

Make your communications more accessible

Quick tips for writers, communicators, designers and production houses



Office for **Disability issues**

Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga
Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

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Accessibility overview

Applying a set of principles, called Universal Design, to information makes it accessible for most people with the least amount of change. Universal Design is also about presenting information in a variety of ways (using specialised formats) so everyone can use it.

To decide whether to use Universal Design and to produce specialised formats (and what sort of formats to produce) ask yourself the following questions.

Who is the target audience?

What sort of information is it and how important is it?

Is the information short-lived or long-lasting?

More people understand plain language



Plain language

- Know your audience.
- Use everyday language readers are familiar with.
- Use short, clear sentences (15–20 words).
- One idea in a sentence is best.
- Keep paragraphs short with one subject in one paragraph.
- Avoid using a multi-syllable word when a shorter one will do.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms, technical words and details and, if you must use an acronym, always provide a full version the first time you mention it.
- Use active rather than passive verbs, for example 'Peter kicked the ball' rather than 'the ball was kicked by Peter'.
- Use 'you' and 'we'.
- Give straightforward instructions, for example 'Please reply to this letter'.
- Be helpful, human and polite.
- It is okay to use lists, like this one, where appropriate.

Use everyday language people are familiar with.

How to talk to, and about, disabled people

Use respectful language

Respectful language is simply showing respect and ordinary courtesy. Think of it in similar terms to the way we talk about women, Māori or older people.

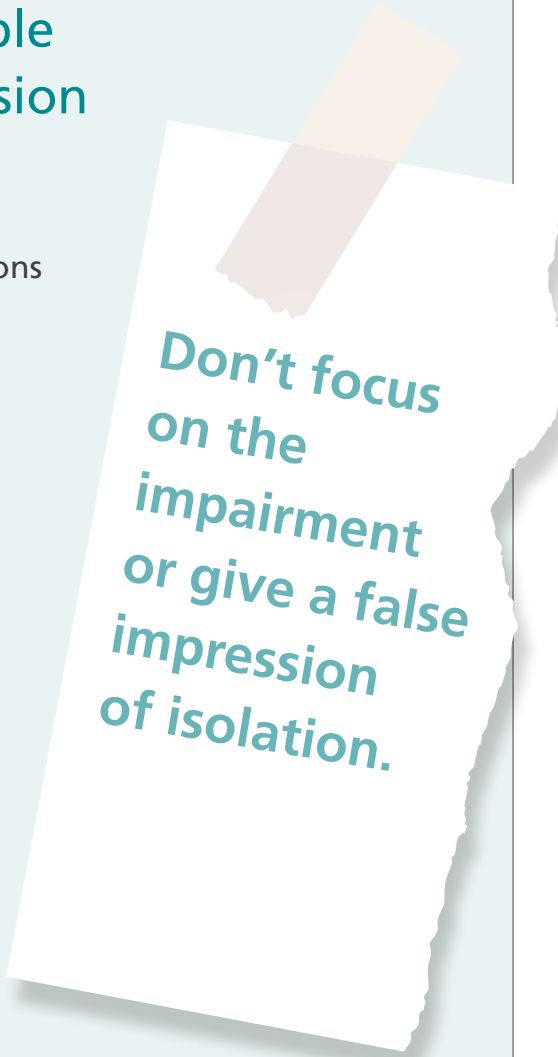
- Keep it simple, accurate and neutral.
- It is often not appropriate to name a person's impairment.
- Don't define someone by their impairment or by the equipment they use.
- Use neutral language – the art of discussing difficult issues while still maintaining dignity and respect for each other.
- Use inclusive language – avoid creating or perpetuating negative social stereotypes. For example, say a person uses a wheelchair rather than being confined by it, or wheelchair bound. Or, someone may have an impairment, but they neither suffer from it, nor are afflicted with it.

Use neutral language – the art of discussing difficult issues while still maintaining dignity and respect for each other.

Using images

Information about disabled people should show them as ordinary people in society and not create an impression of separateness or specialness.

- Disabled people can be included in general illustrations to show they are part of the community like anyone else.
- Show them in everyday social situations and work environments. Don't just focus on medical or dependent relationships, like a blind person being helped to cross the road.
- Don't focus on the impairment or give a false impression of isolation.
- If disabled people are simply in the mix and not recognisable, that's fine – some impairments are invisible after all.



Don't focus on the impairment or give a false impression of isolation.

Use Universal Design to make print accessible

Print design

Fonts

- Make body text 12 point or larger.
- Use a strong sans-serif font such as Arial.
- Avoid highly stylised or simulated handwriting and typefaces.
- Typefaces are available in different weights. Avoid light options because there is less ink to provide the contrast between paper and text.
- Avoid italics which can make text difficult to read for some people.
- Bold type can be used to emphasise particular text.
- Avoid using all capital letters in words. The human eye reads by recognising the shapes of words and a word in all caps interferes with this recognition.

Other design characteristics

- Numbers are more difficult to read than words.
- Use a typeface that makes numerals distinct, or use words.
- Avoid underlining.
- Line length should be about 60–70 characters.
- Align text to the left-hand margin.
- Avoid right-justified text.

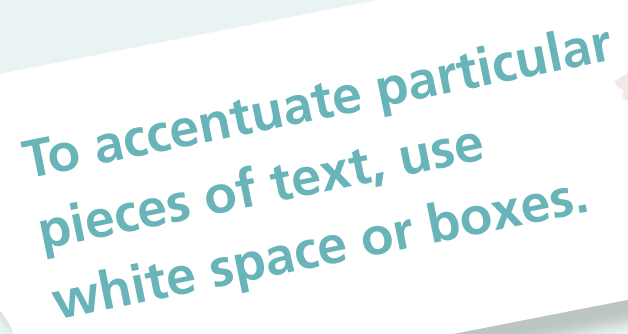
- The space between lines should be between 1.5 and twice the space between words.
- Words should be evenly spaced.
- Make sure there is a strong contrast between the text and background.
- Use plenty of white space around text and images and separate the different elements of the page.
- Avoid using text over images or a patterned background.
- Avoid using colour shading and screens that reduce the contrast between the text and background.
- To accentuate particular pieces of text, use white space or boxes.
- Leave a space between paragraphs for ease of reading.
- Avoid fitting text around images if this means lines of text start in different places and are difficult to find.
- Allow extra space on forms for signatures.
- Consistency is important, for example make sure page numbers are in the same place on the page.

Paper

- Use matt or satin paper rather than glossy paper.
- Use paper of sufficient weight so the print does not show through on the other side.

Binding

- Print documents should open flat.



To accentuate particular pieces of text, use white space or boxes.



Email and Web accessibility

Email

If you are sending out email newsletters:

- Provide the original Word document as well as a PDF file.
- If the document is short, include it in the original email.
- Provide a Web link at the end of the text.
- If appropriate, provide a captioned video or a New Zealand Sign Language video.
- Don't use a PDF file as the only communications tool.

The Web

Information on the Web should be:

- Accessible HTML.
- Tagged PDF files, optimised for accessibility. Don't use ordinary PDF files as the only communications tool. They cannot be read by screen readers and can be inaccessible to people with other impairments as well.
- Specialist formats, like audio, New Zealand Sign Language videos, captioned videos, and transcripts, can be put online.

➔ Specialised formats

You need to develop material in specialised formats for people who can't access information even if it is written, and produced using Universal Design in the previously described ways.

Easy-read for people with intellectual or learning disabilities

People with literacy difficulties and people who don't have English as their first language find easy-read useful. It is not childish. It uses fewer words and more diagrams.

Easy-read pages should have:

- easy words
- big writing
- pictures
- one idea on each page
- words with spoken word audio on the Web
- ways to easily find the page you want.

Easy-read information is produced by People First, phone 0800 206 070. Contact People First early as it takes time to produce these documents.

Formats for blind, vision impaired and Deafblind audiences

The Telephone Information Service

The Telephone Information Service (for Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind members only) contains bulletins accessed by a touch tone phone. The service:

- is a cheap means of communicating information
- is especially useful for people who don't use computers
- carries both national and regional content.

The service is run by the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind (the Foundation), phone 0800 243 333. Material can be provided to the Foundation in Word.

Large print

Large print is useful for people who can't read the recommended Universal Design print size (12pt).

In-house production

- Simple documents without graphics can be produced.
- The typeface should be between 16 and 22 points.
- If the reader needs to write on the page, leave enough space in the margins or between elements on the page for the reader to do so.
- The page size should be easy to physically handle.
- Recurring features such as headings and page numbers should always be in the same place.
- Leave a space between paragraphs for ease of reading.

**“How to produce Large Print” resource packages
are at: www.rnib.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx
www.e-bility.com/roundtable/resources.php**

Outsourcing production

Large-print documents can also be produced by the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, phone 0800 243 333. The Foundation needs at least 10 working days to do this work.

Audio

Digital audio files can be distributed on CD-ROM or DVD, or downloaded from the Web.

In-house production

Producing a digital sound file is relatively simple. All you need is a personal computer with a sound card, a reasonable-quality microphone and sound recording software. You may need to get someone with professional experience to edit the final product to remove any mistakes. Blind people expect high quality sound.

Outsourcing production

Audio format information is produced by the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, phone 0800 243 333. The Foundation needs at least 10 working days to complete this work.

Audio description for videos, including DVDs

Audio description gives you information about the things you might not be able to see. This alternative is still a relatively new technology in New Zealand.

Braille

Braille is commonly used when the reader needs to refer to the document often, and in real time (for example a meeting outline or agenda, consultation documents). Some readers, including Deafblind people, may use computers which display print as Braille.

Braille is:

- more expensive than some other specialised formats
- the primary source for accessing information for some people
- the only source for written information for others, for example some Deafblind people.

In-house production

The set-up cost for Braille equipment is about \$10,000.

Outsourcing production

The Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Incorporated provides advice about options for producing Braille and provides a blind consumer's perspective. Contact the Association on phone 0800 222 694.

The Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind is the primary professional provider of a Braille production service. The turnaround time for Braille printing is a minimum of two weeks. To commission documents in Braille, contact the Foundation on phone 0800 243 333.



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Formats for Deaf and hearing impaired audiences

Video captioning

Captioning translates all sound elements into captions on the screen, so viewers can follow the dialogue and action simultaneously.

Production

There are specialist commercial video production companies that provide captioning services, but check if they know how to caption for Deaf and hearing impaired viewers.

Caption tips

- Ensure the audience connects the person speaking with the text of their speech.
- Place captions in the centre near the bottom of the screen, as long as they don't cover other important information. Create blank space around the text.
- Text shouldn't go to the edge of the screen.
- Use large white text, in a sans-serif font (like Arial), on a solid black background.
- Have one or two lines of text on screen.
- Fewer words on the screen, changing frequently, works best.
- Present names and titles of people that are briefly shown on the screen above the caption space.
- Captions should reproduce the dialogue, not reinterpret or translate what is being said.
- If there are multiple people talking, or the film cuts between different people talking, put their names in the captions in brackets, or use different colours to show the different speakers.
- Best practice in captioning is the Teletext captions available on television.
- Any advertisement on television should be captioned. The Captioning Centre at TVNZ can do this.

New Zealand Sign Language

New Zealand Sign Language is the first language of people who are born Deaf or who lose their hearing before acquiring spoken language.

Print isn't the best medium for this community.

The best mediums are:

- using interpreters
- New Zealand Sign Language DVDs, or videos on websites
- texting, especially for younger Deaf people.

Producing New Zealand Sign Language videos

Work with Deaf people who have a high degree of literacy in sign language and English and who know how to present information to a Deaf audience. Deaf Aotearoa can give you advice on this. Email national@deaf.org.nz

You may also need to work with sign language interpreters.

In-house production

You can produce videos in-house because publication on websites does not require the highest quality resolution.

- Use the best equipment you can.
- Use a contrasting background so the signer's hands and facial expressions are clearly visible. Make sure they are well lit.
- Don't shoot against a window.
- Always use a tripod to avoid any camera shake.
- You need a quiet environment for shooting.
- You don't need to pan or zoom.
- Framing is critical. The frame needs to be slightly wider than the range of the signer's hands. A good rule of thumb is to frame from the waist to the top of the head and a foot either side of the shoulders. Every signer has a slightly different signing space. There are no close-ups in New Zealand Sign Language videos.

- Begin by focusing on the face and then zooming out to set your frame as described above. This will ensure your signer is in focus.
- Your signer shouldn't wear stripes or patterned clothing.
- A lot of New Zealand Sign Language grammar is in facial expressions, so the details of the signer's face need to be visible. If you are posting the content on a website, make sure the video box is big enough and the resolution allows viewers to see the facial expressions of the person who is signing.

New Zealand Sign Language interpreters

Face to face communication using sign language interpreters may be a pragmatic solution in some situations, for example when you need to communicate information to several Deaf people who are able to meet together.

The Office for Disability Issues has information about how to book and to work with New Zealand Sign Language interpreters. To book interpreters directly: www.isign.co.nz/Welcome.aspx



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For more information

To find more information about how to
make your communications accessible

www.odi.govt.nz/resources/guides-and-toolkits/index.html

