

Disability Style Guide for CBOs



Department of
Public Health

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Accessibility means that people with disabilities can access the same information, perform the same essential tasks, and receive the same services as people who do not have disabilities. Aesthetics should be developed within the limitations of disability access.

Develop a message and format that is compatible with many forms of communication such as social media, email, and print. Widely used software and platforms (such as Microsoft Word and Facebook) have many helpful access capabilities. Microsoft Suite projects (PowerPoint, Word, etc) are generally more accessible than PDFs. It is often helpful to work in Microsoft software, run the Accessibility Checker, and then save as a PDF.

Written Communication Principles:

Use active voice with short and direct sentences. Write at a 6th-grade reading level. Further guidance can be found here: <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/>

- Identify and write for your audience.
- Address one person, not a group. Use pronouns to speak directly to readers.
- Write short sections/ paragraphs with useful headings.
- Cover only one topic in each paragraph.
- Place the main idea before exceptions and conditions.
- Use “must” to indicate requirements.
- Don’t turn verbs into nouns.
- Minimize abbreviations.
- Use short, simple words.
- Use the same term consistently for a specific thought or object.
- Don’t use slashes.
- Keep subject, verb, and object close together.
- Have a topic sentence.
- Use transition words.

Formatting Tips:

Choose a simple font. Use formatting such as italics and bold sparingly. Underlining should not connect with letters being underscored. Text should not be written in all upper-case lettering.

Use at least 12-point font in print materials. Use 14-point font when possible. Use 18-point font for large print materials. Size examples: 12-point, 14-point, 16-point, 18-point, 20-point

The main text is left aligned. Right margins are ragged, not justified, because centered and right aligned text is difficult for some people to track.

Print on non-glossy or matte paper.

Readability is best when a dark text is used on a light background, or a light text is used on a dark background. Black and white is best, limit color to headlines and titles where font size is larger.

If images are used, try to maximize contrast:

- Remove images or patterns behind text.
- Make line drawings and floor plans clear and bold.
- Do not overlap watermarks, logos, or text with an image.

Web/Social Media Communication:

Assistive Technology such as screen readers are often used for communicating with people with Access and Functional Needs. It is a best practice to present text as text (bmp, jpg, and other file formats cannot be easily read by assistive technology).

Make text accessible:

- Don't write in all caps. Full caps can be difficult to read and misinterpreted by screen readers.
- Don't share screenshots of text.
- Put hashtags and mentions at the end. Punctuation marks are read aloud by screen readers.
- Avoid saying "click here."
- Limit emoji use.
- Avoid using tables.
- Use the full URL for hyperlink text.
- Avoid special characters. In addition to reduced legibility, some assistive tools read special formatting very differently.
- Use inclusive language. Avoid ableist language, stick with gender-neutral pronouns and terms, and evaluate text for assumptions of limited points of view.
- Include video captions. Often, social media platforms auto-generate captions.
- Add video descriptions.
- Don't rely on color to convey meaning.
- Visualize links. Add an underline or a hover animation to convey that hyperlinked text is clickable.

If using images or charts, provide a written explanation/alternative text with all relevant information:

Be accurate and convey the content and function of an image.

Mention color if it is important to understanding the image.

Share humor and transcribe any text in the image to express the meaning of the image.

Use at least 12-point font in the image description and in any labels of diagrams.

Do not be redundant or provide the same information as text near the image.

Do not include phrases like "image of ..." or "graphic of ...", etc.