more services are moving online. This toolkit gives advice on the provision of the highest quality of online services. Websites should be easy to navigate and updated regularly. The information we provide should be clear and concise, easy to find and understand and forms should be easy to complete.

Finally, I would like to thank the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design and a Working Group which included customer service representatives from all Government Departments and major Offices, for the development of this toolkit. As such the toolkit is reflective of the work of the entirety of the public service. It shows a level of professionalism and reflects on aspirations that we can all work to achieve.

Paschal Donohoe, T.D.

**Minister for Finance and
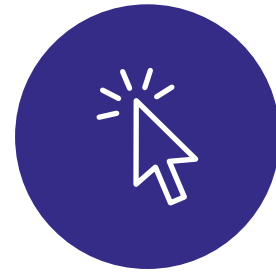Public Expenditure and Reform**

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Customer communications should be easy to:

- ✓ access,

- ✓ understand, and

- ✓ use.

Examples, tips, checklists and links in the toolkit can be used for:

- planning,

- training, and

- informing contractors.

The toolkit sections help to inform the design of:

Written,

Verbal, and
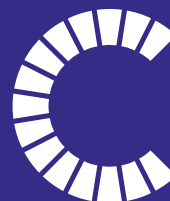
Digital communication.

Find the easy to use toolkit online at the links below.

www.per.gov.ie/customer-communications-toolkit

www.universaldesign.ie/publicservice

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Introduction

Welcome to the Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach. The guidance in this toolkit is to inform the design of customer communication in the Public Service. It is based on a Universal Design approach promoted by the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority (NDA).

> Universal Design is about creating an environment that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.
>
> (In part synopsis from the Disability Act 2005)

In this toolkit you will find sections on the design of Written, Verbal and Digital Communication. It is intended that this toolkit be used in the public service for planning, training and informing contractors. The toolkit sections contain selected statements, examples, tips, checklists and links to learn more. Parts from relevant sections can be used separately and can be made available at service locations. The last section has Question Sets to help check your customer service communication.

Development of communication designs should be guided by an awareness of the following sequence about how people interact with information:

1. Access (approach and perceive)

2. Understand (comprehend and decide)

3. Use (act/react and perform)

Also, it is important to consider that the context of the physical and social environment affects how people use information to perform an activity.

This toolkit complements the Plain English Style Guide for the Public Service developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in partnership with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

Learn more

Visit the website for the **Centre for Excellence in Universal Design**.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) provides **Plain English Guidelines**.

Table of Contents

Written Communication

Written

Written Text Guidance

Following are some key written communication design considerations on how to enhance customer communication with members of the public.

The way you communicate with members of the public is very important; your tone, the words you use and the way you write. It is important to think about whom you are writing for (members of the public) and what they know about your organisation (particularly their familiarity with the technical terms you may use).

Think of the person you are writing for

• What background information do they know about your organisation?

• Are they familiar with the technical terms your organisation uses?

• How will they read the document? Will they just skip to the section of interest to them?

Think of the person you are writing for
What do members of the public know about your organisation?

Make text easy to read and understand

Always use the simplest and clearest language possible. Avoid technical language that members of the public may not understand. If you must use technical language, clearly explain what it means in plain English.

Avoid technical words that members of the public may be unfamiliar with
If you must use technical words explain what they mean.
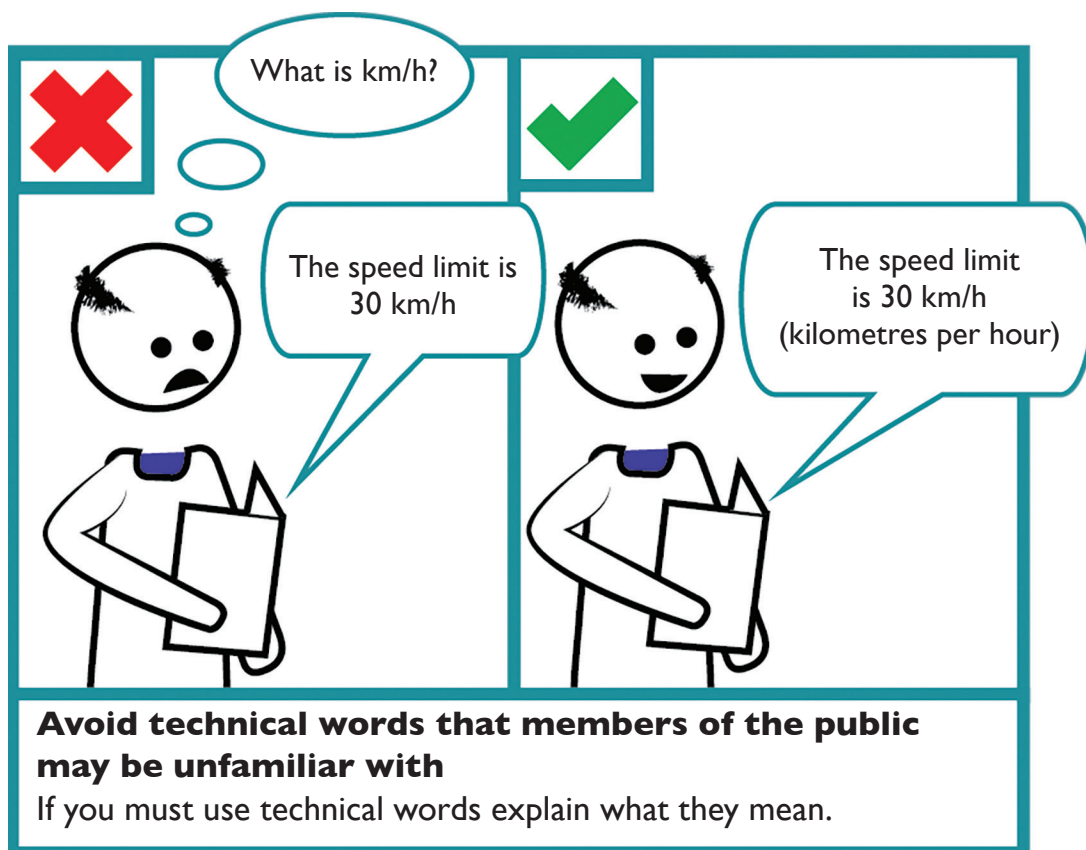
Keep sentences short

Aim to use no more than 15 to 20 words in any sentence. Too many short sentences in a row may appear slightly aggressive to the reader. Mix sentence length. This will provide variety for the reader and sustain energy in your writing.

Break up sentences with full stops, rather than semi-colons. Use one space after a full stop to help with accessibility, particularly for readers using text-to-speech software.

Avoid Latin and French expressions

There can be confusion around abbreviations such as e.g., i.e. and etc.

Try to use the full English equivalents such as 'for example', 'that is' and 'and so on'.

Avoid Latin and French expressions
Try to use the full English equivalents instead.
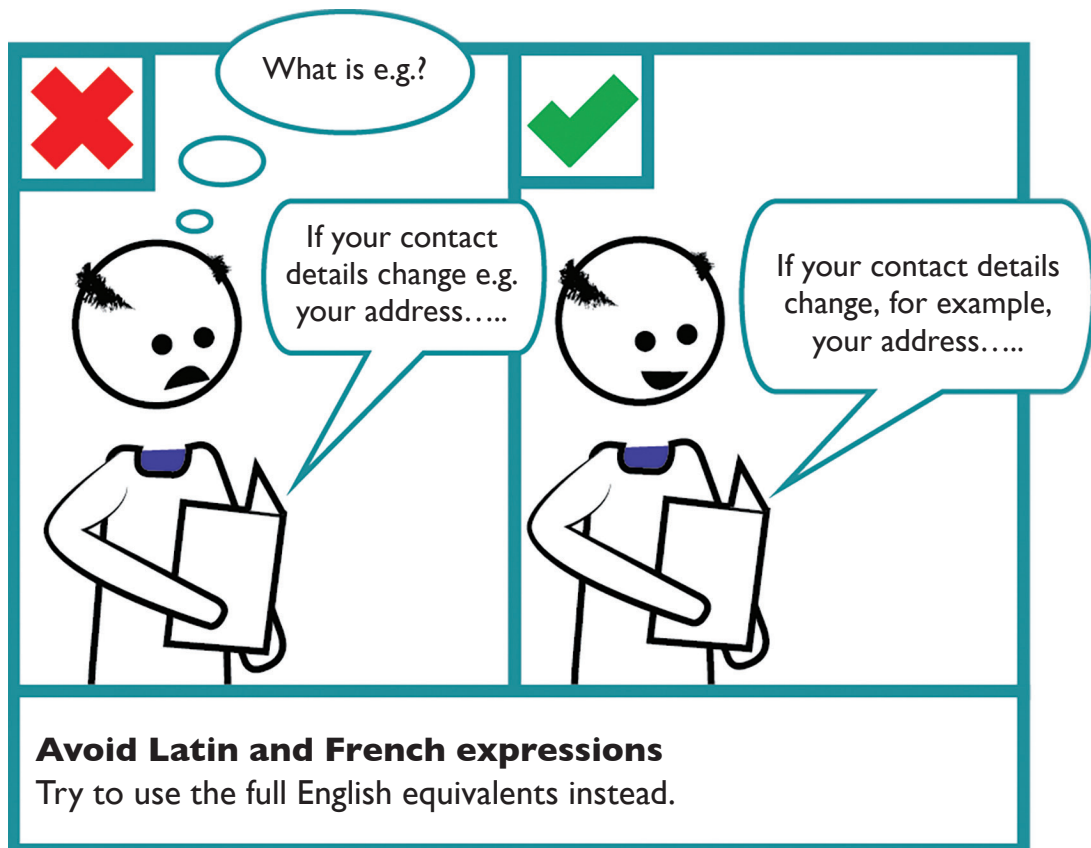
Define unfamiliar abbreviations or acronyms

Where a member of the public may be unfamiliar with an acronym, spell it out the first time it is used followed by the acronym in brackets.

For example, Pay As You Earn (PAYE).

Try to keep unfamiliar abbreviations or acronyms to a minimum.

Be consistent with terms and formats

Use the same terms and formats for the same concept throughout your document. For example, make sure you write dates and numbers consistently; don't change from using the word 'seven' to writing the number '7'.

Be consistent with terms
Use the same term for the same concept throughout your document.
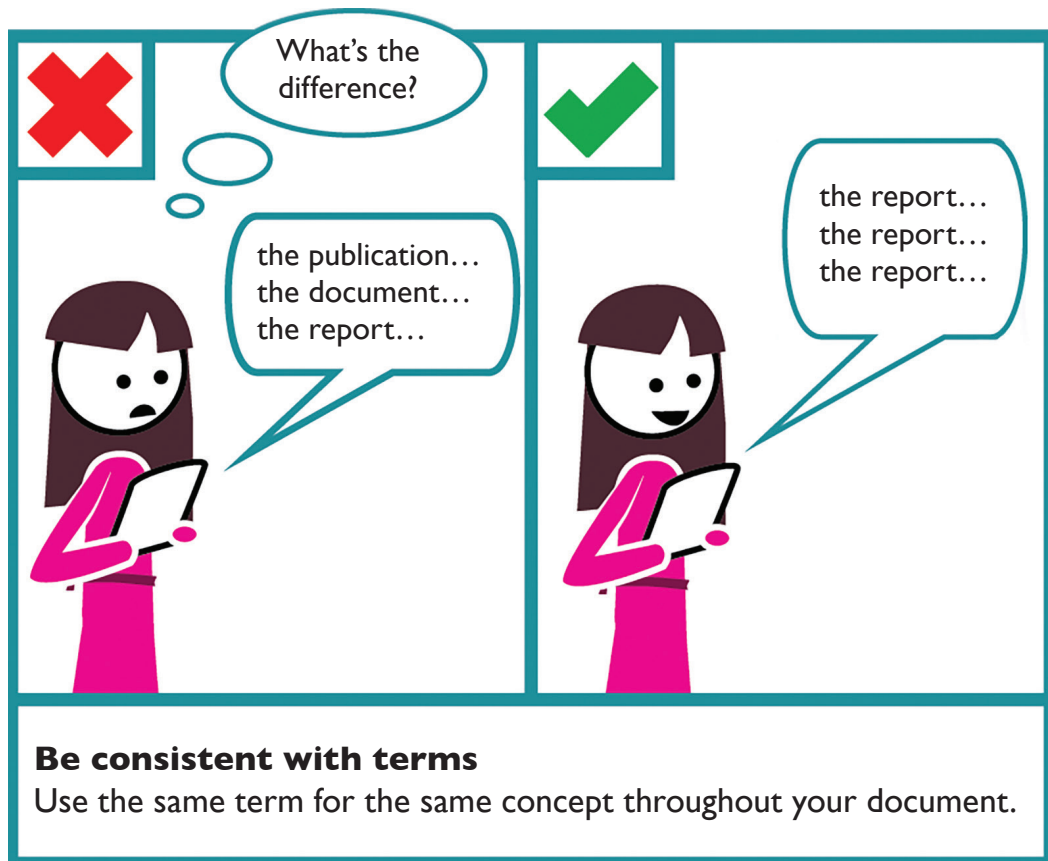
Use questions and answers

Questions and answers help to get information across or emphasise certain facts.

Proofread your document

It is important to proofread your document. It is recommended that this be done at least an hour later, though preferably 24 hours later. This helps you see the document with fresh eyes, making you more likely to notice mistakes. If possible, ask someone else to proofread it as well.

Use a set of terms, phrases and explanations

Create a set of terms, phrases and explanations of technical terms that everyone in your organisation uses repeatedly. This can also be applied to writing and layout standards for your written communication.

• Do you have standard explanations for technical terms that you use for people outside your organisation?

• What standard explanations for technical terms may not be understood by all members of the public?

Additional Information

The Official Languages Act 2003

Public bodies use written communication to engage with the public in many ways including letters, emails, mail shots, information leaflets, reports, announcements and websites. In the case of each of these, public bodies have specific duties under the Official Languages Act.

The Official Languages Act 2003 sets out the duties of public bodies regarding the provision of services in Irish and the rights of the public to avail of those services.

A few important examples of the duties are as follows:

• When a person writes to a public body in Irish, by letter or by email, that person is entitled to receive a reply in Irish.

• Public bodies have a duty to ensure that their stationery (notepaper, compliment slips, fax cover sheets, file covers and other folders, labels and envelopes), signage and recorded oral announcements are provided in Irish or bilingually.

• Public bodies have a duty to publish certain core documents simultaneously in Irish and English.

Learn more:

Further guidance on the Official Languages Act 2003 is available on the website of **An Coimisinéir Teanga**.

Writing dates

The following guidance should be applied when writing dates:

• Write dates in dd mm yyyy (date month year).

   For example, 12 February 2017.

• When referring to a range of dates, use a hyphen in the middle.

   For example, 12-13 February 2017.

• Write decades in digits with just an 's' at the end (no apostrophe) - for example, the 2000s.

• Do not write nd/th as part of a date.

   For example, 24 February 2017 not 24th February 2017.

• Include a comma when including the name of the day before the date - for example, Friday, 10 February 2017.

Writing dates		
Poor example	**Better example**	
10/2/17 ❌	10 February 2017 ✅	**Write dates in dd mm yyyy (date month year).**
2000's ❌	2000s ✅	**Write decades in digits with just an 's' at the end (no apostrophe).**

Writing numbers and amounts

• Write numbers one to nine in words and use digits for number 10 and upwards.

• If a sentence starts with a number, write the number in words, and if it is a double digit over 20, insert a hyphen between the words.

For example, Twenty-one.

• If writing digits, group them in threes from the right, inserting a comma to separate each group.

For example,

Four digit numbers: 2,345

Five or more digits: 20,999   345,345   5,456,678

• The numbers 3, 5 and 8 can be misread and, with some fonts, 0 and 6 can be confused. Choose a font that has clear numbers, such as, Tahoma or Verdana.

• When using tables, make sure the numbers and borders are not too close together.

• Use decimal points only where necessary, as they can be difficult to see.

Writing percentages

- Write percentages with digits and use the percentage symbol (%).

  For example, 60%.

- Replace 'rounded' percentages with a fraction.

  For example, almost three-quarters (74%) of employees in the ICT sector are new to the sector.

- Treat the percentage as a singular or plural according to the subject in the sentence.

  For example, singular - 50% of paper and board produced globally 'is' used for packaging, or, plural - 50% of bananas produced globally 'are' exported to other countries.

Writing numbers, amounts and percentages		
Poor example	**Better example**	
3 ❌	Three ✅	**Write numbers one to nine in words.**
Twenty ❌	20 ✅	**Use digits for number 10 and upwards.**
Sixty per cent ❌	60% ✅	**Write percentages with digits and use the percentage symbol (%).**
2.0 ❌	2 ✅	**Use decimal points only where necessary.**

Writing phone numbers

- Write the area code in brackets before the local number.

  For example, (071) 66522.

- If the local number contains more than five digits, divide the digits into groups of two or three and leave a space between them.

  For example, 209 26 24.

- Divide the digits in Freephone or LoCall numbers according to how easy it is to remember them.

  For example, LoCall 1890 600 20 20.

- Use +353 if writing an international access code for an Irish telephone number.

  For example, write +353 1 800 94 000 instead of 00 353 1 800 94 000.

Writing phone numbers		
Poor example	**Better example**	
01 889 40 00 ❌	(01) 889 40 00 ✔️	**Write the area code in brackets before the local number.**
8894000 ❌	889 40 00 ✔️	**If the local number contains more than five digits, divide the digits into groups of two or three and leave a space between them.**
00353 ❌	+353 ✔️	**Use +353 if writing an international access code for an Irish telephone number.**

Writing addresses

- If space allows, write an address the way it would appear on an envelope.

- If the address appears in this way as part of a sentence, include a colon before the address and put a full stop after the last line.

  For example,
  For more information, write to:
  Department of Public Expenditure and Reform,
  Government Buildings,
  Dublin 2,
  D02 R583.

- If space is tight, put the address on one line, with a comma after each part of the address and a full stop at the end of it.

  For example,
  For more information, write to: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Government Buildings, Dublin 2, D02 R583.

Writing addresses		
Poor example	**Better example**	
For more information, write to: Department of Health, Hawkins House, Hawkins Street, Dublin 2 ❌	For more information, write to: Department of Health, Hawkins House, Hawkins Street, Dublin 2 D02 VW90 ✅	**If space allows, write an address the way it would appear on an envelope.**

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Written Communication

Written Text Checklist

☐ Use plain English.

☐ Keep sentences short; 15 to 20 words in each sentence.

☐ Avoid technical words, unfamiliar abbreviations or acronyms; also avoid French and Latin expressions.

☐ Be consistent with terms throughout your document.

☐ Proofread your document to ensure correct spelling and punctuation.

☐ Check that your document meets all the requirements of the **Official Languages Act 2003**.

Dates, numbers and percentages Checklist

☐ Write dates in dd mm yyyy (date month year).

☐ Write the numbers one to nine in words and use digits for the number 10 and upwards.

☐ Write percentages with digits and the percentage sign (for example, 60%).

☐ Write addresses the way they would appear on an envelope.

☐ If a local phone number contains more than five digits, divide the digits into groups of two or three and leave a space between them.

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Centre for Excellence in Universal Design
NDA

Document Design

When designing and developing written communication, remember the importance of selecting an easy to read font size, good spacing and a clear font type. This will make your written communication easier to read by all members of the public.

Key guidance in the design of documents includes:

Use at least 12 point

Use a minimum of 12-point font size for comfortable reading generally. A person's speed of reading increases as the size of text is increased.

Tip

Different fonts look bigger than others – the size of the 'x' is usually the best guide. If the size of the 'x' is small in the font you have chosen (such as Times New Roman), it is better to use a 14-point font.

For example,

- This is 12-point text in Tahoma

- This is 12-point text in Verdana

- **This is 12-point text in Franklin Gothic Book**

- This is 14 point text in Times New Roman

Use a clear, easy to read font

Use a clear and easy to read font that people are familiar with and recognise easily. It is best to use clear, easy to read sans serif fonts like Verdana or Helvetica. Font style and font size will make written communication easier to read for members of the public.

Comparisons between easy and more difficult to read fonts are illustrated below:

Easy to read fonts	Difficult to read fonts
Verdana	*Brush Script*
Gills Sans MT	Courier
Tahoma	Noteworthy
Helvetica	*Mistral*

Tips

Where possible, make your services usable by a wider audience by offering written communication in alternative formats, such as large print (14-point font or more), Braille or 'easy to read'.

'Easy to read' is designed to be easier to both read and understand. It is of specific benefit for people with intellectual difficulties and may benefit younger readers and people with very low literacy levels. Typically, 'easy to read' content is supported by images and graphics that help explain the text.

Learn more

Find out more about '**Information for all, European standards for making information easy to read and understand**'.

Application Form

Name	First	Surname
Address	House	Road
	City	Post code
Phone number	Prefix	
Mobile number	Prefix	
Email address		

How did you hear about us?

Would you like further information on our services?

Name		Surname
Date	Day and Month	Year
Signature		

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxx

Application Form

- Applicant Details (page 1)
- Payment information (page 2)

Applicant Details

Name

Address

Phone number

Mobile number

Email address

How did you hear about us?   ☐ xxxxxxxxxx
                                ☐ xxxxxxxxxx
                                ☐ xxxxxxxxxx

Would you like further information on our services?   ☐ xxxx
                                                      ☐ xxxx

Name *

Date

Signature *

* Required field   Page 1

Font size affects how easy it is to read
This example of an application form illustrates that it is easier
to read information in bigger font size than in smaller font size.

Make important points stand out

People often scan through documents, brochures and letters, so it is useful to emphasise important information, headings or paragraphs of text.

The general guidance in emphasising important information is to:

• Avoid using BLOCK CAPITALS.

• Avoid using *italics*.

• Avoid using underlining.

People recognise the shape of familiar words, rather than reading each individual letter. Setting a word in CAPITAL LETTERS, italics or underlining distorts the shape of the word, which makes it more difficult to read, particularly for people with visual difficulties.

> # People recognise and read words by shape.
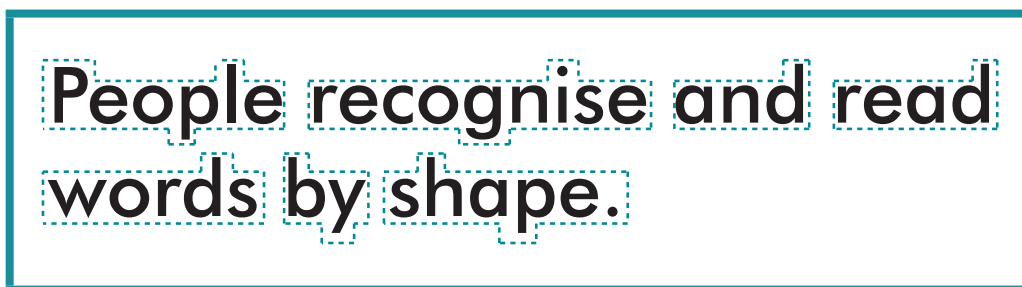
Use bold or bigger sized font to emphasise text

To show the importance of a word or parts of your text, use a **bolder type weight** or bigger sized text.

However, bold text should be used for emphasis rather than being used consistently in the main body of the text.

Text should be set horizontally

Text at an angle or following a curved line can be more difficult to read. People should not have to rotate your document to read it.

❌	✅
Make it easy to read	**Make it easy to read**

Text should be set horizontally
Text at an angle or following a curved line can be more difficult to read.

PEOPLE RECOGNISE THE SHAPE OF FAMILIAR WORDS, RATHER THAN READING EACH INDIVIDUAL LETTER. ❌	**Avoid using BLOCK CAPITALS** to emphasise important information.
People recognise the shape of familiar words, rather than reading each individual letter. ❌	**Avoid using** *italics* to emphasise important information.
<u>People recognise the shape of familiar words, rather than reading each individual letter.</u> ❌	**Avoid using** <u>**underlining**</u> to emphasise important information.
People recognise the **shape of familiar words**, rather than reading each individual letter. ✅	**Use bold** to emphasise important information.

Avoid splitting a word between two lines

Avoid splitting a word between the end of one line and the beginning of another as it disrupts the flow of the text. When using Microsoft Word, and similar programmes, this can be controlled by turning off the hyphenate function.

Templates with accessible formatting

Some organisations may develop their own templates with embedded accessible formatting for documents such as letters, reports and lists which can also be used to produce documents which will be published online.

Use accessible formatting

For reports or documents that provide a lot of information, provide a structure for your document using:

- **Headings and sub-headings:** this helps people to find information on a page. A table of contents may be generated from a heading structure.

- **A table of contents:** in a long document, this helps people find the information they are particularly interested in.

  To create a table of contents that's easy to keep up-to-date in Microsoft Word or similar programmes, first apply heading styles – Heading 1 and Heading 2, for example – to the text that you want to include in the table of contents. Word finds those headings, uses them to build the table of contents, and can update the table of contents anytime you change the heading text, sequence, or level.

  1. Click where you want to insert the table of contents – usually near the beginning of a document.

  2. Click References > Table of Contents and then choose an Automatic Table from the gallery of styles.

Learn more

Accessible formatting prepares a document for online use. Learn more in **Section 3: How to make accessible documents**.

Use a consistent and logical layout

Use a consistent layout for each section to make information easier to find for the user. Use recurring features; such as positioning headings, logos and page numbers in the same place in each section. This acts as a navigational aid for users. Use:

- **Bullet point lists:** these are used to break complex text into lists.

- **Introductory paragraphs:** the introduction can give a summary of the section if a section of a document is particularly long.

Use left aligned text

Avoid justified text as it can lead to large spaces of text between words. This can make sentences more difficult to read, particularly if a person uses text-to-speech software.

Limit each paragraph to one idea

It is important that you do not overload readers with information. Therefore, it is recommended that each paragraph is limited to one idea.

The following considerations are recommended for paragraph formatting:

- Leave a white space between paragraphs.

- Avoid indents at the start of paragraphs.

- Avoid continuing a paragraph over the page.

Normal, Bold 14pt

Normal text Normal text

Normal, Bold 14pt

Normal text Normal

Contact / Brochure / Image

Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Nor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Nor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Nor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Nor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal

Brochure

Heading 2

Normal text Normal text

Heading 3

Normal text Normal text

Heading 3

Normal text Normal text

Image

Clear and uncluttered formatting

Information should be easy for members of the public to find.
Use a consistent layout and clear formatting using headings.

Report

Heading 3

Normal text Norm al text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text t ext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal textNor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Norma ltext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal t ext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Nor mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text No text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal textNor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text No rmal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal rmal text Normal text Normal text Normal text No rmal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal t ext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text

Report

Heading 3

Normal text Normal text

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ext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal textNor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Norma ltext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal t ext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text

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text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal textNor-mal text Normal text Normal text Normal text No rmal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text No rmal text Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal t ext Normal text Normal text Normal text Normal text

Leave white space between paragraphs

Limit each paragraph to one idea, to make the content easier to read.
Avoid indents at the start of paragraphs.

Use images and graphs that are relevant to the text

An image should either support the main body of text or be accompanied by a text caption explaining its significance. Images are particularly useful for readers who have literacy, numeracy or learning difficulties or where English is not their first language.

Some key guidance when using images includes:

- Make sure the graphs or images clarify or add something to your content.

- Avoid using background images behind text. This makes text harder to read. However, where the image is even in tone, for example a blue sky, text can then be placed on the image. The key deciding factor is whether it is easy to read. Ensure good contrast between the image and the text in this scenario.

- Use images and graphs with clear edges and good colour contrast.

- Do not overlay one image over another.

- Avoid images or graphs with too much detail.

- Remember that some people may not be familiar with bar or pie charts and how they work.

- Emphasise the important facts and figures in graphs.

- Place explanatory text close by but separate to the image.

Use spacing to make your text easier to read

Good use of white space instead of a cluttered page makes your text much easier to read.

Ensure your paragraphs have enough space between them. This measurement is controlled by the "Spacing - After" option in the "Paragraph" feature in Microsoft Word. 12-point spacing between paragraphs is generally a good choice.

Ensure that lines of text within a paragraph also have sufficient spacing. This measurement is controlled by the "Line spacing" option in the "Paragraph" feature in Microsoft Word. Single line spacing between one line and the next should be the minimum in the body of your text.

However, avoid line spacing of one and a half lines or more, as it is harder to read successive lines as a coherent text when they are too far apart.

Space between sentences

The space between one line and the next is referred to as the leading. Generally, the leading should be at least 1.5 to 2 times the space between words on a line.

This is not the same as increasing the leading to 1.5 times the point size. This translates into something like 14-point set on 17 point leading, which is equivalent to the space of 2mm between each word and a spacing of 3.75mm between each line. Another example is 12-point set on 15 point leading.

Create a clear space separating columns

If you are using columns make sure the space between the columns (the gutter) clearly separates them. Where the gutter is too narrow between columns, a person with visual difficulties may read straight across from one column to the adjacent one.

Use clear space to separate columns
If you are using columns, make sure the margin between the columns (the gutter) clearly separates them.

Images should not break text flow

For text wrapped around an image, you should place the image on the right side of the page rather than the left. By placing the image at the right side of the page, it does not disrupt the flow of the text when the person is reading.

Images should not break text flow
For text wrapped around an image, place the image on the right side of the page so that it does not disrupt the flow of the text when reading.

Do not convey information just through images

All images either should support the main body of text, or should be accompanied by a text caption explaining its significance.

Ensure good contrast between text and background colour

For all documents, from letters and statements to brochures and reports, it is important that you consider the colours used, specifically, the colour of the text and the background. The selected colours affect how easy it is to read the information being communicated.

Ensure good contrast between text and background colours

Avoid using text and background colours, which have low contrast or text on a patterned background, as this makes it harder to read.

Key guidance on colour contrast is as follows:

- Make sure there is strong contrast between the text and the background colour.

- If using white text, make sure the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast. Contrast is best when using very dark colours together with very pale colours.

- White or cream paper makes text easier to read.

- Use a light coloured paper or a solid background colour to make a document more colourful.

- Avoid combining yellow & blue, and green & red, as these are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.

- White text on a black background typically makes text look smaller, so you may need to increase the size and weight of the text.

- Avoid placing text in front of an image or patterned background, as this makes it more difficult to read.

Learn more

The National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) provides a design approach for written communication in 'Make It Clear'.

Printing

Use good quality, uncoated paper

There are many types of paper used for printing and each one reacts differently to ink. One consideration when choosing paper is how much light the paper reflects (glare).

The best quality paper is uncoated or matt, as it is the best way to avoid glare. Additionally, the surface takes ink well, which improves legibility.

Avoid shadowing by using heavier paper

Make sure your paper is heavy enough to avoid 'shadowing'. Shadowing is where text and images printed on one side of a page can be seen through the other side of the paper.

It is recommended that paper should weigh over 90grams (slightly heavier than standard photocopy paper). You should ask your printer or supplier for advice when choosing paper, as some paper is more transparent than others.

Bind documents so they can be opened out flat

Use binding that allows the document to open out flat for ease of reading. This will make the document easier to hold while reading and easier to set flat on a surface. This is particularly useful for members of the public with dexterity difficulties or those using text-to-speech reading devices.

Tip

Half Canadian binding is an example of binding that allows the document to open out flat and also allows for lettering on the spine for the title of the document so it can be identified when shelved.

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Written Communication

Font and paragraphs Checklist

☐ Use at least 12-point font size and a clear, easy to read font.

☐ Use bold or bigger size font to make important points stand out.

☐ Avoid using features such as <u>underlining</u>, *italics* and BLOCK CAPITALS.

☐ Use left aligned text only, do not justify text.

☐ Avoid splitting a word between two lines.

☐ Limit each paragraph to one idea.

Formatting and layout Checklist

☐ Use clear and accessible formatting to make information easy to find. For example, use headings, sub-headings and a table of contents.

☐ Use a consistent layout for recurring features (such as page numbers and headings).

☐ Make good use of white space so your message stands out.

☐ Use clear spacing:

- Text should be a minimum of single-spaced.

- White space should separate paragraphs.

- There should be a wide, clear space separating text columns.

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Written Communication

Document Design Checklist
Colours, images, graphs and visuals

☐ Use images, visuals and graphs that are relevant to the text.

☐ Images should not break text flow.

☐ Do not convey information just through images.

☐ Ensure good contrast between text and background colour.

Printing

☐ Use good quality, uncoated or matt paper.

☐ Avoid shadowing by using heavier paper (over 90gram).

☐ Bind documents so they can be opened out flat.

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Form Design

In the public sector, forms are used as part of the customer engagement process. This ranges from enquiry forms to contracts. Increasingly, there can be an option for members of the public to access and complete forms that are provided online. The Universal Design guidance for both print and online forms is similar.

> **Tip**
>
> Find out more about **online form design in Section 3**.

Forms should be easy to read and complete without assistance. To do this it is important to consider that members of the public have different needs and skills related to visual or literacy difficulties. Therefore, by better designing forms to meet the needs of people with specific difficulties, you will be better meeting the needs of all members of the public.

Guidelines for the design of forms are as follows:

- Give the form a clear title.

- Identify whom the form is for and its purpose.

- Give instructions in bullet points on the first page.

- If users need reference numbers or documentation to complete the form, ensure that they know this before starting. Awareness can be raised with an obvious "Before you begin, you will need..." message at the top of the form.

- Divide the form into clear and logical sections each with an informative heading and a clear number.

- Use a larger font for section headings.

- Place, if needed, "Official use only" sections near the end of the form.

- Avoid unnecessary or repeated questions.

- Position questions directly across from the space for giving answers.

- Make sure users have enough space for providing answers.

- Where possible, use boxes rather than lines for answers.

- Use as many 'tick-box' questions as possible.

- Make sure 'tick-boxes' are clearly linked to the answer.

- Ensure that 'tick-box' borders and answer lines are solid and at least one point wide.

- Make it clear which fields are mandatory and must be completed.
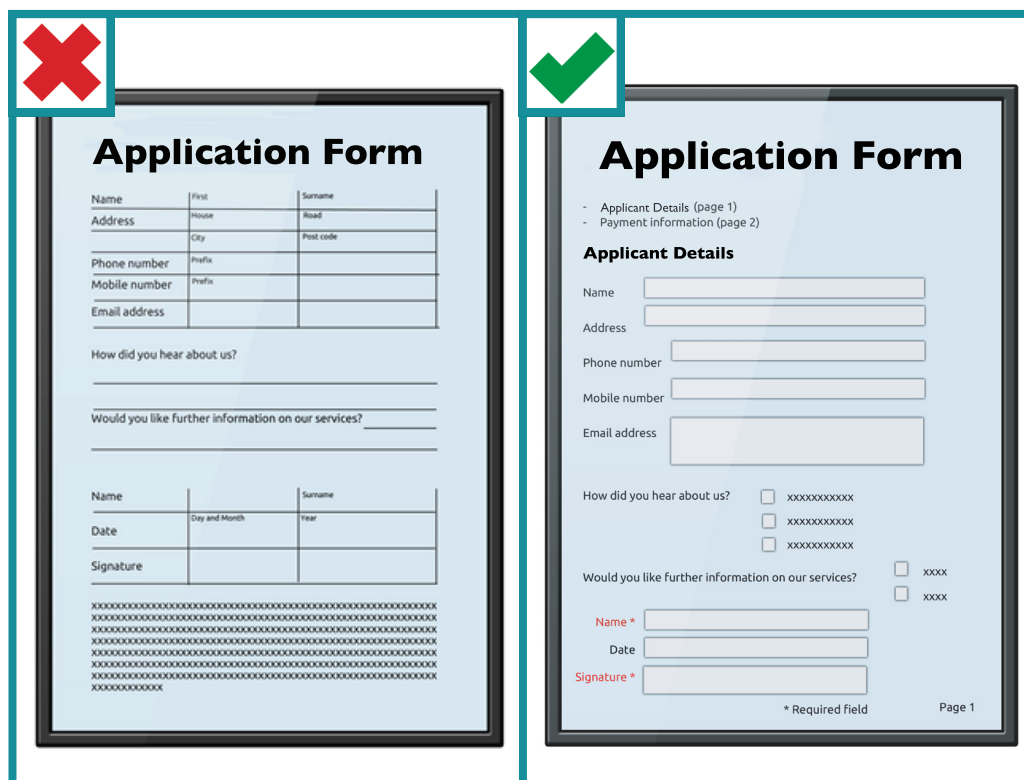
A well-structured layout makes a form easier to read and complete
It is easier for members of the public to complete forms without assistance by providing a logical, well-structured format, which clearly identifies where information should be filled in and which fields are mandatory.

Scannable Forms

Scannable forms, which allow one character per square, are increasingly being used. Where these forms are used, provide boxes that are large enough and leave adequate space between the squares.

For example,

Name: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Learn more

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) provides guidance on designing forms, available in their publication '**See it right**' (2006).

For guidance on designing online forms see **Online Forms** in Section 3: Digital and Web Based Communication Systems.

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Written Communication

Form Design Checklist

☐ The form should have a clear title. It should also identify whom it is for and what its purpose is at the start of the form.

☐ Provide clear instructions at the start.

☐ Place, if needed, "Official use only" sections near the end of the form.

☐ Group similar questions under useful headings.

☐ Use informative headings and clear numbering.

☐ Avoid unnecessary or repeated questions.

☐ Make sure people have enough space for providing answers.

☐ Where possible, use boxes rather than lines for answers.

☐ Make sure 'tick boxes' are clearly linked to the answer and that the borders and answer lines are solid and at least one point wide.

☐ Clearly identify mandatory fields that must be answered.

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Signage Design

All public sector buildings will typically have signage inside and outside of their establishments. This may range from signs for the toilets to health and safety signs. The following signage design guidance is based on the '**Building for Everyone: A Universal Design approach**' publication from the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD).

Under the **Official Languages Act 2003**, a public body has a duty to ensure that signs placed by it or on its behalf within or outside the state are in Irish or bilingual. If bilingual text is chosen, instead of text in Irish only, there are specific regulations that must be adhered to.

The guidance below is provided for sign design in indoor and outdoor areas.

Text on signs

- Make sure the text on your sign is easy to read. Avoid fonts that are highly decorative, very bold, condensed or in italics, as these can be difficult to understand and may make the sign more difficult to read. Examples of easy to read sans serif fonts for signage include, Helvetica, Tahoma and Futura.

- Wording on signs should be as simple as possible.

- Avoid the use of unfamiliar abbreviations.

- Information on signs should be listed alphabetically or grouped logically. For example, by floor level.

- Use Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3), not Roman numerals (i, ii, iii).

- A mixture of upper and lower case letters should be used. Avoid using BLOCK CAPITALS.

- Align wording to the left.

- Wording, font and images should be consistent throughout the building.

- The size of letters on signs should be related to the type of sign and viewing distance.

Avoid using BLOCK CAPITALS
A mixture of upper and lower case letters should be used.

The table below provides recommended letter height for a range of viewing distances.

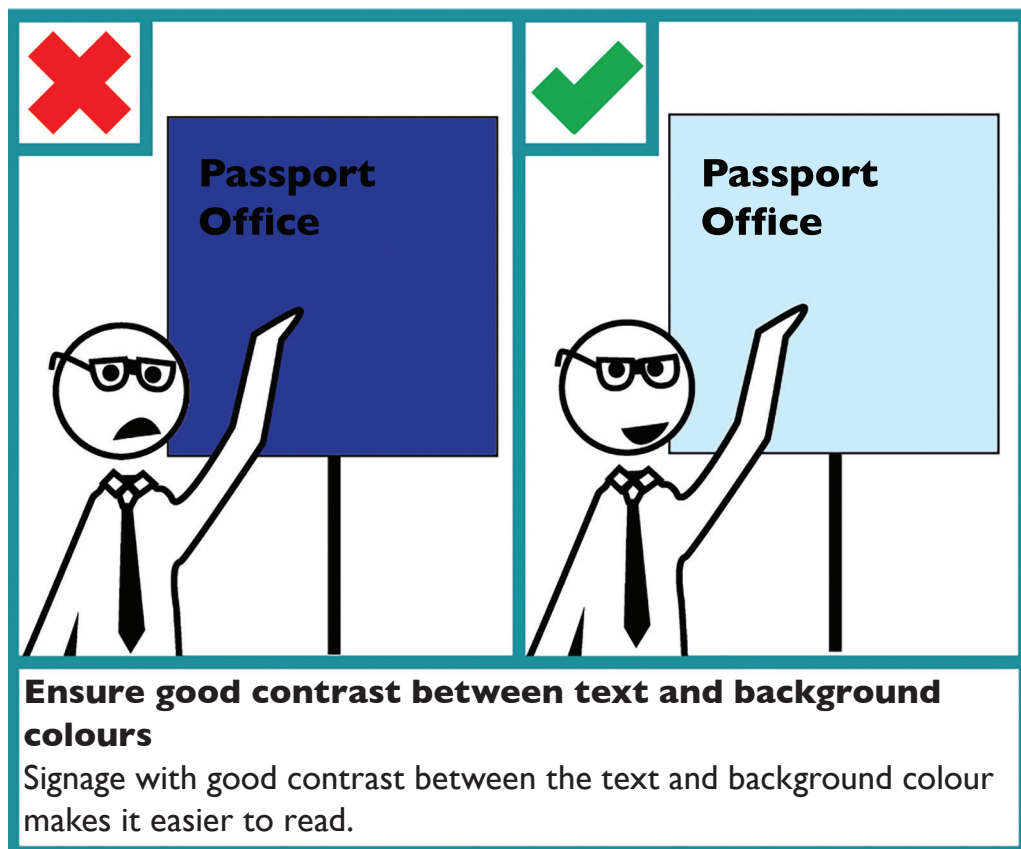| Recommended letter heights in signage viewing distances	
Viewing distance (mm)	**Recommended letter height (mm)**
000	200
4600	150
2500	100
2300	75
1500	50
750	25

Symbols and arrows on signage

- Use symbols in place of text where the symbol is universally recognised. For example, public information symbols.

- Use symbols to accompany text where possible. This is particularly relevant for dual-language signs, as they help people to recognise quickly the information being provided.

- Use arrows to indicate directions.

	Accessible toilets	
	Parking	
Use symbols in place of text where the symbol is universally recognised		

Design

- There should be good contrast between the signboard and any mounting or background surface. This helps draw attention to the sign itself.

- There should be good contrast between the text/symbols and background sign colour. This helps draw attention to the content of the sign.

- Where colour coding is used, use colours that are easy to differentiate.

- Signs should have a matt or satin finish. Avoid shiny and reflective surfaces to prevent glare.

- Signs should be evenly illuminated, with a lighting level of 200 lux.

Ensure good contrast between text and background colours
Signage with good contrast between the text and background colour makes it easier to read.

Tactile signs

Embossed signs enable people with visual impairments to read by touch. When designing tactile signs consider that:

- Embossed letters should be raised above the surface of the sign by 1 - 1.5mm, and have a stroke width of 1.5 – 2mm.

- Embossed letters should be between 16mm and 50mm in height.

- Where Braille is provided, it should be positioned below the related text.

- Engraved and indented letters and symbols should be avoided, as they are difficult to read by touch.

Positioning of signage

- Signs should be positioned at important points along a route, wherever routes intersect or diverge.

- Tactile and Braille signage should be positioned within easy reach.

- Position signs where people reading them will not cause an obstruction.

- Make sure that directional signs help people to retrace their steps and identify alternative locations within a building, without having to return to the main entrance.

Learn more

Further guidance on the Official Languages Act is available on the website of **An Coimisinéir Teanga**.

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design's (CEUD) '**Building for Everyone: a Universal Design approach**' provides guidance on designing signs.

The International Organization for Standardization provides guidance on graphical symbols and signage in 'ISO 2013-01/3000 – '**The International Language of ISO Graphical Symbols**'.

For further information on colour contrast, see **Document Design**.

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Written Communication Design Checklist

Signage Design Checklist

☐ Use an easy to read font.

☐ Wording on signs should be as simple as possible.

☐ The use of unfamiliar abbreviations should be avoided.

☐ Use Arabic numbers (1,2,3) not Roman numerals (i, ii, iii).

☐ Capitalise the first letter of names and messages with all other letters lower case.

☐ List names and messages alphabetically or group them logically, for example, by floor level.

☐ Align wording to the left.

☐ Wording and font should be used consistently in signs throughout a building.

☐ Select a letter size to suit viewing distance.

☐ Ensure the signage complies with the **Official Languages Act 2003**.

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Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Written Communication

Signage symbols, contrast, colour, positioning Checklist

☐ Use symbols in place of text or to supplement text where possible.

☐ Use arrows to indicate direction.

☐ There should be good contrast between the signboard and any mounting or background surface. There should also be good contrast between the text and background colour of the sign itself so that it is easy to read.

☐ Use colour to differentiate where colour coding is used.

☐ The surface of the sign should not be reflective.

☐ Embossed lettering should be raised 1 – 1.5mm above the surface of the sign. Avoid engraved lettering.

☐ Embossed letters should be between 16mm and 50mm in height.

☐ Position tactile and Braille signs within reach.

☐ Position signs where people reading them will not cause an obstruction.

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Verbal Communication

Verbal

Verbal Communication Guidance

Following are some key design considerations to enhance communication with members of the public and those with hearing impairments. While this guidance is focused on face-to-face, telephone and video communication, it equally applies to speeches, conversations and presentations. Parts of this guidance should also be considered in the design of audio outputs from systems such as machine voice recordings and public announcements.

Use Plain English

Always use the simplest and clearest language possible. Avoid using technical words that may not be used by a member of the public. If you must use technical language, clearly explain what it means.

Think about what you are saying

- Are you answering the person's questions?

- Are members of the public familiar with the technical terms your organisation uses?

Speak clearly

Speak in a clear voice, clearly pronouncing your words.

Speak slowly

Take your time and speak slowly to the person. Tailor what you are saying to meet the person's needs.

Keep your message simple

State one piece of information at a time. Provide the information in a logical order.

State the purpose of your conversation

At the start of your conversation, state the purpose of it.

Listen and respond to the person

Be aware of the language the person uses and their literacy level. In Ireland 25% of adults have literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Don't finish a person's sentences

Do not interrupt people while they are speaking. Patiently wait for them to finish.

Open-ended and closed questions

Use open-ended questions to gain more information. Open-ended questions typically provide more informative answers. For example, "What questions do you have?"

Closed questions generally only provide yes or no answers. For example, "Is that your answer?"

If you're not sure what was said, politely ask the person to repeat the information

Alternatively, summarise the information back to the person to check you have correctly understood the request.

Provide dedicated employees to help

Where possible, and if appropriate, have specifically trained employees to deal with members of the public who require extra time.

Questions and answers can provide a good way of finding out if a person has understood the information.

Finish the conversation by saying thank you and good-bye

Tips

To improve the person's experience, look at how you can improve the communication provided by your organisation. This could include:

Providing training on communication techniques such as interviews, presentations, message taking, telephone dialogues and conversational skills.

Providing training for employees on the accessibility needs of people with difficulties. The National Disability Authority produced a free, short, **interactive eLearning training course** that will equip public sector staff with the necessary skills to provide an effective customer service to everyone and especially customers with disabilities.

Providing training on computer-supported video communication techniques.

Be patient. Do not finish the person's sentences
Do not interrupt the person while they are speaking. Patiently wait for them to finish.

If you do not understand what was said, politely ask the person to repeat the information

Face-to-Face Communication

The following guidance should be considered when communicating with a person face-to-face:

Introduce yourself to the person

Identify yourself when you approach a person and speak directly to them.

Wear a badge

When communicating with a person face-to-face, where possible, wear a name badge. This will make it easier for the person to identify who you are.

Speak directly to people

For face-to-face communication, you should always speak directly to the person. This is particularly important if a person is accompanied by an interpreter (for people who have a speech difficulty or whose first language is not English) or companion (who provides assistance to the person).

Ask the person "How can I help?"

Depending on the context of your communication if you are not sure what to do, ask how you can help. Do not just jump in. The person will know if they need help and how you can provide it.

Learn more

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission provides 'For Service For All': a practical guide for Credit Unions to improve accessibility for their members.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission provides 'Accessibility for Members of the public with Disabilities in Community Pharmacies'.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) provides 'Writing and Design Tips'.

Introduce yourself to the person and ask how you can help

Speak directly to the person
This is particularly important if a person is accompanied by an interpreter or companion.

Additional Information

Provide queuing systems that do not rely on peoples' ability to hear e.g. a ticketing system. Provide induction loop systems—and test them regularly. Allow people to use text messages and e-mail to make appointments. Always ask the person how they want to communicate. If a person wants to communicate by note writing, respect his/her wish and respond by writing.

Communicating with people who are Deaf or those who have a hearing loss

Difficulty with hearing, mental health, understanding or cultural norms can present as a person's seemingly difficult behaviour. Helpful guidance is provided below for dealing with members of the public who are Deaf or who have a hearing loss.

Do not have your back to a light source

When you are talking to the person, make sure you do not have your back to a light source (such as a window). This will make it more difficult for members of the public with a visual difficulty to see you or for members of the public with a hearing difficulty to lip read, as you will appear as a silhouette.

Face the person when speaking and do not cover your mouth

It is very difficult for people with hearing difficulties to listen or lip-read if you have your hands in front of your mouth. This is equally true if you turn away from the person while speaking. Look directly at the person. Do not look away, down at your notes, cover your face, chew gum, or have a pen in your mouth while talking. Speak clearly and at a slightly slower pace, but do not shout or exaggerate mouth movements, as this will distort your lip patterns. During meetings, make sure that only one person speaks at a time.

Communicating with people who use Irish Sign Language (ISL)

Provide Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpretation to people who request it. When you publicise a public event or make appointments, say that you will provide Irish Sign Language interpreters or real-time captioning if members of the public ask for them. Say how much notice you will need to arrange an interpreter. For example, you could say, "If you have accessibility requirements, please tell us at least 3 weeks before the appointment". When working with an interpreter talk directly to the Deaf person, and not the interpreter. Do not ask the interpreter's opinion. Make sure that the interpreter sits next to you and that the Deaf person can see both of you clearly.

Learn more

The **Irish Remote Interpreting Service** (IRIS) is a collaborative project between the **Irish Deaf Society** (IDS), **DeafHear.ie** and **Sign Language Interpreting Service** (SLIS).

A **new text relay service** will be launched by **ComReg** and telecommunication providers in 2017. This will enable people who cannot make voice calls to contact people/businesses in real-time via a relay operator. Customers of all service providers will have access to it. Customers will be able to download an App and they will be able to make calls from a smart phone, ipad, laptop etc.

Dealing with seemingly difficult members of the public

Helpful guidance is provided below for dealing with seemingly difficult members of the public. This includes:

- Listen carefully and take their concerns seriously.

- Reassure the person by letting them know you have heard what they have said and you have understood their feelings and concerns. Find some common ground you can agree on.

- Where the person may be aggressive, confrontational, or are repeating the same point unnecessarily, tell the person that you have understood and repeat their words back so it is clear you have heard them fully.

- The person may be unclear about what you can and cannot do. If you need to pass on the information to another organisation or agency, make sure the person understands why you are doing this.

Try to pass on as much information as possible to the referral, so that the person does not need to explain their situation again.

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Verbal Communication

Verbal Communication Checklist

☐ Use plain English.

☐ Speak clearly and slowly. Keep your message simple.

☐ At the start of a conversation, introduce yourself.

☐ Where appropriate ask the person "How can I help?"

☐ Listen first and then respond to the person.

☐ Do not finish the person's sentences.

☐ Do not interrupt the person.

☐ Speak directly to the person.

☐ If you do not understand what a person has said, politely ask the person to repeat the information.

☐ Make sure the person understands what you have said.

☐ Finish the conversation by saying thank you and good-bye.

☐ Be aware of the importance of your non-verbal communication.

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Non-Verbal Communication

Over 90% of your message is communicated non-verbally. This is influenced vocally (38%) by factors such as volume, pitch and rhythm, and by body movements (55%), specifically facial expressions.

Use a friendly smile and welcoming voice

It puts people at ease. All members of the public would like a good customer experience.

Be patient

Be aware that some people may take a little longer to understand and respond.

Listen to the person

Your body language is an important part of your listening behaviour; be aware of your posture, eye contact and facial expressions.

Face the person when speaking

Make eye contact and face the person when speaking to them.

Use a friendly smile and welcoming voice

Look at the person while speaking
It is very difficult for people to hear or lip-read if you turn away from them while speaking.
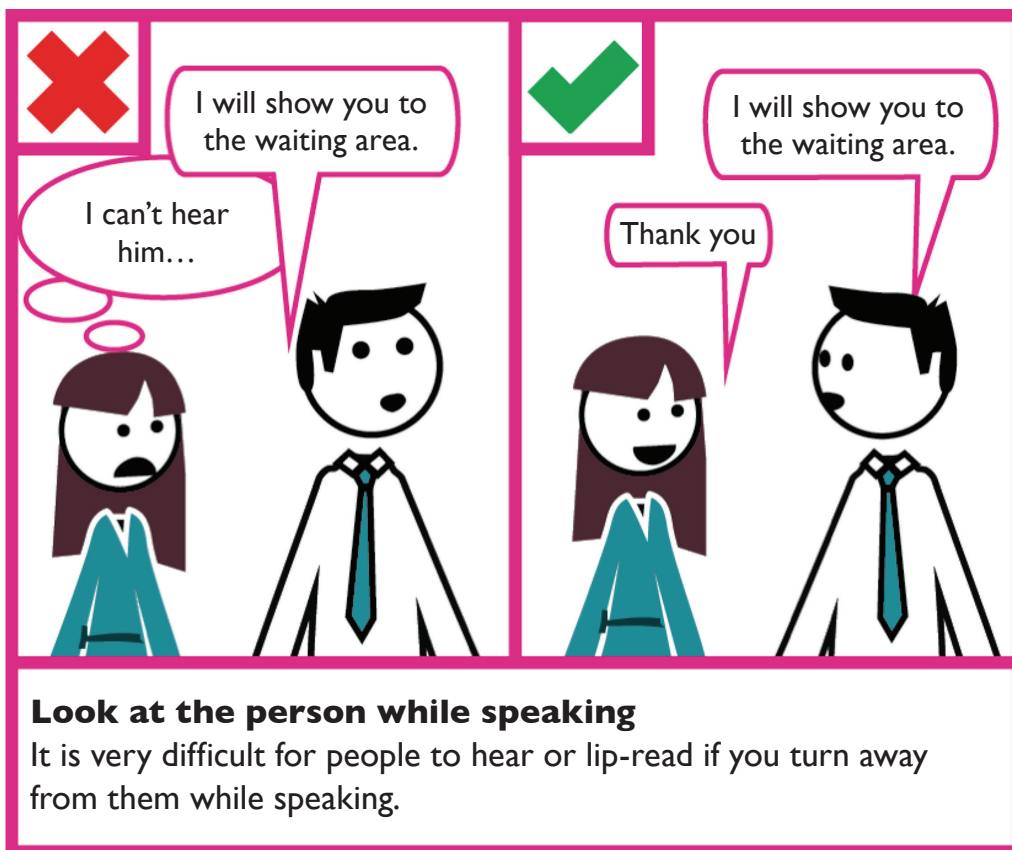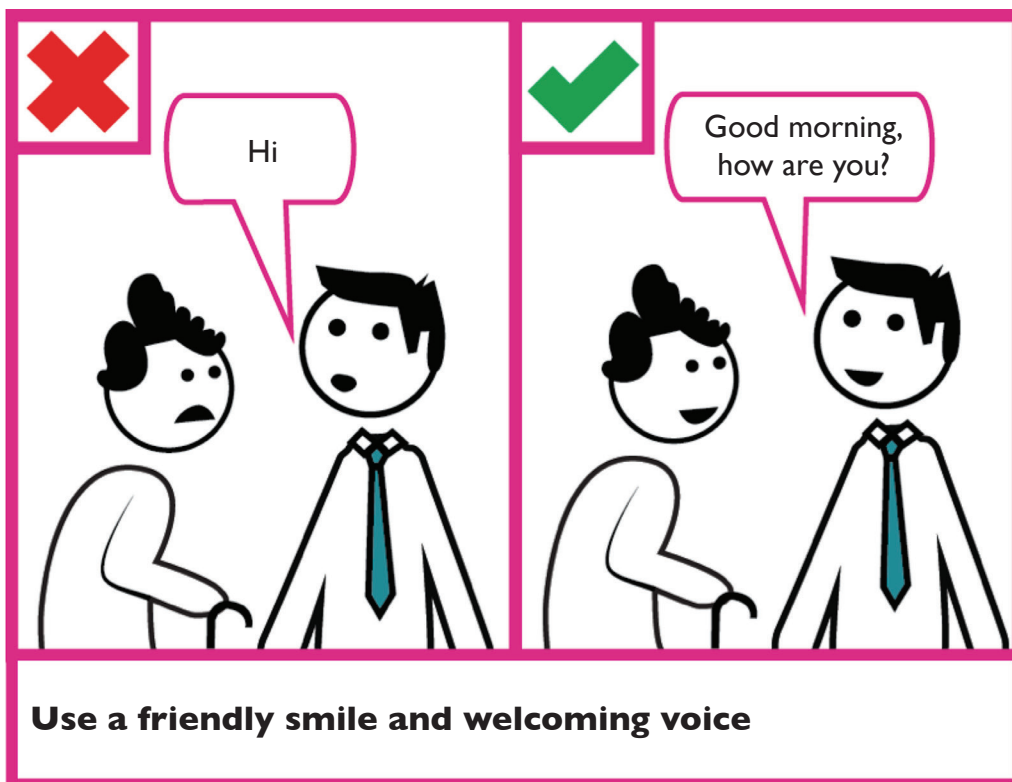
Keep background noise to a minimum

Try to speak in an area with few competing sounds. This is particularly important as one in seven members of the public have some level of hearing loss.

Find a way of communicating that works for the person

For example, keep a pen and paper handy to write information down if necessary. Alternatively, provide images that may help get your message across.

Use alternative ways to communicate

To accommodate different languages, where appropriate, offer information using non-spoken forms of communication; such as sign language, universal symbols, translation software or phrase books.

If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission

Never touch a person, service animal (for example a guide dog) or their assistive products (for example wheelchairs) without permission.

Understand cultural norms

Be aware and have an understanding of the diversity and cultural norms of the customer base.

Consider the distance you are standing from the person

Do not stand too close but also make sure you do not stand too far away.

Treat all members of the public equally

Avoid stereotyping, racist attitudes, prejudice and discrimination.

Loud background music playing...

Keep background noise and distractions to a minimum

Find a way of communicating that works for the person

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

Verbal Communication

Non – Verbal Communication Checklist

☐ Use a friendly smile and welcoming voice.

☐ Be patient.

☐ Listen to the person.

☐ Face the person when speaking. Do not put your hands in front of your mouth while speaking.

☐ Do not sit or stand with the light behind you.

☐ Keep background noise to a minimum.

☐ Find a way of communicating that works for the person.

☐ Consider the distance you are standing from the person.

☐ If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.

☐ Be aware of non-verbal communication when on video calls.

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Digital and Web Based Communication Systems and Services

65

Digital

65
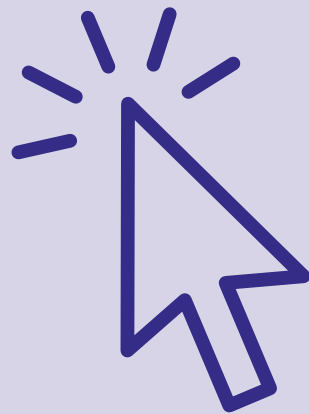
Digital and Web Based Communication Guidance

Following are some key digital and web based communication design considerations on how to enhance customer communication with members of the public.

The guidance should be applied when designing ways to communicate with members of the public by telephone, email, enewsletter, websites or social media.

Writing Good Web Content

The Council of the European Union approved the Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. The Directive

- Applies to the public sector only

- Requires websites and mobile apps of public bodies to meet European accessibility standards.

> **Learn more**
>
> **Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies.**

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0

Public bodies should achieve AA level conformance with WCAG 2.0 guidelines to comply with the statutory Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by Public Bodies (2006).

Learn More

Find out more about the **Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information Provided by Public Bodies (2006)**.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides '**Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0**'.

Tools

The Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides guidance on web accessibility for developers, designers and content creators/editors '**Guidance for Online Public Services**'.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides a list of **web accessibility evaluation tools**.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides '**Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0**'.

Make text easy to read and understand

Always use the simplest and clearest language possible. Avoid technical language that a member of the public may not understand. If you must use technical language, clearly explain what it means in plain English.

Writing for the Web

Where applicable, provide important information in other languages

If a large percentage of your customers do not speak English as a first language, where applicable, provide content in other languages or offer a translate button.

Help members of the public to scan text

Break text into chunks using short paragraphs, lists and sub-headings in order to help members of the public quickly understand and absorb information.

Keep content clear and concise

Adopt word-count targets that are appropriate for members of the public and your content.

Suggested word counts are as follows:

Type of content	Word count
Heading	8 words
Sentences	15 - 20 words
Opening paragraph	30 words
Other paragraphs	60 words
Web page	600 words

Write for members of the public

People interact with text differently online than they do in print. Most people are more inclined to scan text on a website. Therefore, content should be presented in a way that members of the public can obtain key information quickly when they scan your website.

Steps to achieve this include:

1. Present the key conclusion or facts at the start of the text.

2. Present information in order of importance. Support the key conclusion with the most relevant information.

3. Present supporting detail or background information.

4. Provide links to background or related information if available.

Tip

Train content authors and editors in using these techniques.

Learn more

The Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides guidance on '**structure and style to maximise readability and scanning**'.

Use a clear, readable font

Use a clear and easy to read font that people are familiar with and recognise easily. For example, Verdana or Helvetica.

Use bold or bigger sized text to emphasise text

The general guidance in emphasising important information is to:

- Avoid using BLOCK CAPITALS

- Avoid using *italics*

- Avoid using <u>underlining</u>

Avoid unnecessary technical terms

If you must use technical words, clearly explain what they mean.

Define unfamiliar abbreviations or acronyms

Where a reader may be unfamiliar with an abbreviation or acronym, spell it out the first time it is used, followed by the abbreviation or acronym in brackets.

For example, the Personal Public Service (PPS) number.

Try to keep unfamiliar abbreviations or acronyms to a minimum.

Avoid Latin and French expressions

There can be confusion around words such as e.g., i.e. etc.

Try to use the full English equivalents such as: 'for example', 'that is' and 'and so on'.

Use your full organisation name on each page

Spell out your organisation's name in full on every page. This is particularly important for members of the public who land there from search engines.

Use a house style

Develop a house style (or adopt a third-party style guide) to ensure consistency. This can also be applied to writing and layout standards.

Define unfamiliar acronyms
Where the person may be unfamiliar with an acronym, spell it out the first time it is used, followed by the acronym in brackets.

Avoid Latin and French expressions
There can be confusion around words such as e.g.
Try to use the full English equivalent.

Use 'Alternative Text' to make accessible images and media

Alternative (Alt) Text is text associated with images or media that conveys the same essential information as the image.

You should provide Alt Text for any images or time-based media used (for example, videos and advertisements). This enables people who can't access the image or who have visual difficulties to read the content of the image. A text description of the images also allows the text to be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, Braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.

Alternative Text basics:

- Alternative Text may be provided in the alt attribute or in the surrounding context of the image – in the caption.

- Alternative ways of communicating the information should also be provided for time-based media (videos, audio and advertisements). For example, transcripts, captions and descriptive video all ensure that the experience is more accessible.

Learn more

The Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides guidance on **Alt Text**.

Tip

Pretend to describe the image to a person over the phone. This should be used to determine what the image has to say and have the Alt Text give the same meaning.

Provide Alternative Text for images
The image on the left shows an image that has no Alternative Text.
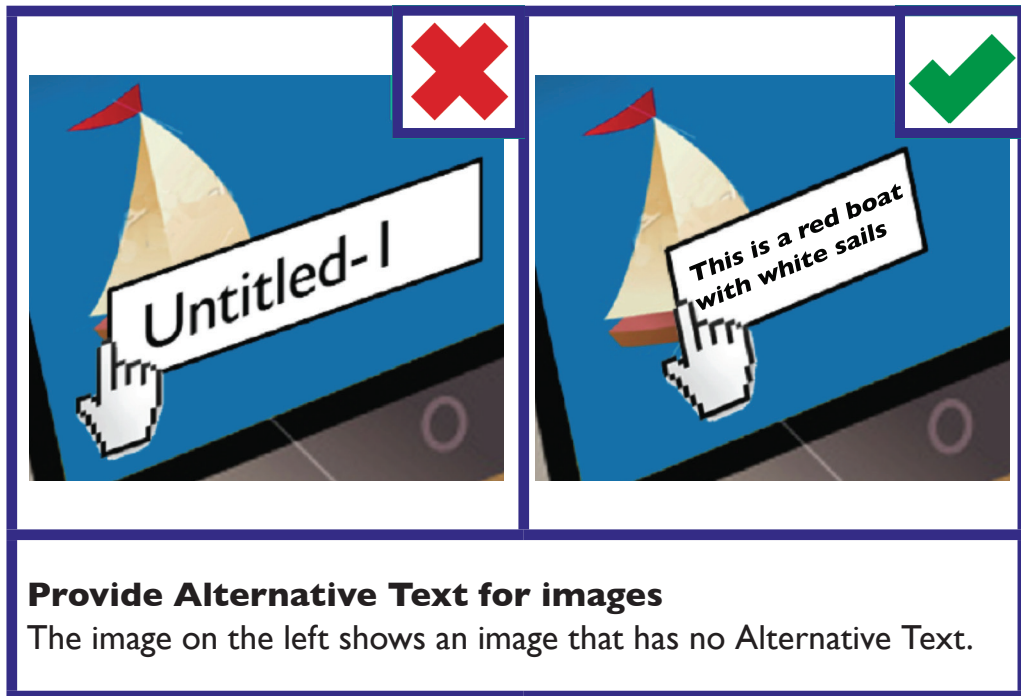
Use colour, spacing, images and layout to break up long blocks of text

- Use images to break up long blocks of text.

- Use images to support the information in text.

- Use white space to separate blocks of information.

- Use colour, spacing and layout to highlight the important information.

Use good quality, relevant images

Use good quality, relevant images that add to or support your text content. Avoid images that are low quality or images that are not relevant to the text content.

Apply for Your Passport

Avoid large blocks of text, as it can be difficult to read and digest.

Apply for Your Passport

Use spacing and images to break up long blocks of text. The selected images should support and add to the text.

Apply for Your Passport

Use colour, spacing and layout to highlight important information and to break up large blocks of text.

Content Quality

If there are issues with the quality of the content on your website, members of the public will quickly identify it. The following guidance is provided to help develop good quality website content:

Make sure your content is up-to-date

Out-of-date content will undermine the quality of the surrounding content.

Use correct spelling and punctuation

This can impact on the credibility of your website, and additionally, your services.

Be consistent with terms and formats

Use the same terms and formats for the same concept throughout your website.

For example, don't change writing the date as '7 July 2017' to writing it as the '07/07/17'.

Learn more

For further information on writing dates, addresses and numbers, please see **Writing Addresses, Section 1: Written Communication**.

Content quality control process

The following steps can be put in place to manage the quality of your content:

Assign a designated manager

Have a manager take ownership of the content function and manage it actively.

Put in place a content review process

Establish an editorial process that involves at least one round of revision and sign-off on all content.

Provide training on developing web content

All content editors and authors should be trained so that they know how to prepare web content and monitor content quality.

Develop a house style guide

The content authors and editors should be supported with a house style guide, or relevant standards and guidelines.

Assign content development as part of their job description

Content development should be a core part of the authors' and editors' job descriptions.

Tip

One of the most valuable processes to ensure content quality is to carry out regular reviews and to include customer feedback in these.

A review should look at each item in a body of text and assess it against the house style guide, standards and guidelines.

Links and Microcontent

Write descriptive links to help your readers

Hyperlinks (links) are typically created by pasting in a URL and pressing the space button. Edit these links to make them easier to understand for your readers by providing descriptors.

Note: If a document or content is to be printed, you may wish to use the full URL and a description in the link text.

❌	✔️
https://www.motortax.ie/OMT/welcome.do;jsessionid=0aa-0114730d745565a71e9234639b-332c609fc630b7d.e38PaNaS-bh0RaO0NbNmQe0	**Online Motortax payments and queries**

Descriptive hyperlinks
Edit hyperlinks to make them easier to understand by providing descriptors.

The following guidance is recommended when providing links:

- Link descriptions should be short but descriptive. It should typically be between two and five words long.

- Provide useful information about the link. For example, file size, and format.

- Link descriptions should describe the target that they link to.

- Link descriptions should avoid 'click here' type terminology.

- Link descriptions should occur naturally in the sentence.

- Links can be presented in the text of a page or separately, such as at the end of the page.

❌	✔️
Click here to pay your motortax online	Pay your **motortax online**

Link descriptions should describe the target that they link to
Avoid using 'click here' type terminology as link descriptors.

> **Learn more**
>
> The Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides **guidance on making links meaningful** and **guidance on writing good web content**.

Microcontent

Microcontent refers to small groups of words that can be scanned by the reader to get a clear idea of what is on a web page. Microcontent includes:

- **Captions for images:** These provide the information required to help the reader understand the image in the context of the rest of the page.

- **Sub-headings:** These are used to break up long passages of text and to provide signposts to readers who are scanning the page.

- **Headings:** Use heading styles or tags correctly, so that it creates a structure that can be read using screen reader software. Do not create text that just looks like headings; for example, do not just increase the font size and weight of the text to create a heading.

> **Learn more**
>
> For further information, see **Section 1 Written Communication, Accessible Formatting**.

Titles and Descriptions

Well-written titles and descriptions help members of the public find your pages using search engines and, once found, encourage them to visit your site.

To write good titles and descriptions:

- Pick out two or three key phrases that are the most distinctive and typical of your page.

- Use key phrases and terms that a member of the public is most likely to use.

- Select a key phrase for your title (fewer than 70 characters).

Descriptions should:

- Include key phrases, or variations of them, at the start.

- Be factual, and accurately reflect the content.

- Be less than 156 characters long, including spaces.

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Writing for the Web Checklist

☐ Ensure you comply with Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies.

☐ Avoid technical language, Latin and French expressions and unfamiliar acronyms and abbreviations.

☐ Where applicable provide important information in other languages.

☐ Present content so that readers can absorb and understand the content quickly. Help readers to scan text by:

- Presenting key conclusions at the start.

- Presenting information in order of importance.

- Presenting detailed or background information.

- Providing links to related or background information.

☐ Keep content clear and concise.

☐ Use the full organisation name on each page.

☐ Use a house style.

☐ Use Alt Text to convey the same meaning as the images or media.

☐ Use good quality, relevant images that add to or support your text content.

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Content Quality Checklist

☐ Make sure your content is up-to-date.

☐ Use correct spelling and punctuation.

☐ Be consistent with terms and formats.

☐ Put a content quality process in place:

- Assign a designated manager with responsibility for content.

- Put in place a content review process before information is placed on your website.

Links Checklist

☐ Link descriptions should be short but descriptive.

☐ Link descriptions should describe the target that they link to.

☐ Link descriptions should avoid 'click here' type terminology.

Titles Checklist

☐ Use key phrases and terms that people are likely to use.

☐ Select a key phrase for your title (fewer than 70 characters).

Descriptions Checklist

☐ Descriptions should be factual and accurately reflect the content.

☐ Descriptions should be less than 156 characters long, including spaces.

Designing and Developing Usable Websites

Website Navigation Guidance

All members of the public should be able to use your website regardless of their level of experience in using the web or the device/operating system they use. The following guidance aims to help make navigation easier to use and access for everyone.

All navigation should be fully accessible through the keyboard

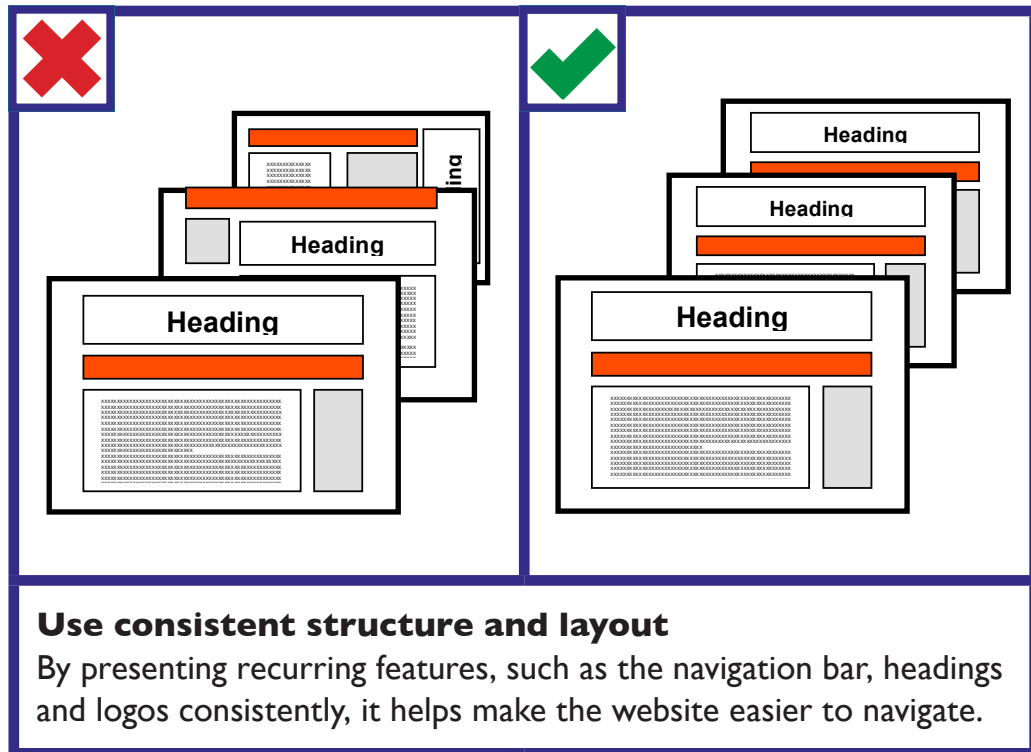A fully accessible site should have no applications that depend only on a mouse or similar cursor control.

Be consistent with navigation layout

Consistent and well laid out content makes it easier for the person to navigate and find the content that they are looking for.

The layout, structure and colour of the content should be consistent to make information easier to find. The exception for consistent formatting/layout may be the homepage if necessary.

The positioning and appearance of recurring items, such as the logo, navigation bar and headings should be consistent throughout.

Provide a link back to the homepage from every page.

Use consistent structure and layout
By presenting recurring features, such as the navigation bar, headings and logos consistently, it helps make the website easier to navigate.

Navigation bars should be easy to identify and distinguish

Use clear navigation bars that are distinguishable from the content.

Navigation bars should provide feedback

The navigation bar should clearly identify where the person is on the website. This can be done by highlighting the person's current location on the navigation bar, and by disabling the link to the current page.

Navigation bars should provide feedback
The navigation bar should clearly identify where the person is on the website. This can be done by highlighting the person's current location on the navigation bar, and by disabling the link to the current page.

Make webpages appear and operate in predictable ways

Webpages, applications and online interfaces should be intuitive and predictable in how they operate. Websites typically have a set structure. This helps people to easily find information and navigate new websites.

Your website should be easy and intuitive to use for members of the public. Examples of established website features, which make navigation more intuitive to use, include:

- **'Breadcrumb' navigation:** This provides information about where the current page is in the site structure and provides navigation to higher levels.

  An example of this could be Home > About > Services.

- **Within page 'contents' section:** For long pages, a contents list for the page should be provided.

- **Primary navigation bar:** This is usually presented horizontally near the top of the page.

- **A search box:** This is usually in the top right area of the page. The search box should be visible on each page without scrolling.

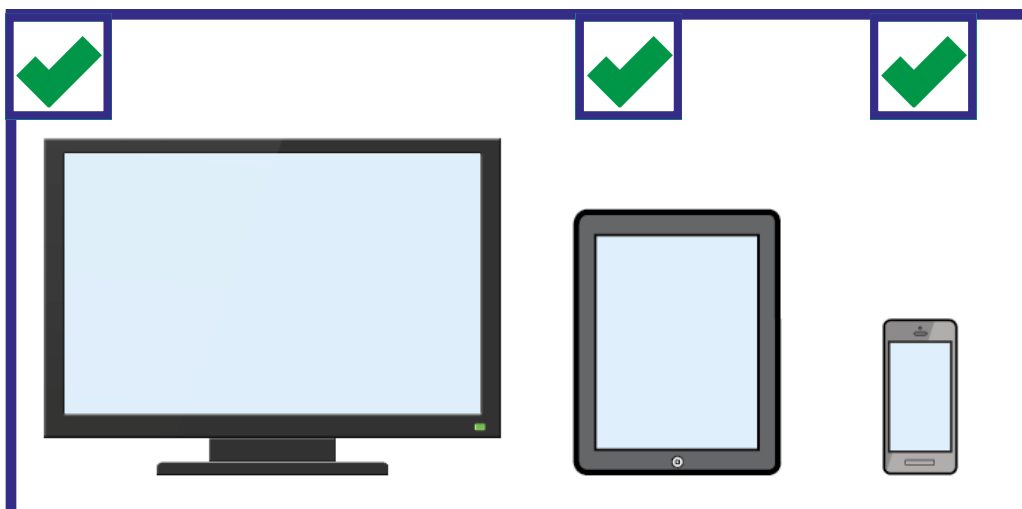# Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

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Website navigation Checklist

☐ All website navigation should be fully accessible through the keyboard.

☐ Be consistent with your navigation layout.

☐ The navigation bar should be easy to identify and distinguish from the rest of the content.

☐ Navigation bars should provide feedback to identify where the person is on the website.

☐ Provide enough time to allow the person to read, digest and respond to information.

☐ Make webpages appear and operate in predictable ways, which are intuitive to use.

☐ Web content and applications should be usable by the widest variety of browsers, devices and assistive technologies.

☐ Avoid the use of pop-ups.

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If possible and appropriate web content should be usable on a variety of devices

Web content and applications should be usable by the widest variety of browsers, devices and assistive technologies by using fluid design and relative widths. (Note: Talk to your web designer about 'responsive websites').

Design for different sized screens and devices
People should be able to access information on a variety of devices from smartphones to tablets.

Learn more

The Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides **information on navigational aids**.

For further information on page structure, see section 2.2 in CEUD's '**Universal Design Guidance for Online Public Services**' (2012).

Online Forms

Forms must be properly structured and optimised to support the person in completing the form without errors.

Guidelines for the design of forms are as follows:

- Give the form a clear title. Identify whom the form is for and its purpose at the start.

- Give instructions in bullet points on the first page.

- Ensure all terms and conditions are clearly explained in plain English.

- If a person's search query results in no hits, suggest some helpful alternatives.

- Divide the form into clear and logical sections with informative headings and clear numbering.

- Avoid unnecessary or repeated questions.

- Make it clear which fields are mandatory and must be completed.

- Make sure people have enough space for providing answers.

- Where possible use boxes rather than lines for answers.

- Create a clear path through the form.

    - Avoid multi-column forms unless necessary.

    - Avoid creating a 'jagged' misaligned appearance.

- Make sure 'tick boxes' are clearly linked to the answer.

- Ensure that 'tick box' borders and answer lines are solid and at least one point wide.

- Many people move between form fields with the tab key. Use the form layout and if necessary use the tab index attribute in HTML to support this.

- Make the 'next' or 'submit' button obvious and distinctive. This is particularly important where it is provided near competing buttons such as 'back'.

- Use the simplest way of presenting options for ease of use:

  - It is recommended that for less than seven options, 'tick boxes' should be provided.

  - For more than seven options, a drop down menu is recommended.

Provide an easy to use layout for your question and answer spaces
Avoid a 'jagged' misaligned appearance. Create a clear path through the form and provide guidance that will help people complete the form without making mistakes.

❌		✔

Carlow	Kilkenny
Cavan	Laois
Clare	Leitrim
Cork	Limerick
Donegal	Longford
Dublin	Louth
⦿ Galway	Mayo
Kerry	Meath
Kildare	Monaghan

Galway ▲▼

Carlow
Cavan
Clare
Cork
Donegal
Dublin
Galway
Kerry

When there are more than seven options, a drop down menu is recommended

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Online Forms Checklist

☐ Give the form a clear title.

☐ Provide clear instructions at the start of the form.

☐ Provide questions in a logical order.

☐ Group similar questions together under a useful heading.

☐ Avoid unnecessary or repeated questions.

☐ Make it clear which fields are mandatory.

☐ Make numbering as simple as possible.

☐ Make it clear where answers should be provided.

☐ Make it easy to navigate through the form.

☐ Make it easy for the person to select options.

☐ Make the 'next' or 'submit' button obvious and distinctive.

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Error messages

If the person is required to complete a form online, the form should be validated when they have completed the form. This is to make sure that the correct information has been provided before it is submitted. If an error in the form is identified, then there is a three-step process to correct the error:

1. Make the person aware that there is an error in an obvious and easy to understand way

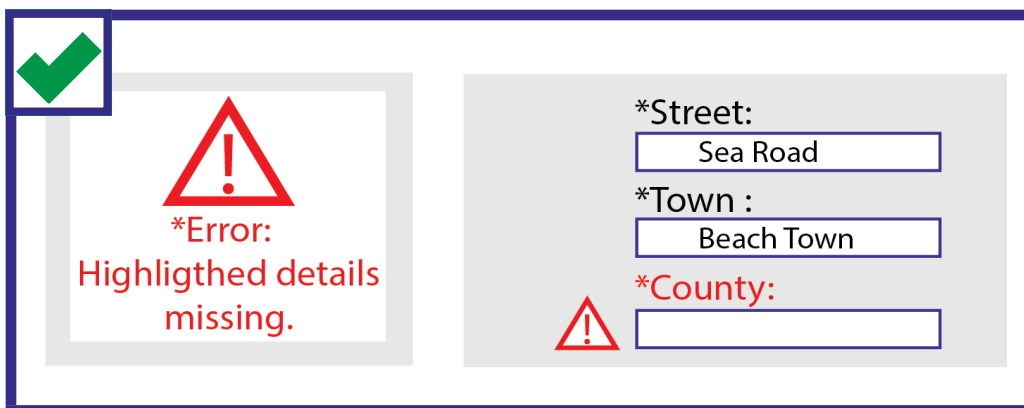There are a number of ways that you can make the person aware of the error:

- Consider alternatives to pop-up windows to avoid the difficulties these can cause for users of screen readers and other assistive technologies.

- Provide the error message on the web page itself.

- Provide the error message as the first item on a new page or focus should be set directly to it.

- Highlight the error. This should be identified using both colour and a symbol (such as a "*"). Errors should not be identified using colour alone.

2. Indicate the location of errors on the form itself

If only one error has occurred, it may be more helpful to display the message and set focus to a point immediately before the area on the form where the error was made.

If several errors have occurred, the incorrect information should typically be displayed together. It is helpful to inform the person about the number of errors that were found.

3. Allow the person to resubmit and revalidate the form
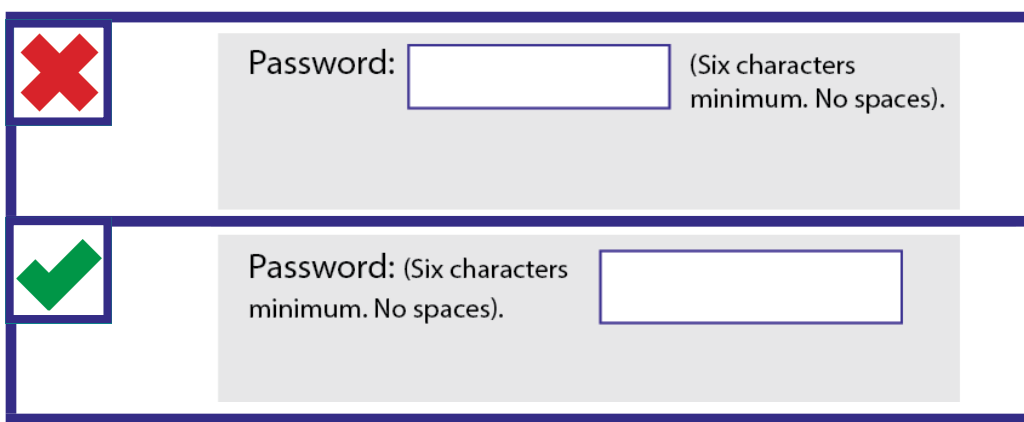
Errors should not be identified using colour alone
An error when filling out a form should be identified using both colour and a symbol (such as a " * ").

Password and Login Details

Guidance should be provided before the password input

For example, when a password is to be created a reminder should be provided that the password needs to be in lowercase and consist of a minimum six letters with no spaces. This guidance should be provided before the space to fill in the person's login details.

Guidance should be provided before the password input

Time-out Messages

Provide enough time to allow the person to read, digest and respond to the information

You can account for this by identifying timed actions. For example, when completing a form, the person is informed, "you have 15 minutes to complete this form". It is recommended that the option of additional time should be provided for timed actions.

Ideally avoid time-outs and time limitations

Where there are time limitations and time-outs ensure that it is possible to request more time. Consider if a person is likely to have to locate or prepare information to enter on a form.

If a time-out occurs, try to ensure that users can restart the process without losing the data they have entered.

CAPTCHAs

Where possible, avoid the use of CAPTCHAs

However, where anti-spam measures must be adopted in forms, use World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) techniques to allow CAPTCHAs to be accessible. This typically requires providing the CAPTCHA test in more than one format (for example, visual and auditory versions) and providing a text alternative that describe these formats.

Learn more

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides information on the 'inaccessibility of CAPTCHA: alternatives to visual turing tests on the web'.

Search

Searching is one of the main ways people find content on the web. The majority of traffic to your site typically starts with a search on a web search engine (such as Google). Members of the public arriving on your site from a search engine are unlikely to have seen any other pages on your website; so it is important that they can quickly figure out where they are and where they can go next.

Your site should support people in finding their way to the most relevant content on your site by:

• Using webmaster tools to make sure the site is indexed by search engines. This is known as search engine optimisation (SEO).

• Checking web analytics and webmaster tools to see how you can improve your visibility for web searches.

• Making sure that metadata titles and descriptions are good.

Provide an easy to use on-site search

When people are trying to find particular content on your site (and if the location of this content is not easy to find), they will typically use your on-site search. The following guidance will help make on-site searches easier to use:

- The on-site search should look and work like the web search engines that members of the public are most familiar with (for example, Google).

- The search results should be ranked by relevance. There should be no duplicate results.

- The search results page should identify the term searched for and the number of matches found.

- The search should allow for misspelled words or variations in spellings, particularly for important search terms.

Provide a basic search option

Most people only use the basic search option and dislike having to choose between different search types. It is therefore recommended that the default search on your site should be a simple search. If you offer an advanced search option, ensure it does not complicate the basic search option.

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Error messages Checklist

Where an error occurs:

☐ Make the person aware that there is an error in an obvious and easy to understand way.

☐ Indicate the number and location of errors on the form.

☐ Allow the person to resubmit and revalidate the form.

Login details Checklist

☐ Guidance/reminders should be provided before the login area.

Time out messages Checklist

☐ Ideally avoid time-out messages and time limitations.

CAPTCHAs Checklist

☐ Where possible, avoid the use of CAPTCHAs.

☐ Provide CAPTCHAs in more than one format (for example, visual and auditory versions).

Search Checklist

☐ Provide an easy to use on-site search.

☐ Provide helpful suggestions and alternative options in search results.

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Multimedia, Images and Colour

Key guidance when using multimedia is as follows:

Use your design to enhance information, not distract from it

Use features such as animation and video to add to your content, rather than to distract from it.

Use information and media that adds to your content not distracts from it
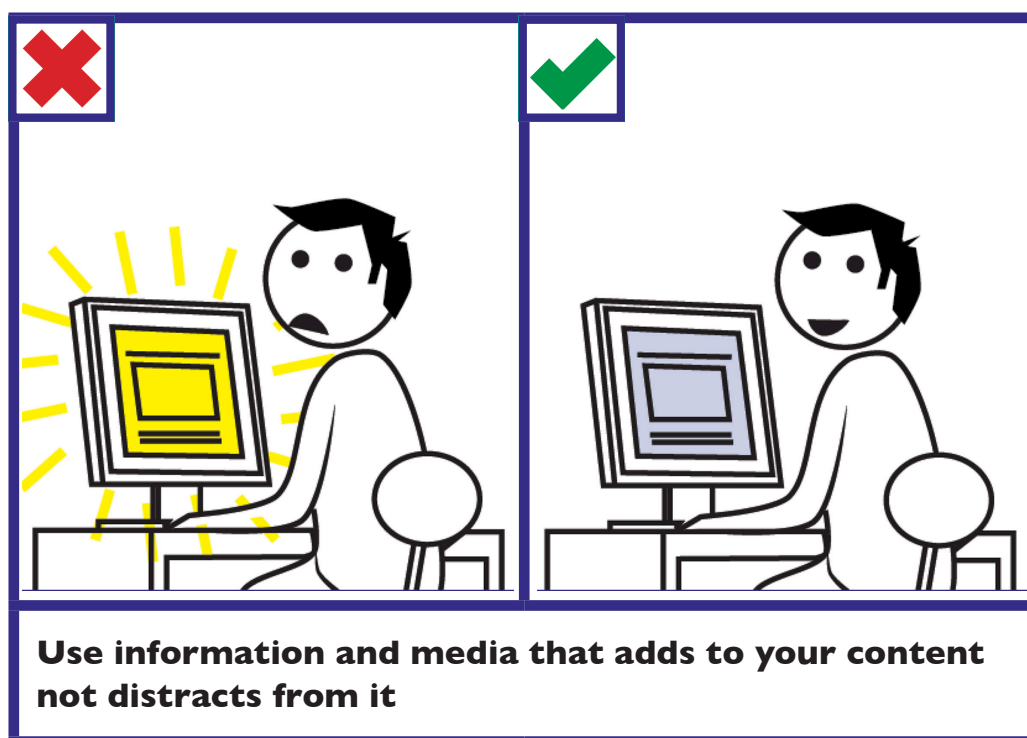
Ensure multimedia is inclusive

Ensure multimedia does not exclude information from those who cannot see, hear or play it.

- The use of video players to play multimedia content should be avoided. All video content should use HTML5 to play MP4 or OGG content.

- For embedded multimedia, supply a link to a standalone version.

- Provide controls to skip, pause or stop the presentation.

- Offer different download sizes. Information on the file size should be included on the page.

- Provide captions for multimedia, so that it can be understood by all members of the public regardless of the volume the multimedia is played at. This is an important consideration as one in seven of members of the public have hearing difficulties.

- Where captions are not provided, provide transcripts for the multimedia. This can be provided either on the same page or as a link to a transcript on a different page.

Learn more

Find more information on deafness by reading the **DeafHear factsheet**.

Avoid content that flashes more than three times per second

High flash content may cause seizures among some people.

Images

Some key guidance when using images includes:

- When uploading an image or graph, supply the same information through Alt Text.

- Avoid text within images.

Colour

Create good contrast between text and background

The contrast between the text and the background affects how easy it is to read information.

Key guidance on colour contrast is as follows:

- Make sure there is strong contrast between the text and the background colour.

- If using white text, make sure the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast. Contrast is best when using very dark colours together with very light colours.

- Avoid combining yellow and blue, and green and red, as these are difficult for people with colour blindness to distinguish.

- Pale text on a dark background typically makes text look smaller, so you may need to increase the size and weight of the text to make it easier to read.

- Avoid placing text in front of an image or patterned background, as this makes it more difficult to read.

Tip

Print your page in greyscale. This will help identify if you have sufficient contrast.

Tools

Use a contrast analyser to ensure there is enough contrast between the foreground and background colours. **WebAim** provide an online colour contrast analyser which also gives guidance on the contrast ratio for normal and for large text.

Avoid using light coloured text and a light background (low contrast)

Avoid placing text in front of a patterned background

Make sure there is strong contrast between the text and the background colour

Increasing the weight or size of light text on a dark background can increase its legibility

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Multimedia Checklist

☐ Use your design to enhance information, not distract from it.

☐ Provide controls to skip, pause or stop the presentation.

☐ Offer different download sizes.

☐ Avoid flash content that flashes more than three times per second.

☐ Provide captions/subtitles for multimedia.

☐ Where captions/subtitles are not provided, provide transcripts.

Images Checklist

☐ Provide Alt Text to convey the same information as your image or graph.

☐ Avoid text within images.

Colour Checklist

☐ Create colour contrast between text and background.

☐ Carefully consider colour combinations.

☐ Increase the size or weight of a light coloured font on a dark background.

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Accessibility based on WCAG 2.0

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 covers a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible.

According to the W3C, content on a web page or web applications (including text, images, forms and sounds) should be:

- **Perceivable:** usable regardless of a person's ability to see, hear or touch.

- **Operable:** usable forms, controls and navigation.

- **Understandable:** content and interface are clear and easy to understand.

- **Robust:** content can be used reliably by a wide range of devices.

It is important that accessibility is an on-going commitment. While a site may comply with WCAG 2.0 at its launch, those standards also need to be maintained as new content and features are added.

Factors that help improve accessibility include:

- Using clear labels for navigation and important buttons.

- Using clear and simple language.

- Ensuring that information does not rely solely on colour.

- Providing accessible documents.

- Providing Alt Text, transcripts or captions for video and audio content. A good summary may be provided to identify what the video/audio is about.

- Providing information in different ways.

  For example, offer the person the option of having information in formats such as large print, Braille or 'easy to read'.

  'Easy to read' is designed to be both easier to read and understand. It is of specific benefit for people with intellectual difficulties but may also benefit younger readers and people with very low literacy levels. Typically, 'easy to read' content is supported by images that help explain the text.

- Evaluating the accessibility of a website. When developing or redesigning a site, evaluating accessibility early and during the development process can identify accessibility problems when it is easier to address them.

Tools

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides a list of **web accessibility evaluation tools**.

Learn more

The Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides guidance on web accessibility for developers, designers and content creators/editors '**Guidance for Online Public Services**'.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides '**Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0**'.

Find out more about the **Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information Provided by Public Bodies (2006)**.

Mobile Web Content and Apps

This guidance is designed to improve the person's experience when accessing web content from mobile devices. The following best practice guidelines have been developed by W3C to ensure web content is usable with mobile web devices:

- People should be able to access content on a range of devices, regardless of differences in presentation capabilities and methods of access.

- Only provide basic navigation at the top of the page.

- Make use of the mobile device's features and strengths to provide a better customer experience.

- Assign access keys to the most commonly used functions.

- Do not cause pop-ups or other windows to appear and do not change the current window without informing the person.

- Divide pages into usable but limited sized sections.

- Make sure that the overall size of page is suitable to the memory capacity of the device.

- Do not use images that cannot be displayed by some devices. Avoid large or high-resolution images except where important information would otherwise be lost.

- Make sure that information presented with colour is also available without colour.

- Ensure that text and background colour combinations provide good contrast.

- Do not use tables unless devices are known to support them. Tabular data can be challenging even for a skilled screen reader user. It is important that data presented in graphs and charts is also available in a text format. Keep tables as simple as possible, and ensure that they are properly marked up.

- Send content in a format that is known to be supported by the majority of devices. Use style sheets to control layout and presentation, unless the device is known not to support them.

- Provide informative error messages and a means of navigating away from an error message back to useful information.

Learn more

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides a '**Mobile Web Best Practice Guide**'.

Apps for Smart Phones and Devices

All smart phones typically have built in accessibility features and functions, which provide a platform on which applications (apps) can be built.

If you develop an app for the public, the content and interface options provided should follow the best practice guidelines developed by World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). These include:

- Use cookies sparingly. Cookies are a common and effective means to store small amounts of information on the app user. These are typically used to personalise data and are commonly used to store a token representing a person's identity in order to enable automatic sign in.

- Ensure the person is informed about use of personal and device information.

- Allow the person to control application behaviour that might not otherwise be apparent, such as access to the network and access to device data.

- Enable automatic sign-in.

- Minimise application and data size.

- Make telephone numbers 'click-to-call'.

- Optimise the application's start up time. Customer experience is strongly influenced by the initial start-up time of an application.

> **Learn more**
>
> The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides 'Mobile Web Application Best Practice Guide'.
>
> For information on making iPhone applications accessible, see Accessibility Programming Guide for iOS.
>
> For information on making Android applications accessible, see Making Apps More Accessible.
>
> For more information on testing for accessibility, see Testing Your App's Accessibility.

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Mobile Web Content and Apps Checklist

☐ Members of the public should be able to access content on a range of devices, regardless of differences in presentation capabilities and methods of access.

☐ Assign access keys to the most commonly used functions.

☐ Do not cause pop-ups or other windows to appear.

☐ Divide pages into usable but limited sized sections.

☐ Make sure that the overall size of page is suitable to the memory capacity of the device. For apps - minimise application and data size.

☐ Where possible avoid large or high-resolution images.

☐ Make sure that information presented with colour is also available without colour.

☐ Ensure there is good contrast between text and background colour combinations.

☐ Send content in a format that is known to be supported by the majority of devices.

☐ Provide informative error messages and a means of navigating away from an error message back to useful information.

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Email and Newsletter Guidance

Key guidance for communicating with the public using email and newsletters is as follows:

Writing for the web

People interact with text differently online than they do in print.

Choose a font colour that will provide good contrast

Simple black and white emails are sufficient for most email conversations, though some people prefer to send replies in a different colour text. Where applicable, choose a font colour that will provide a good contrast, like dark blue or dark green.

Choose a format

You can choose to write your emails, automated email notifications or newsletters in plain text, rich text, or HTML. However, best practice is to provide an option to choose between plain text and HTML.

Plain text email is suitable for most simple, routine correspondence. The advantages of plain text are as follows:

- It is compatible with all email systems.

- It uses the least amount of processing power and storage space.

- It is compatible with all assistive technologies.

However, the limitation of plain text is that you cannot apply document structure and the links are limited to full URLs, which are not very user friendly.

Rich text allows you to add formatting to your text. You can make text bold, add underlines, and insert links. Rich text does not allow you to add 'semantic structure,' such as headings, which helps members of the public using screen readers in navigating through long, complicated documents.

HTML email is recommended as the most accessible email format, as it allows you to add formatting and structure to your message. Emails created in HTML can effectively include anything that may be included in a standard web page.

Provide Alternative (Alt) Text for images and graphics

When images are unavailable (for example, if the device is not capable of displaying the image or if the person has visual difficulties), equivalent information must be supplied. Alt Text should be provided to convey the same meaning as the image. It should be provided for all images.

Use a clear and descriptive subject line on your email

This helps the person to understand quickly the content of the email.

Use clear and descriptive file names for any attachments

This makes it easier to identify the content of individual files.

Inform the person if a document is attached

The body text of an email should mention if a document is attached in different formats. All attachments should be accessible.

Inform the person of when they might expect a response

Providing members of the public with information on the expected response time will help improve their customer experience by providing better communication.

Newsletters

Digital newsletters are often a combination of a HTML email that a person receives in their inbox, which then links to a 'microsite' with further information.

Ensure the newsletters follow the guidance above for;

- Writing good web content

- Emails

- Designing and developing usable websites

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Email and Newsletter Checklist

- ☐ Choose a font colour that will provide good contrast.

- ☐ Choose a suitable email format. Best practice is to provide an option to choose between plain text and HTML.

- ☐ Provide Alternative (Alt) Text for images and graphics.

- ☐ All attachments should be accessible.

- ☐ Use a clear and descriptive subject line on your email.

- ☐ Use clear and descriptive file names for any attachments.

- ☐ Inform the person if a document is attached.

- ☐ Inform the person of when they might expect a response.

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Accessible Documents and Brochures

Accessibility of off-line documents

Many organisations use their website as the main channel for publishing and sharing documents and information. It is important to ensure people know what they are downloading and that the content is usable and accessible. This similarly applies to documents and brochures emailed to members of the public.

When publishing documents to the web, consider the format which is the easiest to read. Documents such as Microsoft Word and PDFs can be made accessible. However, this does not happen automatically, and care should be taken to ensure that accessibility is considered in all stages of the documents development.

To start with, all downloadable documents should have a summary provided in HTML, as well as details on the document's format and file size.

How to make accessible documents

To make a document accessible does not require specific software, it simply requires you to take into account certain considerations (like font size and colour contrast) when developing your document. This will make documents easier to read and understand by the public – particularly members of the public who use assistive technologies like screen reader software.

The following guidance is provided to help make documents easier to use, access and understand:

Give documents a structure using heading styles

A good heading structure is probably the most important accessibility consideration in most Microsoft Word documents.

Many people do not use true heading styles in Microsoft Word. For example, when creating a heading, they simply change the font, increase the font size, and make it bold. The problem with this is that screen readers navigate through the headings function and do not recognise the body text as a heading. So essentially, it does not recognise any structure in the text. In Microsoft Word, the correct way to provide structure is to use 'Word styles' found under the 'Home' tab.

Use pre-set bullet points, numbering and tables

Use pre-set formats such as bullet points, numbering and tables to format and structure your document. This structure will then be carried over into other formats such as PDF, making it easier to navigate.

Provide a table of contents for longer documents

For documents over 10 pages, provide a table of contents. This will make specific information easier to find. Additionally, by using the previously mentioned heading styles, it makes creating a table of contents far easier.

Provide Alternative (Alt) Text

When images are unavailable (for example, if the device is not capable of displaying the image or if the person has visual difficulties), equivalent information must be supplied. Alt Text should serve the same purpose and convey the same meaning as the image. It should be provided for all images.

Fill out document properties

Fill out document properties (author, title, subject and keywords). A link should also be provided back to the website in the comments field if there is not a link in the body of the document.

Save or export to PDF

Save or export your document to PDF. Do this by using the 'Save As' option and selecting 'PDF' in the 'Save as type' drop down section. Do not use the print-to-PDF function.

Turn on accessibility features

Ensure accessibility features such as tagging are turned on when saving.

Check accessibility

If possible, use PDF editing software that supports accessibility to check the accessibility of your PDF file.

> **Tools**
>
> Word 2016 includes an accessibility checker that allows you to check for accessibility problems. To run the accessibility checker, select: File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility.

In long documents provide information in chapters or sections

For very long documents and reports, consider breaking the document into chapters or sections. This allows people to download and read only the relevant sections.

> **Learn more**
>
> Adobe provides guidance on '**Preparing Microsoft Word documents to create accessible PDF files**'.
>
> The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides **PDF techniques for WCAG 2.0**.

Telephone Based Systems

If you use an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System or call routing in your organisation, the following guidance should be applied:

Keep call routing systems simple

The call routing system should be kept as simple as possible. It should have no more than three levels, with no more than four options per level.

If your caller doesn't make a choice, divert the call to a live agent

Where your caller fails to make a recognised choice, they should be automatically diverted to an employee. This should automatically be done once the options have been presented twice.

Avoid repetition or unnecessary gathering of information

If it is necessary to transfer the caller to a different section or organisation during a call, avoid gathering unnecessary information or repetition.

For example, where the caller has provided you with their name or contact details, you should pass this information onto the employee in the other section.

Only state important information

Information that is important to the caller should be presented at the beginning of the automated response options. This is to ensure that the caller is not provided with too much information, which would make instructions harder to follow.

Provide options in order of priority

Options should be presented in order of importance. This should be based on the types of calls that you most commonly receive.

Only provide frequently used options

The options provided should be those that are most frequently used by your callers. This is to avoid providing an exhaustive list.

Inform your caller upfront of the number of options

Make a statement at the start of the call identifying how many options the caller will be asked to choose from.

Music or a signal should be given to indicate that the caller is on hold

Where your caller is placed on hold by the system, music or an alternative signal should be given, to let the caller know they are on hold.

Give an indication of the wait time
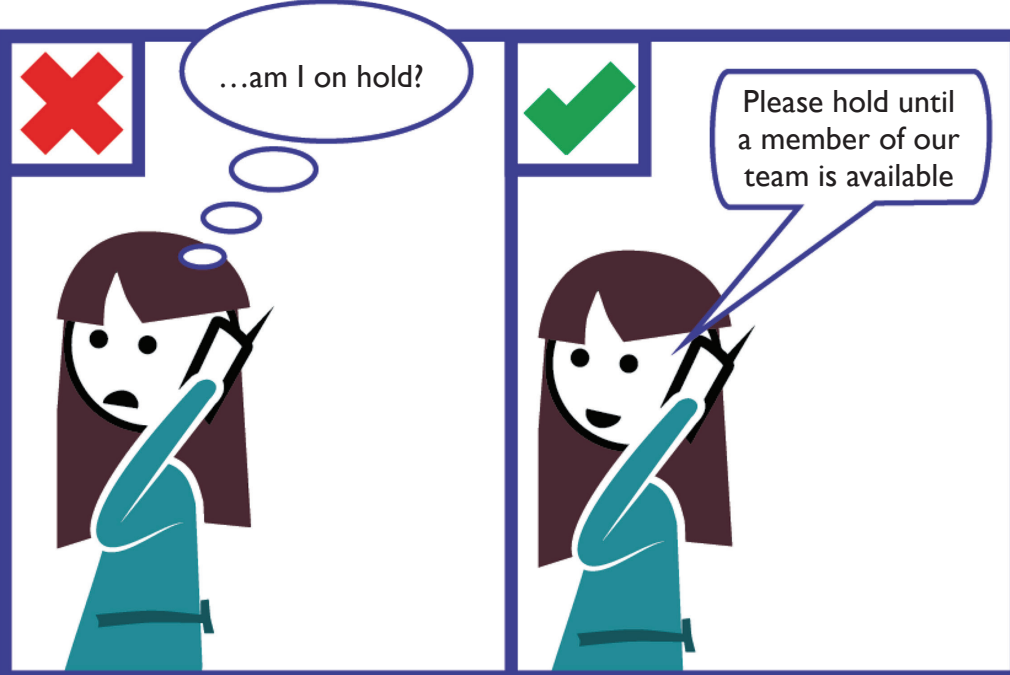
Where possible give the caller an indication of wait time or queue size.

Provide alternative ways to make contact
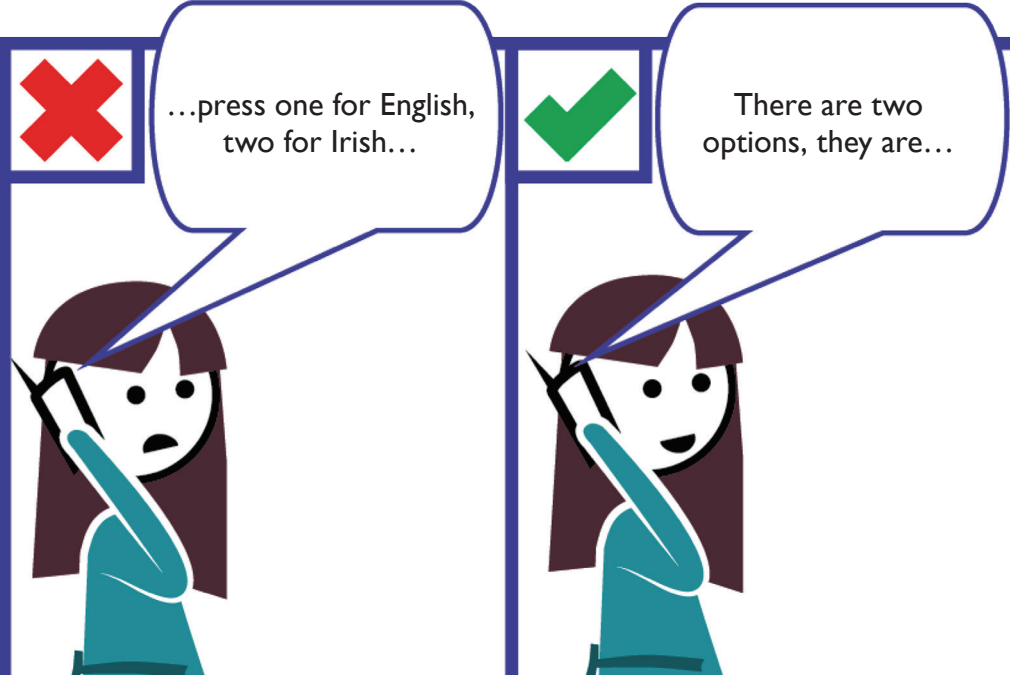
Provide an alternative channel for members of the public who are not able to use telephone based systems. For example, SMS messaging based communication.

Tip

Put details of call routing or IVR on your website and where required in print. This will help members of the public see what their options are and help them choose the option that is most suitable for their query.

Let callers know their call is on hold
A tone, message or music should play to inform the caller that they are on hold.

Inform callers of the number of options
Make a statement at the start of the call indicating the number of options the caller will be asked to choose from.

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Telephone Based Call Routing and Message Service Checklist

☐ Inform the caller upfront of the number of options to choose from and provide the options in order of priority.

☐ Only provide frequently used options.

☐ If the caller does not make a choice, divert to an employee.

☐ Music or a signal should be given informing the caller that they are on hold.

☐ Avoid repetition or unnecessary gathering of information.

☐ Provide alternative ways for members of the public to make contact.

☐ Where possible give an indication of the waiting time.

☐ Confirm when the transaction has been completed successfully.

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SMS Based Communication

There are two general types of SMS (text) services used by public bodies:

- General alerting service: where a public body sends out a general message to a predetermined group of members of the public.

- Direct text communication which involves direct contact between two people on a specific issue. For example, between customer support and a person.

General Guidelines for SMS (texting)

State times that SMS service is available. Where direct text communication is available, clearly state the times that this service is available; for example, between 9.00am and 6.00pm.

Do not use text speak language

Other than in specific contexts, 'text speak' language should not be used. Use **plain English**.

Limit all texts to 160 characters

Keep sentences short.

Use an identifier at the start of all SMS

This will assist members of the public in recognising the number.

Where applicable state whether a reply will cost money and if so how much

If appropriate, include whether a reply is expected or not

If a reply is expected, include a prompt in the SMS such as "Please reply".

Where immediate response is not intended, send an automatic reply to each SMS received to acknowledge it and provide further information, for example, "Thank you for your enquiry. We will be in contact with you shortly".

If the SMS received from a person is not clear, seek clarification

For example, "Do you wish to make an appointment for 2.00pm on the 12 July?"

Alternatively use options to obtain information. For example, "Sorry do you mean **1-** you wish to make an appointment for 2.00pm on the 12 July? **2 -** you wish to cancel your appointment or **3 -** do you want to make a new appointment? Please reply with **1,2** or **3**."

If no reply is received after 30 minutes, contact the person again using the previous message and adding a time that you expect a reply by. For example, "Sorry Mrs Smith, do you mean **1-** you wish to make an appointment for 2.00pm on the 12 July? **2 -** you wish to cancel your appointment or **3 -** you want to make a new appointment? Please reply with **1, 2** or **3** before 6.00pm".

If no further response is received – close the conversation.
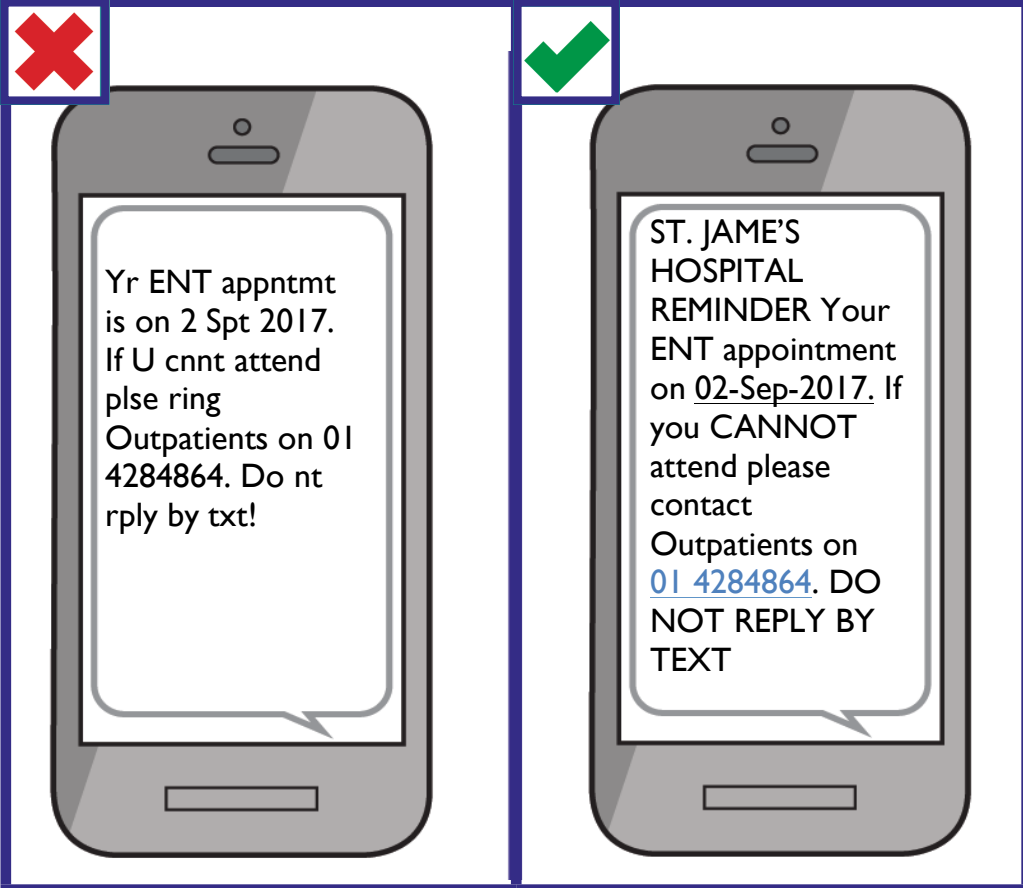
When over, finish the conversation

When you have finished the conversation, always end the SMS with a closing phrase. For example, "No need to reply".

Do not put sensitive information in a SMS

SMS texts should not include or seek confidential information. For example, bank account numbers.

Inform the person of when they might expect a response

❌
Yr ENT appntmt is on 2 Spt 2017. If U cnnt attend plse ring Outpatients on 01 4284864. Do nt rply by txt!

✅
ST. JAME'S HOSPITAL REMINDER Your ENT appointment on 02-Sep-2017. If you CANNOT attend please contact Outpatients on 01 4284864. DO NOT REPLY BY TEXT

Do not use text language
Communicate clearly with the person by using an identifier at the start of all texts and include whether a reply is expected.

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SMS Based Communication Checklist

☐ State the times that SMS service is available.

☐ Do not use text speak.

☐ Limit all texts to 160 characters.

☐ Use an identifier at the start of all SMS.

☐ Where applicable state whether a reply will cost money (and how much).

☐ If appropriate, include whether a reply is expected or not.

☐ If the SMS from a person is unclear, seek clarification.

☐ When over, finish the conversation.

☐ Do not put sensitive information in a SMS.

☐ Inform the person of when they might expect a response.

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Social Media Guidance

Following are some key communication design considerations on how to enhance customer service with members of the public on social media. Ensure that your activity on social media is in keeping with your organisation's Social Media Guidelines or Policy.

Social Media Guidance - Twitter

Twitter is an information network made up of 140-character messages called Tweets. It is an easy way to discover the latest news related to subjects you are interested in.

Know your audience and engage in the conversation

Twitter can be an effective means of engaging with members of the public in keeping with your organisation's Social Media Guidelines or Policy.

Create a tone that suits your organisation

Make sure your content and tone suit your organisation and your members of the public.

For General Account Information provide contact information

Provide your contact number in your bio line. If you don't have a number, put a link to your 'contact us' form. If you do not have a 'contact us' form, put an email link to someone who can provide help for members of the public with questions.

For Photos, Video, and Audio

Put prefixes before tweets that have photos, videos, or audio

This allows members of the public using screen readers to know what to expect before it is read aloud. For example,

- Photos: [PIC]

- Videos: [VIDEO]

- Audio: [AUDIO]

Provide access to the full caption or transcripts for a photo, video or audio. Provide a link back to your website that hosts a copy of the photo/video/audio with a full caption or transcript.

Your tweet should act as a descriptive caption so it has context for the item.

Add a link back to your website for full accessibility.

Hashtags (#) on Twitter

A hashtag - written with a # symbol - is used to index keywords or topics on social media. This function was created on Twitter, and allows people to easily follow topics they are interested in.

Using hashtags to categorise Tweets by keyword:

- People use the hashtag symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase in their Tweet to categorise those Tweets and help them show more easily in Twitter search.

- Clicking or tapping on a hashtagged word in any message shows you other Tweets that include that hashtag.

The 'at' symbol @

The @ sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets: "Hello @twitter!" People will use your @username to mention you in Tweets, send you a message or link to your profile.

A username is how you're identified on Twitter, and is always preceded immediately by the @ symbol. For instance, Twitter Support is @ Support.

For Composing Tweets

Try to place any #hashtags or @mentions at the beginning of the tweet.

Avoid using unfamiliar acronyms.

If possible, avoid using unfamiliar acronyms that would sound strange if read by a screen reader. If space allows, try to spell out the acronyms instead or use a different way to convey the information.

Capitalise the first letters of compound words for hashtags.

Use "CamelCase" for multiple words for hashtags. That is, use capital letters for the first letters of compound words (two or more words joined). For example, use #LeadersQuestions not #Leadersquestions.

Learn more

Twitter provides guidance on '**Getting started with Twitter**'.

Learn more about using **hashtags on Twitter** and the **@ symbol**.

Tip

Before you…

THINK!

T = Is it True?

H = Is it Helpful?

I = Is it Inspiring?

N = Is it Necessary?

K = Is it Kind?

Social Media Guidance - Facebook Posts

Facebook is a social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and groups.

Provide different ways for members of the public to get further information.

Put your website address in the 'about' section of your page to provide an easy way of getting further information.

Provide a phone number, an online 'contact us' form, or general contact email address for further information.

Spell out acronyms when writing status updates.

Do not get carried away with abbreviations or text messaging shortcuts in your status updates. You have plenty of space for your status updates, so spell out acronyms. It is recommended that in the first instance you should spell out the full name followed by the acronym in brackets. For example, the Citizens Information Board (CIB).

For Photos, Video, Audio

Provide Alt Text for photos.

The best way for you to ensure that photos are accessible to everyone is to include Alt Text. Alt Text allows you to describe briefly the photo to ensure that people who are unable to see the image have an Alt Text description of it.

Provide access to the full caption or transcripts for a photo, video or audio

Provide a link back to your website that hosts a copy of the photo/video/audio with a full caption or transcript. After posting a photo, video or audio, immediately post a comment that directs the person to the full caption or transcript.

Provide the option of viewing videos with captions

If your organisation has a YouTube channel, upload videos to the channel and make sure to enable closed-captions (upload your own transcript to make sure the captions are accurate). Then post a link to the YouTube video as a status update, rather than uploading the video into Facebook. This will ensure that people will be taken to the accessible version on YouTube.

Social Media Guidance - YouTube

All videos should have closed captioning (subtitles)

Closed captioning means that the captions are not visible until activated by the viewer.

YouTube has a feature that automatically captions videos in less than 10 minutes. Though YouTube has the ability to create captions based on an audio file, a written transcript should be used for better accuracy.

After uploading a text transcript, set YouTube to sync it up. Then the transcript should be reviewed and edited to ensure caption timing matches the video. Once the YouTube video has captions, it is advisable to download the captions and use an editor to tidy them up.

Tools for creating or editing captions

If creating captions for a video, or editing the existing YouTube captions, there are a number of free tools that can help:

- Caption YouTube: a web-based captioning tool designed specifically for YouTube.

- MAGpie: a free Windows application from the National Center for Accessible Media

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Learn more

YouTube provides a tutorial for creating captions.

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Twitter Checklist

☐ Create a tone that suits your organisation.

☐ Provide contact information in the bio line.

☐ Put prefixes before tweets that have photos, videos or audio.

☐ Provide access to the full caption or transcript for a photo, audio or video.

☐ Try to place any hashtags or @mentions at the beginning of the tweet.

☐ Avoid unfamiliar acronyms.

☐ Capitalise the first letters of compound words for hashtags.

Facebook Checklist

☐ Provide different ways for members of the public to get further information.

☐ Spell out acronyms.

☐ Provide captions for photos.

☐ Provide access to the full caption or transcript for a photo, video or audio.

YouTube Checklist

☐ All videos should have closed captioning.

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Communication Design Question Sets

For some communication design decisions, it can difficult to locate existing design guidance that is relevant.

The following sets of questions are helpful for use when relevant communication design guidance is not available. The questions can also help to inform initial planning, purchase specifications (procurement) and user testing.

The Written Communication and Verbal Communication design question sets can also be used to inform Digital and Web Based design decisions where relevant.

For additional information, visit the website for the **Centre for Excellence in Universal Design**.

Tools

More information about designing for people is available in the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) Guide 71:2014 at a free **Guide for addressing accessibility in standards**. Annex B contains a tool about optional terminology based on the **International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health** (ICF).

Learn More

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides further information about **Universal Design and Body Size**.

CEUD provides information on Universal Design and the **International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health** (ICF).

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Written Communication Design Questions

The following questions are designed to support you in the development of new written communication for members of the public:

1. Is important information presented in order of importance and in a logical order? For example, is similar information grouped together?

2. Is important information structured in a way so that it is easy to find? (Using table of contents, headings, sub-headings and so on).

3. Is the layout consistent? Are recurring features presented in the same location? (For example, page numbers and logos).

4. Is important information clear, concise, easy to read and easy to understand the first time it is read?

5. Is the information written in plain English? Where you must use technical words, have you explained, in plain English, what it means?

6. Where applicable is the information available in other languages?

7. Have you avoided using terms, abbreviations or acronyms that may not be familiar to the reader?

8. Are the symbols and words used familiar to the reader?

9. Do you present important information in different ways? (For example, using audio, touch or images)

10. Is the information accessible to people using assistive technologies (such as screen readers)?

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Verbal Communication Design Questions

The following questions support you in the development of verbal and nonverbal designs for customer communication:

1. Do you provide the same information in different formats, such as through text or images?

2. Do you provide verbal information in plain English?

3. Do your services work with assistive technology products and services?

4. Is information presented in order of importance?

5. Are options presented in a clear and concise way?

6. Is content presented in a way that is easy to understand and use?

7. Is the person familiar with the words and symbols you are using?

8. Where appropriate is the person offered information in different languages?

Customer engagement and outcomes can be enhanced through considerations such as:

1. Have you directly involved members of the public in the process of design, development and testing (especially customers that might normally be excluded)?

2. Have you used specialised resources to represent a wide range of customer abilities and preferences in the process?

3. Has your organisation implemented a policy to promote Universal Design and conduct training to optimise customer communication?

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Notes